

Draft Report



What's on the Menu?

Understanding Food Habits and Challenges of Migrant Workers in Ahmedabad

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1. Introduction and Rationale

“Tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are,” -- renowned gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in 1825.

This study focuses on the migrant workers of rural Rajasthan and their food habits. Migration imposes many constraints on the preparation and consumption of food; which we try to understand and suggest possible interventions which allow the migrants to have better access to wholesome food at a reasonable cost.

Food, one of the three basic physical and social needs, is something that is common to all people, yet it can signify differently from person to person, community to community and culture to culture. Food is one of the most essential expressions of culture. It is not just what we consume. It is also how we consume, who prepares what we consume, how it is prepared, what is used in the preparation, how we get hold of it, when we consume, with what we consume among others. It could be one of the purest expressions of a people, community, country or even personality. Food is also connected to where we come from, to our beliefs, values, tastes not withstanding our dietary patterns impact our health, the amount of work we do and the type of work we do. Various perspectives prevail on the local and global outlook of food through social, symbolic, and politico-economic roles. Specific meanings of Eating and food significantly contribute to men, women and societies defining themselves. The meaning of food crosses many disciplinary boundaries cutting across anthropology, history, psychology, sociology and philosophy.

In the modern era of globalization, where economic needs have overwhelmed cultural expectations of how food ought to be procured and prepared, we find that people have moved away from the ancestral lands in search of livelihood. This kind of movement usually takes place when livelihood options become limited at one place which may be due to climate factors such as a drought or other reasons. Labour migration has taken on a larger dimension than ever before. In developing countries like India unskilled and

unorganised sectors employ large numbers of transient workers who come from rural households to sell their labour. Haberfield *et al* report that rural households in India use migrant labour offered by their members to improve their well-being by both reducing the impacts of inferior conditions and by raising household's income levels. Migrant labour is a compensating mechanism used by households to reduce their disadvantageous economic position. Such migrant households are characterized by lower education levels, fewer local livelihood opportunities, lower levels of income, and often by an inferior geographical location.

The study is in the specific context of southern Rajasthan, which is one of the backward States of India with Human Development Index of 0.356 against all India average of 0.603 (Human Development Report, Rajasthan 1999). Rural residents of southern Rajasthan, with low education and skill levels, demonstrate high labour out-migration to the urban centres within Rajasthan and neighbouring states. The migrants are mostly single males who leave behind their families and lifestyles to become a seasonal part of the urban system. Their lifestyles undergo changes with respect to their living conditions; clothing and fashion; health and sexual behaviour; entertainment and food habits. The Aajeevika Bureau teams conducted surveys of the migrant workers at the destinations observing the harsh conditions in which migrants live and conduct their daily chores. These conditions came up as an arena of concern repeatedly during the field operations of Aajeevika Bureau. Thus, a need for a systematic attempt to understand the food patterns, its arrangement, and expenditure was felt and this study was conceptualized.

The need for this study also became critical as the target group, the rural unskilled migrants, is involved in labour intensive occupations which entail heavy physical work. A properly balanced diet has a strong correlation with physical well being, thereby directly impacting their productivity at work, remuneration, and retention of employment. Provision of balanced nutritive food at affordable cost arose as a vital requirement and a potential area of intervention for Aajeevika Bureau. The study also aims to frame an effective intervention strategy to address the food and nutrition requirement of the

migrant community. Cost efficient food options go a long way to enable people to save more and make migration as a livelihood strategy more effective.

2. Objectives and Scope of the Study

The study explores the food habits and behaviour of migrant workers from the rural areas of Southern Rajasthan to urban settings. It further examines the patterns of food procurement, arrangement, related concerns and the response to them. With this broad outline, the study was conceptualised to answer the following research questions

2.1 What are the eating habits of the migrant workers at their destination?

- How many meals do they consume in a day?
- How regular are they with their meals?
- What patterns of food consumption do they follow – when and what do they eat?

2.2 What are the various ways in which the migrants arrange their food? How is this arrangement related to the nature of their work – work timings, work location and accessibility to resources?

- How popular is a particular arrangement?
- Key features of these arrangements, broadly including expenditure.
- What percentage of their income (or expenditure) is spent on food?

2.3 For those who cook at home, what are their ration procurement patterns?

- What part of the ration do they get from their native villages?
- How often do they buy ration at destination?

- Do they buy in bulk? At what rates?
- Do they buy on credit or direct cash payments?

2.4 What do they eat to make their meals nutritious – milk, fruits, vegetables, ghee, eggs and meat?

2.5 What is the 'eating-out' behaviour of migrants, over and above their food consumption at home?

- How often do they eat out?
- What is this behaviour governed by?
- How much do they spend?

2.6 What are the problems faced and areas of concern around food? How are these related to the occupation that they are involved with?

For the purpose of this specific research study the scope is kept limited to migrants from Southern Rajasthan to the metropolitan city of Ahmedabad. The selection was made keeping in mind the following reasons:

- Ahmedabad is a popular destination for migrants from rural Southern Rajasthan.
- The city provides a broader cross-section of the challenges that migrants encounter. The migrant workers are geographically spread out within and in the outskirts of the city and have varied access to food.
- Aajeevika Bureau has an operational presence in the city and thus a focus was limited to this region in this pilot study on food habits and arrangements. The results of the study will be utilised to plan interventions to further strengthen its presence.

Within migrant workers of Ahmedabad, the focus was on the occupational groups of Loaders (Hamali), Construction Workers (Kadiya), and Factory Workers (Majdoor) which are popular occupations within which unskilled labourers find employment. These involve heavy physical labour and accordingly high calorie food requirements. Any lax on food shows adverse impact on their ability to carry on regular work, in turn impacting their livelihood.

3. Methodology

As mentioned, the study focussed on the migrant destination centre of Ahmedabad. In this report, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were employed. For quantitative data collection structured interviews were conducted with 79 migrant workers at their place of employment (refer Table 1). This data is then supplemented with qualitative inputs from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and participant observation of their work and living spaces. Two FGDs were conducted with each occupational group.

Table 1: Breakdown of structured interviews

Loaders	Construction workers	Factory workers	Total
28	28	23	79

The sampling of migrants was conducted with an aim to capture the diversity of geographical location of their place of work and residence. An effort was made to get a broad section of work locations.

For quantitative research, structured questionnaires were used which determined the nature of work, type of residence, food habits, food arrangements, basic expenditure on food, and procurement behaviour (Questionnaire included in Annexure I.)

Focus group discussions enquired on why particular arrangement or method of procurement was chosen, along with a brainstorming session on possible interventions to

improve availability and affordability of food. In observations, the conditions under which food is prepared were observed and partaken.

4. Nutritional Requirement of the Target Group

Migrant labourers in the given occupational groups are often engaged in hard physical labor for long periods of time. This places demands on their diet that is significantly different from the diet of a person engaged in more sedentary activity. Simplistically, we can break down the kind of labor performed by the laborers in two categories. One kind of labor is where heavy lifting or similar work is performed over short periods of time with rest periods in between. This would be the kind of labor performed by loaders. The other kind is where the amount of load is lighter but the work is performed continuously for long periods of time, as seen in both construction and factory workers.

