

Working Environment and Quality of Worklife in Cashew Processing Units in Kollam District

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Abstract:

The cashew nut processing industry is a major sector in food processing industry in India and it plays a critical role by giving employment to a large number of rural women from the lowest social strata of the society. This study was conducted to assess the status of working environment in cashew processing units in Kollam district and to compare the differences in the quality of working environment provided by public and private units. The study also assesses the Quality of Work Life (QWL) of employees and compare the differences in the QWL in public and private sector units. A well structured questionnaire was employed to interview the workers and the findings were that the working environment of the cashew processing units is not up to the mark and comparatively public sector units provide a better working place than private sector units in terms of drinking water, urinals and latrines, pollution, ventilation and unhealthy environment.

Keywords: Cashew Processing, Working Environment, Quality of Work life, Health and safety, Cashew workers.

INTRODUCTION

Working environment is the surroundings, social relations and physical conditions in which a work is performed. Together these factors have profound impact on the feelings of well-being, workplace relationships, productivity, efficiency and overall employee health. A good working environment ensure the health, safety and security of the workers. A poor working environment results in damaged health and put workers safety at risk. Employer's are legally responsible for ensuring good working conditions for their workers, similarly the workers have also the responsibility to work safely.

In the context of cashew industry, the unique feature is that an overwhelming majority i.e., more than 90 per cent of the workers are women belonging to the economically and socially lower and disadvantaged echelons of the society. In India cashew processing industry is concentrated in Kollam district of Kerala and it accounts for the highest proportion of cashew workers with the numbers going approximately more than 3 lakh workers. The working environment of cashew workers have been both the object of scholarly and policy concerns for long period. However, many of the insecurities affecting livelihood of cashew workers ranging from health hazards to lack of effective social interactions arise from the quality of work environment in which they work.

Quality of Worklife is significantly related to the working environment in any industry. In the present study, opinions of the employees related to the elements of quality of worklife

such as Wages , Working Environment, Rewards and Incentives, Health and Safety, Better Opportunities, Job Security, Social Relevance and Personal Factors.

Employers are law bound to make sure that the workplace meets certain conditions. Typically, an ideal working environment in a work place where more people work should be properly and promptly maintained ensuring the safety and security of the workers. Proper ventilation of the work place is a must to ensure supply of fresh breathable air sufficiently to the workers. Temperature of the workplace have to be maintained at a comfortable level. Just like fresh air there must have provisions for suitable and efficient lightings including the emergency lightings. Working environment must be kept clean by not allowing to accumulate waste scraps from the processing. The workplace must have floor area, height and unoccupied space. Suitable seating arrangements must be provided when and where ever possible. Non slippery floors with even surface with out any obstructions which may hinder the easy passage of the workers must be provided. As the cashew processing industry is a labour intensive industry where majority of the workers are females, sufficient sanitary conveniences with utmost hygiene with easy accessibility must be provided. Adequate supply of wholesome drinking water and cups, readily accessible and conspicuously marked. In this context, this study aims to understand the conditions in which the cashew workers work and also to find the difference if any in the facilities provided in public and private sector units.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are

1. To assess the quality of working environment in the cashew nut processing industry in Kollam and to compare difference in the working environment provided by public and private sector cashew processing units.
2. To assess the Quality of Worklife in the cashew nut processing industry in Kollam and to compare difference in the working environment provided by public and private sector cashew processing units.

HYPOTHESIS

H1 – There is no significant difference in the working environment of cashew processing units in public and private sector.

H2 – There is no significant difference in the quality of work life of employees in public sector and private sector units.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was carried out to investigate the quality of working environment in which the cashew workers are employed in both public and private sector units. Direct surveying was used to get the opinion of the workers with a structured questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted with the questionnaire before finalization. The status of facilities which go into making a good working environment in which the workers work now are included in the

questionnaire. The survey was conducted with 40 interested participants each from public and private sector cashew processing units. To gain better understanding of the status of working environment in these units, responses were rechecked through direct interviews with industry supervisors and experts and with the management peoples. The collected data was tabulated and analyzed using SPSS tools.

