



## Lockdown due to COVID-19 & its impact on the migrants: A study on migrant workers of West Bengal

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed some of the emergent issues regarding the coronavirus pandemic's effect on the migrant worker of West Bengal. The impact of COVID 19 constitutes quite a large proportion among vulnerable population globally. The sudden enforcement of lockdown in India puts a life-sustaining situation to migrant without work and earning. Therefore, millions of migrant workers are lost their jobs, and many have returned to their villages, and many are stuck at the workplace. This study used census data and a telephonic survey with a mixed-method; fifty semi-structured questions were asked to West Bengal's out-migrants. We find that the migrants those stuck at destinations are facing severe food and economic crisis. The pandemic has impacted medical facilities, coupled with the COVID 19, create fear among them. Socio-comically marginalized people are mostly out-migrants. The majority of migrants have been faced food, financial crisis and health problems during the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown. The elderly are more vulnerable as they have multimorbidity and breathing problem, which is one of the critical health problems of elderly migrants. The study argues that monitoring migrant workers, incredibly informal sector workers, could have better prepared and early measures to contain the COVID-19 spread in India.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Lockdown, Impact, Migration, West Bengal, India.

### I. INTRODUCTION:

After fertility and mortality, the third major factor of population change is migration. The transition of fertility and mortality rates with demographic transition has brought down the fertility and mortality rates, except few African continent countries. Migration plays an essential role in the development of an economy. Trade and commerce began in early human history; people migrated throughout the world. In the present world, international migration was considered a voluntarily rational attempt of human beings to develop themselves and attain social uplift. Medical tourism is considered one of the attractive dimension of international migration.

Similarly, several diseases have travelled throughout the world by international movement. Migration and health can be related to migrants' health, and migration influences the public health situation of origin and destination place by transmitting diseases (World Migration Report 2020). International migration for trade, employment, education, and health remains an essential part of life for many communities throughout the world. The kissi triangle cross-border region at the intersection between Sierre Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, critical for trade and commerce, became the epicentre for spreading the Ebola virus in 2014 (World Health Organization).

The worldwide mass spread of COVID-19 creates such socio-economic and health disaster that every individual never face in the last seventy-five years (UN, 2020). Most of the migrants have been returning to their home places due to socio-economic bottleneck conditions. Unplanned lockdown and risky migratory journeys, inadequate housing facilities, and hygiene practices are major issues from underdeveloped and developing countries (WHO, 2020). Individuals facing impoverished socio-economic conditions and health inconsistency due to the unprecedented COVID-19 caused lockdowns (Buheji et al., 2020). The unplanned and sudden lockdown decision has affected migrants negatively, particularly marginalized workers, who depend on daily wages for their survival. They have been returning to their

native places due to a shortage of foods and money (Lodge & Kuchukhidze, 2020; Maji et al., 2020). The migrant and informal sectors workers are in a terrible situation because of lower economic growths, rapid unemployment and job trimming during this pandemic (Bhagat et al., 2020).

About 30 per cent populations are internal migrants; most of the migrants are taken place from economically deprived states in India (Kone et al., 2016; Mahapatro, 2012; Rajan & Sarkar, 2020). A prolonged Indian lockdown humbly affects mainly daily wage earners as well as workers of informal sectors (Hariharan, 2020). Workers from informal sectors are mostly inter-state migrants who contribute 90 per cent workforce in India. Informal workers are the worst sufferer of infection led crisis during the lockdown (Ganguly et al., 2020). In India, migrants are plunged into pathetic situation and chaotic event due to unplanned and mismanaged nationwide lockdown (Sen, 2020). In such circumstances, informal wage workers have been distressed in two ways, i.e. protect themselves from a lethal virus and fights for survival due to loss of income during this pandemic (Srivastava & Das, 2020). India has a 50.40% labour force participation rate out of the total population (Trading Economics 2019). Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary, Union Home Ministry, said railways were taken more than 2,600 special trains since May 1 to transport migrant workers from different regions to their origin. According to census report 2011, there are four crores, migrant workers, in the country. Elaborating on the central government's steps for the convenience of migrant workers since March 25, when lockdown began, Srivastava said 35 lakh migrant workers had reached their home using 'Shramik' special trains, while 40 lakh have travelled in buses to reach their destinations. So there is a massive number of migrants workers staying in urban areas in a vulnerable situation. West Bengal is the fourth largest populated, second largest densely populated and seventh-largest out-migration state in India (Census, 2011). In West Bengal, the rate of out-migration has increased over time due to employment opportunities in other states (Mukherjee et al., 2019). The out-migration pattern of West Bengal shows that about 18 per cent and 12 per cent of migrants destination states are Maharashtra and Delhi (Rajan & Sarkar, 2020), respectively. Thus our present study aims to find out the Food and Financial crisis, Health problems faced by migrant workers of West Bengal. Due to sudden, unexpected and unplanned lockdown at concise notice. This resulted in an ultimately chased situation, and some migrants able to return to their original place, some stuck at the destination place, both were considered for the study. i.e. what is the status of necessary preventive measures during COVID-19 taken by migrant workers?

