
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND LABOUR MARKET
VULNERABILITY OF INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS IN AN
INDUSTRIAL CLUSTER: EVIDENCE FROM HALDIA, WEST
BENGAL**

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ABSTRACT:

The present survey-based study examines the socio-economic and occupational conditions of informal sector workers in the Haldia Industrial Area of Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal. Conducted in January 2026, the study draws upon primary data collected through a structured interview schedule administered to 50 male and female workers aged 18–60 years residing in both rural and urban areas. The findings reveal that informal employment is predominantly concentrated among young adults (54% aged 18–35 years) and males (84%). A majority of workers belong to the General (60%) and Scheduled Caste (30%) categories, reflecting persistent social stratification in labor participation. Despite relatively high educational attainment—98% possessing formal schooling—most respondents remain engaged in contract (38%), casual (22%), or daily wage work (18%), indicating a significant education–employment mismatch. While 30% reported vocational training, 70% lacked formal skill certification. Income distribution shows that 78% earn below ₹15,000 per month, with 72% reporting no savings, underscoring financial precarity. Although access to electricity and sanitation is universal, safe drinking water facilities remain limited. Most workers (56%) have more than five years of work experience, and 94% report regular monthly income; however, household expenditures closely match earnings, limiting upward mobility. The study highlights structural vulnerabilities, including limited social security, low

asset accumulation, and modest health protection coverage. The findings underscore the need for targeted skill development, wage protection, and inclusive social security interventions to improve livelihood sustainability among informal workers in industrial clusters of eastern India.

KEYWORDS: Informal Sector, Socio-economic Conditions, Income Insecurity, Livelihood Vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION:

The hard work and earnings of workers working in informal sectors have an essential impact on the economies of all countries. There is no denying that the foundation stone of civilized society has been laid in the infrastructure built by workers. Their services make the lives of upper class of society sweeter and brighter. The government depends on these workers to provide food, maintain health services, and create employment to run the country. These workers are usually minimum educated, come from lower-middle-class families with average talent. The term “worker” does not only refer to the male race, but also includes the work oriented female community oppressed by the immoral persecutions of patriarchal society. Although their work may seem ordinary in the eyes of society, if we evaluate the significance of that work, we understand that this group of workers is the driving force of the world. Driven by poverty, they are determined to sacrifice their own hobbies and pleasures to support their families. Even though their family members are small or large, they try to fill their basic amenities. Despite the low wages problem of employment, they are able to provide their children with proper education. Even if the work of these ordinary workers does not give them a high status in society, if the quality of the products produced by them is of the highest quality, which is in line with their creative abilities, it can resonate in the world, and then the name of the factory or country is honored in the court of the world because of that worker. Although they have suffered from various physical ailments since joining the workforce, they have remained committed to the development of society. People involved with informal sector try to reform the weak aspects of society through their own efforts, which benefits the entire society. When involved in this work, there is no room for discrimination, and the only goal is to maintain good relations with colleagues and contribute to the prosperity of the organization, as well as to bring smiles to the face of family members and ensure the progress of the country.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the socio-demographic profile of informal sector workers in Haldia Industrial Area, West Bengal, India.
2. To analyze educational attainment and vocational skill status among informal workers.
3. To assess employment patterns, income distribution, and working conditions.
4. To evaluate household expenditure, savings behavior, and financial security.
5. To investigate access to housing, basic amenities, and healthcare facilities.
6. To identify structural vulnerabilities affecting livelihood sustainability in the informal industrial workforce.

METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the socio-economic and occupational conditions of informal sector workers in the Haldia Industrial Area, Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal, India. The field investigation was conducted in January 2026.

A purposive sample of 50 informal sector workers was selected from both rural and urban localities within the district. The sample included male and female workers aged between 18 and 60 years, encompassing individuals with and without vocational training. The selection criteria focused on workers actively engaged in informal economic activities within the industrial cluster.

Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule developed specifically for the study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted through personal visits, enabling direct observation of respondents' housing conditions and access to basic amenities such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and cooking fuel. This approach facilitated contextual validation of self-reported information.

The interview schedule captured demographic characteristics, educational attainment, vocational skills, employment status, income patterns, expenditure levels, savings behavior, health conditions, and access to welfare and medical facilities.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and qualitative analytical techniques to interpret patterns related to employment structure, livelihood security, and socio-economic vulnerability within the informal industrial workforce.

Findings and Discussion:

A. Age Wise Distribution of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that most of the worker’s age in Haldia industrial area 54% of 18 to 35 years, 30% of 36 to 45 years and 16% of 46 to 60 years who engage with informal sector during the survey.

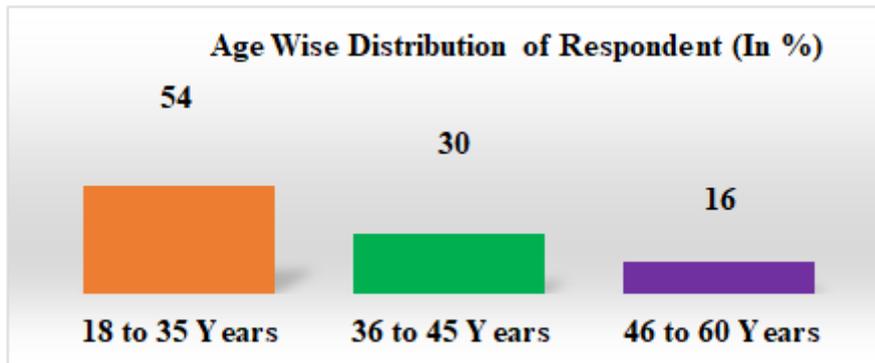


Figure 1: Age wise Distribution of Respondent.

B. Gender Wise Distribution of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that male workers are 84% and female workers are 16% who spend their life through related with informal sector at Haldia industrial area.

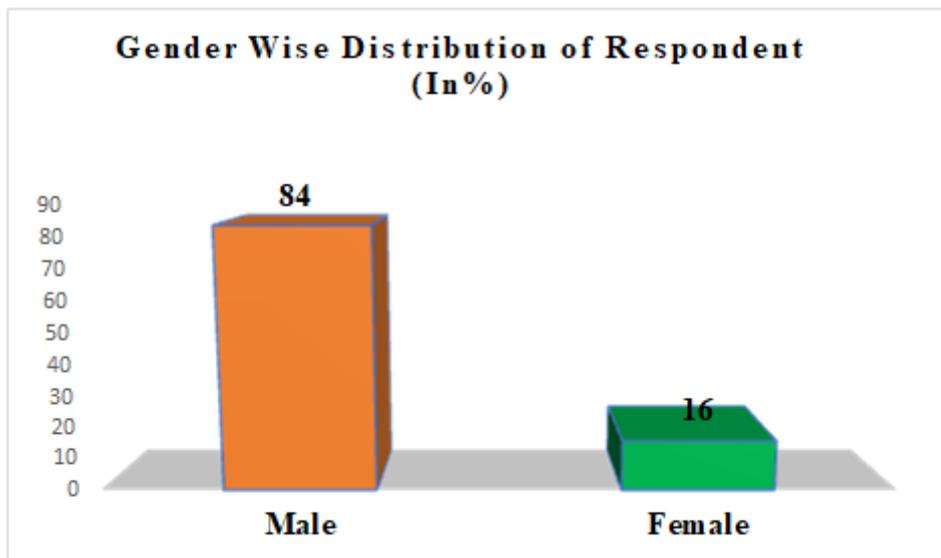


Figure 2: Gender Wise Distribution of Respondent.

