

Rural Job Loss and Livelihood Challenges during the COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic created a severe disruption in rural economies, particularly in India where livelihoods depend largely on agriculture, informal labour, and small-scale enterprises. Lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and the postponement of markets led to large number of job losses among rural workers. Migrant labourers are returning from urban areas to rural, increased pressure on limited rural employment opportunities. Agricultural activities were affected by supply chain interruption, lack of access to inputs, and falling prices of produce. The impact was widespread, with households experiencing decreased income, food shortages, and increased financial obligations. Government interventions such as rural employment schemes, food distribution, and direct cash transfers provided some relief, but implementation gaps limited their effectiveness in certain regions. The crisis exposed structural weaknesses in rural labour markets, including dependence on informal work, lack of social security, and inadequate infrastructure. The pandemic thus highlighted the urgent need for sustainable livelihood opportunities, diversification of rural employment, and stronger social protection systems to enhance resilience against future crises.

Keywords: COVID-19, Rural employment, Job loss, Migrant workers, Informal sector, Livelihood crisis, Food insecurity, Social protection.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented crisis across the world, with rural areas facing severe economic and livelihood challenges. Rural livelihoods largely depend on agriculture, daily wage labour, informal employment, and small-scale activities, all of which were badly disrupted during the pandemic. Nationwide lockdowns, restrictions on movement, closure of markets, and breakdown of supply chains led to widespread rural job loss and income insecurity. Migrant workers were forced to return to villages, increasing pressure on already limited rural employment opportunities. As a result, many rural households experienced loss of income, food insecurity, rising debt, and poverty. The crisis exposed existing structural weaknesses in the rural economy, such as dependence on informal work and lack of social security. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly intensified rural job loss and livelihood challenges, making it an important issue for sociological and economic analysis.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural employment patterns.
2. To identify the major causes of job loss in rural areas during the lockdown period.
3. To analyze the livelihood challenges faced by rural households, such as income loss, food insecurity, and debt.
4. To study the effects of reverse migration on rural employment and resources.
5. To evaluate the role of government relief measures and rural employment schemes.

3. Methodology

A combination of field studies, indigenous knowledge studies, population studies and bases on primary & secondary data were employed to comprehensively assess rural job loss and live hood pattern during COVID-19 Pandemic.

Primary data were collected from selected rural households through structured interviews and questionnaires. Respondents included agricultural labourers, migrant workers and workers engaged in informal and non-farm activities. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents so as to avoid bias. The primary data focused on changes in employment status, income levels, migration type, job loss and live hood pattern during the pandemic.

Secondary data were collected from government reports, research journals, newspapers, etc. Special attention was given to rural job loss and live hood challenges during the lockdown period.

The collected data were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentages, averages, and comparative analysis. Qualitative responses were interpreted to understand the job loss and live hood challenges of rural peoples.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from rural households during the COVID-19 crisis reveal significant disruptions in employment and livelihoods. A large proportion of respondents reported loss of regular work during the lockdown period.

