

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS
OF WOMEN IN SLUMS AND COLONIES OF WEST BENGAL:
A CASE STUDY OF MADHYAMGRAM MUNICIPAL AREA,
DISTRICT NORTH 24 PARAGANAS**

Soumita Banerjee*

ABSTRACT:

The most available features of any metropolitan city all around the world are – slums, shanties, squatter settlements and colonies which are continuously being created by the waves of urbanization. People move from the adjacent outskirts or villages into the cities in expectation of a healthier life. But at last they have to face the most pitiable existence in these slums where they colonize due to lack of space in the cities. There are a lot of women migrants too who are the main bread earners of the families. As we all know, even being the fairer sex, a woman needs to struggle in every field to get things in a fair way. So, it is easily understood how miserable would be the situation for those women who are living in these completely depriving environment. To examine the scenario of the Socio-economic status (SES), Madhyamgram Municipal Area was selected, because it is one of the most important urban units within the jurisdiction of Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (within 18 kilometres from Kolkata) and having a trend of fast paced development. Different strategies based on urban environment development are being implemented here for the betterment of lifestyle of people especially those below poverty line. A study on the socio-economic status of women with emphasis on demographic features, literacy, and economy and health structure was undertaken with a questionnaire based survey. This paper is mainly based on primary data, though some data were taken from the Municipal Authority. It also covers the developmental process of Madhyamgram Municipal Area, present status of the dwellers and future plan for urban development.

Keywords: Women, Slums, Colonies, Socio-Economic Status, Madhyamgram Municipal Area

* Guest Lecturer, Department of Geography, Asutosh College, University of Calcutta

Introduction:

Urbanization and the development of slums and squatter settlements are two opposite sides of a coin- both the processes are complementary to each other. We cannot have progress without the facing its challenges. All over the world, the slum population was almost 889 million in the year 2010 showing an increase of 6 million people per year from 2000. In the year 2012, almost 33% of the urban population was living in slums and leaving sub-Saharan Africa for the first place, all other following positions were occupied by Asian countries, like South Asia (35%), Southeast Asia (31%), East Asia (28.2%), West Asia (24.6%). (Un-habitat Estimates). Coming to the scenario of India, a total of 33,510 slums were estimated to be present in the urban areas. About 41% of these were notified and 59% non-notified. The decadal growth rate of population in slums are 22.4% and 28.1 % for male and female respectively from 2000-2010. Among all the major states West Bengal has recorded the second highest share of slum population (32.5%) after Greater Mumbai (54.1%) in the year 2011.

Table 1: Table showing the number of slums and its population

Places	Statutory Towns	Slum Reported Towns	Total Population of Slums	Notified	Recognized	Unidentified
India	4041	2613	6,54,94,604	2,25,35,133	2,01,31,336	2,28,28,135
West Bengal	129	122	64,18,594	48,918	37,03,852	26,65,824

Source: 20th Conference of Central and State Statistical Organisation, 2011

Slums are growing at an alarming rate due to the fact that the large cities are not very well equipped in terms of providing physical, fiscal, political and administrative support to the huge migrating population who come to the cities for a better life. In reality, they have to fight even for the basic amenities (food, clothing and shelter) in the newly moved to cities. The women move into the slums for different causes, ranging from seeking jobs mostly as house helps or labours in various fields like constructions to make their conditions better in their origin, environmental degradation, family problems resulting from discrimination to coping with health related problems like Cancer, HIV/AIDS and other factors that often leave women isolated and financially destitute. The slum life has never been easy for them leaving their origins behind and they face problems with everything that is necessary and basic for a living. Moreover, the huge

and constant influx of people in slums is making the living and the economic conditions even more acute. On the other hand, colonies can be perceived as a little rise from the life of slum dwellers. The problems faced by the colony dwellers are not much different in nature but of course the magnitude is not that severe as compared to the slums. This paper attempts to find the socio-economic status of women in the slums and the colonies and make out the differences between them.

➤ **Background of the Study Area and the topic:**

Madhyamgram, (22°42'51" North, 88° 22'52"East), locating at a distance of 18 kilometres from Kolkata has always been noticed for its rapid development in the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (K.M.D.A). A place which was not even conducive for habitation some 50 years ago is full of all modern amenities and infrastructure today. Connectivity to Kolkata Airport as well as a railway station makes this place reachable in 10-15 minutes from all corners.

