



Three Domains of Women Commuters; a Critical Analysis with Gender Relation: A Study on Krishnaganj Block, Nadia, West Bengal

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Abstract

Commuting for work by rural women to urban areas is an important phenomenon in recent times. The commuters spend their daily life through three domains i.e. travelling, working and house environment. In these spheres they face different behaviour and experiences from the co-passengers, peer-groups, colleagues, family members and employers. Gender-bias, inequalities and discriminations are commonly seen in these domains from the patriarchic society. Similarly the women commuter plays important role to the above stated domains for the betterment of their family as well as the society. The present paper is an endeavour of the authors to put focus on the rural women commuters' life and livelihoods.

Key words: Commuting, Domain, Empowerment, Inclusive growth, N.R.E.G.A. Scheme, Physical harassment, Psycho-sexual harassment, Social network, Sphere.

1. Introduction

Commuting has vital role to growing financial, cultural and social condition of country side and urban side. Commuting has great role to develop economic and social mobility (Hazra, 2012). Commuting is regular travel between place of residence and working place by person or group of people to compensate social and economic need. It sometimes refers to any regular or often repeated travelling between localities when not work related. People who commute are called commuter. Generally town, city, metropolitan city are broad working fields of people (Short, 1984). Attracting variety of work in formal and informal sector of urban area, workers of suburban or residential corridor, travel daily to working place or urban region through short to medium distance from their residential location. Now a huge number of workers of rural area travel to work a long distance from their residential area for growing work opportunity in informal sector of urban area and development of transport system in over all country as a result of increasing growth rate of India and globalization (Hazra, 2012). In Kolkata and its surroundings, many rural workers of North and South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Hoogly, Haora, Burdwan and East Medinipur, come to work from hundred and above distance. In the study area it has been seen that, maximum commuter travels to Kolkata and its suburban belts between 5 to 11 AM and comeback to home from workplace between 4 to 10 PM. Women commuting add special dimension to our society by which gender role and gender inequalities in different perspectives are deeply realized through private to public sphere.

2. Study Area

For carrying out the present research four adjacent village along the Gede to Sealdah south eastern rail track from three panchayets of Krishnaganj Block, of Nadia of W.B have been selected. These four villages are Gede and Banpur of MataryBanpur Gram Panchayet; Majdia of Majdia Gram Panchayet and Taraknagar (Helencha) of Shibnibash Gram Panchayet. Reason behind selection of the study area as follows:

- i. These four villages of the Krishnaganj Block comprise economically and socially diversified groups of people which helped to realize about the nature of commuting and their work varying among different social and economic groups of people.
- ii. Major portion of people of this area are poor, land less, and immigrated. In this circumstances there are quite scope of work for people. As a result female members of financially and socially vulnerable family go to urban area for work beside male members of society through daily travelling.
- iii. This area is linked with Kolkata metropolitan city by Gede-Sealdah rail way track of south eastern rail way. A person can reach to Kolkata about two and half hour from this area. So location of this area is easier to commuting.

