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Research Article

Work-Life Balance of National Migrant Workers in the Industrial Sector: Challenges, Perceptions and Implications

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Abstract: The phenomenon of internal or national migration for industrial employment represents one of the most significant socio-economic processes in developing economies. This study investigates the work-life balance (WLB) conditions experienced by national migrant workers employed in the industrial sector, examining the intersecting pressures of extended working hours, physical separation from family and social networks, economic precarity, and inadequate institutional support. Drawing on primary data collected from 300 respondents across five major industrial clusters in India, the study employs a structured questionnaire and stratified random sampling to assess physical well-being, psychological stress levels, family satisfaction, leisure time, and perceived organisational support. Findings reveal that over 68% of respondents report significant impairment in family relations, 74% cite inadequate rest time, and 82% express a desire for employer-initiated WLB interventions. The research identifies systemic gaps in industrial labour policy and proposes a multi-pronged framework encompassing legislative reforms, enterprise-level WLB programs, and community-based support mechanisms.

Keywords: Migrant Labour, Work-Life Balance, Industrial Sector, Internal Migration, Occupational Well-being, Quantitative Study

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INTRODUCTION

Internal labour migration is a defining feature of India's developmental landscape. Millions of worker's cross state and district boundaries annually in pursuit of employment, primarily gravitating toward manufacturing hubs, construction belts, textile clusters, and chemical processing zones. The 2011 Census of India estimated the internal migrant population at approximately 450 million, with a significant share engaged in blue-collar industrial occupations. Subsequent demographic studies, including the Economic Survey [1] and the National Statistical Office's Migrant Workers Report (2020–21), suggest that the industrial sector absorbs nearly 30–35% of all economically active internal migrants.

The concept of work-life balance, broadly understood as a person's ability to allocate adequate time and energy to professional responsibilities, personal relationships, health, leisure, and community engagement, has attracted substantial academic and policy attention since the 1980s. However, this scholarship has predominantly focused on white-collar professionals, dual-income urban households, and service sector employees. The WLB experiences of industrial migrant workers — a group characterised by shift-based employment, physical intensity, wage insecurity, and enforced geographic distance from kin — remain comparatively under-examined.

For national migrant workers, the WLB challenge is qualitatively different from that of their non-migrant or professional counterparts. The act of migration itself severs everyday social networks: the village community, the joint family, religious and cultural rituals, and the familiar ecology of home. The migrant worker inhabits a bifurcated social world — economically present in the industrial city but emotionally and socially absent from the family. This structural condition generates chronic psychosocial stress that compounds the physiological toll of hazardous industrial work. Studies by Srivastava and Bhattacharyya [2] and Deshingkar and Akter [3] have documented patterns of social isolation, alcohol dependency, and mental health deterioration among long-term industrial migrants, underscoring the urgency of research-informed policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic additionally illuminated the acute vulnerabilities of this demographic: the reverse migration crisis of 2020, during which an estimated 10–12 million workers undertook long-distance journeys on foot, laid bare the absence of institutional safety nets and the deeply precarious nature of migrant industrial labour. Post-pandemic, as industrial production resumed and migrant flows recommenced, the question of sustainable, humane working conditions for this workforce has become a pressing policy priority.

This article seeks to fill a critical gap in the existing literature by rigorously examining the WLB perceptions, constraints, and aspirations of national migrant workers employed in the industrial sector. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the predominant WLB challenges experienced by national migrant workers in the industrial sector
- How do demographic variables (age, marital status, tenure, industry sub-sector) mediate WLB outcomes
- What role do employer practices, dormitory conditions, and social support systems play in shaping WLB perceptions
- What policy and enterprise-level interventions are most urgently needed and desired by workers themselves

The remainder of this article is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual framework and review of related literature, Section 3 describes the research methodology and sampling design, Section 4 profiles the survey sample, Section 5 presents the questionnaire instrument, Section 6 analyses the primary data and discusses key findings, Section 7 concludes with policy recommendations.