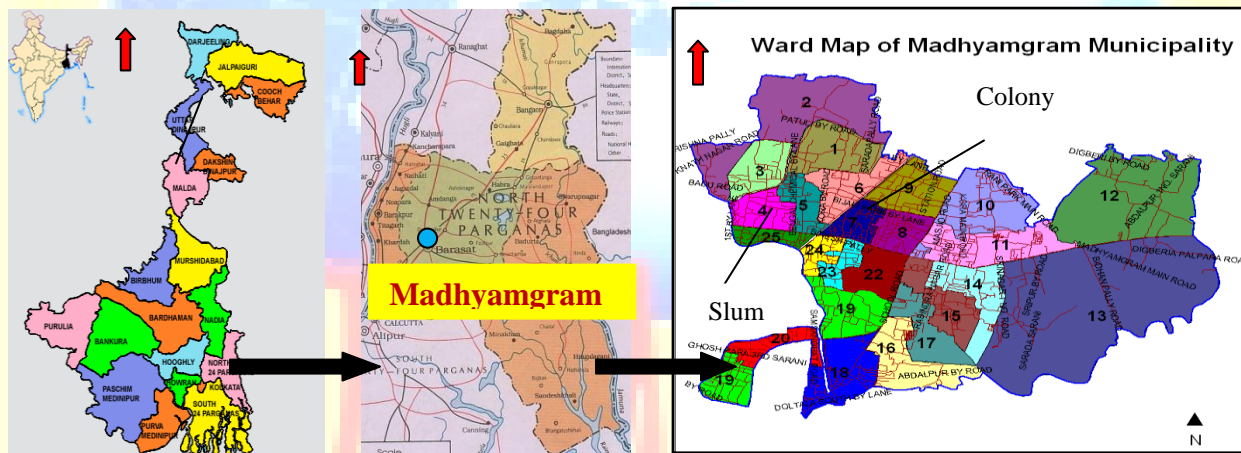


Figure 1: Image showing the location of the study area (Not to Scale)

Source: District Statistical Handbook, N24 Paraganas, 2008 and Madhyamgram Municipality

This Place emerged as a shelter for the refugees from Bangladesh at the time of Independence of India. Now, Madhyamgram is a developing town in North 24 Parganas under the suburban areas of Kolkata- a city having its own Pin code and Telephone code. It falls under the jurisdiction of Barasat Sadar subdivision having a Police Station under the administration of Madhyamgram Municipality.

- In Madhyamgram Municipality Area, ward no: 4 for surveying slum areas, ward no: 7 for colony areas have been selected for the study. Ward no: 4 has almost 1000 families spreading over 4 main slums namely – *Subhasgarh, Bharatgarh, Baikuntha Deb Road* and *Vivekananda Nagar Uttar*. It also has a health administrative unit (run by the municipality) and the people dwelling in the slum are really in destitution which should be an immediate focus and needs attention.
- A colony, generally used as refuge to the homeless people from Erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) is now a low lying area having population in congestion, water logging problems and low height of the houses. It is in transition between slums and housing indeed. Ward no: 7 (some portions of Debigarh) has a few evidences of these types of areas though much more developed than what it was 20-30 years back.

There are a very few places under the jurisdiction of KMDA who has a fast progressive history like the same that Madhyamgram possesses. It was a pleasure for the surveyor to witness such development. Regarding the topic, women have always been the backbone of a families, societies and nations. Without their advancement, no development can take place. So, it is necessary to assess the socio-economic condition of the women living in slums and likely environments, because they form the lowest, strongest and the major stratum of our society. To examine the Socio-economic Status,(SES) some major parameters like literacy and education, occupation, income, health standard of living and some allied parameters like demographical characteristics, food habits, sources of water and quality of sanitation are evaluated in the area of study.

➤ **Objectives of the study :**

The inner/principal objectives of this study are:-

- ✓ To take a closer look on the overall demographic, social and economic scenario of Madhyamgram Municipality Area with a special reference to the selected wards.
- ✓ To find out the disparities among the socio-economic profiles of women living in the slums and colonies.
- ✓ To evaluate the problems of the living condition of slums and the colonies.
- ✓ To think about the prospects of these areas and to collect the possible suggestions from the dwellers and make possible strategies for future development.