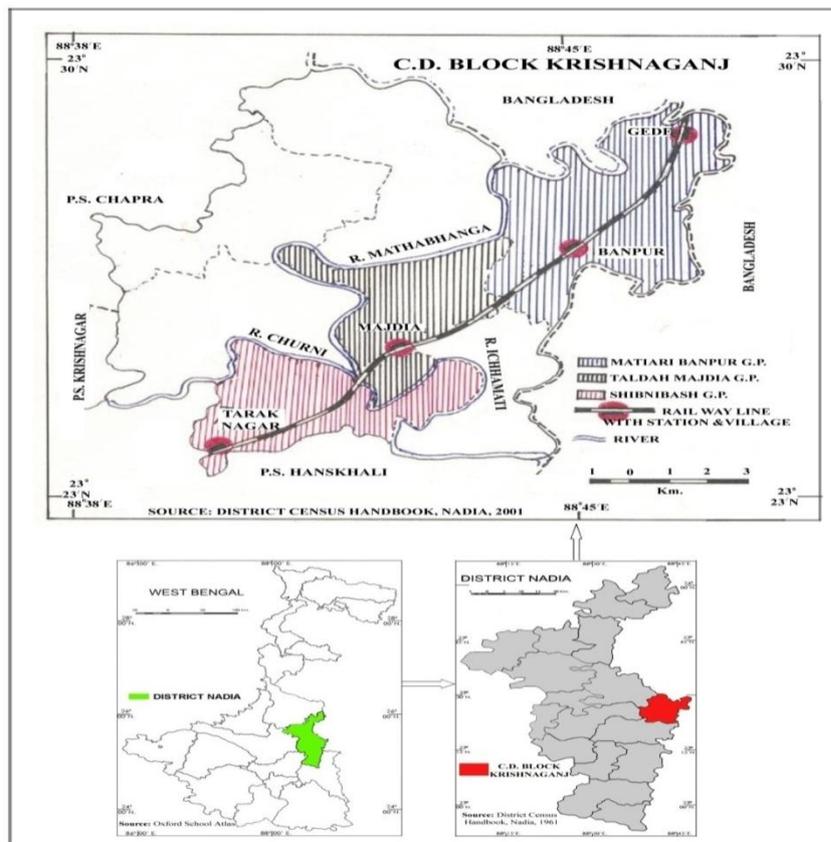


Fig. 1 Location of the study area

3. Objectives

The major objectives of this research work as follows-

- I. To find out their problems, inequalities and facilities in their home, traveling coaches and working places from relative and family members; social network and common people and employer or colleagues.
- II. To identify the economic and cultural development of rural family or society is caused by the share of financial and emotional help in family by women commuters.
- III. To find out and realize actual work pressure of working women at early morning to late night from multi working type in different spheres.
- IV. To realize change in working women's empowerment, confidence, choice, thinking and consumption of goods.
- V. Broadly to search the role of women to develop rural society by managing their family.

4. Database

4.1 Primary Data: The Primary Data for carrying out the research have been collected from field survey taking forty percent sample household on stratified random basis from selected villages of the Krishnaganj Block, Nadia viz. Gede, Banpur, Majdia and Taraknagar. The stratification has done following village and work type. Information about historical background and overall recent position of this area has gotten through deep interview among few senior citizen of this area. According to deep observation and collecting information from local people of this area more or less hundred seventy five women workers daily travel from this area. Out of hundred seventy five commuters seventy commuters are treated for sampling. To collect primary data for this research, survey was done basically at night when they come back home from working place. Some data have been collected at *puja* holiday for the availability of them. After collecting raw data, these are processed by tabulation and diagram.

4.2 Secondary Data: The Secondary data has been collected from District census hand book from 1961 to 2001 and from the Bengal district gazetteer Nadia.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Three Spheres of Commuter

Here the term sphere indicates the areas where people move on a regular basis in the present study. The three principal spheres have been identified viz. home, train and working place. Each sphere is unique and has some individuality, which is very important on the life style of the people in question. In these spheres, people are involved in different types of socio economic activities and gathered different types of experiences. Home is a place where environmental factors and human factors interact. In this environment, people shares feelings, emotions and experiences with the other family members. Working place is another type of environment where people are involved in economic activities. In this environment, different kinds of people interact from different perspective. Working place may affect human life in different ways. Home and working place is spatially distant and heterogenous. Transportation networks overcome spatial distance. Workers travel by train, bus or other types of transportation mode. In the study area, workers generally travel by train. Train bridges the gap between the people of residence and working place. In train, daily commuters develop a friendly atmosphere, which gives them a free environment, which reduce monotonous journey. This friendly atmosphere enhances the human vigor, which is directly proportional to human activities like gossiping, singing, funning etc.

5.1.1 Journey Period

In the study area, the most accessible mode of transportation is train. Workers spend few hours in a day in train. In this period, they travel with general passengers and colleagues. Commuters spent journey period through some behavioural expression and they faced some experiences.

5.1.1.1 Phases of Journey

The travel time of workers can be subdivided into three phases first type of journey is from home to station or station to home. Second phase of journey is that period spent in train compartment in both direction either from home to work place or from workplace to home. Third phase of commuting encompasses the distance from the station to place of work.

