Chapter five: Home environment of construction workers of Kolkata

Introduction:

Poverty and poor housing are mutually inclusive and feeds on the other. Poverty reduces the chances of attaining a better education, occasional recreation and occupational skills. Infectious diseases, chronic diseases and environmentally created diseases are more prevalent in poor housing than in better housing. While overcrowding leads to an increase of respiratory and infectious diseases because of the close contact with contaminated individuals, a number of additional variables like basic personal hygiene practices and habit patterns of individuals, their susceptibility to certain diseases and a vast variety of stresses of various types create a health condition which is generally negative in nature. Within a defective housing structure there are various stresses such as noise, improper lightning, inadequate space, improper ventilation, the presence of various insects and a variety of solid waste. The individuals living in substandard housing with these problems have higher infant mortality rates, a greater level of disease, poorer health, various nutritional problems and a variety of other health defects. Though a specific disease is not usually related to a specific type of housing problem, it is generally recognised that disease rates are higher among substandard housing dwellers. Overcrowding is a general phenomenon in a poverty stricken household. Behavioural problems resulting from inadequate control in crowded dwellings may increase infectious diseases through lack of personal hygiene.

Migrant workers of roads & flyovers, metro and housing sectors do not stay with their families. Construction workers mainly reside in kutcha houses as they are very poor and they cannot afford the luxury of building materials other than the cheapest locally available ones. The workers who stay at rented houses generally reside in slum areas. In fact, workers who stay in either rented or own houses, often stay in badly built and unhygienic houses with complete lack of housing facilities. In Kolkata, construction workers have mainly expenditure on food, remittances and rent. Different awareness pattern (like giving votes or polio to their children), recreation patterns, behavioural pattern (like age at marriage, no of children, no of girl children, child death, family planning programmes etc) and food habit are also discussed in this chapter elaborately.

Family structure:

Usually, migrant workers do not stay with their families. From the Table 5.1 & Fig 5.1, it is found that, only a few (2%) unorganised workers do not stay with their
families. Only 16% and 14% construction workers do stay with their families in the metro and housing sectors respectively. All roads and flyovers workers do not stay with their families as they are all migrant workers and night stay is also related to their work so they can not take their families with them. In fact, the tendency of uneducated migrant workers to take with their families is very low. (Chandna: 1986). 

**Family type:**

Families are grouped into four types; nuclear, joint, extended and broken families. Nuclear family is one comprising of a couple with their unmarried children. Joint family means more than one couple with their children and extended family means a couple with children and other persons (e.g brother, sister, mother etc). The increasing pressure of population on the limited agricultural resource base in the countryside compels the rural males to move to urban areas in search of jobs. The high cost of living in urban areas and problems of proper housing does not let the families to stay together, while the prevailing joint family system facilitates a movement of males alone, whereby the families are assured the security and safety of their family members in the ancestral home. Joint family system supports male migration (Chandna: 1986: 219). In fact, migrant workers mainly have extended families as there is the proper support system to look after the children and the household. [Photo 5.1 & 5.2]. A single mother or a single father or a divorcee mother or a father or a separated father or a mother, or a widower or a widow with his/her children is called a broken family. The fairly larger number of joint and extended families show the semi-feudal nature of the Indian working class.

From the Table 5.2(1), it is shown that the highest percentages of housing construction workers (55%) have nuclear families. The percentages of nuclear families are the highest in the unorganised sector followed by the housing sector whereas; metro sector is completely dominated by the extended family system. [Table 5.2 & Fig 5.2]. Women construction workers (50%) in Kolkata are mainly the major breadearners of the broken families.

Family type is also determined by the religion, caste and place of origin. Male Hindu upper caste unorganised workers have nuclear families where female Hindu upper caste workers have broken families. [Table 5.3A & Table 5.4A & Fig 5.4A]. Most of the Hindu workers (50%) in the metro sector have extended families. [Table 5.3C]. Muslim workers (29%) staying with their families are only found in the housing sector and they have mainly

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nuclear families. [Table 5.3D] Upper caste housing workers (51%) usually have nuclear family system. [Table 5.4D]. Metro workers (50%) belonging to the upper caste have extended families. [Table 5.3C]. Most of the unorganised workers (69%) are from North 24 Parganas and they have nuclear families. [Table 5.5A(I)]. Metro workers from Nadia, Howrah, Kolkata have extended families or joint families as the workers are still maintaining the social system of his forefathers as far as the family type is concerned. [Table 5.5C]. Housing workers staying with their families are mainly from Kolkata (60%) and South 24 Parganas (50%) and they have nuclear families. [Table 5.5D(I)]. As the workers have outgrown the feudal frameworks of their families and are far removed from the social system of their ancestral region. In short, construction workers mainly belong to the nuclear families irrespective of religion, caste or place of origin. [Fig 5.3D, Fig 5.4A, Fig 5.4C, Fig 5.4D, Fig 5.5A, Fig 5.5C & Fig 5.5D].

