

Study on Rural Unemployment, Education and Poverty in the Agriculture Sector of Haryana

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how education and employment shape the extent of poverty in Haryana's agriculture sector. As one of India's smaller states, Haryana's economy revolves chiefly around agriculture, and sustained economic growth is difficult to achieve without strengthening this key sector further. The study categorises Haryana's rural population by occupation — distinguishing agricultural labourers from agricultural cultivators — and draws on Census of India data to show that around 65.2% of the population lives in rural areas. Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, agricultural workers' share of the state's total workforce rose from 15.3% to 17.1%. The paper also reports that Haryana's literacy rate improved from 67.91% in 2001 to 75.55% in 2011 (male 84.06%, female 65.94%), and it uses this trend, alongside unemployment estimates from the Labour Bureau and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), to argue that low education attainment, seasonal and disguised unemployment, and fragmented landholdings jointly sustain rural poverty in the state. Structured as a descriptive review paper based on secondary data, it takes stock of India's current employment landscape, outlines Haryana's economic profile, examines what drives agricultural unemployment in the state, and reviews the government policies designed to curb poverty and joblessness.

Keywords: Unemployment, Agriculture, Population, Education, Poverty, Haryana

INTRODUCTION

In the words of the late President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, “*Almost half of the population of the world lives in rural regions and mostly in a state of poverty. Such inequalities in human development have been one of the primary reasons for unrest and, in some parts of the world, even violence.*”

Rural development continues to be central to India's growth story, since the country's economy rests heavily on agriculture, which accounts for a substantial share of its GDP. Various rural development initiatives have been launched by the government to strengthen agricultural growth further. Almost every country aspires to a strong employment rate for its people, given how directly joblessness affects national GDP. Among the leading causes of unemployment are economic downturns and, at times, policies that end up worsening the very problem they aim to solve. Even so, unemployment continues to be a persistent challenge in a developing country like India, shaped by a mix of interconnected factors — among which education and agricultural livelihood conditions are especially important in a predominantly agrarian state such as Haryana.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the economic and education condition of Haryana.
- To identify the nature and forms of unemployment in Haryana, particularly in the agriculture sector.
- To examine the relationship between education, unemployment and poverty in rural Haryana.
- To identify government policies implemented to reduce agricultural unemployment and rural poverty.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive, review-based study drawing entirely on secondary data. Population, literacy and workforce figures are taken from the Census of India for 1991, 2001 and 2011. Unemployment estimates are drawn from two distinct sources that use different methodologies and are therefore reported separately, with their own year and source noted throughout: the Government of India Labour Bureau's Employment–Unemployment Survey (2015–16), and the CMIE's monthly Consumer Pyramids Household Survey bulletins (2020–21). The two series are not statistically comparable — the Labour Bureau/PLFS estimates and CMIE estimates for Haryana have differed by a wide margin in the same period — and this paper does not attempt to reconcile them; both are presented so the reader can judge the scale of the discrepancy. Peer-reviewed journal articles and government reports listed in the References were reviewed to identify the structural determinants of agricultural unemployment and the welfare schemes currently in place. As a review paper, no primary survey or field data collection was undertaken, which is acknowledged as a limitation in the concluding section.

Educational Status of Haryana

Education plays a vital role in uplifting the socio-economic condition of rural areas, and its absence makes social and economic progress considerably more difficult to achieve. It equips people with specialised skills, sharpens decision-making, and opens up fresh avenues for employment and income generation — which is why this paper treats educational attainment as a starting point for understanding both unemployment and poverty in the state.

Known for its strength in agriculture, Haryana ranks among India's more prosperous states. Alongside agricultural growth, the state has also been working to raise its education standards. As per the Census of India (2011), Haryana's literacy rate climbed to 75.55%, with male literacy at 84.06% and female literacy at 65.94% — up from 67.91% (male 78.49%, female 55.73%) in 2001 (Census of India, 2001, 2011). The persistent gender gap in literacy — about 18 percentage points in 2011 — is significant because women form a substantial share of agricultural labour in the state (Tuteja, 2000; Rani, 2019), and lower female educational attainment is repeatedly linked in the literature to lower-paid, more precarious agricultural work and, in turn, to household poverty.

Economic Profile of Haryana

Haryana became a distinct administrative state on 1 November 1966, carved out of Punjab primarily on linguistic grounds; the national capital, Delhi, borders it on three sides. It is one of India's smaller states, with about 4.4 million hectares of land — roughly 1.34% of the country's total geographical area. It is predominantly an agricultural region with fertile, productive soil, and its farm sector drew considerable benefit from the Green Revolution of the 1960s. The state also supports a rich variety of flora and fauna. Most of Haryana's geographical area lies under cultivation, spanning diverse agro-ecological zones and cropping patterns; it leads the country in producing basmati rice, pearl millet and mustard, and also grows rice, wheat, pulses, cotton, sugarcane and rapeseed-mustard.