People of West Bengal are diversely mobile. In the absence of the primary industrial informal sector, workers cannot find any effective income means. In this paper, firstly- we are trying to capture the out-migration flow of West Bengal and their reasons. Out-migration flow from West Bengal will disseminate the direction of migrants rushing towards which Indian state. Such migration will help us go for a policy solution to restrict out-migration from West Bengal. Secondly, examine the food, health and financial challenges and practice preventive measures by out-migrants of West Bengal during nationwide lockdown for COVID-19 pandemic in India. This will undoubtedly help us represent the efficiency of Public distribution systems, health centres and government financial schemes. Practising preventive measures among out-migrants will reflect the picture of their vulnerability of COVID-19.

## II. DATA & METHODOLOGY:

Study data were collected through a telephonic survey based on a snowball sampling technique. Respondents were asked a semi-structured question, 40 minutes duration and telephone calls were made in the evening time. In this study, the first surveyed person was asked about persons similar to him (out-migrants), and contact numbers were gathered for the following respondents. The survey schedule has four broad categories, i.e., food, finance, health and practising preventive regarding COVID-19. Data was collected between 27/04/2020 to 11/05/2020, and the targeted population were inter-state and inter-district migrants of West Bengal, who have returned to their home place and were stuck at their workplaces. A telephonic survey of 350 people was conducted, and a total of 297 people has responded accurately 53 people have declined to respond. This telephonic survey first pretested among 20 potential participants. Permission to conduct the telephonic survey with questions was taken from the institutional ethics committee. All participants have been informed about the study's purpose and data confidentiality (for study purpose). The study also used census data from the migration table 'D'. Census of India is an authentic and reliable source of migration data in India. Census collected information on internal migration based on place of birth, place of the last residence, duration of stay at the place of enumeration, and migration reasons.

Since 1981, reasons for migration from the last residence were collected; all reasons have been grouped into major seven categories viz. work/employment, education, business, marriage, moved with household,

moved after birth and others. Others are total persons displaced caused by development projects, migrated due to natural calamities such as drought, flood and social disturbances, etc. Census does not collect out-migrants of specific states. We have indirectly calculated out-migration, i.e. information based on how many West Bengal persons were residing in other states as in-migrants. Flow map prepared based on out-migrants of West Bengal (place of the last residence). A flow map of out-migrants and a bar diagram of reasons for Out-migration of West Bengal has been prepared with the application of ArcGIS (Version 10.7.1). We have used simple tabulation to find out background characteristics of the sample, work status, place of destination, and type of work, food, health and financial challenges and SMS (social distancing, mask use and sanitizer) practices of out-migrants of West Bengal with the help of STATA 14 software.

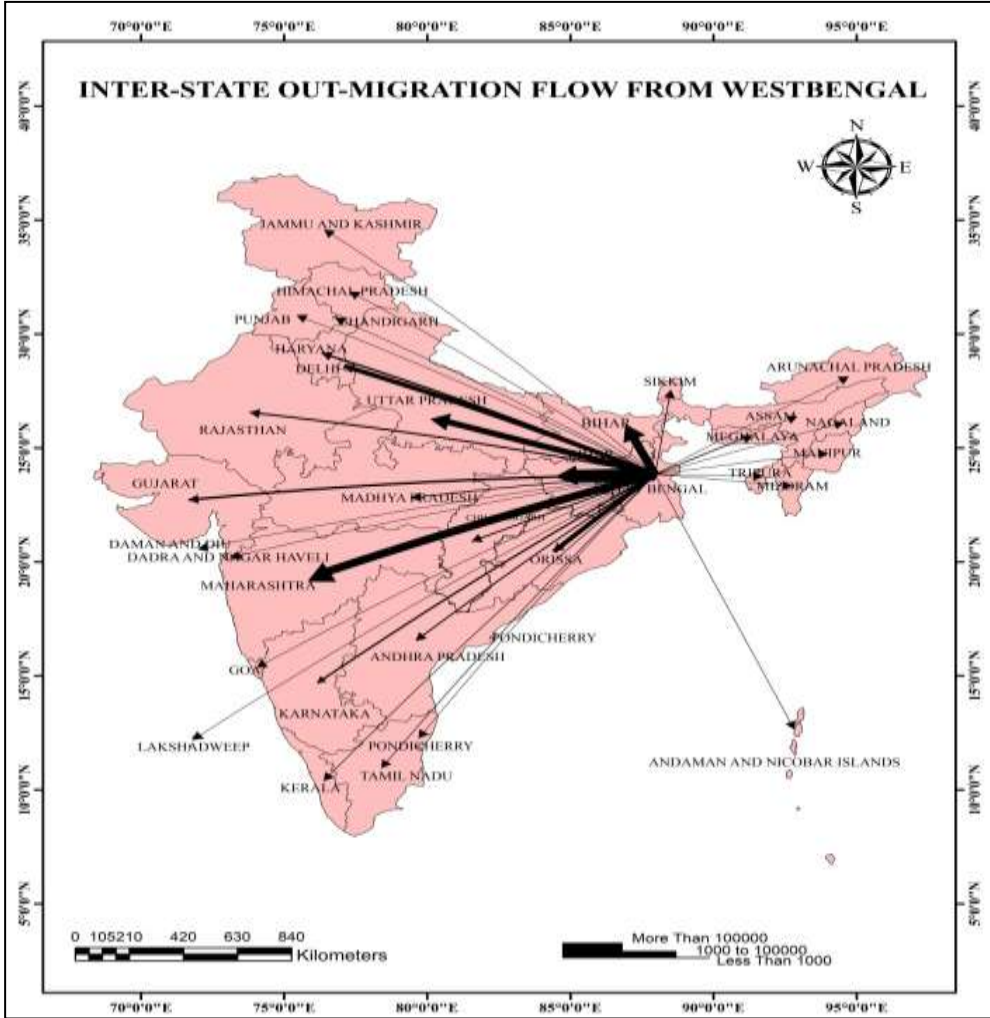
**Limitation of the study:** This study collects data through telephonic call, and respondents find themselves unable to answer all the questions accurately in front of other family members. In this study, no analytical tools have been used as a mixed method of data collection was followed.