Family size structure of workers:

The family size in an underdeveloped country like India is a key indicator of social and economic conditions of the family. The family size reflects the whole gamut of the Indian mode of capitalist production - its ideological and economic conditions can be interpreted through the family size, which is very important vis-a-vis the economic conditions of the household.

The status of man, woman and children of the family is an important index of the mental attitude towards family size. The religious background of a person seems to play a prominent role in governing his mental attitude towards the size of the family. In India; it is thought the birth rates of Muslims are found significantly higher than the Hindus in the similar environment as Islam is against contraception (Kingsley:1951:80). The size of family is larger particularly in the society where the status of women is low, low level of education as well as an early age of marriage. Although a negative correlation between income level and the family size has been observed, yet the deliberate attempts to check the family size are more common to that section which has the widest gap between the desired and actual income levels (Chandna:1986:111). It is really applicable for the construction workers where the earning member is one but the size of family is mostly between 3 and 6 (particularly metro and housing workers) [Table 5.6 & Fig 5.6]. Very few unorganised workers (30%) have knowledge of family planning programmes and they have small families (<3). On the other hand, few male unorganised workers (12%) have large sized families (family members between 7 and 10). [Table 5.6(I)]

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Age- Gender structure of the family members of workers:

Female members outnumber male members in the families of the construction workers and the percentages of the female members (65%) are the highest in the unorganised sector. [Table 5.7A & Fig 5.7A]. The same percentages of the male (48%) and female members (52%) are found both in the metro and housing sectors. [Table 5.7C – Table 5.7D & Fig 5.7C - Fig 5.7D]. The ratio of female members in the families of the workers start to decrease after 25 years as most of them got married and left their parents houses. The factor of age at marriage also operates through the factor of duration of marriage. (Chandna: 1986: 109).\(^1\) But percentages of women above the age of 50 years are high in the families of the unorganised, metro and housing workers as life expectancy in case of females is higher than the males.\(^2\) [Table 5.7A (I), Table 5.7C(I) & Table 5.7D(I)].

On the other hand, the male members are the most numerous below the age of 18 years after which they usually leave the parental home for work. In fact, the male migration is the main reason for the decreasing rate of male population above the age of 18 years. Metro and housing workers family members are mainly migrant workers so after 18 years the numbers of male family members are very low. In the housing sector, there are no male members between the age groups of 18 and 28 years and 29 and 39 years. [Table 5.7D(I)].

Marital status structure of family members of workers:

The highest percentages of unmarried members (52%) are found in the unorganised sectors whereas, married members are the most numerous in the metro (50%) and housing sectors (53%). [Table 5.8(I)]. Very few widows/ widowers are found among the family members of the workers. [ Fig 5.8].

Educational structure of the family members of workers:

The ratio of female illiterates (particularly wives and mothers of workers) is higher as there is a positive correlation between the status granted to the women and literacy rates. [Table 5.9A, Table 5.9B, Table 5.9D, Fig 5.9 A, Fig 5.9B & Fig 5.9D]. Those societies which do not give equal status to males and females, suffer from low female literacy rates. Similarly, the societies where the females are not allowed mobility or which suffer from the prejudices against female education also have low female literacy. Early marriage of girl child and the widespread poverty prevailing among the masses act as stumbling blocks in the propagation of literacy among females. The education of males gets a priority over the education of female


children under such conditions of poverty (Chandna: 1986: 257). Similarly, the degree of participation in economically gainful activities among the females is also low. The females are mostly required to participate in domestic chores (Krishnan & Shyam: 1973: 204). Since, literacy has little functional utility for the females under such socio-economic conditions; therefore, it suffers a setback (Chandna: 1986: 257). Only 15% wives of housing workers are graduates as their husbands are also the same. [Table 5.9D(I)].