➤ **Database :**

Primary data were mainly based on the questionnaire prepared beforehand for the purpose. Direct field observation was also done for assessing conditions. Secondary data were collected mainly from the municipality and I.C.D.S centres of Madhyamgram Municipality (with prior permission from the District Magistrate Office of North 24 Parganas – Barasat , and ward offices of the selected ward no's – 4 and 7 under Madhyamgram Municipality).

➤ **Methodology :**

The methodologies that was adapted for the study includes: **Collection of data and cartographic representation.** The **computation and calculation** of data includes both the primary and the secondary data. Primary data were used for the preparation of master tables from survey schedules. Secondary data were generally for showing the overall information regarding Madhyamgram Municipality.

➤ **Evaluation of the parameters of Socio-Economic Status (SES)-**

In order to support the development of an area in its social and economic perspective the important factors that need to be examined are Economy, Demography, Environmental Conditions and Lifestyle.

➤ **Demography:**

As per the report of Statistical Handbook of North 24 Parganas, 2008 Madhyamgram holds more than a population of 1.5 lacks or more within an area of 21.32 square kilometres. Male-Female ratio here seems to be quite good. Almost 9206 families are marked as B.P.L families. The municipal wards that are located close to the Railway station or the Sodepur-Madhyamgram main road or the Jessore Road are more populated than relatively distant peripheral areas.

- **Marital status:** Almost half the population is found to be married though a very few percentage of people share the population of widows. In the case of slums a few women are found whose husbands left them and now they are living as single mothers earning themselves. Almost all the people in the colonies are found to be married.

Table 2: Table showing the male-female population in the selected slums and colonies

Housing Types	Male Population	Female Population
Ward no:4	2687	2575
Ward no: 7	3148	2916

Source: Madhyamgram Municipal Authority, 2013

- **Age- sex structure** : If we look at the age-sex structure of the surveyed population the maximum concentration is seen in the age groups like 16-30 , 30-45 and >60 while minimum concentration is found in the group 0-9. Though the maximum concentration of the population falls in the category of working population as the level of education is really low in case of slums and partially low in colonies there is no such improvement in the scenario of employment and income.
- **Type and size of families**: The families are mostly extended and joint in case of slum areas increasing the burden of the household.

Table 3: Table showing the family size (in %)

Table 4: Table showing the no. of BPL families

Housing Types	Large(>10*)	Medium(5-10)	Small(< 5)
Slums	42.9	29.5	27
Colonies	27.8	30.5	42.7

Slums	131
Colonies	43

Source: Primary Survey, 2013 (* in Persons)

- **Concentration of BPL Families**: The ward no: 4 (slum area) is having a high concentration of BPL (below poverty line) families though several measures have been taken to eradicate poverty.
- **Caste Composition**: The caste composition varies in three surveyed wards significantly. Most of the population (70%) in the slum area belongs to the SC category whereas the colony population shows quite a balance between General and SC categories.

- **Economy:** Among the total number of main workers 89% belong to the tertiary sector of economy. A huge portion of population is non-workers creating a burden for the society.
- **Types of Occupations:** In the slum areas most of the male workers are engaged in van or auto pulling and most of the female workers are either house helps or cooks to the economically richer sections. They even sell bed sheets or utensils. In the colony areas huge sections of the population works at different factories and mills while some of them run their own shops and even personal businesses.

Table 5: Table showing the proportion of male-female workers (in %)

Housings	Male Workers	Female Workers
Slums	57	43
Colonies	81	19

Source: Primary Survey, 2013

- **Working Hours:** More than half of the population in slum areas work for more than 8 hours whereas in the colony areas almost equal proportion of population work for 7-8 hours mostly.
- **No. of earning members:** Almost 57% of the slum dwelling population have one earning member in their families whereas a this portion is quite huge in the colony. (81%)

Table 6: Table showing the Profile of Income (in %)

Slum		Colony	
Rs.<1000-2000	35.5	Rs.3000-6000	36
Rs.2000-3000	53.5	Rs.6000-9000	51
Rs.> 3000	11	Rs.> 9000	13

Source: Primary Survey, 2013

➤ **Intake of food:**

The greatest psychological need and physical growth occurs in early years and eventual brain development occurs by the age of 2. Malnutrition is the cause of morbidity and mortality as a consequence of protein deficiency. It is also the cause of occurrences of endemic or epidemic diseases. This concern is completely absent in slum areas.

