



Original Article

Beyond Distress Migration: Understanding the Changing Dynamics of Out-Migration from Bihar

Sukriti

Research Scholar,

A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies

Aryabhatta Knowledge University, Patna.

Manuscript ID:

IJAAR-130604

ISSN: 2347-7075

Impact Factor – 8.141

Volume - 13

Issue - 6

July – August 2026

Pp. 22 - 31

Submitted: 10 July 2026

Revised: 18 July 2026

Accepted: 20 July 2026

Published: 31 July 2026

Corresponding Author:

Sukriti

Quick Response Code:



Website: <https://ijaar.co.in/>



DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21773167

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21773167>



Creative Commons



Abstract:

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the literature on Bihar out-migration, with a focus on secondary data analysis to better understand changing migration patterns, determinants, and gender dimensions. Bihar, one of India's most densely populated states, has traditionally been a major source of migrant labor. The review draws on a variety of sources, including census data, scholarly articles, and reports from government and non-governmental organizations. It identifies economic hardship, a lack of job opportunities, and educational aspirations as the primary drivers of migration, which has shifted from permanent to circular patterns in response to changing economic and social environments. Importantly, the paper emphasizes the increasing participation of women in migratory flows, indicating a shift in traditional gender roles and dynamics. This gendered analysis of migration reveals the disparities in effects on men and women, emphasizing the need for policies that address these differences. This review, which draws on existing research, sheds light on the complex socioeconomic factors driving migration from Bihar and provides insights into the implications for both source and destination areas. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at addressing migrants' challenges, with a particular emphasis on empowering women and ensuring equitable development outcomes.

Keywords: *Out-Migration, Bihar, Changing Patterns, Migration Determinants, Gender Dimensions.*

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), which permits others to remix, adapt, and build upon the work non-commercially, provided that appropriate credit is given and that any new creations are licensed under identical terms.

How to cite this article:

Sukriti. (2026). Beyond Distress Migration: Understanding the Changing Dynamics of Out-Migration from Bihar. International Journal of Advance and Applied Research, 13(6), 22 – 31.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21773167>

Introduction:

Migration, a pivotal event in human history, has far-reaching implications for socioeconomic development in both the origin and destination regions. Bihar, a state in eastern India, is a prime

example of this phenomenon, with a long history of outmigration. This paper conducts a thorough review of secondary data to uncover the multifaceted nature of Bihar migration, with a focus on changing patterns, determinants, and, most



importantly, gender dimensions that influence and are influenced by these migratory movements.

Bihar, with its agrarian economy, high population density, and low per capita income, has been a major source of migrant labor for decades (Edmonds & Salinger, 2008). A variety of factors influence migration, including economic hardship, job scarcity, and the desire for better educational opportunities. Such migration not only affects the economic landscapes of the source and destination regions, but it also causes changes in social structures and gender dynamics (Kumar & Bhagat, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in migration patterns from Bihar, with permanent or long-term migration giving way to more circular or seasonal movements. This evolution reflects broader economic and social transformations, indicating a dynamic interaction of migration and development processes (Datta, 2022).

Furthermore, the gender dimensions of migration are receiving more attention, with a growing recognition of women's active participation in migratory flows. This shift not only challenges traditional gender roles, but it also opens up new avenues for studying the effects of migration through a gendered lens. Migration can provide women with new opportunities for empowerment, but it also comes with its own set of challenges (Das, 2018).

This review seeks to synthesize the existing literature on out-migration from Bihar, providing a nuanced understanding of its changing patterns, underlying determinants, and gender dimensions. This paper seeks to provide insights that can inform policy interventions aimed at maximizing the benefits of migration while mitigating its negative effects by leveraging secondary data sources such as scholarly articles, census data, and reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Literature Review:

1. Changing Patterns of Migration:

Migration patterns from Bihar have changed significantly over the last few decades, reflecting broader socioeconomic transformations within the state and across India. This section examines secondary data sources to better understand these changing migration patterns, with a focus on the transition from permanent to circular migration.

