

Health Problems of Women Workers in Cashew-Nut Processing Industry: A Sociological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Work is an essential part of human life; it creates standard of living, pleasure, and satisfaction. It is important for the physical, mental, social and economic development of a man or woman. Women are the backbone of every family. As a daughter, wife, and mother they are sincere towards their roles and responsibilities. They are a social and emotional supporter as well as a caretaker of family. When there is a time of crisis and misshapen for the family, then women come out from the seclusion of men. At times, there are unforeseen circumstances such as critical illness or death. Today, working women have a dual role, dual burden, and dual responsibilities. Cashew is the most delicious and nutritious product referred to as “poor man’s crop and rich man’s food”. It is an item of food rich in protein, fats, and vitamins. The cashew nut processing industry is provides more than three lacks persons are directly employed, of whom 95% are women from socially and economically backward communities in rural areas. At the same time, the cashew-nut processing industrial workers’ health and their quality of life affected. The present study find out the women health problems in Soundhararajan cashew nut processing industry in Vegakollai village, Kurinjipadi Taluk, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu, India.

Keywords: Cashew-nut industry, Women workers, Health problems

INTRODUCTION

Now women have to play a prominent role in the overall economic development of the country. Women constitute around 50 per cent of the total world population. In every society women play a very crucial role. To accelerate the overall growth and prosperity of a nation, it is very important to create opportunities for socio-economic development of women. It is high time that the developing nations utilize their women force to the optimum level. It is imperative to note that men alone cannot break the shackles of poverty, unemployment, inequality and population explosion. With the qualities of dedication, hard work, perseverance and honesty women are capable of producing much better results than men.

Women are the backbone of every family. They are a social and emotional supporter as well as a caretaker. When there is a time of crisis and misshapen for the family, then women come out from the seclusion of men. Working women have a dual role, dual burden, and dual responsibilities. In traditional society they were confined to the four walls but in modern society they have, come out of the four walls to participate in all activities mainly in social and economic activities.

Today, work is an essential part of human life; it creates profitable living standards, pleasure, and satisfaction. It is important for the physical, mental, social, economic and moral development of a woman. An educated woman wants to develop her capabilities and wants to prove herself through her working efficiencies outside her home. In the changing scenario, women are contributing to the workforce in all spheres, whether it is primary sector, secondary sector or service sector. Now they are working from 9 to 5 in the service sector and from morning to till evening in other sectors. They are enough capable to maintain a stability among both household life as well as in work life.

The cashew nut processing industries plays an imperative role in the Indian food processing industry. It has the potential to provide source of livelihood for the cashew growers, empower rural women in the processing sector, create employment opportunities and generate foreign exchange through exports. Moreover, the cashew-nut processing industrial workers face several health hazards that are related to their work. They are often exposed to physical hazards like heat and burns, chemical hazards like exposure to skin irritants, biological hazards like various insect bites and diseases caused by bacteria and viruses, ergonomic hazards such as repetitive movements, poor body positioning etc, and psychological hazards such as mental stress and pressure.

A study undertaken at V.V. Giri National Labour Institute (2014), which examines the socio-economic profile of cashew workers and their households, found that more than fourth-fifth of the workers reported health-related problems due to their work in the cashew-nut processing industry. Pain in the leg/hand/knee/neck/joints and body is the most reported problems. Particularly, the female workers reported more problems than male workers in cashew-nut processing industries. Sivanesan (2013) investigated the working conditions, income and expenditure pattern, problems and living conditions of women workers of cashew industries in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. The study found that skin diseases; asthma, T.B and anemia were 37.35%, 16.65%, and 8 per cent respectively. The majority of cashew industrial workers are affected by skin disease.