Table:1 Phases and Medium of journey

Travelling Phase	Place of Travelling	Medium of Travelling	Duration of Travelling
First phase	home ↔ station	Walking, cycle and rickshaw	More or less 15 minutes
Second phase	village station ↔ station of working place	Train	Less than 1 hour to greater than 2 hour
Third phase	station ↔ work place	Auto, tracker and bus	More or less 30 minutes

Source: Field survey, 2012.

Both general and ladies compartments, gender relation is best understood in terms of their travelling in different compartment. It has been observed that most of the respondents (49 percent) travel in general compartment while 40 percent workers travel in ladies compartment and the remaining portion travel in both types of compartments. Many workers especially workers in the informal sector travelling in general compartment. As per their opinion, general compartment is more comfortable to them for various reasons which are-

- Daily passengers share their seat during journey in train and hence they need not to stand for long time.
- In general compartment less gathering occurs than in ladies compartment.
- Friendly atmosphere developed very soon in general compartments and hence they do not feel uncomfortable.
- In the ladies compartment class division are seen at journey period among the daily passengers. Passengers of formal sectors are dominating group.

On the other hand, relatively few workers of informal sectors travel in ladies compartment because as per their opinion privacy of the females (gossiping, personal care, eating freely etc.) is easily retained in ladies compartment.

5.1.1.2 Behaviours of Passengers during the Journey Period

In the journey period every commuters develop a social network. Normally they get good behaviour from the peer group though some time they face some unexpected or bad behavior also. At the same time, they face similar type of experience from the co-passengers also. In this day -to- day life, they gather some experiences, which become memorable in their life. Among surveyed workers 46 percent, workers have a good relation with the social networks, 9 percent have bad relation with social networks and 45 percent workers did not responded as per the field survey. Both good and bad behaviours come from both male and females of social networks. Good behaviours have some aspects, which have been shown in the following table (Table:2)

Table: 2 Types and sources of good behaviour

Types of good behaviours	Source of good behaviours
1. Friendly behaviour	Mainly come from both male and female friends
2. Recreational behaviour	Generally, in many case this type of behaviour come from male friend.
3. Helpful behaviour in critical situation	It comes from both male and female equally.

Source: Field survey, 2012.

Commuters not only get good behaviour from the social net work of peer group. They also get good behaviour from the general passengers though most of the respondent (63 percent) opinion that in many cases bad behaviour come from general passengers. Bad behaviour takes different forms namely a) Physical torture b) Psychological harassment (Use of slang) and c) Psycho-sexual harassments (Eve teasing). Gender wise degree of harassment is shown by the following figure. It is seen that psychosexual harassment comes fully from male part of the travelers.

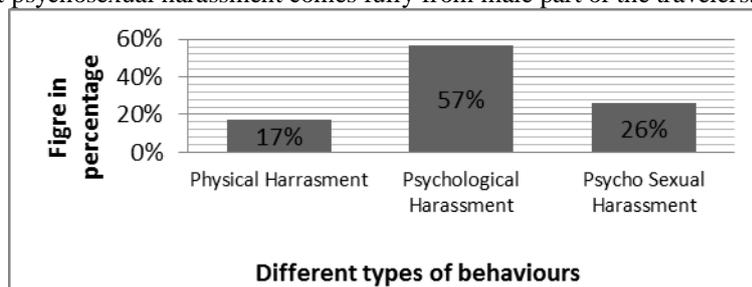


Fig: 2 Forms of harassment

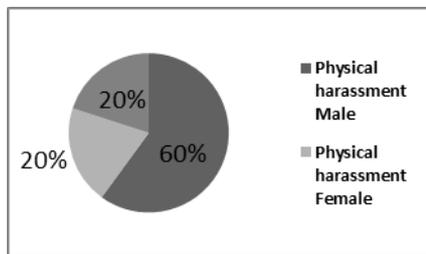


Fig. 3. (a) Source of Physical harassment

Source: Field survey, 2012.