4.1 Employed Before Pandemic

Table 4.1: Employed Before Pandemic

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	423	84.6%

No	77	15.4%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

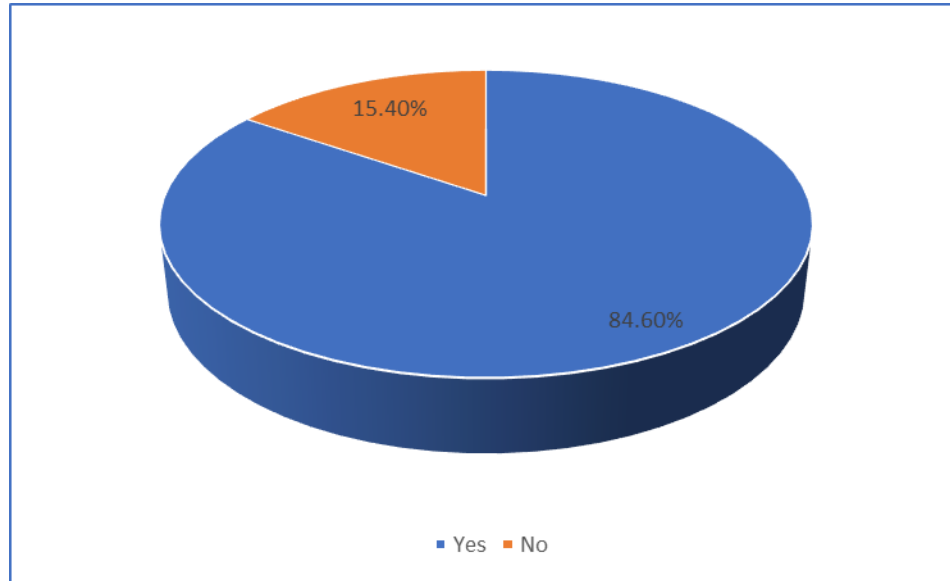


Fig. 4.1: Employed Before Pandemic

Table 4.1 and Graph 4.1 reflect that Out of 500 respondents, 423 (84.6%) have employed before Pandemic whereas 77 (15.4%) were not employed before Pandemic.

Most of the respondents had employed before pandemic.

4.2 Type of Jobs Engaged

Table 4.2: Types of Jobs Engages

Types of job	No of respondent	Percentage
Agriculture	71	14.2%
Daily Wage labour	119	23.8%
Small business shop	35	7%

Government job	11	2.2%
Private job	179	35.8%
Others	22	4.4%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

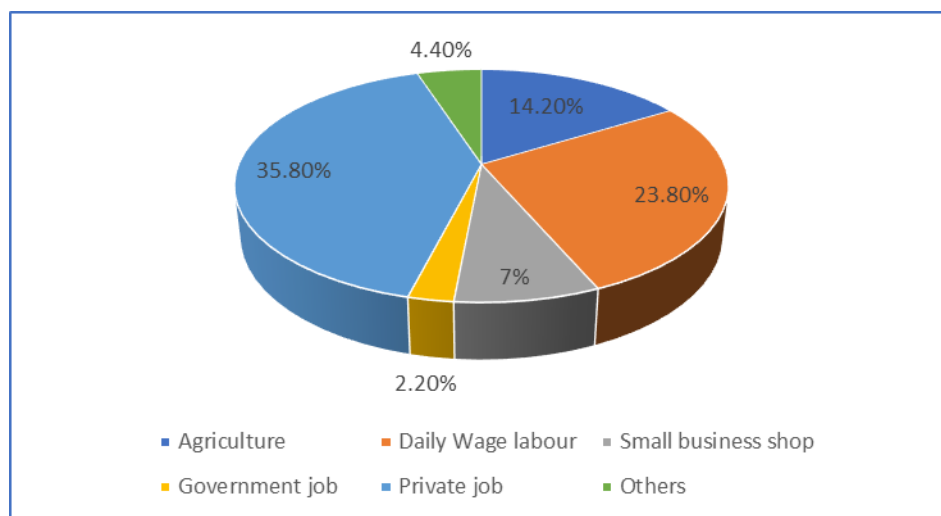


Fig. 4.2: Types of Jobs Engages

Above Table and Figure Reflect That Out of 500 respondents 71 (14.2%) respondents are engaged in agriculture, 119 (23.8%) respondents are engaged Daily Wage labour, 35 (7%) respondents have small business shop, 11 (2.2%) respondents are engaged in government job, 179 (35.8%) respondents are engaged in private jobs, 22(4.4%) respondents are engaged in other jobs.

Most of the respondents are Daily Wage Labour and Private Job holders.

4.3 Earnings Per Month Before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation

Table 4.3 Earnings per Month before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation

Earnings	No of respondent	Percentage
Less than 6000	142	28.4 %
6001-10000	81	16.2 %
10001-14000	138	27.6 %
14001-18000	107	21.4 %
Above 18000	33	6.6 %
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