Nutritional requirement, specific to the occupation can be understood in the light of the kinds of exercises entails. This is divided into two parts depending on the main energy pathway in use in muscles. Heavy loads for a short time is termed anaerobic exercise (Loaders), whereas light loads for long time is termed aerobic exercise (Construction and Factory workers). The two types of exercise impose different requirements on the nutrition profile of the individual. Anaerobic exercise, as in case of loaders results in muscle wear-and-tear and needs a more protein heavy diet. This protein could be from sources like dal, meat, or eggs. Aerobic exercise needs more carbohydrates which are a major energy source. These could come from foods like flour, sugar, chick peas etc.

In addition to the requirements of macro nutrients like carbohydrates and proteins and generic micro nutrient requirements; there is specific need for certain micro nutrients. The worksites for migrant labourers are often dusty and high in pollution. Loaders working in wholesale markets are exposed to dust from grains, jute bags, smoke and pollution from the vehicles, and congested environment of the markets. Similarly, construction workers are exposed to especially inorganic dust of cement, stone and

bricks. Factory workers, depending on the nature of product work in humid, smoke and chemical loaded air. These work environments, where they are exposed to fine dust and smoke for long periods of time results in increased vulnerability to respiratory disorders like Pneumoconiosis. Thus, they need to build up their immune systems against these kinds of disorders. Micro nutrients like Vitamin A and iron are necessary for this. Some traditional foods like ghee, milk and yellow vegetables (carrot, pumpkin etc) are high in Vitamin A. Iron requirements can be met with green leafy vegetables, jaggery, eggs and red meat (especially liver).

5. Main Findings, Observations and Results

5.1 Food Habits: What are the eating habits of the migrant workers at their destination?

An important factor in food arrangement is the number of times they eat in a day. This is

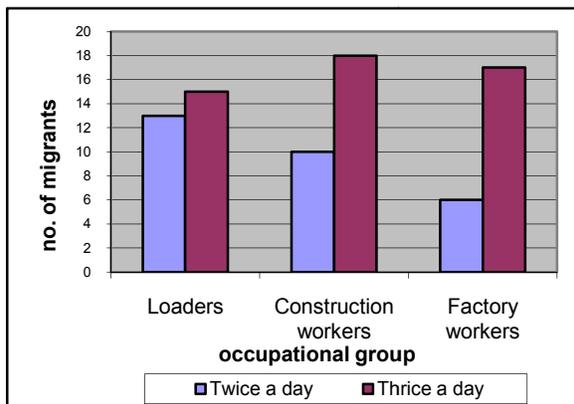


Figure 2: Food Consumption in a day

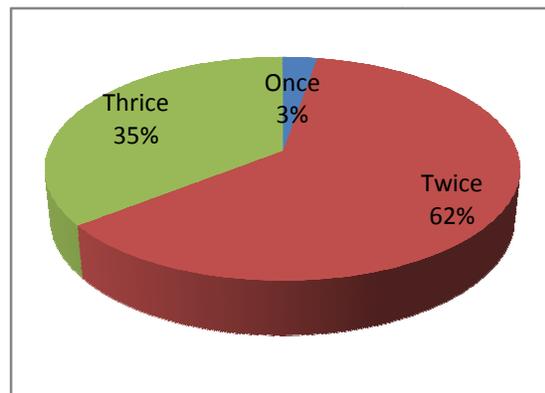


Figure 1: Number of Meals (comprising roti) in a day

summarized in Figure 1. It is observed that loaders have a large variability in how often they eat. Some report eating three times a day while a large enough sample eats twice. It is expected as loaders' work timings are highly variable and they tend to get food between different jobs. This variability is however lower in construction workers and

further in factory workers. Factory workers have the most regular schedule and a large percentage of them eat thrice in a day.

Further, data shows that 62% of the migrants include roti in their diet twice a day, followed by 35% of the migrants who report eating roti three times a day. A small 3% of the migrants ate roti only once a day. However, further research is required to find out how balanced these diets are, what amount of food is consumed on these occasions and its impact on their well being.

Breakfast

The first meal of the day is especially important for labourers involved in heavy physical labour like loaders. Figure 2 shows the regularity with which workers eat breakfast and the timing of their breakfast.

Migrants are regular with their breakfast with 71 % of the respondents reporting that they eat breakfast everyday although a fifth of the workers reported never eating breakfast as well. Among different occupational groups factory workers are most likely to eat breakfast everyday followed by loaders and construction workers. The reason for lesser number of construction workers eating

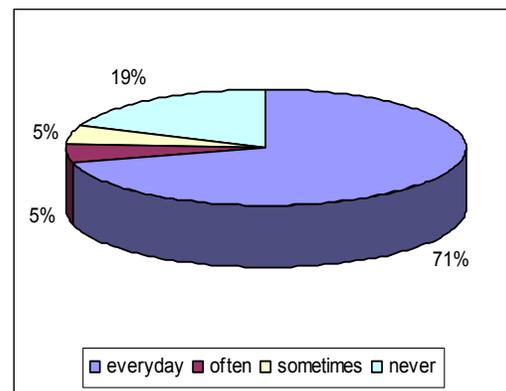


Figure 3: Regularity with eating breakfast

breakfast is that they start early to find work at *nakas*. For loaders the main reason for skipping breakfast is that they follow erratic schedule as per work requirements in the wholesale markets and metal yards.

Breakfast timings range from 6 am to 9 am with majority eating their first meal of the day between 7 – 8 am. This seems to be in tandem with their work timings with loaders and

construction workers having their breakfast relatively earlier as compared to factory workers.

Nutritionally, approximately 70% of those who eat breakfast reported eating a carbohydrate rich meal, comprising of roti (Indian bread) along with vegetable/lentils or tea and not just a snack.

Lunch

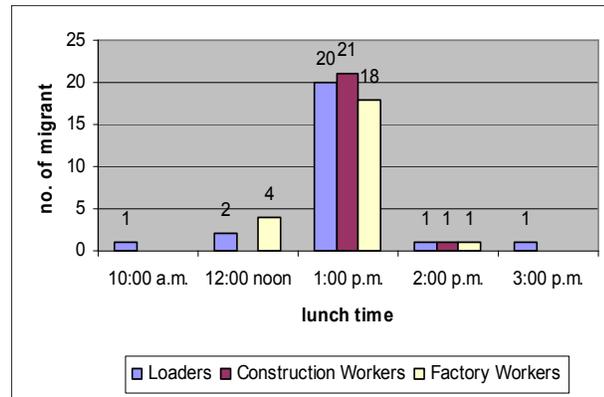
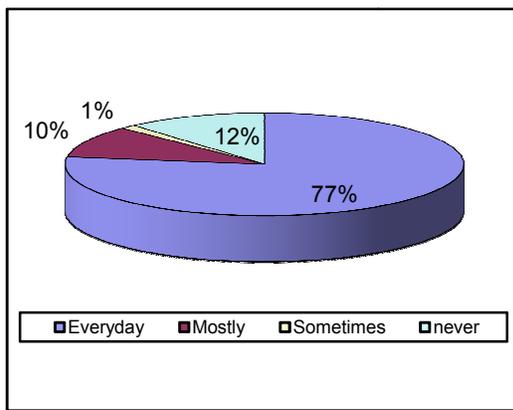


Figure 4: Regularity with Eating Lunch

Figure 5: Lunch Timings

Data summarised in figure 4, shows that almost 4/5th of the migrants eat lunch regularly with about a tenth of the respondents report not eating lunch at all. Data on lunch timings shows 1:00 p.m. as the preferred time for lunch. While lunch timings are more or less regular for construction and factory workers, it is not so for loaders (see Figure 5). They take time out from their work schedule, between two work orders in order to eat a lunch.