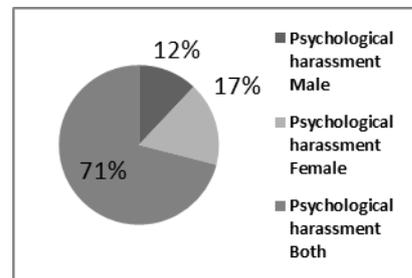


Fig. 3. (b) Source of Psychological harassment

5.1.2 Work Place

Work place is such an activity space of the economic sphere, where the workers involves themselves indifferent types of formative and creative activities. Work place occupies a board part of life and it has profound effect on the sphere of life to meet the financial and social goals. Nature of working sector, amounts of labour wages or salaries of workers, working environment, gender relation in working place and certainly the labour-owner relations are very important to entrance the inclusive growth of the country through ensuring the economic and social security of labour.

5.1.2.1 Transformation of job

In my study, it has been seen that 33 labourers has engaged themselves in fixed job while another 33 labourers have participated in two jobs in their working life and the rest (4laboures) of total laboures have been engaged more than two types of works in their working life. A table has been given here to understand the nature of change of the state of work through the incoming and outgoing number of labours in different types of work.

Table: 3 work transformation

work type		work transformation			
		Fixed job	Incoming labour	Outgoing labour	
Formal worker	Workers of private firm	1	1	1	
	Workers of government firm	1	2	1	
Informal worker	Day labourer	Paint labour	4	17	1
		Construction labour	13	14	3
		Housemaid	3	3	5
		Agricultural labour	5	0	9
		Nursemaid	4	1	2
		Other labour	1	2	16
	Self employed	1	1	3	
Total worker		33	41	41	

Table: showing number of respondents .Incoming and outgoing labour column show extra 4 workers than remaining figure (37) of total respondent (70) as 4 workers have changed work type greater than two times. Source: Field survey, 2012.

According to previously table (3), it is clear that painting work and construction work are emerging whereas the agricultural work and other work are the dooming sectors. The reason lies behind the dominance of painting and construction work are their high wages, reliability and consistency rather than the other work types, which has the opposite impression. It is seen that maximum women labour are like to work as a paint labour because this type of work is easy, light and needs less skill than other work.

5.1.2.2 Nature of work

Reliability of work, leaving status, daily wages is the very important factors to provide social and economic security to the workers. If consistency of work and wages are sufficient to meet the physical and cultural needs of workers then it definitely brings welfare to society. However, it must be remembered that gender disparity in wages will never bring welfare to our society. The physical and mental health of labours depends on the leaving status. Regular leaves like weekly and monthly leaves are very sound and satisfactory for workers. It has been seen in this study that 71 percent of the total workers are perennial workers and most of them are engaged in painting work and construction work and while the agricultural work and nursing works lacks perennality. At least 80 percent agricultural labours work as seasonal labours. In case of leaving status it has been seen that, the informal workers have not any regular leaving system like weekly and monthly leave.

Most of the informal workers (73 percent) earn daily wages between Rs. 100 to 200, and the rest of day labourers have the daily wages more than Rs. 200. This is the generalization of real picture because the in most of the cases the wages are Rs. 110, Rs. 150, Rs.200 or Rs. 240. It has been noted that the average daily wages of the painting and the construction workers is Rs. 200 while the average daily wages of the agricultural and other class labourers are under the Rs.200. It has been notable that the daily wages of the day labourers has increased much than the last decade. The daily wage of an agricultural labourer was between Rs. 60 to 100 in the past decade while it has increased to Rs. 100 to 150 at present, which has been possible due to the fixed labour wages in NREGA scheme (Ananda Bazar Patrika, 19-8-13, p.12). It has enabled them to bargain for their wages with their proprietor. In most of the cases, the housemaids and the nursing maids have monthly salaries. The salary generally ranges between Rs. 2500 to 3000. Here it is notable that most of the respondents (39 workers) said that the male workers have better salaries even at the same job, which denotes gender disparity in wages.

