International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Employment Conditions, Workplace Mobility and Commuting Patterns of Working Women in Kharagpur City, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the job history of the women in Kharagpur city, West Bengal, its reasons behind employment, job security and the distance and means of transport for them to reach their places of work. It is a desk study based on a field survey of 1097 working women from 2022-2024. The women were grouped by place of origin (another block of the district, another district of the state, or another state) and by the period in which they started working (before 1990, 1991–2000, 2001–2010 and after 2010). Frequencies and percentages were used to compare these groups. The most frequently mentioned reasons for getting a job were poor household situation (34.46%), wanting to be financially independent (28.81%) and better education (24.89%). The reasons differed according to the place of origin: the women who came from other blocks worked primarily for financial reasons (48.19%), while more than half of the women from other states (53.62%) worked for financial independence. The percentage of women who started before 1990 who depended on financial need dropped to 27.09% for those who joined after 2010 with a rise in financial independence from 12.50% to 31.61%. The respondents who were in non-permanent jobs exceeded the number of those who had permanent jobs (56.24% to 41.80% respectively in the pre-2010 group and post-2010 group). About half of the women (51.50%) travelled 8–16 km to work, and 28.53% travelled more than 16 km. Train was the most common mode of travel (26.89%), followed by two-wheeler (21.51%) and bus (20.33%). The study revealed that there are more women entering into paid work in Kharagpur, but many of them have insecure jobs and a high dependence on public transport. They would appreciate more stable jobs and improved, safer transportation options for getting to and from work.

Keywords: working women, employment, economic independence, job security, commuting,spatial mobility, Kharagpur city

Introduction

Women's participation in job is an important factor for household welfare and regional economic development.(Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Mehrotra & Parida, 2017 Job can increase women's contribution to family income and support economic autonomy, social participation and self-independence(Kapur, 1970; Shukla, 2002. However, educational qualifications, household economic circumstances, family support, employment security, commuting distance and transport availability can all influence women's work experiences.(Acharya, 1998; Anand & Tiwari, 2006) Kharagpur is an urban centre in West Bengal with railway, industrial, educational, commercial and service-sector activities. These activities provide

varied employment opportunities, but opportunities may not be equally accessible to all women. Women in regular public-sector or educational employment may experience different conditions from women in non-permanent work.Sivasubramanian et al., 2020; Verma & Katiyar, 2011). Similarly, the distance between home and workplace and the mode of travel may affect the time and cost.

Objectives

1.To examine the reasons for choosing job among the selected working women across the spatial and temporal categories

2. To analyses the daily working hours and distance travelled to the workplace.

3.To identify the principal modes of transport and their distribution

Methodology

The paper is based on the primary data collected by personal survey conducted during 2022–2024. The total sample of 1,097 working women was studied. The collected data classifies all the respondents spatially by origin of different blocks, different districts and different states and temporally by the period associated with entry into the job before 1990, 1991–2000, 2001–2010 and after 2010. A descriptive approach is used to summaries the frequencies and percentages for reason for choosing job, job permanence, working hours, workplace distance and commuting mode.

Reasons for choosing job

Among the 1,097 respondents, lower household economic conditions appear as the most common reason for choosing job, accounting for 34.46%. Economic independence specified 28.81%, while 24.89% women identified higher educational qualifications. The remaining 11.84% reported other reasons for choosing job.. These results indicate that employment is associated both with household financial need and with aspirations for self-reliance and the use of educational qualifications.

Sl No	Spatial Analysis	Total Female		Reason for choice of job							
		Frequency	%	Lower economic conditions		Higher educational Qualification		Economical Independent		Other	
				Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	Frequency
1	Different Block	525	47.86	253	48.19	113	21.52	95	18.09	64	12.19
2	Different District of a states	365	33.27	87	23.84	109	29.86	110	30.14	59	16.16
3	Different statesof	207	18.87	38	18.36	51	24.64	111	53.62	7	3.38

