

Centre for Sustainable Employment
Azim Premji University

CSE Working Paper
2018-14

Hard Work , Low Pay : Work Patterns Among Rural Women in West Bengal

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May 2018



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why This Study

This study is the outcome of the experience of the Shramajivi Mahila Samity, an independent, non-party mass organisation of mainly rural working women in West Bengal. Shramajivi Mahila Samity works on gender discrimination and rights of women. It does not run any direct income generating programmes. However, in the 28 years of our work in rural Bengal, we have seen women contributing in myriad ways to the economies of their families. They are an irreplaceable element in the survival of their families, often making the difference between starvation and subsistence. We have always been surprised by the official statistics which show West Bengal as having one of the lowest female labour participation rates in the country. It has led us to believe that there is a gross misunderstanding about women's work and the importance of unpaid work in the economy of a poor household. In the past few decades, we have seen more and more women in rural Bengal joining paid work. We have seen that men are migrating and the agricultural labour force in many areas consists now almost entirely of women. We were therefore surprised to read about a debate on falling female labour participation rate at the national level. It did not match our own work experiences. It has led us to the present study, which we hope will be able to shed some light on what is actually happening to women from the rural working class in West Bengal.

1.2 Women's Labour as the First Step in Capital Accumulation

Women are synonymous with work. Even when it is said that women do "nothing" and are only housewives, we find that women spend 12-15 hours doing work in the house. The only thing which makes this work "nothing", is the fact that this work is unpaid and is not valued in terms of money by the market.

The value of unpaid work in producing and reproducing labour in society cannot be denied by any of us. Women, through the hard labour of bearing a child in her womb for ten months and then the unpaid labour of bringing up a child to adulthood, contribute in irreplaceable ways to society- they produce our labour force.

Women, through the hard and thankless labour of housework – cooking , cleaning, washing clothes, making beds etc. – help men to go out to work . Not only that, through their unpaid labour, women allow men to work for less than subsistence wages, providing the first stage of capital accumulation for owners. Men are able to work at low wages and add to the profit of

1 Background study for the report on the State of Working India 2018.

their employers because they have unpaid slaves at home to do all the housework. Thus, women's labour, unvalued and unpaid is the first stage of capital accumulation.

Contrary to the traditional Marxist assumption about the unproductive character of domestic labour, it was shown that such labour involves both production of simple use-values for direct consumption, and, more importantly, it comprises the production and reproduction of the special commodity labour power. In concrete terms, this means the bearing and rearing of children (future labour power), the maintenance/care of the husband who is a waged employee, and also the restoring of the female waged worker's own labouring strength.

The production of surplus value involves twofold exploitation, of the domestic slave and of the wage-labourer.¹

The understanding of the contribution of labour to the creation of wealth in the country is incomplete unless one looks at the contribution by women's labour. Here, it is essential that we understand the intertwining between the domestic sphere and the public sphere. The economy cannot be solely understood by a study of the public sphere alone and a study of what is considered "productive", as only those activities are considered productive which have a monetary value, and which are bought and sold in the market. This criterion is not met by a lot of labour that women put in, despite the fact that their labour adds to the surplus created in a capitalist economy.

Marie Mies and Peter Custers give the example of women lace makers in Narsapur in Andhra Pradesh and garment workers in Bangladesh, whose labour creates surplus for capitalists even in developed countries. A similar example can be found in the tea sector where a leaf plucker in Darjeeling works for a wage of Rs.150 per day even today, a wage that is insufficient for the survival of her family. On the other hand, the tea leaves plucked by these women make their way to German markets where the daily produce of a single woman (enough to make about 3 kgs of made tea) would sell for about Rs.35000. Retailers and blenders in Germany retain 86% of this amount, while the leaf plucker gets less than 1%.² A major reason why women manage to survive at such low wages is because of the unpaid labour women put in. For example the hugely labour intensive task of fuel collection and water collection in the Darjeeling hills is taken up by these women. Family diets are supplemented by greens that they gather and by livestock and poultry that are kept within the homestead. Women's labour makes the difference between starvation and survival for these families.

Every woman from a working class family in Bengal contributes to her family's income. Yet, very few women are recognised as workers by the Government. Thus, in agriculture, many of these unpaid jobs contribute significantly to farm income (eg working on the family land, processing paddy or *dhan siddho*, taking care of cows, goats, ducks and hens etc.) . A similar contribution is made invisible in household enterprises. For example a wife or a girl child will do much of the work for a *tele bhaja* (fritters) shop or will contribute to a weaver's work in countless ways. As a result of this non-recognition of women's work, as per NSS data, only one in every four women were considered part of the labour force in Bengal in 2011-12.

Even when women's labour is recognised as economic activity or paid work by the Government or society, it is mainly work in the informal sector. Thus, once again, based on NSS data, out of 80,40,308 working women in West Bengal only 243,300 worked in the formal sector in 2010-11.

Unless surplus value is seen to be extracted by exploitation of wage labour and non-wage labour, economics have a bias against women's labour. In Narsapur, for example, women lace-makers are seen as housewives- "their waged work is termed a 'pass-time' activity by the exporters employing them. This ideology facilitates the practicing of an extremely high level of exploitation. While profit levels are high, the women homeworkers are not even paid a subsistence wage for the long hours they toil each day." A similar situation exists in tea, where employers during wage negotiations in the industry have insisted that both husband and wife work in the estate. A family is therefore assumed to be supported by the income of two people, thus justifying the low level of women's wages.

Women are seen as supplementary workers even by the Government, where large numbers of jobs have been created in the care sector for ASHA workers, midday meal cooks, Anganwari workers, trained midwives etc. **All these women are seen as honorary workers, who are doing "voluntary work" and are therefore not Government employees. Each such worker is paid pittance wages, ranging from Rs.500 per month to Rs.3000- much less than the Seventh Pay Commission stipulated minimum wage of Rs.18000 for the lowest paid Government employee.** Nor are they covered by benefits such as Provident Fund, pensions, gratuity, maternity leave etc. Thus, even the Government exploits these women through underpayment. The underlying assumption is that these women are basically housewives with a lot of free time and with little need for an income, so that their work for the Government can be treated as "voluntary social work" which deserves an honorarium and not a decent wage.

1.3 Impact on Women's Lives

The undervaluation of women's work means that she is undervalued in all respects. Women's paid work is seen as "supplementary income" for the family, while the main worker is the man of the family. Hence, women are always the first to be fired when employment shrinks, and jobs are created keeping male workers in mind.

This undervaluing also impacts the wages that are paid to women. Even in the formal sector, huge wage differentials exist. At the All India level from 2003-04 to 2009-10, women were paid half (42-51%) the wages of men, while in West Bengal, they were generally paid 2/3rds (62-75%) of men's wages.³ In agriculture, in 2015-16, women were paid 78% of men's wages at the All India level and 85% of men's wages in West Bengal.⁴

The impact of undervaluation extends to other aspects of a women's life. A girl child is considered a burden and female foeticide is common- the under six sex ratio in West Bengal in 2015-16 was only 960 females for every 1000 males, when we all know that at birth, naturally, more girls are born than boys.⁵

Another indicator of this undervaluation is that less is spent on her health and on her education. The end results of this neglect are apparent- in 2015-16, 62.5 % of all adult women in West Bengal were anaemic and only 26.5% had more than 10 years of schooling. Women, due to the undervaluation of their work, along with other factors, are also subject to violence within their homes. One in every three women in West Bengal in 2015-16 said that she had experienced spousal violence (NFHS, *ibid*).

The increasing spread of dowry is also connected to her undervaluation. A woman is not regarded as a contributing worker, but as a “burden”, who can only be acceptable to her in-laws and husband, if the “economic loss” of marrying her can be compensated by a fat dowry.

1.4 How Important Is Undervaluation

Reports by different agencies show that the contribution of unpaid and unrecognised work towards the economy is huge, even though it is never measured and added to the GDP. For women, the extent of their work that goes unrecognised is substantial. An Action Aid report says that “not only do significantly more women compared to men engage in unpaid work, they spend two to ten times more time on unpaid work.”⁶ The World Economic Forum’s report in 2017 on the Gender Gap Index showed that “on average, 66 per cent of women’s work in India is unpaid, compared to 12 per cent of men’s”⁷. A 2017 UN Report estimates that about 51% of the work done by women in India is unpaid and not counted in national statistics.⁸ A McKinsey report says that “globally women spend roughly three times the amount of time spent by men on unpaid work. In India, the situation is more extreme – women perform 9.8 times the amount of unpaid work than men.” The same report further states that if that unpaid work were to be valued and compensated it would contribute \$300 billion a year to India’s economic output.⁹

A UN report reiterates the same, when it says that women in India spent only ¼ hour in paid activities as against 3 ½ hours in unpaid activities. The GDP of the country would increase by about 11 % if we take into account the unpaid work of the women in the SNA (System of National Accounts) activities.¹⁰

Micro studies also reveal the economic importance of the unpaid work done by women within the household. A study in Hooghly district in 2016 of West Bengal estimates that per capita value of unpaid care work (which is only one part of the unpaid work done by women) is Rs.597.80 for six days.¹¹ This amounts to about Rs.100 per day, which would be almost 2/3rd of the wage prevalent in that area for unskilled, manual work at that time.

The single large Time Use Study¹² (TUS) done in India in 1998-99 throws light on the kinds of activities involved in unpaid work and the extent of time spent by men and women on the same. The study shows that

- On the average men spent 42 hours in a week on System of National Account (SNA) activities, compared to 19 hours by females.
- Even in SNA activities, payment was made for only 38% of the time spent. For women this figure was larger (51%), while it was only 33% for men.

- When extended SNA activities, which include household maintenance and care for sick, elderly and children, are included however, men spent only 3.6 hours a week on such activities while, women spent 34.6 hours a week.
- Women spent 2.1 hours and 1.1. Hours a day on cooking and cleaning respectively and 3.16 hours per week on child care, but participation of men in such activities was nominal.
- In leisure , learning and personal care activities(such as reading, listening to music, reading newspaper, sleeping, eating and drinking, smoking and drinking intoxicants, personal hygiene, physical exercise, , talking and gossiping) men spent 8 hours more per week as compared to women.

In sum, women spend a lot of time on economic activity for which they are often not paid; they spend a lot of their time (as compared to men) on care work; and, finally, they have very little time for leisure or for self-development.

When comparing work participation rates (WPRs) shown by NSSO data and the Time Use study,¹³ it becomes obvious that the NSSO does not properly reflect the actual contribution of the informal sector, where almost all women work. It does not also reflect the total contribution of women in care work and household work. **The Time Use Study (TUS) based WPRs are higher for both men and women than the NSSO based WPRs in both urban and rural areas.** In addition, the WPRs of women are double of those in the NSSO data, with the gap between NSSO and TUS WPRs being much more for women than for men. In addition, the diversification shown in the NSSO data, in terms of difference in WPRs in various sectors is much more than in the TUS data. The TUS data shows a much bigger primary sector, thus reflecting on the ability of such studies to capture the informal nature of the work in the primary sector.

The system of measurement used at the national level uses a paradigm which understands only economic activities that have market value. It also views activities from a male bias and is able to understand only such things that are easily measurable.¹⁴ As a result, women's work and its economic contribution is hugely underestimated and misunderstood. For example, women's care work is often done simultaneously with other housework or some other productive activity. However, as the methods used do not take into account simultaneously done tasks it results in under-measurement.

Also, women and men in the informal sector are often involved in multiple jobs, partly because no one job (e.g. farming a small field) gives them full employment, nor does it give them enough income to survive. Workers also do not have the skills to access a full time job or the funds to expand a part time activity into a full time one. However, again national systems of measurement do not have the capacity to measure so many multiple jobs or activities. From the policy point of view, such measurement results in an incomplete understanding of women's work and in policies that cannot skill her or reduce her drudgery.

1.5 Female Work Participation Rates and NSSO Data

West Bengal has always shown low female work participation rates, despite the fact that most women in rural West Bengal contribute in significant and irreplaceable ways to the economies of their households. Given below are the female work participation rates from

Census data for the past three decades and West Bengal's rank amongst 35 States and Union Territories..¹⁵

Table 1:-Female Work Participation Rates (percentage of total workers (main and marginal) to total population)

				Rank Amongst 35 States and Union Territories		
	1991	2001	2011	1991	2001	2011
West Bengal	11.2	18.3	18.1	29	28	26
All India	22.27	25.63	25.5			

Source: Statistical Profile On Women Labour, 2012-2013 and 2012, Labour Bureau.

NSSO data shows that the female labour participation rates all over India have declined from 2004-05 to 2011-12. However, during a period when there has been great concern all over India at the declining female labour participation rates and its implications for development in general, West Bengal has shown positive growth in the female work participation rates in both urban and rural areas. Thus from 2009 to 2011-12, the rural female labour participation rate in West Bengal shows an improvement from 156 to 194, though for India it declines from 265 to 253. (Table 2 below)

Table 2:-Labour Force Participation Rates (per 1000)(based on NSSO data)

Year	Rural Male		Rural Female		Rural Overall		Urban Male		Urban Female		Urban Overall	
	WB	India	WB	India	WB	India	WB	India	WB	India	WB	India
1993-94	567	561	189	330	382	449	587	543	167	165	393	363
1999-00	549	540	165	302	359	423	612	542	129	147	378	354
2004-05	587	555	184	333	389	446	630	570	169	178	410	382
2009-10	619	556	156	265	399	414	605	559	151	146	386	362
2011-12	602	553	194	253	400	406	630	563	186	155	419	367

Source:- <http://niti.gov.in/state-statistics>

A look at crude work participation rates for West Bengal from the Census during the period 1981 to 2001 (Table 3) shows that female work participation rates have been increasing. The growth has been the greatest for women in rural areas in 1981 to 1991 and in 1991 to 2001. However the difference is that in the first decade the growth was most for rural main workers while for the second decade it has been most for marginal workers in agriculture.

Table 3:- Crude Work Participation Rates (female) : West Bengal

	1981	1991	2001	change 1981-91	change 1991-2001
West Bengal State	8.07	11.25	18.08	3.18	6.83
Rural	8.89	13.07	20.7	4.18	7.63
Urban	5.59	6.21	11.13	0.62	4.92
Main Workers	5.81	7.96	8.86	2.15	0.9
Main Workers Rural	6.19	8.74	8.87	2.55	0.13
Main Workers Urban	4.66	5.79	9.21	1.13	3.42
Marginal Workers	2.26	3.29	9.22	1.03	5.93
Marginal Workers Rural	2.7	4.33	11.83	1.63	7.5
Marginal Workers Urban	0.94	0.41	2.31	-0.53	1.9

Source :- “Levels, Trends and Structure of Workforce in India: Census Based Study 1981-2001”, R.B. Bhagat K.C. Das, International Institute for Population Sciences, 2008

Does this imply that West Bengal had certain aspects in its growth during this period which have been conducive to more and more women joining the labour market? Or does it only mean that the female work force have shifted from work which was not considered “productive” or “measured” by the NSSO and Census to work which is now measurable?

The period between 1981 and 1991 was definitely a period of high growth for agriculture in West Bengal . It was also the period when Operation Barga, which gave rights to tenants over their land and the distribution of *pattas* or vested land to the landless was at its peak. Land redistribution led to a flurry of growth in agricultural production. This perhaps could explain the rise in women’s participation in the labour market , especially as main workers in agriculture during this period.

During this period, there was also the introduction of Government support to self-help groups, first through the Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) and later through the National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

Another explanation, which seems to fit the West Bengal scenario well, has been from Indira Hirway¹⁶. She raises doubts about women who are in very poor families moving in and out of the labour force so frequently. Her explanation is that a number of jobs that women do are not measured by the NSSO and other such surveys accurately. According to her , “..... a large chunk of the labour force does not move in and out of the labour force, but it moves in and out of the low productivity distress work that they take up as a coping strategy.” Some of this work gets measured by the surveys and some doesn’t. She thus raises questions about methods of measurement and their accuracy.

Women contribute in majorly significant ways to families that are poorest and that are in the informal, unorganised sector, especially in rural areas. This contribution forms the first stage

of capital accumulation. This is often not measured or recognised by policy makers leading to distortions in our policy and in programs that never really address the concerns and requirements of these women. We lack policy that can skill these women or reduce their drudgery, as policy makers have an incomplete understanding of the lives of these women.

In such a situation, rural West Bengal provides us with an opportunity to understand this phenomenon. While the rest of the country has been going through a phase when the NSSO data shows a decline in the female labour participation rates, especially for rural women, West Bengal has shown a trend towards increasing female labour participation. As a state that has always had low female labour participation rates, a look at this anomalous experience here could throw up insights into the policy necessary to bring such marginal women into the officially recognised work force, and to perhaps redefine work itself.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The study has been conducted in 4 districts of West Bengal namely

- a. Nadia
- b. North 24 Parganas
- c. South 24 Parganas and
- d. Paschim Midnapore

It was conducted amongst women who were mainly rural workers themselves or were from rural working class families.

It aims to answer the following questions

- How much time, approximately, do rural working class women spend in unpaid work? What is the value of this work? Is it possible to set a value to the same?
- What are the changes in the work patterns of rural working women in these areas? Have they shifted to paid wage from unpaid household work?
- Why did such a shift take place? What were the factors in the external environment that brought about such a change? What are the factors within women's family lives that induced this change?
- Have rural women benefitted from the change in their work patterns? Is being in paid work "liberating" for women? Does paid work bring with it new tensions and problems?
- What kinds of policies and benefits do rural working class women expect from the Government? What is priority for them?

The study relied heavily on the experience of activists of the Shramajivi Mahila Samity (SMS) in the design of the study. SMS is a mass organisation of rural working women that has been actively involved in issues facing rural working women since its inception in 1990. Most of the activists of the Samity have been working on such issues for 20-25 years and were therefore able to give a good insight into the changes that have taken place and the reasons for the same. Three workshops, each for a day each, were held to design the study. While the first workshop focused on a general discussion to understand the issues that needed to be highlighted during the study, the second workshop was specifically to design the questionnaire for the case studies and to decide on women who would be appropriate for the

case studies so as to highlight a wide ranging experience of the women. The third workshop was done to design and plan for the interviews with political leaders and employers, the FGDs and the survey. A fourth workshop for two days was conducted to familiarise the activists with the survey questionnaire and to help them do a pilot on the same. As tablets were used to collect the survey data, this workshop helped the activists familiarise themselves with this technology.

Data was collected through 21 case studies in all the 4 districts. Focus group discussions were conducted in each of the districts, and employers and political leaders were also interviewed. 15 focus group discussions (FGDs) covered 129 women from Hindu and Muslim communities, belonging to different castes and from the Adivasi community. For the survey, one village was selected from each district by the activists so that the village would give us a mix of women who were in paid work and women who were in household based work only. 150-185 households were covered in each village during the survey, giving us a total of 692 respondents in the survey.

While choosing women for the case studies locations for the FGDs and the villages for the survey, we tried to ensure that we got a mix of scheduled castes, general castes, OBCs Adivasis, Muslims and general castes.

More details of the women covered can be got from the tables that follow.²

Case Studies : Basic Information

District	Name	Age	Sex	Caste	Educational level
Nadia	Samsun Nahar Beuya	58	Female	Muslim OBC(A)	Illiterate
	Firdousi Bibi	45	Female	Muslim OBC(A)	Class Eight
	Basana Haldar	42	Female	SC	Illiterate
	Nayantara Sardar	50	Female	SC	Class one
	Bharoti Rajoar	45	Female	SC	Illiterate
	Rajeswari Rajoar	55	Female	SC	Illiterate
	Chaina Roy	40	Female	SC	Illiterate
	Santi Biswas	38	Female	SC	Illiterate
	Paschim Midnapore	Gouri Kundu	58	Female	General
Laxmi Kisku		27	Female	ST	Eight pass
Sabita Kundu		25	Female	General	10 th pass

² Names of respondents are being revealed after getting their explicit consent.

			e		
	Santilota soren	42	Female	ST	Eight pass
	Sita Mandi	32	Female	ST	Eight pass
South 24 Parganas	Debjani bag	49	Female	SC	Class 7
	Jayanti Khamaru	30	Female	SC	illiterate
	Purnima Mistri	42	Female	SC	Class 7
	Samila Naiya	47	Female	Muslim OBC(A)	illiterate
North 24 Parganas	Ameena Bibi	60	Female	Muslim OBC(A)	illiterate
	Droupodi sardar	60	Female	ST	illiterate
	Jahanara BIbi	50	Female	Muslim OBC(A)	illiterate
	Sudharani Sardar	70	Female	ST	illiterate

Focus Group Discussions : Basic Information

District	Village	Number of Women	Caste and Religion
South 24 Parganas	Narayanpur	8	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Damkal	9	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Raidighi Baidyapara	9	Muslim
	Taranagar	7	Hindu with mixed caste groups
Paschim Midnapore	Sabraping	6	Adivasi group
	Bhurungi	5	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Sautiya Uttar Para	7	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Sautiya Adivasipara	9	Adivasi group
Nadia	Gachapukur Para	9	Scheduled Caste
	Naupara	9	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Dogacchia Sardarpara	11	Adivasi group
North 24 Parganas	Khaddakulberia		
	Bagda	10	Scheduled Caste
	Asaru	9	Adivasi group
	Pifa Raghampur	10	Scheduled Caste and Adivasi group

	Kholapota	11	Hindu with mixed caste groups
	Total	129	

Survey Respondents : Basic Information

1. Marital Status

District	Paschim Midnapore	South 24 Parganas	North 24 Parganas	Nadia	
Village	Chakismailpur	Jota	Raghabpur	Bahadurpur	Total
Married	142	150	128	141	561
Unmarried	0	8	17	25	50
Separated	0	0	1	7	8
Widow	9	23	36	1	69
Abandoned	0	3	0	1	4
Total	151	184	182	175	692

2. Age

District	Paschim Midnapore	South 24 Parganas	North 24 Parganas	Nadia	Total
Village	Chakismailpur	Jota	Raghabpur	Bahadurpur	
Less than 15	0	0	0	0	0
15-20	12	7	4	7	30
20-30	48	59	53	49	209
30-40	45	48	52	48	193
40-50	31	37	37	37	142
50-60	15	31	32	31	109
<60	0	2	4	3	9
Total	151	184	182	175	692

3. Education

District	Paschim Midnapore	South 24 Parganas	North 24 Parganas	Nadia	Total
Village	Chakismailpur	Jota	Raghabpur	Bahadurpur	
Illiterate	102	134	149	92	477
Class 1 to 5	20	20	16	9	65
Class 5 to 8	11	19	10	33	73
Class 10 pass	5	0	1	25	31
Class 12 pass	1	1	0	8	10
Graduate	12	10	6	8	36
More than	0	0	0	0	0

Graduation					
Total	151	184	182	175	692

4. Caste and Religion

District	Paschim Midnapore	South 24 Parganas	North 24 Parganas	Nadia	Total
Village	Chakismailpur	Jota	Raghabpur	Bahadurpur	
General	12	64	2	19	97
SC	66	34	73	106	279
ST	43	33	95	28	199
Hindu OBC	0	20	0	3	23
Muslim OBC	30	33	12	19	94
total	151	184	182	175	692

3. WOMEN'S WORK AND ITS VALUE

A good understanding of the situation and the reality within which a working women lives would help us to understand the policies that would aid her in the best manner possible. It, therefore, becomes very important for us to understand how she spends her time and the returns she gets for all the labour she puts in. In this chapter we discuss the amount of time rural women spend on paid work, and unpaid work for the home or family enterprise. We take a closer look at the earnings of rural working women from various kinds of paid work.

3.1 Sources of Data and Its Limitations

Unpaid work (*ghorer kaaj/ baarer kaaj/ sonsarer kaaj*) is defined by the women as work for which they do not receive a monetary payment. Women, therefore, include in this the work of cooking, cleaning, and other kinds of housework as well as the work of caring for family members. Also included is work which is remunerative and brings cash income for the family, but for which they individually do not receive a cash payment. This would include labour on the family farm or enterprise, working with livestock, processing food (parboiling of paddy, making puffed rice etc.), gathering of food, and fishing.

The information presented here was gathered by talking to the women and by making them recall their experiences. The women gave estimates of time used in various activities. No direct measurement by actual observation of the way in which they were using their time was done. So, the information we are giving here is their perspective of how they use their time,

rather than actual measurement based data of their time use. Such information has its own limitations.

The data was collected during detailed case studies, survey with about 692 respondents in 4 villages in 4 districts, and during focus group discussions as described in Methods. During the cases studies, we were able to obtain a fairly detailed recollection with 24 women about the time they spent in housework. Amongst these 24 women, 6 were older women, over 50 years in age, who were also able to give us the manner in which their involvement in housework had changed over time, with their involvement in paid work, and with change in their family composition. During the survey, women answered questions about the amount of time they spent on unpaid work and paid work and on their earnings. In five of the focus group discussions, the issue of the time spent in housework was discussed in detail.

3.2 Hours of Paid Work and Earnings

Of the 387 women, who reported during the survey that they were involved in paid work, the maximum (161) reported working for 8 to 10 hours a day as shown in Figure 1. In fact, about 72% report that they work for 6 to 10 hours on a day when they got paid work.

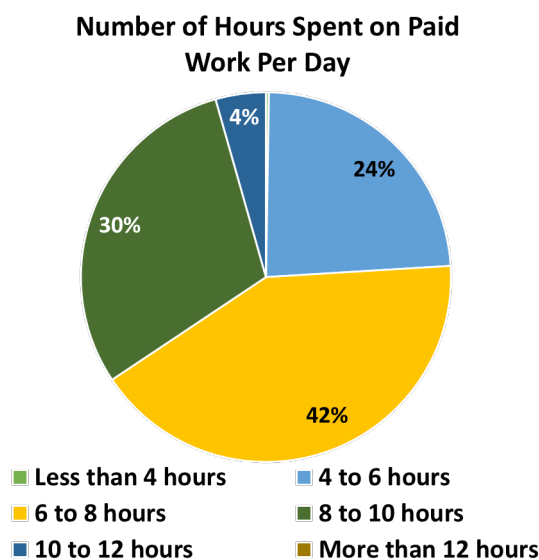


Figure 1: Number of hours women spend on paid work per day as reported by respondents of the survey. The survey had 692 respondents of which 387 women did paid work.