III. RESULTS:

**Distribution and reason for out-migration of West Bengal across India, 2011**

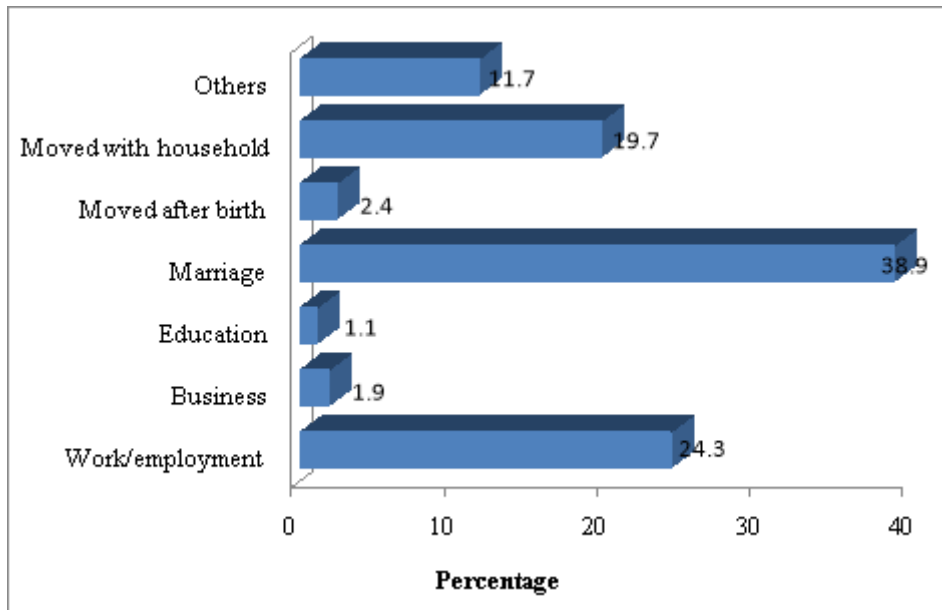
The flow of inter-state out-migration from West Bengal (Census, 2011). It is observed from the map that Jharkhand 20 per cent, Maharashtra 12 per cent, and Uttar Pradesh 9 per cent are central destination states for migrants of West Bengal followed by Bihar 9 per cent, Odisha 6 per cent, Gujarat 3 per cent, Haryana 3 per cent, Karnataka 2 per cent, Rajasthan 2 per cent and Andhra Pradesh 2 per cent. On the other hand, Delhi 7 per cent consider as primary destination states among all union territories in India. Except for Delhi, all other union territories received less than 1 per cent of migrants from West Bengal.

Map 1: Flow map showing inter-state out-migration flow from West Bengal, Census (2011).



Source- Census of India, 2011

Figure 1: Distribution of Out Migration by reasons in West Bengal, Census 2011



Source- Census of India, 2011

#### Distribution of Out Migration by reasons in West Bengal, Census 2011

Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of reasons for Out-migration from West Bengal. It may be seen from the figure that majority of out-migrants 38 per cent take place for marriage as reason, followed by work/employment 24 per cent, moving with household 19 per cent and nearly 12 per cent migrants are migrated for others reason. On the other hand, out-migration for education as a reason is found having the lowest percentage, followed by business reason 2 per cent and moved after birth 2 per cent from West Bengal.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of Sample during the lockdown in West Bengal

Background Characteristics	Percentage %
<b>Age</b>	
Below 20	12.1
20-29	50.7
30-39	29.1
40-above	8.1
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	21.6
Male	78.4
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	69.1
Muslim	28.8
Others	2.1
<b>Caste</b>	
General	21.6
OBC	37.1
SC	28.0
ST	10.3
<b>Education Level</b>	
Illiterate	39.3
Primary	32.1
Secondary	18.3
Higher Secondary & Above	10.3
<b>The primary source of family Income</b>	

Agriculture	56.1
Business/others	18.9
Government salary	3.7
Migrant remittance	21.3
<b>Working Status</b>	
Private Sector Employee	15.5
Daily Labour	65.5
Government employee	3.7
Other	15.3
<b>Total Sample Size(n)</b>	<b>297</b>

Note: OBC= other backward class, SC=Scheduled caste, ST= Scheduled tribes  
Source- Authors Calculation

### Background Characteristics of Respondents:

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the out-migrants of West Bengal. It has been observed that the majority of migrants are in the prime age group of 20-29, followed by the age group 30-39, dominating nearly 30 per cent, and less than 10 per cent migrants are in (40 and above) age group. One-third of migrants are male, 78 per cent. Majority of respondent reported as Hindu, nearly 70 per cent, followed by Muslim 28 per cent, and less than 3 per cent reported as Christian. Approximately 35 per cent of migrants belong to other backward classes followed by scheduled cast 28 per cent, and more than 20 per cent reported as a general category. On the other hand, only 10 per cent of migrants are scheduled tribes of West Bengal's total out-migration.

