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Does Migration Improve Household Living Standards at the Origin? Evidence from Pre- and Post-Migration Comparisons in Rural West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: Migration has emerged as a key livelihood strategy for rural households in developing countries; however, changes in household economic conditions after migration remain insufficiently explored. This study examines variations in household economic conditions between the pre and post migration periods in rural West Bengal. It is based on primary data collected from 253 migrant households through a cross-sectional survey conducted between November 2023 and May 2024. The analysis covers multiple dimensions, including housing conditions, household amenities, financial inclusion, and agricultural activity for both periods. In addition, a Standard of Living Index (SLI) was constructed to assess changes in living standards over time.

The findings indicate significant improvements in the overall living conditions of migrant households following migration. The proportion of households in the low SLI category declined sharply from about 75 per cent to 16 per cent, with a corresponding shift towards medium and high SLI categories. Housing quality improved significantly, the use of clean cooking fuel increased, and access to toilet facilities expanded considerably. Ownership of household assets and access to financial services, particularly savings accounts, also reached near universal levels in the post migration period. However, participation in agricultural activities declined, suggesting a transition away from traditional rural livelihoods.

Binary logistic regression results reveal that migration duration, remittance levels, caste status, and family structure are significant determinants of improvements in living standards. Households with longer migration duration, particularly ten years or more, are significantly more likely to experience upward mobility. Overall, migration functions both as a coping mechanism and as a pathway to sustained economic advancement, while also contributing to broader structural changes in rural economies.

KEYWORDS: Migrant households, Housing conditions, Agricultural participation, Standard of Living Index (SLI), Pre- and Post migration Condition, West Bengal

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is widely recognised as a key social and economic process that determines the household livelihoods, local economies, and broader development outcomes. One of the most direct channels through which migration influences household development is the transfer of resources, both in cash and kind, commonly referred to as remittances (1). These remittances serve as a crucial link between migrants and their households of origin and play an important role in shaping household economic conditions. Existing literature shows that remittances are used for a wide range of purposes (2). Some studies highlight their role in meeting basic consumption needs such as food, clothing, and social ceremonies, while others emphasise their contribution to long-term investments, including housing, children's education, healthcare, agriculture, and small businesses (3–5). This indicates that remittances support both daily consumption and future economic security. Cross-country evidence also suggests that remittance inflows are associated with lower poverty levels and improved living conditions in developing countries (6). In the Indian context, migration, especially circular and seasonal migration, plays an important role in improving household conditions by helping households repay debts, stabilise consumption, and increase spending on marginalised groups. Evidence from Kerala, a major remittance-receiving state, further shows improvements in the quality of life, including reductions in poverty, inequality, and unemployment (7). The increase of household migration often comes at the cost of agricultural productivity in rural areas. As working-age men leave villages in search of employment elsewhere, farms are left with an insufficient workforce. The consequences of this labour deficit are far-reaching: essential, the frequency farming activities are postponed and intensity of crop cultivation decline, and, in more severe cases, agricultural land is left entirely uncultivated (8). However, despite these findings, there is limited research that systematically compares household economic conditions before and after migration.

Examining this change over time is important to understand whether migration leads to sustained improvement or only temporary relief. The period before migration is often marked by economic hardship, , and debt, limited employment opportunities which act

as major reasons for migration (9–11). In contrast, the period after migration may show improvements depending on the regularity of remittances and how households use these resources (2,6). Yet, few studies have directly compared these two periods using detailed household-level data.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the changes in household economic conditions between the pre-migration and post-migration periods in rural West Bengal, focusing Bengal–Mumbai migration corridor. West Bengal is among the leading source states of inter-state labour migration in India, with large numbers of workers, particularly from rural and semi-urban districts, moving to Mumbai and its surrounding metropolitan region in search of wage employment in construction, manufacturing, and the informal service sector. This corridor represents a significant yet relatively understudied axis of internal migration, where households in origin communities depend heavily on remittances sent by members working in distant urban destinations. The study focuses on a set of key indicators, including housing conditions, household assets, financial status, and agricultural activity. In addition, the study examines the overall changes in the standard of living following migration and identifies the determinants that shape these changes. The study aims to provide a clear understanding of how migration influences household economic conditions over time and contributes to the existing literature on migration and development in India.