The earnings of the women respondents who did paid work, however, were meagre as shown in Figure 2. 261 women or 67% women reported earning less than Rs.1000 per month. In fact if we were to include the next category, 92% women earn less than Rs.3000 per month. Using the well accepted 15th Indian Labour Commission and Supreme Court orders, the Seventh Pay Commission has in 2017 declared that the minimum wage for survival of a family is Rs.18000 per month. 92% women are thus earning 1/6th or even less of the amount needed for minimum survival.

Earnings (Rupees per Month) from Paid Work

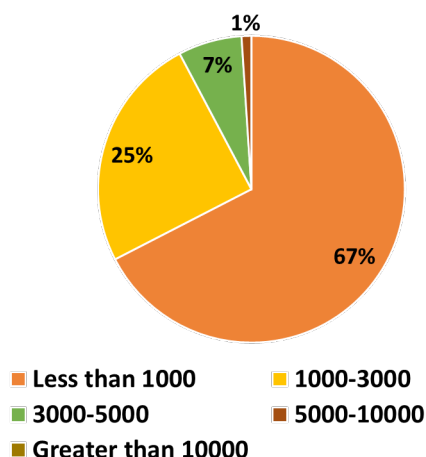


Figure 2: Earnings per month in rupees of women from paid work from a survey of 692 women of which 387 women are involved in paid work

This matches with figures received during the focus group discussions where the average of the incomes reported by the 129 women was Rs.1341 per month.

In the case studies, where we have information on the incomes of 22 women (Figure 3), the average income was about Rs.1640 per month.

Earnings from Paid Work for Women Interviewed in Case Studies

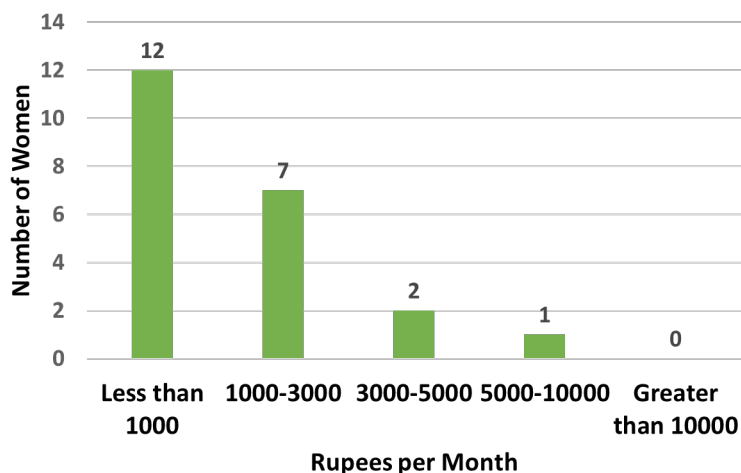


Figure 3: Earnings per month in rupees of women from paid work of women interviewed for the case studies.

Details of the occupations and earnings of the individuals interviewed in our case studies are given in Table 1. The income ranged from Rs.500 per month (in the case of Sudha Sardar, who was now too old to do a lot of manual work) to Rs.6800 per month, which was the income of a single mother (Sita Mandi) who had to work all alone to keep her family of 4 going. For Sita Mandi, not working meant starvation for her and her daughters, so she worked

on all kinds of manual jobs, with very few days off or rest. Her comparatively high income was, therefore, indicative of her desperation, rather than of having a comparatively better job.

We found in the case studies that women in one district – Paschim Midnapore (marked in bold in Table 1) - had higher incomes, a reflection of the fact that the particular area (Dantan) they come from is an agriculturally developed area with 2-3 crops per year and with a huge labour shortage, as most men have migrated to other parts of the country.

Women in the case studies who said they were daily labour earned about 700-1000 rupees per month. However, women who went in for activities other than manual labour had better incomes. For example, two of the women in the case studies (Shamsun Nahar and Ferdousi Biwi) went door to door to sell new and second-hand clothes in the villages. Two had small businesses of selling “tele bhaja” (Fritters). One was involved in making puffed rice. One was involved in vegetable farming. The one with the steadiest income was an ICDS worker, with an assured income of Rs.3350 per month.

Table 1: Occupations and Earnings reported by Women Interviewed for the Case Studies.

Name of Woman	Types Of Paid Work	Income (Rs. per month)
Samsun Nahar	1.Business Of 2 nd Hand Clothes	3000
	2.Agriculture	
Ferdousi Bibi	1.Business Of 2 nd Hand Clothes	1800
	2. NREGA	
Basana Halidar	1. Televaja (Fritters) Shop	2000
	2.NREGA	
	3. Business Of Paddy And Rice	
Nyantara Sardar	1.NREGA	800
	2.Daily Labour	
Bharoti Rajoyar	1.NREGA	700
	2.Daily Labour	
Rajeswari Rajoar	1.NREGA	800
	2.Daily Labour	
Chaina Roy	1.NREGA	1500
	2.Handloom	
Santi Biswas	1.NREGA	1000
	2.Handloom	
Gouri Kundu	1. Making Puffed Rice	3500
Sabita Kundu	1.Tele Bhaja Shop	2750
	2. MDM Cook	
Santilata Soren	1.ICDS Worker	3350
Sita Mandi	1.Brick Kiln Worker	6800
	2.Daily Labour	
	3. Sand Mining Worker	
	4. Agricultural Worker	
Lachmi Kisku	1.Tailoring	2700
	2. Brick Kiln Worker	

	3. Daily Labour	
	4. MDM Cook	
Jayanti Khamaru	1.NREGA	1000
	2.Daily Labour	
Samila Naiya	1.Daily Labour	800
	2.Rice Mill Labourer	
	3.NREGA	
Debjani Bag	1.Daily Labour	2000
	2.Vegetable Cultivation	
	3.NREGA	
Purnima Mistri	1.Daily Labour	700
	2.MDM Cook	
Ameena Biwi	1.Biri Roller	1000
Drapaudi Sardar	1.Daily Labour	1000
Jahanara Biwi	1.Daily Labour	700
Sudha Sardar	1.Daily Labour	500

The Government turned out to be as exploitative as any other employer. Women reported earning Rs.300 to 450 as midday meal cooks, where they shared the earnings with other members of self-help groups and where they got work sometimes for only 4-5 months in the year.

3.3 Unpaid Work

Of the 692 women in our survey, 387 said they were in paid work, while 305 women said they were not involved in paid work.

Women who were not involved in paid work gave the following figures as the time they spent in unpaid work. As can be seen from Figure 4 below, 78% of the women (237 out of 305) spent 8 to 16 hours on this work. The legally accepted norm is of an 8 hour working day. Hence, the unpaid housework of women took the equivalent of a full working day (8 hours) or double the legally accepted working day (16 hours) for a fully employed person.

187 women or 61% said they were involved in their family farms, while 19 or 6% were involved in their family's business as unpaid workers. Despite the fact that these women reported that they did no paid work, about 23% reported that they had no time to rest during the day.

The 387 women who were surveyed and who were in paid work gave the following information about the time they spent on housework. The largest groups of 137 women (35%) and 111 women (29%) reported spending 6 to 8 hours and 4 to 6 hours respectively on housework as shown in Figure 5. **It is worth noting here that 64% of the total women who do paid work spend somewhere between 4 to 8 hours on unpaid housework while 78% of the women who are not in paid work report spending 8 to 16 hours per day on unpaid work.**

Number of Hours Spent on Housework by Women not Doing Paid Work

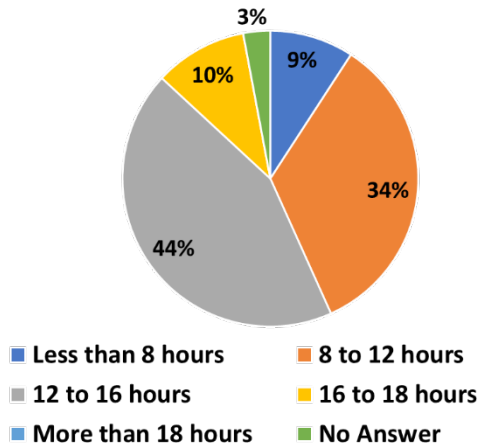


Figure 4: Number of hours per day spent on unpaid housework by women survey respondents who do not do paid work. The survey had 692 respondents of whom 305 did not do paid work

Number of Hours Spent on Housework by Women Doing Paid Work

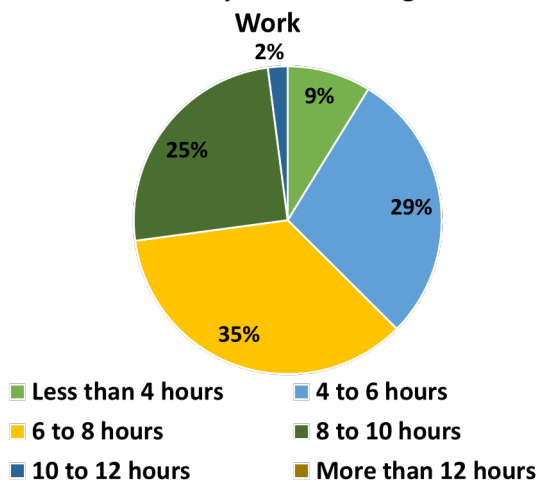


Figure 5: Number of hours per day spent on unpaid housework by women survey respondents who are involved in paid work. The survey had 692 respondents of whom 387 did paid work.

3.4 What Does Unpaid Housework Involve?

From the case studies it emerged that women spent an average of 8 hours 15 minutes in doing housework (Figure 6). The time varied considerably, however, depending on factors such as family size, how much help the woman had, what kind of facilities were available nearby. Thus, the time varied from 2.3 hours in the case of Debjani Bag who now had a daughter in law to help, to 13.5 hours for Gouri Kundu, who in her prime, had to manage her family and children, fetch water, collect fuel, and, also, do all the cooking and cleaning in the house (Table 8 in Annexure I). Women in Paschim Midnapore had tubewells very near the house or

sometimes even within the house, hence the average time they spent on fetching water was 10 minutes. Many women, on the other hand, especially in the Sunderbans spent 1-2 hours to fetch water for the household.

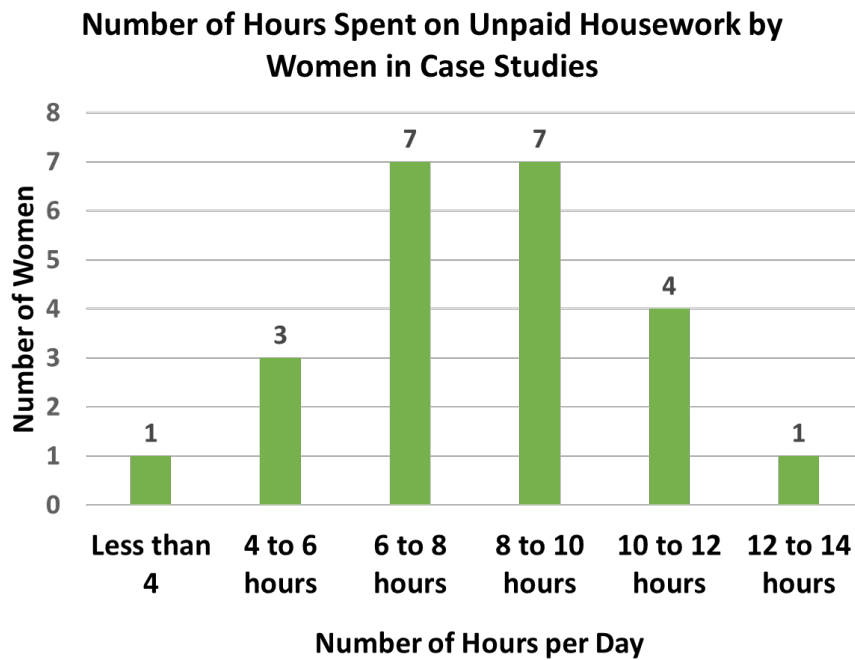


Figure 6: Number of hours per day spent on unpaid housework by women interviewed for case studies.

The tasks involved in everyday housework are given below in Table 2 along with the average time spent on them by the woman in the case studies who reported doing a particular task every day. Many tasks that are, however, performed by women daily such as collecting firewood, cleaning round the house or shopping for food, were done by other women on a weekly basis or two/three times a week.

Fetching water, collecting fuel and making cow dung cakes seem to be three tasks that could easily be reduced if there was better infrastructure in the villages, in the form of tube wells or safe drinking water sources for every family, firewood trees or bushes nearby etc. But this does not mean we are suggesting gas cylinders for all women, as this would mean dependence on a fuel over whose prices and availability women would have no control.

Considering the huge amount of time spent on preparing food for cooking, cooking itself, shopping for food and washing utensils, community or shared systems for cooking seem a good idea. Similarly, cleaning of the house also takes time and social sharing of this task would also be good for women.

Another surprising thing that emerges from this table is the small amount of time these women get to spend in caring for their children – barely an hour a day when many of them have two or more children. Equally surprising is the fact that they have to spend almost the same amount of time on taking care of their husbands- not because he is an invalid or helpless. This is a demand he places on his wife, which she cannot refuse.

The little time that is spent in child care as compared to middle class families, where women spend a large amount of their time looking after their children's physical as well as educational needs, means that these children who are anyway from disadvantaged backgrounds and who do not have access to good schools continue to be educated in substandard manners and the cycle of poverty remains unbroken.

The impact of having a sick person in the family was very evident from Purnima Mistry's case. She spends three hours every day taking care of her disabled son.

Table 2: Tasks involved in everyday housework along with the average time spent on them by the woman in the case studies who reported doing a particular task every day

Housework	number reporting	average time in minutes
Cleaning and Maintaining Home		
Cleaning the home (sweeping, washing the floors, dusting, putting things away)	22	62
Cleaning around the home	2	24
Tending mud floors to keep out dust	15	38
Making beds, hanging and taking down mosquito nets	21	13
Laundry and Cleaning		
Hand-washing clothes; hanging clothes out to dry	21	36
Ironing, folding, and putting clothes away	10	12
Cooking, Dishes, and Grocery Shopping		
Preparing food for cooking: cleaning rice, preparing fish, cutting vegetables etc.	22	53
Washing dishes	21	60
Cooking	20	80
Shopping for food	7	34
Gathering Fuel for Cooking and Lighting		
Tending to and lighting lamps	7	28
Collecting firewood or other materials for fuel	3	90
Making fuel from cow dung	9	28
Childcare		
Teaching children, helping with homework	2	60
Taking children to and from school	1	15
Caring for children (bathing, dressing, tending)	15	65
Household Management		
Supervising household and farm help	6	28
Managing the household (organizing activities and expenses)	1	60
Other Household Tasks		
Carrying water	18	45

Caring for sick	6	78
Taking care of husband	11	62
TOTAL	23	495

The percentage break up of the total amount of time spent on each task by all 23 women is shown in Figure 7.

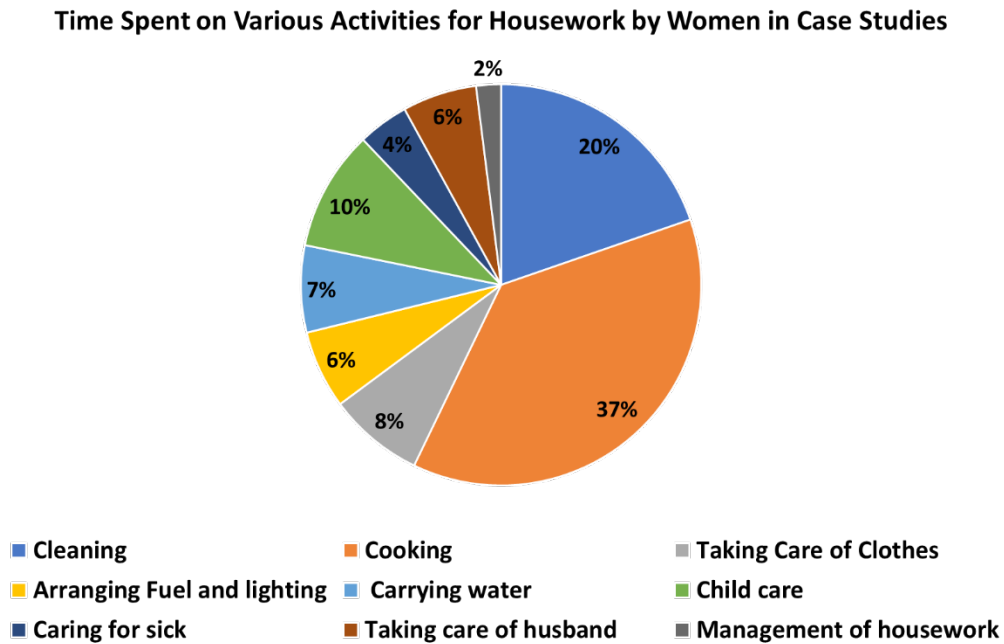


Figure 7: Time spent on various activities in unpaid housework by women interviewed in the case studies. The numbers depicted in the figure are the percentage of the total time spent by all 23 women on each task.

3.5 Patriarchy and the Inevitable Task of Unpaid Work

The natural assumption would be that starting paid work reduce unpaid housework. The survey data supports this. Women who have gone into paid work find that they spend less time for housework. From our survey, as described before, we found that about 73% of women who do paid work outside the home spend less than 8 hours on unpaid housework while only 9% of women with no paid work spend less than 8 hours. Six women during the case studies gave us details of how this involvement had changed for them.

Table 3: Time spent on housework by women interviewed in case studies before and after they started paid work.

Name of woman	Before paid work (hours)	After paid work (hours)
Purnima Mistri	10	7.75
Debjani Bag	16.3	2.25
Jahanara Biwi	11.27	10.75
Sudharani Sardar	8.17	5.76
Draupadi Sardar	10.01	6.06
Amina Biwi	8.97	7.15

However, housework continues to be the woman’s responsibility, no matter what she does. During the FGDs, a group of Adivasi women informed us that they had started paid work when they were 12 years old. They could not remember a time when they had not done housework and they had always done housework along with their paid work.

A common voice that came out from all the case studies and FGDs was that in very few households did men help with the housework. Many women who received help reported that the help was given by men as and when the men pleased, making it not very useful. So, women did not count on it.

In fact, on the other hand, men expected women to serve them, as is obvious from the fact that women spend at least an hour a day (Table 2 and Figure 7) on looking after the needs of their husbands – equivalent to the amount of time they spend in their busy schedules on their two or more children.

In fact, some of the women reported active resistance from men, forget help, if they failed to do any task which was part of their housework. Members of FGD 3 from a Muslim community in South 24 Parganas told us;

“Men want their work done, no matter whether a woman is in paid work or not. Often, there are fights at home because women after work are not able to get meals ready in time.”

Reflecting a typically mixed (but veering on the progressive) attitude towards women’s unpaid work within the household, a Block level political leader from the ruling party in Nadia district informed us that, *“As per social norms, household chores are usually done by women. This trend has to change and men should also come forward and share the responsibility.”* When asked further whether women should be paid for this work, he replied, *“No they should not, because household work gives the basic sense of responsibility to women. Such work is normal for women.”* When he was further asked if this unpaid

household work has any social value, he agreed that this work is important but in our society there is no consciousness about it. “*And this is the main problem*”, he concluded.

3.6 How Women Cope

House work, the women we studied find, is not something that they can stop or reduce drastically, get rid off or get help with easily. They complained that certain tasks – preparing food, cooking, washing utensils, sweeping the house, making beds etc. – have to be done every day, no matter what the load of their paid work is.

FGD 2, a group of women from various Hindu castes in South 24 Parganas informed us;

“Before starting work, the whole day was spent in housework. The reason is there is a chain system in which domestic work has to be done – one task comes after the other almost automatically- it is difficult to reduce time spent on it. We spent about 14 hours on housework before paid work

After starting paid work, the time spent in house work has lessened, but the work is no less. The time spent on rest and sleep has come down. We can spend only 5-6 hours on housework after taking up paid work. We have to finish all the work in this time.”

This means that women work with greater speed and greater stress to get tasks completed in time. The same experience was echoed in many case studies and FGDs.

Women also take up other strategies to cope with these increased demands on their time. Many of them start doing things that they used to do every day only some days of the week. This we found to be especially true of tasks like collecting fuel wood or cleaning around the house.

In other cases, tasks are handed over to other women in the family. A number of the case studies we did were of women who were now aging and were over 50. Many of them had handed over much of the household work to daughters in law. In the case of Sita Mandi, a single mother, her daughters helped.

3.7 Impact of Development On Hours of Work

From the survey data, we received the following results, which are not entirely consistent with the general idea that women’s work load increases when they get into paid work as shown in Figure 8.

In the case of Chakismailpur and Jota (Figure 9 and 10), the results showed that women’s days became longer after they joined paid work. On the other hand, for Bahadurpur and Raghampur (Figure 11 and 12), we find a different trend – women’s working days have become shorter after joining paid work. A possible explanation is that farm lands in Bahadurpur were taken over forcibly by the Forest Department in 2005. This has resulted in women being forced to leave their own farms, where they were part of family labor. They have become wage labour instead, but this has needed less time input than they had to put into their own farms. In the case of Raghampur, the change has been more subtle and long

term. There has been a gradual growth of prawn fisheries in the area, with agricultural land being converted to saline water fisheries. This has again led to displacement of women from their own farms (which are now leased out to fishery owners) and their turning to wage labour, which has required less time input compared to work in their own farms. At the same time, this area has also seen the gradual waning of livestock keeping, with no grazing grounds left. This again has led to a reduction in women's labour.

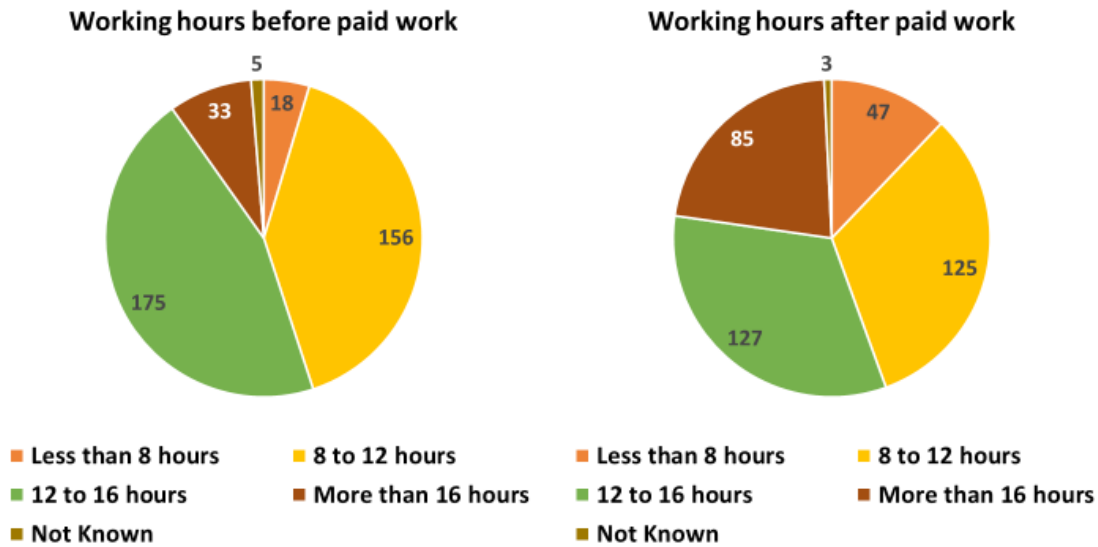


Figure 8: Working hours per day for women before and after involvement in paid work from the survey of 692 respondents. In the survey 387 women of 692 reported involvement in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure are the numbers of women in each category.

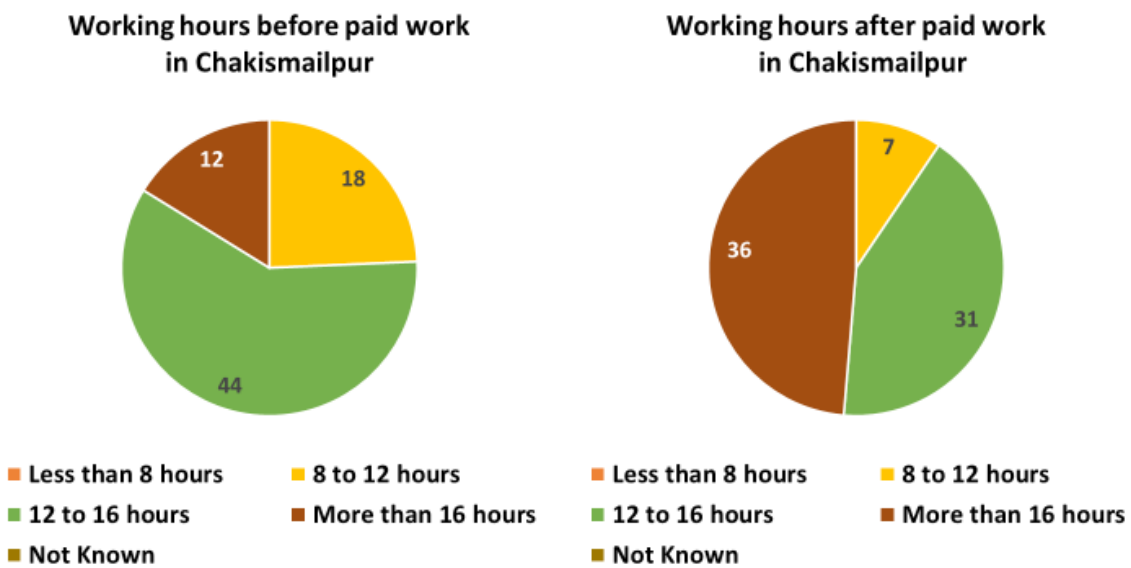


Figure 9: Working hours per day for women before and after involvement in paid work from the survey of respondents in Chakismailpur (151 respondents). In the survey, 74 women from

Chakismailpur reported involvement in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure are the numbers of women in each category.

