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Covid-19 lockdown and migrant workers: Survey of vocational trainees from Bihar and Jharkhand - II

📅 28 July, 2021



Bhaskar Chakravorty

University of Warwick

B.Chakravorty@warwick.ac.uk



Clément Imbert

University of Warwick

C.Imbert@warwick.ac.uk



Maximilian Lohnert

J-PAL South Asia

maximilian.lohnert@ifmr.ac.in



Poonam Panda

J-PAL South Asia

poonam.panda@ifmr.ac.in



Roland Rathelot

University of Warwick

R.Rathelot@warwick.ac.uk

**Apurav Yash Bhatiya**

University of Warwick

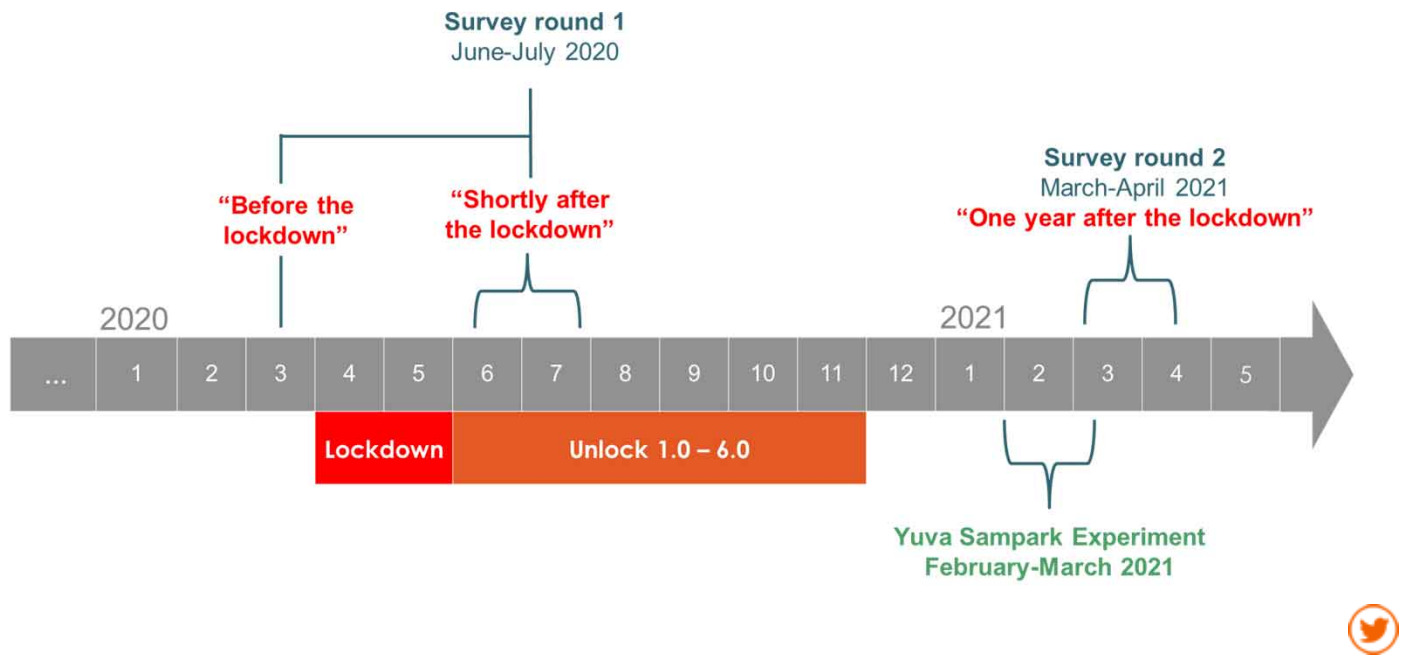
A.Bhatiya@warwick.ac.uk

Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns have led to widespread job losses, and a subsequent exodus of migrant workers from the cities. In this note, Chakravorty et al. discuss findings from their survey of young vocational trainees from rural Bihar and Jharkhand – highlighting the severe impact on employment, increased informalisation, lack of re-migration, and disproportionate adverse effects on women. They also test a digital intervention to help youths find jobs.