	country										
Total		1097	100	378	34.45	273	24.89	316	28.81	130	11.85

Table 1: Spatial–Analysisof ReasonsFor ChoiceofJob

The table presents the spatial analysis of job choice among 1,097 working women in Kharagpur city, highlighting the relationship between the geographical distribution of employment and the reasons for selecting a particular job. The findings reveal that the largest proportion of women, 525 (47.86%), worked in different blocks, followed by 365 women (33.27%) working in different districts within the same state and 207 women (18.87%) working in different states of the country. Regarding the reasons for job selection, lower economic conditions emerged as the most significant factor, accounting for 378 women (34.45%), followed by economic independence, reported by 316 women (28.81%), higher educational qualifications, accounting for 273 women (24.89%), and other reasons, representing 130 women (11.85%). A detailed spatial comparison shows that among women working in different blocks, 48.19% cited lower economic conditions as the primary reason for employment. In contrast, among women working in different districts within the same state, economic independence (30.14%) and higher educational qualifications (29.86%) were the leading considerations. Among women working in different states, economic independence was the dominant factor, accounting for 53.62%, followed by higher educational qualifications (24.64%). The chi-square test further indicates a statistically significant association between spatial category and the reasons for job choice (145.983, df = 6, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the reasons influencing women's employment decisions vary according to the spatial extent of their work. Overall, the findings indicate that economic necessity plays a major role in local and inter-block employment, whereas economic independence and educational qualifications become more prominent among women working across wider geographical areas.

FIGURES

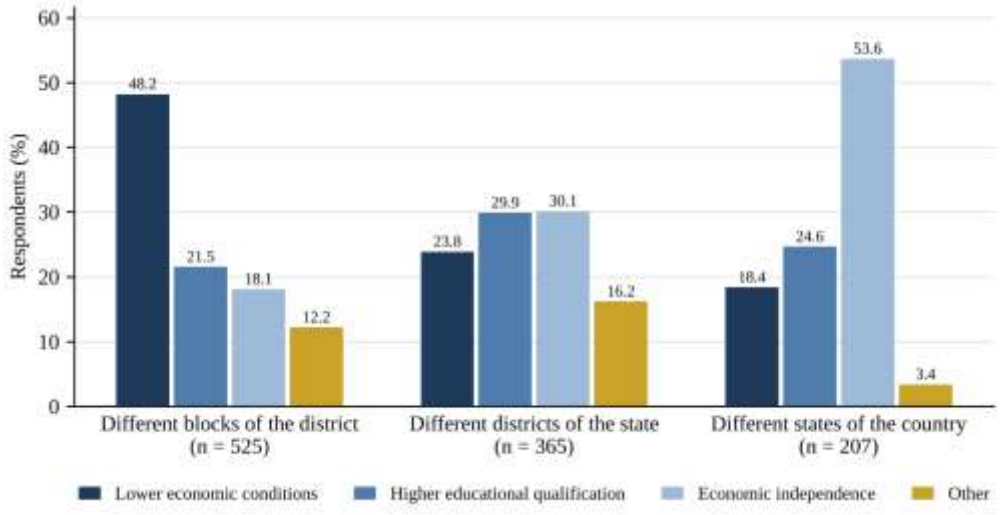


Figure 1: Kharagpur city: Reasons for choosing job by spatial origin of working women (row %)
***Source:* Based on Table 1 (personal survey, 2022–24)**

Table 2: Temporal Analysis of Choice of job of Working Women in Kharagpur City

Sl No	Temporal Analysis	Total Female		Reason for choice of job							
		Frequency	%	Lower economic conditions		Higher educational Qualification		Economical Independent		Other	
				Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	<1990	24	2.19	13	54.17	7	29.17	3	12.5	1	4.16
2	1991-2000	177	16.13	65	36.72	44	24.86	53	29.94	15	8.47
3	2001-2010	298	27.17	138	46.31	69	23.15	71	23.83	20	6.71
4	>2010	598	54.51	162	27.09	153	25.59	189	31.61	94	15.72
		1097	100	378	34.46	273	24.89	316	28.81	130	11.84

Source: Personal Survey,2022-24

The table presents a temporal analysis of the reasons for choosing employment among 1,097 selected working women in Kharagpur city, based on a personal survey conducted during 2022–2024. The data reveal a substantial increase in the number of working women over time. Only 24 respondents (2.19%) entered employment before 1990, while 177 (16.13%) belonged to the period 1991–2001. The number increased to 298 (27.17%) during 2001–2010 and reached its highest level of 598 (54.51%) after 2010. This trend indicates a significant expansion of women's participation in employment in Kharagpur city over the study period. Regarding the reasons for choosing employment, lower economic conditions emerged as the most frequently reported reason, accounting for 378 women (34.46%) overall. Of these, 162 women belonged to the post-2010 period, indicating that economic necessity continued to influence women's employment decisions. The second major reason was economic independence, reported by 316 women (28.81%). Among them, 189 women entered employment after 2010, suggesting that the desire for financial autonomy has become increasingly important. Higher educational qualification was identified by 273 women (24.89%), including 153 women from the post-2010 period. This indicates that educational advancement has also played an important role in women's employment participation. In comparison, 130 women (11.85%) cited other reasons, with 94 belonging to the post-2010 period.