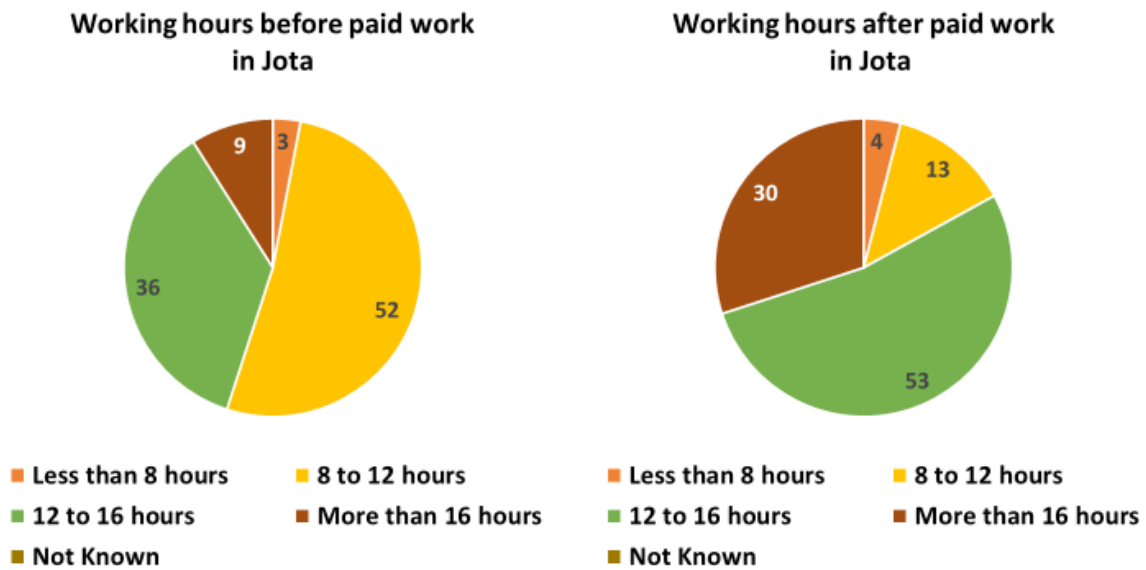


Figure 10: Working hours per day for women before and after involvement in paid work from the survey of respondents in Jota (184 respondents). In the survey, 100 women from Jota reported involvement in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure are the numbers of women in each category.

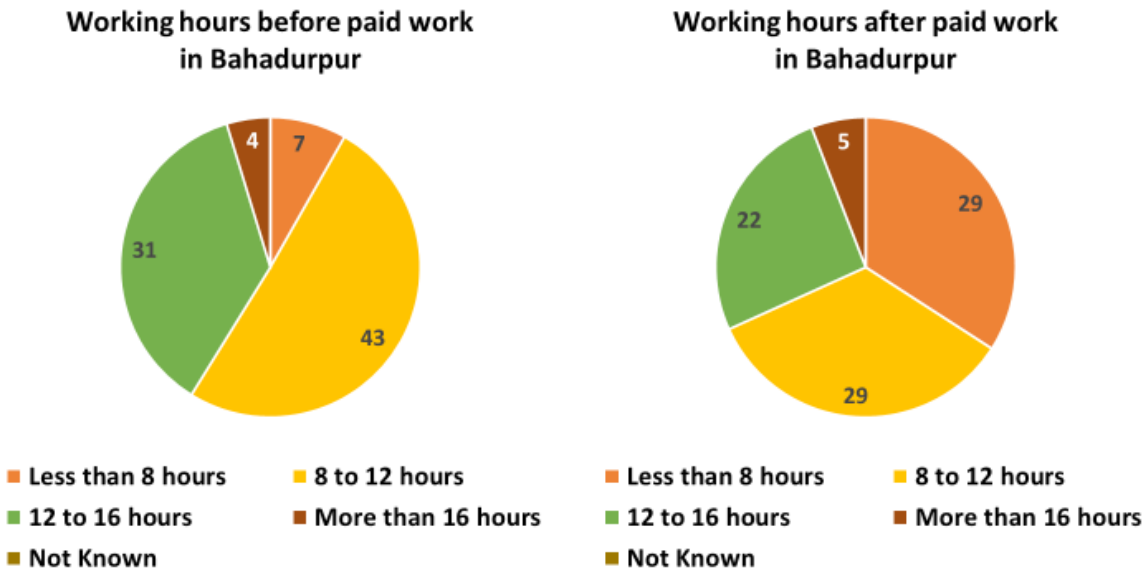
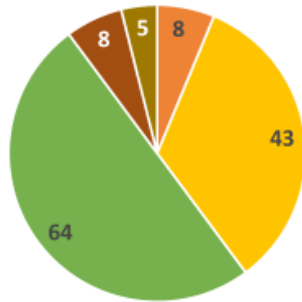
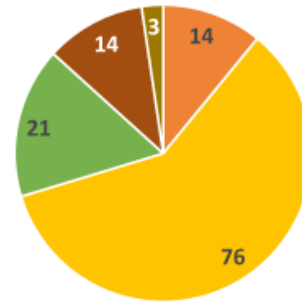


Figure 11: Working hours per day for women before and after involvement in paid work from the survey of respondents in Bahadurpur (182 respondents). In the survey 128 from Bahadurpur reported involvement in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure are the numbers of women in each category.

**Working hours before paid work
in Raghampur**



**Working hours after paid work
in Raghampur**



- | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Less than 8 hours | ■ 8 to 12 hours | ■ Less than 8 hours | ■ 8 to 12 hours |
| ■ 12 to 16 hours | ■ More than 16 hours | ■ 12 to 16 hours | ■ More than 16 hours |
| ■ Not Known | | ■ Not Known | |

Figure 12: Working hours per day for women before and after involvement in paid work from the survey of respondents in Raghampur (175 respondents). In the survey, 85 women from Raghampur reported involvement in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure are the numbers of women in each category.

3.8 Valuation of Unpaid Work

From the case studies, we have found that women spend 8.25 hours on the average on unpaid work (Figure 6 and Table 8 in Annexure I). From the survey, we have found that 78% of the women who were not in work reported spending 8 to 16 hours on unpaid work (Figure 4), while 64% of women who were in paid work reported spending 4 to 8 hours on unpaid work (Figure 5). Women in the FGDs generally gave the figure as 5 to 6 hours when they were in paid work.

Just to give an idea of the amount of work that is being under-valued, if we were to take the prevalent market wage for daily labour as the wage for 8 hours of unpaid work, when women spend 4 hours a day on unpaid work, we could say she is adding 50% of the daily wage to her husband's earnings. When she works for 16 hours on unpaid work, she is in fact adding on 200% to her husband's earnings. This shows us the extent to which her inputs are being undervalued.

3.9 Conclusions

Looking at the labour that women put in on a day to day basis and their earnings shows the stark deprivation within which they live. Our survey has shown that the largest number of women reported working for 6 to 8 hours a day, while if we were to take two categories (6 to 8 hours and 8 to 10 hours) 72% women were putting in this kind of time into their work day.

However earnings were meagre, with the maximum number (67%) saying that they earned less than Rs.1000 per day. The FGDs gave similar figures with the average income of the women being Rs.1391. The case studies gave richer details, but here also we found most women saying they earned between Rs.700 and 1000 per month. There were a few

exceptions, and these were of women who were in an agriculturally developed area and /or who were in small businesses, rather than casual labour.

Low earnings with wages/earnings ranging from Rs. 70 per day (for vegetable picking) to Rs.360 per day (for working in a brick field) was as much a function of non-availability of work as it was of low wages.

The Government was equally exploitative with MDM cooks receiving Rs.300 to Rs.450 per day and that too not for the whole year.

A woman with strikingly high earnings of Rs.6800 per month was more an example of the struggle of a single woman to keep her family from starvation rather than of good earnings, as she worked at all jobs for long hours to earn this amount.

All women, whether they were in paid work or not, had to take responsibility for unpaid housework. 77% of the women who were not in paid work (237 out of 305) spent 8 to 16 hours on this work. This is equivalent to a full legally accepted 8 hours working day or double the legally accepted working day of 8 hours for a fully employed person. A large number of these women (61%) worked on their family farms, thus adding to their family incomes.

Women in paid work spent less time on unpaid work- 4 to 8 hours for 77% of these women. Women in paid work in the FGDs reported spending 5-6 hours on unpaid work, while in the case studies we found women spending an average of 8.25 hours on unpaid housework.

Despite this huge amount of time spent on unpaid work, ranging from 4 hours to 16 hours, many women themselves consider this work as “nothing” (*kichhu nei*). If it was properly valued, the value of this work would range from half a male worker’s wage to double his wage.

A proper valuation and acknowledgement of this work would also lead to much more importance being given to policies and programmes supportive of women such as having a safe water source next to every woman’s house, planting of fast-growing trees that can provide firewood, setting up crèches etc.

In the all-encompassing embrace of patriarchy, housework was always the woman’s responsibility. The fact that she takes on paid work in addition does not lessen this burden. Instead, she must work with greater speed and under greater stress to complete both her paid tasks and her housework. Women complained of not just non-cooperation from the men, but even of anger if tasks were not completed in time. Women coped better if there were other women (daughter in laws and daughters) to help. Daily tasks were often converted into weekly tasks on days when women worked for longer hours to complete tasks (such as collection of fuel, cleaning around the house etc.) that they had not had time to do due to the time taken by paid work.

A telling comment on patriarchy was the fact that women spent an hour a day caring for their husbands and spent an equivalent amount of time on the care of their children. This would only perpetuate the cycle of poverty where neglect of children (combined with poor educational facilities) would lead to the continuing disparities.

The study also brought out some hints on how “development” affects women’s work. Women who were displaced from family farms by forcible eviction or by the takeover of paddy fields by prawn fisheries found that their working day shortened when they moved from working on their farms to being wage labour. They did not however see this as an improvement in their lifestyles and regretted losing their land.

4. NATURE AND TIMING OF PAID WORK

Our initial reading has shown us that women all over India seem to be getting out of the labour force, with female labour force participation rates falling. West Bengal was an exception however, with more and more women joining the labour force. In this chapter, we try to understand this phenomenon. We examine whether women in the micro data that we have are actually joining paid work, and if so the kinds of work that they are taking up. We also look briefly at some Government programmes that could be encouraging this trend.

4.1 Increasing feminisation of the work force

A common strand that ran through many of the FGDs and interviews with employers in rural communities and political leaders in our study region was that more and more women were coming into paid work. Men were migrating to other districts, states and even countries in search of better wages and women were filling the gap in the rural work force.

A rich farmer from Nadia told us during an interview that he had been employing agricultural workers for the last 30 years and, at present, employed 40 to 50 women from the tribal community. Initially, the number of male workers were much higher, but gradually with time the male workers kept migrating, and he had to hire female workers in their place.

A prawn fishery owner in North 24 Parganas who had been involved in this activity for almost 38 years, had a large fishery of 60 bighas (20 acres) which he said appoints about 400 female workers throughout the year. He observed, during an interview, that in the early years there were very few women workers, but now the number has increased.

From South 24 Parganas, a rice mill owner informed us that “*working in a rice mill is considered a male profession by society, but eventually the idea has changed due to poverty in this locality. So, the number of female workers increased.*”. He had built this mill 15 years back, but women workers have been coming to ask for work only in the past five to six years. He was surprised, at first, but gradually, the number of women had increased. At present, 10 female and 6 male workers work in his rice mill.

A political leader from Nadia informed us that in the last 10 years, the tendency to participate in paid work had notably increased amongst women.

The survey data confirms this increasing trend in the past decade. About one fourth of the 387 women respondents (92 or 24%) who were in paid work had got into paid work in less than 5 years, and nearly half (191 or 50%) had started paid work in 10 years or less, as shown in Figure 13.

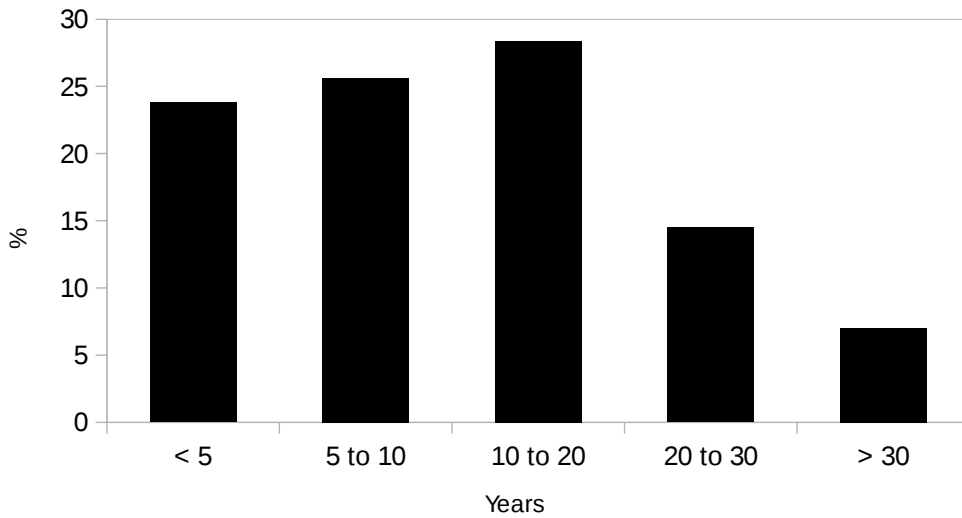


Figure 13:

Number of years of involvement in paid work for survey respondents. The survey had 692 respondents of which 387 were involved in paid work

223 of the 387 women respondents who were in paid work were in the prime working age group of 20 years to 40 years. 135 or 60% of them had started paid work in the last 10 years or less.

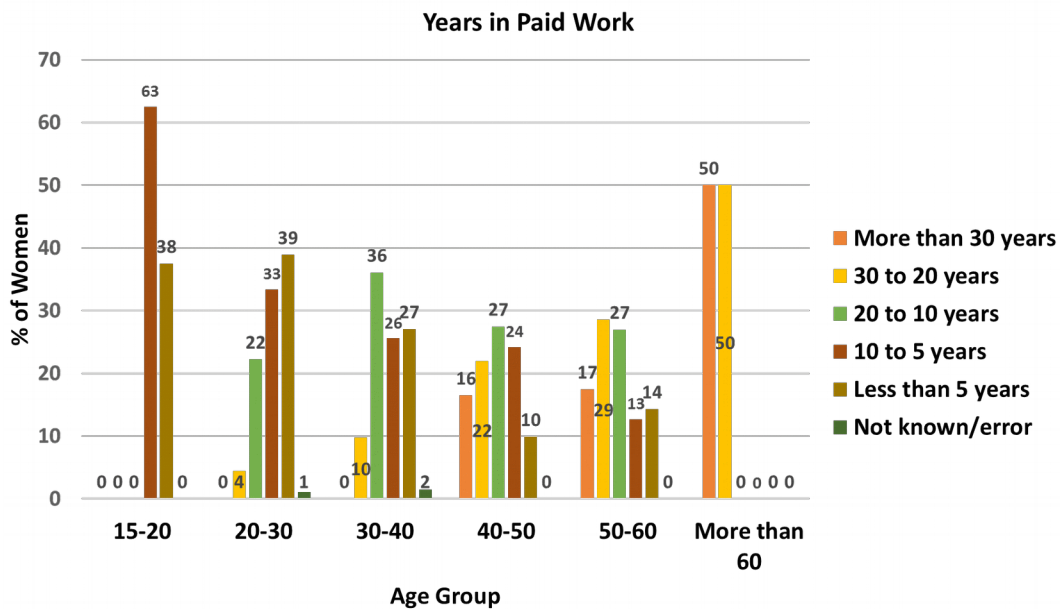


Figure 14: Number of years of involvement in paid work for women of different age groups. The results are from the survey of 692 respondents of which 387 were involved in paid work. The numbers shown in the graph are percentage of women in that particular age group who have been paid work for the stated number of years.

4.2 Occupations

Figure 15 depicts the range of occupations of the women we surveyed. The data shown here is of the occupations reported by the 387 women who were in paid work in our survey of 692 women in 4 different districts.

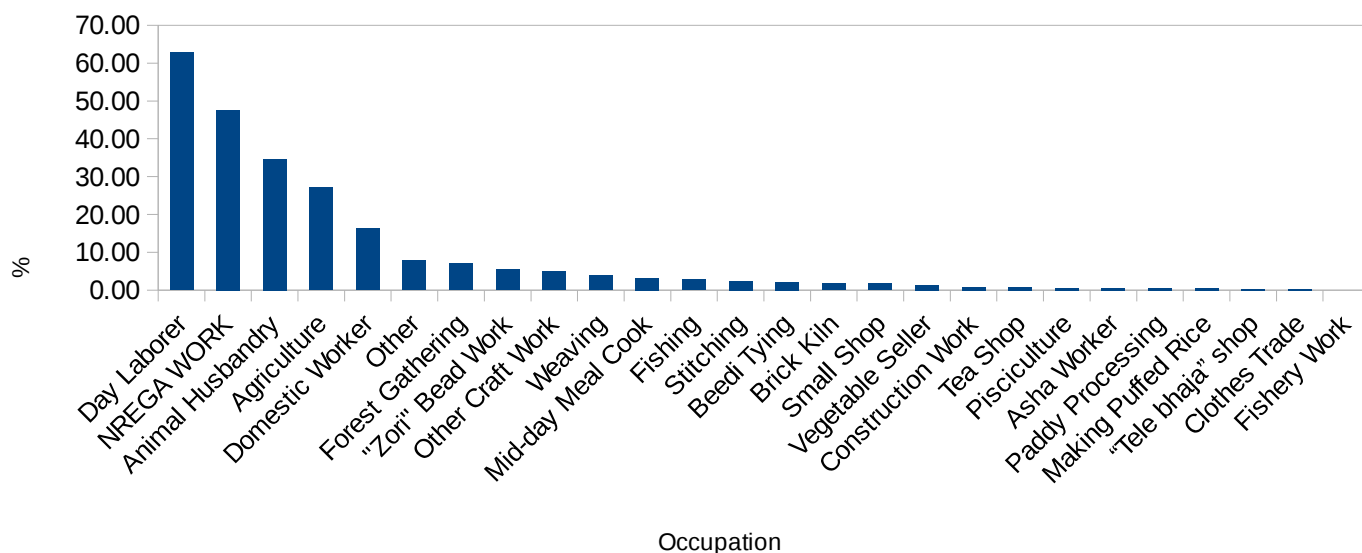


Figure 15: Present occupations of women in survey. Handicrafts involves Zori Bead work, weaving, other craft work, stitching etc. Small Business includes Tea shop, teler bhaja (fritters) shop, small retail shop, vegetable seller, and clothes trade. The survey had 692 respondents of which 387 were in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure depict the number of women with that particular occupation. Although they were 387 respondents, the total number of occupation responses was 916, showing that the women were involved in, on an average, 2-3 occupations.

From the case studies, we found out of 22 women, 15 were involved in more than one paid activity (Table 4). Amongst all the occupations, similar to the proportions observed in the survey data in Figure 3, daily labour and NREGA were the most common with 10 women in the latter and 13 in the former.

Table 4: Occupations reported by Women Interviewed for the Case Studies.

Name of Woman	Types Of Paid Work
Samsun Nahar	1.Business Of 2 nd Hand Clothes
	2.Agriculture
Ferdousi Bibi	1.Business Of 2 nd Hand Clothes
	2. NREGA
Basana Haldar	1.Televaja (Fritters) Shop
	2.NREGA
	3. Business Of Paddy And Rice
Nyantara Sardar	1.NREGA
	2.Daily Labour

Bharoti Rajoyar	1.NREGA
	2.Daily Labour
Rajeswari Rajoar	1.NREGA
	2.Daily Labour
Chaina Roy	1.NREGA
	2.Handloom
Santi Biswas	1.NREGA
	2.Handloom
Gouri Kundu	1. Making Puffed Rice
Sabita Kundu	1.Tele Bhaja Shop
	2. MDM Cook
Santilata Soren	1.ICDS Worker
Sita Mandi	1.Brick Kiln Worker
	2.Daily Labour
	3. Sand Mining Worker
	4. Agricultural Worker
Lachmi Kisku	1.Tailoring
	2. Brick Kiln Worker
	3. Daily Labour
	4. MDM Cook
Jayanti Khamaru	1.NREGA
	2.Daily Labour
Samila Naiya	1.Daily Labour
	2.Rice Mill Labourer
	3.NREGA
Jahanara Biwi	Daily Labour
Debjani Bag	1.Daily Labour
	2.Vegetable Cultivation
	3.NREGA
Purnima Mistri	1.Daily Labour
	2.MDM Cook
Ameena Biwi	1.Biri Roller
Drapaudi Sardar	1.Daily Labour
Jahanara Biwi	1.Daily Labour
Sudha Sardar	1.Daily Labour

Amongst the 129 women who participated in 15 FGDs, 74 said they were involved in more than one occupation at present. Again, the most popular occupations were NREGA (72 women) and daily labour (61 women).

From interviews with political leaders, who were able to give generalised pictures of their areas, we got the following information shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Information on occupation and earnings of working women as well as availability of work in rural communities obtained from interviews of local political leaders.

	Participation of women workers	Income	Availability of work
NREGA	70%- 90%	180/-per day	30 - 40 days in a year
Day Wager	70-90%	200 to 220 per day	30 days in a year to 8 months in a year
Self-help groups	90%		
Cultivation	20%-90%	This is not profitable now. 10,000 to 12,000 per year in Nadia	3 months in a year
Livestock	20%	500- 5500/- per year	Whole year
Small Business	5%	1000-1500/-per month	Whole year
Domestic Worker	5%- 10%	1000 to 1500 per month	Whole year
ICDS	2-4%	3000/- per month	Whole year
Mid Day Meal Cook	2-4%	450-2000/- per month	2-6 months in a year
ASHA worker	2-5%	1000/- per month	Whole year
Jorir Kaj- Zari Embroidery	80% (only in South 24 Parganas)	1000/- per month	Whole year

According to these leaders, women who work are mostly working as daily labour and as NREGA workers. However, the amount of work they get in these two occupations or even in agriculture (which is the next most important activity according to them) is limited. Occupations that provide work throughout the year, such as small businesses, domestic work, or Government jobs like Midday Meal cook, ICDS worker or ASHA workers provide work for only a limited number of women.

It must be noted at this juncture that all the leaders felt that 90% of the women in their areas were members of self-help group, but were not able to say how much income or employment generation was done through them in these groups.

4.3 Change in Occupation

Out of 387 respondents in the survey, 270 or 70% had changed their occupations. Most (61%) of them had changed their occupation in the past 10 years.

Looking at the 4 villages separately brings out the impact of so called development and eviction clearly. Thus , in Bahdurpur, where eviction had taken place 12 years ago , 78% of the women had changed their occupations in the past 10 years and more than half or 51% only in the last 5 years. In Raghampur, where displacement from agriculture due to the expansion of prawn fisheries has taken place, 61% had changed their occupation in the past

10 years and 32% in the past five years. In Jota, where no such traumatic events had taken place, 51% (much below average) had changed occupation in the last 10 years and 26% in the last 5 years. The figures for Chakismailpur were 62% for change of occupation in the last 10 years and only 21% for the past 5 years.

Number of Years Since Change in Occupation

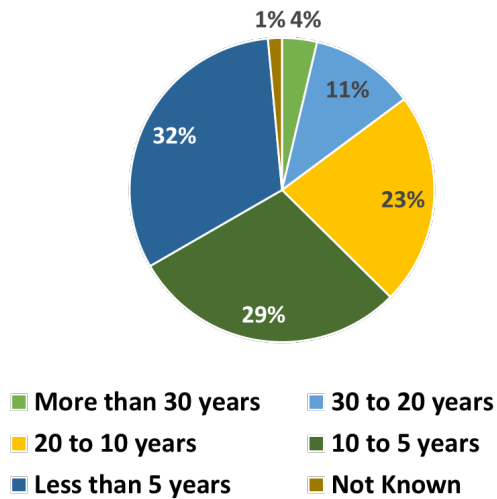


Figure 16: Number of years since change in occupation for women surveyed. Of 692 women respondents to the survey, 387 were involved in paid work. Of the 387, 270 women had changed their occupation since starting paid work.

