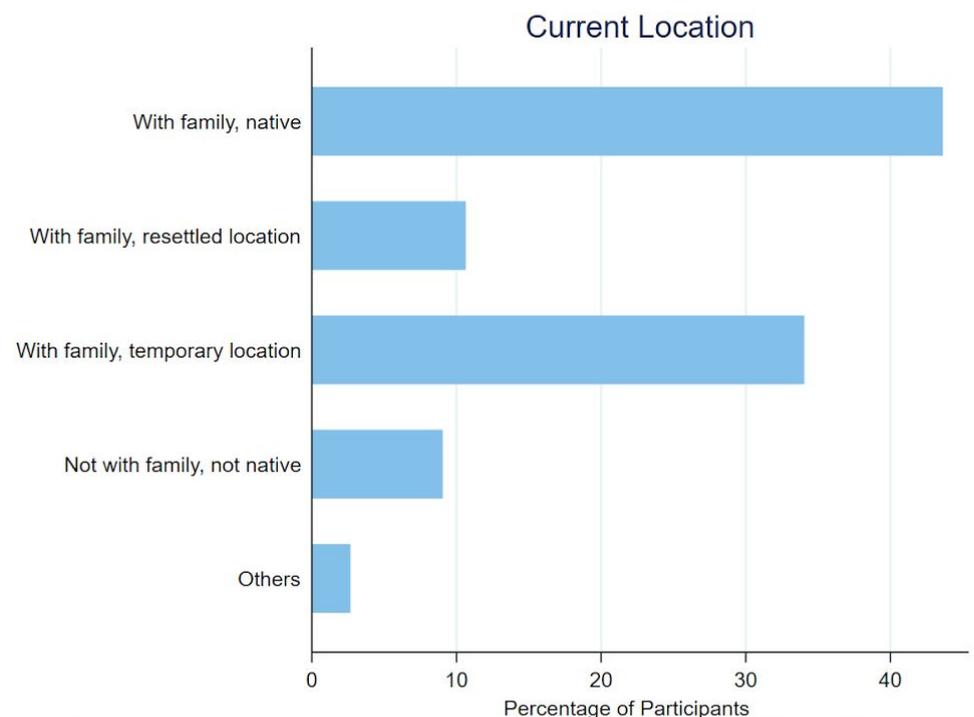


IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON MIGRANT WORKERS IN TAMIL NADU¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has had varied impacts on different sections of the society in India. Amidst all the turbulence caused by the pandemic, the movement of migrant laborers has been one of extreme concern. Since the first lockdown, there have been multiple government orders administering mobility of migrant workers and at the same time, stranded workers expressing their distress due to lack of access to resources, lack of transportation, and loss of jobs. As of 31st May 2020, the New Indian Express states that about 2.5 lakh (250,000) migrant laborers have left Tamil Nadu, whereas [The Wire](#) highlights that there is about 15 lakh (1.5 million) migrant workers in Tamil Nadu and there may be many who are vulnerable in this situation. However, a question that remains predominantly unanswered is the impact on the daily lives and movement of intra-state daily wage migrant workers.

The [Behavioral Development Lab](#), founded by Prof. Heather Schofield, Prof. Frank Schilbach, and Prof. Gautam Rao, has engaged in several research studies in the space of Development and Behavioral Economics, through LEAD at Krea University. One such research that is currently being conducted by Prof. Heather Schofield (University of Pennsylvania), Prof. Supreet Kaur (University of California, Berkeley), and Luisa Cefala (University of California, Berkeley) involves studying the impact of lockdown on intra-state migrant laborers in Tamil Nadu. The lab has been conducting phone surveys with these migrant laborers, who were part of past research that involved studying labor supply in labor stands² based in Chennai.

The current research tries to explore the multifaceted consequences of the lockdown. In the first round of data collection, from the period of 22nd May to 19th June, the team had spoken to 275 people, of whom 42% had traveled back to their home village and only about 35% of them had stated that they found a temporary job nearby. Before the lockdown, all these migrant workers were primarily engaged in construction work in Chennai. However, since the onset of the pandemic, about 25% have reported engaging in



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² Labor stands are gathering points located mostly in suburbs and sometimes in central parts of the city for daily wage labourers to gather and find work. These labor stands witness various recruiters mostly from the field of construction come by and recruit people for a particular job. Majority of the times, work found through these stands are extremely short term, spanning between 1 to 7 days.

agriculture and fishing in their home villages as a way to support the family income.

The survey is also aimed at capturing the behavioral responses to COVID 19 - related measures such as social distancing, hand-washing, and wearing masks. The survey examines access to these resources as well as affordability. Results on this front are encouraging: with almost 85% of the sample receiving information through television and print medium-based news, there is awareness about the importance of wearing masks and the cost of masks, and when asked about their habit of wearing one, 64% said that they cover their face every time they go out. Respondents also mentioned washing hands more often. Promising as these initial statistics are, there is still scope for improving reliable information and health behaviors. For example, many individuals believe some elements of incorrect health information, such as the power of turmeric water to reduce disease risk.



The pandemic has brought about other changes in the respondents' daily lives: the figure above shows that about 22% of the participants mentioned that they watch the news more often than before, 28% of participants mentioned that they now buy things in larger quantities and about 37% mention that they have not been going out as often as before. This pandemic has also taken a heavy toll on emotional wellbeing with 67% of our sample agreeing that they are scared about the situation due to the uncertainty the pandemic has created. Job availability post the pandemic, lack of an income source during the lockdown, and shortage in the food supply are few of the concerns expressed by the people we spoke to.

It has been four months since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Tamil Nadu. Over these four months, the lives of migrant workers have been influenced by a variety of factors, hence the lab is currently conducting a second round of surveys with the same sample to study the changes in beliefs and practices over time. The Behavioral Developments Lab will publish data collected through this study and as well as provide detailed reports on the findings from this study. You can find more about it [\[here\]](#).



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