II. DATA AND METHODS

A. Data sources and sample design

This study uses primary data collected through a cross-sectional survey conducted from November 2023 to May 2024. Data were collected in Bankura District, West Bengal, which emerged as the highest out-migration district through a composite scoring method. Since district-level out-migration data were not directly available, 19 West Bengal districts were ranked using four predictors of out-migration: urbanization, HDI, cultivated land area, and Scheduled Tribe population share, with lower values indicating a higher out-migration tendency; ranks were assigned accordingly. Bankura received the highest composite score, making it the primary migrant-sending district for this study.

Within Bankura District, 14 villages were selected. Since village-level out-migration data were not directly available, return migrant data collected by the District Investigation Bureau of Bankura were used as a proxy to identify high-out-migration villages to Mumbai. Within each village, Mumbai migrant households were identified using the definition: a household with at least one male member who had migrated to Mumbai without his family in search of employment and had resided there for at least six months. If a village had more than 20 eligible migrant households, 20 were selected using simple random sampling; if fewer than 20 were available, all eligible households were included. A total of 253 households were selected for the survey in the study area. Households selected for the study were asked to report their socio-economic conditions for both the pre-migration and post-migration periods. Thus, data were collected at two points in time and analyses accordingly.

B. Variable description

Outcome Variable

This study uses the Standard of Living Index (SLI) as the main outcome variable (High, Medium, Low). The SLI was constructed separately for the pre-migration and post-migration periods using household asset and amenity variables, including landholding size, house construction materials (floor, roof, and wall), number of rooms, drinking water source, toilet facility, cooking fuel, and ownership of household amenities such as television, mobile phone, refrigerator, motorcycle, and car, etc. Variables with limited variation were excluded. Internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$), followed by Principal Component Analysis (PCA), with the resulting factor scores serving as the SLI score. Scores were classified into three categories: low, medium, and high SLI. This procedure was repeated independently for both periods to enable comparison of household living standards before and after migration.

To compare pre- and post-migration conditions, a set of household level variables were examined across both periods, including housing type (kacha, semi-pucca, pucca), sanitation facilities (own toilet, open defecation), cooking fuel (LPG/natural gas, charcoal, wood, others), household assets (television, refrigerator, motorcycle, etc.), financial indicators (savings account, fixed deposits, life insurance), and agricultural activities (livestock ownership, self-cultivation, leased farming, and sharecropping).

Explanatory Variable

To know the determinants of the Standard of Living Index (SLI), a set of explanatory variables was considered, including religion (Hindu, Muslim), caste (Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Class, Others), landholding size (landless, ≤1 acre, >1 acre), family type (nuclear, joint/extended), family size (1–3 members, ≥4 members), remittance inflow (≤₹110,000, >₹110,000), number of migrant members (one vs more than one), and duration of migration (<5 years, 5–9 years, ≥10 years).

C. Analytical Technique

This study used descriptive statistics to examine the socioeconomic profile of migrant households. Bivariate cross-tabulation was employed to compare pre- and post-migration conditions across the selected variables. To identify the determinants of SLI, binary

logistic regression was applied, with SLI categorised as a binary outcome (0 = No Improvement, 1 = Improved). All statistical analyses were performed using STATA 17.

D. Ethical statement

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institute's ethics committee. Participants were informed about the study and provided voluntary consent. Confidentiality was maintained, and respondents could skip questions or withdraw at any time. No incentives were provided.

III. RESULT

A. Socioeconomic characteristics of the household

The findings indicate that migrant households are predominantly Hindu (92.1 per cent), with a significant proportion belonging to Scheduled Castes (56.1 per cent) and Other Backwards Classes (24.9 per cent), reflecting their socially marginalised status. More than half of these households are landless (55.3 per cent), while only a small proportion (3.2 per cent) own more than three acres of land. In terms of family structure, nuclear households are more common (59.3 per cent), and the majority are small, typically consisting of two to three members. A significant feature is the high proportion of female-headed households (nearly 45 per cent), which is likely linked to male out-migration. The heads of households are largely middle-aged, with a mean age of 44.42 years, and most fall within the 40–59 age group (Table 1)

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of the sample households

Background characteristics	Per cent
Religion	
Hindu	92.1
Muslim	7.9
Caste Category	
Others	19
OBC	24.9
SC	56.1
Land holding size (Acre)	
Landless	55.3
<=1	11.1
>1	33.6
Family type	
Nuclear	59.3
Joint/ Extended	40.7
Family size	
1-3 Member	57
4 and more	43
Headship of Household	
Male	56.1
Female	43.9
Age of Household Head (Years)	
20-29	17
30-39	16.6
40-49	24.5
50-59	33.2
60 & above	8.7
Mean age (Years)	*44.43*
Total	**100 (253)**