Number of Years Since Change in Occupation

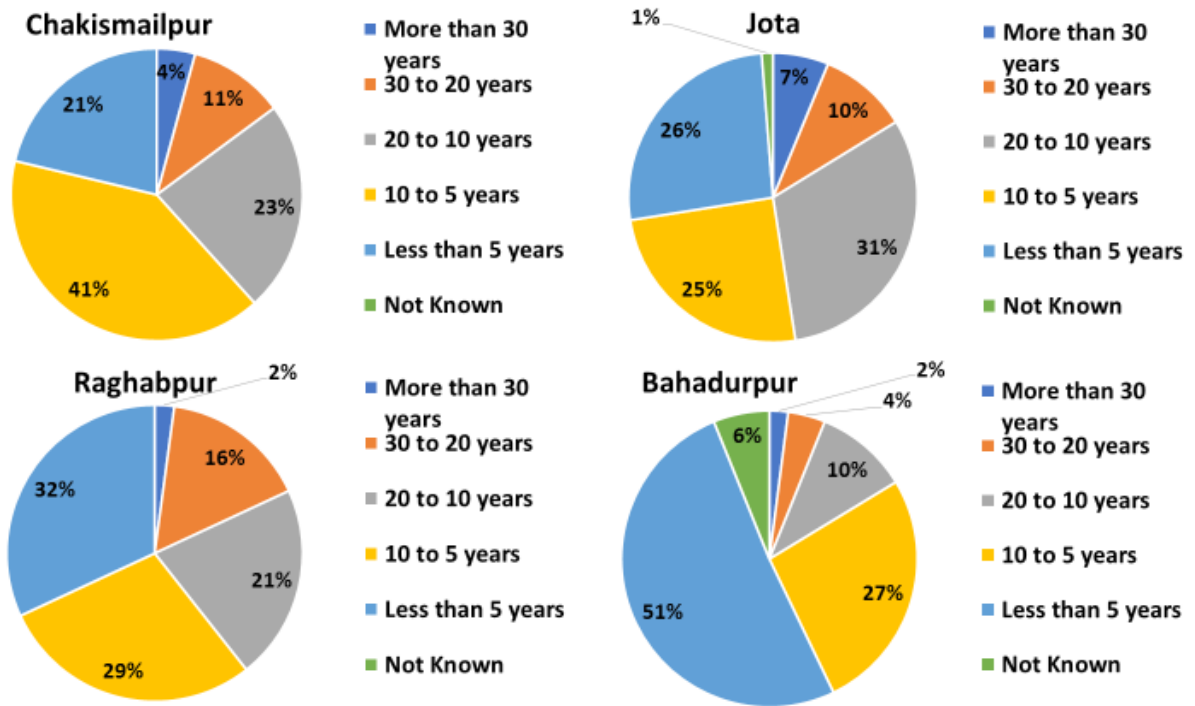


Figure 17: Number of years since change in occupation for women surveyed in the 4 different villages in 4 districts. Of 692 women respondents to the survey, 387 were involved in paid work. Of the 387, 270 women had changed their occupation since starting paid work.

Figure 18 shows the change in the rank of occupations, as assigned by the number of women reporting a particular occupation.

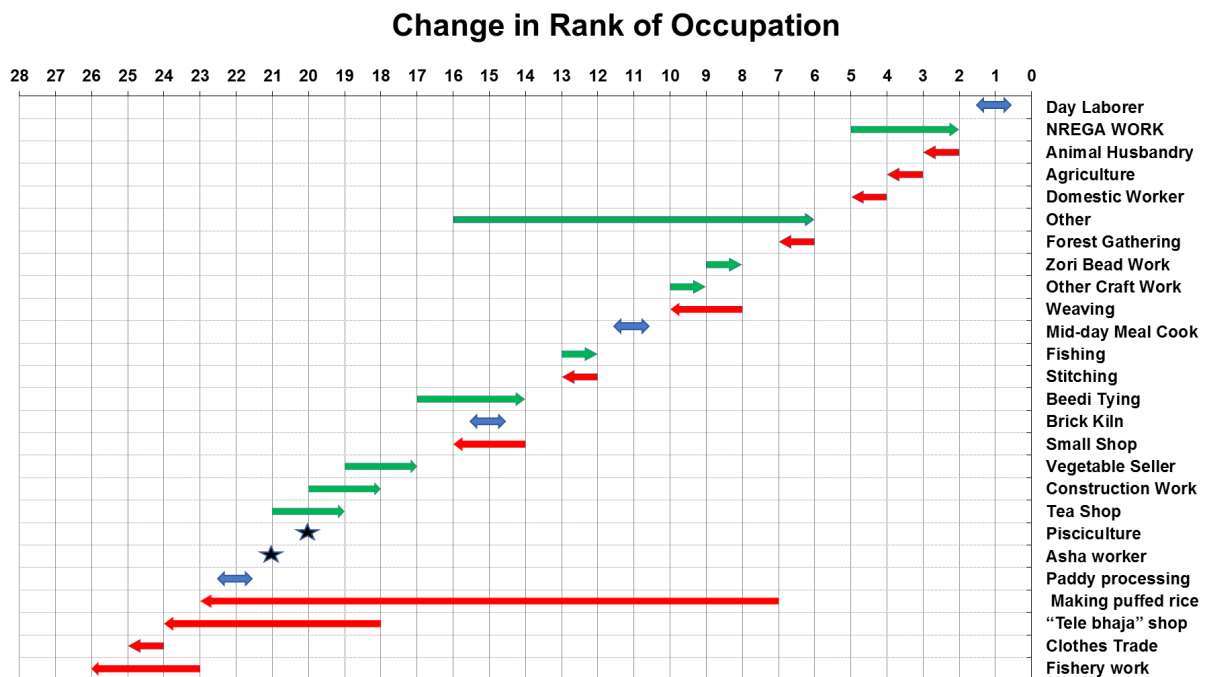


Figure 18: Change in rank of occupations of women in paid work in survey data. Occupations were ranked by the number of women reporting that occupation in the survey with 1 become the most common occupation and 26 being the least common. The survey had 692 respondents with 387 in paid work. 270 of 387 women in paid work reported changing their occupation since they began paid work. Green arrows indicate an improvement in rank and red arrows indicate a decline in rank. Blue arrows indicate that the rank of the occupation has remained the same. Stars indicate occupations that were not present in past occupations. The size of the arrow is proportional to the change in rank with the head of the arrow indicating present rank and the tail indicates past rank.

From the table above, it is clear that for women, very few new occupations have come up. The ranking of occupations is almost the same, with daily labour topping the list. Agriculture and animal husbandry continue to occupy places being the 3rd and 4th most popular occupations (earlier they occupied 2nd and 3rd position). NREGA has however become a very important source of employment, even if it is available for only a few days. It was the 5th most popular occupation for women earlier. Now it is the 2nd most popular occupation.

The other major change is in ranking of making of puffed rice. This used to be the 7th most popular occupation, and it is now the 23rd most popular occupation. This is probably due to the impact of introduction of machines that make puffed rice and that have displaced women from this occupation.

The general prevalence in all the interviews, FGDs, case studies and survey of the occupation 'daily labour' ("din majoor") requires some explanation of what this activity involves. The women report being daily labour when they take up any kind of job that involves any kind of

manual work. On one day it could mean working in a field as an agricultural labourer. On the next day, she could be doing paddy processing or making puffed rice for a landed family. After a few days, she could be carrying bricks during construction work at someone’s house or clearing the jungle in someone’s garden or collecting firewood for a wealthy housewife. On a fourth day, she could be doing road work for a contractor. The work, therefore, involves a myriad of activities and multiple employers. The basic input required is “gotor” – physical labour – and the payment is immediate and higher than that in many other activities- a reason why many women prefer this as an occupation.

Interestingly, education provided a direct benefit in income and occupation to one woman in the FGDs who earned a considerable amount from tuitions. Similarly, women who became ICDS workers or ASHA workers also got these jobs because of their educational levels. However, these women were a very, very small part of the women covered in the course of this study. Amongst the 692 women covered in the survey and amongst all the women covered through FGDs and case studies, we came across only 2 ASHA workers and one ICDS worker.

4.4 Multiple occupations, Marginal employment

Data on the number of occupations women had said they were involved in at present is shown in Figure 18.

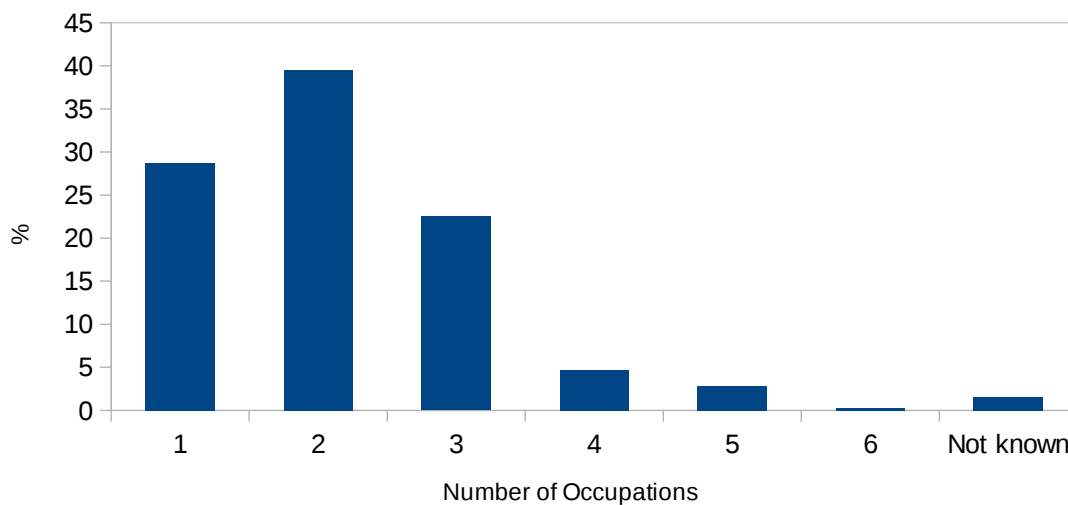


Figure 18: Number of present occupations of each woman in paid work from the survey. Of 692 respondents in the survey, 387 were in paid work.

46 of 111 (41.4%) women who have given a single occupation are daily labourers and 101 of 153 (66%) of those showing 2 occupations have given daily labour as one of their occupations. As daily labourers are workers who do many different things, the variety or multiplicity of occupations is likely to be even more than the percentages shown above. We could, therefore, safely say that more than 80% of women are involved in more than one

occupation. In fact, as we have seen in some of the case studies, women keep shifting from one job to the other in order to keep body and soul together.

While one characteristic of women’s employment is the multiplicity of occupations, another is that no one occupation provides them with full time employment. In Table 2 above (from interviews with political leaders), it was obvious that women got work from 30-40 days in NREGA, 3 months in agriculture and 30 days in some areas to 8 months in others for daily labour. Full time jobs such as that of a domestic worker or an ASHA or ICDS worker were available for very few women. Small businesses, which can also provide full time employment, were also possible for a lucky few. Even the work and remuneration of a midday meal cook has to be shared by many members of a self- help group and often between two or more self-help groups. As a result, work from this job is often for a few months and at very low remuneration.

4.5 Migration

Women want work close to their homes and even when presented with seemingly good options in far-away places, they prefer to stay at home. Thus, migration was not an option many women chose, as can be seen from the table below. Of the 387 women who were in paid work, only 48 or 12% had ever migrated for work.

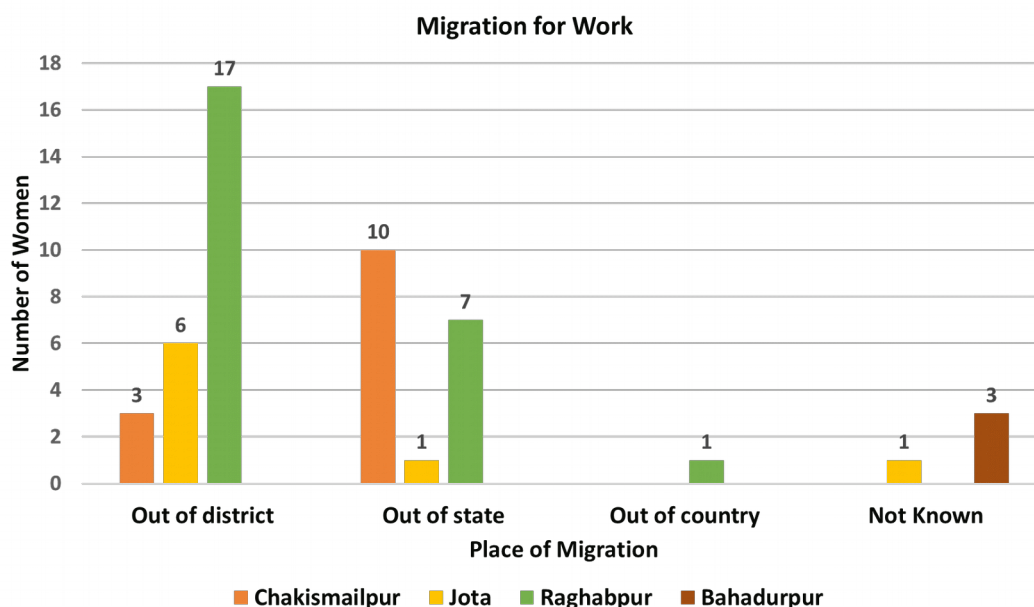


Figure 19: Places women have migrated to for paid work from survey data in the 4 different villages. Of the 692 respondents in the survey 387 were in paid work of whom 48 had migrated for work.

Amongst the women who migrated, most (26 responses out of 49 or more than half) had gone to another district within the state. Also, the large interstate migration shown in Chakismailpur is of women who have gone to Orissa, which is bordering their block and where language, culture etc. is very similar to their own district. So, while this is technically

an inter-state migration, it does not involve all the perils of inter-state migration, of being in a place with an unfamiliar language, far away from familiar territory, with dependence on a *dalal* or agent to return home or communicate with home. Interestingly, in Bahadurpur, where eviction had taken place, no one had migrated.

In the focus group discussions and case studies, the experience of men migrating to other districts and states in search of better work and wages was very common. However, examples of women migrating for work were few and far between.

Many barriers were perceived by the women themselves and they clearly did not choose migration in search of work as an option. The first barrier was their own fears of security and safety. They preferred work closer to home.

Family obligations also made it very difficult for women to leave home and work elsewhere. Many had children and others who needed care or housework that needed doing. Sita Mandi, a tribal woman from Chakismailpur in Paschim Midnapore did not want to go outside her village to find work because she felt it was impossible since there was no one to take care of her daughters when she was gone. Purnima Mistry from Panchpukur in the the South 24 Paraganas had a handicapped son at home and due to this she never went out of her locality to find work.

Patriarchal taboos about women working were quite strong and had to be broken by women seeking to find paid work outside the home as discussed earlier in Section 2. The same taboos were even stronger in cases where women wanted to leave the village and work in a distant place. So, the few who tried migration met with strong resistance from family. Jahanara Biwi from Makhalgaccha in North 24 Parganas said that she wanted to go Kolkata for work, but her husband did not allow her. In FGD 3 (a group of Muslim women from South 24 Parganas), two women said that they wanted to go outside to work in a plastics factory but their husbands did not allow them to go. In FGD 7 (a mixed SC and General caste group from Paschim Midnapore), one woman informed us that she had to lie at home and had to run away to work as a cook in various places. People said nasty things about her character, but she continued to do this work.

Women who did migrate – often out of compulsion and often to escape family problems- had experiences that were not all that positive, which made them reluctant to repeat the experience. Ferdousi Biwi from Nadia told us that 10 years ago, she went to Delhi for paid work. A “*dalal*” or agent took 5 thousand rupees from her and told her that he will give her a good job. But he appointed her as a domestic worker in a Punjabi family. Ferdousi did not want to do “*such work*.”. She believes that this work has no honour. She accused the “*dalal*” and tried to get him to change her job. But he stopped every kind of communication with her. After 6 months she came back to her home with the help of her employer. She said that the family was good and she faced no violence and harassment there, they helped her to come back. But she left the job because she didn’t want to do “*such job that has no honor*”.

In FGD 4, which consisted of both SC and General caste women from South 24 Parganas, two women had gone to Kolkata to work as migrant workers, but were forced to come back because of health reasons for one and marriage of the other. An Adivasi group from Nadia

informed us “One woman went to Kerala to work in brick field. She came back after three months because she was not given her full wages and was only given money for food”

Shashun Nahar Bewa, from Kalabaga Dogacchiya in Nadia said that, she wanted to leave her family because of family discord. She went to Gujarat for one year. There she worked in a sack-making factory. She felt the lack of security for women there. The place was also dirty. So, after a year she came back.. In the case of Laxmi Kisku from Sabraping in Paschim Midnapore When there were no work in their locality, Laxmi with her husband and sister in law went to Odisha, Baleswar for three months. They worked there in a brick kiln. Then they felt it is difficult to stay out of home, so they came back.

In 15 FGDs, we spoke to 129 women, we came across only 14 women who had migrated for work.

On a more positive note, there was the experience of women in Paschim Midnapore (Dantan 1 block) who live across the border from Orissa. These women go for agricultural work to the Orissa side of the border. They were paid Rs.250 per day and were quite satisfied with their experience

Sumitra and Jayanti Khamaru from Suryanagar, South 24 Parganas both had positive experiences working as domestic servants in nearby Kolkata Sumitra worked as a domestic worker at Gariahat. According to her, the family was very good. They helped her when she was in crisis. Jayanti worked as a domestic worker at Budge Budge before she got married. Her working experience was good. That family helped her financially at her wedding.

On the whole, however, the negative experiences, family obligations and patriarchal objections outweighed these few positive experiences. In fact, the women would prefer the creation of local employment so that even their menfolk do not have to leave home and migrate.

4.6 Importance of NREGA and NRLM

While migration is not seen as a solution to women’s need for paid work, NREGA seems to have provided them with a solution that has become increasingly popular. Figures of employment creation under MGNREGA are given in Table 3 below.

In the 2011 Census, the female working population of West Bengal, with both marginal and main workers is 80 lakhs (80, 40, 308). Clearly then, this amount of employment creation would have an impact on the employment situation of women. From our experience, a part of this money is being siphoned off without creating employment. Despite that, it has acted as a way of breaking taboos about women’s entry into paid work, as can be seen from the increasing number of women who are joining this program. Women formed a mere 18% of the NREGA work force in 2006-07, but are almost half the workers in MGNREGA today. With about 80 lakhs women in the work force in Bengal in 2011, this means that NREGA has gone from a program that created roughly 1 person-day for each woman worker in paid work when it started to now creating a fortnight of person days for each woman worker.

Table 6: Employment Creation Under MGNREGA In West Bengal.

	Total No of Person Days (In Lakhs)	Percentage of Persons Days for Women	Total Number of Persons Days for Women (In Lakhs)
2006-07	440.08	18.28	80.45
2007-08	968.8	16.99	164.60
2008-09	786.61	26.53	208.69
2009-10	1551.67	33.42	518.57
2010-11	1553.08	33.7	523.39
2011-12	1433.59	32.4	464.48
2012-13	2002.00	33.71	674.87
2013-14	2296.34	35.7	819.79
2014-15	1696.29	41.4	702.26
2015-16	2864.97	46.28	1325.91
2016-17	2355.61	46.45	1094.18
2017-18*	2492.67	47.39	1181.28

Source : www.nrega.nic.in

*Till January 2018

NREGA as an important occupation was repeatedly mentioned in the FGDs, the case studies and the survey with the women and in the interviews with political leaders. As seen earlier, in the survey, NREGA is the second most important occupation today for women in paid work. In the case studies, 10 women out of 20 mentioned NREGA as being a source of employment (Table 1). In the FGDs, 72 out of 129 women (about 56%) mentioned NREGA as being one of their occupations. Political leaders claimed that 70-90% of the women in their areas were doing NREGA work (Table 2).

Despite huge delays in payment of wages, NREGA continues to a popular occupation with women because it provides work close to home, enabling them to handle both their housework and paid work together. The wages are also higher or almost as much as the market wage in many places. The market wage varies between Rs. 150 to Rs.220 for daily labour and the NREGA wage is Rs.180. The work is less strenuous than many of the jobs available in the market for daily labour or for agricultural work. In many places, under Individual Based schemes, MGNREGA has been used to set up tree plantations, herbal gardens, kitchen gardens etc., which has helped women increase their earning capacity on a long term basis.

Similarly, the state level version of the NRLM, Anandadhara claims to have covered 41,66,605 women through their program¹⁷. This would be about 52% of the total number of

female workers in West Bengal. Along with this are many microfinance programs run by NGOs and by private banks.

All the women we interviewed during the case studies were members of self-help groups, as were a number of women in the FGDs and survey. They did not benefit hugely from this membership except for all the women who worked as midday meal cooks. These women got this work because they were members of self-help groups, and it was government policy to hand over the midday meal work to these groups.

Women stated that they could get loans from their self-help group or the Government and banks, but they were not keen on this. They were afraid that a business for which they would take the loan may not be profitable. Also, they said that in households like theirs that were at margins, loan amounts would be used for consumption purposes and dire needs, rather than starting businesses, putting them into a problem. Many were also not getting loans because one group member was a defaulter.

Despite this, the women are keen to be members of the SHGs because it gives them a chance to get out of the house and meet other women.

Women also take loans from money lenders when they are in an economic problem due to delay in payment of NREGA wages or because of lack of work. They have to pay huge interest for these small loans. Procedurally, however, these are easier than even taking a loan from the self-help group as they say this loan is available at all times. They are very reluctant to take Government or bank loans as these require paper work and immovable property as collateral, which they do not have.

During the case studies and the FGDs, we found a few references to the help women were getting from SHGs. Sabita Kundu's family (from Sautia, Paschim Midnapore), for example, has three loans – Rs. 40,000 from a money lender, for which they pay a monthly interest of Rs. 1200,; Rs.70,000 from Bandhan, (an NGO which has a microfinance program) for which they have to repay Rs. 1480 per month for 13 months; and Rs.20,000 from Sabita's self-help group.

Political party leaders claimed that 90% of the women in their areas were members of these groups. However, the leader interviewed in Raidighi (South 24 Paraganas) after saying this added

“Only Hindu women have joined self-help groups, while Muslim women have chosen to ignore them- because the Muslim women were not granted permission by their respective homes. Those who are members have benefitted - they have started doing many business from the loans they have received.”

Again, this program may not have actually transferred a lot of money to women or led them to become flourishing entrepreneurs, but it has brought women out of their houses and into marginal jobs. Many of them have also developed the skills of dealing with the local administration because they are members of these groups.

4.7 Conclusion

The micro data that we have collected in this study confirms the trend shown in macro NSSO and Census data- more and more women have joined the labour force that does paid work in rural West Bengal. This trend is especially visible in the past 10-20 years.

The most popular occupation for women remained daily labour, where women made themselves available to work for any job involving manual labour and where they were paid on a daily basis. Agriculture and animal husbandry remained popular. NREGA was the new and increasingly popular occupation for women.

Besides the increasingly popular NREGA, there were very few new avenues of employment for women.

Women needed to be in a number of occupations to make a living. In fact, more than 80% seem to be involved in more than one occupation.

Migration, which was very popular amongst men, was almost a closed option for women with only a few women choosing to migrate in search of work. Women's own fears played a part in this, as did patriarchal taboos about going so far away. Women were also bound by family obligations of care and housework and could therefore not afford to work very far away.

In such a situation both NREGA and NRLM seem to have played important roles – not so much in providing women with economically viable occupations, but in exposing them to the job market and the outside world. Restructuring of these programs could therefore provide a viable alternative for women's productive employment.

5. WHY WOMEN JOIN PAID WORK AND CHANGE OCCUPATIONS

So far, we have tried to understand the nature of women's work, both paid and unpaid. We have seen what are the most popular occupations and the timing of when women have joined paid work.

In this chapter we try and understand why women make the decision to join or not join paid work and what the forces are that act as barriers or encourage them to become paid workers.

5.1 Why Some Women Do Not Want to Work

The 305 women who were not in paid work were asked the reason why they had not taken up work from which they could earn some money. The answers are given below. This was a multiple choice question.

Table 1:-Reason Why The Women Are Not In Paid Work

	Bahadur pur	Jot a	Raghab pur	Chakismailpur	Total	Percentage
No need	20	16	8	1	45	11.4
In laws or husband do not want me to work	15	4	17	9	45	11.4
Parents don't want me to work	0	0	0	1	1	0.3

Illness or physical disability	20	20	20	21	81	20.6
There is no work in the area	27	46	16	55	144	36.5
Insecurity at work place	0	1	0	2	3	0.8
Wages are less or irregular	1	1	0	3	5	1.3
Others	12	22	10	26	70	17.8
TOTAL	95	110	71	118	394	100.0

From this table it is clear that the maximum number of responses were that there was no work available in the area. The second most important response was of physical inability or illness, which means that amongst this group of women there would be some at least who would be willing to work if work that they were physically capable of doing was provided. Resistance from the family was not such an important reason. Nor was the fact that women did not feel the need to work because their needs were being provided for already. This is in contradiction to the many pieces that have been written to explain falling female labour participation rates in the NSSO data. These pieces have spoken about improved rural incomes of families and men and therefore the desire of families and men to withdraw women from the work force for the honour of the family.

Interestingly , a very small number (1.3) of responses blamed irregular or low wages, which reflects on the desperation with which women are seeking work.

When these 350 women were asked if they would work if they got the opportunity to work in their local area, a large number (205 or 67%) replied in the affirmative. This again reiterates the point that we have made earlier- women want to work and are willing to work if they can get such work in their local areas.

Table 2:- Willingness To Work If There Is Work Available In The Local Areas

	Bahadurpur	Jota	Raghabpur	Chakismailpur	Total	Percentage
Yes	39	56	36	74	205	67.2
No	36	27	18	15	96	31.5
NK	2	1	0	1	4	1.3
TOTAL	77	84	54	90	305	100.0

5.2 Social Taboos as Barriers to Paid Work

It is assumed very often that women are prevented from being leaving the four walls of their houses by menfolk or paternalistic family members who think the family honour will be ruined if women go out to work. This is a typically mainstream middle class view of the way in which the Indian society functions, especially in rural agrarian communities. While we did find some echoes of such views in our study this was by no means a dominant reality.

For example, not all the 387 women who were part of the survey and who went into paid work met with resistance. The women who met with opposition said that they met with resistance from multiple sources. As can be seen from Figure 20, the greatest resistance was from society- neighbours, village people etc. Families were much more supportive as they probably realised the need for an extra income. The category ‘Others’ includes other relatives like sons, daughters in law, daughters and sons in law, siblings etc., as well as others.