A comparison across the four periods further reveals changes in the relative importance of these factors. Lower economic conditions accounted for 54.17% of respondents employed before 1990, compared with 27.09% in the post-2010 period. In contrast, economic independence accounted for 12.50% in the earliest period and 31.61% after 2010. Higher educational qualification represented 29.17% before 1990 and 25.59% after 2010. These findings suggest that, although economic necessity remains an important factor, the pursuit of financial independence has gained greater prominence in women's employment decisions in recent years. Overall, the temporal pattern reflects both the expansion of women's employment and the

growing importance of economic autonomy and educational attainment in shaping their occupational participation in Kharagpur city.

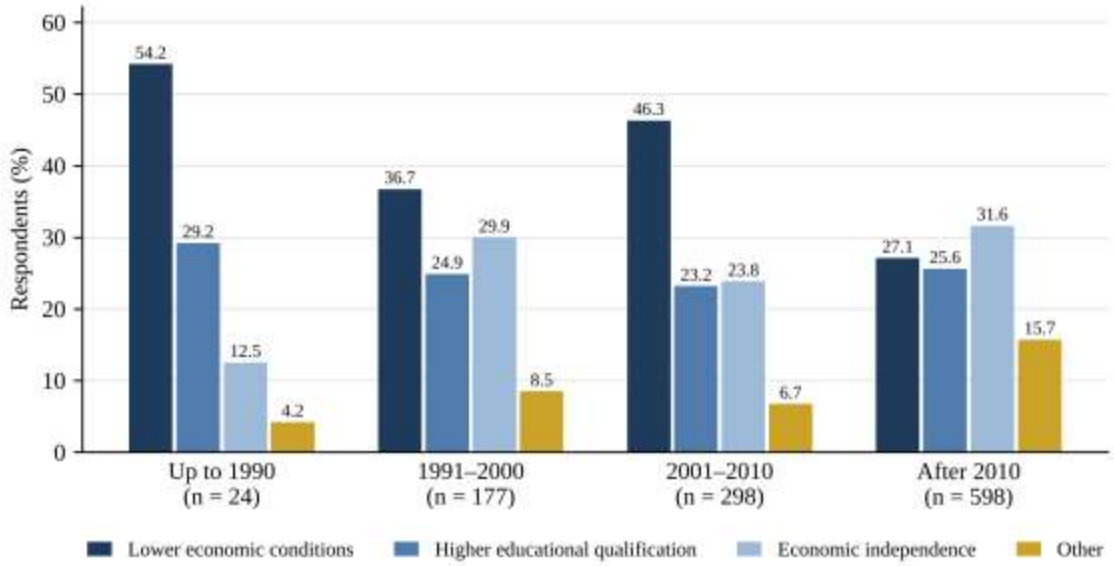


Figure 2: Kharagpur city: Reasons for choosing job by period of entry into employment (row %)
Source: **Based on Table 2 (personal survey, 2022–24).**

Table 3: Spatial –Analysisof Reasonsfor NatureofJobof Selected Working Women

Sl no	Special analysis	Total female	%	permanent	%	Non-permanent	%
1	Different block of a district	525	47.86	194	36.95	331	63.05
2	Different district	365	33.27	174	47.67	191	52.32
3	Different state	207	18.87	112	54.11	95	45.89
Total		1097	100	480	43.76	617	56.24

Source: Personal survey,2022-24

Table 3 presents the spatial analysis of the nature of work of working women in Kharagpur city based on a sample of 1,097 women. The table shows that 43.76% (480) of the respondents are in permanent

employment, whereas 56.24% (617) are in non-permanent employment, indicating a predominance of non-permanent work among the surveyed women. In terms of spatial distribution, women working in different blocks of the district constitute the largest group (47.86%), followed by those working in different districts (33.27%) and different states (18.87%). Among permanent workers of block, district and states 36.95% work in different blocks, 47.67% in different districts and 54.11% in different states. A similar pattern is observed among non-permanent workers, with 63.05% working in different blocks, 52.32% in different districts and 45.89% in different states. Overall, the findings indicate that working women are more concentrated in employment opportunities located within different blocks of the district, while non-permanent employment is more prominent across all spatial categories. This spatial pattern suggests that employment opportunities in and around the district play an important role in shaping the occupational mobility of working women in Kharagpur city.

