

Emotional Deprivation Loneliness and Social Disconnection among Internal Migrant Labourers in Kanpur India

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Abstract

Internal migration in India is often accompanied by profound psychosocial challenges that remain underexplored in empirical research. The present exploratory mixed-method study investigated emotional deprivation, loneliness, and social disconnection among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur, India. A purposive sample of 50 migrant workers participated in the quantitative phase using the Emotional Deprivation Scale (EDS) and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Both instruments demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .965$ and $\alpha = .943$, respectively). Descriptive and non-parametric analyses indicated substantial levels of perceived emotional neglect, relational insecurity, and subjective social isolation. A majority of participants endorsed statements reflecting lack of emotional support, absence of understanding, workplace abandonment, and persistent feelings of emptiness. Similarly, high agreement rates were observed for items indicating having no one to talk to, feeling completely alone, difficulty forming friendships, and longing for companionship. The qualitative interpretive component revealed four dominant themes related to emotional deprivation (lack of emotional support, perceived abandonment, emotional emptiness, and relational insecurity) and three themes related to loneliness (perceived social isolation, emotional non-understanding, and longing for companionship). Findings suggest that emotional deprivation and loneliness are interrelated psychosocial experiences shaped by occupational precarity, migration-related separation, and limited social integration. The study underscores the need for workplace-based support systems, community integration initiatives, and mental health interventions tailored to migrant labour populations to enhance psychosocial well-being and social connectedness.

Introduction

Migration constitutes a significant socio-economic phenomenon characterized by the movement of individuals from one geographical region to another in pursuit of improved livelihood opportunities, employment security, and enhanced living standards. In the Indian context, internal migration—particularly rural-to-urban migration—has intensified over the past decades due to structural poverty, agrarian distress, unemployment, regional disparities, and limited access to education and healthcare facilities (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Srivastava, 2011). Industrial cities such as Kanpur serve as major destinations for migrant labourers who engage primarily in informal, construction, manufacturing, and small-scale industrial sectors.

Although migration often generates economic benefits for individuals and their families, it simultaneously exposes migrant labourers to multifaceted psychosocial challenges. Separation from family members, cultural displacement, language barriers, precarious working conditions, social marginalization, and inadequate access to support networks create substantial emotional strain (Bhugra, 2004; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). These structural and interpersonal stressors frequently contribute to emotional deprivation and loneliness among migrant populations.

Emotional deprivation refers to the persistent perception of not receiving adequate affection, emotional support, validation, or understanding from significant others (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). It is often conceptualized within schema theory as a core unmet emotional need that shapes interpersonal functioning and psychological well-being. In migrant contexts, emotional deprivation may emerge from prolonged family separation, absence of intimate bonds, and limited opportunities for meaningful social engagement.

Loneliness, defined as the distressing experience arising from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981), represents a related but distinct construct. Contemporary literature differentiates loneliness into emotional loneliness (absence of close attachment figures), social loneliness (lack of broader social networks), situational loneliness (triggered by transitional contexts such as migration), and chronic loneliness (persistent social isolation over time) (Weiss, 1973). For migrant labourers, relocation to unfamiliar urban environments often disrupts established support systems, intensifying both emotional and social forms of loneliness.

Urban-industrial hubs like Kanpur further amplify these vulnerabilities. Migrant labourers frequently endure long working hours, unsafe living arrangements, overcrowded housing, economic insecurity, and limited integration within host communities. Social exclusion and stigmatization may exacerbate feelings of invisibility and alienation, thereby deepening experiences of emotional deprivation and social disconnection (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2020). Consequently, understanding the psychological dimensions of migration is essential for promoting holistic well-being among internal migrant labourers.

Review of Literature

Emotional Deprivation Among Migrant Labourers

A growing body of empirical research documents elevated levels of emotional deprivation among migrant populations across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Quantitative studies employing standardized measures such as the Emotional Deprivation Scale (EDS) have reported significant prevalence rates. For instance, Al Maskari (2019) found that approximately 73% of migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates reported moderate to high emotional deprivation. Similarly, Goyal (2022) identified a 58% prevalence rate among Indian migrant labourers, while Amiri (2022) reported comparable findings among Afghan migrant populations.

