

Assignment 2

Analysis of Working Conditions of Housekeeping Staff of IIIT-H

a. **Introduction:**

Working conditions are often a primary concern for employees. These include the physical working environment, work hours, the type of work, the equipment required to use, the pay, and the benefits. And the working conditions can also include relationships with co-workers and supervisors.

Working conditions can vary greatly depending on the type of job across various industries. A construction worker and a software engineer have different working conditions and may have different advantages and disadvantages. For example, construction workers risk being injured by falling objects or being struck by equipment. They may be exposed to harmful chemicals or noise levels that can damage their hearing. Software engineers may sit for long periods, leading to back problems, and the massive stress level can affect one's mental health in exchange for a highly paid job.

Poor working conditions can lead to health problems, safety concerns and a general decline in morale. As per human rights, employees have a right to a safe and healthy work environment, and employers are expected by the law to provide certain protections. The standards of a healthy work environment vary depending upon countries. Developed nations often focus on maintaining a healthy work environment, whereas developing nations lack in implementing the standards without many strict laws and punishments for violations.

In the given Assignment for the course Research Methods in Human Sciences, we have focused on studying the working conditions of housekeeping staff employees of the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad, a Tier-1 educational institute in a developing country like India. And further, I will compare with the staff members of other domains, such as security staff and mess workers.

b. **Nature of the research and methodologies**

For the given assignment, we formed a group of four students of the Human Science Research Group, namely, Sudha Tanay Doddi (2020115014), Hariharan Kalimuthu (2020115015), Pradhuman Tiwari (2020115016) and myself, Aaryan Sharma as we wanted to obtain information around the working conditions of housekeeping staff and the gardeners of IIIT.

We designed a questionnaire of 10 questions to get extensive information about various aspects of the life of desired subjects through a survey, as a survey is an essential, quick and easy tool for collecting data and information from numerous individuals about their opinions, beliefs, and behaviours.

Through various questions in the survey, we aim to identify the significant problems they went through in the last three years, in which we want to study the working conditions in different periods. The first was pre-COVID, then the working conditions during the two waves of COVID

and in between them and the final period was the post 3<sup>rd</sup> wave when the institute finally returned to normalcy.

IIIT campus can be broadly divided into the following places where the housekeeping staff works, i.e. office spaces, Bakul Niwas, Palash Niwas, Parijaat Niwas and Kadamb Niwas. We identified Bakul Niwas and Palash Niwas (OBH) as our primary areas of the survey as we could not get access to interview the female housekeeping staff in Parijaat Niwas. Majorly office spaces were closed during the pandemic, and most students on campus were residing in Bakul Niwas and Palash Niwas only during the pandemic.

For interviewing the workers, we contacted Mr Manohar, who works as a Supervisor for the staff and is available at the OBH security desk; however, after the incoming of the UG1 batch, he was seen more on Bakul premises. After a discussion with Manohar about the nature and requirements of the assignment, he gave his green flag to approach the housekeepers and told us that they would be available at lunchtime (1 pm-2 pm) or after 4 pm.

So for convenience, we split into two teams, Hariharan Kalimuthu and Sudha Tanay D., who both lives in OBH and Pradhuman Tiwari and I, Aaryan Sharma, formed another team to interview the housekeeping staff at the Bakul Niwas. Since Tanay is already from Hyderabad and can proficiently speak Telugu and understand, language would not have been a barrier to the first team. To tackle this problem, I met Arihant Tadanki (UG2k19, CND/ 2019113005). I explained every question to him, followed by a questionnaire revolving around different aspects of the questionnaire and what we wanted to know from any particular question. Therefore, for the interviews in Bakul Niwas, Pradhuman Tiwari and I sought help from Arihant Tadanki (UG2k19, CND/ 2019113005), who can proficiently speak Telugu as it is his mother language.