Historically, migration from Bihar was marked by long-term or permanent moves motivated primarily by the desire for better employment and living conditions. During the early stages of this migration, a large number of people from Bihar moved to other parts of India, particularly to more industrialized cities, in search of work (Rajan & Percot, 2020). However, recent trends indicate a shift towards circular migration, in which migrants return to their place of origin on a regular basis (Srivastava, 2020). This shift is attributed to a number of factors, including the changing nature of the Indian economy, improvements in transportation, and changes in the types of job opportunities available.

The economic liberalization of the 1990s, which accelerated urbanization and industrial growth in some parts of India, had a significant impact on migration patterns. This economic transformation created new job opportunities in urban areas, but the nature of these jobs, which were often contractual or informal, meant that they lacked the stability and permanence of previous employment opportunities (Ahmed & Walmsley, 2009). As a result, many Bihar migrants now engage in circular migration, moving between their homes in Bihar and workplaces in other states based on seasonal employment cycles.

Furthermore, the development of better and more affordable transportation options has aided the shift toward circular migration. Improved



connectivity has made it easier for migrants to maintain ties with their home state and return on a regular basis, balancing economic goals with social and familial obligations (Bhagat & Keshri, 2020).

According to research, social networks play an important role in shaping these migration patterns. Migrants rely on their existing networks of friends and family for information about job opportunities and support in their destination cities. These networks not only assist in finding employment but also provide a safety net that encourages the circular migration pattern by allowing migrants to navigate between multiple locations with greater security and lower risks. (Munshi, 2020).

2. Determinants of Migration:

A complex interplay of factors influences individuals to choose to migrate, particularly those from Bihar. This section uses secondary data to examine the key determinants driving out-migration from Bihar, focusing on economic, educational, and environmental factors.

Economic Factors: Economic insecurity and the desire for better job opportunities continue to be the primary motivators for migration from Bihar. The state's agrarian economy, which is characterized by small landholdings, low productivity, and high population density, fails to provide long-term livelihoods for a sizable portion of its population (Singh, 2013). The scarcity of industrial and service sector jobs in the state forces individuals to look for work elsewhere, often in cities with more economic opportunities (Barman & Roy, 2023). Furthermore, wage disparities between Bihar and other Indian states act as a significant pull factor, causing individuals to migrate in search of higher incomes (De Haan, 2002).

Educational Aspirations: The desire for better educational opportunities motivates migration from Bihar. The state's education system, which is

plagued by issues of quality, accessibility, and infrastructure, drives families and individuals to relocate to areas with better educational institutions (Kim & Sondhi, 2015). This migration is not solely for employment purposes, but also as a strategic move to improve human capital and ensure better future prospects.

Environmental Factors: Environmental degradation and climate-related shocks have emerged as key migration drivers. Bihar, which is prone to flooding and other natural disasters, is experiencing significant agricultural disruption, resulting in economic instability for rural households (Jha et al., 2018). These adverse environmental conditions exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, prompting individuals to migrate as a coping strategy.

Social Networks and Information: The importance of social networks in facilitating migration cannot be overstated. Migrants from Bihar frequently rely on pre-existing networks of family and friends to learn about job opportunities and support in their new communities. These networks reduce the costs and risks associated with migration, making it more appealing to many (Gurak & Caces, 1992).

3. Gender Dimensions of Migration:

The gender dimensions of Bihar migration provide critical insight into how men and women's migratory flows and experiences differ significantly. This section examines these gendered nuances using secondary data, focusing on participation rates, roles, and the effects of migration on both genders.

Increasing Female Participation: Traditionally, migration from Bihar was male-dominated, with men moving to cities for work and women remaining in rural areas. However, recent trends show a gradual increase in the number of women migrating, both independently and as part of family units (Siddique, 2003). This shift is attributed to a number of factors, including economic necessity,



improved employment opportunities for women in destination areas, and the pursuit of education (Shanthi, 2006).