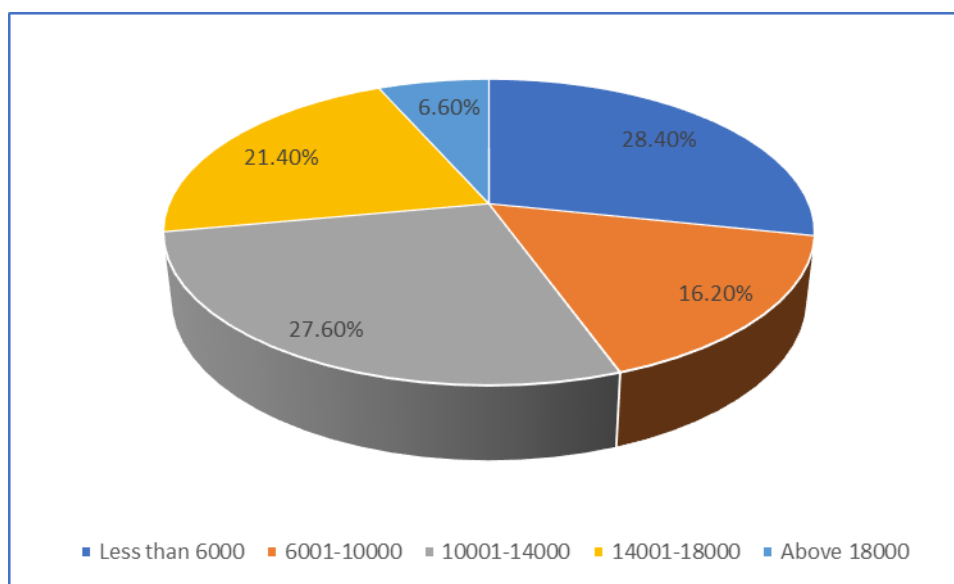


Fig. 4.3: Earnings per Month before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation

Table 4.3 and Graph 4.3 reflect regarding the earning per month Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 142 respondents (28.4%) had less than 6000 earnings per month Before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation whereas 81 respondents (6.2%) had 6001-10000 earnings per month Before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation, 138 respondents (27.6%) had 10001-14000 earnings per month Before Covid-19

Pandemic Situation, 107 respondents (21.4%) had 14001-18000 earnings per month Before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation, 33 respondents (6.6 %) had above 18000 earnings per month Before Covid-19 Pandemic Situation.

4.4 LOSE OF JOB OR SOURCE OF INCOME DUE TO COVID-19

Table 4.4: Lose of Job or Source of Income due to Covid-19

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	419	83.8%
No	81	16.2%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

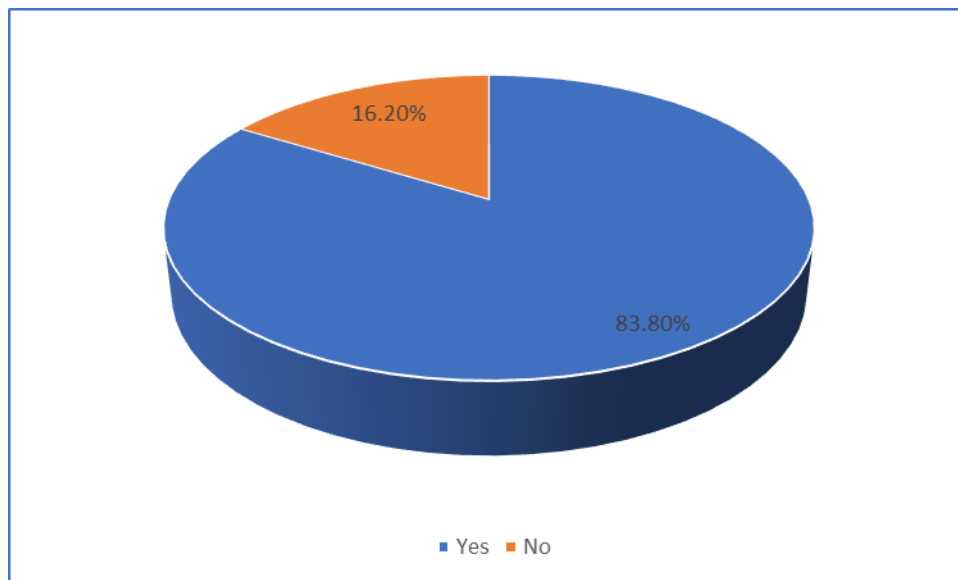


Fig 4.4: Lose of Job or Source of Income due to Covid-19

Table 4.4 and Graph 4.4 reflect regarding the earning per month, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 419 respondents (83.8%) had lost job/source of income on account of Covid 19 pandemic whereas 81 respondents (16.2%) had not lost job or

source of income on account of Covid-19 pandemic.