Longitudinal investigations further indicate that emotional deprivation significantly predicts adverse psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and reduced life satisfaction (Hasan, 2020; Dewi, 2022). These findings align with schema theory, which posits that unmet emotional needs may lead to maladaptive coping strategies and impaired interpersonal functioning (Young et al., 2003).

Mixed-method studies have emphasized the protective role of perceived social support in mitigating emotional distress. Chen (2020) and Chandrasekhar (2022) demonstrated that migrants with stronger community ties and familial communication exhibited lower emotional deprivation and better psychological adjustment. These findings underscore the buffering hypothesis of social support, which suggests that supportive relationships moderate the impact of stressors on mental health outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Qualitative inquiries provide deeper insight into lived experiences. Ahmed (2020), Kumar (2019), and Banerjee (2022) reported themes of emotional suppression, coping through endurance, perceived abandonment, and persistent longing for family among migrant workers. Such narratives reveal that economic migration often entails emotional sacrifices that remain largely invisible in policy discourse.

Loneliness and Social Disconnection Among Migrants

Loneliness has been widely documented as a prevalent psychological outcome of migration. Comparative studies indicate that migrants are more vulnerable to loneliness than native populations due to disrupted social networks and integration challenges (Delaruelle et al., 2022). Luo and Wang (2020) found that limited social integration and perceived discrimination significantly predicted loneliness among rural-to-urban migrants.

Empirical research also highlights the mediating role of loneliness in mental health outcomes. Wang et al. (2018) demonstrated that loneliness partially mediated the relationship between migration stress and depressive symptoms. Chronic loneliness has been linked not only to psychological distress but also to adverse physical health outcomes, including cardiovascular risk and weakened immune functioning (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Despite extensive international scholarship, research within the Indian context remains comparatively limited, particularly regarding internal migrant labourers in industrial cities. Existing Indian migration studies predominantly focus on economic vulnerability, wage exploitation, housing insecurity, and labour rights (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Srivastava, 2011), while the psychological dimensions of migration receive insufficient scholarly attention.

Objectives

The present study aims to systematically examine the psychosocial experiences of internal migrant labourers in an urban-industrial context. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To assess the prevalence and intensity of emotional deprivation among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur.
2. To evaluate levels of loneliness and perceived social isolation within this population.

3. To analyze the interrelationship between emotional deprivation and loneliness in shaping psychosocial vulnerability.
4. To identify structural, occupational, and relational determinants contributing to social disconnection.
5. To generate policy-relevant recommendations for integrating psychosocial well-being into migrant labour welfare frameworks.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do internal migrant labourers experience emotional deprivation in urban-industrial settings?
2. What is the prevalence and pattern of loneliness among migrant labourers in Kanpur?
3. What socio-occupational and relational factors contribute to perceived social disconnection?
4. How are emotional deprivation and loneliness interrelated within the migrant labour context?
5. What implications do these findings hold for labour policy and psychosocial intervention design?

Rationale of the Study

Although international literature robustly documents emotional deprivation and loneliness among migrant populations, empirical investigations focusing on internal migrant labourers in India, especially within urban-industrial settings such as Kanpur—remain scarce. Most Indian studies emphasize structural determinants such as employment precarity, income instability, and labour exploitation, thereby overlooking the emotional and psychosocial experiences of migrants.

Moreover, limited research integrates both emotional deprivation and loneliness within a unified analytical framework to explore their interrelationship in shaping migrant well-being. Emotional deprivation reflects unmet emotional needs, whereas loneliness captures subjective social isolation; examining these constructs together may provide a more comprehensive understanding of migrant psychological vulnerability.

The absence of localized qualitative inquiry further constrains contextual interpretation. Kanpur, as a major industrial center, attracts thousands of internal migrant labourers employed in factories, construction, and informal sectors. Many reside in overcrowded accommodations, experience extended work hours, and possess limited access to social support systems. Such conditions may intensify emotional deprivation and social disconnection.

Understanding these experiences is crucial for several reasons:

- Emotional distress negatively affects occupational productivity and job satisfaction.