The prevalence of heart disease was comparatively higher in the shelling group. Hypertension prevalence was highest in the peeling group, followed by cutting and grading. Diabetes prevalence was highest in the grading group. Leg/knee/hand pain, back pain, body pain, neck pain, joint pain, and headache followed by an allergy due to the corrosive oil from the raw nuts and dust were the commonest occupational-related health problems. The probability of having at least one occupation-related health problem, reproductive morbidity, menstrual problem and general morbidity was found to be highest among those engaged in the shelling, followed by those engaged in peeling and grading. However, the major occupation related health problems did not seem to vary across the different types of jobs significantly. The prevalence of hypertension, thyroid problems and diabetes mellitus were found to be higher among cashew-nut processing industrial workers.

The cashew tree was introduced to South India in the Seventeenth Century by the Portuguese, originally due to its application in preventing soil erosion due to the extensive root system. The cultivation of cashew was initiated on a small scale, became the source of the flourishing cashew industry by the 1930s and this was primarily due to the Western Companies which realized its potential as a profitable export commodity. The export-based industry thrived and huge profits were realized. As the industry did not require much capital, local entrepreneurs soon entered the field, set up small plants, recruited workers, purchased raw nuts on a small scale for their roasting and shelling, while the Western Companies focused on the more profitable aspects of packaging and marketing for export to US and Europe. Soon, the local entrepreneurs managed to centralized all these activities and open their own factories. The cashew nut is a highly nutritious product. It gives more calories to the human body. Because of its nutritious content it gives more strength and stamina to the body. The cashew nut producers take a little percentage for their consumption and used to sell the remaining percentage. The largest producers sell the products for led sales and exports. They buy the cashew, roast & break it and take the inner nut which is very tasty. The outer surface of the nut is used of fire wood which is brought by hotels and industries. The cashew nut is commonly adjudged as poor man crop, but rich man food of its wide adoptability in poor marginal soils and is rich proteins, fats carbohydrates and minerals. Cashew apple is a rich source of Calcium, Phosphorus and Beta-carotene, it is grown in Salem, Tanjore, Kanyakumari, Marthandam and Colachel and Cuddalore regions in Tamil Nadu.

In North East India cultivation of cashew nut is mainly found in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura. The raw cashew has a very caustic acid content (caustic oil) which can burn the skin of worker and produce noxious fumes when heated and therefore it required to undergo an elaborate process of sun drying, roasting, breaking (shelling), heating and peeling of brown layer to become suitable for consumption. There are two commonly followed methods of cashew nut processing, viz., Roasting process and Steam (roasting) Cooking process.

Satheeshkumar and Krishnakumar (2018) have conducted a study on cashew-nut processing industrial workers in Kerala. The subjects were randomly selected from three cashew-nut processing industries situated in

Kollam District of Kerala State. The study found that the lower back pain was the most prevalent among the subject (54.6%), knee (54.3%) is the second most prevalent body pain followed by neck(46%), shoulder (40%), upper neck (36.6%), elbow (32.6%), ankle (26.8%), hip (16.9%) and wrist (13.1%). The study concluded that when the duration of employment increases, the symptoms also found to be generally increases in the body region, shoulder, and elbow, wrist, hip, knee and ankle problems among the industrial workers.

Borah (2019) has conducted a study in cashew-nut processing factory in Meghalaya, India. In this study conducted on a sample of forty women labours between the age group 20-50 years involved in shelling and peeling activity of cashew-nut factory, the workers complained of severe to very severe pain in the upper arm (4.73), lower arm (4.60), fingers (4.93), thigh (4.43), feet (4.10), upper and lower back (4.63 and 4.53), shoulder joint (4.38), knee (4.43) and ankle (4.25). In terms of self perceived exertion, worker expressed that shelling work is heave to very heavy and the peeling workers reported their work to be moderately heave to heavy. Women workers felt severe to very severe pain in fingers, wrists, and the upper and lower arm which is due to more strain while shelling cashew nuts. Moderate pain was reported by the workers in the neck (3.88) and eyes (3.68). Thus, it was evident that women were working in an awkward sitting posture for prolonged periods throughout the day and hence suffered from neck, wrist and shoulder disorders. Further, the women workers had lots of physiological and musculoskeletal hazards including pain in fingers, wrist, joints, upper and lower extremities due to continuous working right from early morning till evening; wounds. In fingers as working with knife and wooden mallet; were prone to repetitive strain injury as they worked with arms repetitively. Continuous sitting on gunny bag, bending of legs for hours leads to many musculoskeletal and neurological disorders. The study concluded that the workers had chemical health hazards as they came into contact with caustic acid, which oozed from the cashew shell after roasting, which leads to discoloration and tanning of palm and skin infections.