4.5 YEAR OF JOB LOSS:

Table 4.5: Issue Related to Job Loss

Year of job losing	No of respondent	Percentage
March-May 2020	11	2.2%
June-December 2020	67	13.4%
In 2021	422	84.4%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

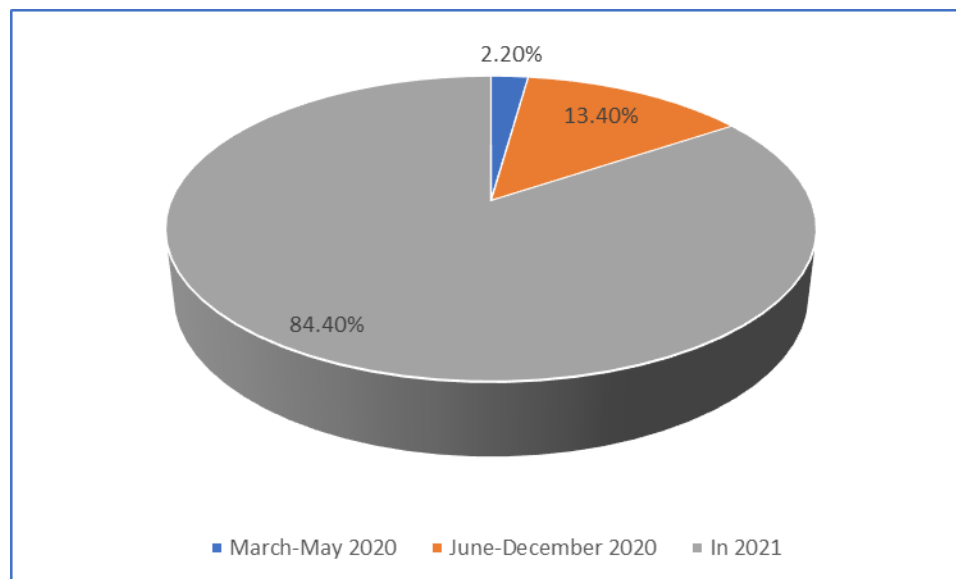


Fig 4.5: YEAR OF JOB LOSS

Table 4.5 and Graph 4.5 reflect regarding the earning per month, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 11 respondents (2.2%) had lost job during March-May 2020 on account of Covid 19 pandemic whereas 67 respondents (13.4%) had lost job during June-December 2020 on account of Covid 19 pandemic, 422 respondents

(84.4%) had lost job in the year 2021.

4.6 REASON FOR JOB LOSS

Table 4.6: Reason for Job Loss

Reasons of job loss	No of respondent	Percentage
Lockdown	62	12.4 %
Business Closure	73	14.6 %
No transportation	48	9.6 %
Decreased demand	22	4.4 %
Migrated back to village	332	66.4 %
Others	63	12.6 %
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

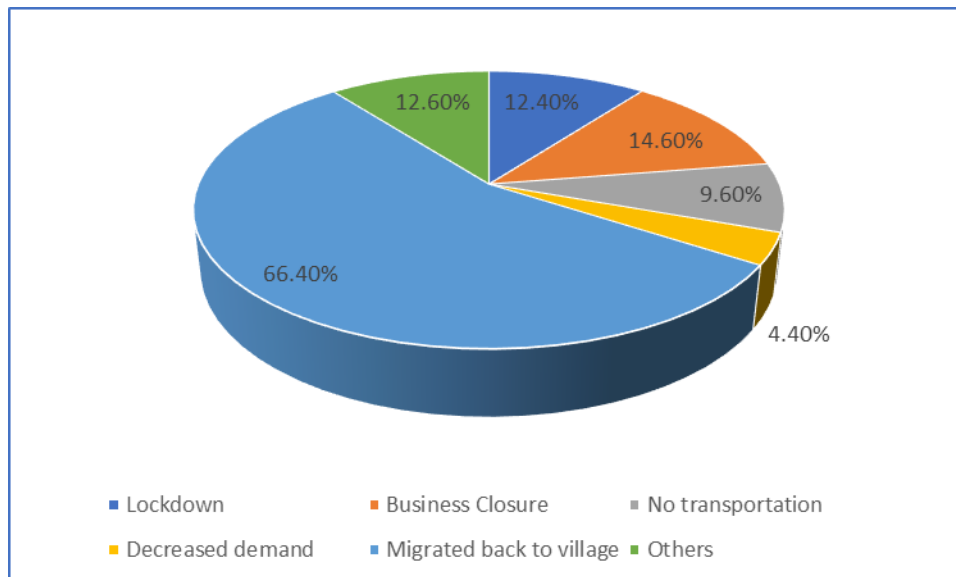


Fig. 4.6: Reason for Job Loss

Table 4.6 and Graph 4.6 reflect regarding the earning per month, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 62 respondents (12.4%) had lost job for lockdown whereas 73 respondents (14.6%) had lost job due to business closure , 48 respondents (9.6%) had lost job due to not availability of transportation, 22 respondents (4.4%) had lost job due to decreased demand, 332 respondents (66.4%) had lost job due to Migrated back to village and 63 respondents (12.6%) due to other reasons.