It may be seen at the educational level that most of the respondents, 71 per cent are illiterates. Only 10 per cent of the migrant has achieved higher secondary education. It may be noted that agriculture is the primary source of household income, followed by remittance of 21 per cent and less than 20 per cent of migrants depend on business/others as a source of family income. Among out-migrants, two-third are engaged with daily labour, followed by the private sector 15 per cent, and less than 15 per cent are involved in other activity.

**Table 2:** Place of work of out-migrants of West Bengal by their background Characterises.

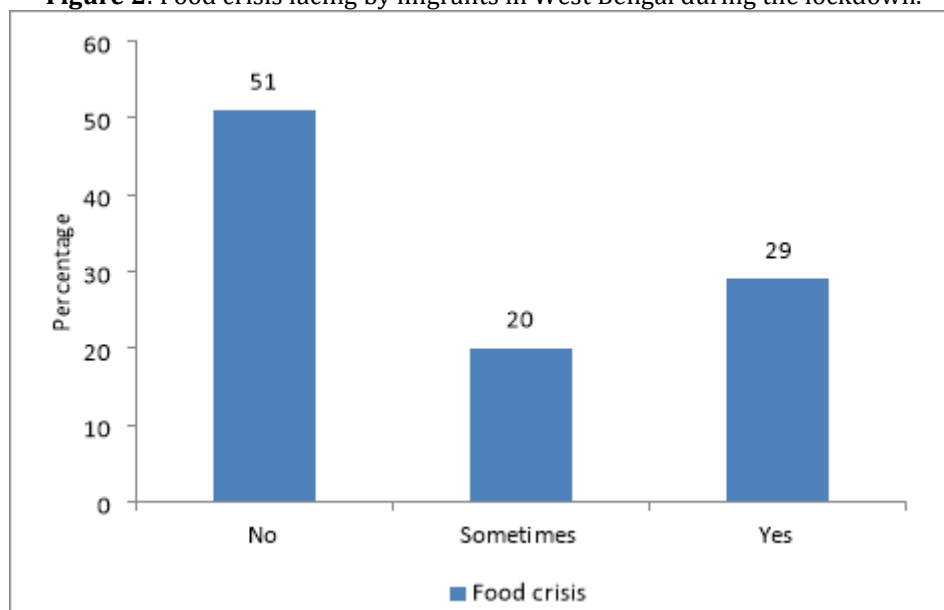
Background Characteristics	Place of work/destination	
	Inter-district migrants	Inter-States migrants
<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	60.8	40.2
20-29	29.3	70.7
30-39	39.9	60.1
40-49	33.3	66.7
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	89.5	9.5
Male	23.7	76.2
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	45.3	54.7
Muslim	27.3	72.7
Other	80.0	20.0
<b>Caste</b>		
General	31.6	69.4
OBC	23.9	76.1
SC	14.8	85.2
ST	25.9	74.1
<b>Work status</b>		
Private Sector Employee	36.7	63.3
Daily Labour	29.5	70.5

Source- Authors Calculation

### Place of work for out-migrants of West Bengal:

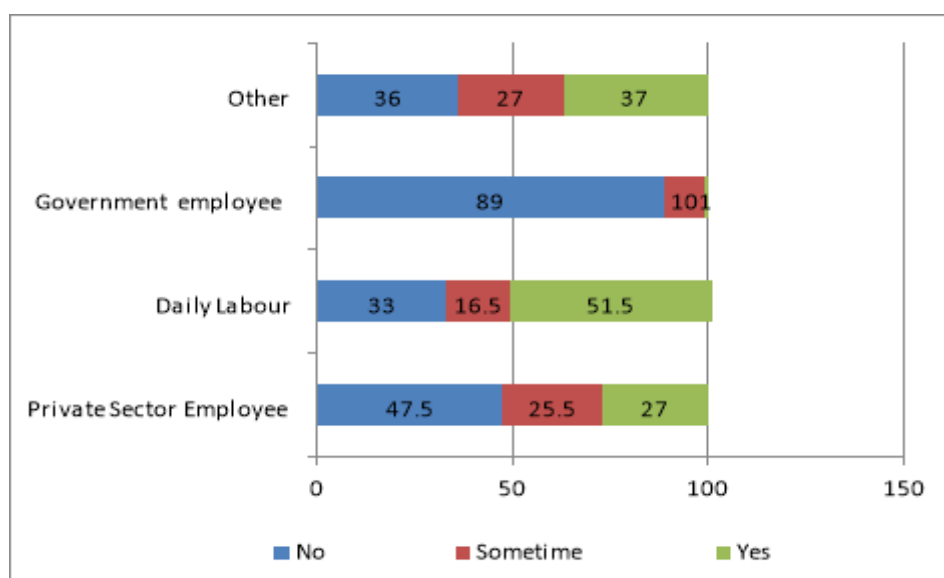
Table 2 shows the place of destination of out-migrants of West Bengal. It may be seen from the table that one-third of total migration are inter-state migrants, and nearly 30 per cent are inter-district migrants of West Bengal. The trend of inter-state migration is increasing with the increasing age of migrants. Migrants in age below 20 years are mostly preferred inter-district migration in West Bengal as a working place. Female migrants, 89 per cent are preferred inter-district movement for the workplace; on the other hand, males tend to preferred inter-state movement. From a religious perspective, most inter-state migrants are Muslims, and they migrated to work/employment as a reason. Hindus are equally distributed Inter-state and inter-district migration for work/employment as reason. Caste wise distribution, inter-district migration observed highest among general caste 31 per cent followed by other backward classes. However, inter-state migration is higher among schedule caste 85 per cent, followed by other backward classes 76 per cent, scheduled tribes 74 per cent and 70 per cent are under general category.