Defining Work-Life Balance in the Migrant Context

The theoretical underpinnings of work-life balance draw from several intellectual traditions. Greenhaus and Beutell's [4] seminal work on work-family conflict conceptualised the tension between occupational and domestic roles as a form of inter-role conflict arising from time, strain, and behaviour incompatibility. Clark's [5] Work-Family Border Theory extended this model by treating work and family as distinct domains separated by permeable, flexible borders that employees navigate daily. Grzywacz and Carlson [6] further argued for a positive conceptualisation of WLB as the accomplishment of role-related expectations negotiated between the individual and their role-related partners in work and family domains.

For national migrant workers, this border is not metaphorical but literally geographic. The spatial separation between workplace and family creates a unique dynamic in which the worker cannot engage in daily family negotiations — school pickups, elder care, household decisions — that constitute the substance of WLB management for sedentary workers. Instead, the migrant worker's WLB must be understood through the lens of translocal family management, periodic return visits, and the psychological burden of remote parenting and spousal relations.

Industrial Labour Conditions and Health Outcomes

Research on industrial labour in India consistently documents long working hours, with Kundu and Sharma [7] finding that workers in manufacturing zones regularly work 10–12 hours per shift, often without overtime compensation. Exposure to noise, dust, heat, and chemical hazards combines with sleep deprivation to create cumulative health deterioration. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector [8] reported that approximately 92% of industrial workers in informal arrangements lacked access to social security, medical coverage, or regulated working hours. These structural deficiencies directly undermine WLB by eliminating the temporal and physical resources necessary for rest and recovery.

Social Isolation and Psychological Well-being

Bhagat et al. [9] and Awasthi [10] document high rates of loneliness, depression, and anxiety among male industrial migrants separated from families. The absence of feminine social care typically provided by wives, mothers, or daughters in Indian household structures means that migrant men often lack both emotional support and basic domestic maintenance. Notably, Mahapatro [11] found that female migrant workers in industrial settings face

compounded challenges: in addition to long working hours, they encounter gender-based harassment, wage discrimination, and the dual burden of domestic responsibilities in shared accommodation.

Policy and Employer Response

Global frameworks, including the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and SDG Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasise the right to reasonable working hours, rest periods, family time, and safe working environments. In the Indian context, the Code on Wages [12], the Code on Industrial Relations [13], and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code [14] collectively represent a consolidation of existing labour legislation, though critics note that enforcement mechanisms remain weak and implementation uneven across states. Enterprise-level WLB interventions remain largely absent from industrial contexts, being concentrated instead in IT and financial services sectors.

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design combining quantitative primary data collection with contextual qualitative insights gathered through informal interviews. The mixed-method orientation acknowledges that statistical frequencies, while valuable for establishing the scope of WLB challenges, must be supplemented by workers' own narrative accounts to illuminate the lived texture of their experiences.

Study Area and Population

The research was conducted across five major industrial clusters in India, selected to represent geographical and sectoral diversity:

- Surat, Gujarat — textile and diamond processing
- Faridabad, Haryana — automotive and metal fabrication
- Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu — hosiery and knitwear manufacturing
- Bhilai, Chhattisgarh — steel and heavy engineering
- Noida, Uttar Pradesh — electronics and light manufacturing

The study population comprised male and female workers who had migrated from another state or district for the purpose of this employment, had been employed continuously for at least six months, and were aged 18–55 years.

Sampling Design

A stratified random sampling technique was employed. The strata were defined by industry cluster (five clusters), gender (male/female), and employment type (formal/informal arrangement). Within each stratum, workers were selected using a systematic random sampling approach from labour colony registers, trade union membership lists, and factory gate intercepts. A total of 300 respondents were surveyed, with 60 respondents drawn from each cluster.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured, Likert-scale questionnaire administered face-to-face by trained field investigators between January and April 2026. Questionnaires were translated into regional languages (Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, and Odia). A pilot survey of 30 respondents was conducted in December 2025 to test instrument validity and reliability, Cronbach's alpha for the full instrument was calculated at 0.81, indicating good internal consistency.