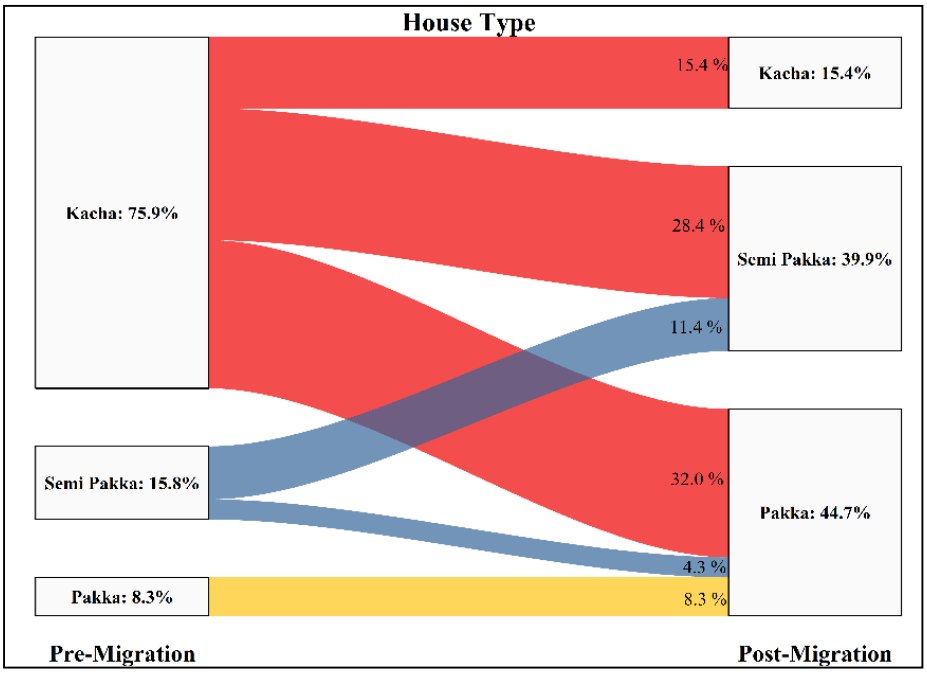
Source: *Researcher's fieldwork, household surveys at origin and migrant surveys at destination, 2023 to 2024*.

B. Changes in Housing conditions Pre- and Post-Migration Period

Housing conditions improved markedly after migration across several dimensions. The share of households living in kacha houses declined significantly from over 75 per cent in the pre-migration period to about 15 per cent post-migration. This shift was

accompanied by an increase in semi-pakka houses (from 16 per cent to around 40 per cent) and pakka houses (from 8 per cent to nearly 45 per cent), with 32 per cent directly upgrading from kacha to pakka houses (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of households by change in type of house in the pre- and post-migration period



Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Housing space also improved significantly. Before migration, nearly 70 per cent of households lived in single-room dwellings, but this dropped to about 15.8 per cent after migration. A shift in households to double-room houses increased their proportion from 26 per cent to 66 per cent, while households with more than two rooms also rose from 5 per cent to over 18 per cent (Figure 2).