Before conducting the survey, The purpose of the survey was mentioned to the housekeepers, along with the fact that their identity would not be disclosed to any authority in any case, and they could opt to participate in the survey anonymously. Also, we asked them for their consent if they were comfortable with us mentioning their name in the assignment. Then we asked the housekeepers in which language they would be comfortable answering the questions and asked them questions in the same language by someone who can write in their preferred language. Then we translated the responses into English and shared them with the other team. By the end of the survey, we managed to get information from 19 random housekeepers. Then we shared the datasets in our group for individual analysis of the collected data and to find the answer to the question, "How have working conditions changed for workers in IIIT-H in the past two years?".

### c. Questionnaire for the survey

We followed a specific set of questions with each individual, and the set of questions is as follows:

1. What is your hometown?
2. Places where you have lived in the past two years?
3. Does your family live with you?
4. How much have you studied?
5. Which school did your children study in?
6. In the past two years, have you purchased any smartphones?
7. Does the college directly hire you, or do you work under some contractor?
8. Do you know someone who has left their job or was kicked out in the past two years?
9. Are you given paid holidays/incentives or not?
10. Any change in the number of working hours

#### d. Analysis of the questionnaire and the responses by the housekeeping staff

We asked the workers about their **hometowns** to answer whether they worked as migrants. The idea behind asking this question is to identify how working conditions for locals and migrants vary and whether it is easy for a migrant to get employed or not. And most of the housekeeping staff live within a radius of 5 km. Most of them reside in Serilingampalle, from which they can use different means to commute daily, such as public buses or personal vehicles.

Also, it can be a proxy indicator for one of the following two possibilities, i.e. either the housekeepers are paid low; therefore, the migrants don't want to work for the housekeeping staff, or the employing agency doesn't employ the migrants from other states as the housekeeping staff has direct access to rooms of students, and this could lead to a significant controversy if they steal anything. The contractors trust the local population more than the migrants. So, it might be difficult for a migrant worker from UP to assimilate into the housekeeping staff.

We asked the workers **if their families lived with them and for the place they have lived in the past two years**, to know if they have a stable and steady income so that they can survive in a metro city along with other dependents rather than living in their native village in Andhra Pradesh or Telangana. Also, as most of them live in Serilingampally, most of the housekeeping community comes from the same region. They live with their family and have developed an ecosystem there for themselves. Also, this indicates that the housekeeping staff has better working conditions that allow them to live with their families, unlike other workers in different colleges.

We asked the workers for their **educational background** to know if they were employed in the housekeeping sector because of a lack of employment opportunities or their educational barriers. Also, this is a proxy indicator that they know their rights as a worker and human rights to raise their voice at the workplace if they are uncomfortable. And we learned that none of the housekeeping community staff members had passed 12th grade.

We asked the workers **if their children attend which school in online mode, and we also asked if they have bought any electronic device in the last two years** to know about their savings capacity and how much their job allows them to invest in leisure or any service that makes their lives easy. Education is an investment that requires a hefty amount of money. By asking the question about their children's schooling, we can know if their salaries were slashed by huge margins that they have to cut their children's education. Also, if they continued to attend school in online education, we asked about electronic appliances to know if they already had any smartphones or had to buy them for their children's education. There was only one case where the parent made their daughter drop out of school during the pandemic. Instead, most of them continued to spend the same on education. Instead of changing schools, they bought a new or second-hand smartphone but did not shy away from spending on children's education.

Additionally, any electronic item other than a smartphone comes under luxury, so we can get an insight into if they can spend their leisure or not. Also, I noticed that most housekeepers have a smartphone, and while some still use a keypad mobile, all of them look more than 40 as they have grey hair. Another aspect is that the workers often hide their income and showcase that they don't spend much on luxuries, but one worker at Bakul Niwas bought a new OnePlus mobile for more than 20000 just a week before the survey. However, the worker did not tell us the same; his friend mocked him for spending this much on his mobile.