Analytical Framework

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were computed for all variables. Cross-tabulation and Chi-square tests were employed to examine associations between demographic variables and WLB outcomes. A composite WLB Index was constructed from seven sub-dimensions:

- Physical health and rest
- Psychological well-being
- Family relationship quality
- Leisure and recreation
- Financial security
- Social connectedness
- Perceived organisational support

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Migrant Workers by Age, Gender, Marital Status, Education, Income, Migration Duration, and Living Arrangements (N = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–25 years	72	24.0
	26–35 years	118	39.3
	36–45 years	79	26.3
	46–55 years	31	10.4
Gender	Male	234	78.0
	Female	66	22.0
Marital Status	Married	201	67.0
	Single/Unmarried	84	28.0
	Widowed/Separated	15	5.0
Educational Level	Illiterate/Primary	61	20.3
	Secondary (Class 10)	129	43.0
	Higher Secondary	83	27.7
	Graduate and above	27	9.0
Monthly Income	Below ₹8,000	54	18.0
	₹8,000–₹12,000	117	39.0
	₹12,001–₹18,000	93	31.0
	Above ₹18,000	36	12.0
Migration Duration	Less than 1 year	48	16.0
	1–5 years	162	54.0
	More than 5 years	90	30.0
Living Arrangement	Factory dormitory	96	32.0
	Shared private accommodation	153	51.0
	Independent accommodation	51	17.0

Source: Primary field survey, January–April 2026. n = 300

Survey Sample

The sample comprised 300 respondents across five industrial clusters. Key statistics: Total respondents: 300 | Male: 78% (234) | Female: 22% (66) | Average migration tenure: 4.2 years. The sample is dominated by males in the 26–35 age cohort with secondary education, consistent with the broader demographic profile of industrial migrant workers documented in national surveys. A majority (67%) are married, with their families residing in origin locations Table 1.

Questionnaire Instrument

The survey instrument comprised 42 items distributed across seven thematic modules. Items used a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree / Never) and 5 (Strongly Agree / Always).

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree/Never | 2 = Disagree/Rarely | 3 = Neutral/Sometimes | 4 = Agree/Often | 5 = Strongly Agree/Always

Module A Working Hours and Physical Conditions

- **Q1:** My daily working hours regularly exceed 8 hours without adequate compensation
- **Q2:** I am provided with sufficient rest breaks during my work shift
- **Q3:** My workplace is physically safe, with adequate ventilation, lighting, and protective equipment
- **Q4:** My job involves significant physical strain that leaves me too exhausted to engage in personal activities after work
- **Q5:** I have experienced work-related injuries or illnesses in the past twelve months
- **Q6:** I receive adequate medical care from my employer when I am ill or injured

Module B — Family Relations and Communication

- **Q7:** I am able to communicate with my family members regularly (daily or near-daily)
- **Q8:** My work schedule allows me to return home for significant family events
- **Q9:** My absence from home has negatively affected my relationship with my spouse/partner
- **Q10:** My absence from home has negatively affected my relationship with my children
- **Q11:** I feel guilty about not being present for my family's daily needs
- **Q12:** Financial remittances I send home adequately substitute for my physical presence in family decision-making

Module C — Psychological Well-being and Stress

- **Q13:** I frequently feel lonely or socially isolated at my place of work/accommodation
- **Q14:** I experience anxiety or depression related to separation from my family and community
- **Q15:** I find it difficult to sleep or maintain a regular sleep schedule due to work demands
- **Q16:** I have access to counselling or mental health support at my workplace or in my residential area
- **Q17:** Work-related stress significantly impacts my physical health (headaches, fatigue, digestive issues)
- **Q18:** I feel optimistic about my future and career prospects

Module D — Leisure, Recreation and Social Life

- **Q19:** After work, I have sufficient time and energy for leisure activities
- **Q20:** I have access to recreational facilities (parks, sports grounds, community halls) near my accommodation
- **Q21:** I maintain a social circle of friends or community members near my place of work
- **Q22:** I am able to observe religious or cultural practices that are important to me
- **Q23:** My weekly day(s) off are fully protected and I am not required or pressured to work on them

Module E — Financial Security and Economic Well-being

- **Q24:** My wages are paid on time and in full, without unauthorised deductions
- **Q25:** After meeting my living expenses, I am able to remit a satisfactory amount to my family
- **Q26:** I am enrolled in formal social security schemes (Provident Fund, ESI, or equivalent)
- **Q27:** Financial insecurity is a significant source of stress in my daily life

Module F — Accommodation and Living Conditions

- **Q28:** My living accommodation is clean, safe, and provides adequate personal space
- **Q29:** I have access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and hygienic cooking facilities
- **Q30:** My commute between accommodation and workplace is within an acceptable time and cost
- **Q31:** The quality of my accommodation negatively affects my sleep quality and recovery