**Income structure of family members of workers:**

Most of the workers are the only earning members of their families and other members of their families are dependent (mostly women and aged) on them particularly women and aged persons. [Table 5.10A, Table 5.10B, Table 5.10D, Fig 5.10 A, Fig 5.10B & Fig 5.10D]. Very few male members of the unorganised (11%) and metro (8%) workers have a monthly income less than Rs.2000 whereas, 9% female members of the housing workers earn monthly less than Rs.2000. On the other side, 3% and 8% male family members of the unorganised and metro sectors are earning between Rs.2000 and 4000 monthly. [Table 5.10A(I), Table 5.10C(I) & Table 5.10D(I)].

**Occupational structure of the family members of workers:**

Female members in the families of workers (wife, daughters, sisters, aged persons etc) are mostly unemployed. Very few family members (2%) of the workers are construction workers. [Table 5.11 & Fig 5.11]. Children of the workers particularly sons are studying. [Table 5.12, Table 5.12(I) & Fig 5.12]. The highest percentages of the workers children (89%) in studies are mainly found in the unorganised sector while the highest percentages of unemployed (60%) are found in the metro sector. [Table 5.11(I)].

**Housing pattern of construction workers:**

**Ownership pattern of homes:**

Some construction workers (89%) have own houses and some of them (11%) have rented houses. [Table 5.13 & Fig 5.13]. Construction workers have their own houses though they are economically very poor but most of them come from the villages where they have their own huts. In the roads and flyover sectors, all construction workers stay in makeshifts tenements. The tenements of the metro sector are provided by the Government. 27.5% male, 60% female unorganised workers and 8% housing workers stay in rented houses. In Kolkata,

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shanties houses of workers are mainly found along the rail tracks or in the slum areas. [Table 5.13(1)].

**House type:**

House is the third important need of man after food and clothing. The house is a shelter built by man to protect himself from the vagaries of climate and to meet the basic physiological requirements of the body. Structurally, a house consists of a roof, supported by walls with a door. The Census of India defines a ‘House’ as a building or a part of a building having a separate main entrance from the road, common courtyard or staircase, etc. used or recognised as a separate unit. According to Census of India, houses have been classified as Pucca, Semi Pucca, and Kutcha and Semi Kutcha according to the types of material used in the construction of wall and roof of the house. For the purpose of this classification, the criterion adopted by National Building Organisation has been made use of. The basis of the classification is as below.

**Table 5.14:** House types and building materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Materials used for construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pucca</td>
<td>Walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burnt bricks, G.I. sheets or other metal sheets, stone, cement, concrete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutcha</td>
<td>Grass, leaves, reeds, bamboo, mud, wood, un-burnt bricks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pucca</td>
<td>Roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tiles, Slate, shingle, corrugated iron, zinc or other metal sheets, asbestos, cement sheets, bricks, lime and stone, stone and RBC/RCC, concrete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutcha</td>
<td>Grass, leaves, reeds, bamboo, thatch, mud, un-burnt, bricks, wood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


When both walls and roofs are made of kutcha materials, the house is classified as kutcha (roof is made of bamboo, walls are made of bricks and mud floor). Pucca house are those houses which have both wall and roof made of pucca materials are classified as pucca (walls are made of cement and roof is made of cement as well as floor is made of cement). When wall or roof is made of pucca material and the other of kutcha material, then the house is classified as semi pucca or semi-kutcha houses. Most (66.5%) of the construction workers from remote villages have their own mud houses or kutcha houses. Very few unorganised, metro and housing male workers have pucca, semi kutcha and semi pucca houses. [Table 5.14, Fig 5.14, Photo 5.3 & 5.4].

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**Household assets:**

Household assets are divided into three groups. One is recreational which are used for entertainment like television or radio. Second is income generating household assets which are used for income generation like cycle, moped, agricultural land, cattle and poultry and the third one is called as assets which are really used as security for future like jewellery, homesteads etc.