4.7 FAMILY MEMBERS AFFECTED BY COVID

Table 4.7: Family Members affected by Covid

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	389	77.8 %
No	111	22.2 %
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

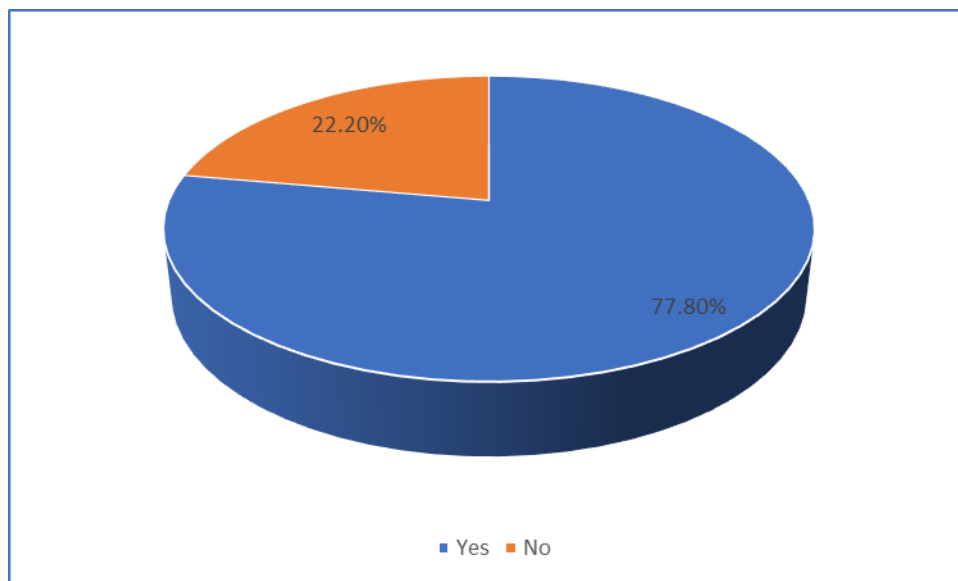


Fig. 4.7: Family Members affected by Covid

Table 4.7 and Graph 4.7 reflect, Family members of 389 respondents (77.8%) affected by the Covid whereas family members of 111 respondents (22.2%) were not affected.

4.8 EARNINGS PER MONTH DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Table 4.8: Earnings per month during Covid 19 Pandemic

Earnings	No of respondent	Percentage
Less than 6000	123	24.6 %
6001-10000	288	57.6 %
10001-14000	93	18.6 %
14001-18000	64	12.8 %
Above 18000	32	6.4 %
Total	500	100 %