C. Marital Status of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that 26% workers are single, 72% are married and 2% are widowed who work informal sector at Haldia industrial area.

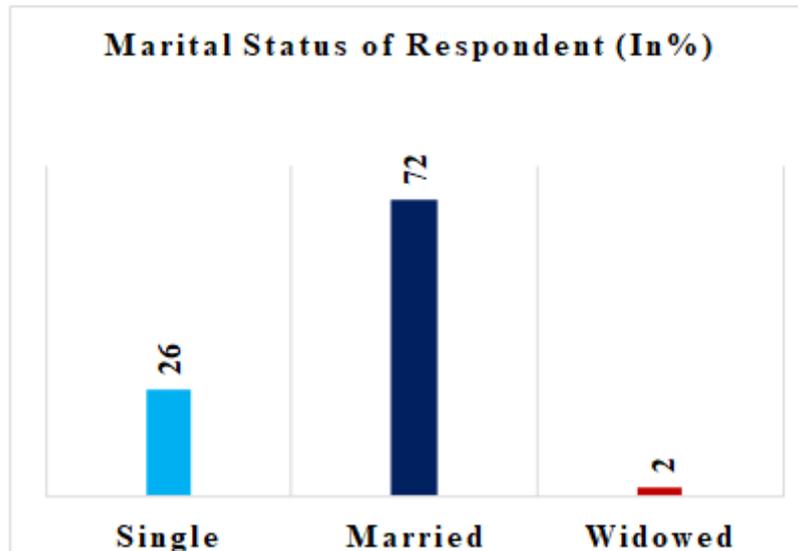


Figure 3: Marital Status of Respondent.

D. Religion Wise Distribution of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that most of the informal sector workers belongs to Hindu Religious community which are 94% and only 6% workers belong to Muslim community.

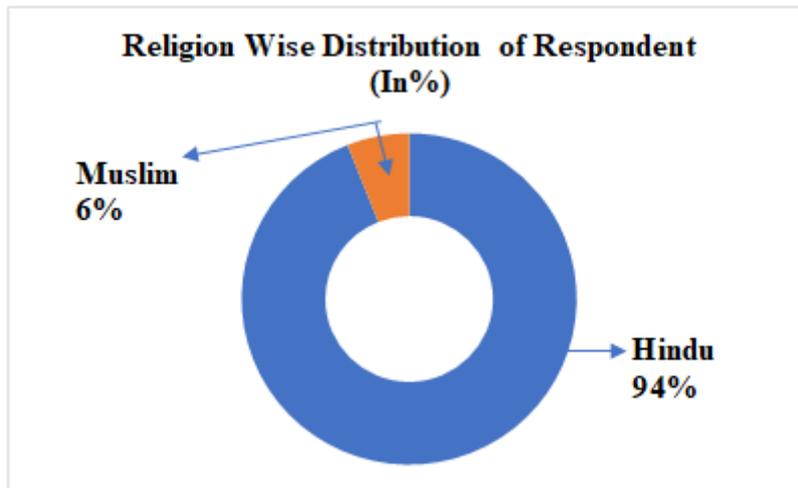


Figure 4: Religion Wise Distribution of Respondent.

E. Caste Wise Distribution of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that General category (UR) workers are 60%, Schedule Caste (SC) category workers are 30%, Other Backward Class (OBC) category workers are 10%, Schedule Tribe (ST) category workers are 0%, Economically Weaker Section category (OBC) is 0% who works informal sector.

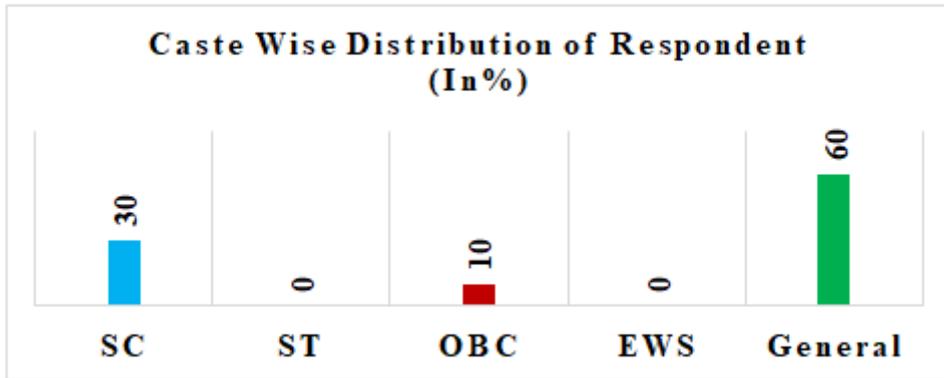


Figure 5: Caste Wise Distribution of Respondent.

F. Respondent's Place of Origin: In the studied area it has been seen that 68% informal sector workers live in urban area of West Bengal and 32% informal sector workers live in rural area of west Bengal.

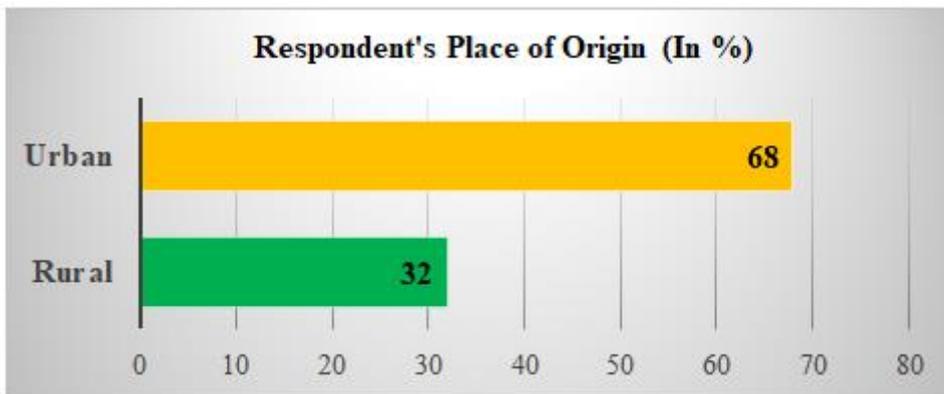


Figure 6: Respondent's Place of Origin.

G. Migration Status of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that 92% worker are local resident and 8% worker are migrant from other place who attach with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

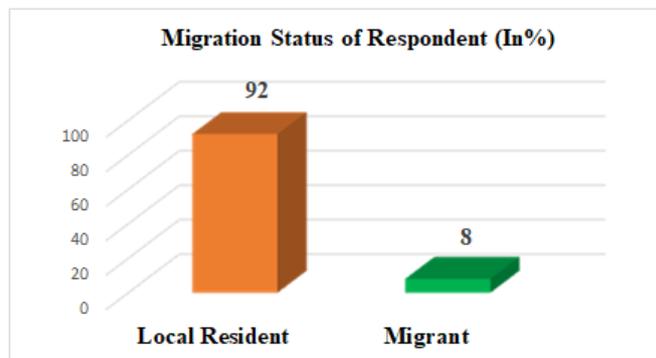


Figure 7: Migration Status of Respondent.

H. Educational Qualification: In the studied area it has been seen that respondent who involve with informal sector among them 2% is illiterate, 6% is primary passed, 36% is upper primary passed, 18% is secondary certificate holder, 24% is higher secondary certificate holder, 4% is belongs to under graduate category, 10% is belongs to post graduate category.