Women in the case studies and FGDs also mentioned barriers in the past when they first started getting into paid work. These barriers differed according to the caste or religious group the women belonged to.

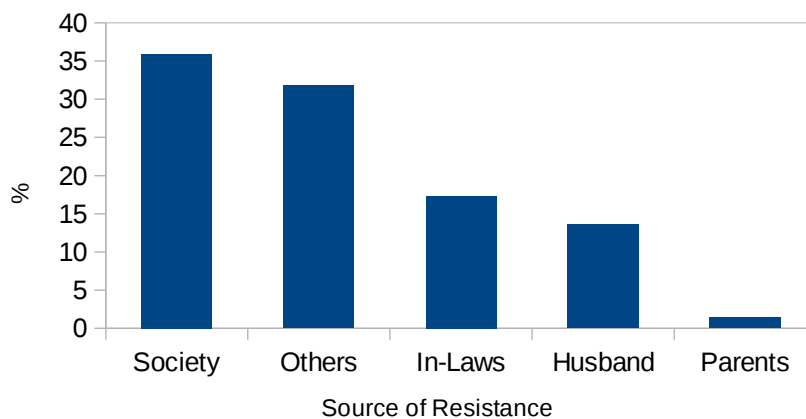


Figure 20: Sources of resistance to decision to start paid work faced by women who responded to the survey. The survey had 692 respondents of which 387 were involved in paid work. The women who met with resistance gave 220 responses and said that they had faced resistance from different sources due to their decision to do paid work.

A group of Muslim women from FGD 3 stated that they were not allowed by their husbands to go out of village or to live elsewhere and work, because husbands believed it was their responsibility to feed and clothe their wives. They said,

“So we have to work near the house and that too where we go in a group. Husbands don’t like us working in places where there are too many men.”

In FGD 6 with Hindu SC and general caste women, the women said,

“We faced restrictions. They said a woman will become a “bad” women if she goes out to work. One of us had a mother in law in work already, so she did not have to face this talk. We went out to work despite this talk because our husbands did not look after us.”

Basana Haldar (Pipragacchi, Nadia), a woman from a lower caste community said,

“20 years ago, when I started working, I was teased by people. They used to say that “ghorer bou” (the housewife, implying she is the honour of the house) is going to work! Why is this “meyemanush” (derogatory term for woman) going out of home at night etc. I had to go to the employer at night to collect paddy and to give money because I did not get time in the daytime. That made things worse but I did not care for anybody.”

The women in FGD 7 with Hindu SC and general caste women also said that various nasty things were said when they went out to work, but they did not pay attention to the same.

For some women, however, work started when they were unmarried and it was considered part of their work. This was especially true of Adivasi women, all of whom claimed that they had started working very early in life. For example, in FGD 8 there was a group of Adivasi women who said they began working when there was an economic crisis in the family. They worked from when they were 12 years old even before they got married.

Lachmi Kisku (Sabraping, Paschim Midnapore) said,

“Before marriage I worked as a daily labourer. Then the wage was 25 to 30 rupees per day . I continued after marriage. I took only 3 months for rest when I was pregnant.”

Muslim women, on the other hand, talked about strict restrictions on working, especially when they were unmarried.

Jahanara Biwi (Makhalgaccha, North 24 Parganas) said,

“I got married when I was 16 years old. I grew up at my uncle’s place. I had started working as a day wager just after marriage. I was not allowed to go outside for work at my uncle’s home, and they were also rich. I was forced to go for work because of poverty at my in-law’s house.”

Things were also changing - Women in FGD 2 from South 24 Parganas claimed that taboos on women working have changed, but not altogether. Similarly, in FGD 4 from the same district, the women said that no one was involved with paid work because there was no such work in the local area. And, they were far away from transport, the nearest station being 3-4 kms away. It was distance and lack of transportation that stopped them from working. They faced no restrictions from men on working. Both groups were of both general and scheduled caste women in South 24 Parganas.

5.3 Why Women Started Getting Into Paid Work

Poverty seems to play the greatest role in making women join paid work. All 387 of the women who were in paid work said that lack of money (“*orthabhav*”) had made them join paid work. As this was a question in which multiple answers were allowed, other answers were also given, which are shown in Figure 21. Except for 8% and 7% women who also chose reasons in the last two categories, all other responses point to economic pressures that have pushed these women into work.

In interviews with political leaders and employers, the mention of poverty as a force driving women into paid work was also there strongly.

In the FGDs, the issue of economic problems forcing women into paid work came up repeatedly. According to one group (FGD 6, a Hindu group with mixed castes from Paschim Midnapore), the husband’s income alone was not enough to run the family. It was especially a problem to meet educational expenses of children with only one income. Women in FGDs 9 and 10, both Hindu groups from Ndia district with scheduled caste and other castes, also, felt it was impossible to run a family with one person’s income. Women in FGD 11, an Adicasi group from Nadia, stated that they were all from landless families. None of them worked before marriage, but now they work because the family income is low, but the family size is growing. Other groups also brought up the problem of poverty pushing them into work.

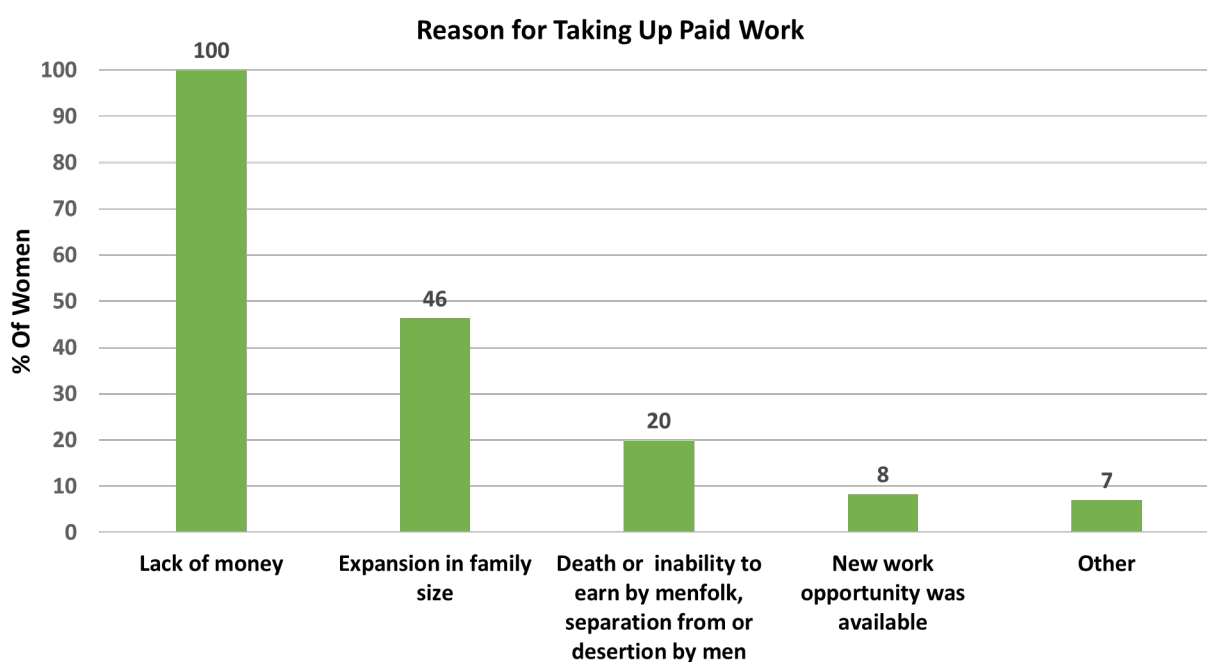


Figure 21: Reasons for taking up paid work given by women in the survey of 692 respondents. Of the 692 respondents, 387 were involved in paid work.

Amongst a group of 40 women from 4 FGDs in North 24 Parganas, we received detailed information about how often they had changed their occupation and why. Poverty was the overwhelmingly mentioned reason for seeking new work. These 40 women had worked for an average of 17 years and had on the average changed their occupation three times during this period.

It is interesting to note that these groups were from all the districts we covered and had members who were from Muslims, Hindus, general caste, scheduled castes and Adivasis, implying that for all communities, the economic push of poverty was far greater than social taboos.

5.4 Impact of Modernisation

Modernisation in its many forms was taking work away from women. An oft repeated complaint from the FGDs and the case studies was that work was reducing due to mechanisation in agriculture. Women from Paschim Midnapore in FGD 6 informed us that in their area there was work available 4 times in the year as the area had two paddy crops. However due to mechanisation and the introduction of combine harvesters, their work had been reduced to 3/4ths of what they used to get earlier.

In Nadia, where weaving was common, women complained that due to the introduction of power looms, their work had become unprofitable and had reduced.

Muslim women from South 24 Parganas in FGD 3 complained that Zari work had also reduced due to the introduction of machines. On the other hand, Hindi women from all castes from another district, Paschim Midnapore in FGD 7 said that due to the introduction of machines (JCBs) for digging work, their work had reduced. Mechanisation of other activities was held responsible by many for the reduction in their work in road construction. Rice mills had taken the place of old fashioned, home-based paddy processing. Women who used to do paddy processing earlier in Group 7 no longer found it profitable, as returns reduced in the competition with machines. Machines had also come in to make puffed rice.

Strangely, in an echo of debates found in the media which seemed far away from the lives of these women, women in FGD 1 from a remote village in the Sunderbans blamed the GST for reduction in their work. They said that work on clothes and on beads has lessened because the agents who used to bring work to village are finding cloth and beads too expensive to buy because of GST.

Women who used to work in fishing and those who kept goats complained of shrinking commons due to commercialisation of all activities in the village. This had led to the lack of free access to grazing land and wetlands, causing a shrinking in their ability to catch fish and keep goats. These were responses from women of FGDs 7, 9 and 10 in Paschim Midnapore and in Nadia districts

5.5 Why Women Change Occupations

Profitability and availability of work were strong reasons for changing occupations and switching activities.

For example, in FGD 1, women from Namkhana (South 24 Parganas) said that they chose other work rather than making hilsa fishing nets because the profits in this work were low. Payments for picking chillies were only Rs.60 to 70 a day, while earnings from making bead necklaces was also just Rs.10 for making 33 feet of necklaces. So they were leaving all this work to become daily labourers, as they were paid Rs.150 for a day's work. However, the women keep making fishing nets when they have no other work.

Muslim women in FGD 3 from South 24 Parganas said they had left the work of stitching shirts (*Punjabis*) because this work was not available and because the wage was very low. They left the work of midday meal cooks because payment was irregular and too little.

Women said they had shifted to NREGA because payments were higher and the work was less. However, they complained that there was not enough work and wage payment in NREGA was delayed.

Many women complained that even if they wanted to work, work was not always available.

As far as agriculture was concerned, women in many FGDs said that it was not so profitable with a hike in price of fertilisers . There was too much of hard work and very little profit. Adivasi women in FGD 9 from Nadia said they prefer the work of domestic servants to that of farming because farming is a great deal more of hard work. Also men were migrating so it was not possible for women to do agricultural work alone, while it was too expensive to do agricultural work with hired labour. This was probably a group that was doing farming after taking land on lease or that had small plots of land themselves, which they were now giving out on lease.

The women in FGD 10 , who were from different Hindu caste in Nadia said, *“A lot of land has been taken by the Government, who now says it will give it on lease to whoever pays. So lots of land that was for common use is now Government land”*

The women also complained about lack of veterinary infrastructure. Women in FGD 6, a group of women from all Hindu castes in Paschim Midnapore said that they stopped keeping goats because there was no common grazing land. Also no veterinary service were available when a dog bit their goats. Another group of Adivasi women from Nadia (FGD 9) said they used to keep ducks and hens for commercial purpose, but the fox eats them up or they die, so now they keep ducks and hens only for home consumption.

FGD 10, a group of Hindu women said they had stopped fisheries work because the ponds are full of hyacinth. They used to catch fish in a large wetland earlier, that has now been sold and the new owner does not allow them to fish there.

The family situation also plays an important role in women joining or leaving paid work. In FGD 1, 2 women had lost their husbands , one had a husband who is ill, so these women had to start paid work. Excessive drinking by the husband , or the husband’s illness, or the husband not taking care of his family or his desertion were given by women in FGD 6 , 7 , 9 and 10 as reasons for taking up work.

On the other hand, women in FGD 5, 9 and 10 also spoke about son sand daughters-in-law who now took responsibility for the family and therefore they were now able to work less. Many older women took over the responsibility of taking care of children or of paddy processing and left paid work to their sons and daughters in law.

Marriage and other changes in family circumstances also led to a change in activity. This was especially true of women who were domestic servants before getting married and then left. (FGD 5, a group of Adivasi women from Paschim Midnapore). When men folk were not

available women found it hard to do farming. Many left paddy processing because it was hard to do such work without a man's help.

In FGD 3, women said they had left Zari work because their eyesight became bad after working for many years. Besides this, illness and old age were often given as reasons for stopping certain occupations. In FGD 4, one woman left her job as a domestic servant because of illness. Another stopped working outside due to illness and started doing making of puffed rice instead.

5.6 Conclusion

The general impression one gets about rural women from our survey, case studies, and focus group discussions is that they are keen to become members of the paid work force. They may have faced some social taboos when they started working, but these have been overcome. The poverty of their families is the main motivating factor turning them into paid workers. Their families cannot survive on a single person's income, and often they are also forced to become the only earning member in the family, when the menfolk fail in this task for some reason or the other. There seems to be a constant search for an occupation which will provide them with work regularly with quick payments and with a level of income that is at subsistence level at least.

In this situation, on the one hand, so called *modernisation* with mechanization and automation with machines of all kinds replacing manual labour are reducing women's work. While combine harvesters, power tillers and tractors and threshing machines in agriculture have reduced manual work and employment, power looms are displacing women in the handloom sector. JCB earth movers and sophisticated machines have reduced the need for labour in road construction and earth work. Even the humble profession of making puffed rice and paddy processing has faced mechanisation and subsequent displacement of women.

While animal husbandry has reduced due to the replacement of oxen by machines in agriculture, grazing commons are also reducing, with more and more vacant land being occupied for agriculture. Double and triple cropping are becoming common as people try to eke out a living from the little land they have and vacant land for grazing for at least part of the year for goats and cattle is becoming rare. Waterbodies where women can catch fish have also become commercially used ponds. Water is now a resource in demand even in rain rich Bengal, where now water is required for commercial cropping. So, women find water bodies where they used to fish dry up very soon.

Prices of fertilisers and other farming inputs are rising while the price of the produce is not keeping up with the increase in expenses, making farming a barely sustainable profession for the smaller farmer. With the use of fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture, water bodies are getting polluted. They no longer have so many fish, and no longer are there wild greens for women to pick and use.

On the other hand, there is the lack of support from the government in terms of making policies that are supportive of these women. For example, despite a number of women being involved in agriculture and animal husbandry, veterinary services are few and far between.

With the move from subsistence agriculture to cash and commercial farmings, food now has to be bought increasingly and women need cash incomes for this also.

All in all, women's lives seem to have become harder with the push towards modernisation and commercialisation.

6. IMPACT ON WOMEN'S LIVES

The general assumption is that it is good for women to come into paid work. It is assumed that having some money in hand enables them to be much freer in their choices. While there is some concern that it increases the burden on women in terms of the time and energy they have to spend on paid work along with their housework, it is assumed that paid work is empowering.

In this section we examine whether involvement in paid work actually empowers rural working women in terms of both economic and socio-political impacts on women's lives. . We examine whether paid work leads to economic empowerment and whether this economic empowerment goes hand in hand with an increase in a woman's voice and agency both within the confines of the home and in the broader community. We also examine the impact of this change on her mental and physical health.

During the study, through case studies, FGDs, interviews with leaders and employers and the survey, we have looked at various aspects to understand the impact of paid work on women's lives. These aspects are economic, social, psychological and political. Along with this, we have also looked at the impact on women's health, and we have looked at empowerment on the whole. Again, the responses are from the women to specific question and therefore are their views on the changes in their own lives.

6.1 Economic Impact: An Income Insufficient to Meet More Than Basic needs

As the primary objective of joining paid work is to increase incomes, economic impact should be the most clearly visible. In the survey, we asked women the key areas in which expenditure had increased after they had started earning. Figure 1 shown the answers we received.

The maximum number of women (92%) said that their expenditure on health had increased followed by spending on clothes and education. 30% had used their earnings for savings, while 7% had used the money for land and jewellery. Some had also used the money for entertainment (22%) and to buy consumer goods (18%) like cycles, furniture, mobile phones, TVs etc..

A closer look at these responses brought out a more nuanced picture than is available from Figure 1 which is namely:-

- Of the 387 women, we have responses from 363 women for all 6 areas.
- Of these, 17 women had not increased their expenditure in even one of the 6 areas they were asked about. 6 had managed to increase expenditure in only one of the

essential expenditures of health, clothing, education and housing repair. These 23 women (6% of 363 complete answers) could be said to be on the verge of destitution despite being in paid work

- 4 women – a miniscule 1% of the 363- had increased expenditure in all 6 areas.
- 123 women (34%) were able to increase their expenditure on two or three areas amongst the basic needs of health , education, housing repair and clothing
- 104 (29% of 363) women had increased their expenses on all the essential and basic expenses of health, clothing, education and housing repair.
- 101 women (27% of 363) increased expenditure on one or more areas in the basic expenses of health, clothing, education and housing repair, and also increased their savings and/or bought land and jewellery.
- There were no women who spent their earnings only on entertainment and/or buying consumer goods.

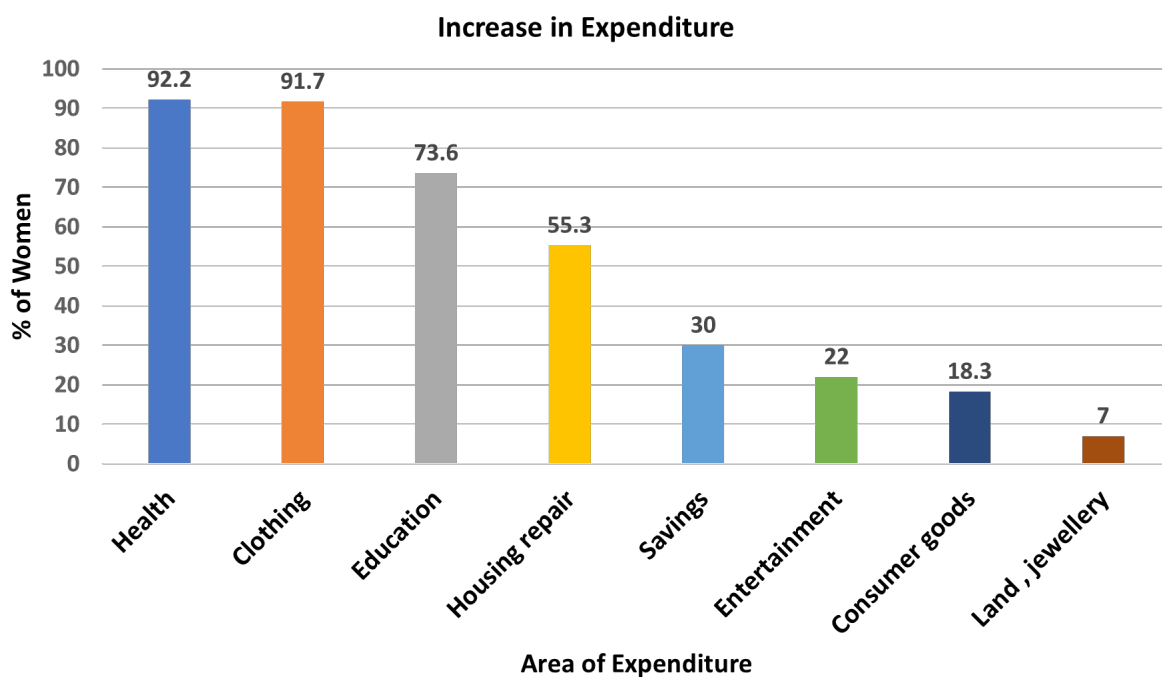


Figure 22: Key areas in which expenditure increased after beginning paid work for women in survey. Of the 692 respondents in the survey, 387 were in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure depict the percentage of women in paid work who said that their expenditure in the particular key area had increased after beginning paid work.

These results reflect on the low level of earnings by the women, where 6% could be said to remain in destitution, while only 1% has really achieved a transformation in their expenditure in all 6 areas. The tendency of the women seems to have been to spend on essentials, as well as to increase savings. None wasted money on only entertainment and buying of consumer goods. This shows that even small income transfers to women are used in very wise ways.

The data above also highlights two other issues- one, with public expenditure on health and education being reduced by the Government, women are having to step in and increase their

work burdens to make up for this deficit. Second, the level of destitution and the impact of small earnings would have been even more starkly visible if we had asked about increase in expenditure on food in the survey. We have done so in the case studies and FGDs and this brings out the meagreness of the earnings, and the difficulties faced by the women even more.

In terms of income women felt that their incomes had increased, but what they were getting was quite insufficient to transform their lives.

In FGD 5, a group of Adivasi women from Paschim Midnapore women said,

“Earlier we were very poor. We could not arrange enough food. We used to eat the seeds of bamboo and grass and wild roots from the jungle. We had to eat the flour of jowar (millets) or broken rice. But because of our work this situation has changed.”

In FGD 10 from Nadia district, with Hindu women from all castes told us said *“Earlier, we had no slippers and went barefoot. Now we have slippers.”*

In the words of the women in FGD 2 from South 24 Parganas *Women’s income is just enough to keep the family income in balance*

The experiences below of women from the case studies brings out this point even more forcefully. Jayanti Khamaru, who is a daily labourer and NREGA worker from Suryanagar in South 24 Parganas said in her interview,

“Our family income has increased. But in the rainy season we cannot get any work. It becomes very difficult to run the family at that time.”

Jayanti Khamaru has an income of about Rs.1000 a month. She has a bank account but no savings. She can manage food 3 times a day for the family but she can’t manage nutritious food. Her family does not have enough money to spend for health expenses. Her brother has to help in urgent situations. It is not possible to spend on the house or on building up any assets. She can buy clothes according to her needs and she can spend Rs.200 as she wishes every month. But she spends no money on entertainment

Samila Naiya who works as a daily laborer, NREGA worker and rice mill laborer in Raidighi in South 24 Paraganas told us during her interview,

“My income is not sufficient to help my family. We have not been able to buy any assets or save any money”

Samila’s family, however, does manage to have healthy food despite a meagre income of about Rs. 800 a month. She never buys clothes for herself – her brother gives her clothes. Her own personal expenses are about Rs 100 per month. They do not have money for health or education expenses. Nor do they spend anything for entertainment.

Jahanara Biwi, who is a daily laborer with an income of Rs.700 a month, from Makhalgaccha in North 24 Paraganas said,

“I can help my family now with some good food. I can buy clothes according to my need and spend some money on my health. I also go on religious tours for 2-3 days every year and keep a pocket money of Rs.200 per month. But we have not been able to build up any assets or save any money”

Ameena Biwi, who works as Biri Roller in Hawaspur (North 24 Parganas) and has an income of about Rs. 1000 a month said,

“I feel that after I started earning, my family was greatly benefited. Now I can afford nutritious food for everyone in the family. I can buy as many clothes as needed, but not more than that. I could afford to lend money to others a few years ago, but I could not do it now. I have not been able to do any savings or build up any assets. Or spend a paisa on house repair. I am not allowed to go outside for any form of entertainment. I have to hand over the money I earn to my husband. I do not even have the minimum amount of money for my own expenditure.”

As was visible in the survey results, in the case studies and FGDs, the woman’s income helped the family to meet some of its basic expenses but there was rarely sufficient money to build up assets or to even repair the house. Expenses on health and housing were also rarely mentioned. Some women in the case studies and FGDs mentioned pocket expenses for themselves, but this was about Rs.50 to 200.

6.2 Economic Impact: Shrinking Incomes

For some women, the experience was of shrinking incomes after getting into paid work. As we have mentioned before, modernisation and so-called development are having an adverse effect on women’s incomes. Given below are a few examples from the case studies.

Rajeswari Rajowar from Bahadurpur in Nadia district expressed the impact of losing her land due to a forest department takeover on her life to us during her interview. Rajeswari works as a daily laborer and NREGA worker making a meager income of about Rs. 800 a month. She said,

“We have lost our land a few years ago to the Forest Department. When we had land, I had to do both household work and agricultural work. Both were unpaid. When we lost our land, our poverty increased. I started doing paid work. Now I do household work along with paid work. Now I have a double burden. And I don’t have any control on my earnings. And I can’t spend not even a rupee for myself. All my life I have been working like a “jhi” (a domestic servant). I wake up at 5 am and go to bed at 10 pm. I become tired. But I have to work because of poverty.”

Bharoti Rajowar, from the same village also expressed the same sentiment about eviction from her land. Like Rajeshwari,, Bharoti worked as an NREGA worker and a daily laborer making an income of about Rs. 700 a month. She said,

“Our family had its own land, but we lost it few years ago because of eviction by the Forest Department. I depend mainly on NREGA works and now I am not getting even this work, because it is irregular. That is why now financially I am in a critical condition.”

In other villages, women, expressed the impact that mechanization and introduction of modern technology on their lives. They were increasingly pushed out of their jobs by machines and marginalized. Santi Biswas from Malipota in Nadia district was a weaver

proficient in the use of the handloom who relied on NREGA to supplement her income but still made only about Rs.1000 a month. During her interview she said,

“Nowadays, power looms are becoming popular. A power loom can make a sari very fast. It is more profitable for businessmen. With a handloom a woman can make one sari in 3 days. I get 150/- for a normal sari. It means the per day wage is only 50 rupees. The wage for a designed sari is 250 rupees, and it takes 4-5 days to make it. So now it becomes difficult to run a family with this small income. And, because of the power loom we are not getting enough work.”