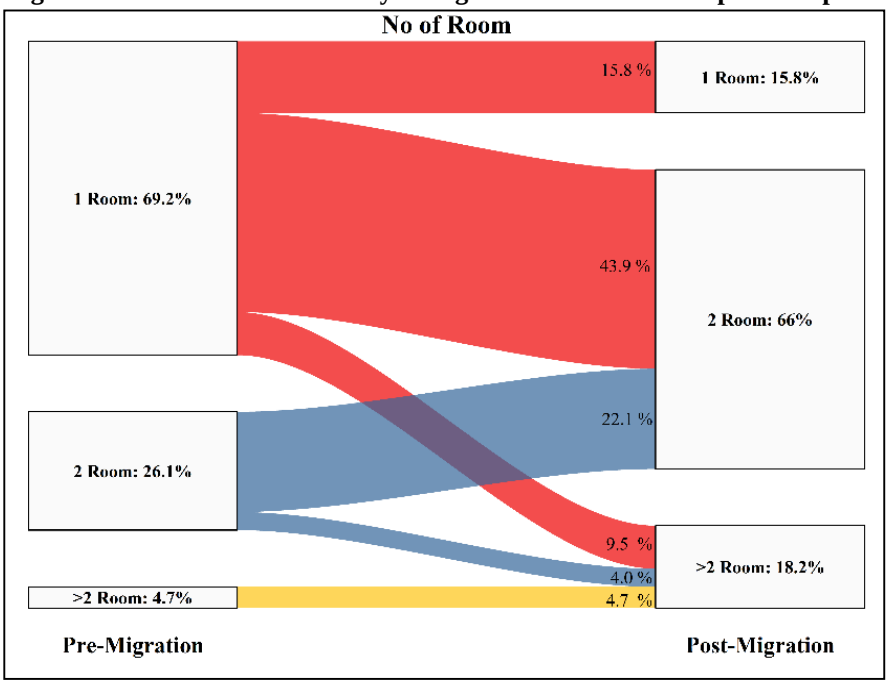
Toilet facilities also improved notably after migration. Before migration, only about 37 per cent of households had access to a toilet, whereas this nearly doubled to around 70 per cent in the post-migration period. Approximately 44 per cent of households constructed toilets after migration, reflecting a significant improvement in sanitation facilities (Figure 3)

Use of cooking fuel also improved significantly after migration, particularly with the adoption of clean fuels such as LPG or natural gas. Before migration, only about 8 per cent of households used clean fuel, but this increased to nearly 42 per cent post-migration. Among these, around 30 per cent had previously relied on charcoal. The use of charcoal declined sharply from 47 per cent to 17 per cent, while dependence on wood showed little change, with about 40 per cent of households continuing to rely on it both before and after migration (Figure 4).

C. Household Amenities in Pre- and Post-Migration Period

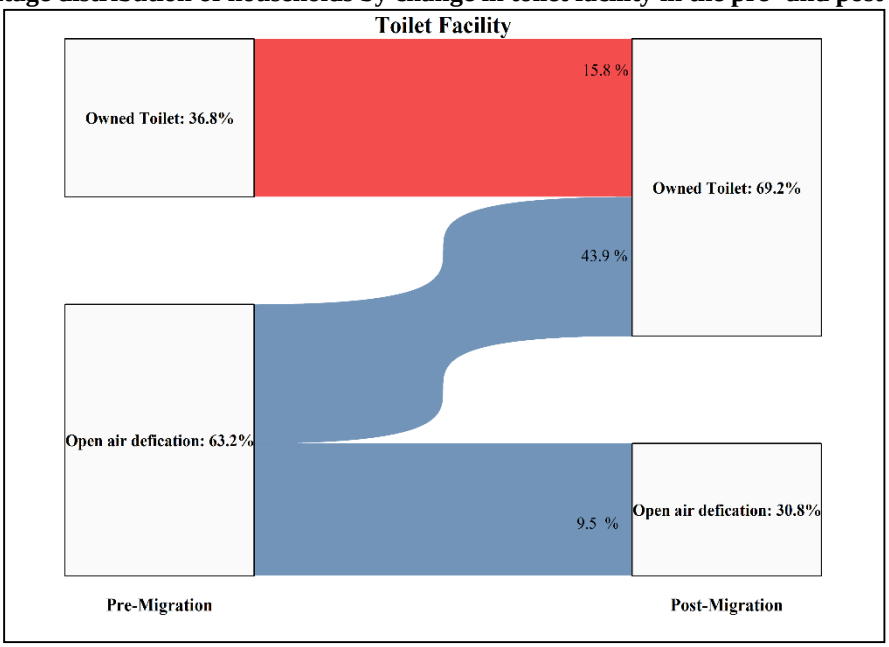
The results show a clear improvement in household amenities after migration. Access to electricity rose from 65.2 per cent to 98.8 per cent. Ownership of key assets increased sharply, including televisions (18.6 to 74.3 per cent), refrigerators (5.9 to 34.4 per cent), and especially mobile phones (39.9 to 99.2 per cent), indicating enhanced connectivity. The use of cookers, clocks/watches, and bicycles also improved substantially, while motorcycle ownership grew moderately. In contrast, items such as radios and computers recorded only marginal increases. Overall, the findings suggest that remittances significantly improved household living standards, particularly in basic amenities and communication infrastructure (Table 2).