- Chronic loneliness increases susceptibility to depression, anxiety, and physical illness (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).
- Social disconnection impedes community integration and access to welfare resources.
- Labour policies rarely incorporate mental health and psychosocial well-being into migrant welfare frameworks.

Therefore, the present study seeks to examine emotional deprivation, loneliness, and social disconnection among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur through a qualitative lens, supplemented by quantitative assessment. By situating psychological experiences within socio-economic contexts, this chapter contributes to theoretical discourse on migration and mental health while offering implications for culturally sensitive interventions and labour welfare policies.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed an exploratory research design integrating quantitative assessment with interpretive analysis to examine emotional deprivation, loneliness, and social disconnection among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur, India. An exploratory framework was considered appropriate due to the limited empirical scholarship addressing the psychological dimensions of internal migration within industrial urban contexts in India.

The study adopted a mixed analytical approach in which standardized psychometric instruments were used to quantify levels of emotional deprivation and loneliness, followed by descriptive and content-based interpretation of response patterns. This integrative design enabled both statistical representation of psychosocial conditions and contextual understanding of migrant labourers' lived experiences. By combining quantitative measurement with interpretive insight, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of emotional vulnerability within this population.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique to ensure inclusion of individuals with direct experience of rural-to-urban migration and labour-intensive employment. The final sample comprised 50 internal migrant labourers residing and working across industrial, construction, and informal sectors in Kanpur.

To ensure relevance to the research objectives, participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) internal migration within India from rural to urban regions; (b) residence in Kanpur for a minimum of six months; (c) engagement in factory work, construction, or informal labour sectors; (d) age 18 years or above; and (e) voluntary informed consent.

The sample reflected diversity in educational attainment, socioeconomic status, marital status, and duration of migration. Both male and female labourers were included to enhance representativeness and capture gendered dimensions of psychosocial experiences. This demographic variability strengthened the interpretive depth and contextual validity of findings.

Measures

Emotional Deprivation Scale (EDS)

Emotional deprivation was assessed using a 10-item Emotional Deprivation Scale designed to measure perceived lack of emotional support, affection, interpersonal validation, and psychological reassurance. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), yielding a total possible score range of 10 to 50. Higher scores indicate greater perceived emotional deprivation.

The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .965$), indicating high reliability within the migrant labour population. The Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to assess distribution normality, and results indicated non-normal distribution ($p < .05$), supporting the use of descriptive and non-parametric interpretation.

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Short Version)

Loneliness was measured using the 10-item short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a widely validated instrument assessing subjective feelings of social isolation and dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships developed by Daniel Russell. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting greater levels of loneliness.

The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .943$), confirming measurement reliability. The high reliability coefficients of both instruments indicate strong internal coherence and measurement stability within the study population.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face administration of structured questionnaires in Hindi, the participants' preferred language. Prior to participation, respondents were briefed about the purpose and scope of the study and provided informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Given varying literacy levels among participants, the researcher provided assistance in reading and explaining scale items when necessary to ensure accurate comprehension and response validity. Each data collection session required approximately 20–25 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive statistical procedures and interpretive techniques.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods were employed, including frequency distributions, percentage analysis, and calculation of means and standard deviations where appropriate. Given the non-normal distribution of Emotional Deprivation Scale scores, interpretation focused on descriptive trends rather than parametric inference.

Interpretive Content-Based Analysis

Beyond statistical summaries, response patterns were examined using content-based thematic interpretation. Items with higher agreement frequencies were conceptually grouped to identify recurring psychosocial themes. These thematic clusters reflected underlying experiential patterns, including perceived lack of emotional support, feelings of abandonment, emotional emptiness, social isolation, and longing for companionship.

This interpretive layer enriched the quantitative findings by situating numerical trends within broader socio-emotional contexts, thereby enhancing analytical depth and explanatory strength.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) and the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical review was formally waived by the Research Centre, Acharya Narendra Dev Nagar Nigam Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kanpur, affiliated with Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJM University), Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, because the study involved a non-invasive observational survey with minimal risk to participants and no clinical or experimental intervention.

All participants received information regarding the objectives of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and all responses were collected anonymously.