Most of the workers (37.5%) have nothing but radio for their amusement. Some workers have television (7%) and cycles (23%). Some of them have poultry (5%), agricultural land (9%), cattle (6%) for income generation. Very few workers have moped (0.5%) and jewellery (13%). [Table 5.15, Fig 5.15, Photo 5.5 & 5.6]. Women workers have only radio at their houses. Conditions of Muslim roads & flyover workers are worse than their Hindu counterparts. Very few Muslims workers have agricultural land, poultry and cattle whereas, most of the Muslim metro workers have radio as a recreational assets and agricultural land as an income generating asset. [ Fig 5.16A - Fig 5.16D]. The percentages of the agricultural land (19%), cattle (14%), and poultry (9%) of the Muslim working in housing sectors are higher compared to the Hindus,[Table 5.16D(l)]. Economic conditions of upper caste workers are much better than the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes workers who are historically deprive both socially and economically.127 Upper caste unorganised male workers economic conditions are much better than the females.

Very few assets are found in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes households. [Fig 5.17A- Fig 5.17D]. Male Unorganised workers from North 24 Parganas, Kolkata have radio, T.V and jewellery where women unorganised workers from North 24 Parganas have only radio for recreation. On the other hand, roads & flyovers workers from Murshidabad, Bardhaman, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have agricultural land as they are all farmers. Most of the roads & flyovers workers have radio and T.V for amusement like the unorganised workers. In the metro sector, some workers from North 24 Parganas, Nadia and Birbhum have jewellery as real assets. [Fig 5.18A - Fig 5.18D]. Most of the housing workers from Bihar, North 24 Parganas, Medinipur and Murshidabad have income generating assets like agricultural land, cattle as they are farmers and during slack season they move to Kolkata to earn some money.

**Housing Facility:**

The workers tents are nothing but overcrowded insanitary hovels, without any adequate ventilation facilities whatsoever. They do not have separate toilet, kitchen and drinking water facilities. The workers cook inside their rooms and collect drinking water from

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the nearby tap or pond. The workers who stay at rented houses generally reside in slum areas which are found along the railway tracks. In fact, workers who stay in either rented or own houses, often stay in badly built and unhygienic houses with complete lack of housing facilities.

**Life style of workers:**

**Food habit of workers:**

Food timings vary from site to site and in different groups; especially in case of workers on shifting duties. The main food items are rice, curry, roti, parata, tea, moori or biscuits. The breakfast usually consists of tea, bread, moori, biscuits; roti, sabji etc. in some cases rice is also eaten. For lunch rice, vegetables, dal etc are eaten. This is the typical Bengali food habit. Some male unorganised workers have only tea and women have nothing. The economic condition of women is really worse than their male counterparts. An unorganised women respondent said in this context "we are not sure about getting jobs every day and in this situation I can not waste 50 paise or Rs.1 for buying moori as tiffin for me". The workers normally do not take any tiffin. Very few have tea and moori. For dinner they usually eat roti, rice and vegetables. Workers are identified as vulnerable groups of malnutrition. The women and children usually eat nothing between meals. In fact, they have only staple food like rice, roti etc. No energy efficiency food like fats or proteins are taken by them as they are very poor and they cannot afford to buy them.

**Expenditure pattern:**

The expenditure pattern is the prime indicator of the living standard of the worker. The analysis of the expenditure pattern reveals the daily problems that the workers face and hardships they try to overcome with the help of their very insufficient income. The social structure of the worker can be easily understood by the way he regulates his expenditure.

The expenditure patterns of workers reflect the standard of a poverty stricken worker. It has been derived from the primary data provided by the worker himself in the survey schedule. The worker provided approximate expenditure for each item. The approximate money spent on various items (e.g. food, clothing, rent etc.) have been calculated by themselves.

The process of consumption is supposed to be synonymous to the process of expenditure. A convenient and classical approach to the analysis of consumption is utilitarianism, which dominated the economic thought in the early nineteenth century. A dominant feature of this school of thought is that while it held human wants (i.e. demand) to be an important determinant in the production and distribution of goods and services, it rested us the assumption that these wants are essentially structureless— that is, random in
variation in society. The history of consumption theory in economics during this century has been marked by an attempt to read some psychological or social structure into the concept of demand.

The theory developed by Alfred Marshall (1842-1924), brought in the concept of psychological structure into the consumption pattern of an individual. In addition, Marshall indicated that many human wants are structured in relation to cultural and social pattern.

The work of Keynes brought into focus the balance between consumption and savings. His theory of consumption and savings rests on what he called a "fundamental psychological law".

The Keynesian theory has been challenged by Duesenberry's theory of consumption. Duesenberry developed a utility index incorporating the influence of the expenditure of other individuals on the choice of a consumer.

