



A study of Indian railway employees

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Abstract

The Indian Railways, a vital component of the nation's infrastructure, plays a crucial role in transportation, employment, and economic development. This study investigates the working conditions, welfare measures, and grievances of employees across various job categories within the Indian Railways. While the organization provides certain health facilities, including health insurance, the overall welfare provisions are found to be inadequate. The demanding nature of the work, coupled with exposure to diverse weather conditions, contributes to challenging working environments. The research highlights the need for significant improvements in worker welfare to enhance job satisfaction, productivity, and the overall efficiency of the Indian Railways system.

Keywords: Indian railways, working conditions, employee welfare, grievances

Introduction

The railway industry is a cornerstone of modern economies, deeply embedded in transportation, employment, economic development, and social structure. It not only facilitates the movement of goods and people but also plays a pivotal role in regional development and national security (Jain, 2017). The Indian Railways, in particular, stands out as a vital component of the country's infrastructure, often described as the "lifeline" of the nation due to its extensive reach and significance (Sinha & Sarma, 2016) ^[20].

The scale of Indian Railways is immense, encompassing a vast network that stretches over 67,000 kilometres and a workforce exceeding 1.3 million employees (Indian Railways Annual Report, 2022). This extensive network supports diverse employment categories and is crucial for the country's economic and social fabric. However, the working conditions and welfare provisions for railway employees have been subjects of significant concern and scrutiny. The demanding nature of their roles and the challenging operational environment raise critical questions about their well-being and job satisfaction (Rai, 2018).

One of the central aspects of managing such a large workforce is the establishment and maintenance of robust industrial relations. Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a crucial role in this regard, aiming to ensure smooth interactions between employers and employees (Singh & Kumar, 2011, as cited in Absar, 2012) ^[1, 17]. Industrial Relations (IR) or Labor Relations, a field of study focusing on the interactions between various stakeholders in the employment relationship, encompasses various elements including trade unions, collective bargaining, dispute resolution, and grievance handling (Weeratunga, 2003, as cited in Absar, 2012) ^[1].

In the context of developing countries like India, industrial relations are further complicated by issues such as high levels of worker exploitation, low participation in decision-making, and significant governmental and political interference (Khan & Taher, 2008, as cited in Absar, 2012) ^[1]. These challenges are compounded by widespread illiteracy among workers, limited awareness of rights and laws, and lower levels of labor productivity (Absar, 2012) ^[1]. These factors not only affect the quality of life and job

satisfaction of railway employees but also impact the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the railways.

The evolution of industrial relations theory provides insight into how these issues have been approached historically. The early focus of industrial relations was on critiquing and offering alternatives to classical economic theories regarding labor (Kaufman, 2004a, as cited in Kaufman, 2010) ^[14]. Over time, the field has expanded to include a broader range of issues, including the bargaining dynamics between workers and management, and the explicit and implicit rules governing these relationships (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994, as cited in Sodhi & Plowman, 2002) ^[21].

Industrial relations theories emphasize the importance of managing labor problems through structured systems of interaction and negotiation between workers and employers (Walker, 1967, as cited in Sodhi & Plowman, 2002) ^[21]. This includes understanding the institutions of job regulation and the factors affecting bargaining processes (Flanders, 1970, as cited in Sodhi & Plowman, 2002) ^[8, 21]. Effective management of these relationships is essential for addressing grievances, improving working conditions, and fostering a productive work environment (Barbash, 1984, as cited in Sodhi & Plowman, 2002) ^[21].

In the Indian context, the challenges faced by railway workers are multifaceted. The nature of railway work is inherently demanding, with employees often exposed to harsh weather conditions and irregular working hours (Gosavi, 2017). Despite the provision of health facilities and insurance, concerns about inadequate welfare measures persist (Indian Railways Annual Report, 2022). The need for comprehensive industrial relations strategies is evident to address these challenges and enhance worker welfare.

This study aims to explore the working conditions, welfare provisions, and grievance mechanisms within Indian Railways. By examining various employment categories and their experiences, the research seeks to highlight areas for improvement and provide insights into enhancing the overall working environment. Understanding these aspects is crucial for developing effective policies and practices that not only address the current issues but also support the long-term sustainability and efficiency of the Indian Railways system.

Methodology of the study

The research methodology for this study was designed to thoroughly investigate the working conditions, welfare, and grievances of railway employees within the Indian Railways system. The methodology employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Data collection was carried out over the fiscal year 2015-19, targeting a diverse sample of railway employees, specifically focusing on Group C and D workers. The selection of these groups was based on their significant representation within the workforce and their exposure to varying working conditions. To gather data, a structured survey was administered, consisting of both closed and open-ended questions to capture a broad range of information. The survey included questions on working conditions, welfare benefits, and grievances, designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the employees' experiences and perceptions.