Women's roles in migration are multifaceted; they not only enter the workforce in destination cities, but they also play critical roles in maintaining familial networks and managing remittances. Furthermore, migration provides women with opportunities for social and economic empowerment by allowing them to participate in decision-making processes within their families as well as in larger community contexts (Ghosh, 2009). However, it is critical to recognize the dual burden that many women face as they navigate the challenges of working in destination areas while also bearing primary responsibility for household tasks and caregiving duties.

Impacts on Gender Relations: Migration has a significant impact on gender relations in both the source and destination regions. According to studies, migration can cause shifts in traditional gender roles, with women taking on more prominent roles in public and household decision-making. This shift may help to change perceptions of gender norms and roles, potentially leading to greater gender equality. However, the consequences are complex and can increase vulnerabilities for female migrants, who may face gender-based discrimination and violence (Mazumdar, 2013).

Women Migrants' Challenges: Despite the opportunities that migration provides, women migrants face unique challenges, such as lower wages than their male counterparts, precarious employment conditions, and limited access to social protection and healthcare services in destination areas (Devi, 2020). These challenges highlight the importance of targeted policies that address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women migrants.

4. Comparison of Census Data of 2011 & 2001:

The comparison of 2011 and 2001 census data provides a quantitative foundation for understanding Bihar's shifting out-migration landscape. This decade has seen significant changes in migration patterns, determinants, and gender dimensions, all of which are being driven by India's broader socioeconomic transformation.

Migration Patterns:

- **Increase in Migrant Numbers:** Between 2001 and 2011, the number of migrants from Bihar increased significantly. According to the 2011 census, there was a 35% increase in the number of out-migrants from 2001. This increase reflects escalating economic pressures and the desire for better employment and educational opportunities outside of Bihar (Census of India, 2011).
- **Shift to Circular Migration:** The data show a shift from long-term to circular migration, with a greater number of migrants returning to Bihar each year. This trend is due to the changing nature of employment in destination states, which is becoming more contractual and seasonal, as well as improved transport, which makes travel easier (Datta, 2020).

Determinants of Migration:

- **Economic Factors:** The economic motivation for migration increased, with the widening income gap between Bihar and more prosperous states acting as a pull factor. The 2011 Census data highlighted this disparity, showing that states like Punjab, Maharashtra, and Gujarat became increasingly appealing for Bihari migrants seeking better wages (De Haan, 2002).
- **Educational Aspirations:** There has been a noticeable increase in migration for educational reasons, particularly among youth. According to census data, the number



of migrants citing education as their primary reason for migration has doubled, highlighting the state's ongoing challenges in providing quality education (Kim & Sondhi, 2015).

Gender Dimensions:

- **Increased Female Participation:** According to 2011 Census data, there has been a significant increase in female migration, with a noticeable increase in the number of women migrating for employment and education. This shift represents a gradual change in societal norms and an increase in economic opportunities for women in the destination regions (Das, 2018).
- **Changing Gender Roles:** The data also shed light on the changing gender dynamics within migrating families, with an increase in female-headed households in Bihar as a result of male migration. This change points to the evolving roles of women, both in the workplace and within familial structures (Ghosh, 2009).

Methodological Approaches:

The study of out-migration from Bihar, with a focus on changing patterns, determinants, and gender dimensions, makes extensive use of secondary data sources. This method uses a variety of sources, including census data, government reports, scholarly articles, and publications from international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A diverse data set allows for a more comprehensive analysis by providing insights into demographic changes, economic policies, and migrants' personal narratives. While secondary data has the advantages of breadth and cost-effectiveness, it also presents challenges in terms of data consistency, timeliness, and limited control over the research process. Despite these limitations, secondary data is still invaluable for

understanding the complex dynamics of migration in Bihar, providing a foundation for policy recommendations and future research (Ghosh, 2009; Mazumdar et al., 2013; International Labour Organization, 2020).