In March 2020, when the Government of India imposed a national lockdown in response to the first wave of Covid-19, it became clear that the health emergency would also lead to an economic crisis. In the aftermath of a devastating second wave, it is now more urgent than ever to learn about the economic and social fallout of the first.

Through 2020-2021, we have followed the employment and migration trajectories of about 2,260 young women and men from rural Bihar and Jharkhand. Before the pandemic, these youths had benefitted from the training and placement programme of the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India, **DDU-GKY** (Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojna). They were part of a randomised experiment, which involved provision of information to trainees about post-training placement opportunities in order to improve their employment outcomes (**Chakravorty et al. 2021**). As part of recent IGC research, we conducted two phone surveys, one in June-July 2020 (shortly after the national lockdown) (**Chakravorty et al. 2020, 2021**), and one in March-April 2021 (one year after the national lockdown). Respondents of the June-July 2020 survey were retrospectively asked about their employment and migration situation before the lockdown. In collaboration with the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS), we also experimentally test whether a government-supported job platform (app) was of assistance to them in their job search. We discuss our findings in this note.

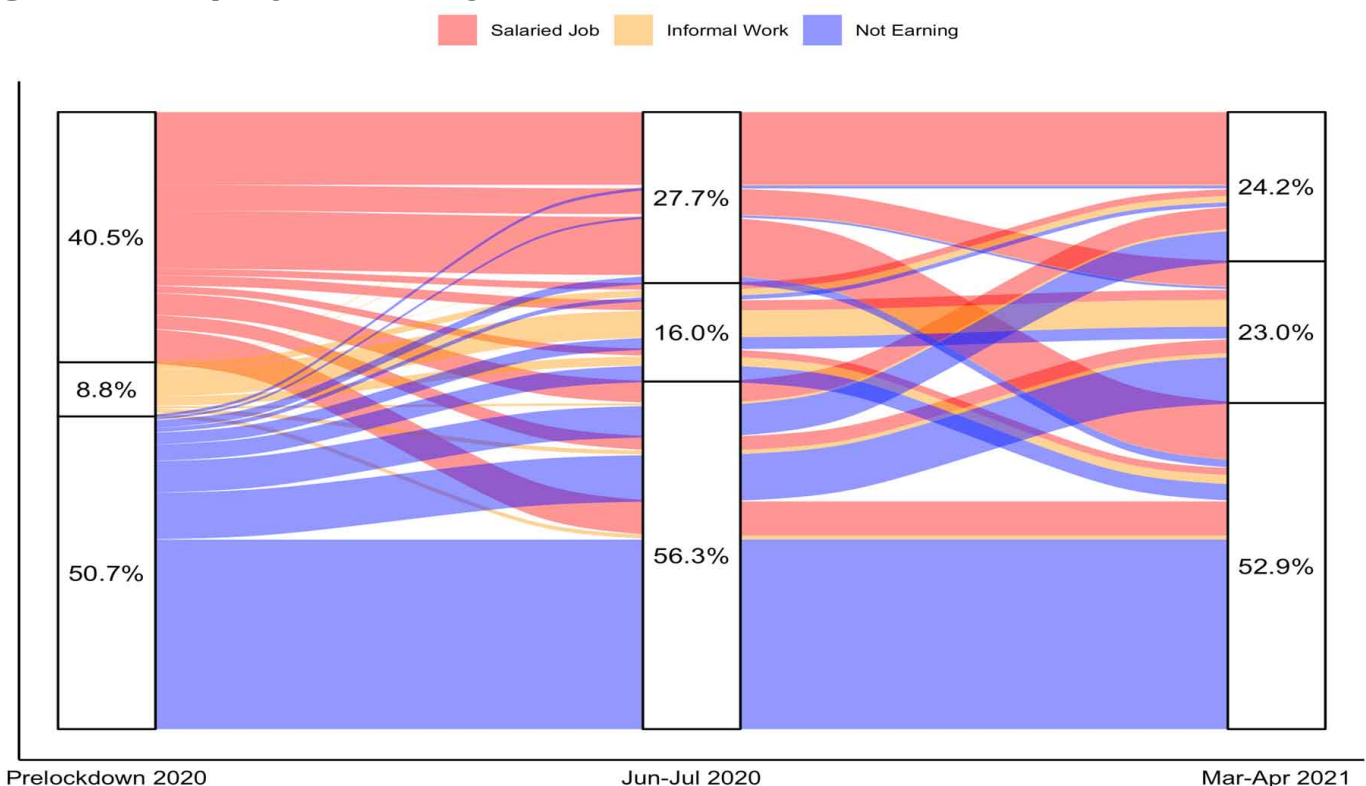
Figure 1. Time periods of phone surveys and the experiment