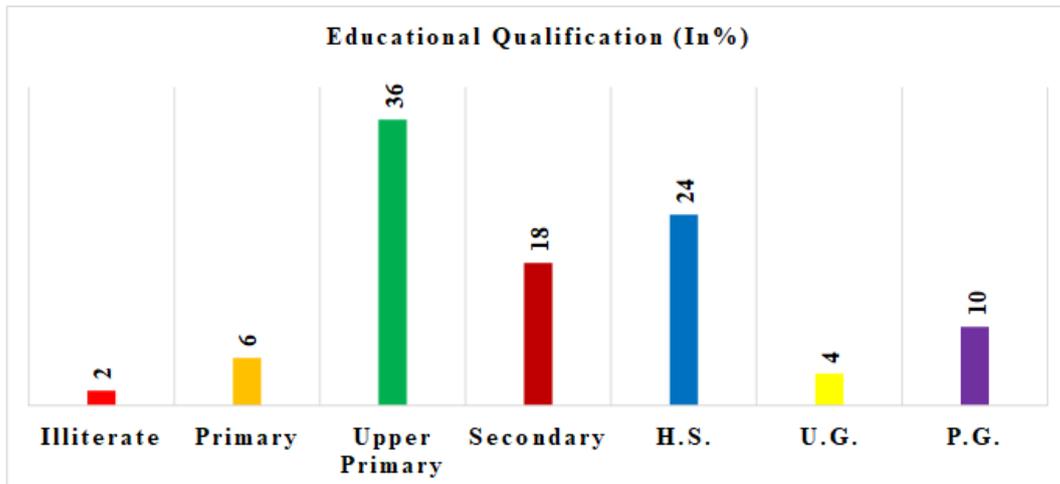


Figure 8: Educational Qualification.

I. Vocational Skill: In the studied area it has been seen that 30% workers are trained with vocational skill and 70% workers have no vocational skill who connected with informal sector at Haldia industrial area.



Figure 9: Vocational Skill.

J. Status of Vocational Skill: In the studied area it has been seen that 70% informal sector workers have no vocational skill and 30% workers who have vocational training among them 6% have maintenance mechanic degree, 2% have diploma in mechanical engineering, 2%

have diploma in electrical engineering, 2% have chemical operator degree, 2% have fitter certificate, 2% have grander certificate, 4% have tailoring skill, 4% have electrician skill, 2% have fisheries training, 2% have nursing certificate, 2% have plastic engineering degree.

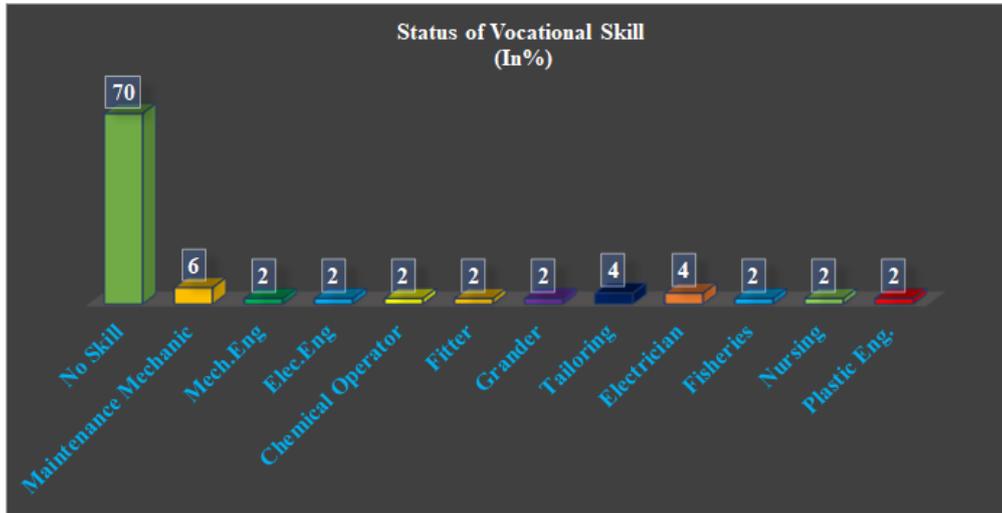


Figure 10: Status of Vocational Skill.

K. Type of Employment: In the studied area it has been seen that 38% workers are contract labour, 22% workers are casual labour, 18% workers are daily wage worker, 18% worker are self-employed, 4% worker are helper/loader who attach with informal sector in Haldia industrial area.

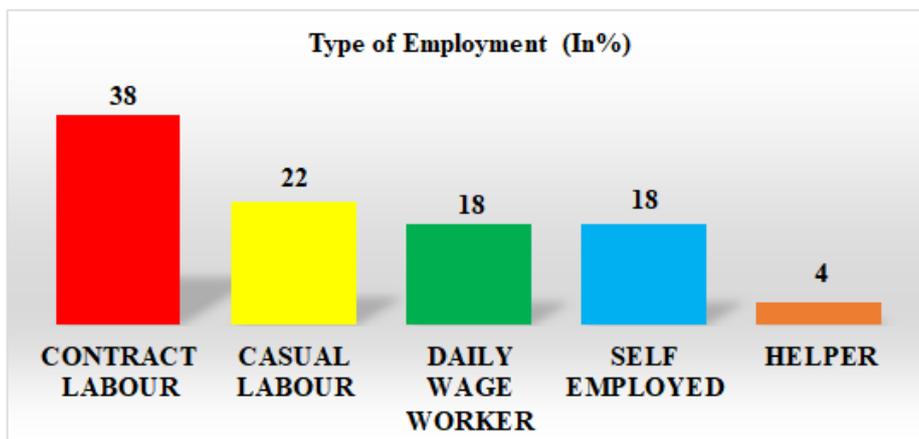


Figure 11: Type of Employment.

L. Occupation: In the studied area it has been seen that our selected respondent engages with various type of informal industry. They are 2% are related with animal husbandry, 2% are involved with pathology, 2% are attached with cycle repair shop, 2% are related with house servant, 8% are engaged with cleaner duty, 2% are involved with papped rice mill

(muri mill), 2% are attached with brick field, 2% are engaged with farmer job/ agriculture, 2% are involved with telecom sector, 8% are related as shop keeper, 2% are involved with human hair, 2% are engaged with tea stall, 2% are related with toto driver job, 46% are involved with manufacturing sector, 10% are engaged with port and logistic sector, 6% are attached with petrochemical sector, and 0% worker are related with transport and construction job.