Nutritionally, lunch is a heavier meal than breakfast and we find that most workers have roti with a dal or vegetable. About a tenth of the workers

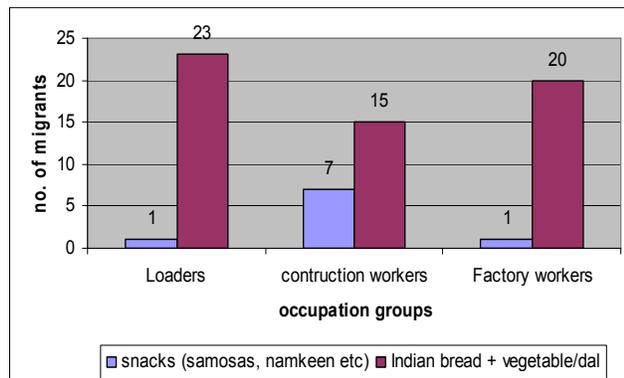


Figure 6: Composition of Lunch

reported eating a light snack such as a samosa for lunch (refer figure 6). Construction workers reported more incidents of eating a snack instead of a proper meal. Almost 1/3 rd of construction workers opt to eat samosas, namkeen, biscuits, and bhajiya for lunch. Construction workers do not have fixed locations for work. Also, construction sites are often not in locations that are well served. Their choice of what they eat for lunch is governed by whatever is available around their worksite. They often start early and therefore do not get sufficient time to fix a lunch to carry to work. This result in them either completely skipping the meal or eating a nutrient poor meal at a much higher cost.

Evening Snack

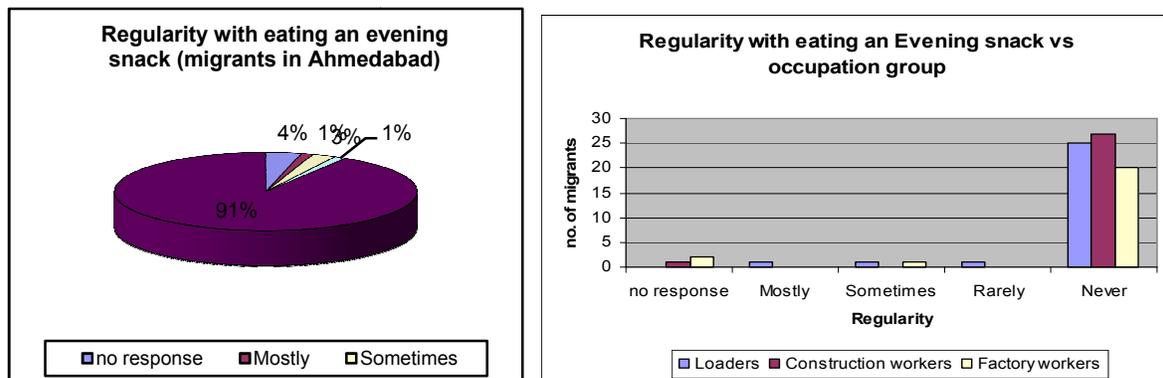


Figure 7: Regularity with eating an evening snack among all workers and by different occupation groups

About 5% of migrants report eating an evening snack (fig 7). Generally, they have a tea in the evening but not eat anything with it. The few who reported eating an evening snack were mostly loaders. This can be due to the nature of their work which requires them to do concentrated heavy work for short durations as compared to construction workers or factory workers who work over a spread out time period.

Tea consumption

Having tea is perceived as taking a short break off work and discussion revealed that loaders had more tea as time killing activity when they waited between work orders. Tea

is easily available in the market and most people report having 2-4 cups of tea during work hours per day (refer Figure 8).

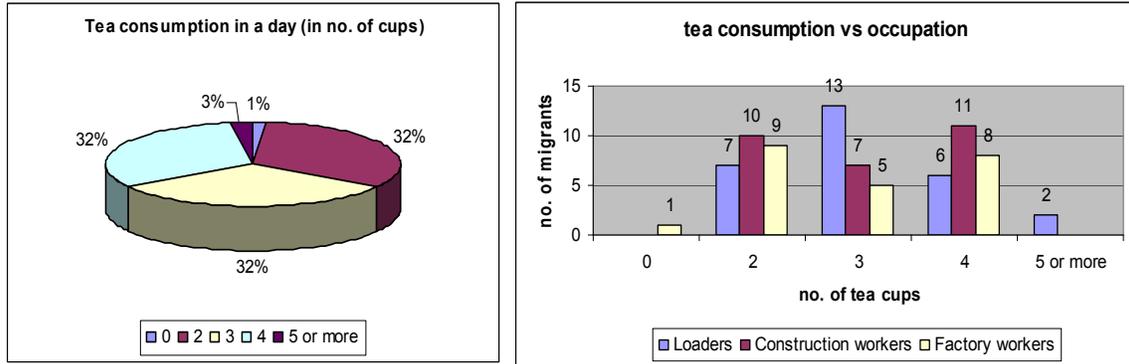


Figure 8: Tea consumption in a day and tea consumption across different occupation groups

The total tea consumption is much more. While drinking tea by itself doesn't have adverse health impacts, it is responsible for immediate loss of appetite. It is often observed that migrants have tea along with roti, bread or biscuits for breakfast. Such consumption of tea along with food reduces the extent of absorption of nutrients by the body.

Tea is often a substitute for water, for people believe that drinking water immediately after work makes them prone to throat infections. This behaviour of reduced consumption of water also reduces the body's capacity of absorption of nutrients.

Dinner

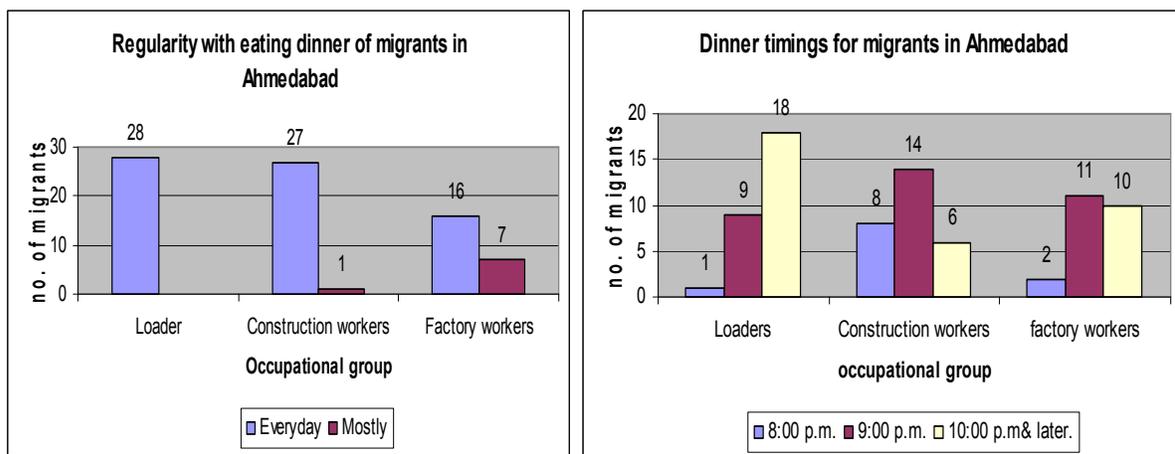


Figure 9: Regularity of eating dinner among migrants and dinner timings for migrants across occupational groups

Dinner is the meal that is eaten with most regularity among all occupational groups and especially high among loaders and construction workers (refer Figure 9). All report eating roti along with vegetable or lentils (or both) for dinner with about a third reported eating rice for dinner and a few supplementing it with curd or butter milk. Dinner timings are variable starting from 8 and continuing beyond 10 (refer Figure 9). Construction workers have a more regular schedule with dinner reflecting the strictly followed closing time for construction workers.