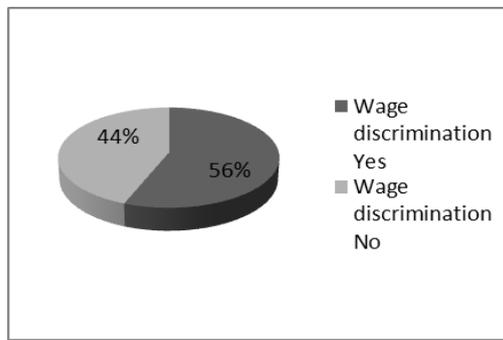


Fig:4 Response about wage discrimination
 Source: Field survey, 2012.

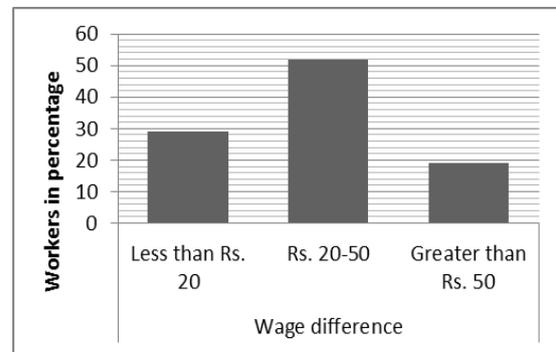


Fig:5 Degree of wage discrimination

From the above figure, it has been seen that the wage disparity normally ranges between Rs.20 to 50 per day, which is ugly picture of gender disparity of our society. In my research, it has been also found that agricultural labourers, painting workers, construction workers are the most sufferers in wage disparity. While the women labourers do the same duties and sometimes even more than the male workers do. It is a common picture in our patriarchic society where physical and mental ability of women are presented narrowly for deprivation them both financially and in dignity. It is one type of cruel politics of society. Yet in many time many scholars have honored them for their dignity, patience, spirituality and efficiency. Mahatma Gandhi said, “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capabilities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details, in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with them” (Gupta and Mashelkar, 2005). Almost all of the studied workers work as helper or assistants. A few of them works as artisan. Women are not allowed to work as an artisan or any managerial work in informal sectors because they are undermined by the male controlled work management system. Male part of management system are argued that women are not eligible for conducting duties as they lack work efficiency and managing power.

5.1.2.3 Relation with Employers and Colleagues

There is a strong relation between the working environment, working efficiency of the labour and the relation of a worker with her employer and colleagues, which reveals the gender relation in our society. In this research, it has been seen that most of the workers have a good relation with their employers and colleagues. However, the workers from the painting and construction work have same problem with their supervisor but it resolves smoothly.

For having a clear cut idea about working environment and gender relation, it is very important to know the relation of the women workers with them colleagues specially with the male colleagues. It has been seen that most of the workers (54 workers) having good relation. In case of good relation, most of the respondents (64 percent) indicated good relation with both male and female colleagues and very marginal portion (6 percent) of respondents indicated good relation with their male colleagues. Here it may be stated that a few workers from the construction (10 percent among construction labours) and painting (8 percent among painting labours) sector have good relation with only the male colleagues

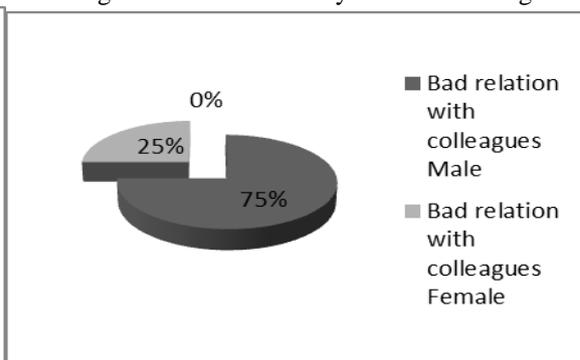
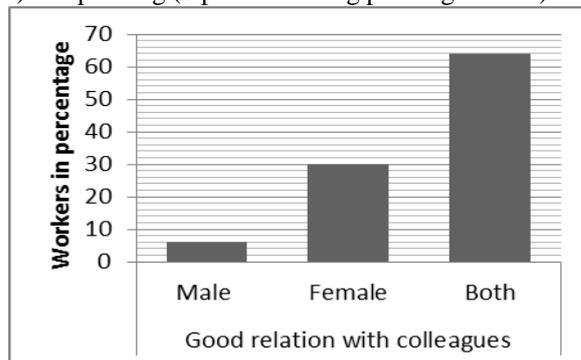