Sita Mandi from Chakismailpur in Paschim Midnapore worked in many manual jobs to support herself and her three daughters as a single mother. She worked as a daily wage laborer, agricultural worker, brick kiln worker as well as sand mining laborer. The highest wage she could get (360 rupees per day) was from working in the sand mines, but this work was becoming difficult to get. She expressed her apprehensions about machines replacing laborers like herself and said,

“Nowadays the sand mining employers are using machines to gather sand. This is the main reason of not getting enough work at the sand mine.”

For this group of women the struggle was to keep body and soul together. There was very little chance of their expenditure increasing on any item.

6.3 Economic Impact: Female Headed Families

During the case studies, we came across three female headed families. The experience of all three was quite dissimilar.

On the one hand, we have Shamshun Nahar and Firdousi Biwi, Muslim women from Nadia district. Both are divorcees. Shamshun lives with her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren. She is the head of the family. She has a business in second hand clothes and new clothes where she earns about Rs. 3000 per month. She decides what happens in the family. She is independent financially and seems to exude confidence. Firdousi Biwi, who also has a business in second hand clothes, lives with her mother and decides on everything in her family. She is financially relatively well off with an income of about Rs.1800 per month.

On the other hand, Sita Mandi, an Adivasi woman from Paschim Midnapore district finds life a struggle as a single woman with three daughters. Working in all kinds of manual jobs to make ends meet, she expressed her desperation,

My husband never helped me in household works. He sometimes helped me in agricultural work. When he was alive, I had to do all the work and now in his absence I am doing all household work. But then there were 2 earning members in my family, and now I have become the only earning member. I never think of myself. Now I don't know how I will manage the education, marriage etc. of my three daughters all alone. I have no savings. It is difficult to manage daily meals for 4 members. The question of nutrition seems like a joke (laughing sadly). I buy clothes for the family

once a year. I have no money to spend for health. I have to work very hard to collect money for my daughter's education. I think the term entertainment is meaningless to a poor widow woman. Now I am only struggling to survive.

6.4 Economic Impact: Helping in Accumulation

Some of the case studies we did were with mothers in law and daughters in law in order to understand the generational change that had taken place. Gouri Kundu and Sabita Kundu are one such set of mother in law and daughter in law. Their lives show the manner in which women's labour has helped to bring significant change in their family's life.

Gouri Kundu, the mother in law, who is 58 years old, describes her life in the following manner

I got married when I was 11 years old and I started paid work when I was 17 years old. My husband was a bonded labourer. He took his lunch at the employer's home. I had to cook then for my three children and myself. My elder daughter, Lili, took care of my children and Lili also helped me in the household work. I did not have enough money to spend on my children's education.

My first job was to go to a land owner's house and make puffed rice for their family. I was pregnant for the first time then. So, for health reasons I left this work very soon. Then for 10 to 12 years, I worked as a domestic servant in a land owner's house. They gave me one meal a day and one sari and 50 rupees a year. This was 30 years ago. I was not satisfied with this payment system, so I stopped this work.

I also used to take contracts to make puffed rice for other families. I used to get Rs.500 for each contract for the year. I have worked as a daily labour 25 years ago for one rupee a day. 15 years ago, this became 5 rupees per day and 10 years ago it was 35 rupees a day. I had to stop this work because it was very hard work and my health was getting bad. I also did paddy processing for three years, but that was also very hard work so I left it.

As a family we tried to take land on lease recently for agriculture for two years, but we are going to stop this as it is not profitable. Now my main occupation is making puffed rice. I also do paddy processing for one family. I earn about Rs.3500 per month. I used to go the landowner's house to do all this work, but now I refuse to go. I work in my own house.

I spend about 5-6 hours every day making puffed rice. I will soon stop working after a year because of poor eye sight. My back pains and I am weak because of old age.

Now I want to and can spend money on my grandson's education. My daughter in law has gifted me two gold earrings. I have 2 bank accounts and a fixed deposit of Rs. 15000. We eat well now, but I think Horlicks, egg and chicken are a waste of money. I have money to buy clothes but I think 2 sets a year are enough. My daughter in law spends on sanitary napkins. This is a silly fashion, I feel. I spend Rs.100 on betel nut

every month and I save to go to religious tours with my husband every year. I also have money for my health expenses and my grandson's education, and sometimes to help to repair the house.

Sabita Kundu, the daughter in law, who has passed her Class X exams, is the most educated member in the family. Her husband has studied up to Class VII and her parents in law are illiterate. She has one son who is seven years old. There are now 4 earning members in this family of five.

Sabita got married in 2007, but she has been in paid work since 2011, 4 years after her marriage.

"We have 15 cottahs (0.25 acres) of land and we have taken 2-3 bighas (about an acre and a half) on lease for farming. I never go to the fields to work. After the paddy is brought home from the fields, I do work like threshing the paddy or parboiling it etc.

We also have a duck, 2 chickens and 4 cows. I help with the milking and looking after the cows. We sell the milk, and we get Rs. 40 rupees daily.

About 6 years ago, in 2011, my husband asked me to help him in the tele bhaja shop (fritters shop). I did not agree because I thought it will be very difficult to manage both household work and the shop's work. But finally, I agreed.

When the shop closed for two years, I tried to work in a car belt making factory nearby. They paid me Rs.8 per hour, Rs.40 per day in 2014 and 2015. My mother in law did not like this work and I also felt the money was too little. So, I stopped and re-started the tele bhaja shop

For the past one year, I have been running the tele bhaja shop by myself, without my husband.

When I wanted to join a self-help group, my mother-in-law did not like it. But with the help of my husband, I joined. Then when I started doing the midday meal cooking, my mother-in-law did not like it. But when they found that I earn some money every month and the money was helping the family, they were happy. I have been doing this for three years now and I earn Rs.3000 per year. I have full control over the money I earn from the midday meal programme.

I am also applying for Government jobs like Anganwari worker and Civic Police, as I want a fixed monthly income and security.

I have a bank account and also an insurance policy in my name for which we pay Rs. 12000 yearly. I have also bought gold ornaments for myself. I can buy clothes according to my needs. I spend Rs. 200 per month on my own expenses and Rs.800 for my health problems

The capital of our tele bhaja shop is 5 thousand rupees.

In 2014, our family bought land for 2.1 lakhs. My ornaments were pawned for this. Loans of Rs.60000 have been taken from my sisters and sister in laws. We borrowed

Rs.40,000 from a money lender, for which we pay a monthly interest of Rs.1200. We have taken Rs.70,000 from Bandhan (a microfinance company) for which we have to repay Rs. 1480 per month for 13 months; and we have borrowed Rs.20,000 from my self-help group.

My husband's earnings are used to give the interest and to return the loans. My income from the telebhaja shop is used for the fees of my son's school and his private tuition, my medical treatment and other expenses of the family. My mother-in-law goes to many temples every year and spends her money for this purpose. My father in law looks after all the festival expenses and the giving of presents amongst relatives.

The family has thus, over a period of 30 years, transformed itself from a family where the father in law was bonded and where the mother in law worked for a daily meal and Rs.50 a year. It has become a land-owning family with savings, gold ornaments and sufficient money for its basic needs, pocket money for the women and its entertainment expenses. Women's labour has played a huge role in this. First, the mother in law has contributed through back breaking work to bring up her children and keep the family kitchen running. Now the daughter in law is contributing, both within the family through her housework, her work with the cows and in paddy processing and through running their shop and cooking in the MDMS programme. The cash income brought in by the two women is about 7500 rupees per month. With 4 members out of 5 working and earning well, the family has managed to buy land, and though it is in debt, it is undergoing a transformation from bonded labour to land owner.

Sabita wants to use her education to get a Government job. The advantage of a steady income and a Government job is apparent from Santilata Soren's experience below. Santilata is an ICDS worker and her regular monthly Government salary of Rs.3350 has made a huge difference to her family.

A few years ago, nobody would agree to give us a loan. They thought that I will not be able to pay back this money. We were very poor then. But now (after joining the ICDS job) I am not facing this problem

Earlier, my work was agriculture on land that we had leased in, which was not profitable. I also did NREGA work and daily labour, where wages were too low.

Now I earn Rs.3350 every month. I have an insurance policy for which I pay 3 thousand rupees per year. I have another account in the post office for which I pay 200 per month. My husband had a van rickshaw. I have now bought him an engine van for Rs.50,000.

The experiences of Gouri, Sabita and Santilata are exceptions and not the rule. However, they do show that a regular and substantial income by women can transform not just their lives, but that of their families.

6.5 Social Impact

Moving out of the house for work means women leave the narrow confines of their houses and begin mixing with many more people. This has an impact on a woman's social standing. But it can also bring repercussions for her in her own family life. It can also mean that she changes many of her beliefs about social hierarchies and superstitions.

To understand the social impact on the woman after her involvement in paid work, during the survey, we took only two of the many issues that were discussed in the case studies and FGDs- the issue of domestic violence and of social recognition. Women were asked if domestic violence had increased after their involvement in paid work. They were also asked if they were now accepted more by society. The most basic recognition was that they were now no longer regarded as "so and so's wife" or "so and so's mother or so and so's daughter in law" (the general way in which women are known in their communities), but were known by their own names in the village. The answers received are shown in Figure 2. A sizeable number of women (31.3%) said domestic violence had increased, which is an issue of great concern. On a more positive note, 74% said that they were now more recognised by society, which in this case would mean people in their village and neighbourhood and in nearby areas.

In the case studies, many other dimensions of the way in which paid work impacted the social aspects of women's lives were discussed. Some women admitted that they were now more mobile and free to move out of their houses and meet and talk to people. Freedom was, however, related to the caste or religious group women belonged to. There were many exceptions where men continued to control women's interactions with other people especially men. Thus women from FGD 5 and 8 who were primarily from the Adivasi community, and those from FGD 7 and 10, who were from mixed Hindu families (Scheduled Caste and General Caste) had the freedom to move.

We have the freedom to move out of house (FGD 5) (FGD 7) (FGD 10)

All kinds of freedom are there (FGD 8)

On the other hand, women from FGD 3, a Muslim group, were subject to many restrictions, as were women from FGDs 1,2, 9 and 11 who were from scheduled caste or general caste Hindu communities.

We can move out for work, but not otherwise. We have to ask our husbands before going to our parents' house (FGD 11)

We have no freedom to move. We have to ask our husbands for permission when we are going out. If we don't ask him about going out, there is trouble and turmoil. We can go to our parents' house, but we have to come back in 2 days, otherwise there is trouble (FGD 2)

If we do not come back soon from our parents' house there is trouble and violence (FGD 3) (FGD 9) (FGD 11)

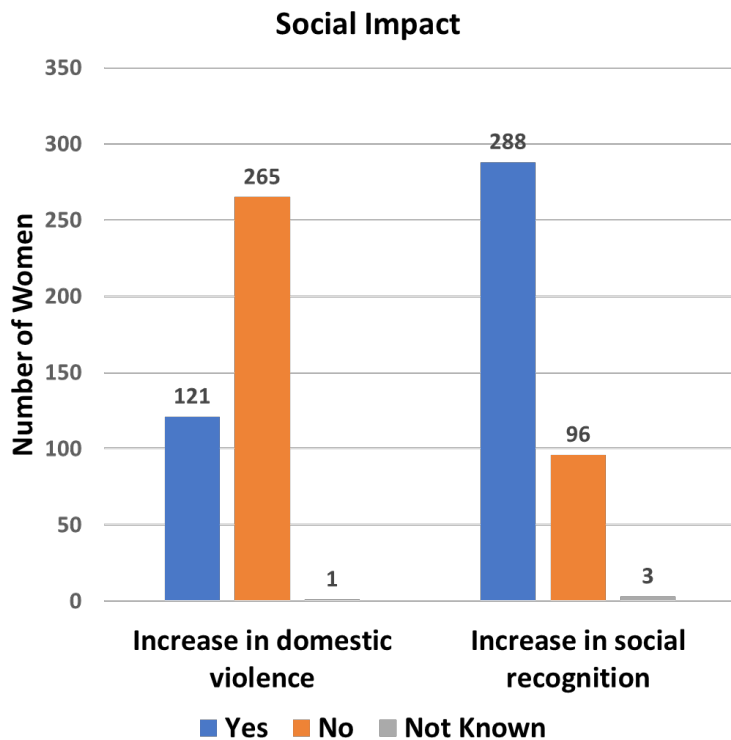


Figure 23: Social impact of starting paid work on lives of women as reported in survey. Of 692 respondents to the survey, 387 were in paid work.

Draupadi Sardar an Adivasi woman from Raghampur, North 24 Parganas told us about the conservatism of her husband. This was surprising because generally Adivasi women seemed free as far as mobility was concerned. She said,

“I have to take permission to go to my father’s house. If I go without permission, my husband will not allow me to enter his home again.”

Single women had the problem of getting a bad name and of being labelled as characterless. Firdousi Biwi, a single Muslim woman and a divorcee from Nadia who lived with her mother, felt this would affect her ability to earn and work.

“There is no male member in my family, that is why I am afraid of society. I am especially afraid of getting a bad name when my mother goes to a relative’s home. If I spend the night alone at home, people will talk about me and spread canards. So, I ask some other woman from my village to stay with me. I am also afraid of the males of my village. If I get a bad name, it will be impossible for me to run my business of selling second hand clothes”

This could also be because she was from the more conservative Muslim community. Sita Mandi , on the other hand, as an Adivasi widow who had three daughters to look after dismissed concerns about getting a bad name and said that in their society women were much freer to move about.

“I don’t care about social restrictions. I have to earn at any rate, because now the whole family’s responsibility is on my shoulders. Now my family is female headed, and completely controlled by me alone. There is no one left from whom I have to take permission. Adivasi women are generally free from these kind of restrictions”

Part of mixing with other people meant that barriers of caste and religion, which are relatively weak in southern, rural Bengal compared to most other regions in India were further broken down. Basana Halder from Nadia, who had had a very difficult married life herself, showed great progressiveness in the way she treated her daughter in law who was from another caste.

“My daughter in law is from another caste. I have no problem with that. I love her very much. My son is not good in character, I know very well. He is a drunkard. That’s why I will give all my property to my daughter in law. I don’t want to see her in the position that I faced all my life. I am trying my best to make her life secure.”

However, the patriarchal control that was visible in many families when we spoke about moving out of the house was again visible when we spoke about mixing and talking with outsiders. Again, the groups who gave the responses below are from all the various caste and religious groups we interviewed. The conservatism in this aspect of women’s lives seems to be cross cutting across various groups.

Women in FGD 1, 2, 3 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11 were all from General Caste and SC Hindu families and from all the districts that we covered. They expressed the following;

If we talk to outsiders without reason, our husbands gets angry. We have fights and problems because of this . If he is not satisfied with answer about why one talked to outsider there is trouble. (FGD 1) (FGD 2)

We are not free to talk to outsiders There are problems in mixing with people of different religion We don’t like mixing with people of other religions (FGD 3) (FGD 9)

However, some mixed groups, with SC and General caste Hindus were less conservative about mixing with outsiders. Also, as we received opposite responses from FGDs 1 and 2 of both restrictions and freedom to mix with outsiders, we could say that it is difficult to really conclusively say that working in paid work and moving outside the house had helped to remove restrictions on women’s mobility and their ability to interact with outsiders.

There is no problem about talking to outsiders (FGD 6) (FGD 7)

There is no problem about mixing with people from other religions (FGD 1) (FGD 6) (FGD 7) (FGD 10) (FGD 11)

Earlier, it was a greater problem mixing with other religions and castes. Now the problem is less (FGD 2)

The freedom to dress as one pleases was also sometimes curtailed by family and men, but often by the women themselves, who continue to hold on to traditional ideas about what is appropriate dressing and what is not. This was cross-cutting across areas and districts and communities.

Only sarees are worn (FGD 1) (FGD 2) (FGD 6) (FGD 11)

We wear nighties at night in hiding (FGD 2)

An Adivasi group (FGD 5) from Paschim Midnapore also however, despite saying that they had the freedom to move around said there were “*various taboos about clothes*”.

On the other hand, from almost the same area in Sautia , a village that was 10-12 kms from the Adivasi village , a mixed Hindu group which formed FGD 7 said “*there are not many prohibitions on what we wear. We earlier had ghumta (veil), but now we don't*”

This leads one to the conclusion that even when women are being forced to go out to work to support their families, the hold of patriarchy in their lives does not reduce remarkably.

Family violence continued to be a part of these women's lives, as in the case of women in the survey where 31.3% women had experienced an increase in domestic violence (Figure 2). We did not get the feeling that this had been reduced considerably by the women entering paid work. Women spoke with the spectre of violence haunting them. Basana Haldar from Pipragacchi in Nadia is now 42 years old and a grandmother. She began working immediately after she got married.

I got married when I was 12 years old. I am my husband's fourth wife. The previous two wives committed suicide and the third one left home with another man. My husband was oppressive by nature. I and the other three wives were tortured by him. My husband's first and second wife committed suicide because of his torture. I was also tortured and sexually harassed by my husband. I faced marital rape too. My husband always suspected that I had an extra marital affair. Now my husband is 90 years old. I don't like my husband since my marriage. My marriage happened without my consent. Before marriage I was not engaged with paid work. But after marriage it become my responsibility to earn for family. I was the only one earning member after my marriage.

Draupadi Sardar from Raghampur in North 24 Parganas also spoke about the continuing violence in her life , with her husband as perpetrator, despite the fact that her earnings were important for the family. Samila Naiya, 47 years old, whose husband has a second marriage also spoke about continuing violence from her husband despite her capacity to earn and support her family substantially.

Social recognition for many women increased and some were involved in serving these communities. This was as much a function of their involvement with Shramajivi Mahila Samity as with the fact that they were now women who were in paid work outside the four walls of their homes.

I am engaged with various voluntary community work. Like I go for deputations about NREGA work, I go to the hospital to admit ill people and pregnant women from my village, I go to the police station with villagers when they need to go. I started to work with “khetmojur samiti” and “mohila samiti”18 years ago. After earning and after joining the mohila samiti I am now respected by society. (Shamsun Nahar, Nadia)

Superstitions and taboos seem reduced after women enter paid work. For example it is no longer possible to obey all the taboos surrounding menstruation or rules about untouchability (e.g, bathing before touching the rice bowl etc.). However, we found one case where women due to social taboos around menstruation had to lose out on wages. It took them so long to follow all the taboos to do with menstruation that they could not put in a full day's work, and the employer cut their wages.

Traditional beliefs that display a patriarchal value system continued. Examples of these beliefs were believing that dowry was necessary, that a boy child was to be preferred, that it was a waste of money to educate girls etc. These beliefs did not change much despite women working.

The social impact of being in paid work, thus, seems to be a mixed one. It does not seem to be the magic pill that many social scientists make it out to be, when they say that if women get into paid work, their freedom will increase. Paid work combines with traditional beliefs, community strangleholds, patriarchal values and structures and restricts the freedom it brings to women. Changes in social aspects happen slowly and in convoluted ways, so it would require a much more nuanced approach than this study has taken to understand what makes for such changes.

6.6 Impact on Health

Getting involved in paid work also has an impact on women's health as it involves longer working hours, unsafe working conditions and many other occupational hazards. The response during the survey clearly indicate that the extra burden of being in paid work is taking its toll on women's health. 96% women complained of tiredness, and this was echoed in almost all the case studies and FGDs. Women also tended to neglect their own health when they had tight resources, preferring to spend on other family members. Delay in eating meals was a frequent problem.

During her case study interview, Nayantara Sardar,(Mahatpur, Nadia) who worked as a daily labourer and NREGA worker and earned about Rs. 800 a month said that she always thinks that her health problems are secondary things. She first wants to serve her family (husband and children) properly,

“I don't have enough money to spend on my health. I am already spending money for my husband's health problem.” .

Rajeshwari Rajowar, (Bahadurpur, Nadia) also worked as a daily labourer and NREGA worker earning about Rs.800 a month after losing her land to the Forest Department expressed similar sentiments,

I become tired. But I have to work because of poverty. I have a problem with my knees and eyesight. But I have no money to spend on my own health. My husband also has a health problem.

Gouri Kundu who earned about Rs.3500 per month making puffed rice in Sautia in Paschim Midnapore district said,

“My tiredness is increasing day by day and I am becoming unfit because of age.”

Her daughter in law Sabita Kundu multi tasks as a Mid-Day Meal cook , looking after the cows at home helping with the family farm work. Her main work is , however, running a “tele bhaja” shop . She told us

Before joining paid work, I used to take rest after lunch. But now there is no time to take rest. I wake up early in the morning. I am not getting enough sleep. I become tired more than before.

Ameena Biwi who made her living rolling Beedis in Hawapur, North 24 Paraganas expressed the same feeling of being overworked and under-rested. She said,

“Once I started rolling bidis, I became more tired than before. I can’t take meals at the proper time due to my engagement with paid as well as household work”

The awareness about occupational diseases was very low. Despite this we found that in the survey 33% or 1/3rd of the women complained of occupational diseases.

The occupational diseases women seemed aware of in the FGDs and case studies were the very obvious ones. Purnima Mistry from South 24 Parganas complained of her eyesight getting affected due to doing Zari embroidery. A group of women in the FGDs who worked in cleaning prawns complained about their hands getting fungal infections and sores. (FGD 3). Those who worked as agricultural workers were afraid of snake bite. (FGD 8). Women who had to sit in front of fires for long periods to make puffed rice or parboil paddy also complained about the ill effects of long exposure to heat. Those involved in hard manual labour complained of back pain and knee pain.

A factor which could have a positive impact on women’s health was help that they get from men folk in housework. 54% or more than half said that they got this help. This is quite different from the feedback women have given in the case studies and FGDs, where housework is supposed to be entirely the woman’s responsibility. The answers in the FGDs and case studies generally showed that men do not help with the housework. The few who helped did so as and when they pleased so this could not be really called help, according to the women (FGD 1). Other women (FGD 2) felt it was wrong if husbands helped them. Another group (FGD 11) said that *“When we work outside , if we do not come home and do our housework in time , there is tension with the husband.”*

Expenditure on health was determined by the amount of money a family had. For those who had the extra money, expenditure on health was a must. For others, as Bharati Rajowar stated, health was neglected, but illness meant a huge loss of income and further poverty and illness caused by poverty and neglect. She said,

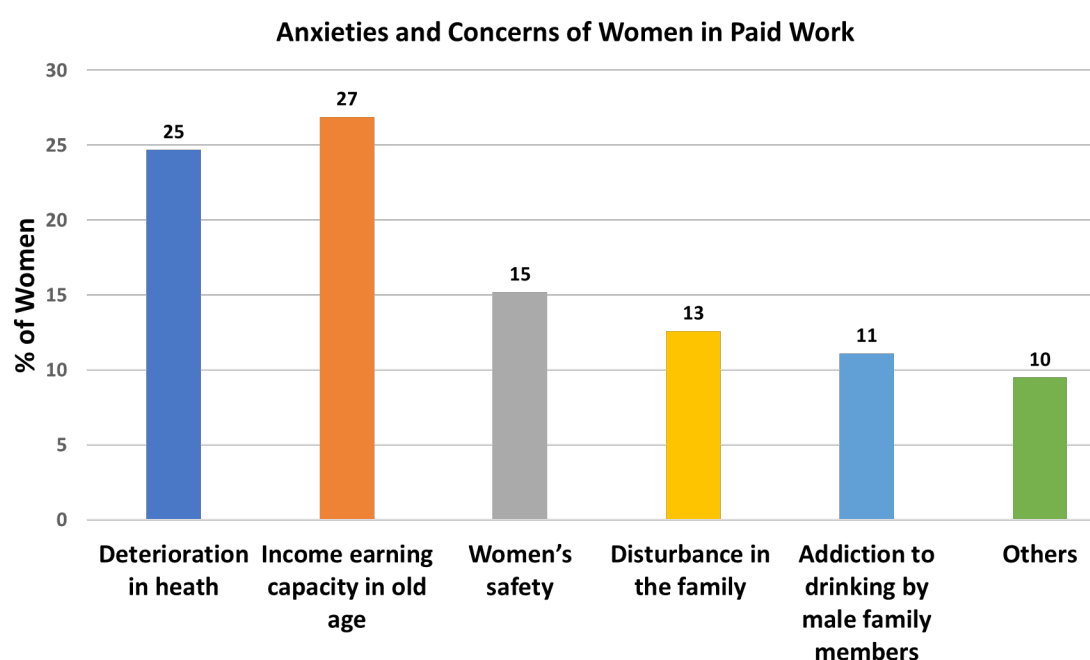
Health issues become a secondary thing because of poverty. I have no health problem or disease. But I am worried about my husband’s health. Our ability to do manual labour is our only source of income. If we become ill, we will stop earning.

Bharati also gave a very good analysis of why working-class women suffer from ill health.

The health of working women suffers because they work on both paid work and household work; they get no rest; they don't get enough sleep; they give birth several times; they get no rest or proper food after giving birth ; they faces domestic violence from husbands and sons; they do not get healthy food; and , they are mentally exhausted because of poverty and oppression

6.7. Psychological Impact

2/3 or 67% of the women say they are at peace while one third or 33% say they are unhappy. Women were also asked about the things that were worrying them. This was a question in which women could choose multiple answers. The answers received are shown in Figure 24.



The biggest worries seem to be about survival in their old age, followed by deteriorating health. This reflects on the lack of social security for such workers.

Social issues of security and safety within and outside the family also concern the women, with 15% worried about women's safety, 13% with family disturbances and 9% with drinking by male members. All three of these issues can make women insecure and vulnerable to male violence both inside the home and outside.

In the FGDs, many women expressed unhappiness with their lives (FGDs1, 5, 8,9, 10,11) Others said they were quite happy (FGDs 2,3,5,7, 8). These groups cut across districts and caste or religion groups,we cannot really draw any conclusions form these statements about paid work leading to greater happiness or unhappiness

However, we should note that one of the chief reasons for unhappiness was incomes being low and no security of getting work.

