Incidence and Determinants of Poverty among Rural Labour Households in Punjab

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the incidence and determinants of poverty among the rural labour households in Punjab. The study is based on a survey of 530 rural labour households from 22 villages. The study reveals that as per the Tendulkar criterion, the incidence of poverty is 40.89 and 37.40 per cent for the rural labour households on the basis of their income and consumption expenditure, respectively. As per the World Bank's moderate poverty line criterion, the proportion of population living below the poverty line is 60.47 and about 56 per cent on the basis of income and consumption expenditure. The incidence of poverty is higher among agricultural labourers as compared to non-agricultural labourers. The family size, number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations are the determinants of income-based poverty and the number of dependents and education level of the decision maker in the family are determinants of consumption-based poverty.

Keywords: Rural labour, Poverty, Income, Consumption, Determinants.

JEL Classification: I32, P24, P36, Q12, Q13.

Introduction

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. It has multiple causes such as economic, social and political. Poverty reduction policies have become one of the priority policy targets of governments in developing countries and the pillar of external financial assistance from donor countries. To reduce poverty is formidable challenge in developing countries where widespread poverty prevails, income is extremely low, growth rate is weak and income distribution is unequal. These features create systemic tendency for the poverty elasticity of income to be weak, making the growth induced poverty reduction less effective (Besley and Burguess, 2003). Even economies with remarkable growth rate could not achieve sustainable poverty reduction if the growth process does not generate productive job opportunities and accumulation of assets and capital for an increasing population (Moges, 2013). The evil poverty is more serious than ever in large parts of the world. The new political economy asserts that citizens, politicians, bureaucrats and states use the authority of government to distort economic transactions for their own benefit. The result is an inefficient and inequitable allocation of resources, general impoverishment and reduced freedom**.** One reason for the failure of poverty eradication was the neglect of political constraints and of the need to create a constituency for reform. (Streeten, 1995). Capitalist development create poverty through a variety of ways including the processes of dispossession and displacement, pauperised production under petty commodity production, unemployment of labour, and employment under precarious conditions under global value chains. These social processes sometimes generate wealth along with poverty (Mishra, 2022). The role of state and strategies adopted by state are very important to reduce poverty (Donaldson, 2016). The inability of government institutions to provide basic services have serious consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the society. The lack of opportunity can prevent generations of poor families from lifting themselves out of poverty (Anonymous, 2012).

The problem of poverty, especially rural poverty has drawn a great deal of attention of intellectuals, planners and policy makers in India. The extreme poverty in rural India shows a high growth level, especially in the agricultural sector. This poverty can be explained through an unequal distribution of land, water as well as added value, that is deeply entrenched in social relations of dependency (Claire *et al.*, 2015). The importance of reduction in poverty and provision of other basic needs have been emphasized in all the Five-Year Plans, particularly since the Fifth Five-Year

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Plan (Sharma, 2009). Though various public schemes have been attempting to improve the economic conditions of the poor in India for a long time, they have not achieved much in terms of reduction in deprivation (Banerjee, 2022). These schemes have given thrust on creating adequate livelihood opportunities, provisioning of public services and goods, targeted development of backward regions through resource transfers and supportive policy measures for the marginalised segments of the population etc. (Kumar *et al*., 2011). The proportion of population living below poverty line in Punjab was 28.15 per cent in the year 1973-74. This proportion declined to 11.77 per cent in the year 1993-94 and further declined to 11.3 per cent in the year 2011-12 (GoI, 2014). Though, the employment programmes have been strengthened in the successive years, a large proportion of agricultural labourers is still living below the poverty line in rural Punjab (Singh and Singh, 2016). In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the incidence and determinants of poverty among the sampled rural labour households in Punjab.