We asked the workers if the college **directly hires them or do they work under some contractor, and if they know someone who has left their job or was kicked out from the job in the past two years** to know upto what degree or extent they can hold the college authorities liable to maintaining a positive work condition in the campus. Upon enquiring, I learned a private contractor at Ajanta

Services hired them. Therefore, there is a big difference in how a Tier-1 national college and a local private contractor would work to maintain a workspace and follow government policies. It was a negative aspect of the working conditions as apart from the washerman at Bakul Niwas, a private contractor employs everyone else. Due to this, we noticed a lack of job security but the contractors have not fired anyone in the last three years, and the housekeepers were only satisfied by this fact. Also, we found only one person who used to work in OBH has left the contractor to work at a different place.

Ultimately, we asked them if they are **given paid holidays/incentives or not if they fall sick abruptly and how the working hours have changed in the past three years**. Getting paid leaves and less than eight working hours showcase a positive work environment. Also, the access to paid holidays shows that the workers can rest if they are unhealthy rather than coming to work even with lousy health to prevent salary reduction. According to their contract, the workers responded by saying they get two paid holidays every month, government-declared holidays, and Sundays. Also, if they want to take a paid holiday, they must inform just 3 hours prior rather than a day or more. They also have a daily work shift of 8 hours, which changed from 9 am – 5 pm pre-COVID to 8 am - 4 pm post-covid. And they were expected to work 3 hours a day twice a week during the pandemic to maintain the office spaces and corridors of the hostels where the students lived.

e. **Shortcomings of the survey**

Firstly, we designed the survey to collect information about housekeepers and gardeners of IIIT-H. However, upon contacting Mr Ravindra, the supervisor of the gardeners at college, he told me that they're accessible during lunchtime. Once when I called him to talk if he was at the campus, he told me he was outside to buy saplings, and after a lack of contact with him, we eventually dropped the idea of finding the changes in working conditions for gardeners.

Also, even after the interviews, I was in contact with different individuals on the housekeeping staff. When I saw the washerman watering plants in front of Kadamba Niwas, I asked him if he also works as a gardener, to which he reiterated that he planted two new trees in the COVID era. He waters only two of them as sometimes the gardening staff don't pay much attention to football ground maintenance.

Another aspect I found out that came out as a shortcoming of our survey is that two contract companies provide housekeeping staff. Ajanta Services provide housekeepers to OBH and Bakul Niwas, the areas where we surveyed, but the other company provide housekeepers to Parijaat Niwas and Kadamba Niwas; therefore, it would have been difficult for us to come to a collective conclusion for all the housekeepers in the college, but since the domain for other company was relatively small in the pandemic, we can rely on the fact that we have not missed a critical data set.

f. **Comparison of working conditions of housekeeping staff with the working conditions of the mess workers of IIIT and the security staff**

The working staff of IIIT is not only limited to housekeepers and gardeners, but the mess workers and the security guards of the college are also an equal part of the college community, who also stayed back on the campus during the pandemic and worked rigorously during different waves of COVID.

As my group studied housekeepers, the group of Rahul Garg (2020115006), Yug Dedhia (2020115004), Srijan Chakraborty (2020115001) and Karthik Prasanna(2020115007) studied the working conditions of security guards of IIIT-H. Devesh Marwah(2020115005), Hitesh Goel(2020115003), Vithesh Adala Reddy(2020115002), and Radheshyam Thiagarajan (2020115013) studied the working conditions of mess workers of IIIT-H.

I asked Yug and Devesh to provide me with the data they've collected through their survey, and in this section, I will discuss my analysis and comparison of the working conditions of the three groups. Moreover, after my analysis, I contacted a mess worker Krishna and security guard Suresh to ask them the above teams' questions and confirm my hypothesis with them.

The mess workers work in four different messes: North Mess, South Mess, Kadamba Mess, and Yuktahar Mess. And unlike the housekeepers, primarily locals, mess workers are predominantly migrants from north India who came to Hyderabad for new employment and didn't speak Telugu even after living in Hyderabad for more than ten years. In the case of security guards, there are equal numbers of people from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and an equal number from other parts of India such as Assam, UP, Bihar and Haryana. This shows that mess workers and security guards are the sectors that came to provide a comfortable environment for migrants who work in the other city.