Women in FGD 9 said,

“We are worried because there is no surety about work and income. There is not enough work, and we are always tense about losing work.”

One of the women in the group added,

“ One day, I didn’t go to my employer’s house for work. As a result, I lost my job as domestic worker”]

Women in FGD 3 said,

“We have the fear of losing our job, as our work place is on government land. Also, our houses are on government land, so we can lose our homes.”

Women in FGD 2 echoed this feeling of insecurity,

“We have to labour our entire lives, but we can leave nothing for our children.”

Even Sabita Kundu who was employed by the government as a Mid-day meal cook in Sautia in Paschim Midnapore district expressed her insecurity,

“When I go for midday meal cooking, I am afraid of losing my job. Party members of the ruling party can stop the work of our self-help group.”

Some women complained of mental tiredness. Worries about old age and health problems were also common. A lot of the older women worried about who would take care of them in their old age.

Shamsun Nahar from Dogacchia in Nadia district said,

“We have worked all our lives. Now my son has separated with his wife. He now says what have you done for me or given to me. I am unhappy because of this”

This was echoed by women from FGD 11 from Nadia.

A single woman (Firdausi Bibi, Nadia) in the case studies seemed to suffer from the tension of being alone in old age as well as the problem of people calling her a “bad woman” because she was single and alone. During her interview she said,

“I have no child. When I will not be able to work, who will take care of me? When my mother dies, I will be all alone. How can a lone woman live in a house? And then I am afraid of “bodnam” (of people saying she is characterless).”

Women who had problems in their marital lives were the worst affected. DraupadiSardar from Raghampur said she was mentally exhausted because of her husband’s torture along with poverty.

Working was also a relief for some women, not just for women to whom it provided a large enough income (like Gouri Kundu who earned Rs. 3500 per month making puffed rice and

Santilata Soren who earned Rs. 3350 per month as an ICDS worker), but also for other women with lower incomes who found it a relief getting out of their houses. Women from FGD 7 said their worries are less when they were working. In FGD 2 and 6, women said,

“We like spending time outside the house for work – it gives us a feeling of freedom.”

In FGD 6, women said,

“The atmosphere at the work place is good”

Most women felt more self-confident now that they were working. (FGD 2, 6, 10, 11).

We received no actual complaints of sexual harassment from the women we interviewed in the case studies or in the FGDs. There were however, some hints about possible harassment. In FGD 3, Muslim women said,

“The work place is safe, but some of us are afraid of our male colleagues.”

Sabita Kundu from Sautia in Paschim Midnapore, a relatively educated (passed Class X) and economically well-off woman, earning Rs. 2750 per month working as a Mid-day Meal cook and running a “tele bhaja” (fritters) shop in a family of 5 with 4 earning members, complained,

“I face verbal harassment in the tele bhaja shop from customers.”

Women who worked in a brick field did complain directly of sexual harassment, but these were migrant women from Orissa and Jharkhand and outside the scope of our study. Generally, women who worked near their homes and with employers who were from the same or neighbouring villages did not seem to experience sexual harassment because the employer and the women were from the same area and knew each other and each other’s families. Community networks ensured that local women were not harassed in the work-place, while women from Orissa and Jharkhand were outside these networks and seemed “fair game” to the employers, their *sardars* (agents) and supervisors.

6.8 Political impact

The involvement in paid work has had some impact on women’s involvement in politics. It brings them in contact with the outside world, which also means their contact with local political leaders increases. 48.8% of women said that they had increased contact with political leaders after beginning paid work while 51.7% of the women also reported an increased awareness of their rights as women. This result should however be treated with due caution, as it is the women’s own view of how conscious they are of their rights. This is the answer to a straight forward question “are you more aware of women’s rights after getting into paid work” without examining what rights we are talking about, or what we mean by rights.

The ability to deal with political leaders and awareness about rights seemed also to be a function of whether women were part of women’s organisations like the Shramajivi Mahila Samity rather than whether they were in paid work or not. Thus, women like Gouri Kundu who had substantial income and had economically transformed their families were not

interested in dealing with political leaders. They were also not aware of their rights as women. On the other hand,, Debjani Bag, Purnima Mistri and Sudha Sardar were not major earning members. They earned between 500 and 1000 rupees a month only, but were important as decision makers in their families. They were also confident leaders in their areas, despite being from marginalised communities of Scheduled Castes in the case of Debjani and Purnima and Adivasi in the case of Sudha. Women like Shamsun Nahar, Firdousi Biwi and Basana Haldar were also important decision makers in their families, as well as important local leaders. They were also important earning members. Shmasun Nahar and Firdousi were divorcee Muslim women and Basana was the fourth wife of her husband, much tortured and reviled. The Mahila Samity had helped them deal with their unhappy family histories. All these women gave the Mahila Samity credit for making hem vocal and able to deal with the Block administration, the Panchayat and the Police.

The example of Lakshmi Kisku from Paschim Midnapore brings out the complexity of women's involvement in politics and their empowerment in general. Lakshmi Kisku is a Panchayat member from the ruling TMC party. She is 27 years old, married and has one son. She has worked as a daily labour from her adolescence. The only time she took time off was for 3 months when she was pregnant. She regrets becoming a Panchayat member and is determined to not stand for elections the next time. The reason is that she no longer has time to work. Also, many people are not willing to take her for work because she is now a Panchayat member. She also feels it is undignified for her a panchayat member to ask for work. Being a panchayat member has also not empowered her in many ways. She has no property in her name; she does not get time for rest; she can't go to her father's house by herself without her husband's permission. When she gave birth to her first child, Lakshmi was not mature enough, but it was a joint decision. But her husband forces her to have sex. He doesn't care about her consent. She is worried that she can't sexually satisfy her husband. Her unhappiness as a Panchayat Member, compounded by the fact that she can't get work because she is a Panchayat member, causes her a lot of mental anxiety and she feels her increasingly hopeless. She is more tired than she was before. She can't have dinner and lunch in proper time. She has a breathing problem. But there are some aspects that she feels positive about. As a panchayat member she can talk to political leaders when she needs to. People know her by name in her locality. Now, she can protest on various issues faced by her community.

6.9 Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. In the case of women, who are the deprived and exploited gender in a patriarchal society like ours, empowerment becomes an important way of understanding whether women are gaining from the changes in their lives. Our study has also looked at this aspect. We have seen empowerment as the ability of the women to have greater control over her own life and her family, her body and her earnings.

The results from the survey are shown in Figure 25 below, where we took the answers to 5 questions as indicators of empowerment.

69% of the women felt they were in a position to decide how to spend their own income, which means that over 30% were earning but the decisions about spending the money was taken by the husbands and other members of the family.

A smaller number (63%) said they could take decisions independently within the household. Again 37% felt that they did not have this power despite being earning members.

The lack of control over their own bodies was a frightening aspect of this process that was supposed to empower women in all aspects of their lives through economic upliftment and empowerment. - Only 37% women decided when to have a child. For the majority, (63%) the decision was taken by the husband or mother in law.

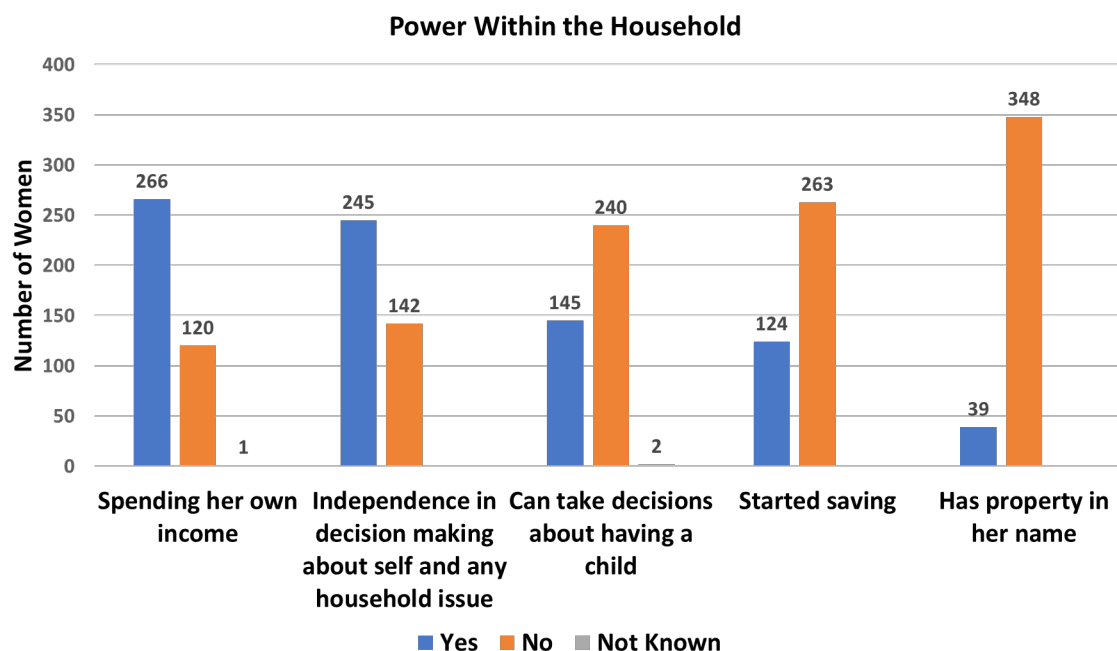


Figure 25: Impact of involvement in paid work on women’s power within the household for women in the survey. Of 692 respondents in the survey, 387 were in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure depict the number of women in a particular category.

Few had started saving money in their own names – only 32%, which might also a function of the fact that women had very little money to save.

Very few had property in their own names – only 10%. This means that 90% worked for their families to increase the family income and welfare and sometimes to accumulate wealth for the family. Yet they did not have any right on the family property.

We also looked at the number of questions to which women had given affirmative answers in order to further understand the extent of empowerment. It emerges that less than 2 % of the women felt empowered enough to say yes to all 5 questions, while a fairly large group (16%) said no to all 5 questions. Most felt empowered to answer yes to two (25%) or three (26%) questions.

In the FGDs, one group (FGD 9, a group of Hindu mixed caste women from Nadia) very flatly said that they did not feel that there had been a change in their situation as far as empowerment went.

Amongst the other groups, except for one group (FGD 7 a mixed caste Hindu group from Sautia in Paschim Midnapore), the others felt that they had very little decision making powers within their families.

Women had very little control over their earnings. The women of FGD 11 said,

“We give our earnings to the husband. He decides how to spend it. Often he drinks it away.”

Even on health-related issues, women did not have the freedom to get themselves treated. They complained that they got little rest (FGD 2 and 3), could not decide to go the doctor themselves (FGD 3) and if they had to go beyond the village quack doctor to a proper hospital or doctor, the husband had to go with them (FGD 11).

None of the women owned any property and many thought this was normal- property should be in the name of the husband or other menfolk.

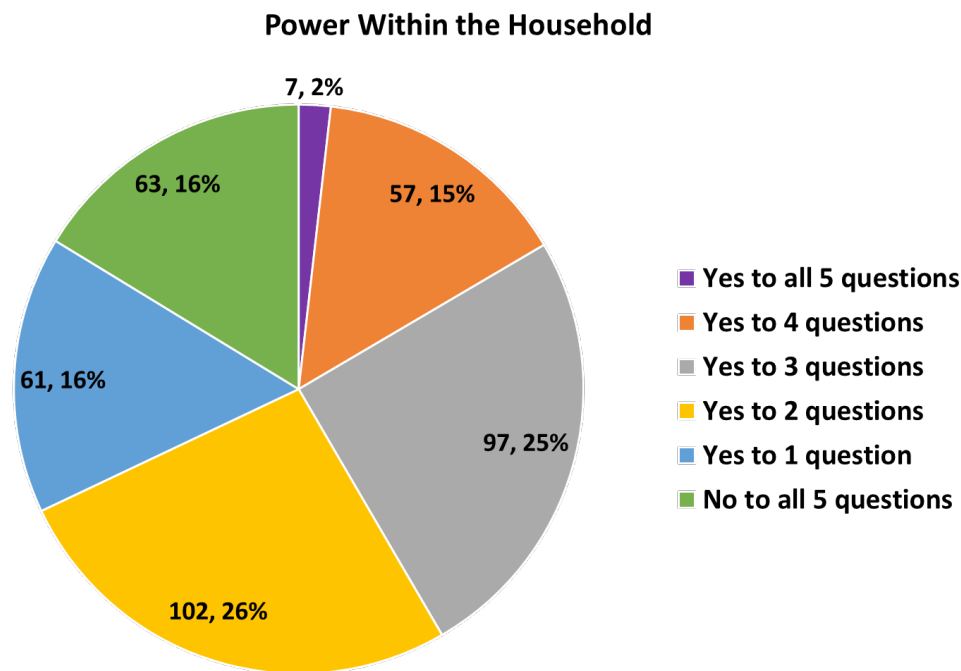


Figure 26: Impact of involvement in paid work on women's power within the household for women in the survey as measured by the number of women with affirmative responses to the 5 chosen indicators of empowerment. Of 692 respondents in the survey, 387 were in paid work. The numbers shown in the figure depict the number and percentage of women in a particular category.

Women did not have the power to decide about having a child or the power to say “No” to sex. Women in FGDs 2, 3 and 11 said that the decision on having a child was taken by the husband, and the sexual relationship was established at his wish. Also, they accepted the fact that he could use force when necessary. Some of these views were echoed by FGDs 6, 8, and

9. An insecurity that the husband might leave her and a feeling that the marriage bond was fragile coloured her views.

“Our opinion is not sought in sexual matters. To avoid conflict and problems, we agree to our husbands’ opinions and his will. He may go to another woman if we do not agree, so even when we feel bad, we submit.” (FGD 6)

In the case studies, many women spoke about being forced by husbands to have sex. Many (Samila Naiya , Basana Haldar) spoke about being raped by their husbands. Decision about children were almost always taken by the husband or mother in law.

Ameena Biwi, a woman who was a biri roller, when asked about various issues , had told us that she had very little freedom of movement or decision making within the family. However, she felt more positive about her sexual relations with her husband. She said,

“I could not conceive in the first eight years of my marriage. The society and my in laws blamed me for this but even then my husband never tried get married again. And for that I am so grateful to my husband.”

Here, too, Ameena is not “empowered”, but “grateful” because her husband has been “kind” to her despite what she assumes is her infertility. In Ameena Biwi’s eyes her childlessness warrants her mistreatment by her husband and him taking another wife. Her low sense of self-worth and her passive acceptance of highly patriarchal structures that surround her rather than her actual “empowerment” leads her to a relatively rosy assessment of her marriage.

In the case studies, we found that women who were free from patriarchal bonds of marriage were more empowered. Thus, Shamshun Nahar, a divorcee with a son (and, now, daughter in law) told us about how she took decisions independently about her work and earnings.

I have a small paddy field of 2 bighas and 5 cottahs (74 decimals). I am not the owner. I have leased it and I have to pay 40 thousand rupees for 5 years. I am cultivating paddy, jute, mustard seeds etc. Rarely do I appoint agricultural labourers. I and my son work on this land. I sell the produce myself to the wholesaler. When I was with my husband I had no right to say anything. But now I can decide.

Similar feelings were echoed by Firdousi Biwi, who was also a divorcee

Now I am financially independent. I have control on my family, I spend my money in the way I want.

On the other hand was Sita Mandi who as a single woman raising 3 daughters on an income of Rs.6800 per month from many different kinds of manual work was finding it very difficult running her family as the only earning member. Being the only decision maker was tiring for her in her poverty. During her interview she said,

“Now I am the only one to take decision about everything at her home. I am tired of it.”

Firdousi had also joined the Mahila Samiti a few years ago. After earning and joining the Mahila Samiti, she thinks she has become empowered. Basana Haldar also saw the Mahila Samity as a source of empowerment. As we have mentioned before, Basana got married when

she was only 12 years old against her wishes to a husband who was much older. She was his fourth wife and complained of torture, marital rape and constant suspicion by her husband. She said,

“Now I am a member of the Mahila Samiti. And now I feel freer than before. Now I am respected by villagers. And I am involved with various voluntary community work. I can go anywhere I want.”

Money and being able to earn was a source of at least partial empowerment for the women we studied. Economic circumstances within the family seemed to play a big part. On the one hand were Nayantara Sardar, a poor, aging, daily labourer and Bharati Rajowar, whose family land had been taken over by the Forest Department. Nayantara an Adivasi woman from Mahatpur, Nadia clearly felt this connection between wealth and empowerment and said,

“Empowerment is closely related to family income. No one will show respect if you are poor.”

Bharati Rajowar from Bahadurpur, Nadia felt the devastating economic impact of losing her land extended beyond economics to her control over her own life. Monetization of her labour had, in fact, disempowered her. She said,

“When we had our own fields, I worked there. But when we lost our land, I started to work as a daily labourer on other’s fields. The difference is now I can earn money. But I have no control on my own earning. This is not because of any oppression or force, poverty gives me no opportunity to do anything else but survive”.

Empowerment is, thus, impacted by wider societal processes, as well as individual capacities to earn and circumstances within the family. In the example above, development and Government action has pushed Bharati into a worse situation

On the other hand, were women like Sabita Kundu, whose income from her “*telebhaja*” shop helped to run the family and Santilata Soren, who earned regularly every month as an ICDS worker. They contributed a substantial part of the family income. So, their opinions counted within their households.

Sabita Kundu said,

“Before joining paid work no one gave attention to my health problem. But now when I have money for my treatment, my husband, my mother-in-law give importance to my health issues. Because now I am an important earning member of this family and many things depend on my income.

When I got married my husband used to buy me one packet of sanitary napkin. But it was not sufficient for me. I did not ask him for more sanitary napkins. I used cloth then. And after joining paid work, I can buy 3 packets of sanitary napkin every month.

My husband also gives importance to my opinion. Few years ago, he used to say that “keep quiet, being a “meyemanush” (derogatory term for woman) don’t say anything, and don’t give me advice. I don’t want to listen you” but now he listens to my opinions and gives me responsibility for many important things.”

Now I can give suggestions and opinion about buying property, which doctor to show, children's education etc. I have a bank account."

Santilata Soren said,

"I have full control on my income and on my husband's income also. My husband helps me in household work. My husband never forces me to have sex. He gives importance to my consent. It was my decision when and how many children will be born."

Sabita Kundu's case could be considered as one the best examples of empowerment, where her contribution has made a significant difference to the family money income and to the accumulation of wealth by the family. However, even in this case , there are many crucial areas where she remains oppressed.

"I can't go to my "baper bari" (parents' house) because of the pressure of work. And when I go there and spend 2-3 extra days, my husband becomes angry. My husband also doesn't give me permission to go outside sometimes. When there was a puja (religious festival) at my sister's home, my husband did not let me go there.

I have to follow many rules. I have to take a bath after having sex, then I can't touch the rice bowl. I have to dress properly and stay properly veiled in front of my father-in-law. When my mother-in-law saw that I had made golden ear rings for myself, she got very angry. She thinks that my first priority should be my family, not myself. My sisters -in -law also support my mother- in law. When I began working in the tele bhaja shop, they got very angry. They don't want the "ghorer bou' (the housewife , and the honour of the house) to sit in the bazaar.

I am not allowed to talk much with males. Nothing has changed after joining paid work.

I had long hair, but my mother-in-law cut it forcibly, when I was asleep. Her logic was that it is harmful for her son, her son's life span will be decreased because of it. I was very annoyed, but could do nothing.

I have finished my school final. My mother-in-law mocks me by saying "you have become a pundit (scholar).We are illiterate so you are not giving proper respect to us"

My father had to pay a dowry of 50 thousand in my marriage. But still my mother-in-law taunts me saying that your father promised to give us furniture, but he did not keep his words. He has betrayed us.

Rules have increased for me after joining paid work. I don't say anything because if I protest I will be forced to stop paid work by my family members. So, I remain silent."

She has no property in her name. She has no opportunity to take rest. Her sex life is controlled by her husband. He doesn't care about her consent. Sabita has no idea about marital rape. She knows that husband has the right to do anything with her body. And she thinks it is her duty to satisfy him

6.10 West Bengal in General: Marital violence and Empowerment

To give a context to the issue of empowerment through paid work, we are giving a more general picture of the situation of women in West Bengal. This data is for all women in West Bengal, and not just for those in paid work.

The National Crime Record Bureau’s (NCRB) annual report “Crimes in India, 2016” shows that West Bengal has been consistently holding the position of the state with the second highest incidence of Crimes Against Women in 2014, 2015 and 2016. In fact, in 2016, it ranked highest in the country in terms of domestic violence with 19,302 such incidents being registered. Earlier, in the 1990s, the NCRB report would also give information on incidence of crime at the district level. This data showed that two districts South and North 24 Parganas, both of which are part of this study, ‘had the dubious distinction of being the districts with the second and third highest number of cases of cruelty by husbands and relatives all over India.’¹⁸ The occurrence of domestic violence thus has a long history and is well entrenched in West Bengal.

The National Family Health Survey-4 in 2015-16 shows the following position for women in rural West Bengal. We compare it in Figure 9 with the position of rural women all over India.

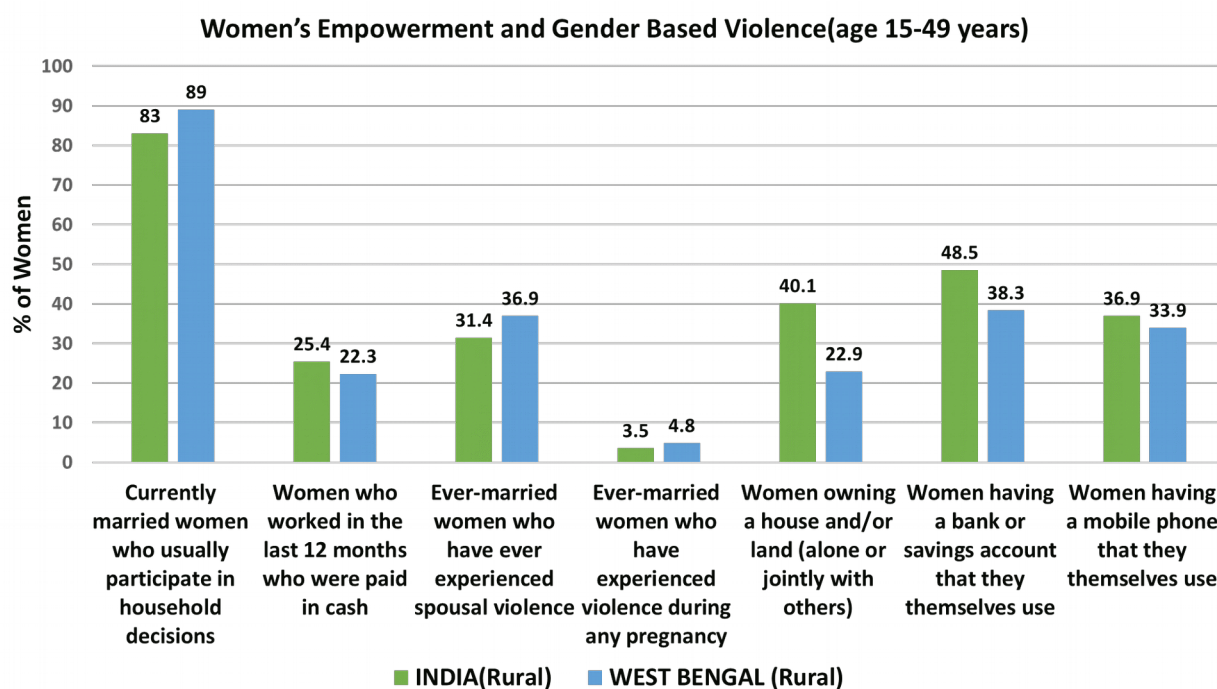


Figure 27: Women’s empowerment and gender-based violence statistics reported in the National Family Health Survey in 2015-16³

Except for participation in household decisions, in all other indicators of empowerment and gender based violence, women fare worse in West Bengal. Fewer women received cash for

³ Source: <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/pdf/NFHS4/India.pdf> and http://rchiips.org/NFHS/pdf/NFHS4/WB_FactSheet.pdf

work. Fewer women owned property, or had bank accounts, or owned a mobile phone. More women experienced spousal violence, both generally and during pregnancy.

6.11 Conclusions

It is difficult to isolate what the impact of earning more money has on a woman's life. Many inter-related factors work to have a positive impact on her life, as well as to empower her. Similarly, many factors work together to keep her oppressed. Her ability to earn is an important positive factor. However, meagre earnings mean she is tense herself about her life of poverty and she does not have much say in her family and if there is not substantial earning there is little impact on other aspects of her life. On the other hand, women's earnings, when substantial, tend to be used in wise ways and lead to accumulation of wealth in the family, besides improving her health and well-being also.

A woman's family circumstances play an important role, with single women likely to be more positively impacted if their income levels are high enough. However, single women also suffer from becoming the sole earning members of their families and poverty can make life drudgery and at subsistence level, when they are the only earners. For women in families with husbands and adult sons, their mental peace and freedom is largely dependent on the way in which their menfolk and sometimes mothers in laws behave. A sizeable section continued to face domestic violence despite their monetary contribution to the family.

Another factor that augments the positive impact of earning on the woman's life is her involvement in women's collectives like the Shramajivi Mahila Samity. This helps her to develop her self-confidence and to deal positively with many of the hurdles that come before her. It also earns her social recognition.

So called development, on the other hand is having an adverse impact on her capacity to earn and to meet even her basic needs. Eviction due to takeover of land by Government agencies, shrinking commons, replacement of people by machines in sand mines, earthwork, power-looms, machines for making puffed rice etc. – all these have affected women adversely.