Methodological Rigor

The exploratory mixed-analytical methodology enabled systematic quantification of emotional deprivation and loneliness while also facilitating contextual interpretation of psychosocial patterns among internal migrant labourers. The integration of reliable psychometric instruments with content-based analysis enhances empirical rigor, interpretive validity, and contextual relevance. This methodological design strengthens the study's contribution to migration research by bridging quantitative measurement and experiential understanding.

Results

1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the 50 internal migrant labourers included in the study. The majority of participants were graduates (50%), followed by postgraduates (14%) and those with secondary education (12%). No participant reported being illiterate, indicating a relatively educated migrant sample.

Most respondents (84%) were originally from Uttar Pradesh, while 16% migrated from other states. The sample was predominantly male (68%), with females comprising 32%.

In terms of monthly income, 40% earned between ₹10,000–25,000, 36% earned less than ₹10,000, and 24% reported income between ₹25,000–75,000. None earned above ₹75,000, reflecting low-to-middle income occupational status.

Regarding family occupation, 58% belonged to families engaged in labour work, followed by agriculture (20%), private employment (16%), business (4%), and government service (2%).

Nearly half of the participants (48%) reported an urban family background, 36% rural, and 16% from towns. A large majority were married (90%), and 70% were living with their family members in Kanpur, whereas 30% were living away from family.

Overall, the demographic data reflect a predominantly married, male, lower-income migrant workforce with labour-oriented family backgrounds.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 50)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Education Qualification	Postgraduate	7	14
	Graduate	25	50
	Secondary Education	6	12
	Higher Education	3	6
	Primary Education	3	6
	Illiterate	0	0
State of Origin	Uttar Pradesh	42	84
	Others	8	16
Gender	Male	34	68
	Female	16	32
Monthly Salary (₹)	Less than 10,000	18	36
	10,000–25,000	20	40
	25,000–75,000	12	24
	More than 75,000	0	0
Family Occupation	Agriculture	10	20
	Business	2	4
	Private Job	8	16
	Government Job	1	2
	Labour Work	29	58
Family Background	Urban	24	48
	Rural	18	36
	Town	8	16
Marital Status	Unmarried	10	10
	Married	40	90
	Widowed	0	0
	Divorced	0	0
Living With Family	Yes	35	70

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	No	15	30

2. Loneliness Among Migrant Labourers

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of responses on the UCLA Loneliness Scale. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .943$), supporting its reliability in assessing subjective experiences of loneliness among migrant labourers.

Descriptive findings indicate a consistent pattern of moderate-to-high agreement across multiple loneliness indicators. A substantial proportion of respondents reported that they have no one to talk to (57.7%), reflecting perceived deficits in accessible interpersonal communication. An even higher percentage (67.3%) indicated feeling unhappy doing many things alone, suggesting distress associated with solitary functioning in daily life. Similarly, 57.7% reported that they cannot tolerate being so alone, while the same proportion expressed that no one understands them, highlighting both social and emotional dimensions of loneliness.

Feelings of complete aloneness were endorsed by 57.7% of participants, and 55.8% reported feeling starved for company, indicating unmet needs for companionship and social connectedness. Although slightly lower in magnitude, a considerable proportion of respondents also reported difficulty in making friends (48.1%) and feelings of exclusion by others (44.2%), suggesting barriers to social integration within the urban-industrial context.

While some participants selected neutral or disagreement responses, the dominant distribution across items demonstrates a pronounced subjective experience of social isolation and relational dissatisfaction. The convergence of perceived communication deficits, emotional misunderstanding, and longing for companionship suggests that loneliness among migrant labourers is not merely situational but reflects deeper structural and relational disconnection.

Thematic Interpretation

Content-based interpretive clustering of highly endorsed items revealed three interrelated psychosocial dimensions. The first dimension, perceived social isolation, encompasses feelings of having no one to talk to and experiencing complete aloneness. The second dimension, emotional non-understanding, reflects the belief that others fail to comprehend or validate one's feelings. The third dimension, longing for companionship, captures expressions of waiting for contact, distress when alone, and feeling deprived of social company.