- **In case of slum dwellers:** Most of the people in the slum take their food three times a day, a very few percentage is seen to take food four times a day. Most of the households live on vegetables over all the days of a week, at the most being able to afford cereal, plant protein or animal protein (milk, meat) once in a month may be. Thus they show a very poor relation in health making and consumption of foods.
 - **In case of colony dwellers :** Here also most of the people take their food three times a day and almost equal percentage of population is found to have food two times and four times a day. But the scenario is just the opposite of the slums as they consume protein (cereals, plant, and animal) much more than the slum dwellers on. At an average they almost live five days a week on non-veg foods. Thus they can give a better picture of relation between consumption of protein and health building.
- **Water connections:** All the wards are seen to be facilitated with sufficient stand posts, hand wells depending on the size of the wards, however the surveyed area is not well equipped with water connections. Water in this municipality area contains iron in high proportions .It is to be noted that the surveyed population reports scarcity of water.

Table 7: Table showing the number of all kinds of Water connections

Housing Types	No. of Stand Posts	No. of Tube- Wells	No. of Deep Tube Wells	No. of Connections	
				Housing	Commercial
Slums	50	19	61	749	5
Colonies	17	8	1	11	31

Source: Madhyamgram Municipal Authority, 2013

- **Housing conditions:** Slum mostly has huts made of either bamboo (47%) or tin or clay where the roofs are either tiled or tinned. These huts are devoid of windows reflecting an

unhealthy living condition, especially for women and children as they have to spend longer time inside than males. With the help of various “Awas Yojana (Housing Schemes)”s these houses (82%) are getting cemented in the colony areas.

- **Waste collection:** For the slum areas the municipality collects waste once in a week or a fortnight. Alternatively they throw their wastes away in the canal that passes through adjacent to their houses. These dwellers have made their toilets on their own. In the colonies the municipality collects wastes thrice a week.
- **Status of Health:** The results derived from the primary survey on health issues of the slum and colony population is that 73% and 59% of the population is disease affected in slum, colony respectively.
- **Diseases occurred:** In all these areas the diseases like fever, stomach upset, cold and coughs are quite common in women and child population. Due to the iron content of water hair fall is quite frequent in the female population in this area. In slum areas the diseases like insomnia, dust allergy, drug allergy, are found especially in women. Some gynaecological problems were explored while surveying but due to the lack of knowledge of the slum dwellers, they can't detect them or go for treatments. The scenario is almost same in surveyed households of colony with the exception that malaria spread out some years ago and affected few people.
- **Carrier of diseases:** Among all the diseases slum dwellers are much more affected with the water borne diseases like hair fall, liver problem and air borne diseases like dust allergy and vector borne diseases like fever at times. The dwellers of colonies are more affected with water borne diseases than the air borne. But vector borne diseases like malaria occurred some years ago.

Table 8: Places and Mode of Treatments Adopted by the Surveyed Population (in %)

Housing Types	Government Hospitals	Municipality Hospitals	Private Nursing Homes	Homeopathy	Allopath	Superstitions
Slums	39	61	-	51	31	18
Colonies	-	74	26	36	64	-

Source: Primary survey, 2013

- **Medical Expenditure:** All the surveyed people agreed to the fact that expenditure regarding medical treatment is increasing day by day. Slum dwellers have to loan money from various money lenders at a high interest rate, the colony dwellers are catering these needs with either their own savings or loans.
- **Leisure:** Half of the slum people have leisure of 1-2 hours and more than half of the colony dwellers have almost an hour of leisure time in a day. Most of the population, be it slum or colony spend their leisure hours watching T.V. or sleeping or chatting.