Grandjean (1982) has reported that sitting posture has a disadvantage because it affects digestion and breathing due to prolonged slacking of the abdominal musculature and the purported ill effect of the flexion of the lumbar spine. These labour forces are subject to the exposure of a corrosive anacardic acid during manual process of roasting, shelling and peeling. This causes occupationally acquired severe to mild skin dermatitis. The cashew nut processing industrial women workers are mostly illiterate, socio-economically poor and belong to underprivileged section of the society and therefore these women are exploited without any consideration of workload demands, physical fitness, nutritional status and their biological status as they performed a dual role. As a result, the aggregate workload placed on them was so high that it became incompatible with their physical fitness leading to fatigue thereby lowering efficiency and impairing health in the long run (Bhat, 1988).

The study conducted by Pasricha and Srinivas (1991) on the dermatological harms confronted by female workers in the cashew-nut manufacturing units found that the workers were suffering from severe dermatic reactions on their hands and feet caused by cashew nut shell oil. Rajam, (1992) conducted the study to analyze the health problems faced by the women workers and incentives provided to the workers the major findings of the study is the workers face a variety of health hazards of headache, pain at joints, fatigue, tanning of the palm, and loss of vision etc.

Remani, (1992) conducted the study with the objectives to analyze the health hazards faced by them among the sample of 300 female workers in various cashew units. The study findings the health hazards of these women were respiratory/chest diseases (25 per cent), headache, pain in the joints of arms/legs (25 percent), and back pain (10 percent). Four percent of the workers complained of general fatigue. Twenty-four percent experienced tanning of the palm, and six percent had uterus complaints. Four percent had a urinary infection. The vision was affected in two percent cases.

Nag (1996) conducted the study to analyze the reasons for the cashew industry women workers' health hazards. The different categories of the work of women in the cashew industry, like shelling, which is done in the squatting arrangement with a head bent forward posture, seems to pose the highest degree of postural strain on their skeletal system. The extended sitting posture is likely to affect their musculoskeletal harmony, the productive health hazards faced by women due to work stress are showing adversely influence the women's physical and mental organs, including instances of hypertrophic changes through a syndrome of pelvic

congestion. Health effects caused by chronic discomforts include musculoskeletal pain and miscarriages or birth defects. **Aziz** (1991) state that the hands of some of the workers suffered blisters and deformities, similar to those of leprosy patients. To prevent abrasion of worker's hands by cashew shell oil, innovative indigenous techniques like the application of coconut oil on their hands before and after work has become a conventional performance, but whether the crisis could be eliminated by this method is yet to be ascertained.

Statement of the Problem

Cuddalore District is one of the major cashew-nut cultivation areas of Tamil Nadu. Here 32 exports oriented cashew-nut production units situated in and around the district, besides 250 cashew-nut processing cottage industries also located. These cashew-nut processing industries are providing employment opportunities and generate some health issues to the workers. The major stages of cashew-nut processing including roasting the raw nuts to facilitate removal of the hard outer shell, shelling or cutting the outer shell, peeling the skin of the kernel and grading the kernels based on quality. These a large number of female workers working with unhealthy squatting posture, working near furnaces and contact with the cashew nut shell liquid may make many health problems. In order to understand many women workers have facing various health problems due to cashew-nut processing units. The present study is taken up Soundhararajan Cashew-nut processing Private Limited in Vegakollai Village of Kurinjipadi Taluk, Cuddalore District, and Tamil Nadu with following objectives:

Objectives

- To study the socio-economic conditions of the women workers in Soundhararajan cashew nut processing private limited
- To find out the women workers' working conditions in the cashew nut processing unit
- To identify the various health problems of women workers in the cashew nut processing unit

Research design

Research design is very important because it facilitate the smooth operation for research. It is a procedure which is adopted by the researcher for testing the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The researcher has selected the descriptive research design for this study.