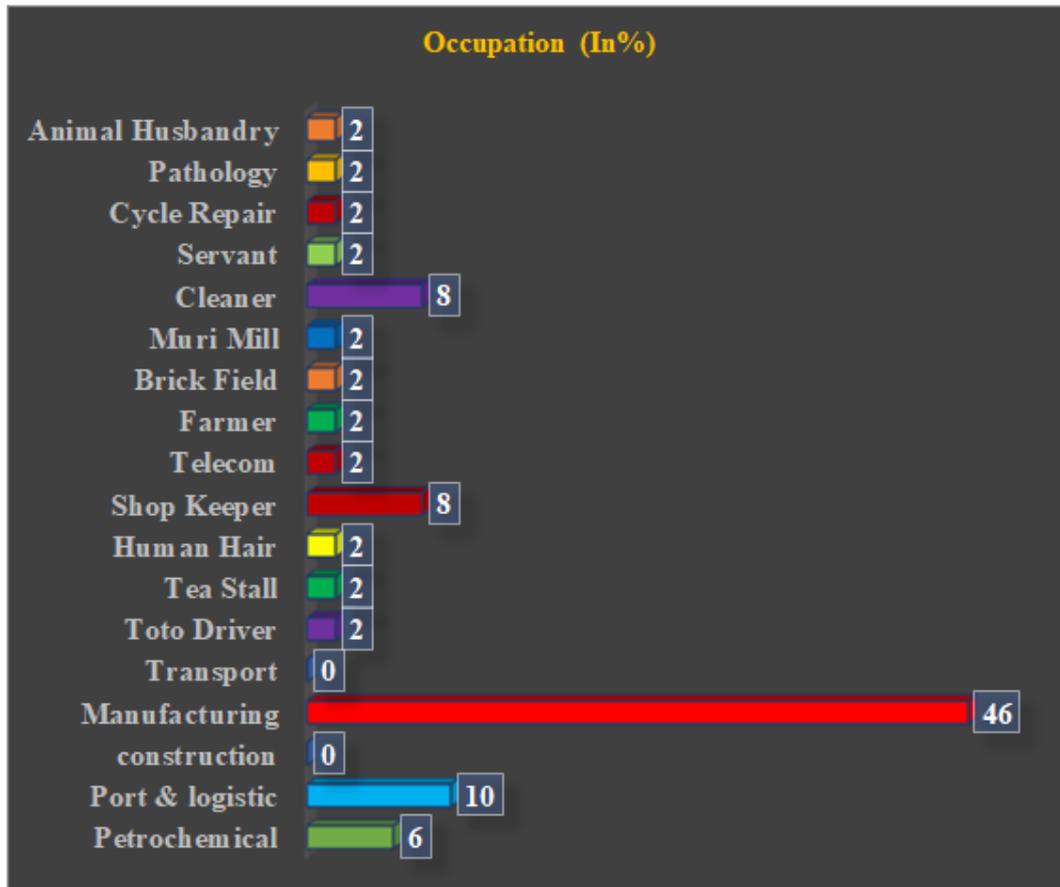


Figure 12: Occupation.

M. Work Experience: In the studied area it has been seen that 56% workers are doing their job for above 5 years and 46% workers are doing their job for below 5 years in the informal sector at Haldia industrial area.

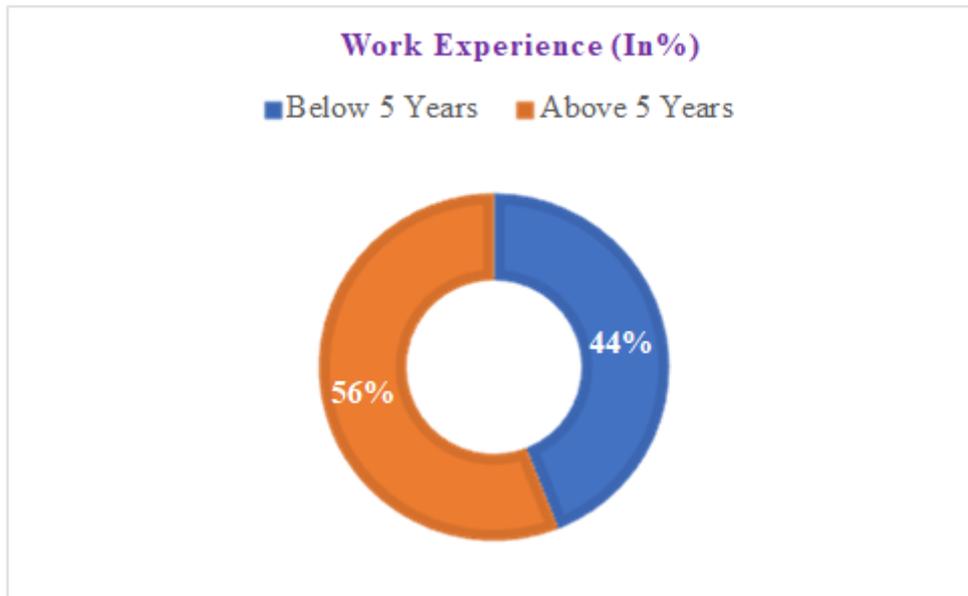


Figure 13: Work Experience.

N. Average Working Days Per Month: In the studied area it has been seen that 94% workers have above 20 days average working days per month and 6% workers have below 20 days average working days per month who involved with informal sector works at Haldia industrial area.

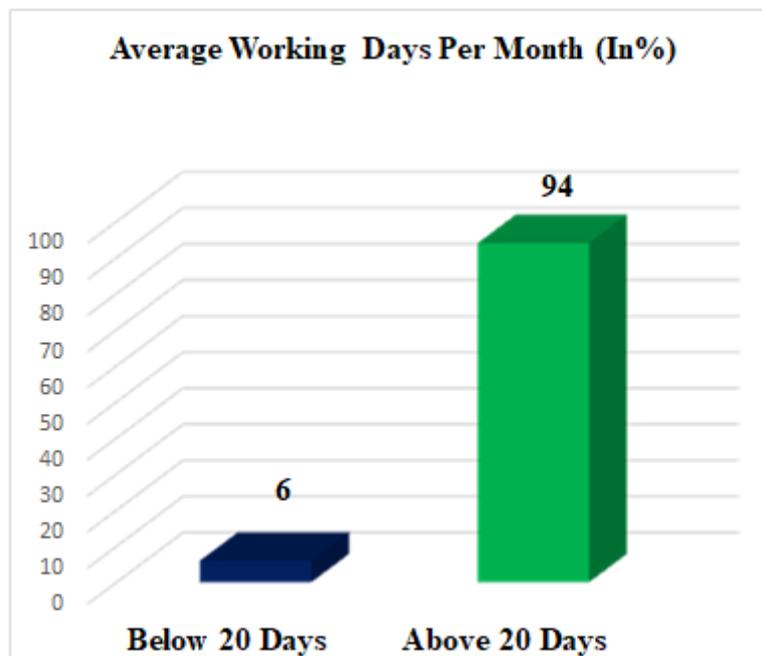


Figure 14: Average Working Days Per Month.

O. Average Working Hours Per Day: In the studied area it has been seen that 54% Workers have within 8 hours duty in their working field and 46% workers have above 8 hours duty in their working field of informal sector in Haldia industrial area.

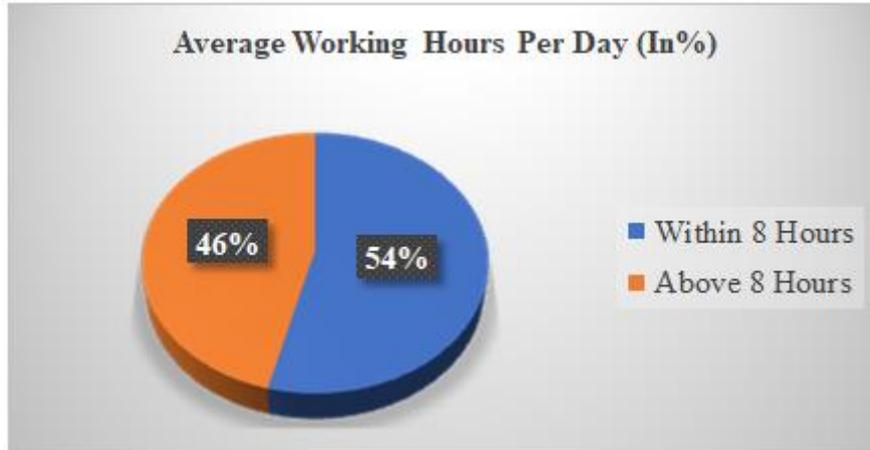


Figure 15: Average Working Hours Per Day.