In total, 507 survey forms were distributed to employees, and responses were collected and analyzed. The survey instrument was carefully designed to ensure validity and reliability, incorporating established scales and questions that addressed the research objectives. Alongside the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of employees and officers to gain qualitative insights into the more nuanced aspects of the employees' experiences. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in responses and the exploration of topics that emerged during the conversations.

The quantitative data collected from the surveys were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. This analysis involved generating descriptive statistics to summarize the data and performing cross-tabulations to explore relationships between different variables, such as employee category, working conditions, and reported grievances. The use of SPSS allowed for a rigorous examination of patterns and trends within the data, facilitating a clearer understanding of the overall state of industrial relations within Indian Railways.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using

thematic analysis, which involved coding the data into themes and categories relevant to the study's objectives. This approach provided deeper insights into the contextual factors affecting employee welfare and grievances, complementing the quantitative findings and offering a more holistic view of the issues at hand.

The research objectives were to evaluate the current working conditions, assess the quality of work relationships, examine welfare provisions, and identify prevalent grievances among railway workers. The study aimed to highlight the specific areas where improvements are needed and to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing the overall work environment.

The rationale for this study stems from the recognition that Indian Railways, as a large and historically significant organization, faces unique challenges related to employee welfare and industrial relations. Given the scale of operations and the diverse nature of the workforce, understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to address employee concerns and improve working conditions.

The significance of the study lies in its potential to contribute to the field of industrial relations by providing empirical evidence on the state of employee welfare and grievances within a major public sector organization. By identifying key areas of dissatisfaction and proposing targeted interventions, the study aims to reduce conflicts, enhance worker-management relations, and ultimately improve the overall work environment for Indian Railways employees. The findings are expected to inform policy-making and organizational practices, promoting better industrial relations and a more supportive work environment.

Causes of disputes and grievances

Table 1 presents data on the primary causes of disputes and grievances among employees in Indian Railways, segmented by gender. The table highlights the proportion of employees identifying various issues as sources of conflict or dissatisfaction in the workplace. The data offer a comprehensive view of the key areas contributing to workplace grievances and allow for gender-based comparisons.

Table 1: Main Causes of Disputes/Grievances in Indian Railways

Gender	Discipline	Pay/Wage/Salaries/Bonus	Discrimination	Work allocation/staffing levels	Non pay terms and conditions	Overtime	Health and Safety	Equal Treatment	Work/Life Balance	Working Conditions	Welfare	Behaviour of the supervisory staff	Promotions/Suspension/Unjust Dismissal of Layoff	Interpersonal Relations	No Response	Total
Male	41.7	9.8	6.7	8.4	.6	2.0	4.5	1.4	.8	10.6	1.1	1.7	.8	.3	9.5	N=357
Female	44.3	11.5	1.6	13.1	1.6	1.6	3.3	1.6		4.9		1.6			14.8	N=61
No Resp.	---	---	50.0	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	50.0	N=2
Total	41.9	10.0	6.2	9.0	.7	1.9	4.3	1.4	.7	9.8	1.0	1.7	.7	.2	10.5	N=420

Source: Primary survey data

The data indicate that the most common causes of grievances across both genders relate to discipline, pay/wages/salaries/bonuses, and work allocation or staffing levels. Specifically, discipline-related issues are the leading

cause of grievances for both male (41.7%) and female (44.3%) employees. This suggests that disciplinary practices or enforcement may be a significant area of concern within the organization.

Pay/wage/salaries/bonus issues are also a notable cause of dissatisfaction, particularly among female employees (11.5%). This indicates that compensation-related grievances are a significant concern, warranting further investigation into how pay structures and bonus systems are perceived and managed.

Work allocation or staffing levels are another prominent area of grievance, especially among female employees (13.1%). This suggests potential issues with job distribution or staffing adequacy that could be impacting employee satisfaction and productivity.

Discrimination is reported as a grievance by a small proportion of employees, with 6.7% of males and 1.6% of females identifying it as a key issue. While less prevalent, the presence of discrimination-related grievances indicates that there are areas where equity and inclusion may need to be addressed.

Other issues reported include health and safety concerns, overtime disputes, and non-pay terms and conditions. Health and safety grievances are reported by 4.5% of male employees and 3.3% of female employees, suggesting that maintaining safe working conditions is an ongoing concern. Overtime disputes are a grievance for a small percentage of male employees (2%), and non-pay terms and conditions are a concern for 2% of female employees.