Friedman's work on the "permanent income theory of consumer behaviour" contains a few sociological variables, he hold that the ratio of consumption to permanent (i.e. expected) income is a function of the interest rate, the ratio of assets to permanent income, and "tastes". Friedman also mentioned that the sociological variables of age and composition of family affect tastes. In a similar theory, Modigliani, Brumberg and Ando held that consumption is a function of current and expected income and assets. The expected income is influenced by such facts as age of retirement and the age distribution of the population. Finally, Orcutt and his associates introduced variables such as marital status and duration of marriage, as well as age, education and race into probability models of spending and

199 Ibid, p. 72-78.
200 Ibid, p. 81.
saving behaviour. The sociological variables these theories incorporate are limited to gross demographic indices.

In the theories of consumption pattern a dearth of social-structural variables has been noted. On the contrary, the consumers should be grouped according to various sociological dimensions (e.g. social class, race etc.) involved in the social structure. These structures influence their spending patterns both at a gross level (e.g. spending—saving ratios) and at a detailed level.

Sociological and other variables influence different kinds of consumer behaviour. With regard to food consumption for instance, the following kinds of social correlates are of interest:
(i) Sex and age
(ii) Ecology
(iii) Economic resources
(iv) Occupational status of family members

Food:

In Kolkata, construction workers mostly spend on food, remittances and rent. Most of the construction workers monthly earn between Rs. 2000 and 4000 but their expenditure on food, remittances, rent are different according to their age groups, place of origin, family size etc. All metro workers spend is less than 70% of their total expenditure on food. All female married unorganised construction workers expenditure on food is less than 70% of their total expenditure as they have a monthly income less than Rs.2000. Between the age groups of 29 and 39 years most of the unorganised male local workers from North 24 Parganas have their families which comprise mainly between 3 and 6 members and their monthly expense on food is between 70% and 90% of the total expenditure with a monthly income between Rs.2000 and 4000. Roads & flyovers sectors are mainly dominated by the young migrant workers of Bihar, Murshidabad, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand (between the age groups of 18 and 28 years) and they spend very little money on food. They usually send most of their salaries to their families in villages. So most of the roads & flyovers workers (70%) have a monthly food expenses less than 70% of their total expenditure irrespective of caste & religion. But the reverse picture is found in the housing sector where 72% workers' monthly food expenses are more than 90% of their total expenditure. They are also young migrant workers of Bihar and Murshidabad. [Table 5.19A, Table 5.19B, Table 5.19D, Fig 5.19A, Fig 5.19B, Fig 5.19D, Table 5.20A, Table 5.20B, Table 5.20D, Fig 5.20A, Fig 5.20B & Fig 5.20D].

Remittances:

After food, remittances are the most important and largest expenditure of the household. Since a large section of the partial or seasonal migrant workers have some dependants or family members in the villages, they usually try to send as much money as possible to them. The amounts of remittances vary on the number of dependents away from, his work place and, to some extent, on the income of the worker. The large amount of remittances sent away to villages prove the link of the workers to the villages and the feudal family structure they are still living in. The remittances sent to the, villages are almost entirely used for food.

Only roads and flyovers and metro workers have expenditure on remittances (between 25% and 50% of their total income) as they are migrant workers of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Murshidabad. Housing workers are also migrant workers but their expenditure on remittances are negligible. [Table 5.21B & Fig 5.21B].

Rent:

House rent & education are having the least priority in the expenditure pattern of workers. 70% unorganised construction workers and 4% housing workers have own kutcha shanties along the rail tracks or in the slum areas and rest (30%) of them are rent payers. [Table 5.22(I)]. Most of the unorganised workers pay 10 -15% monthly rent of their total expenditure. [Fig 5.22].

Education:

Unorganised workers spend less than 10% of their total expenditure on children’s education. Generally unorganised female workers get unskilled jobs like helpers of their male co workers and they are paid very low. So they can not afford their children education even they can arrange food for their children hardly.

Savings and deficit:

Construction workers can save very low amount (Rs.500 to 1000 monthly) of money as savings after spending money on their food, rent and remittances. Their monthly incomes are not sufficient for the workers.