**Figure 2:** Food crisis facing by migrants in West Bengal during the lockdown.



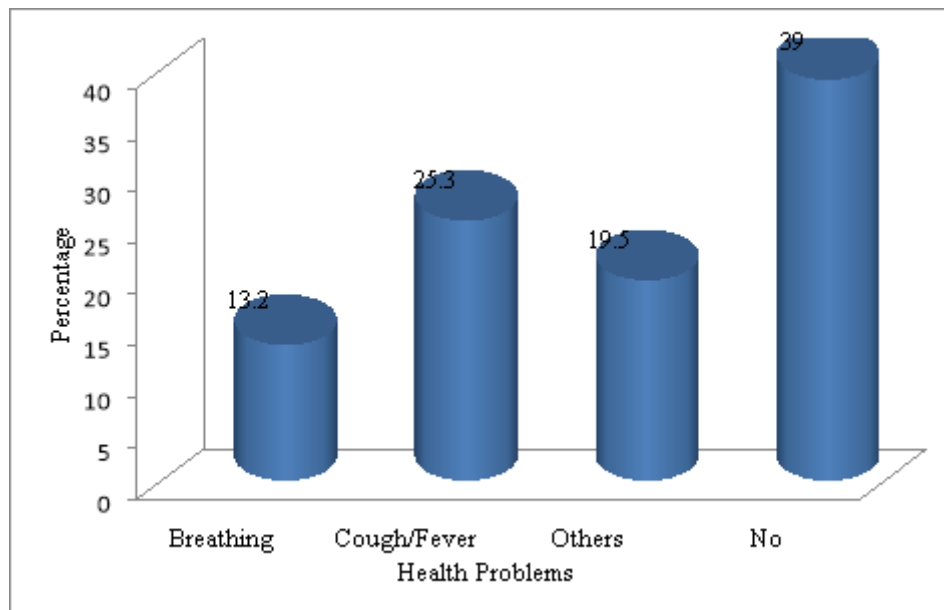
Source- Authors Calculation

**Figure 3:** Food Crisis of migrants by type of occupation during the lockdown in West Bengal



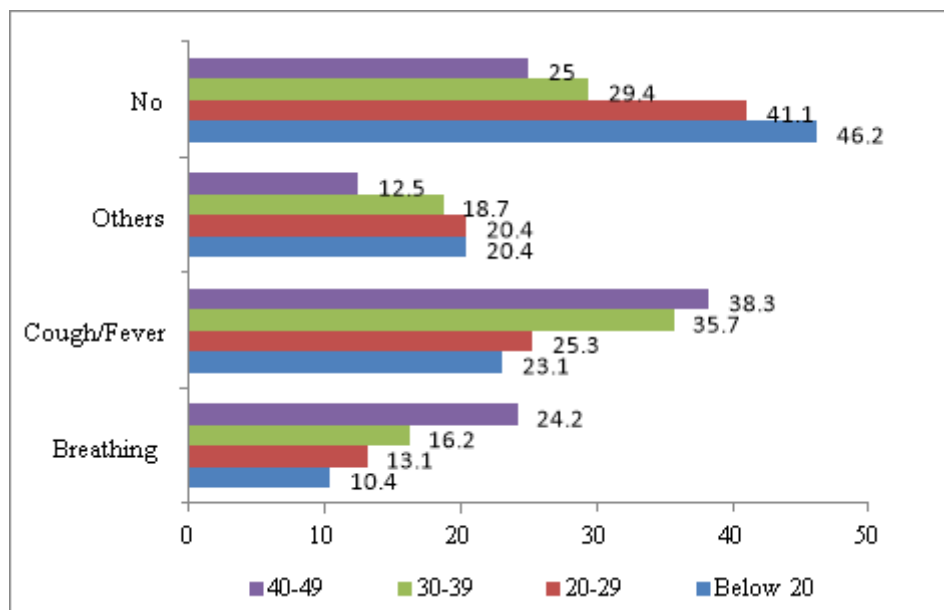
Source- Authors Calculation

**Figure 4:** Major health problems of out-migrants in West Bengal during the lockdown.



Source- Authors Calculation

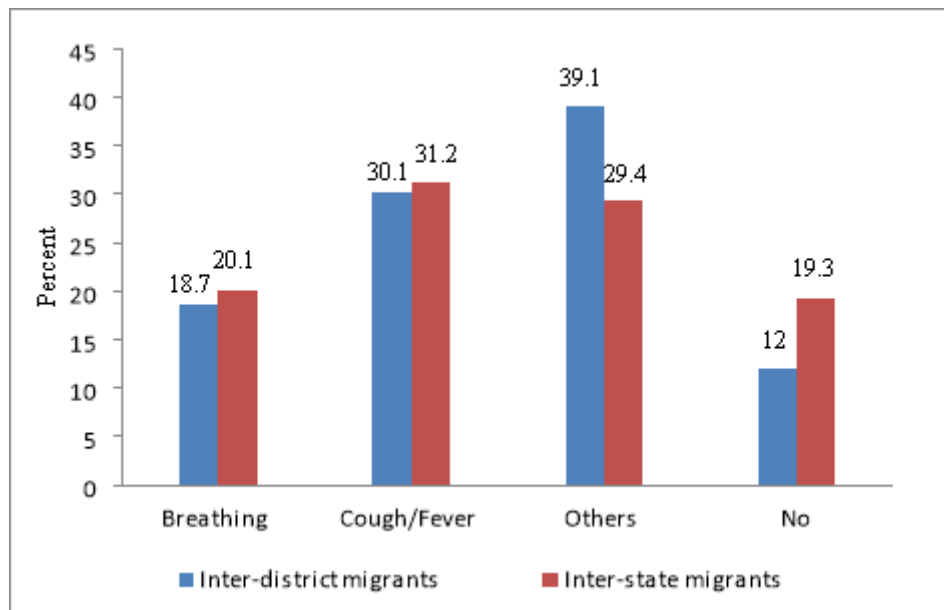