Most youth have lost their salaried work, and many have taken up informal work

The economic shock of the pandemic has led to a decrease in the proportion of respondents working in salaried jobs – it has decreased from 40.5% before the lockdown to 24.2% one year after the lockdown. Of those who were in salaried jobs pre-lockdown, six out of 10 have lost their job or quit one year later. This decrease in salaried work has been accompanied by increased informalisation: the proportion of respondents working in the informal sector has nearly tripled from 8.8% before the lockdown, to 23% one year after the lockdown.

Figure 2. Employment trajectories



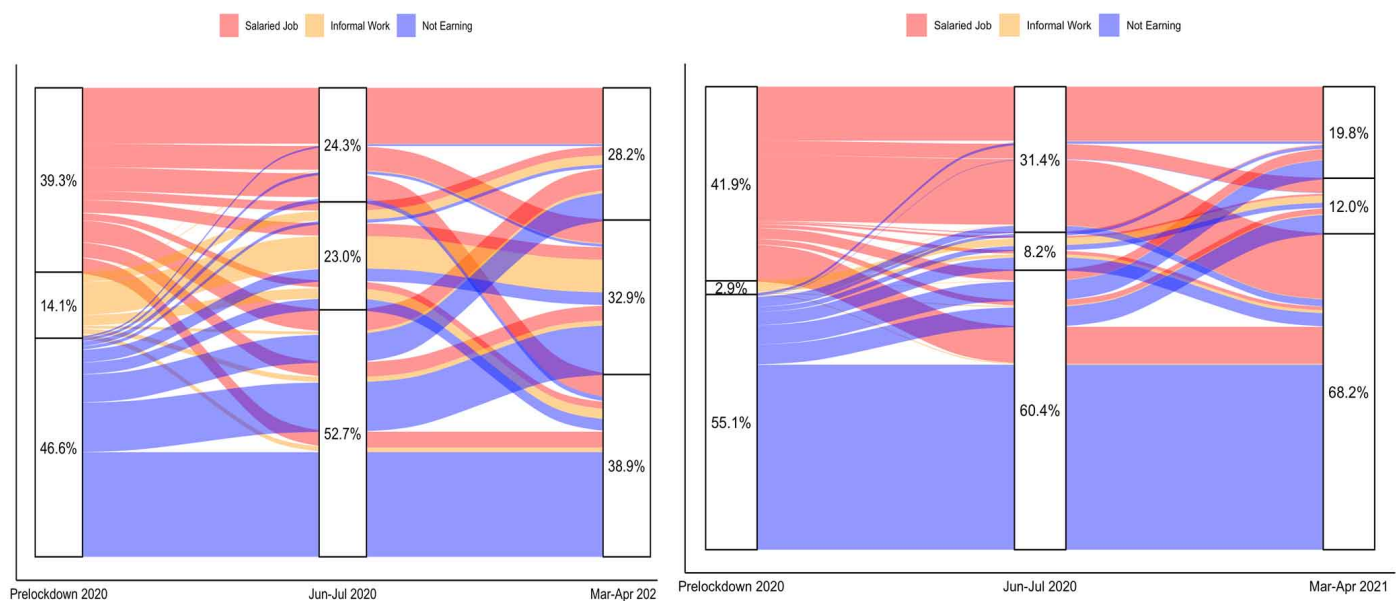
Note: 'Prelockdown' refers to the period after the festival of Holi (10 March 2020) until the announcement of the nationwide lockdown on 25 March 2020.