Addiction pattern of workers:

The workers come from their work tired, exhausted, and find their living place comfortless, dirty, damp, and repulsive; they have urgent need for recreation. Their work is really hectic in nature; their weak and diseased frame, weakened by bad air and insufficient food, violently demand some external stimulus. Unorganised male construction workers are mainly (51%) addicted to bidi while females are mainly addicted to pan. Some roads &
flyovers Hindi speaking migrant workers of Bihar are addicted to khaini (22%), ganja (4%) and bhang (2%) etc. Similarly, 26% Bihari housing workers are addicted to khaini. Education also has its impact on the addiction pattern of workers; illiterate or uneducated construction workers have a tendency to take bidi and cigarettes, country liquor etc. They are unaware that those things are injurious to their health. On the other hand, migrant workers have multiple addiction patterns also (like pan, Bidi, cigarettes, country, liquor etc). The modes of addiction are more or less following the traditional Indian pattern of addiction. [Table 5.23(i), Table 5.24A - Table 5.24D, Table 5.25A - Table 25D, Table 5.26A - Table 5.26D, Fig 23, Fig 24A - Fig 5.24D, Fig 5.25A - Fig 25D, Fig 26A - Fig 26D, Photo 5.7 & 5.8].

Recreation pattern of workers:

The workers’ recreation pattern represents both the old habits of the villages and the “western” culture of the cities. Workers spend surprisingly little on recreation. The reasons are varied: lack of income and spare time are the main reasons. Most of the male workers generally listen to radio (21%) or watch television (14%) at their free time. Going out for watching movies with friends; talking to friends; worshipping and listening to scriptures in their free time are other recreational activities of workers. Roads & flyovers, metro and housing workers stay together in tents where they have only a radio or a television for entertainment. Television sets are also found in the houses of the unorganised workers. According to the construction workers, after doing such a labourious work they do not want to do any thing other than sleeping. Metro workers stay in tents together and they have shifting duties so they have to finish their tent work when they get off time. Women get very little time to relax than their male counterparts after finishing their household work. [Table 5.27 & Fig 5.27].

Awareness pattern of workers:

98% unorganised male construction workers have voting cards, similarly the highest percentages of the male unorganised workers have knowledge in family planning programme. 46% males are found in the medium class where 42% males are found in the higher class who have knowledge about family planning programmes and pulse polio. In case of roads & flyovers the highest percentages of construction workers (90%) have ration cards followed by voting cards (86%). On the other hand, 64% have workers have knowledge about pulse polio. 82% metro workers have knowledge about pulse polio where 38% have bank pass book. Most of the housing workers have ration card and 64% are aware of giving pulse polio to their children. [Table 5.28A(1-III) - Table 5.28D(1-III)].
Behavioural pattern of construction workers:

Fertility pattern of workers

Fertility is usually measured on the basis of either the number of births over a period of time or the average number of children born to a woman during her reproductive span of time. The reproductive potential of a woman marrying at 17 years of age is estimated as approximately 13 children, but this maximum is very rarely achieved.\textsuperscript{207} Fertility depends upon several factors:

a) Age of marriage
b). Education
c) Economic status
d) Rural-Urban differences

The fertility pattern of the workers depends on various factors, some of them are medical ones and some of them are socio-economic. The combination of these factors create some behavioural changes that lead to the present pattern of fertility. Due to these reasons, we find differences in fertility rates. Different behavioural patterns regarding fertility are also found in various linguistic and religious communities.

Early age at marriage is closely related to the higher number of children as they have a long married and fertility life. Lack of knowledge about family planning programme; illiteracy etc are the reasons behind the higher number of children of the construction workers. Generally construction workers have children between one and three. Poverty is also related to their large family. Their income level is low but their family members are higher causing poor economic conditions and poor quality of life.

No of children of workers:

The normal picture is that women are younger than their husbands at marriage. It is normally expected that women who marry at an early age, get an early opportunity to affect their fertility performance and hence are likely to bear many children.\textsuperscript{208} Female construction workers mostly got married underage and have 3-6 children. Lack of awareness, appalling poverty; low status of women; low degree of participation among females in the economic activities as well as illiteracy all are the reasons behind the early marriage of women especially in the village areas (Chandna: 1986: 257).\textsuperscript{209} But male unorganised workers age at


\textsuperscript{209} Ibid, p. 257.
marriage is between 18 and 28 years and more than 28 years. Most of the workers have children between 1 and 3. [Table 5.29A - Table 5.29D, Fig 5.29A & Fig 5.29D].