Findings and Discussion:

1. Economic and Social Impacts:

Out-migration from Bihar has had a significant economic and social impact, affecting both migrants and their families, as well as larger communities in both source and destination areas. To investigate these impacts, this section synthesizes findings from secondary data sources, including scholarly articles, government reports, and studies conducted by international organizations.

Economic Impacts on Households: One of the most immediate effects of migration is the financial remittances sent back to families in Bihar, which play an important role in household economy. Remittances are used for a variety of purposes, such as basic necessities, education, healthcare, and even investment in local businesses (Afsar, 1994). These funds not only improve households' living standards, but also help to reduce poverty in the region. However, reliance on remittances can result in a lack of economic diversification in the source areas, raising concerns about long-term viability (Datta & Mishra, 2011).

Social Impacts: Migration has a significant social impact on Bihar's families and communities. While the absence of a family member can cause social and emotional stress, it also necessitates changes in family dynamics and roles, especially for women who are left behind and may take on additional responsibilities (Kumar & Bhagat, 2017). Migration also has an impact on social structures and norms, which may result in changes in traditional practices and attitudes toward education, employment, and gender roles (Ahl, 2006).



Developmental Impacts on Source and Destination Areas:

Migration from Bihar has implications for development in both the source and destination areas. In addition to economic contributions through remittances, migration can cause labor shortages, particularly in agriculture, affecting local economies (Singh et al., 2019). Migrants in destination areas contribute to economic growth and urban development, but they may also face integration, service access, and rights protection issues (International Labour Organization, 2020).

2. Gendered Experiences and Contributions:

The migration phenomenon in Bihar reveals gender-specific experiences and contributions, which both influence and are influenced by broader socioeconomic and cultural dynamics. This discussion synthesizes secondary data to investigate the gender-specific effects of migration, focusing on the diverse experiences of male and female migrants and the resulting changes in gender relations within migrant communities.

Female Migrants: Empowerment and Challenges: Women's migration from Bihar, whether alone or with their families, has been linked to opportunities for empowerment through employment and education. Women migrants frequently have increased autonomy and decision-making power, both economically and domestically (Fleury, 2016). However, these opportunities are accompanied by significant challenges, such as gender discrimination, precarious employment conditions, and restricted access to social protection and healthcare in destination areas. Such disparities highlight the need for gender-sensitive migration policies that address women migrants' unique vulnerabilities (Gathoskar, 2013).

Male Migrants: Economic Pressure and Social Change: Male migrants are primarily motivated by economic pressures and a desire to provide for their

families. This migration has social consequences, including changes in family dynamics as men adjust to urban environments and different work cultures. Separation from families also has an impact on social ties and responsibilities, causing shifts in traditional gender roles within households, with women taking on more significant decision-making and household management roles in the absence of male family members (Agasty & Patra, 2013).

Impact on Gender Relations: Migration has a complex impact on gender relations, challenging traditional roles while also contributing to a gradual shift toward more egalitarian relationships. Female migrants' economic contributions raise their status within their families and communities, potentially leading to a reevaluation of gender norms and expectations. However, these changes are not consistent and can vary greatly depending on factors such as caste, class, and educational level. The changing gender dynamics highlight the importance of gender considerations in migration research and policy formulation (Shanthi, 2006).

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

The analysis of out-migration from Bihar, with a focus on changing patterns, determinants, gender dimensions, and economic and social consequences, provides valuable policy insights. To maximize the benefits of migration while mitigating its negative consequences, policies must be nuanced, multidimensional, and gender-sensitive. The following are key policy implications and recommendations derived from the findings:

Enhance Economic Opportunities in Source Areas:

- **Diversification of Rural Economy:** Invest in rural development projects that diversify the economic base beyond agriculture, such as small-scale industries and services, to create local job opportunities.



- **Skill Development Programs:** Implement targeted skill development programs that cater to the changing labor market needs, both within Bihar and in potential destination regions, with specific modules for women to improve their employability.