Fig: 5 Gender based good relation with colleagues. **Fig: 6** Gender based bad relation with colleagues
 Source: Field survey, 2012

5.1.3 Household

It has been a common trend of human being to have a shelter for him, which is one of the basic needs of life. It provides not only a secure living place but also it is the place where men indulge themselves in a long range of socio-economic activities, which may include the use, consumption or management of various resources. Here a comprehensive picture of women using, consumption, and management of household resources is given.

5.1.3.1 Household Resources

Household resource means material and non-material elements which is nurtured, managed and developed in household by members of household. It fulfills the demand of household members. There are different types of household resources which are natural and cultural like house, water, fuel, human, domestic animals and birds, plant, capital etc.

5.1.3.2 House

Home is a unique element of family life, which enhances the family bonding between the members. More over almost all of the socio-economic activities is being operated within it. It has been a common trend that the shape, size,

building materials depend on the economy, class, caste, and religious fabric of the residents. Similarly, the physical expression of the households is mirror of the socio-economic structure of the residents. It may be stated here that the women play a great role in the maintenance and beautification of the houses. It has been normal tendency of the women of taking care home, which in one hand enhances the longevity, or durability of houses on the other hand reduces the maintenance cost. It has been seen that workers not only keep the house but also provide economic back up to the male counterpart of the family. In this research, it is found that some of the women workers have invested money to construct latrine and house.

5.1.3.3 Water

Water has great role for household activities. Women do maximum household activities. Drinking water and water for domestic use have always been, and been seen as, women's responsibility. It is they who spent large parts of their lives in fetching and storing water. They spent an even greater part of their lives utilizing it for cooking, for washing cloths and cleaning floor etc. (Joy and Paranjape, 2005). In the household water is collected and managed mainly by women for different purposes of family. It is seen that women spend for long time of a day to collect water, use water and managed water for family avoiding their physical and mental stresses. Male part of a family is deeply depended on the women for water and many other resources. In this way woman manages the physical and mental health of other family members. In the study, workers who spend long time of a day in working place they use water for cooking at night in every working day at home and other water related activities like washing clothes, cleaning floor, shaping muddy wall etc. are done by them in non working day. Therefore, it is said that women have always-close relationship with water.

5.1.3.4 Human resource

The geometric growth of all other resources could not be possible without the development of human resource. Human resource includes- human labour, power, and knowledge, intellectuality, working efficiency etc. that greatly depends upon his education, health, culture, and stages of technological development. Home is the miniature of these properties of human resources. The women play a vital role to develop human resources in terms of quality and quantity (Ghosh, Laskar and Islam, 2012). Health condition, child education, creativity, working efficiency of other members of family totally depends upon the women. Manage and development of human resource is a matter of concern to both male and female members of family, in reality there is different picture of involvement of male and female in theoretical consciousness and practice (Ghosh, Laskar and Islam, 2012). Unlike the non-working people, the working or women commuters have little chance to manage the human resource of household. However, they make some important decisions in human resource management like the meal chart and budget, taking care of child education etc.

5.1.3.5 Capital

Money is the chief dynamo of family as well as society, which ensures the availability of other resources. Who is earning money? Who is consuming? Or using it and who is controlling monetary circulation system in family management? These are very rational and relevant question to reveal the gender biasness or disparity. As per the speech of the respondents only 39 percent women commuters enjoys the freedom Of spending their money as their will and 14 percent workers are unable to spend their earnings as per their will and they are forced to hand it over to their husbands or other male members of family. Remaining 47 percent workers spend their earnings jointly with their husband. It is found that most of the formal workers are able to spending their earnings to meet their own needs or demands where as informal workers spend their earnings independently to meet the family needs. The female earnings not only meets the basic demands of the family but also to meet some auxiliary demands of family like maintenance and repairing of houses etc. It is found that 9 percent women workers have bear almost half of total expenses for house construction and maintenance, 21 percent hold the responsibility to spend money in various social festivals like marriage, *puja* etc. and almost 6 percent women bears the medical expenses for the family. Maximum workers save little part of their earnings for future of family. Women are in better position in savings than male counterparts of the poor family in respect of remaining money of their total earnings where as male members of family expenses their remaining money for their enjoy purposes and addiction activity like smoking, drinking.