Taken together, the findings indicate that loneliness among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur extends beyond physical separation from family members and represents a broader disruption of meaningful social bonds. The high prevalence of loneliness-related experiences underscores significant

psychosocial vulnerability and reinforces the need for community-based and workplace-oriented social support mechanisms.

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Loneliness Among Migrant Labourers (N = 50)

Item	Strongly Agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly Disagree n (%)
I feel I have no one to talk to	10 (19.2)	20 (38.5)	6 (11.5)	15 (28.8)	1 (1.9)
I feel unhappy doing many things alone	6 (11.5)	29 (55.8)	8 (15.4)	8 (15.4)	1 (1.9)
I cannot tolerate being so alone	7 (13.5)	23 (44.2)	7 (13.5)	13 (25.0)	2 (3.8)
I feel no one understands me	9 (17.3)	21 (40.4)	8 (15.4)	12 (23.1)	2 (3.8)
I wait for people to call me	9 (17.3)	19 (36.5)	5 (9.6)	14 (26.9)	5 (9.6)
I feel completely alone	9 (17.3)	21 (40.4)	6 (11.5)	13 (25.0)	3 (5.8)
I feel unable to communicate	5 (9.6)	20 (38.5)	11 (21.2)	13 (25.0)	3 (5.8)
I feel starved for company	9 (17.3)	20 (38.5)	6 (11.5)	14 (26.9)	3 (5.8)
It is difficult for me to make friends	4 (7.7)	21 (40.4)	5 (9.6)	17 (32.7)	5 (9.6)
I feel excluded by others	6 (11.5)	17 (32.7)	9 (17.3)	17 (32.7)	3 (5.8)

3. Emotional Deprivation Among Migrant Labourers

Table 4 presents the distribution of responses on the Emotional Deprivation Scale (EDS). The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency within the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .965$), indicating high reliability and internal coherence in measuring perceived emotional neglect among internal migrant labourers.

Descriptive analysis reveals a pronounced pattern of perceived emotional deprivation across multiple interpersonal domains. A majority of respondents endorsed statements reflecting absence of emotional attention and support. Specifically, 55.8% reported that no one pays attention to them, while 57.7% indicated that there is no one who stands by them during times of difficulty. An identical proportion (57.7%) agreed that no one listens to them patiently. Furthermore, 59.6% reported that no one

understands their feelings, suggesting perceived emotional invalidation and lack of empathic engagement within their social networks.

Workplace-related relational strain was also evident. More than half of the participants (55.8%) reported feeling abandoned by coworkers when under pressure, highlighting vulnerabilities within occupational environments that are typically expected to provide collaborative or peer-based support. The most strongly endorsed item was “Sometimes I feel a sense of emptiness,” with 71.1% of respondents expressing agreement. This high prevalence indicates a pervasive internal emotional void, suggesting that emotional deprivation among migrant labourers extends beyond situational distress to more enduring affective dissatisfaction.

Although a smaller proportion of participants reported disagreement across selected items, the overall distribution demonstrates a dominant trend toward perceived emotional neglect. The findings collectively suggest that migrant labourers frequently experience limited emotional responsiveness, inadequate relational reassurance, and insufficient protective support in both personal and professional contexts.

Thematic Interpretation

Content-based interpretive analysis of highly endorsed items yielded four interrelated psychosocial dimensions underlying emotional deprivation. The first dimension, lack of emotional support, reflects deficits in attention, empathetic listening, and emotional understanding. The second dimension, perceived abandonment, captures feelings of being unsupported during personal distress and occupational strain. The third dimension, emotional emptiness, represents persistent inner void and psychological withdrawal tendencies, as evidenced by the high endorsement of affective emptiness. The fourth dimension, relational insecurity, reflects perceived absence of protection, guidance, and emotional reassurance within social relationships.

Overall, the findings indicate that emotional deprivation among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur is not incidental but structurally embedded within their socio-occupational realities. The convergence of interpersonal neglect, workplace abandonment, and affective emptiness underscores significant psychosocial vulnerability. These results highlight the necessity of integrating emotional well-being into labour welfare policies and urban mental health interventions targeting migrant populations.