ANALYSIS

In this section, the collected data is subjected to analysis using SPSS.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

TABLE 1: OPINION OF WORKERS ON THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN WORKPLACE

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Unpurified Drinking Water	n	13	6	0	18	43	3.92	1.51	12.433	0.000
	%	16.25	7.5	0.00	22.5	53.75				
Lack of urinals and Latrines	n	11	0	13	3	53	4.15	1.40	16.556	0.000
	%	13.75	0.00	16.25	3.75	67.5				
Pollution	n	5	6	9	28	32	4.05	1.13	18.425	0.000
	%	6.25	7.5	11.25	36.25	41.25				
Poor Ventilation	n	12	8	6	18	36	3.72	1.49	9.915	0.000
	%	15	10	7.5	22.5	45				
Lighting	n	5	13	9	12	41	3.91	1.34	13.972	0.000
	%	6.25	16.25	11.25	16.25	51.25				

From the Table 1 it can be seen that 53.75 per cent respondents strongly agreed that there is lack of provision for purified drinking water in their units. 22.5 per cent of them agreed that there is lack of provision for drinking water in their work place. 16.25 and 7.5 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively for the provision of lack of

drinking water. A high mean score of 3.92 suggests that there is lack of provision for purified drinking water in cashew processing units. A value of significance less than 0.05 also suggests that there is no significant difference in the result from the mean score. A huge majority of 67.5 per cent of the workers opined that the latrines and urinals facility was deplorable to the extreme in their work places. A minority of the workers who constituted 13.75 per cent of the workers opined that the facilities provided by the employers are good enough. A high mean score of 4.15 indicates that there is no properly maintained urinals and latrines in majority of the units. A high mean score of 4.05 for pollution means workers in cashew factories are working in polluted ambience in cashew factories. Proper waste management practices are not there in place in the companies. An overwhelming 41.25 per cent of the workers strongly opined that their workplace is polluted and another 36.25 per cent of the workers opined that they work in a polluted environment. A very high majority of 45 per cent of the workers strongly feel that their work place is poorly ventilated and another 22.5 per cent of the workers feel that their workplace is poorly ventilated to cause discomfort for them. Regarding the ventilation a mean score of 3.72 points that proper and adequate provision for ventilation in cashew processing units is lacking. Similarly a high mean score of 3.91 for lighting suggests that majority cashew processing units fail to maintain a healthy environment. A huge majority of the workers strongly agreed that their work in an lighting.

CHART 1: STACKED BAR CHART OF OPINION OF WORKERS ON WORKING ENVIRONMENT

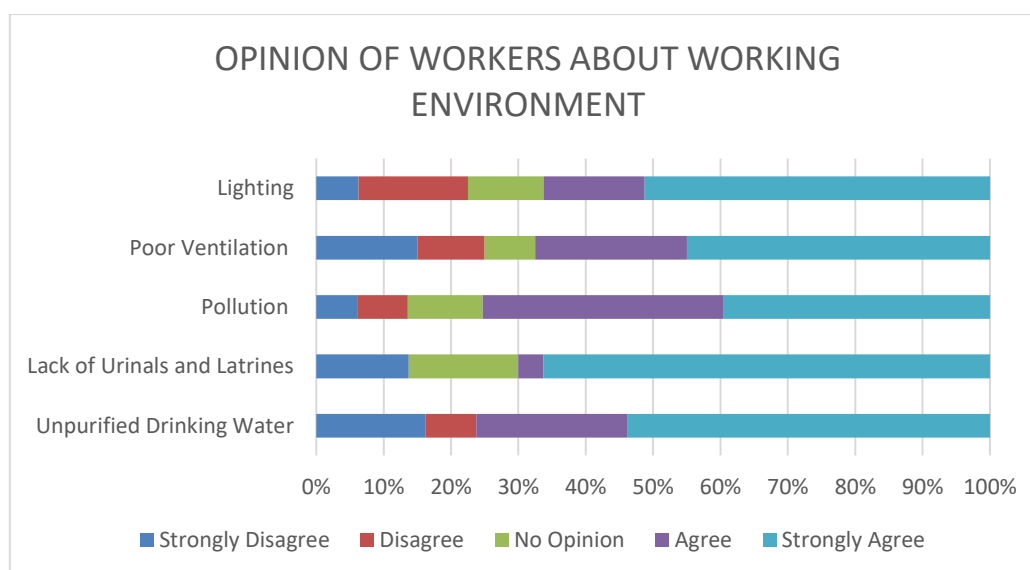


Table 3: Variation of problems in Public and Private sectors

	Public		Private		ANOVA		MANOVA	
	Mea n	S.D	Mea n	S.D	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Unpurified Drinking Water	4.71	0.38	4.73	0.19	1.408	0.214	621.650	0.000
Lack of urinals and	2.70	0.93	4.83	0.17	1069.74	0.00		

latrines					2	0		
Pollution	3.76	0.78	4.70	0.28	271.642	0.00		
Poor Ventilation	3.15	0.53	4.85	0.16	1984.67	0.00		
Lighting	3.43	0.63	4.34	0.13	343.428	0.00		