5.2 Arrangement of Food

Traditionally, food is cooked at home by the women of **the family**. This pattern of arranging food works well with migrants who migrate with their family. In the study, it is found that 29% of the respondents stay with their families. The unstable nature of employment for most migrant workers does not permit this arrangement. Among those migrating with families, about 50% of them are factory workers reflecting the somewhat more stable employment at those locations. On the other hand, construction workers and loaders who are usually paid on a daily basis are single migrants and cannot avail of this traditional arrangement.

Among the 66% of migrants who are single migrants, the above arrangement cannot be continued and they resort to other methods of arranging food. Migrants often stay together with other migrants of the same region of origin, nature of work, caste and often those who stay together also cook together. **They buy ration together, share the effort in cooking food and then share the cost among themselves.** Often these are small groups of 3-5 individuals. The figure 10 gives a breakup of the number of people staying together and the number of people who cook together. Even as more people stay together, migrants either cook alone or in smaller sub-groups depending on their taste in food and interpersonal relations. It becomes logistically difficult for these larger groups to manage accounts and prepare food as per everyone's choice. Often in such cases the burden of preparing the food gets concentrated on 2 to 3 individuals, which in turn leads to disagreements and squabbles. To avoid such situations, even as migrants stay in larger

groups of 6 to 8 and share the cooking space they do not like to cook together. They buy ration either by themselves or in small groups, often on a daily or per meal basis.

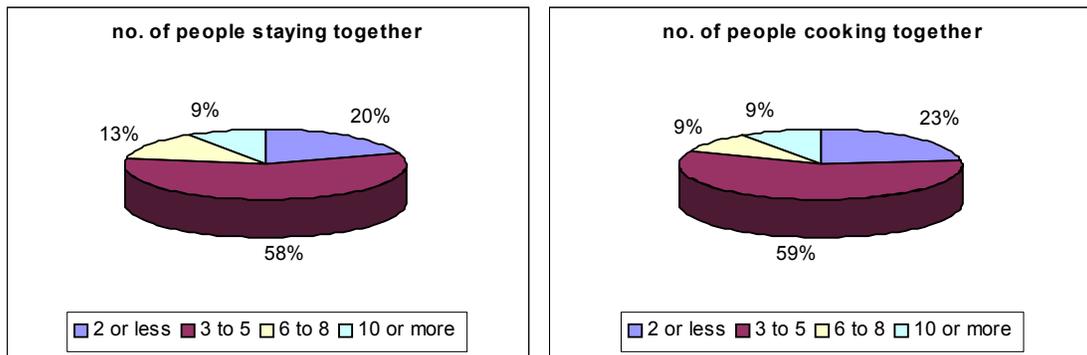


Figure 10: Graph showing breakdown of number of people staying together and number of people cooking together.

With workers who are in larger groups and staying on worksite (loaders staying in godowns and construction workers on site) a common way of arranging food is to appoint a cook to prepare food for the group. This method is more common when a large number of migrants are from a single region and bring a dedicated cook with them. Often this arrangement may also be setup by the contractor who employs them. As compared to people who cook for themselves, the migrants here pay for a cook and the responsibility for procuring ration and preparing the meals is transferred to the cook rather than the migrant himself. Usually the cook is only responsible for two major meals of the day. The cook's salary ranges between Rs.1500 to 2400 per month

Lastly, **when the workers have neither family, cannot cook for themselves due to lack of cooking tools or skills the only option for them may be to eat out in a restaurant or dhaba.** This is among the most expensive options and rarely exercised. In our surveys only 2/79 of those surveyed report eating out all the time. Construction workers in particular showed more incidents of eating their lunch out. The average cost of eating out was reported to be between Rs. 15 – 20 for a meal.

Among different meals of the day different methods of arranging them are found. Dinner has the most stable arrangement among different meals. As Figure 11 shows, the most

popular method for dinner is to eat with fellow workers, followed by eating with family, and then having a meal cooked.

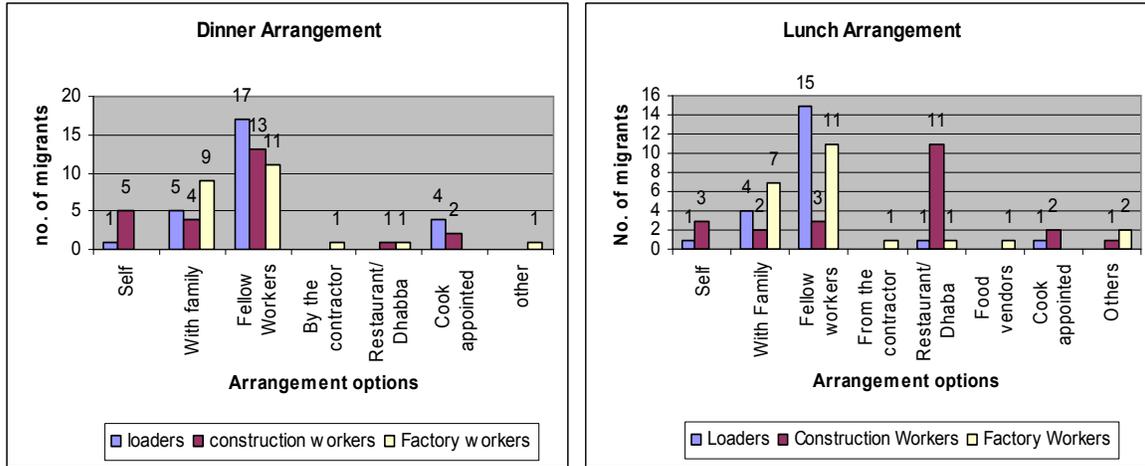


Figure 12: Arrangement Options for Lunch and Dinner

Comparing the graphs in Figure 11, we notice that there is not much difference in the breakdown for lunch and dinner, except for construction workers. A significant portion of construction workers who have dinner with fellow workers tend to have lunch outside. Qualitative discussions showed that this is because construction workers tend to start their day very early (waiting at *nakas* to get work) and do not have time to cook meals in the morning and take it for lunch. Thus, they eat out at roadside food vendors, dhabas, or whatever is available near the construction site. As construction sites are not fixed they