➤ **Reproductive Health of Women:**

- ✓ Most of the women get married at a very early age almost between 10-15 years in case of slum dwellers while in the colony population half the population gets married during the age of 15-20 years.
- ✓ During pregnancy other than 30% of the slum dwelling women the changes in the dietary habits occurs almost in everybody. Most of the slum dwellers, mothers, carry the breastfeeding process up to six months, but the maximum proportion babies up to three colony dwellers shows a mediocre picture overall.
- ✓ During delivery most of the cases are unplanned and devoid of any kind of contraceptive measures in slum areas whereas the colony area is quite a few steps ahead than the slum people in this regard. In case of the slum dwellers some their deliveries take place in their residences only.
- ✓ Bith of the surveyed area have produced a concerned picture on Polio or Vaccination.
- ✓ The gap between 1st and 2nd issues is really narrow (even below 1 year) in the female of the slums .Colony people show mediocre awareness in this regard.

➤ **Health Reports**

Three main centers of the Health Administrative Units (H.A.U) are located at *Karbala*, *Bireshpally* and *Dohariya* and almost 20 sub centers of the H.A.U are working in the Madhyamgram Municipality Area. All the centers of H.A.U are set up in the scheme of IPP-VIII (Indian Polio Prevention Program).Integrated Child Development Scheme (I.C.D.S) was launched on the 2nd of October 1975 by the Government of India. This program is meant for early childhood development. Ward no: 4 has got 3 I.C.D.S centers, and ward no: 7 has got 1

I.C.D.S center. All these centers work for more than 21 days in a month and nourish the children from birth till 6 years and take care of the pregnant and lactating mothers.

Table 9: Table showing the types of

Sterilization, 2011

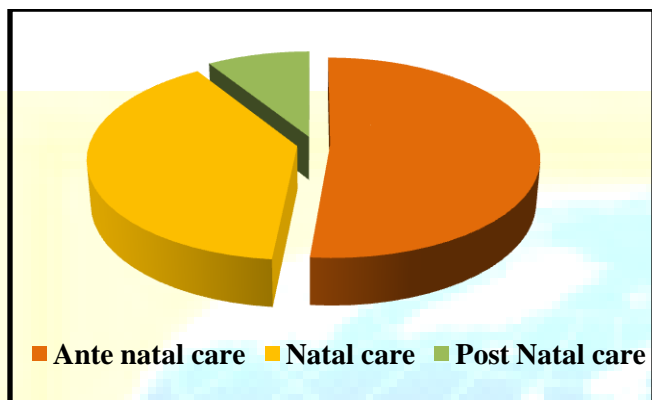


Figure: 2 Figure showing percentage of mother care, 2011

Types	No. of Patients
Female Sterilizations	Abdominal- 2528 Laprosopic- 2007
IUD users	374
OP users	5456
Other measures	2009

Status of Sterilization, 2011

<u>No. of sterilizations done in 2011</u>
Spontaneous – 17
No. of MTP's done- 42

Source: Reports of ICDS centre of Madhyamgram-
New Barrackpore Municipality and Health
Administrative Units, 2011

➤ **Educational Status**

Educated people are the assets of the nation. Though Madhyamgram shows quite a high literacy rate (75%) but the awareness for education is hard to find among the slum dwellers and even in some portions of the colony dwellers and also the level of education is also very poor among them.

- **Slum dwellers:** The urge for education in the females is almost absent; the rate of dropouts is even high among them. Moreover almost all the people have biasness that the girl child in the family need not be educated and they even send their girl children to the school at 4-5 years of age whereas pre-school education starts almost at 2.5 years. The

parents of the children have a strong notion of make getting their children involved into vocational trainings.