Census data for 1991–2001 shows that about 71.07% of the population lived in rural areas during that period, with agriculture contributing 31.19% to the state's net domestic product — a share that had fallen to 21.45% by 2006–07, reflecting a relative decline in the agriculture and animal husbandry sector even as the sector continued to employ a large share of the rural workforce (Census of India, 1991, 2001). This gap between agriculture's shrinking contribution to output and its continued importance for rural employment is itself a source of underemployment and disguised unemployment, discussed further in Section 7.

Population of Haryana

According to the Census of India (2011), Haryana's population stood at 2.54 crore (25,351,462 persons — 13,494,734 males and 11,856,728 females), up from 2.11 crore (21,144,564 persons — 11,363,953 males and 9,780,611 females) in 2001 (Census of India, 2001, 2011).

Growth Rate of Haryana's Population

Haryana's overall decadal population growth rate stood at 19.90% in 2011, down from 28.06% in 2001, while its share of India's total population edged up slightly from 2.06% in 2001 to 2.09% in 2011 (Census of India, 2001, 2011). A slower but still substantial rate of population growth continues to add to the rural labour force faster than agricultural and non-farm jobs are created, which links directly to the forms of unemployment discussed next.

Unemployment Scenario in Haryana

According to the Government of India Labour Bureau's Employment–Unemployment Survey, Haryana's unemployment rate during 2015–16 was estimated at 4.7%, somewhat lower than the all-India rate of around 5% for the same period (Government of India, Labour Bureau, 2016). Unemployment itself is not a single phenomenon; in the agricultural context it takes several distinct forms:

1. **Seasonal Unemployment:** Employment is generally considered full when a person works throughout the year, but this is rarely possible in agriculture. Farm work, though carried out year-round, is inherently seasonal — demand for labour peaks during harvesting, sowing, weeding and transplantation, when employment rises sharply. Once these seasons pass, many workers are left without work.
2. **Voluntary Unemployment:** This arises when individuals choose not to accept work at the prevailing wage rate. It also covers people who already earn income from property or other sources and therefore have no immediate need to work.
3. **Frictional Unemployment:** Essentially voluntary in nature, this stems from the time it takes to match job seekers with suitable openings. It occurs when a worker leaves one job to search for another — in agriculture, this happens when labourers move away from production work in pursuit of alternative employment, temporarily pushing up this category of unemployment.
4. **Casual Unemployment:** This occurs when workers are hired on a day-to-day or contractual basis and lose their job once the contract ends. It is common in contract-based sectors such as building construction and agriculture, and creates a surplus of available workers relative to job openings; economic slowdowns worsen this further.
5. **Disguised Unemployment:** This occurs when more people are engaged at a workplace than are actually needed. In agriculture, an entire family may work on a farm that genuinely requires only three or four hands; the extra members remain engaged because they cannot find work elsewhere, not because the farm needs them.

Pattern of Unemployment in Haryana

Data released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) for February 2021 showed Haryana recording the country's highest state-level unemployment rate, at 26.4% — nearly four times the national average of 6.9% for that month (Kumar, 2021; CMIE, 2021). This followed a dip in the state's CMIE-recorded unemployment rate in January 2021, when it had fallen to 17.7% from 32% in December 2020. It is worth noting that CMIE and official Labour Bureau/PLFS estimates for Haryana have differed substantially in the same period, and the Haryana government has itself disputed the CMIE figures as unrepresentative of the state's actual employment situation (Section 3). Read cautiously, the pattern nonetheless points to agriculture's seasonal nature in the region, combined with water scarcity, as a plausible driver: mustard, a major crop grown in the state, has a short growing and harvesting season that cannot sustain year-round employment, and because Haryana depends heavily on seasonal rainfall for irrigation in several districts, inadequate water supply further limits farming activity through the rest of the year.

Table 1. Key Socio-Economic and Employment Indicators for Haryana

Indicator	2001	2011	Source
Total population (Haryana)	2.11 crore (21,144,564)	2.54 crore (25,351,462)	Census of India, 2001; 2011
Decadal growth rate	28.06%	19.90%	Census of India, 2001; 2011
Literacy rate (persons)	67.91%	75.55%	Census of India, 2001; 2011
Literacy rate (male / female)	78.49% / 55.73%	84.06% / 65.94%	Census of India, 2001; 2011
Rural population share	71.07% (1991–2001 avg.)	≈ 65.2%	Census of India, 1991–2001; 2011
Agricultural workers' share of workforce	15.3%	17.1%	Census of India, 2001; 2011
Unemployment rate (Haryana, state estimate)	–	4.7% (2015–16)	Labour Bureau, Govt. of India, 2015–16
Unemployment rate (Haryana, CMIE estimate)	–	26.4% (Feb. 2021)	CMIE, 2021