6. Work Pressure of Women Commuters

It has been seen that there is a big gap in work pressure between the male and females of commuters. The women commuters get exhausted physically and mentally due to high work pressure though the schedule of work varies in working and non working day but the scenario is almost same. It has been seen that in a working day the workers have go through a tight schedule from early morning to bed. Most of the workers (51 percent) prepare foods for family before starting their journey. Even some bodies have to prepare the foods again after coming back at home. They are not free even in non working day as on those particular days they have to conduct several family works like cleaning house, shaping muddy wall and washing clothes etc. Vivid work pressure of workers is shown by table (4.4) and model (4.8).

Table: 4 working pressure of workers

Day status	Working pressure of respondents							
	Cooking morning	Cooking night	Commuting	Working in work sector	Bedding	Child caring	Washing Dress	Cleaning room
Working day	57	51	70	70	66	33	2	0
Non working day	68	40	0	0	68	33	63	54

* Numerical Figures in the table showing number of respondents.

Source: Field survey, 2012.

It has also been seen that the workers some time gets help of other members of family. Without this it could have been impossible for the workers to continue their job. In most of the cases, other women members of family are involve in house hold work by whom workers are benefitted. The sole family responsibilities like child bearing, cooking etc. have been done by the women members of household when commuters stay out of home. Least involvement in household works by male members is seen in our society. Seventeen respondents have infants who remains under the care of their grandmother, aunts etc. in working days. Generally, family management and child bearing have been the chief duties of women. However, to the workers the pressure is tremendous, as they have to maintain both of the sphere home and of work place simultaneously. In patriarchic society these types work of women get least importance though the non-economic works of women in household give energy to family members to do other works that is cause to real development of family.

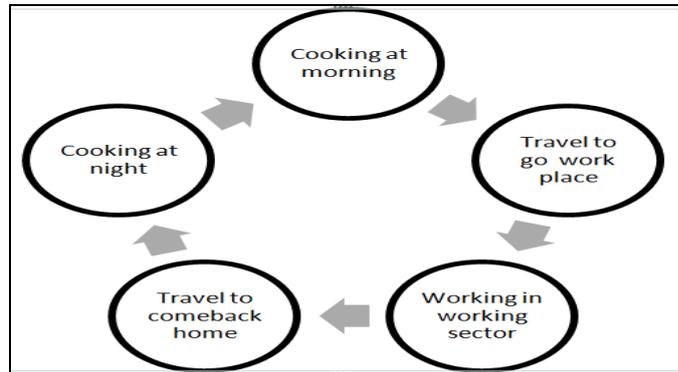


Fig:7 Work pressure cycle (Source: Field survey, 2012)

7. Conclusion

- Most of the workers are poor. Basically they are immigrated, land less people. Poverty is the triggered factor for work in out of home though it is not only factor. It is seen that there are poor households of peasant. Women of these families cannot go out of household for work to save family.
- Most of the workers like to travel by general compartment for some opportunities.
- In ladies' compartments class division is clearly seen among commuters.
- In many cases, workers get greater facilities and help male part of social network and also general passengers. In the same manner they faced various problems from male part of social network and general passengers in travelling period.
- In study area, most of the daily labourers travel by train to Kolkata and sub-urban region to work.
- Most of the daily labourers work as construction and paint labour whereas involvement of agriculture as daily labour in out of residential area is quite seen.
- Among the women workers in informal sectors, maximum work as labourers whereas maximum artisans are male. Very few women work as an artisan.
- In some cases wage difference are seen between male and female in same job and same work.
- Women workers have greater work pressure than male part. They work both at home and at work places. It is seen that women workers work smoothly with less breaks than male counterpart.

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