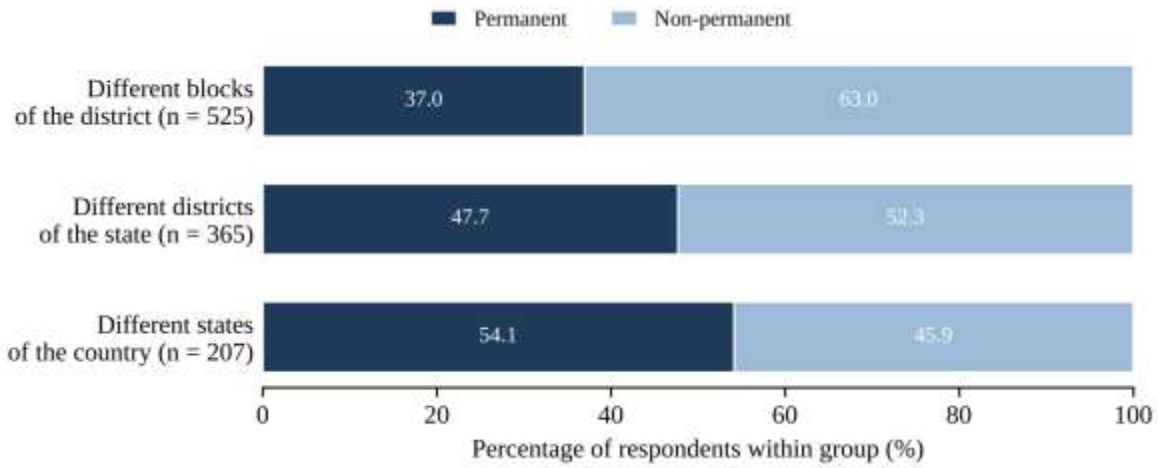


Figure 3: Kharagpur city: Permanent and non-permanent employment by spatial origin of working women (row %)

Table 4:Temporal analysis of nature of work of working women in Kharagpur city

Sl.No	Temporal ANALYSIS	TOTAL FEMALE		NATURE OF JOB			
		FREQUENCY	%	Permanent	%	*f*	%
1	<1990	24	2.19	18	3.75	6	0.97
2	1991-2000	177	16.13	79	16.46	98	15.88
3	2001-2010	298	27.17	133	27.71	165	26.74
4	>2010	598	54.51	250	52.08	348	56.40
Total	1097	100	480	43.76	**43.76**	**617**	**56.24**

The table presents a temporal analysis of the reasons for choosing employment among 1,097 selected working women in Kharagpur city, based on a personal survey conducted during 2022–2024. The data reveal a substantial increase in the number of working women over time. Only 24 respondents (2.19%) entered employment before 1990, while 177 (16.13%) belonged to the period 1991–2001. The number increased to 298 (27.17%) during 2001–2010 and reached its highest level of 598 (54.51%) after 2010.

This trend indicates a significant expansion of women's participation in employment in Kharagpur city over the study period. Regarding the nature of employment, 480 women (43.76%) were engaged in permanent jobs, while 617 women (56.24%) were employed in non-permanent jobs. Before 1990, permanent employment accounted for 18 women (75%), compared with only 6 women (25%) in non-permanent employment. During 1991–2000, the number of women in permanent jobs increased to 79 (44.63%), while 98 women (55.36%) were engaged in non-permanent jobs. A similar pattern was observed during 2001–2010, when 133 women (44.63%) held permanent positions and 165 (55.36%) worked in non-permanent employment. After 2010, 250 women (41.80%) were employed in permanent jobs, whereas 348 (58.19%) were engaged in non-permanent jobs.

The findings indicate that although women's participation in employment has increased significantly over time, non-permanent employment has become the predominant form of work in the later periods. The proportion of permanent employment declined from 75% before 1990 to 41.80% after 2010, while non-permanent employment increased from 25% to 58.19%. This shift may reflect the expansion of contractual, temporary, self-employed, or other less-secure forms of employment among women. However, the specific reasons for this change would require further investigation. Overall, the temporal analysis highlights the growing participation of women in the workforce in Kharagpur city, alongside the continuing challenge of securing permanent employment.