Selection of the sample

The sample technique plays an important role in the process of research. The word sampling simply means smaller representation of a large whole. The success of research is based on the proper identification of sample. The researcher has selected soundhararajan cashew-nut processing unit in kurinjipadi taluk of cuddalore district. Because, a large number of women workers are working. Totally 127 workers are working in this unit among them 26 workers are male and 101 workers are female. The research study focused on only female workers' health problems. So, the researcher has collected data from 101 women workers and he has applied census method.

Tool of data collection

The primary data were collected from the women workers by adopting a well-structured interview scheduled. The researcher visited each and every unit of SRC private limited and obtained relevant information from the workers. They have extended their full co-operation for the successful data collection.

Data analysis

The collected data were classified and tabulated according to the requirement of the study. The chi-square test was applied for examine the association between independent variables and dependent variables. General table interpretation is carried out with the help of simple percentage analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table-1 Age wise Distribution of the Respondents

Age group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
20 – 30	40	39.60
30 – 40	33	32.67
40 – 50	28	27.73
Total	101	100.00

The above table presents data on age wise distribution of the respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 101 respondents, 39.60 per cent of the respondents are belong to the age group of 20-30 years and 32.67 per cent of them fall under the age group of 30-40 years. The remaining 27.73 per cent of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 40-50 years. It is clear from the above discussion that the majority of the workers are belonging to the age group of below 40 years. It is shows that almost majority of the reproductive age group workers have working in the cashew nut processing industry.

Table-2 Caste wise Distribution of the Respondents

Caste group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Most backward caste	52	51.49
Scheduled caste	26	25.74
Backward caste	23	22.77
Total	101	100.00

The above table shows data on caste wise distribution of the respondents. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, 51.49 per cent of the respondents are belong to most backward castes and 25.74 per cent of them belong to scheduled castes. Further, 22.77 per cent of the respondents are belonging to backward castes. It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that the majority of the workers are belong to most backward castes. It is shows that majority of the most backward castes workers are working in the cashew nut processing industry.

Table-3 Education wise Distribution of the Respondents

Educational level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	32	31.68
Primary level	27	26.73
Secondary level	28	27.73
College level	14	13.86
Total	101	100.00

The above table indicates data on educational wise distribution of the respondents. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, 31.68 per cent of the respondents are illiterates and 26.73 per cent of them have studied up to primary level education. Moreover, 27.73 per cent of the respondents have educated up to secondary level and 13.86 per cent of them have educated up to college level. It could be seen that nearly two-thirds of the workers have educated and one-third were illiterates workers are working in the cashew nut processing industry.

Table-4 Income wise Distribution of the Respondents

Monthly Income (In. Rs)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
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Below 8000	52	51.49
8000 – 10000	28	27.73
10000 - 12000	21	20.78
Total	101	100.00

The above table explains data on income wise distribution of the respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 101 respondents, 51.49 per cent of the respondents have earn their income less than Rs. 8000 and 27.78 per cent of them have earned their income between Rs.8000-10000 per month. Further, 20.78 per cent of the respondents have earned their income between Rs. 10000-12000 per month. It is clear from the above discussion that majority of the workers have earned their income below Rs. 8000 per month. It is shows that majority of the workers are getting low income from the cashew nut processing industry.

Table-5 Age wise Distribution of the Respondents and their opinion on Health Problems

Age group	Respondents' Opinion on Health Problems				
	Pain in Finger & Wrist and Wounds in Fingers	Pain in Joints of Arms/Legs and Neck Pain	Back pain, Knee pain and Arthritis	Headache, Fatigue and Respiratory Problems	Total
20 - 30	10 (25.00)	16 (40.00)	11 (27.50)	3 (7.50)	40
30 - 40	17 (51.52)	6 (18.18)	5 (15.15)	5 (15.15)	33
40 - 50	5 (17.86)	4 (14.29)	7 (25.00)	12 (42.85)	28
Total	32 (31.68)	26 (25.74)	23 (22.77)	20 (19.80)	01(100.00)

χ^2 Calculated value: 23.98; Degrees of freedom:6 χ^2 Table value (5%):12.6.