Module G — Organisational Support and WLB Preferences

- **Q32:** My employer or supervisor shows genuine concern for my personal well-being beyond work performance
- **Q33:** My employer provides or facilitates access to any WLB-related services (e.g., family communication, healthcare)
- **Q34:** I would benefit from employer-facilitated phone/video communication centres to contact my family
- **Q35:** I would value a formalised leave policy that guarantees I can return home during major festivals or family emergencies
- **Q36:** I am aware of any government scheme or policy specifically designed to protect my rights as a migrant worker
- **Q37:** Overall, I am satisfied with the balance between my work life and personal life in my current situation

Working Hours and Physical Conditions

The data reveal a pervasive pattern of excessive working hours across all five clusters. An overwhelming 86.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their daily working hours regularly exceed eight hours without adequate compensation (Q1). The steel and heavy engineering workers of Bhilai reported the longest average shifts (11.4 hours), followed closely by textile workers in Surat (10.8 hours). Only 38.7% reported receiving sufficient rest breaks during their shifts, while a majority (61.3%) indicated inadequate break provision. Physical exhaustion preventing after-work personal activities was reported by 78.7% of respondents.

Workplace safety conditions were rated poorly, with only 44% affirming access to adequate protective equipment and safe working environments. Work-related injuries or health complaints in the preceding twelve months were reported by 52.3% of respondents. Access to employer-provided medical care was confirmed by merely 29% of the sample.

Family Relations and Communication

The family dimension of WLB is where migrant workers experience their most acute deficits. Daily or near-daily communication with family was possible for only 41% of respondents. A striking 74% reported that their work schedule did not adequately permit return visits for significant family events, with the most frequently cited missed occasions being children's school examinations (52%), parental illness or death (38%), and major festivals (61%).

The perceived impact on spousal relationships was severe: 68.3% agreed or strongly agreed that their absence had negatively affected marital relationships (Q9), and 71% reported feelings of guilt about their inability to contribute to daily family life (Q11). Among the 201 married respondents, 47% reported that their spouses had expressed a desire for the worker to return to their home location even at the cost of reduced income.

Psychological Well-Being and Stress

Social isolation emerged as a defining psychological feature of migrant workers' experiences. Frequent loneliness was reported by 63% of respondents (Q13), and 54.7% reported experiencing anxiety or depression attributed to family separation. Sleep disruption was reported by 69.3%, with shift rotation and noisy dormitory conditions identified as the principal causes. Access to counselling or mental health support was confirmed by a mere 7.3% of respondents — underscoring the near-total absence of mental health infrastructure for this workforce.

Cross-tabulation analysis revealed that workers with migration durations exceeding five years reported significantly higher scores on loneliness and depression dimensions ($\chi^2 = 18.43$, $p<0.01$). Female workers reported higher rates of gender-based harassment (41.7% of female respondents) and additional domestic burdens, generating a double burden that male respondents did not face to comparable degrees.

Leisure, Recreation, and Cultural Life

Leisure and cultural participation were found to be severely constrained. Only 26.7% of respondents reported having adequate time and energy for leisure activities after their working day (Q19). Access to recreational facilities was acknowledged by just 31.3%, and the majority of workers described their off-work time as primarily consumed by essential domestic tasks in shared accommodation. Weekend rest days were confirmed by 64% of respondents, but among this group, 43% reported informal pressure or explicit instruction to work on designated rest days during peak production periods.

Financial Security and Economic Well-being

Timely and complete wage payment was reported by 67.3% of respondents, though irregular payment and unauthorised deductions were frequently cited in the informal sector subset. Enrolment in formal social security schemes (PF, ESI) was confirmed by only 34% — significantly below legal requirements. Only 41.3% felt that their post-expense remittances adequately met family needs.

Accommodation and Living Conditions

Living conditions were rated below acceptable thresholds by a majority of respondents. Only 44.7% described their accommodation as clean, safe, and providing adequate personal space. Among dormitory residents ($n = 96$), overcrowding was a nearly universal complaint, with an average of 8.4 persons per sleeping room. A regression analysis of accommodation quality on WLB composite scores showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.34$, $p<0.001$), underscoring that housing quality is directly constitutive of WLB outcomes.