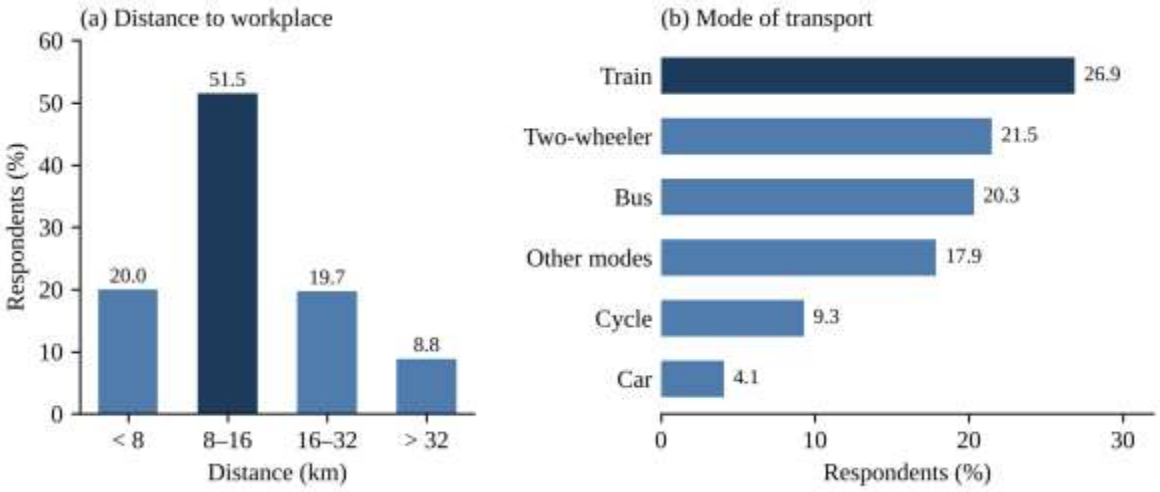


Figure 4: Kharagpur city: Commuting characteristics of working women – (a) distance between residence and workplace; (b) mode of transport

Source: **Based on Tables 6 and 7 (personal survey, 2022–24)**

Table 5: Kharagpur city: Distance between residence and workplace of working women

Distance	Respondents	Percentage
Less than 8 km	219	19.96
8–16 km	565	51.50
16–32 km	216	19.69
More than 32 km	97	8.84

Distance	Respondents	Percentage
Total	**1,097**	**100.00**

Source: Personal survey, 2022–24.

The reported distance distribution shows that 565 respondents (51.50%) travelled 8–16 km to work. A further 219 women (19.96%) travelled less than 8 km, 216 (19.69%) travelled 16–32 km and 97 (8.84%) travelled more than 32 km. The 8–16 km category was therefore the most common. At the same time, 313 women (28.53%) reported distances exceeding 16 km, indicating that a substantial minority faced relatively long commutes.

Table 6: Kharagpur city: Mode of transport of working women

Mode of transport	Respondents	Percentage
Cycle	102	9.30
Bus	223	20.33
Train	295	26.89
Car	45	4.10
Bike/two-wheeler	236	21.51
Other modes	196	17.87
Total	**1,097**	**100.00**

Source: Personal survey, 2022–24.

Train was the most frequently reported commuting mode, used by 295 respondents (26.89%). two-wheeler travel accounted for 236 women (21.51%), while 223 (20.33%) used buses. Other modes were reported by 196 women (17.87%), bicycles by 102 (9.30%), and cars by 45 (4.10%). The pattern indicates an important role for rail and bus transport, alongside personal or alternative mode of transport.

Conclusion

The survey of 1,097 working women in Kharagpur city highlights several dimensions of women's employment. Lower household economic conditions were the most frequently reported reason for working, although economic independence and educational qualifications were also important motivations. Non-permanent employment accounted for more than half of the sample, indicating that employment participation coexists with concerns about job security. Most respondents reported working 6–8 hours per day, and the most common commuting distance was 8–16 km. Train, bus and bike/two-wheeler travel were important commuting modes, demonstrating the relevance of transport access to women's employment.

The temporal classifications in the source show that more than half of the respondents were associated with the post-2010 period. This suggests that the surveyed group is concentrated in more recent employment cohorts, but it should not be treated as a city-wide historical trend without further methodological evidence. Overall, the findings point to the importance of secure employment, accessible

public transport and opportunities that support women's economic independence. Future research could examine how occupation, income, education, family responsibilities, safety and transport costs intersect to shape women's work experiences.

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