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of households by change in no of room in the pre- and post-migration period



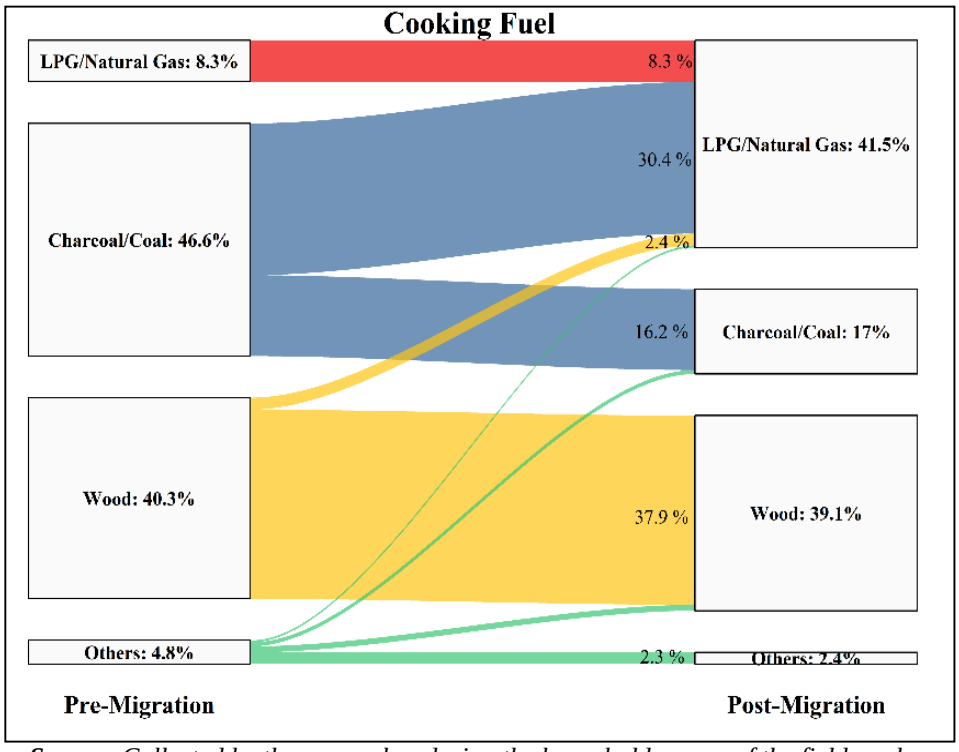
Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of households by change in toilet facility in the pre- and post-migration period



Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of households by change in cooking fuel in the pre- and post-migration period



Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Migrant Households Possessing Amenities Before and After Migration

Item	Pre migration	Post migration	Percentage change
Electricity	65.2	98.8	33.6
Radio	1.9 (5)	4.4	2.4
TV	18.6	74.3	55.7
Mobile	39.9	99.2	59.3
Refrigerator	5.9	34.4	28.5
Coocker	16.2	54.6	38.3
Computer	2.8 (7)	3.9	1.2
Watch/ Clock	54.2	88.9	34.7
Bi Cycle	64.8	99.6	34.8
Motor Cycle	12.25	21.74	9.5
Total	**100 (253)**	**100 (253)**	**100**

Based on multiple responses

Figures in parentheses indicate actual numbers, provided due to small cell sizes.

Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

D. Financial condition pre- and post-migration period

The results of this study reveal a significant improvement in the household financial conditions of migrant families between the pre- and post-migration periods. The most notable transformation is seen in access to savings accounts, which increased from 59.3 per cent of households before migration to almost universal coverage (99.6 per cent) after migration, marking an increase of over 40 percentage. Similarly, households with Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) policies expanded sharply from 8.7 per cent to 37.6 per cent, reflecting a 29-percentage rise and a growing tendency to secure the family's future and invest in long-term financial instruments. Ownership of fixed deposits and business activities slightly increased from the pre- to the post-migration period (Table 3).

Table 3: Financial condition of migrant households' pre-migration and post-migration period

Financial activity	Pre-Migration	Post-Migration	Change
Savings account	59.3	99.6	+40.3
Fixed Deposit (FD)	4.0 (10)	9.9	+5.9
Life Insurance Corporation (**LIC)**	8.7	37.6	+28.9
Business	2.4 (6)	5.5	+3.2
Others	6.4	15.4	+9.0
Total (Percentage)	**253 (100)**	**253 (100)**	

Based on multiple responses, totals may exceed 100 per cent.

Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Note: *Figures in parentheses indicate actual numbers, provided due to small sizes*

E. Agriculture activity pre- and post-migration period

Table 4 highlights changes in migrants' agricultural activity between the pre- and post-migration periods. The share of households practicing self-farming declined sharply from 69.9 per cent to 37.4 per cent (32.5 per cent decline), and those engaged in livestock rearing also fell by 20.2 percentage. Conversely, the farmland increased significantly from 30.9 per cent to 62.6 per cent. Participation in sharecropping by the migrant household also decreased from 27.1 per cent to 11.5 per cent. Overall, the results indicate that migration reduces direct household involvement in agricultural production.

Table 4: Percentage of migrant households engaged in agricultural activities pre- and post-migration period

Agricultural activity	Pre Migration	Post Migration	Percentage Change
Livestock	59.7	39.4	-20.2
Self-farming*	69.9	37.4	-32.5
Given lease farm	30.9	62.6	+31.7
Sharecropping	27.1	11.5	-15.7
Total	**100 (253)**	**100 (253)**	**100 (253)**

Based on multiple responses, totals may exceed 100 per cent.

** Total sample size may not be match due to missing case.*

Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

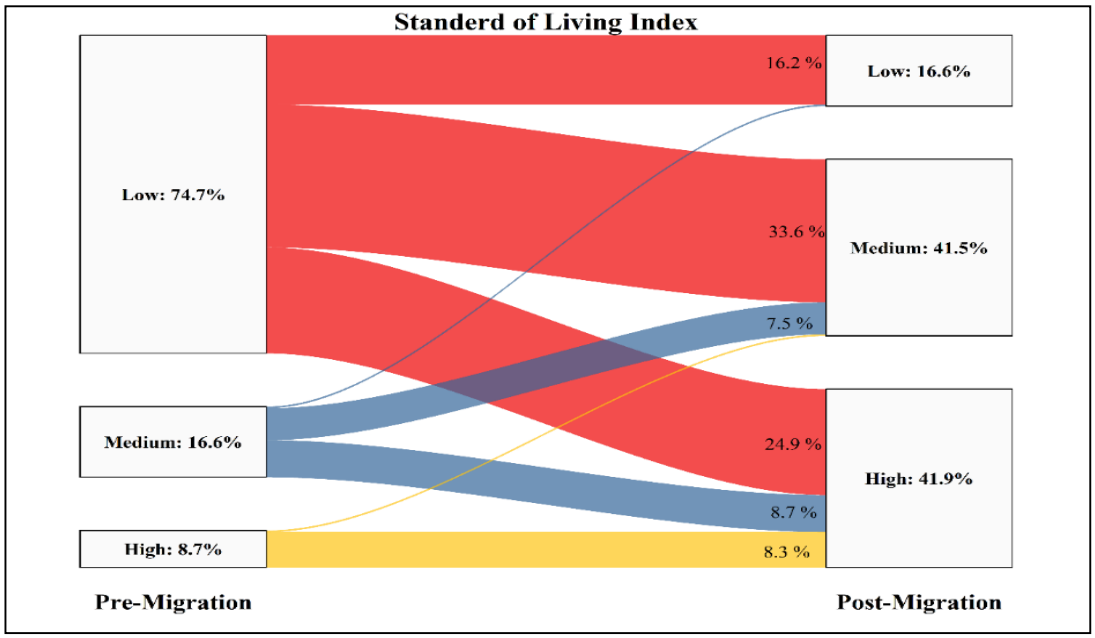
F. Standard of living of the migrant households in the pre- and post-migration period

The Standard of Living Index (SLI) was constructed using indicators of household amenities, household assets, and landholding size to determine the overall condition of the migration. The results in Figure 5 indicate a significant improvement in the migrant household's standard of living after migration. Before migration, nearly 75 per cent of households were in the low-standard of living, but this percentage declined to 16 per cent after migration. About 34 per cent of households moved from low to medium standard of living, therefore, the share in the medium category rising from 16 per cent to 42 per cent. Similarly, 25 per cent of households moved from low to high, raising the proportion in the high category from 9 per cent before migration to 42 per cent in the post-migration period. Overall, around 67 per cent of households experienced an improvement in their standard of living, either low to medium or low to high as a result of migration, while downward mobility was very minimal.