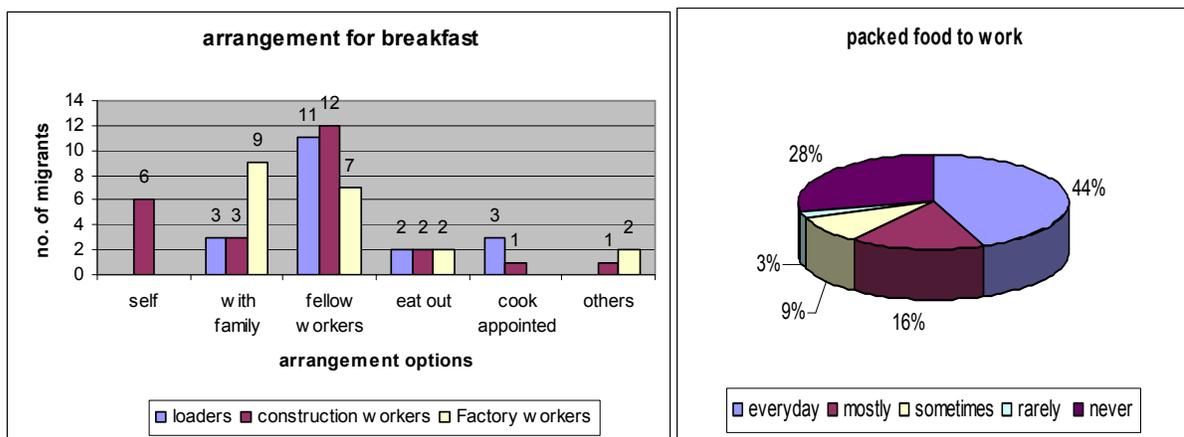


Figure 11: Breakfast Arrangement Options and Regularity of Carrying Packed Food

tend to not be attached to a particular food vendor. Thus, **construction workers feel that the most important intervention that can be made in their food arrangement is during lunch.**

As lunch is typically in the middle of a work day, the options are typically between taking prepared food from home and eating out. Only a small percentage of people have access to food provided by contractors on site. As can be seen from the chart in Figure 12, a majority of migrants pack lunch every day or almost everyday. We also note that almost a third of migrants only pack lunch rarely or never do it and rely on eating outside or are workers staying and cooking at the worksite.

Considering the breakdown of food arrangement for breakfast, we see that more people eat out as compared to dinner. Part of the reason for this is that for many people breakfast consists of a simple tea with a biscuit and thus they do not feel the need to cook for themselves. Also, some migrant workers tend to skip breakfast altogether.

Considering all meals together in Figure 13, we see that 50% of the meals are taken with fellow workers. An interesting finding is that, even though 29% of the migrants stay with their families, only 22% of the meals are with the family and the reason is that often lunch or breakfast is consumed outside due to work timings or work location. Also, contractors only arrange for food in a miniscule number (1%) of the cases although in

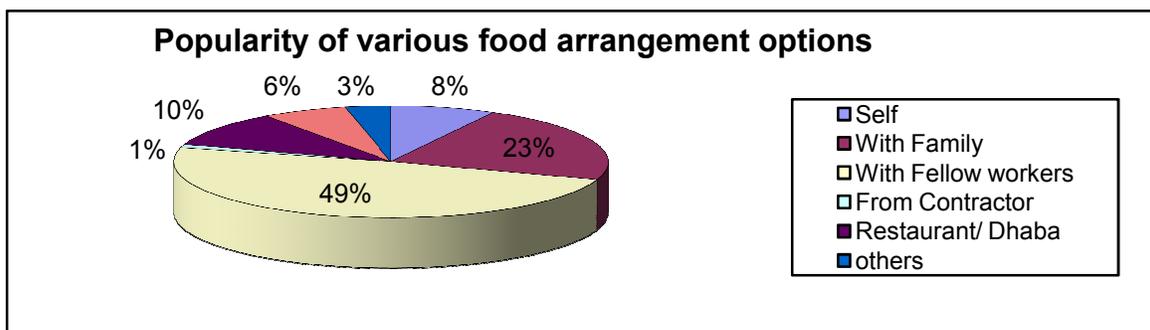


Figure 13: Overall Popularity of Various Food Arrangement Options

some of the cases where a cook is provided, it is done through the contractor. Of the very few who reported eating an evening snack, 75% ate from the nearby dhaba or food vendors. They spend approximately Rs. 10 each time for the snack.

The breakdown of costs of eating out for migrants who eat out at a regular basis indicates that dinner out at a dhaba or restaurant, costs anywhere between Rs 15 – Rs 20 for a meal. The cost of lunch or breakfast ranges from Rs 5 – Rs 20, which constitute the price of a pack of Parle-G glucose biscuits to a meal of Roti-vegetable or dal. For those migrants whose food is provided by their contractor, reported that the contractor deducts from their wages and the deduction comes out to Rs 35 per meal.

5.3 Ration Procurement

Among migrants who cook at home an important factor in the cost of food is how they procure ration for their daily cooking. Ration needs of the migrants are largely met in the city. Of the 79 workers who cook at home 8 (10%) reported getting any amount of ration from home with 50% of those who stay with their families in the city, mostly getting ghee and wheat. Out of the 51 migrants who stay either alone or with fellow single-male migrants, only 4 (7%) reported getting any ration from their native villages. The ration obtained from the village is mostly wheat, lentils, and jaggery.

Even as many of the migrants are themselves cultivators and could procure staples like wheat from their own farms for a very low price chose not to do so for various reasons. This phenomenon was especially pronounced in interstate migrant workers. The reasons for this were that interstate migrants tended to visit their villages only twice a year or so thus the amount of ration would be too large to transport effectively. Moreover, interstate duties levied on goods transported make this an unattractive option. **In addition, the residence of the migrants is not equipped for long term storage of food.** Some stay in open space while others often stay in groups in rented rooms which are cramped and can barely provide to store their day to day things. These living spaces are also ill equipped to

safeguard food items from humidity and rodents. The cost sharing of such items that are not specifically bought is also complicated between co-habitants.

5.3.1 Ration buying patterns

Buying in bulk can lead to significant cost savings in procuring staples. However, in practice only a quarter of the migrants buy their ration in bulk.

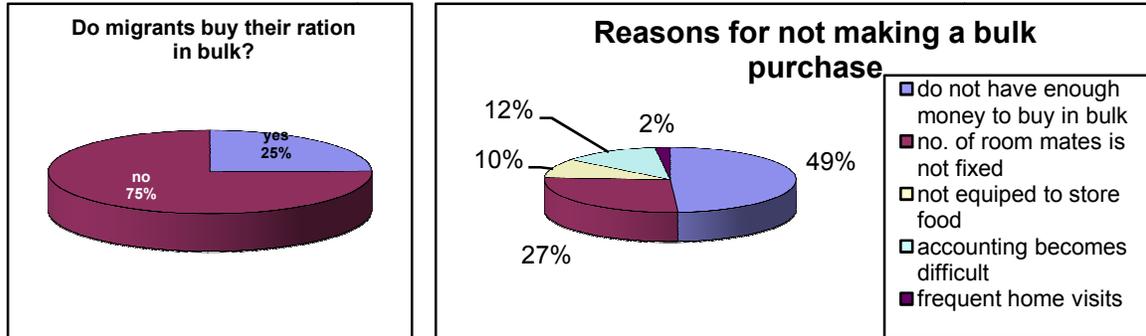


Figure 14: Bulk purchasing of ration and reasons given by migrants for not making a bulk purchase

The most popular reason (48% of respondents) being that they do not have enough money to buy ration in bulk. The next most frequently given reasons were that number of co-habitants was not fixed and accounting became difficult as different people often have significantly different appetites.

Where bulk purchase is not very popular among the migrants for a variety of reasons stated above, different behaviour is observed for different food articles. Some buy on a daily and even per meal basis, others tend to buy more and store it for weeks, fortnight or more. Migrants mostly buy flour for duration anywhere between 4 - 15 days, followed by bulk purchases of 20 or more days (refer fig 15). Only 7 people report to buy flour on a daily basis. These were mostly construction workers who didn't have a proper place to reside and stayed on either road side or in large numbers in small cramped rooms and hence not equipped to store food.