**Figure 5:** Major health problems of out-migrants by age during the lockdown in West Bengal



Source- Authors Calculation

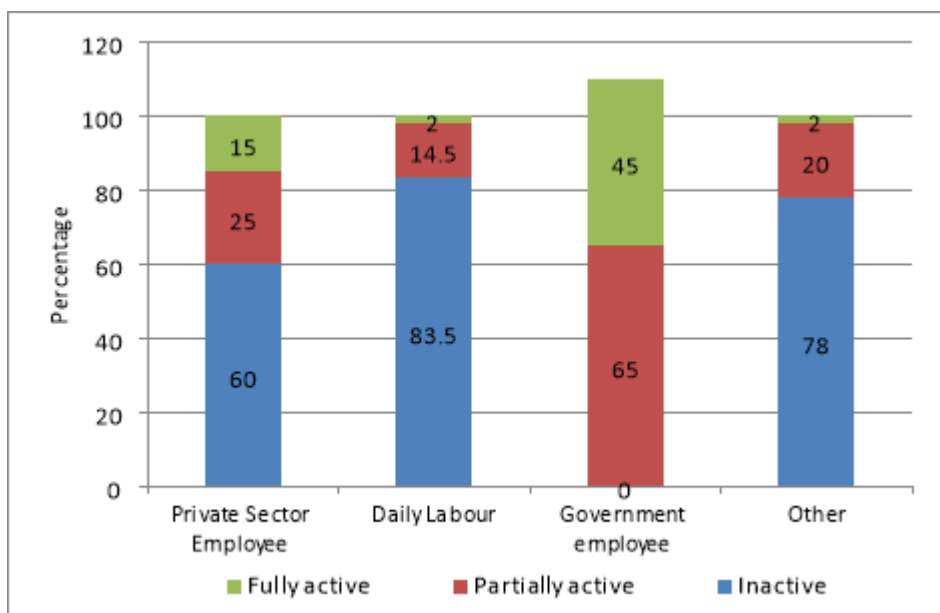


**Figure 6:** Major health problems of out-migrants by place of stuck during the lockdown in West Bengal



Source- Authors Calculation

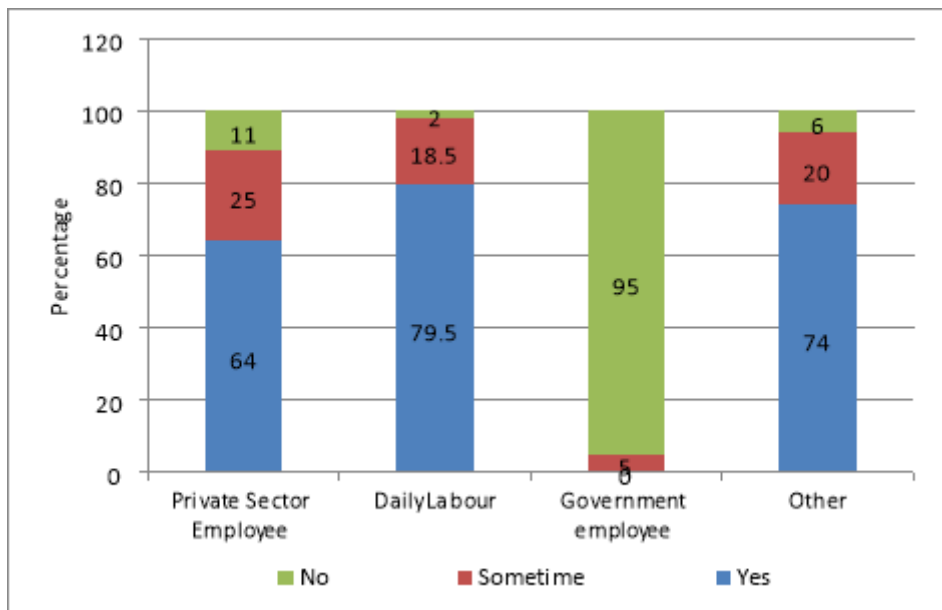
**Figure 7:** Present working status and working activeness during the lockdown in West Bengal