Improve Access to Quality Education:

- **Strengthen Educational Infrastructure:** Improve the quality and accessibility of Bihar's educational institutions to reduce the educational migration push factor. Focus on girls' education to ensure gender equality in access to educational opportunities.

Support Migrants in Destination Areas:

- **Legal and Social Protection:** Enhance legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect migrants from exploitation and discrimination in destination areas. Implement accessible social protection schemes for migrants, such as health insurance and housing support.
- **Integration Programs:** Create programs aimed at the social integration of migrants in destination areas, including language training, cultural orientation, and community engagement activities that are sensitive to the needs of women migrants.

Promote Gender-Sensitive Migration Policies:

- **Address Specific Needs of Women Migrants:** Develop policies that specifically address the vulnerabilities of women migrants, with a focus on safety, employment rights, and access to health care. Create support systems for women who experience gender-based violence or discrimination.
- **Empowerment Initiatives:** Implement initiatives to empower migrant women, such as leadership training, financial literacy programs, and support for

women entrepreneurs. These should aim to increase women's agency and participation in the economic and social spheres.

Foster Sustainable Development in Source and Destination Areas:

- **Balanced Regional Development:** Encourage balanced regional development to reduce economic disparities between states, which drive migration. Invest in infrastructure and public services in underdeveloped areas to make them more appealing to both residents and potential returnees.

Encourage Community and Stakeholder Engagement:

- **Inclusive Policy Making:** Involve migrant communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in the policymaking process to ensure that policies are based on migrants' lived experiences and address their needs.

Conclusion:

Out-migration from Bihar is characterized by changing patterns, multifaceted determinants, and significant gender dimensions, posing both challenges and opportunities for individuals, families, and communities. This review, which draws on a wide range of secondary data, sheds light on the economic and social consequences of migration, emphasizing how these movements affect the livelihoods and social structures of both the source and destination regions. Economic incentives, educational goals, and environmental concerns have emerged as primary motivators, driving people to migrate in search of better opportunities and living conditions. Concurrently, the increased participation of women in these migratory flows indicates a shift toward more inclusive migration dynamics, while also emphasizing the need for policies that address the



unique challenges and vulnerabilities that women migrants face.

The analysis emphasizes the complexities of Bihar migration, revealing how it is linked to larger socioeconomic and cultural transformations. Migrants make significant contributions to the economies of both source and destination areas through remittances and labor, but they also face integration, rights protection, and service access challenges. The gendered analysis of migration enriches our understanding by demonstrating how migration can alter traditional gender roles and relationships, providing opportunities for empowerment while also posing new challenges.

Drawing from the findings, it is clear that addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities presented by Bihar migration necessitates comprehensive, multidimensional, and gender-sensitive policy responses. These policies should aim to increase economic opportunities in source areas, improve access to quality education, assist migrants in destination areas, and promote long-term development. Furthermore, the involvement of all stakeholders, including migrant communities, civil society, and government agencies, is critical in developing and implementing effective migration policies.

To summarize, migration from Bihar, with its numerous determinants and consequences, provides a lens through which we can observe the intersections of economic development, social change, and gender dynamics. By taking informed and inclusive approaches, we can reduce the negative effects of migration while maximizing its benefits, contributing to the long-term development of both source and destination regions and improving the well-being of migrants and their families.

References:

1. Afsar, R. (1994). Internal migration and women: An insight into causes, consequences and policy implications. *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, 22(2/3), 217-243.
2. Agasty, M. P., & Patra, R. N. (2013). Migration, wages and agriculture: Empirical evidence and policy implication. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 14(5), 9-20.
3. Ahl, H. (2006). Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 30(5), 595-621.
4. Ahmed, S. A., & Walmsley, T. L. (2009). Gains from the liberalization of temporary migration: the case of India. *South Asia Economic Journal*, 10(1), 61-80.
5. Barman, B., & Roy, R. (2023). Socio-economic Determinants of Rural Out-migration in Koch Bihar District of West Bengal, India. In *Population, Sanitation and Health: A Geographical Study Towards Sustainability* (pp. 47-68). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
6. Bhagat, R. B., & Keshri, K. (2020). Internal migration in India. *Internal migration in the countries of Asia: A cross-national comparison*, 207-228.
7. Census of India. (2011). "Primary Census Abstract for Bihar." Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.
8. Das, M. (2018). Male Out-migration and Women in Rural Bihar: A Socio-legal Study. *Journal of Migration Affairs*, 1(1), 21-40.
9. Datta, A. (2020). Circular migration and precarity: Perspectives from rural Bihar. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 63(4), 1143-1163.



10. Datta, A., & Mishra, S. K. (2011). Glimpses of women's lives in rural Bihar: Impact of male migration. *The Indian journal of labour economics*, 54(3), 457-477.
11. De Haan, A. (2002). Migration and livelihoods in historical perspective: A case study of Bihar, India. *Journal of development studies*, 38(5), 115-142.
12. Devi, S. D. (2020). Plight of Women Domestic Workers in India. *Issue 6 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, 3, 449.
13. Edmonds, E. V., & Salinger, P. (2008). Economic influences on child migration decisions: evidence from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. *Indian Growth and Development Review*, 1(1), 32-56.
14. Fleury, A. (2016). Understanding women and migration: A literature review. *Washington, DC*, 55.
15. Ghosh, J. (2009). Migration and gender empowerment: Recent trends and emerging issues.
16. Gothoskar, S. (2013). The plight of domestic workers: Confluence of gender, class and caste hierarchies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 63-75.
17. Gurak, D. T., & Caces, F. (1992). Migration networks and the shaping of migration systems. *International migration systems: A global approach*, 150, 176.
18. International Labour Organization. (2020). *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers*. Geneva: ILO.
19. Jha, C. K., Gupta, V., Chattopadhyay, U., & Amarayil Sreeraman, B. (2018). Migration as adaptation strategy to cope with climate change: A study of farmers' migration in rural India. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*, 10(1), 121-141.
20. Kim, A. H., & Sondhi, G. (2015). Bridging the literature on education migration. *Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster Discussion Paper Series/Un Réseau Stratégique de Connaissances Changements de Population et Parcours de Vie Document de Travail*, 3(1), 7.
21. Kumar, N., & Bhagat, R. B. (2012). Outmigration from Bihar: causes and consequences. *Journal of Social and Economic Studies*, 22(2), 134-144.
22. Kumar, N., & Bhagat, R. B. (2017). Interaction between migration and development: A study of income and workforce diversification in rural Bihar. *Environment and Urbanization ASIA*, 8(1), 120-136.
23. Mazumdar, I., Neetha, N., & Agnihotri, I. (2013). Migration and gender in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54-64.
24. Munshi, K. (2020). Social networks and migration. *Annual Review of Economics*, 12, 503-524.
25. Rajan, S. I., & Percot, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Dynamics of Indian Migration: Historical and Current Perspectives*.
26. Shanthi, K. (2006). *Female labour migration in India: Insights from NSSO data* (Vol. 4). Chennai: Madras School of Economics.
27. Siddique, M. A. B. (2003, December). Women in migration and development: Review and analysis. In *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) Consultative Meeting on "Migration and Mobility and how this movement affects Women" Malmö, Sweden* (pp. 2-4).
28. Singh, S. (2013). Dynamics of agricultural marginalization in emergent rural economy: a study in south Bihar. *International journal of rural management*, 9(1), 71-96.



29. Singh, S., Singh, A., & Singh, C. B. (2019). Climate change and migration: Adapting to crisis. *Asian Journal of Environment & Ecology*.
30. Srivastava, R. (2020). Understanding circular migration in India: Its nature and dimensions, the crisis under lockdown and the response of the state. *Institute for Human Development, Centre for Employment Studies Working Paper Series-WP*, 4, 2020.