The data also reveal a high percentage of non-responses among the survey participants, particularly concerning issues of discrimination (50% of non-responses). This indicates that some employees may be unwilling or unsure about disclosing specific grievances, potentially due to fear of reprisal or lack of clarity on the survey questions.

Table 2 presents data on employees' perceptions of discrimination or harassment at the Indian Railways, segmented by gender. The survey reveals that a significant majority of employees, regardless of gender, believe that no discrimination or harassment occurs at their workplace. Specifically, 61.0% of male employees and 66.7% of female employees feel that their workplace is free from such issues. This consensus suggests a widespread belief in the absence of discrimination among the employees surveyed.

Table 2: Employee Perceptions of Discrimination and Harassment by Gender

Gender	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Resp.	Total
Male	22.4%	61.0%	7.9%	8.7%	100%(N=392)
Female	20.3%	66.7%	5.8%	7.2%	100%(N=69)
No response	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100%(N=2)
Total	22.2%	61.6%	7.6%	8.6%	100%(N=463)

Source: Primary survey data

Table 3: Exposure to Discrimination and Harassment

Gender	From manager/supervisor	From colleagues	From subordinates	From other persons	Any other	No response	Total
Male	20.5%	3.2%	2.5%	2.5%	5.8%	65.5%	100%(N=278)
Female	18.5%	1.9%	3.7%	1.9%	7.4%	66.7%	100%(N=54)
No response	50.0%					50.0%	100%(N=2)
Total	20.4%	3.0%	2.7%	2.4%	6.0%	65.6%	100%(N=334)

Source: Primary survey data

The analysis reveals that the highest proportion of employees reporting exposure to discrimination or harassment is from managers or supervisors. Specifically, 20.5% of male employees and 18.5% of female employees have experienced such behaviour from their managerial or supervisory staff. This suggests that managerial and

In contrast, the proportion of employees who perceive discrimination is relatively low. Only 22.4% of male employees and 20.3% of female employees believe that discrimination or harassment does occur at the Indian Railways. This indicates that while some employees acknowledge the presence of these issues, it is not a predominant view. The lower percentage of those who report discrimination underscores a general perception that such problems are not prevalent.

The survey also highlights a segment of respondents who are unsure or chose not to respond. For both male and female employees, the percentage of those who are uncertain ("Don't Know") is modest, with 7.9% of males and 5.8% of females in this category. Additionally, a small percentage of respondents did not provide an answer, with 8.7% of males and 7.2% of females falling into this group. The high non-response rate among the two respondents who did not answer may suggest either a lack of knowledge or reluctance to discuss the issue, though it is too small to draw definitive conclusions from.

Overall, the data indicates a dominant perception among Indian Railways employees that discrimination and harassment are not significant issues in their workplace, with a smaller fraction acknowledging these problems. The consistency across genders in the perception of no discrimination suggests a uniform viewpoint among employees.

Next, we examine the worker are exposed of any form of discriminations or harassment and gender of the employees in the Indian Railways (table no.6) from the highest proportions 21% (male are discriminated from the managers/supervisors, 7% (female are discriminated from the other persons), 4% (females are discriminated from the subordinates), and 3% (male are discriminated from the other persons).

Table 3 provides insights into the exposure of employees to various forms of discrimination or harassment at the Indian Railways, categorized by gender. The data illustrates the proportions of employees who have encountered discriminatory or harassing behaviour from different sources, including managers/supervisors, colleagues, subordinates, and other persons. The Table 6 is the result of question posed: Are you exposed to any other form of discrimination/Harassment?

supervisory levels are perceived as the primary sources of discriminatory or harassing behaviour in the workplace. In contrast, a smaller percentage of employees report being discriminated against by colleagues, subordinates, or other persons. For example, only 3.2% of male employees and 1.9% of female employees have experienced harassment

from colleagues, while 2.5% of both male and female employees report similar issues from subordinates. Harassment from other persons is reported by 2.5% of male employees and 1.9% of female employees. These figures indicate that while such interactions do occur, they are less prevalent compared to those involving managers or supervisors.

Additionally, there is a notable percentage of employees who did not provide a response to the survey. Among male employees, 65.5% did not respond, while 66.7% of female employees also chose not to answer the question. This high rate of non-response may reflect a variety of factors, including a reluctance to disclose personal experiences of discrimination or harassment, a lack of awareness, or other reasons unrelated to the actual incidence of such issues.