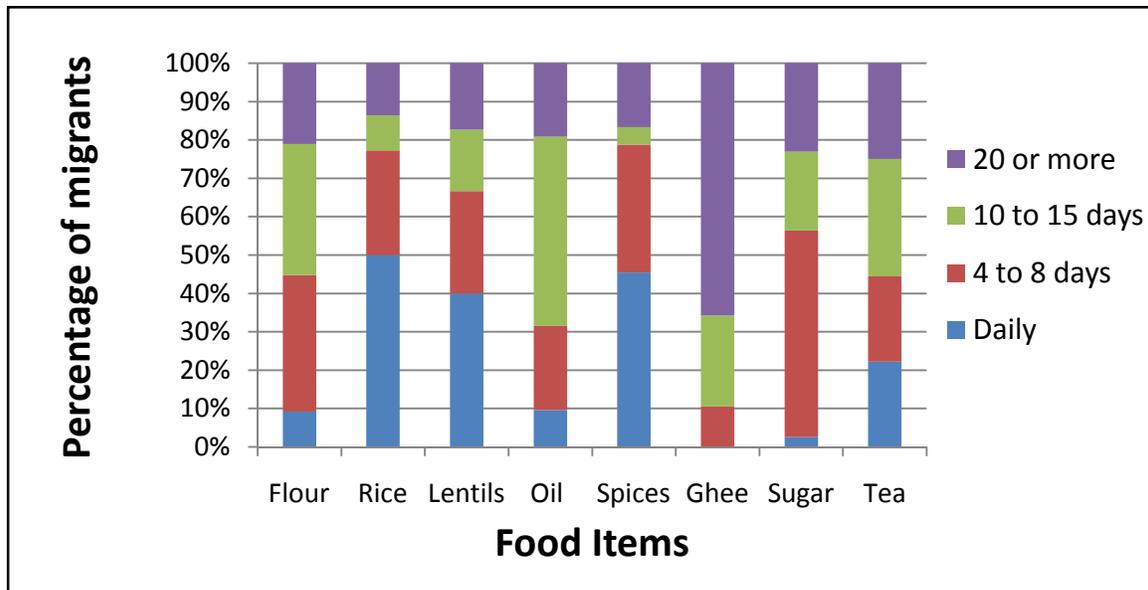


Figure 15: Buying pattern for raw food provisions

Buying trends of onions are different than wheat. Data shows clear preference of migrants buying onions on a weekly basis rather than daily. This can be explained by the eating habits of the community which includes onion in their daily diet, as an ingredient in preparation of other vegetables to be eaten with Indian bread as well as an accompaniment itself. It is also cheaper than most vegetables and can be stored over a certain period of time. Green vegetables on the other hand are perishable and are often bought and consumed on the same day.

While some food items are bought and consumed in sync with their shelf life, there are others that show deviation from what can be called the usual trend. Potatoes and lentils, more so lentils can be stored for some time in case they are bought in bulk to be eaten over an extended period of 15 days to a month (refer fig 15). Lentils are expensive and buying in bulk becomes cost efficient. However, the migrants report a different trend. They tend to eat vegetables and lentils alternatively, therefore buying only small quantities of each that last them a meal. A majority of 40% of the migrants who reported buying lentils bought it for a short period of 3 or less days. Among this group the highest number was reported by migrants staying with fellow migrants.

A sizeable percentage of 26% report buying lentils for a period of 4 to 8 days. Similar is the buying pattern of potatoes; with 45% and 43% of migrants reporting to buy potatoes for less than 3 days and 4 to 8 days respectively. They also buy spices sufficient only for one time preparation. **The spices thus bought come in small packets which are not standardized by weight but rough estimation of the shop keeper, increasing the chances of miscalculations and even fraud.**

The consumption of rice is much less than wheat with migrants eating rice not as a part of their staple diet. Another reason for such low consumption of rice is its higher price and lesser importance of rice in the traditional cuisine of Rajasthan. They therefore buy it only in small amounts, generally for the particular day's consumption. This is reflected clearly in the large numbers of people reporting to buy rice for less than 3 days in figure 15.

The use of sugar is limited for the preparation of tea. However, tea and sugar buying patterns show difference (refer fig 15). Sugar is bought for shorter duration as compared to tea largely because of the higher maintenance that sugar requires, saving it from insects and moisture.

5.3.2 Fuel Usage

Migrant workers who cook their meals at home use many different fuels for cooking. The most popular fuel in use by about 2/3rd of the migrants is kerosene (refer fig 16). Kerosene is typically sourced from the black market as migrants do not have ration cards at their place of work. We see a large variance in the prices paid by the migrants from Rs. 9 to Rs. 36 per litre. The lower limit rate of Rs 9 per litre is the price offered by the government ration shop where 5 litres kerosene is made available per ration card. At source end the fuel requirements are compensated mostly with wood collected locally. At destination, this is not the case. Kerosene is available only in black market at a modular price of Rs. 30 per litre. 81% of the respondent who used kerosene reported to buy it at this price.

The average monthly consumption of kerosene per person is reported at 10 litres, making fuel one of the large components of the food expenditure. As kerosene is expensive and supply unreliable, migrants supplement this with wood as cooking fuel.



Figure 16: Usage of different types of fuel and buying patterns for the major fuel, kerosene

About a tenth of the migrants use wood exclusively as cooking. Wood is bought at the rate of Rs 2 per kg, with average monthly consumption ranging between 75- 150 kilograms. The monthly cost of wood thereby ranges anywhere between Rs 150 to 300 bringing it at par with kerosene prices. Wood is a less efficient and more polluting means of cooking and as most migrants cook and live in the same space, those cooking with wood have to deal with smoke and heat in their house which has deleterious health consequences.

The small percentage of respondents reported using LPG as cooking fuel. The reported cost of a cylinder ranges from Rs 346- 600, lasting anywhere between 1-2 months. This comes out as the most cost efficient fuel; however the establishment cost of LPG is much higher making it an unviable option. The cost of fuel therefore forms a large component of food expenditure, irrespective of which kind of fuel is used.

5.3.3 Food categories

Despite popular notions that migrants are likely to be ill-informed and may not know about a balanced meal we find that they eat a large range of foods and are aware that the

food that they eat has a direct link to their ability to work. Thus, they make an effort to eat well. The graph below shows the percentage of migrants who include the stated food items in their diet.

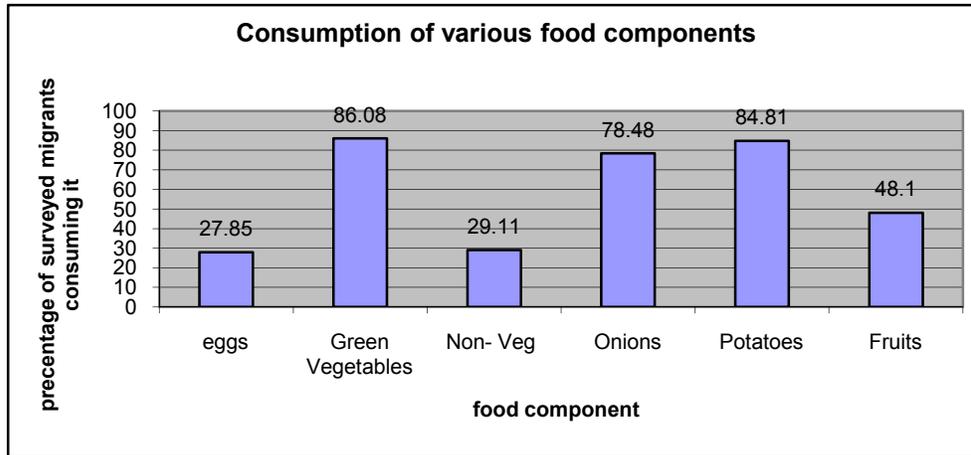


Figure 17: Consumption of different types of food components among migrants

5.4 Food Expenditure

5.4.1 Food Expenditure

The monthly income of a migrant worker depends solely on his skill levels in the trade. For example, Contractors in construction work earn significantly more than the skilled or unskilled worker. The respondent reported monthly income in a range of Rs 1500 – Rs 9000, with 60% earning anywhere between Rs 3000 – Rs 5000.