The reasons behind such large families of the construction workers are lack of awareness and literacy. All the migrant workers of roads & flyovers have got married at very young age (between 18 and 28 years) and leave their wives at home and move to the cities to earn their livelihood. In the villages of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh childhood marriage is a common feature (Chandna:1986:257)210 and they have a long married life and children between 1 and 3. Very few male migrant workers (4%) of the metro sector have got married before migration under the age of 18 years and they have children between 1 and 3. 52% and 84% of the housing workers have got married between the age groups of 18 and 28 years and above 28 years and they have children between 1 and 3. [Table 5.29C(I) & Table 5.29D(I)].

**No of girl child of workers:**

A large family and marriage of a minor girl child is a common feature among the construction workers. They are unaware of family planning programme and have such large sized families. They do not practice female infanticide or foeticide but gender discrimination against girls in their upbringing is prominent.211 In fact, most of the workers (56%) are married between the age groups of 18 and 28 years and they have girl children between 1 and 2. Very few (18%) metro and housing (13%) workers have girl children between 3 and 4. Low status of women, son preference, male centred kinship pattern and early marriages are the reasons behind the greater number of children (especially girl children) of workers.212[Table 5.30A - Table 5.30D & Fig 5.30A - Fig 5.30D]. Women construction workers are mainly separated or deserted so they have to run their own families. According to some respondents they have been left by their husbands for not having male children.

Women's status is comparatively low in Muslims community; and they are the most backward group in our society. They grant very low status to the women. Gender discrimination and son preferences are the major reasons for the higher number of girl children of the Muslim workers compared to the Hindu construction workers as son preferences and undervalue of women is a common feature in the Muslim society showing more girls. (Chandna: 1986: 257).213 But in this study, except in the metro sector, other three

sectors (unorganised, roads & flyovers and housing) of Hindu workers have more girls than Muslims. In fact, both the religious groups have many girl children that strongly implies gender discrimination, son preference and lack of knowledge of family planning programmes.  

Roads and flyovers sectors are dominated by the upper caste workers (88%) who have girl children between 1 and 2. 50% Scheduled Caste women unorganised workers have 3-4 girls. [Table 5.32A (I) & Table 5.32B(I)] Unorganised sector is completely dominated by the upper caste workers from North 24 Parganas and they have girl children between 1 and 2. Roads and flyovers workers are mainly from north (Uttar Pradesh) and north eastern (Bihar) parts of India where male centred kinship pattern dominates. Metro migrant workers are mainly from remote villages of Murshidabad and they also have a higher number of girl children (between 1 and 2). Similar feature of the upper caste housing workers are found who are mainly from eastern (Bihar and Orissa) parts of India where male centred kinship pattern as well as patriarchal system dominate. 

There are no differences between an illiterate person and an educated person in case of son preferences. In fact, educated construction workers mainly prefer sons. Their economic conditions are really worse since they have large families with very low income (monthly Rs.2000 and 4000). [Fig 5.34A – Fig 5.34D & Fig 5.35A – Fig 5.35D].

**Girl child death:**

1% roads & flyovers workers, 2% metro workers and 1% housing workers have child deaths. They have only girl children deaths as gender discrimination against girl child is rampant.

**Immunization & family planning programme:**

20% unorganised, 26% roads & flyovers workers, 70% metro workers and 56% housing male workers are not aware of pulse polio or any kind of immunization schemes due to lack of knowledge, illiteracy and remoteness of villages where television, radio, billboards etc. are absent.

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Family planning programmes:

The essential objectives of family planning in India are to ensure the survival of the mother and the child (preventive obstetrics) and promote the well being of the family from a physiological point of view. There also are various community aspects of family planning based on various social, economic, political and environmental hypotheses. Family planning is based on the concept that a small family will serve the welfare of individual and of this is the reason for want of social welfare at national level.

Women all are unaware of immunization and family planning programmes due to illiteracy, purda system and because they are denied decision-making capacities. Many construction workers are also unaware of the family planning programme as they are illiterates. Gender discrimination against girl child and strong son preference both act against the family planning programmes in Indian society. Construction workers who have large families are unaware of the family planning programme. Large family sizes and low incomes make their living standard miserable and indescribable. 11% male unorganised workers, 2% roads & flyovers workers have no concept of family planning and they have large families between 3 and 6 members. 7% metro & 12% housing workers are also unaware of family planning. Non-availability of family planning devices, lack of health-care facilities, lack of counselling and follow-up practices, social and religious stigma attached to family planning etc. are root causes behind the unpopularity of family planning practices in general.