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Emotional Deprivation Among Migrant Labourers (N = 50)

Item	Strongly Agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly Disagree n (%)
No one pays attention to me	3 (5.8)	26 (50.0)	6 (11.5)	13 (25.0)	4 (7.7)
No one stands by me in trouble	8 (15.4)	22 (42.3)	7 (13.5)	10 (19.2)	5 (9.6)
No one shows affection when I am in pain	8 (15.4)	21 (40.4)	7 (13.5)	13 (25.0)	3 (5.8)
No one listens to me patiently	9 (17.3)	21 (40.4)	6 (11.5)	11 (21.2)	5 (9.6)
No one understands my feelings	10 (19.2)	21 (40.4)	6 (11.5)	12 (23.1)	3 (5.8)
No one protects me from threats	8 (15.4)	18 (34.6)	8 (15.4)	13 (25.0)	5 (9.6)
No one guides me in distress	6 (11.5)	21 (40.4)	5 (9.6)	14 (26.9)	6 (11.5)
I feel abandoned by coworkers	11 (21.2)	18 (34.6)	8 (15.4)	9 (17.3)	6 (11.5)
I withdraw from people at work	8 (15.4)	18 (34.6)	12 (23.1)	9 (17.3)	5 (9.6)
I feel a sense of emptiness	14 (26.9)	23 (44.2)	5 (9.6)	5 (9.6)	5 (9.6)

The descriptive and thematic findings collectively demonstrate that internal migrant labourers in Kanpur experience pronounced emotional deprivation and loneliness. The convergence of high agreement rates across both scales indicates a strong overlap between emotional neglect and perceived social isolation.

Non-normal distribution of Emotional Deprivation scores suggests variability in intensity; however, descriptive trends clearly show that a majority of participants experience moderate to high psychosocial distress.

The interpretive analysis situates these quantitative trends within broader socio-emotional realities of migration, including disrupted support systems, workplace vulnerability, reduced intimacy, and limited meaningful interpersonal bonds.

Overall, the results highlight that emotional deprivation and loneliness are not isolated experiences but interconnected psychosocial conditions shaping the lived realities of internal migrant labourers in Kanpur.

Discussion

The present study systematically examined emotional deprivation and loneliness among internal migrant labourers in Kanpur and explored their interrelationship within an urban-industrial context. The descriptive findings provide consistent empirical evidence of high psychosocial vulnerability within this population.

Prevalence and Intensity of Emotional Deprivation

Descriptive analysis indicated that more than half of the participants endorsed statements reflecting emotional neglect, absence of support, and relational insecurity. For example, a majority reported agreement with items such as “No one stands by me in trouble,” “No one listens to me patiently,” and “No one understands my feelings.” Notably, over two-thirds of respondents endorsed the statement “I feel a sense of emptiness,” representing the highest level of agreement across emotional deprivation indicators.

This pattern of responses suggests that emotional deprivation among migrant labourers is both prevalent and affectively intense. From an attachment-based perspective (Bowlby, 1969), chronic perceptions of unavailability of supportive others may contribute to internalized insecurity and emotional vulnerability. The persistence of emptiness reported by participants is consistent with schema-based conceptualizations of unmet core emotional needs (Young et al., 2003), indicating that deprivation may be experienced as a stable affective condition rather than episodic distress.

Prevalence and Pattern of Loneliness

Similarly, descriptive evidence demonstrated substantial levels of loneliness. More than half of respondents reported having no one to talk to, feeling completely alone, and being unable to tolerate prolonged isolation. A considerable proportion also indicated difficulty forming friendships and feelings of exclusion.

These findings align with the cognitive discrepancy model of loneliness (Perlman & Peplau, 1981), which posits that loneliness arises when there is a perceived mismatch between desired and actual relational closeness. Although migrant labourers may engage in routine occupational interactions, the data suggest that these interactions lack emotional depth and meaningful reciprocity.

Weiss’s (1973) distinction between emotional and social loneliness provides further interpretive clarity. Emotional loneliness was reflected in perceptions of being misunderstood and lacking affection, while social loneliness manifested in difficulty making friends and perceived exclusion. The descriptive frequencies demonstrate that both dimensions co-occur, indicating multilayered relational deprivation.