Perceived Organisational Support and WLB Preferences

Perceived organisational support was strikingly low across the sample. Only 22.7% agreed that their employer showed genuine concern for their personal well-being (Q32), and only 18.3% confirmed access to any employer-facilitated WLB service. However, demand for such interventions was high: 82% expressed a desire for employer-facilitated family communication facilities, 87% expressed strong support for a formalised festival leave guarantee, and 79% indicated that affordable healthcare access would significantly improve their WLB. Awareness of government migrant welfare schemes was low at 28.7%.

Demographic Mediators of WLB

Chi-square tests and one-way ANOVA revealed several significant demographic mediators. Married workers reported significantly lower WLB scores than single workers across all dimensions except financial security ($p<0.05$). Workers in factory dormitories reported lower physical and psychological WLB scores than those in independent accommodation.

Table 2: Composite WLB Index by Dimension

WLB Dimension	Mean Score (1–5)	% Reporting Deficit	Industry with Lowest Score
Physical Health and Rest	2.31	76.4%	Steel/Heavy Engineering
Psychological Well-being	2.19	71.3%	Textile (Surat)
Family Relationship Quality	2.08	68.3%	Electronics (Noida)
Leisure and Recreation	2.44	73.3%	Automotive (Faridabad)
Financial Security	2.67	58.7%	Hosiery (Tiruppur)
Social Connectedness	2.23	63.0%	Steel/Heavy Engineering
Organisational Support	1.94	81.7%	All clusters equally low

Note: Composite WLB Index mean = 2.27 (poor to moderate WLB). Scale: 1=Very Poor, 5=Very Good
Primary survey, 2026

Workers in informal employment reported significantly lower scores on financial security and organisational support dimensions. Age was not a statistically significant predictor of overall WLB, though older workers (46–55) reported higher resignation and acceptance, potentially reflecting habituation rather than genuine satisfaction Table 2.

CONCLUSION

This study presents compelling empirical evidence that the work-life balance of national migrant workers in India's industrial sector is systematically and severely compromised across all seven measured dimensions. The composite WLB Index mean of 2.27 out of 5 signals a condition well below acceptable standards of worker welfare, and the qualitative data suggest that many workers have normalised these conditions out of economic necessity rather than genuine satisfaction. The structural conditions of migrant industrial labour — excessive working hours, physical hazards, spatial separation from families, precarious accommodation, and virtual absence of institutional or employer support — together constitute a system that extracts maximum productive labour while externalising the social and psychological costs onto individual workers and their families.

The following recommendations are grounded in both the empirical findings and the expressed preferences of respondents:

- **Legislative Enforcement:** The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020) must be actively enforced in industrial clusters, particularly provisions on maximum working hours, mandatory rest periods, and access to medical care
- **Social Security Universalisation:** Enrolment in PF and ESI schemes must be addressed through mandatory registration at the time of employment contract, with portability of benefits across state boundaries
- **Festival Leave Guarantee:** A statutory minimum annual leave entitlement of 15 days, including guaranteed leave during major regional festivals, should be established for industrial workers with provisions for travel assistance
- **Employer WLB Programs:** Industries above a specified threshold (50+ workers) should be required to provide subsidised communication facilities for family contact, on-site healthcare, and access to trained social welfare officers
- **Affordable Housing Standards:** Migrant worker dormitories should be subject to mandatory quality standards, including maximum occupancy rules and access to hygienic kitchen and sanitation facilities
- **Awareness and Outreach:** Government migrant welfare scheme entitlements should be communicated to workers in their native languages through factory-based and community-based channels
- **Gender-Responsive Measures:** Female migrant workers require specific interventions including secure women-only accommodation options, accessible complaint mechanisms for harassment, and crèche or childcare facilities
- **Mental Health Integration:** Employee Assistance Programs offering confidential counselling services should be mainstreamed into industrial welfare obligations

The national migrant industrial worker is, paradoxically, among the most economically productive and socially vulnerable members of Indian society. Achieving SDG Goal 8's vision of decent work for all requires that this population be moved from the margins of policy attention to its centre. Work-life balance is not a luxury to be deferred, it is a foundational condition for sustainable, humane, and productive industrial labour.

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