Causes of Unemployment in Haryana

Uneven development lies at the heart of Haryana's agricultural unemployment problem. Despite decades of independence, growth in rural employment has remained slow, largely due to the following interconnected factors:

1. **Rising Population:** Population growth is a significant driver of unemployment in rural Haryana. As the rural population keeps rising, it adds continuously to the labour force while job creation fails to keep pace, worsening the unemployment situation. This growth also strains resources available for capital formation, and higher living costs leave little room for households to channel income toward savings and investment.
2. **Limited Land Availability:** Land, unlike population, is a fixed natural resource that cannot expand. As Haryana's population grows while its land area stays constant, pressure on land intensifies. Since most rural residents depend on land for their livelihood, this limited availability relative to a growing population contributes directly to unemployment among those reliant on agriculture.
3. **Seasonal Nature of Agriculture:** Agriculture remains the primary source of employment for rural residents, who depend on it directly or indirectly. Because farming in Haryana is largely a seasonal activity, it offers employment mainly during the monsoon or at sowing and harvest time; outside these periods, many people are left without work.
4. **Fragmentation of Land:** Rapid population growth has led to the fragmentation of landholdings in Haryana, as land gets divided between agricultural use and personal needs. This fragmentation hampers agricultural productivity and leaves many agricultural workers underemployed or without employment.
5. **Outdated Agricultural Methods:** Farming methods in much of rural Haryana remain traditional, limiting crop yields and restricting farmers' ability to generate surplus income. Reduced income, in turn, makes it harder for households to fund their children's education or help them move into other occupations — a direct link between low agricultural productivity and low educational attainment.
6. **A Degree-Oriented Education System:** The current education system is often criticised for prioritising certificates over genuine, employable skills — it remains degree-oriented rather than job-oriented.

Individuals without adequate general or vocational education often struggle to find non-farm work, leaving self-employment or continued reliance on seasonal agricultural labour as their only viable options.

Linking Education, Unemployment and Poverty

The evidence reviewed above suggests a self-reinforcing cycle rather than three separate problems. Lower female literacy (65.94% against 84.06% for males in 2011) is associated with women's concentration in low-paid, seasonal agricultural labour rather than better-remunerated non-farm work (Tuteja, 2000; Rani, 2019). Fragmented, shrinking landholdings (Section 10) reduce farm income, which in turn constrains households' ability to invest in their children's education (Section 10.5), reproducing low educational attainment in the next generation. At the same time, a degree-oriented rather than skill-oriented education system (Section 10.6) means that even where literacy has improved, it has not always translated into non-farm employment, leaving disguised and seasonal unemployment (Section 8) as the visible symptom of an underlying skills mismatch. Taken together, these linkages indicate that raising literacy alone is unlikely to reduce rural poverty in Haryana unless it is accompanied by land-use reform, non-farm skill development, and employment guarantee measures — the focus of the following section.

Government Policies to Address Rural Unemployment and Poverty

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): Provides a legal guarantee of up to 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to rural households willing to do unskilled manual work, offering a partial buffer during the lean agricultural season (Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, 2023).

Haryana Kaushal Rozgar Nigam (HKRN): A state-run outsourcing agency intended to provide contractual employment and reduce reliance on informal, casual labour arrangements (Government of Haryana, Department of Skill Development and Industrial Training, 2023).

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY): A national skill-development scheme aimed at making the workforce more employable outside agriculture, directly addressing the degree-versus-skill mismatch identified in Section 10.6.

Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP): A Haryana-specific family identification scheme used, among other things, to track self-declared unemployment and target welfare benefits more precisely at the household level.

These schemes address different links in the cycle described in Section 11 — MGNREGA cushions seasonal income loss, HKRN and PMKVY target the skills mismatch, and PPP improves targeting — but their effectiveness depends on implementation quality, which is beyond the scope of this review.

CONCLUSION

Haryana is fundamentally an agricultural state, with a large share of its rural population engaged in farming. Since Indian agriculture depends heavily on rainfall, inadequate rain translates fairly directly into seasonal unemployment for farm labourers. Beyond rainfall, this review has shown that unemployment in the state is also driven by population growth, limited and fragmented landholdings, and a degree-oriented rather than skill-oriented education system — and that these factors reinforce one another rather than acting independently: low farm income limits investment in education, and a mismatch between education and employable skills limits movement out of low-paid seasonal farm work. Addressing rural poverty in Haryana's agriculture sector therefore requires coordinated action on land reform, skill-oriented education, and employment-guarantee schemes rather than any single intervention alone. As a review based on secondary data, this paper's main limitation is that it cannot establish causal direction between these factors; primary, district-level survey research would be needed to test the relationships proposed in Section 11.

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