Women are more likely to drop out of the labour force, and only a few have searched for jobs

There is a stark difference in the employment trajectories of women and men. Half of the women who had a salaried job before the lockdown, have lost their jobs and are still not earning, even one year after the lockdown. At the same time, many men have transitioned from having salaried jobs in the pre-lockdown period, to informal work one year after the lockdown. This gender difference is likely to persist – only half of the women we survey say they are looking for jobs as against three quarters of men, and only 13% of the female workers in our sample applied for a job in the last two months (against a quarter of men).

Figure 3. Employment trajectories, by gender



Note: Graph on the left indicates employment trajectories for men and graph on the right indicates employment trajectory for women.

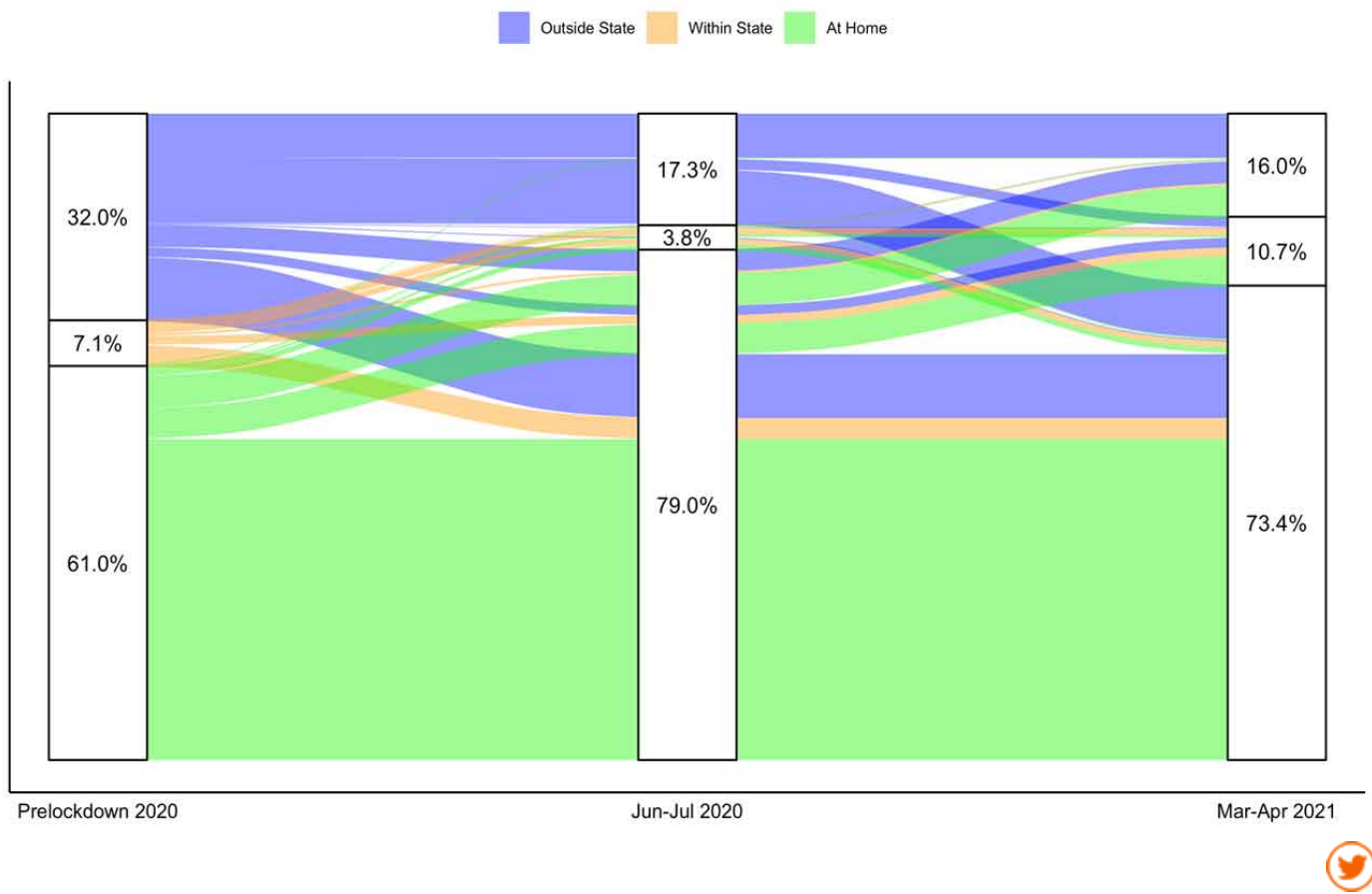


Many migrant workers have come back home, and are still home a year later

The proportion of young people in our sample who work outside of their home state has decreased by half, from 32% before the lockdown to 16% one year later. Nearly half (45%) of the interstate migrants have returned home shortly after the lockdown, and we find that half of the remaining migrants who were still outside their home state shortly after the lockdown (June-July 2020) have returned home one year after the lockdown (in March-April 2021). The intention to re-migrate is

relatively low, particularly among women workers – 37% of the men we survey are willing to work outside of their home state, against 17% of women.

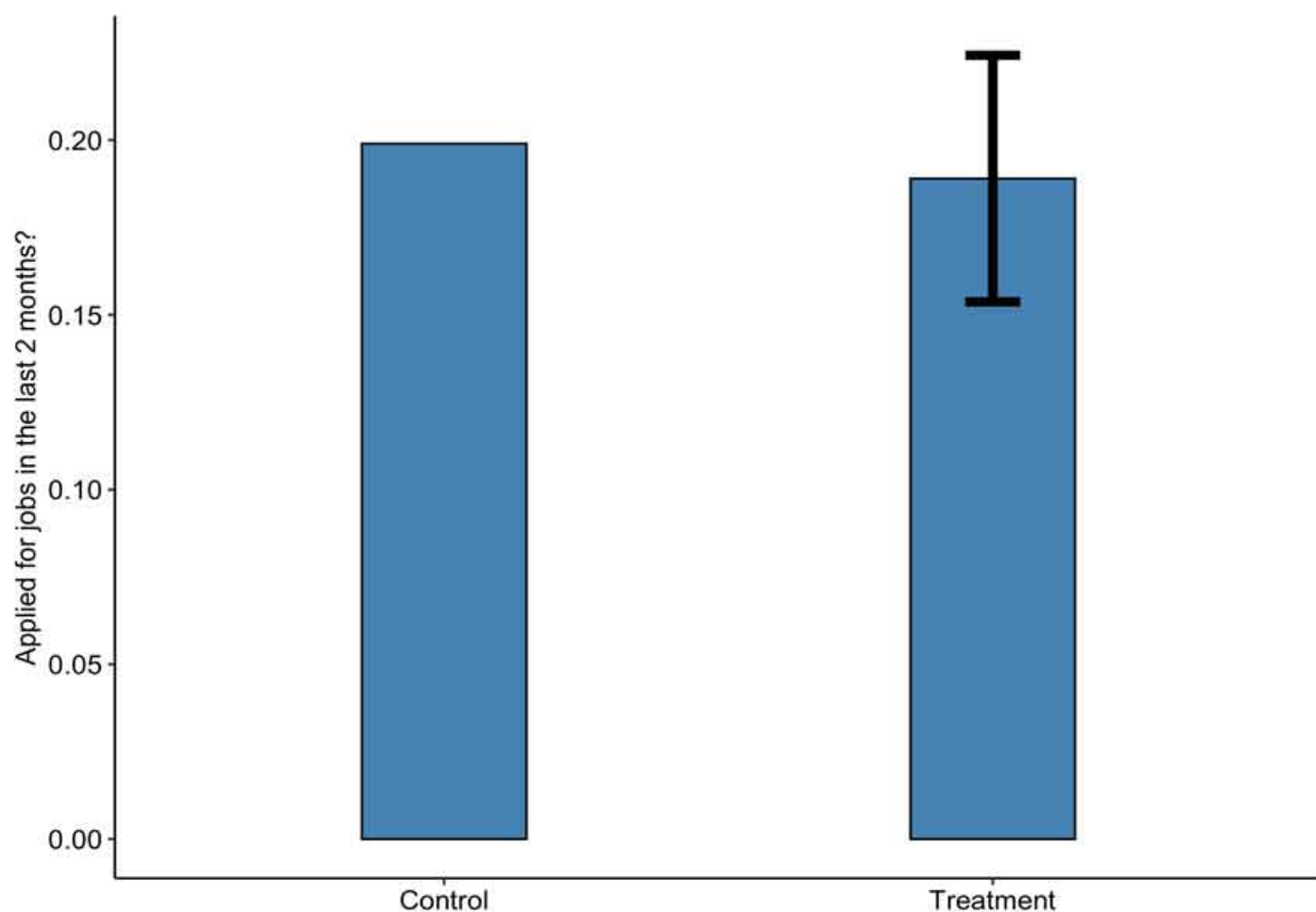
Figure 4. Migration: Pre-lockdown, shortly after lockdown, and a year after lockdown