Source: Primary Data, Survey

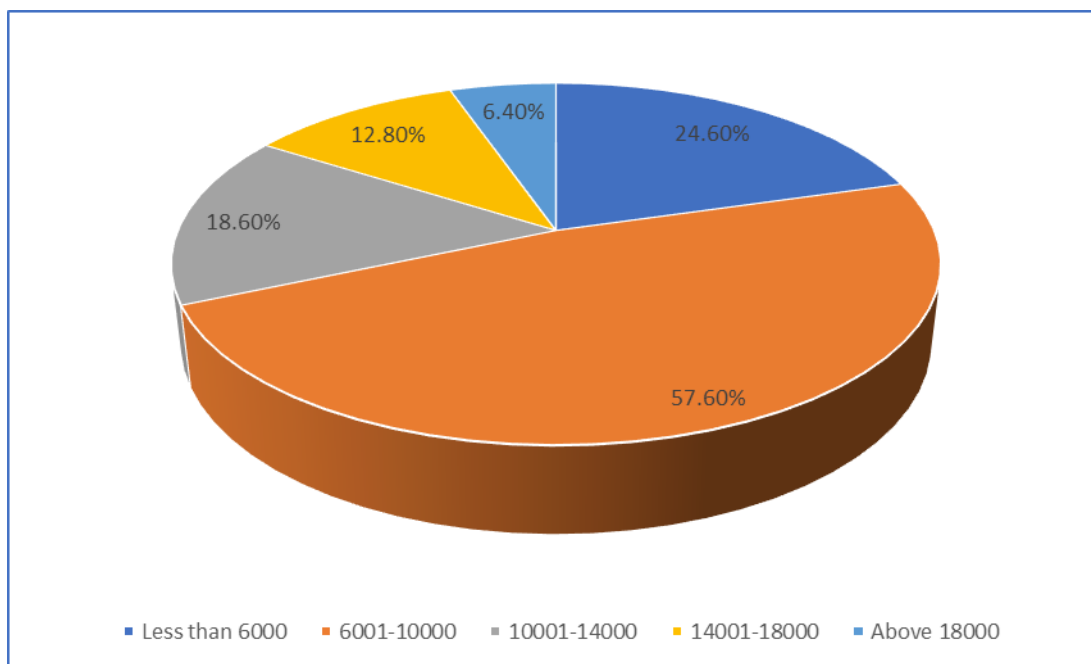


Fig. 4.8: Earnings per month during Covid 19 Pandemic

Table 4.8 and Graph 4.8 reflect regarding the earning per month, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that earnings of 123 respondents (24.6%) were less than 6000 whereas earnings of 288 respondents (57.6%) were 6001 to 10000, earnings of 93 respondents (18.6%) were 10001 -14000, earnings of 64 respondents (12.8%) were 14001 -18000 and earnings of 32 respondents (6.4%) were above 18000.

4.9: PROBLEMS YOU FACED DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Table 4.9: Problems you faced during Covid 19 Pandemic

Problems faced	No of respondent	Percentage
Psychological stress	62	12.4 %
Social disruption	00	0 %
Lack of peer contact	00	0 %

Depression	00	0 %
Lack of social adjustment during work	71	14.2 %
All of these	367	73.4 %
Total	500	100 %

Source: Primary Data, Survey

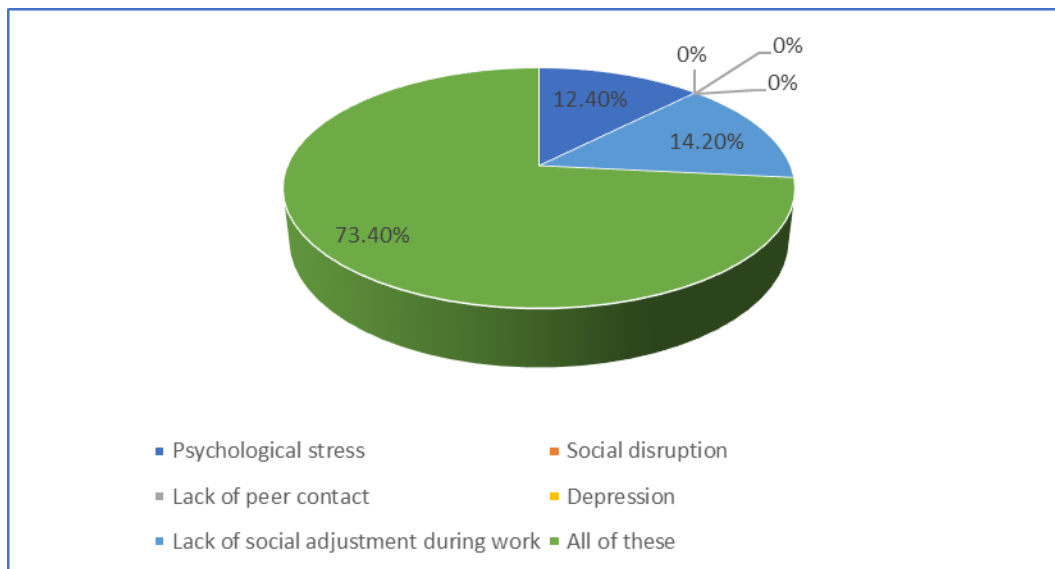


Fig. 4.9: Problems you faced during Covid 19 Pandemic

Table 4.9 and Graph 4.9 reflect the **problems faced by respondents during Covid 19 Pandemic**, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 62 respondents (12.4%) were under psychological stress, 71 respondents (14.2%) were under lack of social adjustment during work, 367 respondents (73.4%) were under Psychological stress, Social disruption, Lack of peer contact, Depression and Lack of social adjustment during work.