A. Determinant of improvement in the standard of living of the households

The results are presented in Table 5, which highlights several significant determinants of improved standards of living among migrant households. Scheduled Caste households are more likely to experience improvement compared to the "Others" caste group (OR = 3.83, $p<0.05$). Family structure plays a critical role: joint or extended families are over five times more likely to improve their living standards than nuclear families (OR = 5.34, $p<0.01$). Migration factors, such as higher remittance receipts, also significantly enhance outcomes, as households receiving more than the mean (110,000 rupees) annually are about 2.6 times more likely to show improvement (OR = 2.56, $p<0.05$). Most importantly, migration duration strongly influences the household standard of living. Those with 5–9 years of migration have nine times higher odds of improvement (OR = 9.01, $p<0.001$), while households with ten years or more are nearly twenty-two times more likely to improve (OR = 21.78, $p<0.001$)

Figure 5: Percentage distribution of households by change in Standard of Living in the pre- and post-migration period



Source: *Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work*

Table 5.: Odds ratios derived from logistic regression analysis of improvement in the Standard of Living Index (SLI) of the migrant household by their background characteristics

Background Characteristics	OR	CI
Religion		
Hindu ®		
Muslim	7.59	[0.66-87.77]
Caste Category		
Others ®		
OBC	1.66	[0.51-5.46]
SC	3.83*	[1.15-12.83]
Land holding size (Acre)		
Landless ®		
< =1	2.24	[0.52-9.62]
> 1	2.22	[0.75-6.57]
Family type		
Nuclear ®		
Joint/ Extended	5.34**	[1.67-17.06]
Family size (Ex Mig)		
1-3 Member ®		
4 and more	0.82	[0.29-2.36]
Remittance Received		
<=110000 ®		
>110000	2.56*	[1.08-6.06]
No of Migrant Member		
1 Member ®		
> 1 Member	1.62	[0.33-7.92]
Migration Duration (Years)		
<5		
5-9	9.01***	[3.86-21.02]
10 & More	21.78***	[6.92-68.61]
Observations	**248**	

*Exponentiated coefficients; 95% confidence intervals in brackets (*p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001)*

Dependent Variable: Improved in SLI is 1, and 0 is decline/No change.
Source: Collected by the researcher during the household survey of the field work

IV. DISCUSSION

This current study tired examine household economic condition in pre and post migration period. The pre- and post-migration comparison shows a clear improvement in living standards, reflected in shifts from kacha to semi-pakka or pakka housing, greater use of clean cooking fuels, greater toilet access, and overall better household amenities (12–14). These improvements suggest that migrant households tend to utilize remittances for long-term investments rather than merely meeting daily consumption needs (15). Financial inclusion has also strengthened, with near-universal ownership of savings accounts after migration. This indicates that migration not only improves household income but also strengthens integration into formal financial systems, facilitating secure savings, efficient remittance transfers, and improved financial management (16). An interesting change is the increased coverage of life insurance among migrant households, an aspect that was largely absent before migration. its may be due to migration brings higher incomes, greater exposure to formal financial systems, and a stronger need to protect families back home. Consistent with our findings, similar studies also reports that remittance-receiving households are more likely than non-recipient households to hold savings bank accounts and to have insurance coverage (16,17). However, household participation in agriculture has declined, likely due to low returns and reduced workforce as working-age members migrate out (18,19). The overall standard of living has improved significantly, with most households moving from low to medium and high levels. These improvements are more pronounced among joint families, households receiving higher remittances, and those with longer migration durations. This may be because joint families can pool more resources, share financial responsibilities, and manage household finances more effectively, which strengthens economic support, while higher remittance inflows enable households to spend more on housing improvements and consumer durables (Rajan, 2023; Singh & Bhandari, 2012). In addition, longer migration duration often ensures a more continuous flow of remittances, enabling cumulative investments over time and gradual improvement of standard of living (22,23).

V. CONCLUSION

Migration from rural West Bengal emerges as a key pathway of socio-economic transformation, enabling households to move beyond subsistence conditions towards improved living standards through sustained remittance flows. The findings show that these gains are cumulative and depend on the duration of migration, regularity of remittances, and household structure. However, this improvement is accompanied by a decline in agricultural engagement, reflecting a broader shift in rural livelihood patterns. Thus, migration operates as both a coping strategy and a pathway to upward socio-economic mobility, highlighting the need for policies that support productive use of remittances while addressing the changing dynamics of rural economies.

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