Government-sponsored job app has not had any short-term effect on job search

The Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) contacted a randomly selected half of our sample, to introduce them to the job platform *YuvaSampark*, assist them in registering on the app, and support them in applying for jobs. Two or three weeks after the call, we do not see any impact on job applications, job search method, or intensity of job search between ‘treatment’ (those who received the intervention) and ‘control’ (those who did not receive the intervention) groups (Figure 5). The app had a few issues that limit its effectiveness for rural youth. First, the app had relatively few job postings, and only in a limited number of sectors. Second, all the modules in this app were in English. Third, a smartphone and good internet connectivity are required to use the app, which is not universally available in many parts of India.

Figure 5. Job applications in the two groups



Discussion and policy implications

The Covid-19 pandemic has had dramatic consequences for the sample of young migrant workers from rural Bihar and Jharkhand who were part of the DDU-GKY programme before the pandemic. Many lost their jobs and returned to their hometowns after the first lockdown, and a year later, only a few of them have gone back. Some of them, mostly men, have taken up informal employment, are still looking for jobs, and hoping to migrate again. In contrast, most women who lost their jobs have dropped out of the labour force and are neither looking for jobs nor thinking of migrating. Hence, the crisis seems to have reinforced the disadvantages faced by the rural youth, especially women, in accessing formal jobs in urban areas.

As digitisation becomes more widespread, digital solutions have tremendous potential to help rural youths to access information about job vacancies. However, not all tools will be of use to them. The results of our experimental trial suggest that these digital solutions must be carefully designed to be easy to use for the job-seekers, and attractive for employers to offer a wide range of job openings.

The rural youth from Bihar and Jharkhand, particularly women, face additional barriers in accessing formal jobs, which require vocational training – only available in cities in other states. The success of DDU-GKY in overcoming these barriers –

evident from the number of youths (almost equal percentage of women and men) employed in formal jobs pre-lockdown – suggests that dedicated efforts are needed by the government in collaboration with NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and private partners.

The authors would like to thank BRLPS, JSLPS and the Ministry of Rural Development for collaboration on the project. They are also grateful to Mr Sanjay Kumar (BRLPS) and Mr Abhinav Bakshi (JSLPS) for their extensive cooperation during the implementation of this study.

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Notes:

1. The programme provides short-term residential training to disadvantaged rural youth aged between 15 and 35 years.
2. Those outside of state before the lockdown.

Further Reading

- Chakravorty, B, AY Bhatiya, C Imbert, M Lohnert, P Panda and R Rathelot (2021), 'The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on rural youth from Bihar and Jharkhand: Evidence from a panel survey and an experiment', Policy Brief, J-PAL South Asia at IFMR.
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- Chakravorty, B and C Imbert (2020), 'Short and long-term impacts of the lockdown on young rural migrants from Bihar and Jharkhand', International Growth Centre.