4.10 Return During the Pandemic

Table 4.10: Return during the Pandemic

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	338	67.6 %
No	0	0%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data, Survey

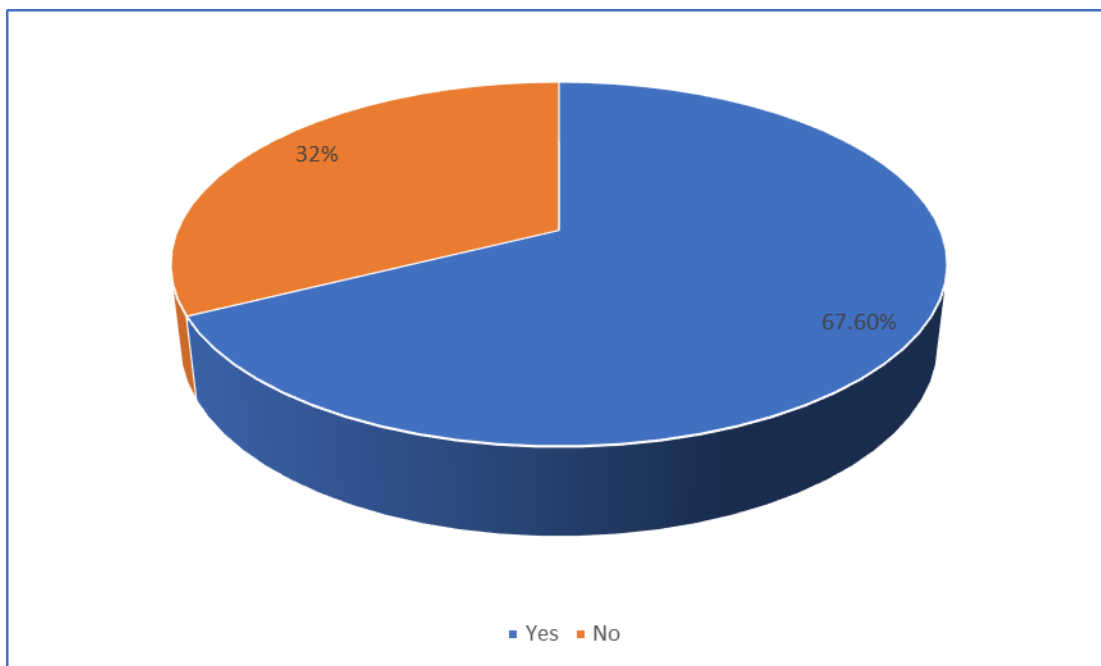
**Fig. 4.10: Return during the Pandemic**

Table 4.10 and Graph 4.10 reflect the above issue, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that 338 respondents (67.6%), returned during the Pandemic whereas 162 respondents (32.4%) gave negative answers.

4.11 After Return Find Any Employment in the Village

Table 4.11: After return find any Employment in The Village

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	72	14.4 %
No	109	21.8 %
Temporary	319	63.2 %
Total	500	100 %

Source: Primary Data, Survey

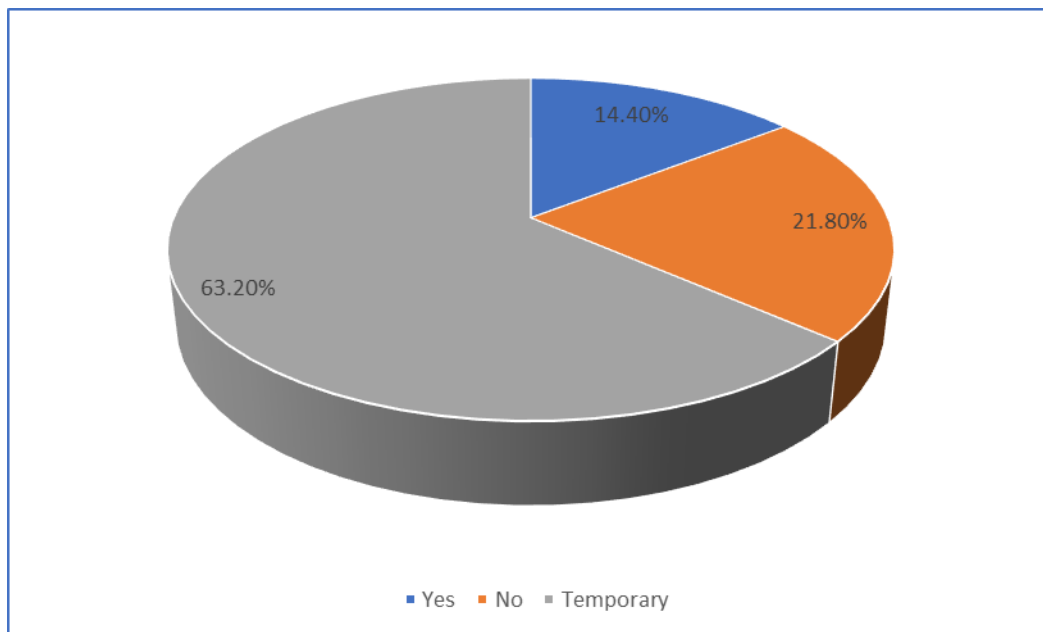


Fig.4.11: After Return Find any Employment in the Village

Table 4.11 and Graph 4.11 reflect the above issue, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that as per the Opinion of 72 Respondents (14.4%), After Their Returned they find any employment in the village whereas 109 respondents (21.8%) gave negative answer and 319 Respondents Got Temporary Placement.