The above table presents data on age wise distribution of the respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be noted that out of the total 101 respondents, 31.68 per cent of the respondents have reported that frequently facing pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers due to the cashew nut industrial processing. Moreover, 25.74 per cent of the respondents have stated that frequently occur some health problems like pain in joints of arms/legs and 22.77 per cent of them have realized that back pain, knee pain and arthritis due to the cashew nut processing. Further, 19.80 per cent of the respondents have reported that frequently occur headache, fatigue and respiratory diseases due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

Out of the total, the majority (51.52%) of 30-40 years age group respondents have stated that frequently facing pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers due to the cashew nut industrial processing and the age group between 20-30 years (40.00%) respondents have reported that frequently occur pain in joints of arms, legs and neck due to the cashew nut industrial processing. As well as, nearly half of (42.85%) the age group of 40-50 years respondents have realized that headache, fatigue and respiratory diseases due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

The chi-square test is applied for further analysis. The computed chi-square value is 23.98 which is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level of significance. Hence, there is an association between age wise respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that almost all the age group workers have frequently facing various health problems. Particularly, the productive age group workers have highly suffering from health problems due to cashew nut industrial processing.

Table-6 Caste wise Distribution of the Respondents and their opinion on Health Problems

Caste group	Respondents' Opinion on Health Problems				
	Pain in Finger & Wrist and Wounds in Fingers	Pain in Joints of Arms / Legs and Neck Pain	Back pain, Knee pain and Arthritis	Headache, Fatigue and Respiratory Problems	Total
Most backward caste	16 (30.77)	15 (28.85)	16 (30.77)	5 (9.61)	52
Scheduled caste	5 (19.23)	5 (19.23)	3 (11.54)	13 (50.00)	26
Backward caste	11 (47.83)	6 (26.09)	4 (17.39)	2 (8.69)	23
Total	32 (31.68)	26 (25.74)	23 (22.77)	20 (19.80)	101 (100.00)

χ^2 Calculated value: 23.45; Degrees of freedom:6; χ^2 Table value (5%):12.6.

The above table shows data on caste wise distribution of the respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, the half of the (50.00%) scheduled castes respondents have realized that headache, fatigue and respiratory diseases frequently occur due to the cashew nut industrial processing. Moreover, nearly half (47.83%) of backward castes respondents have stated that pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers frequently as well as the most backward castes (30.77%) respondents have reported that frequently suffer back pain, knee pain and arthritis due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

The chi-square test is applied for further analysis. The computed chi-square value is 23.45 which is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level of significance. Hence, there is an association between caste wise respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that almost all the caste workers have reported that frequently facing various health problems. This result shows that the scheduled caste workers frequently suffer from some health problems due to cashew nut industrial processing.

Table-7 Education wise Distribution of the Respondents and their opinion on Health Problems

Here is the data formatted into a clean table.

Educational Level	Pain in Finger & Wrist and Wounds in Fingers	Pain in Joints of Arms/Legs and Neck Pain	Back Pain, Knee Pain and Arthritis	Headache, Fatigue and Respiratory Problems	Total
Illiterate	3 (9.37%)	5 (15.63%)	14 (43.75%)	10 (31.25%)	32
Primary Level	9 (33.33%)	11 (40.74%)	3 (11.11%)	4 (14.82%)	27
Secondary Level	13 (46.42%)	7 (25.00%)	4 (14.29%)	4 (14.29%)	28
College Level	7 (50.00%)	3 (21.43%)	2 (14.29%)	2 (14.29%)	14
Total	32 (31.68%)	26 (25.74%)	23 (22.77%)	20 (19.80%)	101 (100.00%)

χ^2 Calculated value: 24.12; Degrees of freedom:9; χ^2 Table value (5%):16.9.