P. Average Monthly Income: In the studied area it has been seen that 10% workers have belonged to below 5000 income category, 26% workers have belonged to 5001-10000 income category, 42% workers have belonged to 10001-15000 income category, 12% workers have belonged to 15001-20000 income category, 10% workers have belonged to above 20000 income category who engaged with informal sector work in Haldia industrial area.

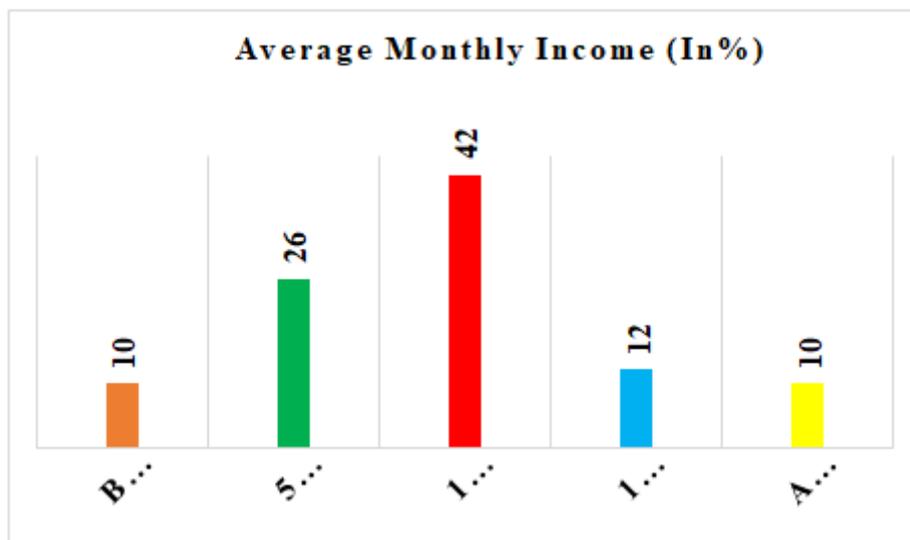


Figure 16: Average Working Hours Per Day.

Q. Income Condition: In the studied area it has been seen that 94% workers have regular monthly income, 4% workers have irregular monthly income, 2% workers have seasonal monthly income on the basis of survey report at Haldia industrial area informal sector.

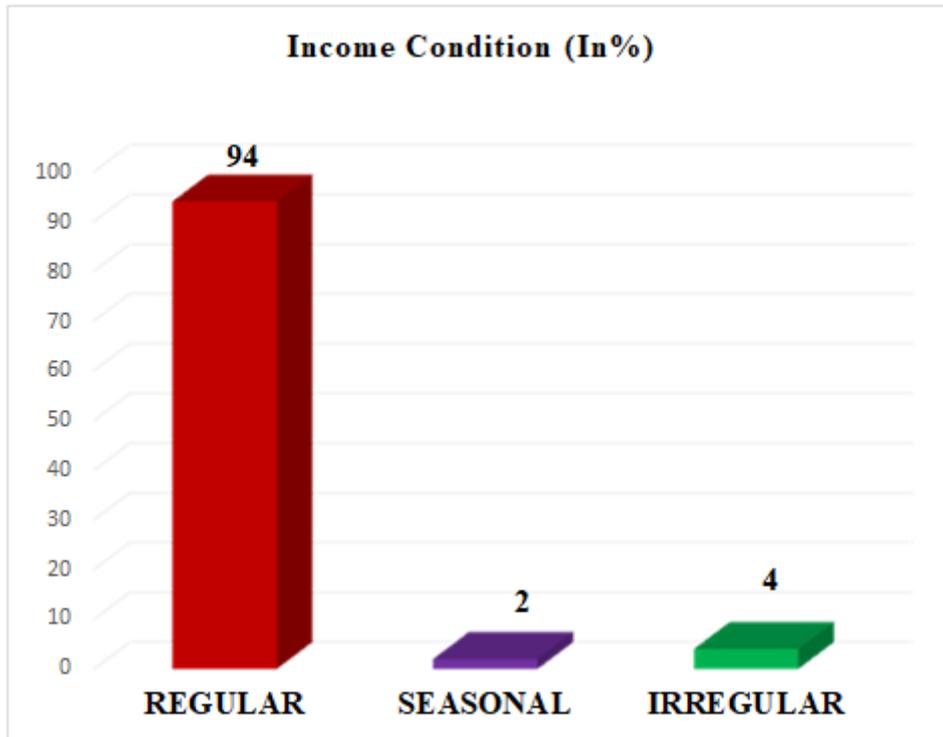


Figure 17: Income Condition.

R. Other Sources of Income: In the studied area it has been seen that 88% workers have no other source of income and 12% workers have other source of income in the Haldia industrial area informal sector work.

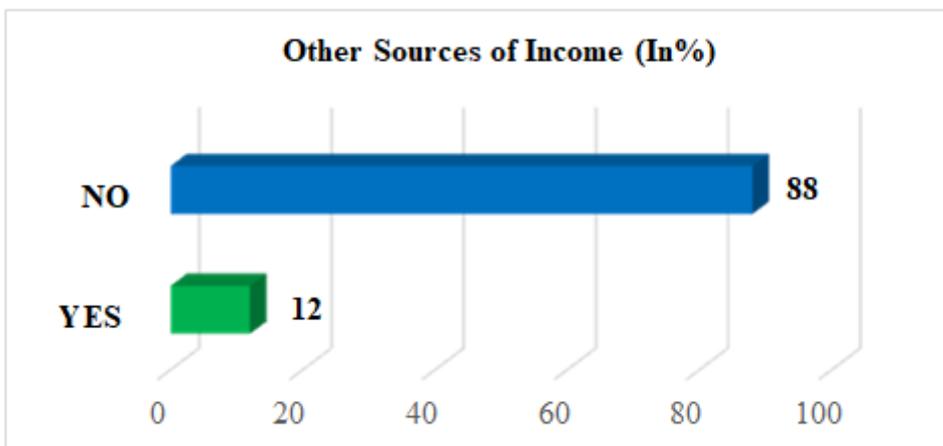


Figure 18: Other Sources of Income.

S. Monthly Household Expenditure: In the studied area it has been seen that 4% workers spent their expenses within 5000, 66% workers spent their expenses from 5000 to 10000, 26% workers spent their expenses from 10001 to 20000, 4% workers spent their expenses above 20000 on the dependence of informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

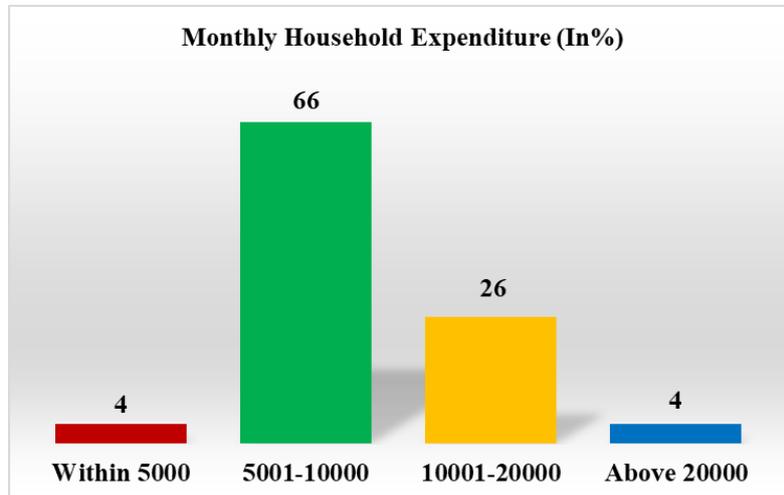


Figure 19: Monthly Household Expenditure.