Source- Authors Calculation

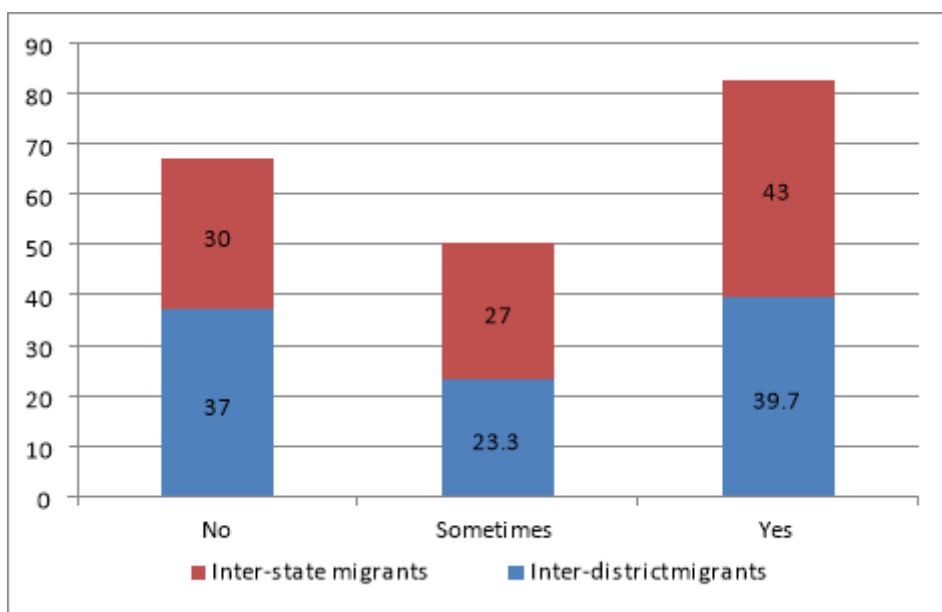


**Figure 8:** Type of work and financial crisis during the lockdown in West Bengal



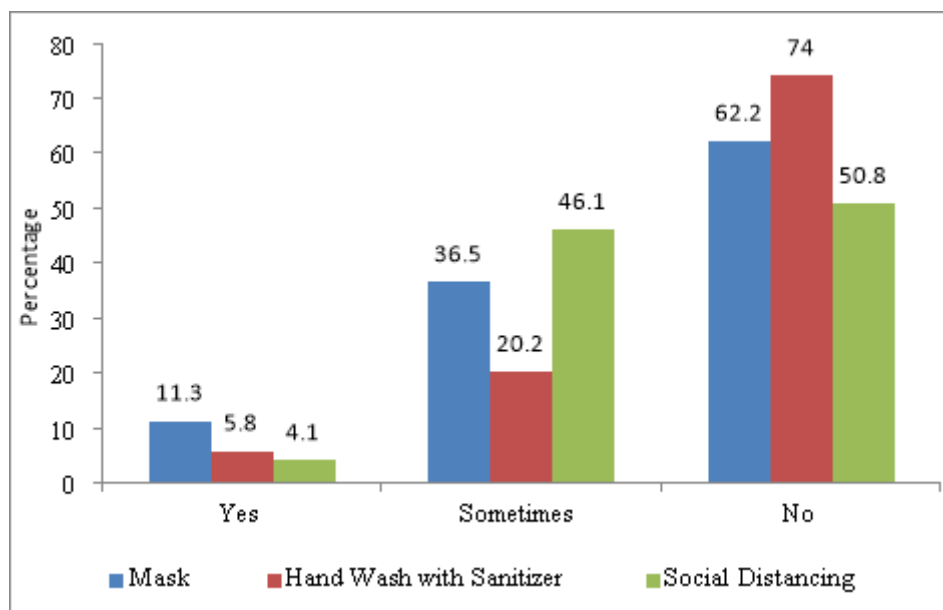
Source- Authors Calculation

**Figure 9:** Financial crisis and present location of staying during the lockdown in West Bengal



Source- Authors Calculation

**Figure 10:** Following SMS (Social distancing, Mask and Sanitizer) by out-migrants during the lockdown in West Bengal



Source- Authors Calculation

#### **Food, Health and Financial Challenges faced by out-migrant of West Bengal:**

Figure 2 shows the food, health and financial challenges of migrant workers. The above figure depicts nearly 30 per cent of migrant workers facing a food crisis due to nationwide lockdown. However, 20 per cent of migrant workers reported that they often faced a food and shelter crisis in their workplace. It is interesting to see that half of the migrants, 51 per cent, reported that they are not suffering from the food crisis. Among migrants who stuck in other states, they had faced a severe food crisis of 23 per cent, and 33 per cent are often faced food crisis, which is significantly more than migrants stuck in others state, 27 per cent. It is interesting to know that more than 50 per cent of inter-state and inter-district migrants are not faced with any food shortage during the lockdown.

Figure 3 reveals that a respectable number of government employee, 89 per cent and private sector employee, 47 per cent, did not plunge into the food crisis. Half of the daily labour, 51 per cent endure food crisis, followed by respondents engaging with other activity 37 per cent and private sector worker 27 per cent. More than 27 per cent of migrant workers who engage in other occupational activities face a food crisis, sometimes followed by private-sector employees 25 per cent and daily labours 16 per cent.

