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Labour demand in construction industry: A case of residential building

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Construction production is a unique process which incorporates several resources such as material, finance, machine and man. Of all the resources and factors of production man has the highest priority and is the most significant factor of production and plays a crucial role in areas of productivity and quality. This research has found the labour requirements for specific construction skills and investigated the current issues of labourers in Sri Lankan construction industry using data from final accounts of residential building projects and interviews with professionals in construction firms. Using collected data, the labour required for 1m² of gross floor area for selected work sections of masonry, concreting, tiling, plastering and painting were calculated. It was observed from the calculations that the labour required per unit of floor area does not proportionately increase as the gross floor area increases. Labour intakes for luxury buildings are higher than for semi luxury buildings. For concreting for the semi luxury building skilled labour requirement is 0.078 labour days/m² and 0.467 labour days/m² for unskilled labourers. For luxury buildings it is 0.087 & 0.522. In case of masonry the skilled and unskilled labour required for semi luxury buildings are 0.495 & 0.871 and 0.640 & 1.026 for luxury buildings. For wall tiling the skilled and unskilled labour required for semi luxury buildings are 0.101 & 0.114 and 0.114 & 0.128 for luxury buildings. For floor tiling the skilled and unskilled labour required for semi luxury buildings are 0.324 & 0.364 and 0.331 & 0.372 for luxury buildings. In case of plastering the skilled and unskilled labour required for semi luxury buildings are 0.295 & 0.440 and 0.376 & 0.560 for luxury buildings. For painting the skilled labour required for semi luxury and luxury buildings are 0.340 and 0.576 as the painting work does not require unskilled labourers. It was found that the masonry work requires higher amount of labour involvement and wall tiling require lesser amount of labour input in both semi luxury and luxury residential buildings.

The research also revealed that the industry faces the problem of recruiting and retaining labourers. In addition, there has been a shortage for labourers in the skills of masons, carpenters and tile setters due to increased construction activities, reasons related to wages, behaviour of labour subcontractors, job security, attitudes of management towards etc. Thus, the industry uses the strategies of giving job security, maintaining good payment system, maintaining good working conditions, emergency assistances etc to retain the labourers.

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