Data Sources and Methodology

The present study is based on primary data. For the purpose of data collection, the whole state has been divided into three regions on the basis of agricultural productivity namely low, medium and high productivity regions. One district has been selected from each region. The Mansa district from low productivity region, Saheed Bhagat Singh Nagar from medium productivity region and Ludhiana from high productivity region has been selected. One village has been chosen from each development block of these three selected districts. There are five development blocks in Mansa district, five in S.B.S. Nagar district and 12 in Ludhiana district. Thus, in all, 22 villages have been selected from three districts under study. One-tenth of the households from the total number of rural labour households of the villages have been selected randomly for the survey. Thus, in all, 530 rural labour households have been selected from 22 villages. Out of 530 rural labour households, 163 from Mansa district, 175 from S.B.S. Nagar and 192 from Ludhiana district have been selected. Out of 530 rural labour households, 229 households were agricultural labour households and 301 were non-agricultural labour households. Out of 229 selected agricultural labour households, 99 households were from Mansa district, 49 households from S.B.S. Nagar district and

81 households from Ludhiana district. Similarly, out of 301 selected non-agricultural labour households, 64 households were from Mansa district, 126 households from S.B.S. Nagar district and 111 households from Ludhiana district. The primary data collected from the respondents pertained to the year 215-16.

Different Criteria for Measurement of Poverty

The prevalence of poverty among the sampled rural labour households in Punjab has been analysed on the basis of following criteria:

Tendulkar criterion

In 2005, Tendulkar committee was constituted by the Planning Commission to review the methodology for estimation of poverty in India. This committee recommended to shift away from the calorie-based model and made the poverty line somewhat broader way by considering monthly spending on education, health, electricity and transport also. For 2004-05, the poverty line using by this methodology is estimated to be Rs. 543.51 per capita, per month for the rural areas of Punjab (GoI, 2009). However, for the purpose of this study, the figures are converted for the year 2015-16 by taking consumer price index for rural labour. The cut-off income for the year 2015-16 is given below:

By following the above criteria, the poverty line comes to be Rs. 16242 per capita, per annum for the year 2015-16. Hence, all the rural labour households having per capita income or per capita consumption expenditure below Rs. 16242 per annum has been considered as poor households. The most widely used measure of poverty is the Head-Count measure, given by the proportion of the total population falling below the specified poverty income.

Rangarajan criterion

An Expert Group under the chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan, to review the methodology for measurement of poverty in the country, was constituted by the Planning Commission in June 2012. This Expert Group has submitted its report on 30th June, 2014. According to this committee, the poverty line is estimated to be Rs. 1127.48 per capita per month in the rural areas of Punjab at 2011-12 prices (GoI, 2014). However, for the purpose of this study, the figures are converted by using consumer price index for rural labour for

Table 1. Calculation of poverty line on the basis of Tendulkar methodology

Year	CPI of rural labour (Punjab) 1986-87=100	Index	Monthly poverty line	Annual poverty line
2004-05[*]	359	100	543.51	6522.12
2015-16[**]	894	249.03	1353.50	16242.00

*Source: * The figures for 2004-05 from GoI (2009) Report of the Expert Group to review the methodology for measurement of Poverty.*
 **The figures for 2015-16 compiled from GoI Annual Report (2015-16), Labour Bureau, Chandigarh.*

Table 2. Calculation of poverty line on the basis of Rangarajan methodology

Year	CPI of Rural labour (Punjab) 1986-87=100	Index	Monthly Poverty Line	Annual Poverty Line
2011-12[*]	681	100	1127.48	13529.76
2015-16[**]	894	131.28	1480.16	17761.92

*Source: * The figures for 2011-12 from GoI (2014) Report of the Expert Group to review the methodology for measurement of poverty.*
** The figures for 2015-16 compiled from GoI Annual Report (2015-16), Labour Bureau, Chandigarh.

the year 2015-16. The cut-off income for the year 2015-16 is given below:

By following the above criterion, the poverty line comes to be Rs. 1480.16 per capita, per month or Rs. 17761.92 per capita, per annum for the year 2015-16. Hence, all the rural labour households having per capita income or per capita consumption expenditure below Rs. 17761.92 per annum has been considered as poor households.