T. Status of Savings: In the studied area it has been seen that 72% workers have no savings for future life and 28% workers have savings to spent their future life smoothly who related with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

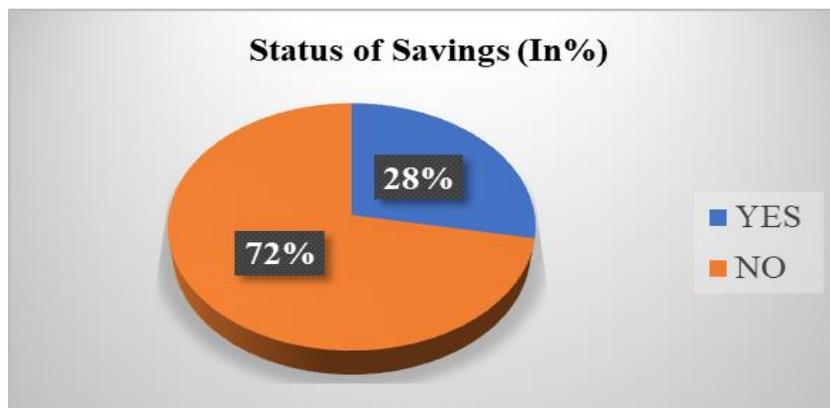


Figure 20: Status of Savings.

U. Type of Housing: In the studied area it has been seen that 72% workers have pucca house, 24% workers have semi pucca house, 4% workers have kutcha house on the basis of survey report who attached with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

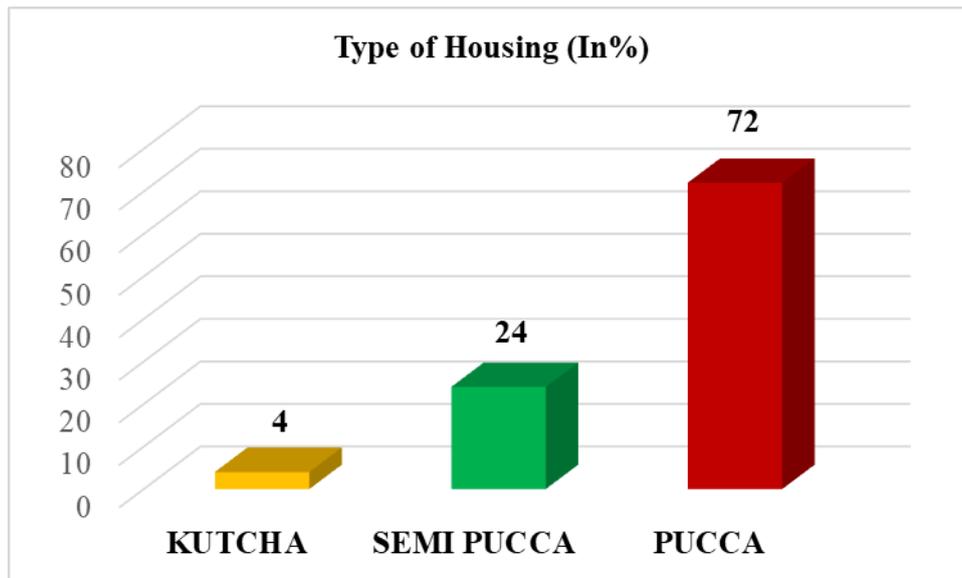


Figure 21: Type of Housing.

V. Status of Ownership of House: In the studied area it has been seen that 96% workers have own house and 4% workers live in rented house who works in the informal sector at Haldia Industrial area.

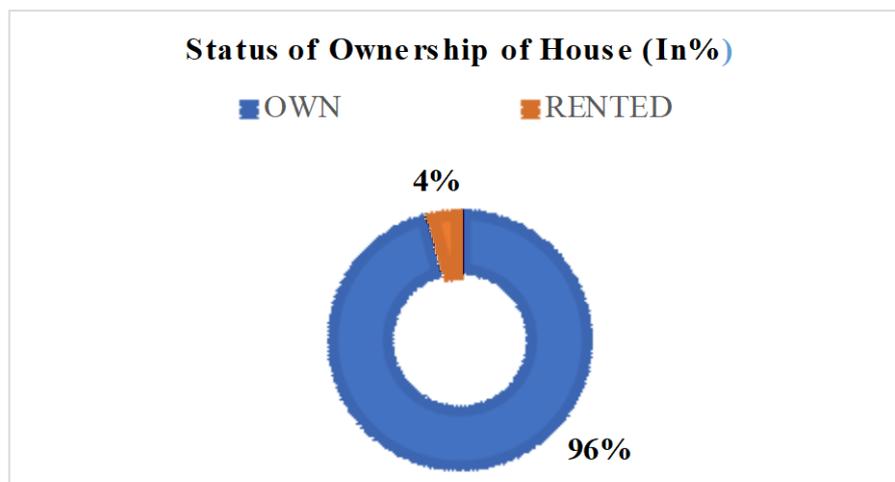


Figure 22: Status of Ownership of House.

W. Access to Basic Amenities of Respondent: In the studied area it has been seen that our selected respondents who worked informal sector at Haldia industrial area among them 96% workers have no drinking water facilities in their house (means submersible pump or electric filter), they use tube well water and packaged drinking water and only 4% workers has own drinking water facilities in their house. 100% workers have electricity and toilet facilities in

their house. 80% worker use L.P.G. connection for cooking, 18% workers use fire wood for cooking, 2% workers use both of them and 0% workers use coal for cooking.

Table 1: Access of Basis Amenities of Respondent.

Drinking Water		Electricity		Toilet Facility		Cooking Fuel		
Yes (In%)	No (In %)	Yes (In %)	No (In %)	Yes (In %)	No (In %)	L.P.G. (In %)	Wood (In %)	Wood + L.P.G. (In %)
4	96	100	0	100	0	80	18	2

X. Number of Family Member: In the studied area it has been seen that 44% workers belong to within 3 members category, 54% workers belong to 4-7 members category, and only 2% workers belong to above 7 members category who involved with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

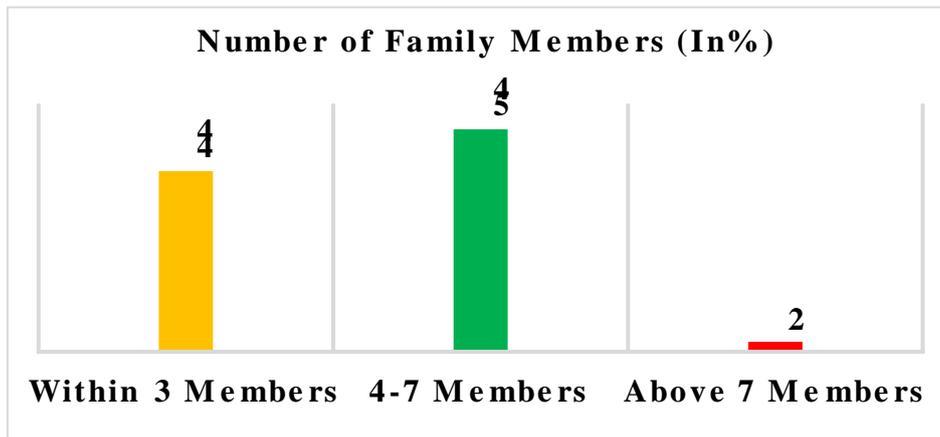


Figure 23: Number of Family Member.