One of the significant differences in the working conditions of all three groups is that the different groups are entitled to work at a specific place. For example, the housekeepers are also assigned a particular hostel and work in their workspace only, which leads to forming groups among the workers' community. The mess workers work in one particular mess and often interact with people working in their mess. However, when it comes to the security guards, they don't have any specifically assigned to any particular area, and they rotate continuously.

For example, the security guard to whom I checked on the information if it was right or not told me that he had been working for one week at the hostel desk and then would have a duty at the main gate next week. This continuous rotation of points of work helps better form connections within the community of security guards. The guard also claimed to know every security guard working at the campus.

But this also has different aspects, such as the security guards having to work daily, and the shift also changes every week, which makes it difficult for them to have a fixed sleep schedule. The housekeepers have fixed work hours, and the mess workers also have a fixed time in which they have to prepare the food, and most of them have a reasonable amount of time to do whatever they want. For example, when he is free, the mess worker Krishna runs a barbershop beside OBH. In contrast, a morning shift security guard can be transferred to an evening shift next week.

Talking about the interaction with different parts of the community, which is also an essential part of working conditions, the housekeepers often don't interact with the student community and only live with their group. The security guards tell how they often talk to students, and students ask them doubts about any hostel policy. And the mess workers have the most interaction with the student community. Many mess workers can be actively working out with students and playing sports such as badminton and volleyball. Also, a mess worker claimed he knew a colleague who smuggled a packet of cigarettes for a student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave when the gates were closed for students.

It is also seen as a pattern that the security guards from different parts of India were also most educated among all groups as they have to do paperwork about the maintenance of registers and entries at different levels, and the guards at Nilgiri operate computers too.

And about employment, it was earlier mentioned that the housekeepers are employed through contractors, and they faced a salary cut in the covid waves. However, the mess workers and the security guards have a different story altogether. The mess workers are employed by the college

and managed by the Mess Committee in the Kadamba Niwas. During the second wave, they were given the option to get 50% of their salary if they went back home, as many of them were migrants from other states. Those who stay on campus will get a full salary, and the college administration will also provide them with accommodation to maintain a bio bubble. However, those who stayed on campus complained about the increased workload because of the lack of workforce. They had to pack food for students in quarantine apart from just working in a mess only, and few of those who went home faced social exclusion because of returning from a covid hotspot city. In the case of the security guards, they were employed through a security agency and lived within a radius of 5 km in different regions. And a security guard, RK, told me that the college administration offered the migrant security guards to leave their contracts with the company and work directly for the college administration, and out of 50, only 15 joined the college administration was providing them with free accommodation on campus and free food. But they complained that they were mostly the primary person of contact to anyone outside campus, leading to a lack of job satisfaction among a few.

#### g. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, an individual's working conditions usually depend on their working sector. Still, there are some general trends that I have observed in the study of the working conditions of various individuals in three different groups on that IIT campus. For example, migrants from other states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, will likely work as security guards or mess workers. They can work with the other migrants without social exclusion due to the group formation local population.

Also, it was evident that working directly for the college administration has many benefits than working for the contractor as the college administration is more liable and accountable for providing the employees with proper working conditions and holding their rights as an employee itself. It can easily be seen in the treatment they received from the administration during the COVID waves, as the workers who decided to stay on campus did not get any salary slash. Those who chose to go home also got 50% of their salary without doing any active work, but those who chose not to work those who are working under a contractor did not enjoy such benefits. Therefore working under a body that can be held accountable for any action provides better working conditions than private contractors.

#### h. References

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YKITZ3HwL8iDjHyVYPC\\_3mVASWbuJPw8?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YKITZ3HwL8iDjHyVYPC_3mVASWbuJPw8?usp=sharing)