World Bank's moderate poverty line criterion

The World Bank's moderate poverty measure was also used to describe the incidence of poverty among the rural labour households in Punjab. The revised moderate international poverty line was $3.10 per day, per person at purchasing power parity (Ferreira et al., 2015). In this study, the poverty line was converted into rupees on the basis of purchasing power parity in 2015-16. The purchasing power parity of the Indian Rupees with US $ in 2015-16 is 1$ = Rs. 17.52 (Anonymous, 2016). As per this criterion, the cut-off income for the year 2015-16 is as given below:

Cut-off income = 3.10 × 17.52 × 365 = Rs. 19823.88

50 Per cent of State PCY criterion

The fourth criterion to define poverty in relation to contemporary living level is half of the average per capita income (PCY) level of the state. Punjab's per capita income at current prices for the year 2015-16 is Rs. 119261 (GoP, 2016). The formula for finding the income level of persons, who appear below the poverty line, can be worked out as follows:

Cut-off income = PCY of state × 50%
= Rs. 119261 × 50/100
= Rs. 59630.50

40 Per cent of State PCY criterion

The below poverty line persons in the rural Punjab can also be identified by taking into consideration only 40 per cent of per capita income (PCY) of the state instead of 50 per cent. The cut-off income as per this criterion can be calculated as below:

Cut-off income = PCY of state × 40%
= Rs. 119261 × 40/100
= Rs. 47704.40

The factors determining and influencing poverty of

the rural labour households has been analysed and carried out by the use of multiple regression analysis. The multiple regression model used as follows:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + ... + b_nX_n$$

Where, Y is the dependent variable; X_1-X_n are the explanatory variables; a is a constant term and b_1-b_n are the regression coefficients for X_1-X_n, respectively. The factors influencing per capita income of the rural labour households are considered to be the determinants of poverty. The following factors were considered in our model:

$$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4)$$

Where, Y= Per capita income (Rs.), X_1= Family size, X_2= Per capita expenditure on education (Rs.), X_3= Number of earners, X_4= Income from subsidiary occupations (Rs.).

The factors which affect the consumption expenditure are considered as determinants of consumption based poverty of rural labour households. The following variables were chosen for final run:

$$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4)$$

Where, Y= Per capita consumption expenditure (Rs.), X_1= Number of dependents, X_2= Repayment of debt (Rs.), X_3= Education level of the decision maker in the family, X_4= Income from subsidiary occupations (Rs.).

Results and Discussion

Incidence of Income-based Poverty Among Sampled Rural Labour Households

The term 'poverty' is defined as inability of an individual to satisfy certain basic minimum needs for a sustained, healthy and reasonable productive living. In the narrow sense, it represents the basic material conditions of households or individuals in terms of low production, income and consumption. All those persons who live below minimum desirable levels of living are said to be living below the poverty line. All the rural labour households having per capita income below the cut-off income have been considered as poor. Table 3 depicts the percentage of rural labour households living below the income-based poverty line, which has been worked out on the basis of different criterion as mentioned above. A perusal of the table showed that 40.89, 43.23 and 37.77 per cent of the total family members of the rural labour, agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour

Table 3. Incidence of income-based poverty among sampled rural labour households

Criterion	Poverty Line (Per capita income, per annum)	Percentage of persons living below poverty line		
		AL	NAL	All Sampled
Tendulkar criterion	16242.00	43.23	37.77	40.89
Rangarajan criterion	17761.92	47.72	47.41	47.37
World Bank's Moderate poverty line criterion	19823.88	63.95	57.76	60.47
50 Per cent of State PCY criterion	59630.50	99.84	99.48	99.63
40 Per cent of State PCY criterion	47704.40	99.35	97.85	98.47

Source: Field Survey, 2015-16.
Note: AL-Agricultural Labour Households and NAL-Non-agricultural Labour Households.

households, respectively are living below the poverty line as per Tendulkar criterion in rural Punjab.