Most of the respondents have not got any employment in the village after returning from outside.

4.12 FEMALE MEMBERS OF FAMILY LOST JOBS OR INCOME SOURCES

Table 4.12: Female Members of Family Lost Jobs or Income Sources

Option	No of respondent	Percentage
Yes	408	81.6 %
No	11	2.2 %
Not applicable	81	16.2 %
Total	500	100 %

Source: Primary Data, Survey

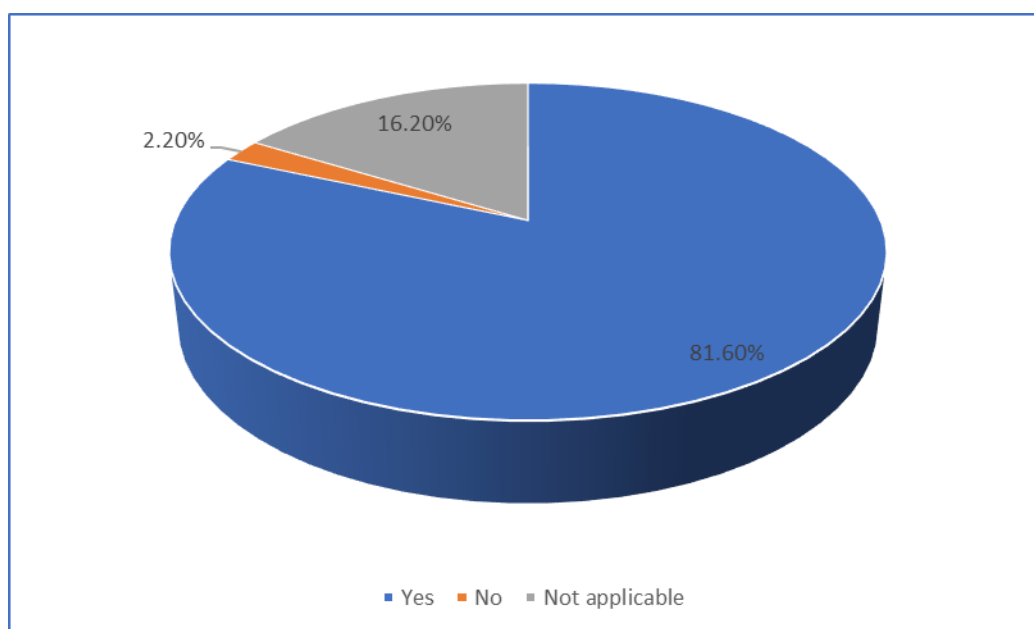


Fig. 4.12: Female Members of Family Lost Jobs or Income Sources

Table 4.12 and Graph 4.12 reflect the above issue, Out of 500 respondents it is evident that as per the opinion of 408 respondents' (81.6%), female members also lost Jobs or income sources whereas 11 respondents (2.2%) gave negative answer and not applicable for 81 respondents (16.2 %).

It is evident that most of the female members of family lost job during pandemic

Overall, the analysis shows that the COVID-19 crisis led to widespread job loss, income insecurity, and livelihood instability in rural areas. The situation exposed structural weaknesses in the rural economy, including dependence on informal employment and limited social security, highlighting the need for stronger rural employment policies and support systems.

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on rural employment and livelihoods. The nationwide lockdown, disruption of markets, and restrictions on movement led to widespread job losses, especially among daily wage labourers, migrant workers, and those engaged in the informal sector. The return of large numbers of migrant workers to rural areas further increased pressure on limited employment opportunities, resulting in income insecurity and economic distress.

Many rural households faced serious livelihood challenges, including reduced earnings, food insecurity, rising debts, and depletion of savings.

The crisis exposed the structural weaknesses of the rural economy, such as dependence on informal employment and lack of adequate social security. Therefore, there is a need for stronger rural employment programs, improved social protection systems, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

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