The dependence of monthly income to the occupational group is little. However, the average earning of loaders is highest (Rs 4012 per month) followed by construction workers (Rs 3826 per month) and lastly factory workers (Rs 3185 per month). As compared to this the estimated expenditure on food (refer table 2) ranges between Rs 1250 to Rs 1950 per month which is 35 – 45% of their incomes.

Table 2: Per capita Food Expenditure

Approximate expenditure on provisions (per day per person)	
Flour	Rs10 -14
Vegetable/ Dal	Rs 10 -12
Spices	Rs 5
Milk/ tea	Rs 7
Oil/ ghee	Rs 4 - 10
Total (per day)	Rs 36 – 48

Approximate monthly expenditure towards food (per person)	
Provisions	Rs 1000 - 1400
Fuel	Rs 100 - 300
Tea at work	Rs 100 – 150
Occasional Eating out	Rs 50 – 100
Total (per month)	Rs 1250 - 1950

The migrant workers therefore end up spending a large part of their incomes on their own maintenance in the city and have limited savings. They either cut down on their expenditure on stay, conveyance and food; or work long hours and beyond their capacities to be able to send more money to their families.

5.4.2 Credit facilities

Migrant workers have a limited cash flow which can often be unreliable and thus they have a need for credit to allow them to buy in bulk or tide over lean periods. Unfortunately, the credit facilities available to them are really limited and only slightly over half of them report buying on credit (including those buying both on credit and cash) (refer Figure 18). Even when credit is available the time period over which credit is

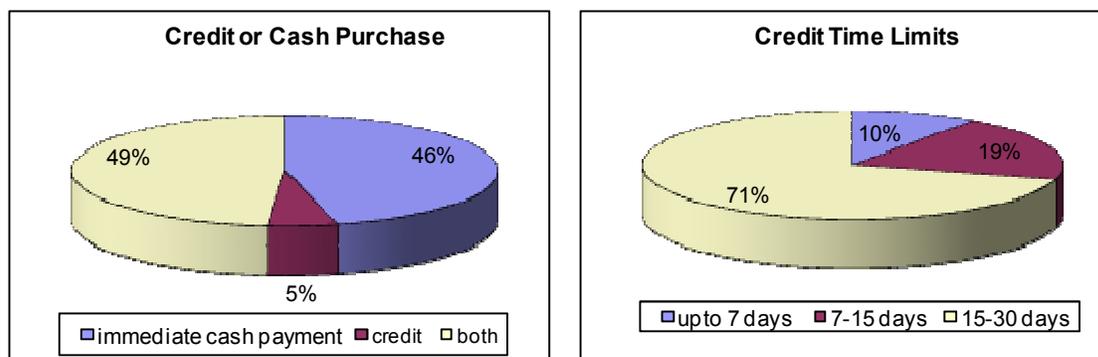


Figure 18: Breakdown of purchases by cash or credit and time limits on credit extended to them

available is short as migrants do not have a fixed address and shopkeepers are wary of extending credit to them (refer Figure 18). About half of the migrants report buying only on cash which limits the amount of ration they can buy in a single purchase which results in a higher per unit cost.

5.5 Dining-Out

For the purpose of this study we define dining out as incidents of eating out over and above the regular food consumption. This is not the preferred food arrangement option but a choice made in extra ordinary conditions. Most migrants do not depend on cooked meal from an external source such as a food vendors or restaurants for their regular food requirement but the incidents of occasionally eating out are found to be significantly higher – 75% in loaders followed by 65% in factory workers and 60% in construction workers. The reasons are varied, from eating out due to shortage of fuel, ration or time to means of entertainment (refer fig 19). A few other reasons were 'rains' and when they are alone. The most commonly cited reason was tiredness or delay at work, followed by fuel shortage. This is peculiar to a migrant as the responsibility of both the economic work and managing abode and oneself lies solely on him, unlike the traditional family system where these roles are distributed among members. The other dominant reason reported for occasional eating out is when they are alone at their room, especially among migrants who stayed in small groups cooked together. When alone, they lacked the enthusiasm of cooking at home besides not having a helping hand to do so.

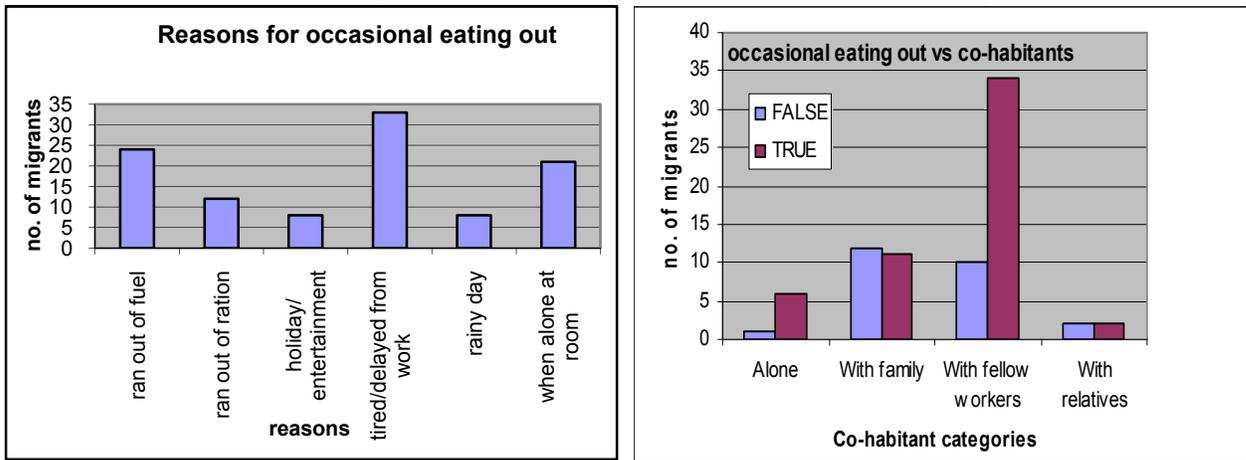


Figure 19: Reasons for occasional eating out and occasional eating out behaviour vs co-habitants

Other than these logistical issues, migrants ate out for entertainment as well. This would happen on a holiday, when they wanted to eat something they like and/or cannot cook. This would include dal-bati, meat and eggs etc.

While Loaders reported highest incidence of dining out, the relatively lower numbers in factory workers can be understood in the light of the fact that a sizeable number of them stay with their families. Often what they relish is prepared at home. As compared to this construction workers reported fewer eating out incidents as they often ate out regularly and thereby didn't view it as particularly entertaining.