However, according to the Rangarajan criterion, the incidence of income-based poverty among the family members of the rural labour households is 47.37 per cent for the whole Punjab. While the percentages for the agricultural and non-agricultural labour households living below the poverty line were 47.72 per cent and 47.41 per cent, respectively. As per the World Bank's moderate poverty line criterion, the proportion of population of the rural labour, agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour households living below the poverty line was 60.47 per cent, 63.95 per cent and 57.76 per cent, respectively for whole Punjab. Further, according to the 50 per cent of state per capita income criterion, 99.63 per cent, 99.84 per cent and 99.48 per cent of the family members of the rural labour, agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour households, respectively in Punjab were living below this poverty line. Even when the 40 per cent of the state per capita income criterion is taken into account, the proportion of the family members of the rural labour households living below the poverty line is 98.47 per cent. The proportion of the poor was very high among the sampled rural labourers. Thus, economic growth in India spontaneously leading the rural poor towards some kind of social advancement seems highly unrealistic (Claire

et al., 2015).

Incidence of Consumption-based Poverty among Sampled Rural Labour Households

The extent of consumption-based poverty among the family members of rural labour households is also worked out and the results are presented in Table 4. The basic criteria for the poverty line remains the same as applied in the income-based poverty measures. A perusal of the table showed that out of the total family members of the rural labour, agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour households, 37.90 per cent, 41.37 per cent and 33.03 per cent, respectively are living below the poverty line as per Tendulkar criterion for the whole Punjab.

However, according to the Rangarajan criterion, the incidence of consumption-based poverty among the family members of the rural labour households was 43.20 per cent for the whole Punjab. While the percentages for agricultural and non-agricultural labour households living below the poverty line were 45.09 per cent and 40.54 per cent, respectively. As per the World Bank's moderate poverty line criterion, about 56 per cent of the total population of the rural labour households in Punjab is living below this poverty line. This proportion was 56.53 per cent and 55.43 per cent for the agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour households.

Table 4. Incidence of consumption-based poverty among sampled rural labour households

Criterion	Poverty line (Per capita consumption, per annum)	Percentage of persons living below poverty line		
		AL	NAL	All Sampled
Tendulkar criterion	16242.00	41.37	33.03	37.90
Rangarajan criterion	17761.92	45.09	40.54	43.20
World Bank's Moderate poverty line criterion	19823.88	56.53	55.43	55.89
50 Per cent of State PCY criterion	59630.50	99.84	98.95	99.32
40 Per cent of State PCY criterion	47704.40	98.94	97.62	98.17

Source: Field Survey, 2015-16.
Note: AL-Agricultural Labour Households and NAL-Non-agricultural Labour Households.

Further, according to the 50 per cent of state per capita consumption expenditure criterion, 99.32 per cent of the family members of the rural labour households in Punjab are living below this poverty line. This proportion is as high as 99.84 per cent and 98.95 per cent for the agricultural and non-agricultural labour households, respectively. Even when the 40 per cent of state per capita consumption expenditure criterion is taken into account, the proportion of the family members of rural labour households living below the poverty line was 98.17 per cent for Punjab as whole.

The above analysis shows that the incidence of poverty was higher among agricultural labour households as compared to non-agricultural labour households in rural Punjab due to less work opportunities available to agricultural labour households in the agricultural sector. Moreover, due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, the employment is not available throughout the year in the agricultural sector. So, the income of the households depend on agriculture sector is low. Moreover, by comparing the income and consumption-based poverty among the rural labour households, it has been found that the incidence of consumption-based poverty is slightly less than the incidence of income-based poverty. These households are forced to borrow from others to maintain a minimum level of living (Uppal *et al*., 2018).