Y. Health Issue Faced: In the studied area it has been seen that 84% workers have no health issue, 2% workers have orthopedic problem, 2% workers have spondylitis, 2% workers have diabetes problem, 4% workers have breathing problem, 2% workers belong to handicap category, 2% workers have thyroid issue, 2% workers have heart disease who attached with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

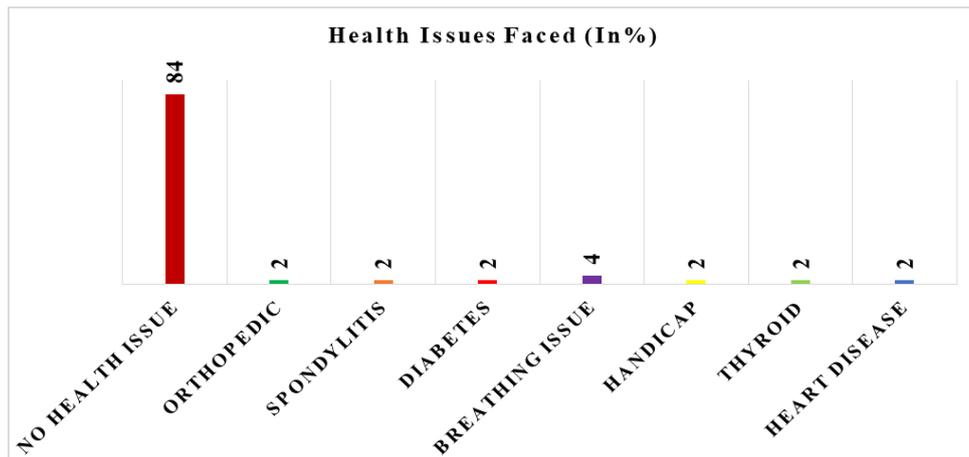


Figure 24: Health Issue Faced.

Z. Access to Medical Facilities: In the studied area it has been seen that 60% workers go to government hospital for treatment and 40% workers go to private clinic for checkup their health who related with informal sector at Haldia industrial area.

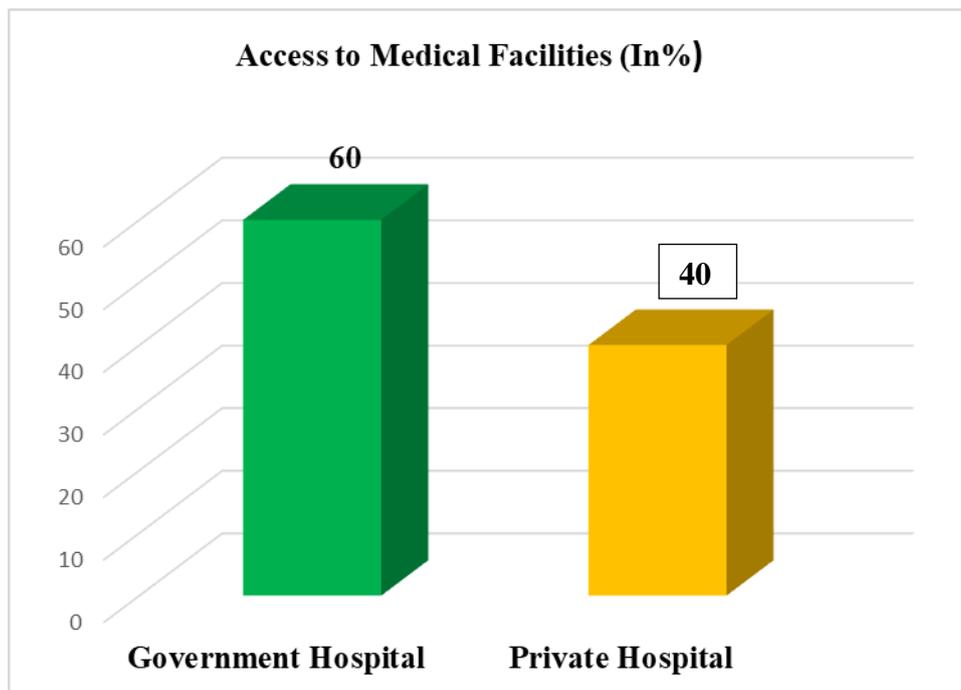


Figure 25: Access to Medical Facilities.

Major Findings:

1) It has been seen that most of the worker who attached with informal sector work at Haldia belongs to 18 to 35 years old which are 54%, then 36 to 45 years old which are 30%, next 46 to 60 years old which are 16%, this is the age limit of informal industry worker.

- 2) On the basis of survey report analysis, it has been seen that most of the worker are male which is 84% and female worker are 16% who engaged with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.
- 3) It has been seen that most of the worker are married which are 72%, then 26% worker are single and only 2% worker are widowed, this is the marital status of informal industry worker.
- 4) It has been seen that most of the workers who attached with informal sector work at Haldia Industrial area belongs to Hindu religious community which are 94% and only 6% workers belong to Muslim religious community.
- 5) In the informal sector worker, it has been seen that Unreserved Category (General) workers are 60%, Schedule Caste (SC) workers are 30%, Other Backward Class (OBC) workers are 10% and 0% workers is Schedule Tribe (ST) and Economically Weaker Section (EWS).
- 6) It has been seen that most of the informal sector workers belongs to Urban area of West Bengal which are 68% and 32% workers belongs to Rural area of West Bengal in Haldia industrial site.
- 7) It has been seen that most of the worker is local resident which is 92% and 8% worker is migrant from other place but permanently live in Haldia industrial area who related with informal sector work.
- 8) On the basis of survey data analysis educational qualification of workers are: 2% is illiterate, 6% is primary passed, 36% is upper primary passed, 18% is secondary certificate holder, 24% is higher secondary certificate holder, 4% is belongs to under graduate category, 10% is belongs to post graduate category.
- 9) It has been seen that most of the workers has no vocational skill which are 70% and 30% workers has vocational skill who engages with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.
- 10) Informal sector worker who has vocational training we have been seen varieties of skill they acquired which are: 6% have maintenance mechanic degree, 2% have diploma in mechanical engineering, 2% have diploma in electrical engineering, 2% have chemical operator degree, 2% have fitter certificate, 2% have grander certificate, 4% have tailoring skill, 4% have electrician skill, 2% have fisheries training, 2% have nursing certificate, 2% have plastic engineering degree.
- 11) It has been seen that most of the workers are contract labour which are 38%, then casual labour is 22%, next 18% workers are daily wage worker, also 18% worker are self-employed, and 4% worker are helper/loader who attach with informal sector in Haldia industrial area.

12) On their specification of work it has been seen that 46% workers are related with manufacturing company, 2% are related with animal husbandry, 2% are involved with pathology, 2% are attached with cycle repair shop, 2% are related with house servant, 8% are engaged with cleaner duty, 2% are involved with puffed rice mill (muri mill), 2% are attached with brick field, 2% are engaged with farmer job/ agriculture, 2% are involved with telecom sector, 8% are related as shop keeper, 2% are involved with human hair, 2% are engaged with tea stall, 2% are related with toto diver job, 10% are engaged with port and logistic sector, 6% are attached with petrochemical sector, and 0% worker are related with transport and construction job.

13) It has been seen that most of the informal sector workers have above 5-year work experience in Haldia industrial area which are 56% and 44% workers have below 5-year work experience.

14) It has been seen that average working days per month of 94% worker is above 20 days and 6% worker get chance below 20 days working availability per month.

15) It has been seen that average working hours per day of 54% workers is within 8 hours and 46% workers get chance above 8 hours working availability per day.