From the Table it can be inferred that availability of purified drinking water is a major issue faced by the workers in both public and private sector cashew processing units. Lack of proper urinals and latrines are reported mostly in private sector units even though public sector workers also face problems with the facility provided by the management. Polluted working environment is a major issue in private sector units as inferred by a high mean score of 4.70, where the mean score of public sector units is 3.76 which suggest that they are also working in polluted working environment. Coming to proper ventilation of the work place private sector workers feel that they are working in poorly ventilated area and the quality of ventilation is very low. Private sector employees also complain that they are working in unhealthy working environment in terms of physical and mental health. All these problems exist in both private and public sector units but the severity of the issues are more felt in private sector units.

Result: Null Hypothesis is Rejected.

There is significant difference in the working environment of the cashew workers in public and private sectors is rejected as the value of significance is less than .05.

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF WORK LIFE OF EMPLOYEES

Table 4 Mean Score Analysis of the QWL of employees in Cashew Processing Industry

Sl. No.	Variables	Mean	SD
1.	Wages	2.59	1.198
2.	Working Environment	2.76	0.095
3.	Rewards and Incentives	2.32	1.004
4.	Health and Safety	2.67	1.870
5.	Better Opportunities	2.12	0.368
6.	Job Security	2.33	0.296
7.	Social Relevance	2.89	1.008

8.	Personal Factors	2.54	0.592
	Quality of Work Life	2.52	0.8039

From the Table 4 it can be seen that the Mean scores of the variables of Quality of Worklife such as Wages, Working Environment, Rewards and Incentives, Health and Safety, Better Opportunities, Job Security, Social Relevance and Personal Factors are 2.59, 2.76, 2.32, 2.67, 2.12, 2.33, 2.89 and 2.54 respectively. Interestingly, the Mean Value of the Quality of Worklife is 2.52 which is much lower than the statistical mean value of 3. Thus, it can be concluded that the Quality of Worklife of the cashew workers is very low in Kollam district.

Table 5 Mann-Whitney U Test comparing Public and Private sector units

Elements of QWL	Mean Score		Mann-Whitney U Test Value	P Value
	Public Sector	Private Sector		
Wages	184.65	193.43	17657	<0.001**
Working Environment	198.18	154.97	14643	<0.001**
Rewards and Incentives	202.55	143.42	19464	<0.001**
Health and Safety	189.29	163.37	15679	<0.001**
Better Opportunities	174.22	156.21	10864	<0.001**
Job Security	235.75	202.34	20947	<0.001**
Social Relevance	297.24	232.41	19632	<0.001**
Personal Factors	201.68	184.93	19854	<0.001**
QWL	210.445	178.885	17342	<0.001**

Note: ** denotes significance level at 1%

Table 5 exhibits the Mann-Whitney U test to find the differences between Mean Scores among two sectors of the cashew processing industry. The P value of all the variables like Wages, Working Environment, Rewards and Incentives, Health and Safety, Better Opportunities, Job Security, Social Relevance, and Personal Factors are less than 0.001. Thus, we can reject the null hypothesis as the P value is less than 0.001 at 1% level of significance.

Result: Null Hypothesis Rejected

There is significant difference in the Quality of Work life between the public and private sectors of the cashew processing industry.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the working environment in the cashew processing industry is low in both the public and private sectors. It leaves much to be desired for the workers. The employers have several reasons not to provide the facilities as expected by the workers, still they are law bound to provide a good working environment where the workers can work safely. Similarly, the Quality of Work life is also low in the workers of cashew processing industry. As the Quality of Work life is closely related to the working environment it is necessary on the part of the employers to provide basic facilities in good condition to make the workers feel good at the workplace and feel that they can have a healthy and safe life in the company.

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