Determinants of Income-based Poverty of Sampled Rural Labourers

The data given in Table 5 depicted that per capita income based poverty of the rural labour households is explained by the family size, per capita consumption expenditure on education, number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations. The regression coefficients for all the factors except per capita expenditure on education were found to be statistically significant for the rural labour households for the whole Punjab. The value of R^2 is 0.485 which reveals that 49 per cent variations in per capita income of the sampled rural labour households for whole Punjab are explained by

these explanatory variables. The family size was the biggest constraint on the levels of living of rural labour households in Punjab. The regression coefficient for this variable is negative and significant at one per cent level. The regression coefficients for number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations are positive and statistically significant at one per cent level of probability. This means that the increase in number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations can greatly contribute to reduce the income-based poverty of the rural labour households in Punjab. The regression coefficient for per capita consumption expenditure on education is positive but statically non-significant.

For the agricultural labour households, the regression coefficients for all the factors except per capita expenditure on education are found to be statistically significant for the whole Punjab. The regression coefficient for family size is negative and the regression coefficient for number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations are positive and statistically significant at one per cent level of probability. The regression coefficient for per capita consumption expenditure on education is negative but statically non-significant in rural Punjab. The value of R^2 is 0.532 which revealed that 53 per cent variations in per capita income of all sampled agricultural labour households are explained by these explanatory variables. In the case of non-agricultural labour households, the regression coefficient for family size is negative and number of earners is positive and statistically significant in rural Punjab. The regression coefficient for income from subsidiary occupations and per capita expenditure on education were non-significant for the whole Punjab. The value of R^2 is 0.50 which reveals that 50 per cent variations in the per capita income of the sampled non-agricultural labour households in rural Punjab are explained by these explanatory variables.

The above analysis depicts that the policy measures like increase in income from subsidiary occupations and increase

Table 5. Factors affecting income-based poverty of sampled rural labourers

Factors affecting income-based poverty	AL	NAL	All Sampled
Family size	-0.748*	-0.825*	-0.806*
	(-13.136)	(-16.319)	(-21.170)
Per capita expenditure on education	-0.049^{NS}	0.014^{NS}	0.012^{NS}
	(-0.897)	(0.329)	(0.355)
Number of earners	0.348*	0.342*	0.402*
	(5.534)	(6.704)	(10.084)
Income from subsidiary occupations	0.280*	0.004^{NS}	0.146*
	(5.590)	(0.086)	(4.334)
R^2	0.532	0.500	0.485

Source: Field Survey, 2015-16.
Note: Figures in parentheses indicate t-values.
*Significant at one per cent. **Significant at five per cent. ***Significant at ten per cent. NS: Non-Significant.

Table 6. Factors affecting consumption-based poverty of sampled rural labourers

Factors affecting consumption based poverty	AL	NAL	All Sampled
Number of dependents	-0.543*	-0.446*	-0.472*
	(-10.105)	(-10.403)	(-14.034)
Repayment of debt	-0.097***	-0.047[NS]	-0.036[NS]
	(-1.762)	(-1.206)	(-1.086)
Education level of the decision maker in the family	0.259*	0.449*	0.404*
	(4.743)	(10.818)	(12.186)
Income from subsidiary occupations	0.162*	0.026[NS]	0.111*
	(3.041)	(0.700)	(3.505)
R^2	0.380	0.581	0.480

Source: Field Survey, 2015-16.
Note: Figures in parentheses indicate t-values.
*Significant at one per cent. **Significant at five per cent. ***Significant at ten per cent. NS: Non-Significant.

in the number of earners by providing them alternative employment opportunities can contribute significantly to reduce poverty among the rural labour households in Punjab. The other policy measure that can be adopted to reduce poverty among them is reduction in their family size by providing knowledge about family planning methods. Kaur and Kaur (2020) also found that number of earner and family size are significantly contributed to poverty of labour households.