The above table indicates data on educational wise distribution of the respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, the half of the (50.00%) college level and (46.42%) secondary level educated respondents have reported that pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers frequently due to the cashew nut industrial processing. Moreover, nearly half of the (43.75%) illiterates have stated that back pain, knee pain and arthritis as well as 40.74 per cent of the

respondents have reported that the joints, arms, legs and neck pain frequently occur due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

The chi-square test is applied for further analysis. The computed chi-square value is 24.12 which is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level of significance. Hence, there is an association between educational wise respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be seen clearly observed that from the above discussion that all the educated workers have reported that frequently facing various health problems. This result shows that the college level educated workers have frequently facing some health problems due to cashew nut industrial processing.

Table-8 Income wise Distribution of the Respondents and their opinion on Health Problems

Monthly Income (Rs.)	Pain in Finger & Wrist and Wounds in Fingers	Pain in Joints of Arms/Legs and Neck Pain	Back Pain, Knee Pain and Arthritis	Headache, Fatigue and Respiratory Problems	Total
Below 8,000	9 (17.31%)	17 (32.69%)	18 (34.62%)	8 (15.38%)	52
8,000–10,000	11 (39.29%)	4 (14.29%)	3 (10.71%)	10 (35.71%)	28
10,000–12,000	12 (57.14%)	5 (23.81%)	2 (9.52%)	2 (9.52%)	21
Total	32 (31.68%)	26 (25.74%)	23 (22.77%)	20 (19.80%)	101 (100.00%)

χ^2 Calculated value: 22.79; Degrees of freedom:6; χ^2 Table value (5%):12.6.

The above table explains data on income wise distribution of the respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, more than half of the (57.14%) high level income group (Rs. 10000-12000) respondents have reported that pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers frequently due to the cashew nut industrial processing. Further, low income group (below Rs. 8000) respondents have stated that back pain, knee pain and arthritis frequently occur due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

The chi-square test is applied for further analysis. The computed chi-square value is 22.79 which is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level of significance. Hence, there is an association between income wise respondents and their opinion on health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

It is clearly observed from the above discussion that almost all the income group workers have reported that subsequently facing various health problems. This result shows that the high level income group workers have frequently facing some health problems due to cashew nut industrial processing.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that the majority of the respondents are belonging to the age group of below 40 years and most of them belong to most backward castes. A good majority of the workers have school level education and most of the workers have got their monthly income is below Rs. 10000. Almost all the women workers have suffered frequently from some health problems. Particularly, the age group of 30-40 years workers has reported that frequently suffer from pain of fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers due to the cashew nut industrial processing. Further, the study results reveals that the majority of the scheduled castes workers have suffer from headache, fatigue and respiratory diseases as well as backward castes also affected some health problems like that pain in fingers, wrist and wounds in fingers due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

From the findings of the study it is evident that the most of the college level and secondary level educated workers have suffered from pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers as well as the primary level educated workers have pointed out that pain of joints of arms, legs and neck pain. However, the most of the illiterate

workers have felt frequently from back pain, knee pain and arthritis due to the cashew nut industrial processing. The majority of the high level and middle level income group workers have stated that frequently facing some health problems like back pain, knee pain and arthritis due to the cashew nut industrial processing.

Thus, the study results highlight that almost all the women workers have suffered in various health problems due to the cashew nut industrial processing. It is significant that the cashew nut industrial process is make severe damages to the women's health such as pain in fingers & wrist and wounds in fingers, pain in joints of arms and legs, neck pain, back pain, knee pain, arthritis, headache, fatigue and respiratory diseases. Because, women workers working in squatting posture a long time in the cashew nut industrial processing units. The results highlight that irrespective of age, castes, level of education and income status, the workers have expressed that the cashew nut industrial processes severely affect their health status.

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