Overall, the data suggests that while instances of discrimination or harassment are present, they are not widespread across all levels of interaction. The managerial and supervisory levels are identified as significant areas where discrimination and harassment are perceived, while interactions with colleagues, subordinates, and other persons are reported less frequently. The high non-response rate warrants further investigation to understand the reasons behind the lack of responses and to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and sources of discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Table 4 examines the types of discrimination reported by employees in Indian Railways, categorized by gender. The data indicates that discrimination occurs across various dimensions, with different types being more prevalent in specific groups.

Table 4: Types of Discrimination at Indian Railways by Gender

Gender	Age factor	Qualification/Education	Sex factor/Gender	Religion	Caste/Class	Region	Race	Any other	No response	Total
Male	5.9%	10.3%	3.3%	2.6%	10.6%	3.3%	4.0%	11.0%	49.1%	100%(N=273)
Female	9.1%	5.5%	3.6%		7.3%		1.8%	18.2%	54.5%	100%(N=55)
No response								50.0%	50.0%	100%(N=2)
Total	6.4%	9.4%	3.3%	2.1%	10.0%	2.7%	3.6%	12.4%	50.0%	100%(N=330)

Source: Primary survey data

From the analysis, caste or class-related discrimination is the most commonly reported issue, affecting 11.0% of male employees. This is followed by education or qualifications-related discrimination, also prominent among male employees at 10.3%. These findings suggest that caste and educational background are significant factors influencing discriminatory experiences in the organization.

Female employees report age-related discrimination at a notable rate of 9.1%, highlighting that age factors play a considerable role in their experiences of discrimination. Additionally, 7.3% of female employees report discrimination related to sex, indicating that gender-based discrimination is also a relevant issue.

The prevalence of other forms of discrimination is lower but still present. Race and religion-based discrimination are reported by 4.0% and 3.0% of male employees, respectively, while region-based discrimination is reported by 3.3% of male employees. For female employees, sex-based discrimination and region-based discrimination are less frequently reported.

A significant portion of the survey respondents did not provide information on their experiences. Notably, 49.1% of male employees and 54.5% of female employees did not respond to the question regarding types of discrimination. This high non-response rate may indicate either a lack of awareness, unwillingness to disclose personal experiences, or other factors that could affect the overall understanding of discrimination within the organization.

Table 5 provides an overview of employee experiences with accidents that resulted in damage, work delay, or safety

risks over the past year, broken down by gender. The data reveals a clear trend regarding the prevalence of such incidents among male and female employees.

The majority of employees, regardless of gender, report no accidents in the past year. Specifically, 81.4% of male employees and 89.9% of female employees indicate that they did not experience any accidents causing damage, work delay, or safety risk. This high percentage of employees who have not faced accidents suggests a generally safe working environment for the majority.

Table 5: Accidents Causing Damage, Work Delay, or Safety Risks by Gender (Past Year)

Gender	Yes	No	No response	Total
Male	9.8%	81.4%	8.8%	100%(N=388)
Female	4.3%	89.9%	5.8%	100%(N=69)
No response		50.0%	50.0%	100%(N=2)
Total	8.9%	82.6%	8.5%	100%(N=459)

Source: Primary survey data

However, a notable proportion of employees have encountered accidents. Among male employees, 9.8% report having experienced such accidents, compared to a smaller 4.3% of female employees. This indicates that male employees are more likely to face incidents that impact their work and safety. The data underscores a gender disparity, with males experiencing a higher rate of accidents than females in the Indian Railways.

The survey also highlights that a significant percentage of respondents did not provide an answer to the question about

accidents. Specifically, 8.8% of male employees and 5.8% of female employees chose not to respond. This non-response rate could imply a range of factors including a lack of recall, unwillingness to disclose information, or an actual absence of relevant experiences. The high non-response rate among the total sample (8.5%) further suggests that there might be underlying issues related to the reporting or acknowledgment of accidents.

Overall, the data indicates that while a substantial majority of employees have not encountered accidents, those who have experienced such incidents are more frequently male. This disparity highlights a potential area for further investigation into the causes and prevention of workplace accidents, with a focus on reducing the risk for male employees and addressing any underlying factors that contribute to the higher accident rate.

Conclusion

Employees are more likely to remain attracted to and retained by their organizations when a significant number of their expectations are met. The study reveals that while the Indian Railways provides some essential welfare facilities, such as health insurance, it falls short in addressing the overall needs of its employees. The demanding nature of the work, often in open-line environments, coupled with inadequate housing and canteen services, contributes to a challenging work environment. These findings underscore the urgent need for the Indian Railways to prioritize improvements in worker welfare, including better housing, canteen facilities, and working conditions. By addressing these issues, the organization can enhance job satisfaction, productivity, and the overall efficiency of the Indian railway system. When employees' needs are met, their morale improves, leading to increased motivation and commitment to their work. This benefits the organization as a whole.

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