16) It has been seen that 10% workers' monthly family income is below Rs.5000, 26% workers' monthly family income is between Rs.5001-10000, 42% workers' monthly income is between Rs.10001-15000, 12% workers' monthly family income is between Rs. 15001-20000, 10% workers' monthly family income is above Rs.20000 respectively.

17) It has been seen that most of the workers have regular monthly income which are 94%, then 2% workers have irregular monthly income, and 4% workers have seasonal monthly income who involved with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

18) It has been seen that most of the workers have no other sources of income which are 88%, and only 12% workers have other sources of income through their family members job sources.

19) It has been seen that 4% workers' monthly household expenditure is below Rs.5000, 66% workers' monthly household expenditure is between Rs.5001-10000, 26% workers' monthly household expenditure is between Rs.10001-20000, 4% workers' monthly household expenditure is above Rs.20000 respectively.

20) It has been seen that most of the workers have no savings for future asset which are 72% and 28% workers have savings concept for better future life.

21) It has been seen that most of the informal sector workers at Haldia industrial area live in pucca house which are 72%, next 24% workers live in semi-pucca house and 4% workers live in kutcha house.

22) It has been seen that most of the workers have their own house which are 96% and only 4% workers live in rented house who related with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

23) It has been seen that basis of survey data analysis 96% informal sector workers have no drinking water facilities in their house (means submersible pump or electric filter), they use tube well water and packaged drinking water and only 4% informal sector workers have own drinking water facilities in their house. 100% workers have electricity and toilet facilities in their house. 80% informal sector worker use L.P.G. connection for cooking, 18% informal sector workers use fire wood for cooking, 2% informal sector workers use both of them and 0% workers use coal for cooking at Haldia industrial area.

24) It has been seen that 44% workers belong to within 3 members category, 54% workers belong to 4-7 members category, and only 2% workers belong to above 7 members category who involved with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

25) It has been seen that most of the workers have no health issue which are 84%, but who have health problem their specification is: 2% workers have orthopedic problem, 2% workers have spondylitis, 2% workers have diabetes problem, 4% workers have breathing problem, 2% workers belong to handicap category, 2% workers have thyroid issue, 2% workers have heart disease who attached with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area.

26) It has been seen that more than half percentage workers go to government hospital for treatment which are 60% and 40% workers go to private clinic for checkup their health who related with informal sector at Haldia industrial area.

Recommendations:

1) Strengthening Social Security Coverage

Given that 72% of workers have no savings and the majority earn below ₹15,000 per month, there is a pressing need to:

- Expand registration under e-Shram Portal and ensure portability of benefits.
- Extend coverage of Employees' State Insurance (ESI) and Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PMSYM) to informal industrial workers.
- Introduce contributory micro-pension and accident insurance schemes tailored to contract and casual labourers.

Cluster-based facilitation centers in Haldia Industrial Area could assist workers in documentation and enrollment.

2) Skill Development and Certification Reform

Although 98% of respondents possess formal education, 70% lack vocational skills. This indicates an education–employment mismatch.

- Establish localized Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programs under Skill India.
- Link informal manufacturing and petrochemical subcontracting units with NSDC-certified training modules.
- Provide industry-linked apprenticeships for youth (18–35 years, 54% of respondents).
- Encourage female-focused skill training to address low female participation (16%).

Skill upgradation should align with dominant sectors (manufacturing 46%, logistics 10%, petrochemical 6%).

3) Formalization of Contract and Casual Labour

Since 38% are contract labour and 22% are casual workers:

- Strict enforcement of the Code on Social Security, 2020 and Occupational Safety Code.
- Mandate written contracts and wage transparency in subcontracted manufacturing units.
- Create grievance redressal cells within the industrial zone.

4) Income Stabilization and Wage Protection

With 78% earning below ₹15,000 monthly:

- Introduce minimum wage monitoring mechanisms specific to industrial clusters.
- Promote wage digitization for transparency.
- Facilitate collective bargaining forums or worker cooperatives.

5) Financial Inclusion and Savings Promotion

Given that 72% lack savings:

- Promote micro-savings through Jan Dhan accounts and SHG linkages.
- Financial literacy camps on insurance, pension, and small investment schemes.
- Encourage cooperative credit societies for emergency loans.

6) Occupational Health and Safety Measures

Although 84% reported no illness, occupational risks remain high in manufacturing and petrochemical-related work.

- Periodic free medical camps within the industrial area.
- Mandatory safety gear provision.
- Awareness programs on respiratory and musculoskeletal health risks.
- Link workers to Ayushman Bharat health insurance schemes.

7) Basic Amenities and Drinking Water Infrastructure

Despite universal electricity and sanitation access, 96% lack safe in-house drinking water facilities.

- Install community filtration plants in worker-dense localities.
- Promote subsidized water purification schemes.
- Public-private partnerships for safe drinking water access.

8) Gender Inclusion Strategies

Female participation (16%) remains limited.

- Provide safe transport and crèche facilities.
- Promote women's self-help group enterprises linked to industrial supply chains.
- Encourage female-specific vocational skill certification.

9) Migrant and Local Integration

Although 92% are local residents, 8% migrants require:

- Portability of welfare benefits.
- Rental housing support schemes.
- Multilingual awareness drives.

10) Industrial Cluster-Based Welfare Model

Haldia Industrial Area can adopt a Cluster Welfare Framework:

- Worker facilitation center
- Skill upgradation hub
- Legal and documentation support desk
- Occupational health unit
- Cooperative marketing platform for self-employed workers (18%)

CONCLUSION:

We may highlight that Unreserved Category (General) workers are 60%, Schedule Caste (SC) workers are 30%, Other Backward Class (OBC) workers are 10% and 0% workers is Schedule Tribe (ST) and Economically Weaker Section (EWS) engages with informal sector work at Haldia industrial area in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal, India. Among them 2% are illiterate but 98% workers have educational degree from minimum to maximum stages yet they worked as a contract labour, casual labour, daily wages worker, even helper also due to lack of good quality job may be its government or non-government. Despite of having educational degree 70% workers have additional vocational training to secure their informal sector job. It has been seen that 72% workers are married, 26% workers are single

and only 2% are widowed. It has been seen that most of the informal sector workers have above 5-year work experience in Haldia industrial area which are 56% and 44% workers have below 5-year work experience. After this hard work it has been revealed that 10% workers' monthly family income is below Rs.5000, 26% workers' monthly family income is between Rs.5001-10000, 42% workers' monthly income is between Rs.10001-15000, 12% workers' monthly family income is between Rs. 15001-20000, 10% workers' monthly family income is above Rs.20000 respectively. It has been seen that most of the workers have no other sources of income which are 88%, and only 12% workers have other sources of income through their family members job sources. We can know that 16% workers have work related health issue in different category. In this situation to spent their livelihood with 44% workers belong to within 3 members category, 54% workers belong to 4-7 members category, and only 2% workers belong to above 7 members category, it has been seen that 4% workers' monthly household expenditure is below Rs.5000, 66% workers' monthly household expenditure is between Rs.5001-10000, 26% workers' monthly household expenditure is between Rs.10001-20000, 4% workers' monthly household expenditure is above Rs.20000 respectively. As a result, 72% workers have no savings for future life investment.

In summary, the findings of the present study demonstrate that informal industrial workers in Haldia experience relative employment stability but structural vulnerability characterized by low income, limited savings, skill gaps, and restricted social protection. A combined approach of skill-linked formalization, wage security, financial inclusion, and cluster-based welfare governance is essential to ensure sustainable livelihood enhancement.

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