#### **Health Problems faced by out-migrant of West Bengal:**

Figure 4 shows the health status of migrants workers of West Bengal. It has been observed that 25 per cent of out-migrants suffer from fever/cough, followed by nearly 20 per cent having others health issues and 13 per cent having breathing problems. It is interesting to see that nearly 40 per cent are not suffering from any diseases. Nearly 40 per cent of migrant workers (40 and above age group) suffer from cough/fever, which is a significant health issue. Young adult migrant workers reported mainly no issues 46 per cent. On the other hand, mature adults are also suffering from Cough/fever 35 per cent. However, inter-state migrants reported suffering from cough/fever 31 per cent, whereas inter-district migrants reported 39 per cent.

#### **Financial Crisis faced by out-migrant of West Bengal:**

Figure 8 shows the present working status and type of work of migrants workers of West Bengal. About 83 per cent of daily labours and 60 per cent of private-sector employees did not contact any working activity at the time of the survey, whereas about 65 per cent of government employees reported they were partially active and 45 per cent of government employees were fully active. In daily labour, 14 per cent are partially active, and only 2 per cent of daily labours reported they are fully active in their work. The majority of the respondent, except government employee, addressed that they had faced a financial crisis.

In contrast, in daily labour, 79 per cent faced significantly higher financial crises than private-sector employees 64 per cent and another kind of economic worker 74 per cent (see Figure 9). Figure 10 shows that 37 per cent of inter-district and 30 per cent of inter-state migrants are in financial problem.

#### **Following SMS (SOCIAL DISTANCING, MASK AND SANITIZER) of migrant workers**

Figure 10 shows the following SMS among migrant worker. It is observed from the figure that the majority of migrants are not following SMS properly. One-third of migrant workers not using sanitizer. Only one-tenth of migrants using mask regularly to protect themselves from COVID 19. More than 50 per cent migrant is not maintaining social distancing due to lack of separate room, and only 4 per cent are following adequately to protect themselves during COVID-19 lockdown.

#### IV. DISCUSSION:

Major destination states of West Bengal's out-migrants are Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Gujarat, Haryana and the union territory of Delhi. Employment or work is the second most important reason for out-migration in West Bengal. Study results displayed that most of West Bengal's out-migrants are 20-29 years old, male and belong from the Hindu religion, and primarily engaged in daily labour at the destination place. Socially marginalized community, i.e. Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other Backward Caste, covered about 70 per cent share of out-migration of West Bengal. Different socio-economic conditions exert force on people, mainly from poor backgrounds, to become out-migrants (Zulu et al., 2011). In West Bengal, one-fifth of household's income mainly depends on migrant's remittances in 2020. Place of destination of out-migrants is varied significantly with age, religion, caste. Mostly mature aged, Muslims and Schedule caste and tribes preferred interstate out-migration than intrastate migration. Half of the migrants have been facing a food crisis during the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown; mostly, they are stuck in other states, engaged with informal and daily labour sectors. A similar result also found in many pieces of research in India and abroad (FAO, 2020; Zurayk, 2020; Choudhury et al., 2020; Pulla, 2020). Nationwide lockdown resulted in a mass movement of migrants workers and rising food scarcity among especially migrants who work in the informal sector (Lancet, 2020). The majority of migrants are reported they having morbid conditions like cough, fever, breathing problems or others. Many informal sector labours are suffered from different communicable and non-communicable diseases (Pinja et al., 2012 and Zuhu et al., 2011). Out-migrants in the older age group mostly have Cough/Fever or breathing problems compared to young parsons. Aged persons have low immunity, co-morbidities and are more vulnerable to corona pandemic (Kumar, 2007 and Wagstaff, 2002). The epidemiologic transition can be applied to adult age groups (Pinja et al., 2012). Those out-migrants stuck in other districts or states are suffering from different diseases due to starvation and stomach related problems (Daggal, 2007). Breathing is one major problem among out-migrants because they are primarily engaged with unhealthy, dangerous and dirty jobs, unhealthy congested living place, and unhygienic WASH practice (Parvin et al. 2019; Dakua, 2019). These crowded places are favourable for the spread of communicable diseases (Gupta & Kumar, 2007). The preliminary design of lockdown switches the migrant's risk of remaining unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation, poverty and food scarcity (Choudhury et al., 2020). To combat with epidemic or pandemic such as COVID-19, lack of awareness leads to careless attitude, which may negatively affect these challenges' preparedness (Roy et al., 2020). COVID-19 is transmitted between human to human beings through close contact and droplets (CDC, 2020). The most effective preventive measures are wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing, and performing hand hygiene frequently (WHO, 2020).

Overall, MHS practicing is very poor among migrants; it may be due to high illiteracy, unawareness about health and COVID-19 transmission, poor economic status. The majority of migrants do not use handwashing with sanitizer due to poor economic conditions or illiteracy. Obeying social distancing is a difficult task for migrants because they live in congested poor and low-cost areas. Mean parsons in sleeping is very high.

#### V. CONCLUSION:

Intra-district and inter-state out-migration of West Bengal both are significant. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi union territories are the primary destination of West Bengal's out-migrants. Employment is the second most important reason for out-migration, primarily engaged with informal and daily labour sectors. Socio-comically marginalized people are mostly out-migrants. The majority of migrants have been facing food, financial crisis and health problems during the COVID-19 nationwide

lockdown. The Elderly are more vulnerable as they have multimorbidity. Breathing problem is one of the critical health problems of elderly migrants. Overall, MHS practicing is very poor among migrants. The government should adequately supply adequate foods and medicines to migrants and appropriate financial support.

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