Conclusion:

The workers shanties are overcrowded, without any adequate ventilation facilities. They do not have separate toilets, kitchens and drinking water facilities. Construction workers’ monthly salaries are not sufficient for themselves also. Migrant workers who come to Kolkata and join this work for their better livelihood can send very little amount of money to their families in their villages. In fact, the home conditions of workers are really miserable without any assets.

The alienation of the worker from the other classes is aggravated by an unbridled thirst for pleasure, to want of providence, and of flexibility in fitting into the social order, to the general inability to sacrifice the pleasure of the moment to a remoter advantage. But this is natural under the circumstances. When a class can purchase few and only the most sensual pleasures by its wearying toil, must it not give itself over blindly and madly to those pleasures? A class about whose education no one troubles himself, which is play-ball to a thousand chances, knows no security in life—what incentives has such a class to providence, to “respectability”, to sacrifice the labour of the moment for a remoter enjoyment, most uncertain precisely by reason of the perpetually varying, shifting conditions under which the workers live? Since this class bears all the disadvantages of the social order without enjoying its advantages, their alienation with the rest of the society is complete.
Fig 5.1: Family structure

Fig 5.2: Family type

Fig 5.3D: Family type & Religious structure: Housing workers

Fig 5.4A: Family type & Caste structure: Unorganised workers
Fig 5.5A: Family type & Place of origin structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 5.5C: Family type & Place of origin structure: Metro workers

Fig 5.4C: Family type & Caste structure: Metro workers

Fig 5.4D: Family type & Caste structure: Housing workers

Fig 5.5B: Family type & Place of origin structure: Metro workers

Fig 5.5D: Family type & Place of origin structure: Unorganised workers
Fig 5.5D: Family type & Place of origin structure: Housing workers

Fig 5.6: Family size structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 5.7A: Age & Gender structure of family members: Unorganised workers
Fig 5.10: Income structure of family members: Housing workers

Fig 5.11: Occupational structure of family members of workers

Fig 5.12: Occupational structure of the children of workers

Fig 5.13: House ownership structure of workers

Fig 5.14: House type
Fig 5.15: Household assets structure

Fig 5.16A: Household assets & Religious structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 5.16B: Household assets & Religious structure: Roads & Flyovers workers
### Fig 5.19A: Food expenditure, Age & Gender structure: Unorganised construction workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>% of workers</th>
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<td>&lt;10</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;70</td>
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<td>70-80</td>
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<td>&gt;80</td>
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### Fig 5.19B: Food expenditure & age structure: Road & Flyovers workers

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### Fig 5.19C: Food expenditure & Age structure: Housing workers

<table>
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<td>&gt;80</td>
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</table>
Fig 5.29A: No of children, Age & Gender structure: 
**Unorganised workers**

Fig 5.29B: No of children & Age structure: Roads & Flyovers

Fig 5.29C: No of children & Age structure: Metro workers

Fig 5.29D: No of children & Age structure: Housing workers

Fig 5.27: Recreation pattern of workers
Fig 5.30A: No of girl child. Age & Gender structure:
Unorganised workers

% of workers

Male

Age groups

Fig 5.30B: No of girl child & Age structure: Roads & flyovers
workers

% of workers

Age groups

Fig 5.30C: No of girl child & Age structure: Metro workers

% of workers

Age groups

Fig 5.30D: No of girl child & Age structure: Housing workers

% of workers

Age groups

Fig 5.31A: No of girl child & Religious structure: Unorganised workers

Hindus

three to four

One to two

73%
Fig 5.31B: No of girl child & Religious structure: Metro workers

Fig 5.31C: No of girl child & Religious structure: Roads & Flyover worker

Fig 5.31D: No of girl child & Religious structure: Housing workers

Fig 5.32A: No of girl child & Caste structure: Unorganised workers

Fig 5.32B: No of girl child & Caste structure: Roads & Flyovers workers
Photo 5.3: House type of the construction workers

Photo 5.4: Materials used by the construction workers for making their houses, a picture of a Kutcha house of a construction worker

Photo 5.5: Household materials and assets of the female construction workers
Photo 5.6: Household assets of the construction workers

Photo 5.7: Roads & Flyovers construction workers are taking Ganja at their off time

Photo 5.8: A construction worker of flyovers is smoking Biri during work