Determinants of Consumption-based Poverty of Sampled Rural Labourers

The economic condition of rural labour households was also reflected from their per capita consumption expenditure. Therefore, the factors influencing the per capita consumption expenditure of rural labour households were considered to be the determinants of consumption-based poverty. Table 6 depicted that per capita consumption-based poverty of the rural labour households is explained by the number of dependents, repayment of debt, education level of the decision maker in the family and income from subsidiary occupations. The regression coefficients for all the factors except repayment of debt were found to be statistically significant at one per cent level of probability for the rural labourers for the whole Punjab. The table further explains that the high number of dependents is the biggest constraint on the levels of living of rural labour households in Punjab. The regression coefficient for this variable is negative and significant at one per cent level of probability. The regression coefficients for education level of decision maker in the family and income from subsidiary occupations are positive and significant at one per cent level. This means that the increase in the education level of the decision maker in the family and income from subsidiary occupations can greatly contribute to reduce the consumption-based poverty of rural labourers in the Punjab. The value of R^2 is 0.480 which reveals that 48 per cent variations in per capita consumption

expenditure of all the sampled rural labour households in Punjab are explained by these explanatory variables.

For the agricultural labourers, the regression coefficients for all the factors are found to be statistically significant in rural Punjab. The regression coefficients for number of dependents and repayment of debt are negative and for the education level of the decision maker in the family and income from subsidiary occupations are positive. The value of R^2 reveals that only 38 per cent variations in per capita consumption expenditure of all the sampled agricultural labour households in rural Punjab are explained by these explanatory variables. In the case of non-agricultural labourers, the regression coefficients for the number of dependents and education level of the decision maker in the family are found to be statistically significant and for the income from subsidiary occupations and repayment of debt are non-significant in rural Punjab. All these explanatory variables explain 58 per cent variations in per capita consumption expenditure of all the sampled non-agricultural labourers in rural Punjab.

The above analysis depicts that the policy measures like increase in income from subsidiary occupations, providing them more non-farm employment opportunities and increase in education level can contribute significantly to reduce consumption expenditure-based poverty among the rural labour households (Singh *et al.*, 2013)

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The present study highlighted that as per Tendulkar criterion, the incidence of poverty is about 41 per cent and 38 per cent on the basis of their income and consumption expenditure respectively in rural Punjab. The corresponding figures were 47.37 per cent and 43.20 per cent as per the Rangarajan criterion. As per the World Bank's Moderate Poverty Line criterion, 60.47 per cent and 55.89 per cent of the total population was living below poverty line on the basis of income and consumption, respectively. The incidence

of poverty is slightly more than 99 per cent as per the 50 per cent of state per capita income criterion. The incidence of poverty is higher among agricultural labour households as compared to non-agricultural labour households. The family size, number of earners and income from subsidiary occupations were the main determinants of income-based poverty and the number of dependents, education level of the decision maker in the family and income from subsidiary occupations are the main determinants of consumption-based poverty. The rural labourers were greatly inhibited by lower attainments of different types of assets. A majority of them are generally landless and have low level of education and consequently, the returns on their productive assets (whichever they own) are too low to pull them out of the morass of poverty.

To improve their situation, the sincere efforts must be taken by the state government to provide more job opportunities to rural labourers. The establishment of agro-based industries in the rural areas, proper implementation of MGNREGS and strict enforcement of minimum wage act would go a long way to reduce the incidence of poverty. Further, the government may start special training programmes for the rural labourers to upgrade their skills and capabilities. There may be emphasis on generation of non-farm activities in rural areas especially during off-seasons. Banks and other financial institutions have come forward to finance these activities to those people who are unable to provide any type of collateral security. There may be a policy of delinking the credit market from the asset ownership for these economically weaker sections of the rural areas. The rural poverty alleviation programmes should be integrated and well-coordinated with the programmes of universalisation of education, basic health services as well as decent housing.

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[1]The views expressed in the research paper are authors' own.

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