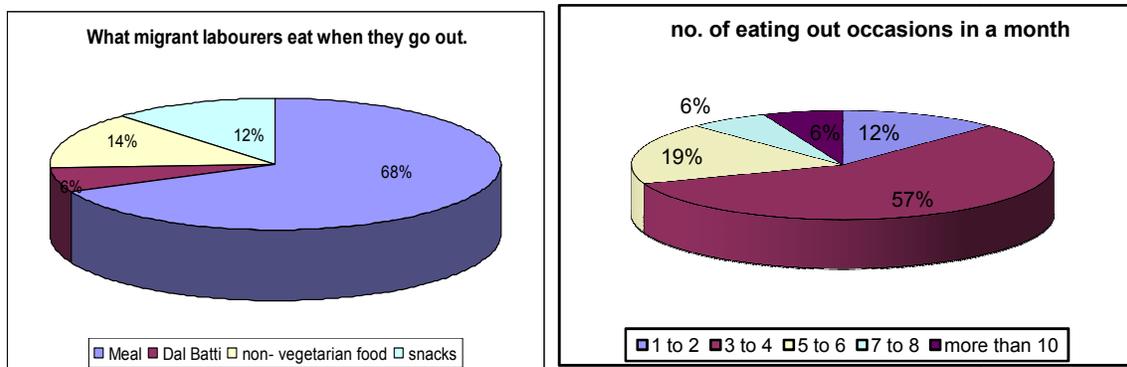


Figure 20: Food eaten when eating out and number of times migrants eat out per month

Occasional eating out behaviour showed significant dependence on the nature of co-habitants. As seen in fig 20, those who stayed with some sort of family system, their own

families or relatives seemed to be eating out lesser than those staying alone or with fellow workers.

Migrants often went out to eat when they couldn't cook at home due to a variety of reasons. This is also reiterated in the data pertaining to what they ate with 68% suggesting that they ate a meal of roti-vegetable/ dal (refer fig 20). The next most popular item was non-vegetarian food followed by snack which comprises of bhel, pakodi, pav-bhaji etc.

Findings on the number of occasions that migrant workers eat out in a month show that slightly over half of them eat out 3 to 4 times in a month followed by around a fifth of them eating out 5 or 6 times in a month. Towards the extreme, 6% of the migrants report eating out more than 10 times a month going up to 15 times a month.

Considering the expenditure on eating out in a month we find that among those who eat out about a third spend Rs. 51-100 on eating out each month (refer fig 21). Among those who reported dining out about half of them spend Rs. 50-100 per month on eating out; and about 16% spend Rs. 50 or less per month. In the extreme cases, a few reported spending over Rs. 250 on occasional eating out which could be over 8-10% of their

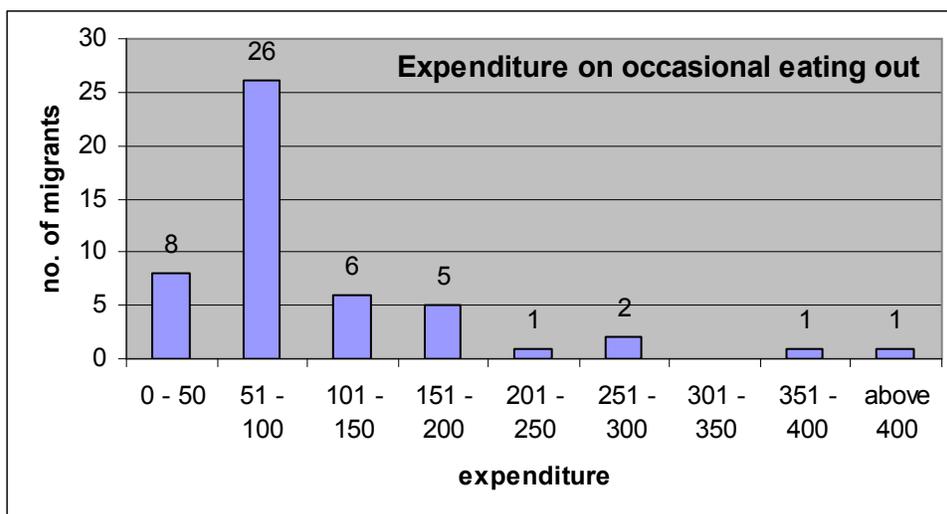


Figure 21: Expenditure on occasional eating out

monthly income. A comparison of their eating out to their income showed a slight negative correlation. That is, those who earned more tended to spend less on eating out. **Possible reasons for this may be that those who earn less may resort to eating out when they run out of ration or fuel while those earning more will have less number of incidents like that.**

Eating out is not a regular part of migrants' lives when they are at their source. The reasons for this are many as explained above. Eating out is an indicator of their vulnerability at their destinations where they do not have access to ration as conveniently as at their source. Thus, improvement of ration availability would make a significant improvement in the lives of the migrants.

6. Conclusion

The problems faced by interstate migrants are exacerbated by the fact that they fall between the cracks of the social support system provided by the state governments for economically weaker persons. They are off the radar for local Ahmedabad administration despite the fact that they are the backbone of construction and economy. If the migrant workers are removed from the picture, the city of Ahmedabad will come to a standstill. The Rajasthan government is unable to help in this regard as migrants have moved beyond its border.

The food habits of migrants depend largely on their tradition and culture from the native villages but also on the affordability, availability of time, space, and equipment. Their long and erratic work schedule does not always allow them to put in the time and effort required to prepare a wholesome tasteful meal, which otherwise was the forte of the womenfolk in the family. The relatively higher cost of living in the urban areas also makes food expensive, making it the dominant expenditure for migrant workers. The limited incomes and the pressure to save constrict the choices of diet to an extent of compromising on the nutrition requirement.

We find that migrants spend 35-45% of their income on food and associated expenditures. This is expected in the economically weaker sections of society which have a lower disposable income and thus spend a higher percentage of their income on necessities like food. The efficiency of migration as a means of providing for their family goes down as they spend a large percentage of their income on supporting themselves at their destinations.

To improve the efficiency of migration as a means of livelihood, a successful intervention would reduce the cost of living at the destination. From the study, it is seen that most migrants cook their own food. The major expenditure comes about in the procuring of raw food provision and fuel.

- The most commonly used fuel is kerosene which is significantly more expensive for migrants as they are unable to buy it from Ration Shops and are forced to purchase it in the black market at a price 3-4 times higher than what they are entitled to.
- The cost of ration is more expensive as they are unable to purchase in bulk due to unavailability of enough funds. They are also unable to access credit due to their being considered a transient population and hence unreliable.
- As they procure their food provisions daily they buy in small quantities which are prepared approximately by the seller and are not of standard weight leading to migrants being shortchanged.

In the specific context of construction workers, whose work timings are such that they start working very early in the morning and do not have time to prepare lunch or breakfast. Thus, they resort to food options such as locally available snacks which are both expensive and nutritionally deficient.

The expense on procuring raw materials for food could be reduced by providing better access to Fair Price Shops or making better arrangements for migrants to access the Public Distribution System. The larger challenge for these particular migrants and the PDS is that these are interstate migrants and policy advocacy at a central level would be required. In the specific case of construction workers, there is a need for intervention which provides for prepared food.

There is a need to better understand the nutritional breakdown of their food habits especially given that migrants perform heavy physical labour which makes their nutrition profile different from that of an average person. Further studies on this aspect would be needed to provide intervention on not just making effective arrangements for procuring food but also making sure that the food is nutritious and healthy.