Interrelationship Between Emotional Deprivation and Loneliness

The third objective of the study was to examine the interrelationship between emotional deprivation and loneliness. The convergence of high endorsement rates across both scales suggests a reciprocal association. Participants who reported lack of emotional attention and guidance also frequently reported feeling completely alone and socially excluded.

This overlap indicates that emotional deprivation may heighten subjective loneliness, while chronic loneliness may amplify perceptions of neglect. As argued by Cacioppo and Hawkley (2009), prolonged loneliness can increase social threat vigilance and promote withdrawal behaviors. Descriptive evidence from the present study—particularly reports of withdrawing from coworkers and feeling abandoned in occupational settings—supports the possibility of a self-reinforcing cycle of relational disconnection.

Structural and Occupational Determinants

The findings must be interpreted within broader socio-structural contexts. Participants were predominantly engaged in labor-intensive sectors characterized by long working hours, economic precarity, and limited institutional support. Many resided away from family networks, further reducing access to emotionally protective relationships.

The stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) suggests that social support mitigates the psychological impact of stress; its absence intensifies vulnerability. The high descriptive frequencies indicating lack of protection, guidance, and reassurance suggest weakened buffering mechanisms in both personal and occupational domains.

Furthermore, internal migrants may experience social invisibility and cultural dislocation within urban-industrial environments (Bhugra, 2004), despite remaining within national borders. Such structural marginalization likely contributes to perceived emotional neglect and social disconnection.

Integrated Interpretation

Collectively, the descriptive patterns across emotional deprivation and loneliness scales indicate that migrant labourers in Kanpur experience not merely physical separation but profound relational insecurity. Emotional deprivation and loneliness emerge as interrelated dimensions of psychosocial strain, embedded within occupational precarity and limited community integration.

Conclusion

The present study contributes empirical evidence to the limited literature on psychosocial well-being among internal migrant labourers in India. Descriptive findings demonstrate substantial prevalence of emotional deprivation and loneliness, characterized by perceived absence of attention, guidance, affection, and meaningful companionship.

The interrelationship between emotional deprivation and loneliness underscores the multidimensional nature of migrant vulnerability. Migrant labourers are not only economically marginalized but also emotionally and socially disconnected. Recognizing these intersecting dimensions is essential for

developing comprehensive migrant welfare frameworks that address both structural and relational determinants of well-being.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings support integrative conceptualizations of psychosocial vulnerability that combine attachment theory, cognitive models of loneliness, and migration stress frameworks. Emotional deprivation and loneliness should be examined jointly in future migration research.

Policy Implications

Labour policies should expand beyond economic protections to include mental health and relational well-being. Evidence from this study supports the need for:

- Workplace-based peer support systems
- Structured mentorship and supervisory engagement
- Community integration initiatives for migrant workers
- Inclusion of psychosocial services within labour welfare schemes

Practical Implications

Culturally sensitive counseling services, group-based psychosocial interventions, and workplace cohesion programs may reduce emotional emptiness and chronic loneliness. Strengthening interpersonal networks within occupational and residential settings may function as protective buffers against psychological distress.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study is limited by its modest sample size and focus on a single industrial city, which may restrict generalizability. Self-report measures may introduce response bias, and the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine temporal trajectories of emotional deprivation and loneliness. Comparative studies across multiple industrial regions would enhance contextual generalizability. Incorporating qualitative in-depth interviews could further illuminate coping strategies and resilience mechanisms among migrant labourers. Examination of moderating variables such as gender, duration of migration, and family separation patterns would provide additional analytical depth.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017). Formal approval from an Institutional Ethics Committee was not required because the study involved a non-invasive, observational research design using anonymous self-report questionnaires and posed no more than minimal risk to participants. The study protocol was reviewed and permitted by the Research Centre, Acharya Narendra Dev Nagar Nigam Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kanpur (affiliated with Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India) in accordance with the institutional guidelines applicable to minimal-risk social science research. Before data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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Author Contribution

S.V. conceptualized and designed the study, supervised the research, interpreted the findings, and wrote the main manuscript text. S.M. collected and analyzed the data, conducted the literature review, and assisted in manuscript preparation. K.M. collected and organized the data, conducted the literature review, and assisted in manuscript revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality.

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