Being in paid work does not impact social problems very effectively. It is not a magic pill which changes social aspects of a woman's life. Paid work combines with traditional beliefs, community strangleholds, patriarchal values and structures and restricts the freedom it brings to women. Changes in social aspects happen slowly and in convoluted ways. Such change would require a much more nuanced approach than just getting into paid work.

The impact on women's health of being in paid work was undoubtedly negative. Tiredness and the lack of rest were the most common complaints. There was also the extra burden of occupational diseases. However, earnings did lead to some improvement in diets. Psychologically, women were happier after working, though many tensions, especially the fear of losing work and the tensions of earning too little remained.

Politically women remained disinterested in politics and there seems to have been the least difference made in this aspect of women's lives. Even being elected as a Panchayat member was not hugely empowering.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND PREFERENCES

In the study, we also tried to explore women’s understanding of their needs and limitations both as part of a paid work force and as unpaid workers, the difficulties that they faced financially and socially and their evaluation of how the state could intervene for their economic betterment.

A preliminary exploration of the Government programmes and the actions by the administration that the women wanted was done during the case studies and FGDs. Women were asked what they wanted from the Government to make their lives and work better. They were also asked to rank their suggestions. A set of 19 actions and programmes were chosen from these FGDs and case studies. These were put before the women during the survey. Women who were working only within the home and those who were also doing paid work along with unpaid housework were asked for the actions and programmes they wanted. They were also asked to rank their choices. This chapter deals with the preferences that the women have shown.

7.1 Women’s Preferences

The 692 women surveyed gave the following responses when giving their choices about the kinds of programmes and actions they wanted from the Government.

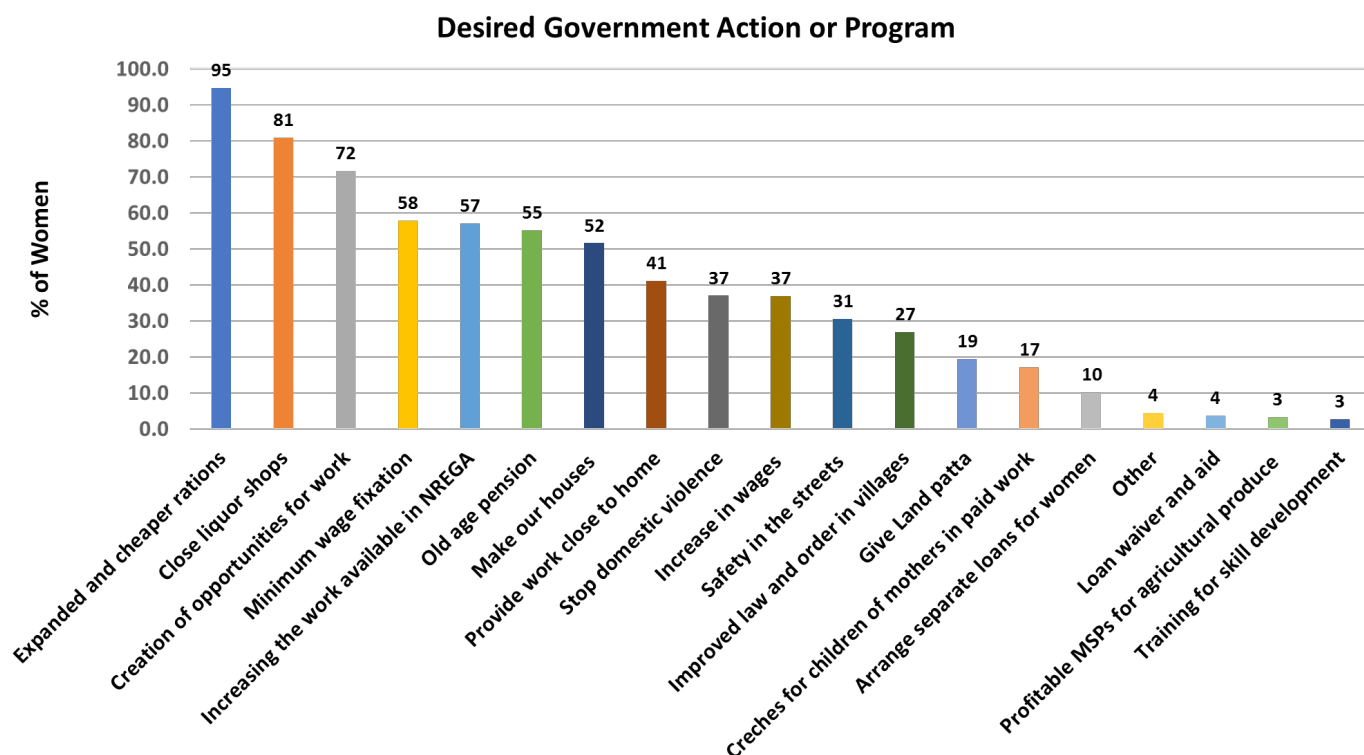


Figure 28: Government programs and actions chosen by women in survey. The numbers shown in the figure depict the percentage of women who chose this particular option. The survey had 692 respondents in 4 different villages in 4 different districts.

The preferences shown by the women are more or less the same across the four villages.

Almost all women (95%) have asked for expanded and cheaper rations i.e. for more and more items to be provided cheaply through a rationing system. The emphasis on work creation is significant, with 72% women wanting greater creation of work opportunities, 57% for more work under NREGA and 41% for work near their homes. As we have noted in an earlier chapter on the nature of women's paid work, women are not keen to migrate and want more work in their local area.

It is significant that the policy options that are most often talked about in the mainstream discussions of policies that are required for rural poverty alleviation and improvement in agriculture sector (Loan waiver and aid, Profitable MSPs for agricultural produce, Training for skill development) are very low priorities for women here with only 3-4% women choosing this option.

37% of the women want increased wages, and 58% want a minimum wage to be fixed which will give them a decent living. Social security measures, especially old age pensions (55%) and housing (52%) are in fairly high demand

Women are equally concerned with improved safety in their lives. 37%, 27%, and 31% women want the government to take actions to stop domestic violence, improve law and order in villages and ensure women's safety in the streets respectively. This is along with 81% women who want liquor shops to be closed, which is an aspect in rural India that threatens women's safety and well-being and is a big drain on family incomes.

If we are to take the seven most important choices made by women in the figure above, these choices are for necessities being provided at cheap rates from the ration shop, for closure of all liquor vends, creating more work, fixation of minimum wages, increasing the work available under NREGA, old age pensions and house construction.

After we looked at ranking assigned by women to policy options chosen by them in the survey, we found many preferences had been ranked 10th or 15th. So we decided to look at only the first six preferences. We assessed the perceived importance of each policy action by calculating a weighted performance score. Each score was calculated by assigning a weight of 6 to being ranked 1 and weight of 5 to being ranked 2 and so on. The numbers of women assigning a rank value to a particular option was multiplied by weight for that rank to get a weighted number. These weighted numbers were then added to get the total weighted preference score. The results are shown in Figure 2.

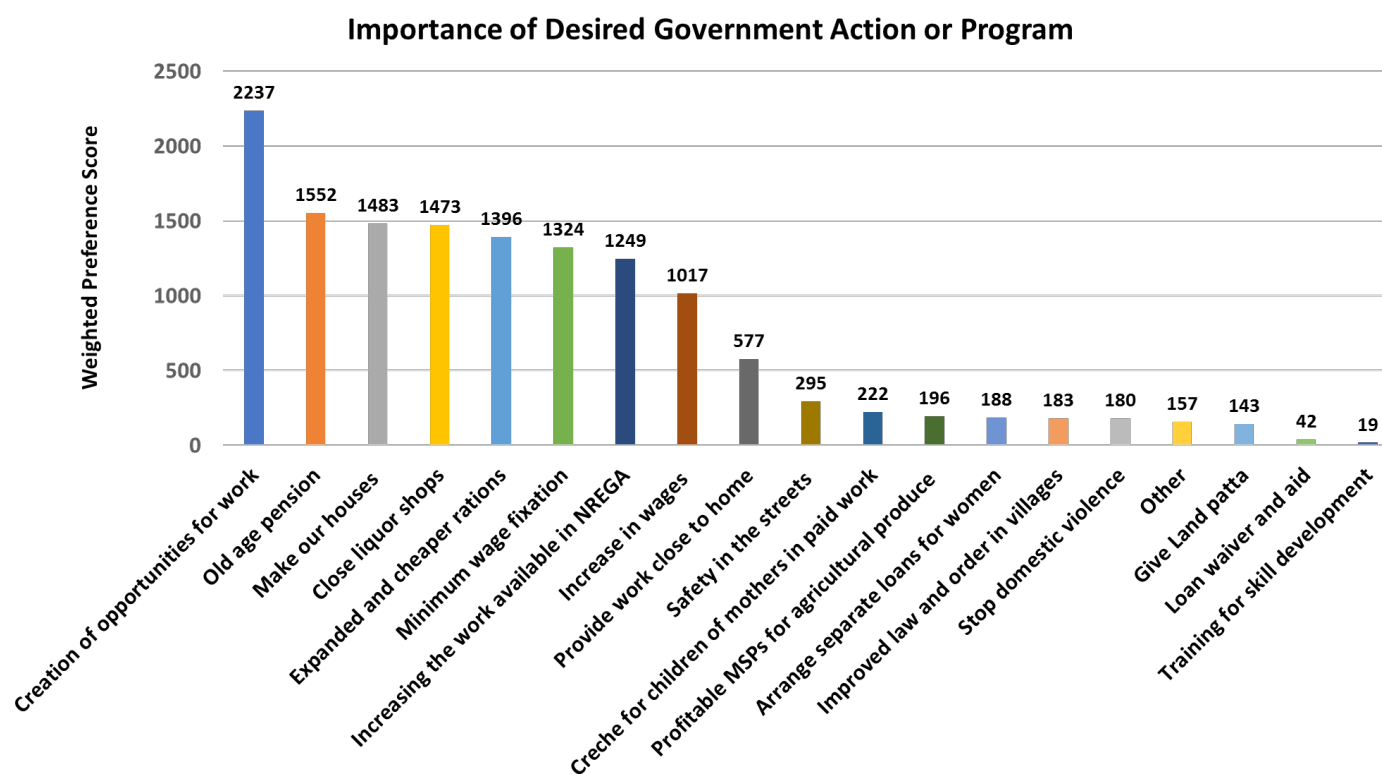


Figure 29: Weighted preference scores for policy options chosen by women in the survey with 692 respondents.

Further grouping of the preferences was done, so that similar actions and programmes could be grouped together in broader sectors or categories. The preferences for policy options in different categories is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Desired government actions or programs selected in broader categories by women in survey.

Broad area	Detailed actions	Subtotal
Social security	Provide all necessities at cheap prices in the ration shop; Make our houses; Old age pension; creches for children of mothers in paid work	1255
Employment related	Increasing the work available in NREGA; Creation of opportunities for work; Provide work close to home	998
Safety	Stop domestic violence; make proper arrangements for peace in the village; close liquor shops; safety in the streets	732
Wage related	Minimum wage fixation; increase in wages	584
Agriculture related	Government will decide profitable prices for agricultural produce and will buy at these prices; giving land pattas	102

Promoting entrepreneurship	Arrange separate loans for women; loan waiver and aid; training for skill development	79
Others		29

A similar ranked preference was created from the preferences given in FGDs by the groups of women we met. Their preferences were outlined in the FGDs and the chosen ranks are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Policy options and assigned ranks selected during focus group discussions with women.

		Number of Women Giving Ranks						
Broad area	Actions and programmes	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	Total women
Wage related	Equal wage, full day wage instead of piece rate, higher wages	2	4			1		7
Employment related	Employment throughout the year , Government work, regular NREGA work, regular payment, work suitable for women, stop mechanisation	4	4	1	5	5	1	20
Social Security	Social security from Government-pensions, cheap goods through ration shop, relief, housing for all	2	2	6	3		1	14
Public Services	Public services - Health facilities , transport	1		1				2
Promotion of Entrepreneur Ship	Loans, job oriented training	1			1		1	3
Beneficiary Selection	Redo BPL list, ST card			2				2
Safety	Stop sale of liquor					1		1
Total		10	10	10	9	7	3	49

Both the FGDs and the data from the survey show that employment, social security, and wages are important for the women. During the survey, women also said that their chief worries were about deteriorating health (25%) and survival in their old age (27%), both issues arising from the lack of social security measures.

In addition, during the survey, issues of safety were also very important. This could be because the survey had more or less equal representation from working (387) and non-working women (305) we are taking working and non-working, while the FGDs were with working women only. Again when asked about what worried them, women also talked about safety issues. Amongst the women in paid work, 15% worried about women's safety, 13%

were concerned with family disturbances and 9% with drinking by male members, all three of which can make women insecure and vulnerable to male violence both inside the home and outside.

Another thing to note is that women do not give the importance the Government gives to skill development through training and to loans etc. to set up one's own business. There is thus a clear mismatch between what the Government thinks is important and what women want.

Women want more work, better wages and social security - demands that are basic to any group of working people. In addition, as a group that are subject to or threatened with violence in many forms, women are also concerned about safety issues.

Interestingly, entrepreneurship related programs- training, loans and loan waivers, skill development – do not interest them, almost involving a rejection of the main strategies Governments would like to adopt for poverty alleviation.

7.2 Loss of a potential source of growth and equity

The study clearly shows that there is a huge potential amongst women that we are losing out on as a country. India's working age population is now 63.4 % of the total population. Almost half of these are women. Yet only 25% of the women are workers. We are therefore losing out by not utilising such a huge portion of our work force.

As our study has shown, working age women, even when they are non-workers spend 8 to 16 hours in unpaid work inside the house and in their family farms and enterprises. There is no acknowledgement of this work by women themselves, who say that they are doing "nothing", because there is no monetary return for this labour. Their families also do not acknowledge this contribution to the family's income and well-being, with women owning practically no property, and with little control over their family decisions as well as over their own mobility and bodies. Society at large also does not acknowledge their contribution, so that starting from the definition of what is work to the measurement of the same, and to making policies for the country at large, this huge section of our population becomes invisible. From the policy point of view, such measurement results in an incomplete understanding of women's work and in policies that cannot skill her or reduce her drudgery. The result is distorted policies for employment creation and for the welfare of our people. The result is also the down grading of women to second class citizens and their oppression through violence and deprivation of various kinds within the family.

On the other hand, as we have seen, even small transfers of money to women through paid work result in wise and sensible expenses. Women spend their money on food, medical expenses, education of their children, essentials like clothing and house repair.

Women themselves are keen to join the paid work force, as has been shown by this study. Their main problem is that there is not enough work for them in their local areas, and migration is not an option that is open to them because of their family obligations.

7.3 How Do We Acknowledge Women's Economic Contribution?

The first task towards acknowledging women's contribution to the economy is to make her contribution visible. For this we need to change our definition of what contributes to the economy and to include the many tasks that women do within the house as unpaid work in our definition of work. Measurement of this work would make her contribution visible and would make it necessary for planners to include the same in their plans and policies. It would also help activists and feminists to campaign for programs and policies that are oriented towards women in unpaid work. Only if we understand and measure the problem can we come up with successful programmes to skill women and to reduce her drudgery.

Most women in this study who are in paid work have worked for long hours for pittance wages. Very few of them get work throughout the year, and they generally earn between Rs.500-1400 per month. The work that they get is irregular. They work for multiple employers and at multiple jobs. Special professions for women with their skill set are not available, nor do women have the required skills to take up any profession. So the easiest task seems to be to become a daily labourer- someone who is available for all kinds of tasks on the payment of a daily wage.

On the other hand, the study also brought out clearly through a few experiences that a higher and regular income for women (income as little as Rs.2000-3500 per month) led to at least some change in the power equations within the family, and benefitted the family as a whole, pulling them out of the trap of poverty. An extremely important measure for the acknowledgement of women's work is therefore to ensure the payment of a fair and decent wage for her work.

A third important measure is to change the way in which wages are calculated. Almost all calculations of minimum wages by State and Central Government adopt measures that artificially lower wages. Thus, in West Bengal, the State Government has used a basket of food to calculate wages that provides workers with 2700 calories (a well-accepted norm) but has used high calorie, cheap food like potatoes, cooking oil and rice . It has thus managed to keep the minimum wage low while following all accepted rules.

Trade union activists accept the norms given by the 15th Indian Labour Commission and by various Supreme Court to calculate minimum wages. The Seventh Pay Commission's system of calculation given in Annexure 1 gives an example of the manner in which these norms are employed. This is probably one of the best accepted and approved methods of wage calculation in the country. This method provides for all the necessities in life like nutritious food, clothing , soap, detergent etc.; housing, fuel, electricity and water; festivals, marriage and recreation. In other similar calculations, provisions may also be there for health, education expenses, old age, provident fund etc. However, even the best calculations do not recognise women's work within the household in any way and provides in no way for the compensation for her labour. A necessary step to recognise women's unpaid labour is to add an allowance that compensates for it in the wages calculated for any job. In our calculations, women have worked from anything between 4 hours (for women in paid work) to 16 hours (for women who are not in paid work) on unpaid housework. A provision of 50% at least, as a

start, over and above the wage calculated for the worker should therefore be kept as an allowance for unpaid family labour.

7.4 Questioning Development

Acknowledging women's contribution also means that the way in which we look at development must change. So far, development has meant mainly a growth in GDP with some lip service to redistribution. However our study clearly brings out that such development is responsible for making women's lives harder and for taking work away from them.

For example, the State and Central Government have encouraged prawn fisheries in the Sunderbans area because this is a huge export earning crop. One of the villages we studied, Raghampur, was part of this area. Rice fields in the Sunderbans have been flooded with brackish water. Small and marginal farmers have been coerced by local party led mafia to give their land on lease to rich fishery owners. The entire process has involved violence. It has also been against existing land and environmental laws. However, the administration have turned a blind eye. Instead, the Fisheries Department has actively encouraged this process and banks have happily lent money for it. Women and men have lost work, with men becoming migrant workers. Women have stopped animal husbandry, vegetable and paddy cultivation. There is a drinking water crisis in the area. Even bathing ponds are no longer available. The area has been turned into a wasteland of huge brackish water fisheries, with little or no vegetation. The sufferers have been the women and the poor of that area. A handful of fishery owners have become very wealthy and the country has received huge contribution to its GDP growth and export earnings at the cost of these women.

The take-over of land by the Forest Department in Bahadurpur, one of the villages we studied was part of a World Bank funded project. Fertile agricultural land was taken over to establish a forest in 1996 and despite people's struggles, they lost their land. (See also Annexure 2). There has been at least one starvation death in the affected villages. As in the Sunderbans example given above, people have lost their land in an even more sudden and dramatic manner. Women have lost work and many are now in destitution as we have shown in the study. However, again, economic gains through one more World Bank loan was definitely part of the calculations made by so called planners and economists. Mono culture forestry has been started by the Forest Department. Local villagers are harassed if they even touch a tree. After some years, timber will be sold, and the Forest Department will show a good income-again at the cost of the women and poor in the area.

Our study has also brought out the manner in which mechanisation is taking away work from women. This has ranged from the replacement of handlooms by power looms in Nadia. JCB machines and other machines have taken over tasks like earth removal and road construction. Women in Paschim Midnapore who could get work 4 times a year in agriculture complain about power tillers, tractors, combine harvesters, mechanical sowing machines, mechanised threshers etc. taking away their work. They speak of a reduction of as much as 75% of their work. Making puffed rice was the seventh most important occupation previously amongst the women we surveyed. It was now 26th in rank. Women left this occupation because they no longer found it profitable, when puffed rice making machines could make puffed rice at

much cheaper rates. Again, all this mechanisation is taking place with active support from the Government, which provides subsidies and trainings, and banks which provide loans.

The mechanisation within agriculture has also affected other aspects of village life. Women no longer keep oxen and cows at home, so their involvement in animal husbandry has reduced (as we have seen in the survey also). In addition, there is increasing commercialisation in agriculture. Here again is the active intervention of the Government, whose agricultural policy encourages this. This means that commons are getting lost, of which there were some examples in the study. Both water bodies and grazing land that were available for public use are now being taken over by individual land owners or by groups of party mafia for commercial use. In the process, occupations like fishing and keeping goats, ducks, hens etc. are reducing.

The impact of a long history of reduced investment in agriculture by the Government is also visible in the study. Without the support of public investment and with very little private investment, many women spoke about agriculture (which was a very important source of employment for rural women) being unprofitable and their family and their decision to stop or reduce farming.

7.5 Impact of Privatisation, Low Wages and Irregular Work

On the one hand Government policy has reduced traditional avenues for women's employment without creating any major new avenues. On the other hand, Government policy over the past some decades has been privatising both health and education. As a result, women have been forced to go in for any kind of ill-paid employment. A number of them have said that they have been forced to do this out of poverty, as it is no longer possible to manage on one person's income. Expenditure on health has been one of the major areas where they have spent whatever additional money they have managed to earn, and education has been another area. These are a direct result of the reduction of public services in the health and education. It is also a result of low wages in the informal sector, where most of these women and their families work, and the irregular and precarious nature of work in this sector.

Thus an improvement of the situation of this vast work force (93% of our work force) requires public services, higher wages and regular employment.

7.6 Patriarchy, Property and Women's Collectives

The study has also brought out the stranglehold of patriarchy on women's lives. Not only are women subject to violence within the family, they are worried about safety in public places.

Their decision making powers even about their own work and earnings, about their bodies and families are controlled by husbands and sons. Even for single women, the hold of patriarchy remains, with a fear of being labelled characterless.

We have found that the gains made by going into paid work are mitigated by the patriarchal hold of families. Thus any strategy or policy to deal with women's empowerment through income generation or involvement in paid work must also deal with patriarchy.

The hold of patriarchy is most apparent in the very low percentage of women who own property or have savings in their names. A change in this aspect by having joint property or property only in women's names is essential if we want the hold of patriarchy on women's lives to be weakened.

In terms of dealing with such forces, women do not seem to find traditional political parties and politics responsive to their needs. On the other hand membership of women's collectives like the Shramajivi Mahila Samity has had a positive impact on their self-confidence and ability to deal with social issues. Perhaps this could be an avenue for empowerment of women.

7.7 Policy Recommendations

Broadly speaking, women have emphasised on 4 areas for policies and programs by the Government in the study. These are as follows:-

1. Employment related policies, where they are asking for more employment to be created near their homes and for policies that stop their replacement by machines.
2. Wage related, where they are asking for a higher wage.
3. Social security measures where they are asking for pensions, cheap necessities in ration shops, housing, crèches etc. from the Government
4. Safety related , where they are asking for action against domestic violence , peace in the villages, closure of liquor shops and safety in the streets.

In keeping with the above and with the findings of the study, we suggest the following policy recommendations:-

1. There should be a re-examination of the systems of defining and measuring work in the NSSO and the Census so that women's unpaid work is also included in our System of National Accounts.
2. An allowance for women's unpaid work should form a part of the calculation of minimum wages for all trades. A strict enforcement to ensure the payment of the wage that is calculated in this manner must be ensured.
3. In order to encourage the employment of labour and discourage mechanisation, the Government should on the one hand provide a subsidy to those employing female labour, and on the other hand should impose higher taxes on the use of labour displacing machines. In this, NREGA funds (if augmented) could be used to ensure that employers are able to provide a decent wages to labour that they employ, with the Government providing the wage component or part of it in various works that they take up.
4. As agriculture and animal husbandry still remain two of the biggest areas where women get employment, the Government should support these two sectors by ensuring minimum support prices and markets for their produce. It should also increase the investment for infrastructure that can support these two sectors, such as cold storage facilities, irrigation, readily available veterinary services etc.

5. In MGNREGA, labour budgets must be augmented and wage payment should be on a daily or weekly basis in order to provide more employment to women near their homes.
6. All social security measures such as old age pension, health facilities, accident benefits, etc. must be extended to all women who are uncovered by other schemes, irrespective of whether they are in paid work or in unpaid housework.
7. Infrastructure in villages – such as a safe drinking water source within 50 metres of every family, sanitation units for every family, social forestry for fuel wood, smokeless chullahs, creches etc. - must be improved so that women's drudgery in housework is reduced.
8. Public expenditure on services like health, education, housing , cheap necessities in ration shops etc. must be increased, so that women can make the best use of their limited incomes.
9. Schemes like MGNREGA and NRLM should be restructured so that loans are more easily accessible and so that NREGA funds can be used for individual based schemes that augment women's long term income generating capacities.
10. Rights to property and land must be ensured for women.
11. The Government should encourage the formation of women's collectives and should take stern steps to ensure safety of women (for example stern and quick action against domestic violence,, peace in the villages, closure of liquor shops and safety in the streets.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All production whether artistic, material or abstract are the products of joint labour. Thus, behind every artiste and scientist are assistants who help to complete the project. There are mentors who inspire and there is the silent worker in the background who provides the tea, the coffee and the food and the services to keep all that great mental work going. Like all labours in life, this study similarly owes its existence to the labour of many. First and foremost are the activists of the Shramajivi Mahila Samity- Amita , Archana , Asta, Bela, Jaynur, Khadeja, Namita,Suchitra and Swapna who gave ideas from their decades of experience and valuable time taken away from their organising work to make this study possible. Not only did they help in designing the various tools that were used for data collection, they also completed the survey in record time with their usual efficiency and terrific team work. Then, there is Aahana, who introduced us to modern ways of collecting data, making life much easier, and the results of the survey much better. She also helped to present data in visually appealing ways. Madhuparna, who worked as a research assistant, kept us on track and laboured away till the end. Kade provided the report with information and insights into the manner in which systems of measurement exclude women. And many thanks to Ritwik who helped with the translation. Last but definitely not the least are Azim Premji University and friends like Amit Basole, whose support made this study a reality. I would like to thank all of them, and many others who contributed in so many ways to make this study possible.

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