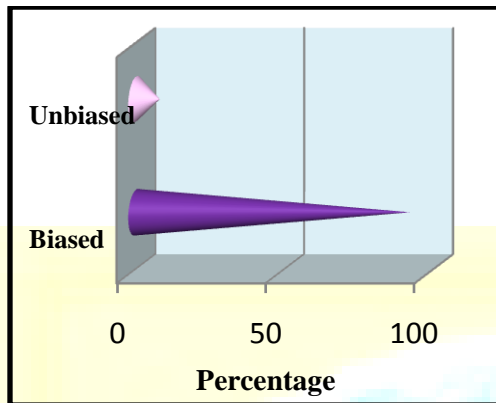


Figure: 3 Figure showing Gender bias for education

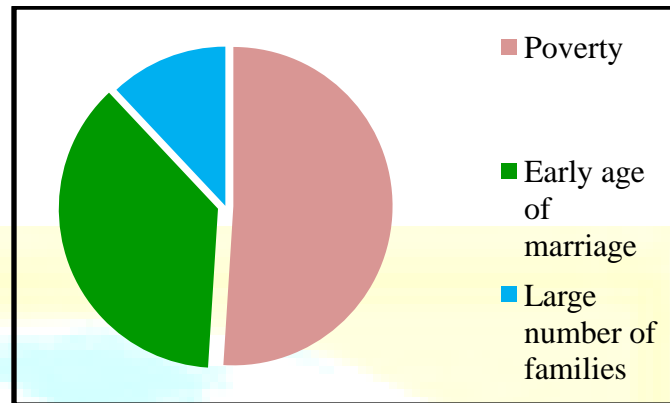


Figure 4: Reasons for dropouts in slum children

- **Colony dwellers:** Most of the females are found to be educated up to class VIII and the males up to X or XII. Very few people are graduates but some students are found to have education till graduation now. Most of the females had to leave education mid way due to early marriages. Some of the families of the colony area still possess the biasness of not giving education to the girl child and get them married at early ages. The women are found to have interests in sewing and embroidering.
- **Major Findings:** The major problems that have emerged during survey can be summarized as followed:

Overall problems:

- ✓ There was a problems regarding finding the colony of its earlier origin because all the houses are roads are being improved with different Governmental schemes.
- ✓ The dwellers of this locality were even reluctant in answering the questions.
- ✓ Particularly the slum and the colony dwellers are not happy with the activities being done by municipal authority.

- ✓ The developmental works are very much restricted within the already developed wards near the municipality, airport, and railway station. No improvement plans are being carried out in the peripheral wards.

❖ **Problems of Slum dwellers:**

- Lack of source of water and poor quality of water.
- Water logging even in a little rain.
- Even being enlisted in the BPL category, no benefits are being received.
- Fake people coming under BPL category for being privileged.
- No services of Self-help groups for the women are being reached up to the remote wards.

❖ **Problems of Colony Dwellers:**

- Low lying land increasing the water logging.
- Inefficient drainage system
- Scarcity of Water and its poor quality
- The problems of street lights causing different types of social nuisances.

➤ ***From the Desk of Municipality :***

KUSP (Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor)- This project aimed for the betterment of quality of life in a sustainable way lasted up to 2008 in Madhyamgram Municipality Area. After that BSUP (Basic Services for the Urban Poor) started in the year 2009. BSUP Phase-I finished in the year 2011 and the second phase is going on while the third phase shall soon be in operation after the completion of the second phase. This project aims to improve housing, physical and social infrastructure of the slums as well as the town. Besides these a number of schemes have been adopted by the municipality. They are as followed:

- Bangla Swanirbhar Karma Sangsthan Prakalpa (BSKP).
- Prime Minister Employment Generation Program (PMEGP).
- Special Component Program (SCP) for SC/ST beneficiaries.
- Minority Development Scheme, Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) etc.

➤ **Suggestions :**

There are some common suggestions from the surveyed people:

- ✓ The benefits of different Governmental schemes should be well distributed to the most distant wards of Madhyamgram Municipal Area, because all the wards adjacent to *NOAI khal* are mostly remote.
- ✓ With the help of Municipality, some of the poor ladies have opened a canteen in the Municipality. They provide Tiffin to the workers. Likewise, more efforts should be given towards such kind of employments.
- ✓ Free vocational trainings should be given to school drop-outs or those who couldn't continue their studies.
- ✓ A lot of health campaigns should be organized for rousing awareness among women in slums.
- ✓ Special attention should be given to increase the sources of water.

➤ **Conclusion:**

Madhyamgram Municipal area has lots of problems as stated above. But this area has also set an example of progresses from health care facilities to beautification and the maintenance of the roadways in last few decades. They have a plan with the help of different Governmental schemes and NGO's to provide security to the tenures to the women living in slums and their families, to give them a safe environment along with the access towards basic facilities and housing schemes and most importantly giving a sound empowerment of them. Thus, soon, it can be hoped, Madhyamgram Municipal Area will become a satellite town around Kolkata to support its pressure of population.

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