

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

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Abstract

Domestic workers who are women are not entitled to the same job security as employees in offices, schools, and other establishments. Women who work as domestic help therefore lack job security because their employment is dependent on the whims and fancies of their employers. The mood of employers will once more influence a pay increase for female domestic workers. Many female domestic workers have been employed by the same employer for many years without receiving a pay increase. This article explores the socio-economic conditions of female domestic workers in Chennai city of Tamil Nadu. The survey was conducted between January and July of 2023. Both primary and secondary data were used to inform the study. The researcher used non-probability sampling and a convenient sampling method to collect the sample because the population of Chennai City was initially divided into fifteen zones. In Chennai, Tamil Nadu, 150 domestic workers were chosen as respondents. With the aid of a schedule, 150 domestic workers in Chennai City provided information about the socioeconomic status of the respondents. Due to housewives' lack of time and physical capacity as well as the emergence of a modern lifestyle among city dwellers, the demand for domestic help has increased in urban areas. These domestic workers are in great demand today, but neither they nor their work are given the respect they deserve. Therefore, the importance of domestic workers in an economy cannot be overstated. However, their job is not valued. Domestic workers' work is not valued by the economy. The domestic workers themselves had no idea how valuable and important their work was. Another job that needs to be acknowledged, valued, respected, and considered to follow an organized pattern is this one. Therefore, the government must take the necessary action to regard this job as respectable. Additionally, it is up to the nation's populace to treat these domestic workers with dignity and respect.

Keywords: Women domestic Workers, Socio-economic conditions, Family, Household activities.

Introduction

Women contribute significantly to society in many ways, including as homemakers. The largest workforce in the world, homemakers, are still underpaid and undervalued. The nations do not regard a woman's domestic duties as an occupation. It is also regarded as a pointless task. However, the work that women do at home is the most beneficial to the growth of the country. The term "domestic servant," "worker," or "maid" refers to employees who perform the same tasks as a homemaker in the homes of others. Women typically became these kinds of domestic workers to ensure their own survival as well as the survival of their families. This is a result of women's lower educational awareness or illiteracy rates. In this

regard, the women who work as domestic help have important roles to play in both their own lives and those of their employers. The world's nations do not value or consider domestic work or housekeeping to be a productive occupation. It is regarded as a pointless task. However, in actuality, women's domestic labor, particularly that of less educated women, is that which is most productive for the advancement of both the family and the country. These kinds of domestic work are typically entered into by a large number of women. This is due to the fact that many women worldwide are illiterate or have low levels of educational awareness. In this regard, domestic workers who are women have important roles to play in both their own lives and those of their employers, where they contribute in turn to the development of the nation. Compared to men, women have access to some of the most convenient and comfortable jobs in society, such as caring for the home. With this job, they are providing their family with a livable income. Because they are the primary breadwinners in some families, the income of these domestic workers is essential to the well-being of those households. Particularly women who moved to other locations for social reasons—such as marriage and a better standard of living for their families—perform this kind of domestic work for their own improvement. In some instances, a mother who also works as a housekeeper will keep her daughter or daughter-in-law with her in order to help with the housework and find a way to hire another housekeeper. For instance, they permit their daughter to go to the employer's house to do her share of the domestic work because they know that domestic workers are often the least healthy and the oldest, which gradually leads to their daughter becoming a domestic worker as well.

Numerous social issues also plagued the female domestic workers. One of the economic issues facing domestic workers is their low pay, which is especially problematic for female domestic workers. Despite putting in long hours and working in one or more homes, they only make a pitiful living. They were not guaranteed a day of rest each week. Domestic workers who were women have occasionally been sexually, mentally, and physically abused. Some of them also experience discrimination based on their race, sex, and caste. Due to the nature of her domestic work, a woman who works as a domestic encounters some health problems. They have a variety of physical issues, including fatigue, skin conditions, body aches, fever and colds, injuries, and occasionally even chest pain. They are also affected by some psychological issues, such as having trouble finishing daily tasks, especially when working in more than two homes, spending time with their families, having trouble keeping appointments, having too much domestic work due to events and functions at the homes of their employers, having difficulty setting their own priorities, and having trouble pleasing their employers. These workers' main problems include unethical hiring procedures, a lack of employment contracts, unpaid wages, and verbal, physical, and emotional abuse at work. Most frequently, fly-by-night brokers' con games target migrants. These brokers frequently defraud migrants by making false promises about employment abroad and failing to take the necessary actions to obtain the necessary documentation to allow the migrants to work as domestic workers legally. The process for moving abroad to work is still largely unregulated in India. There is no pre-migration program in place by the government to inform migrants of their rights.

One of the most contentious topics on the agenda of the International Labour Conference in June 2010 was the precise definition of a "domestic worker." According to the ILC 2010, the employers' group sought to narrow the definition while the workers' group

pushed for a broad definition. They made reference to the fact that the domestic sector is enormously diverse and profoundly unequal, but that all workers must be given access to those workers' rights. The unorganized sector in India includes domestic work, which is the most common type and is done by many men and women. The majority of domestic workers come from the socially disadvantaged groups. Due to their low socioeconomic status, lack of education, gender disparities, lack of knowledge of their equipment, lack of marketing expertise, and ease of availability, these workers hurried into this work. They perform a variety of tasks, including cooking, laundry, sweeping, child care, gardening, etc., but domestic workers are paid less than other workers because the pay depends on the type of domestic work that the employer assigns to them. Because domestic workers are expected to perform three to four tasks per household per day and work for nine to ten hours per day, this is a burden for them. They also encounter issues at the workplace, such as being exploited. The goal of the current research paper is to shed light on the working conditions faced by female domestic workers in Chennai, city of Tamil Nadu.

Issues of Domestic workers in India

A domestic worker is defined as "any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship" by ILO Convention 189. A domestic worker may be employed full-time, part-time, by one household or by several different households, live in the employer's home (live-in worker), or live out of their home (live-out worker). A domestic worker might be employed in a nation that she or he is not a citizen of. Between the ages of 12 and 75, women and children (especially girls) make up nearly 90% of domestic workers in India, and 25% of them are thought to be under the age of 14. A large percentage of domestic workers lack literacy. They are working on activities that are traditionally associated with women and viewed as servile in nature, such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. The caste system in India contributes to the stigma attached to domestic work by associating jobs like cleaning and sweeping with those from the "so-called low castes." Because they are frequently referred to as "servants" and "maids," domestic workers often feel insecure and beneath others. This has furthered the status of disgrace given to the services offered by them. Highly exploited domestic workers are not given fair wages or decent working conditions. They are paid considerably less than the minimum wage for low- or moderate-skilled workers. Most live-in domestic helpers put in at least 15 hours per day, seven days a week. Part-time employees frequently put in close to 8 to 10 hours a day in 3 to 4 different homes. Domestic workers may put in anywhere from 8 to more than 18 hours per day at their jobs. The employer controls wages, leave policies, medical benefits, and downtime. They frequently fall prey to suspicion, too. They are the first to receive threats, physical violence, police questioning, conviction, and even dismissal if anything is missing from the house. Numerous live-in domestic helpers are chosen from rural or tribal communities. A foreign environment, culture, and language must be learned by them. Due to the solitary nature of their work, domestic workers often feel extremely lonely. Most people have no or very little free time, which makes them feel even more isolated. They also find it difficult to contact friends and family who live far away. Frequently, they are forbidden from using the phone and from interacting with friends and family who reside and/or work in the same city.

Live-in Domestic workers: Domestic helpers who live on site are employed there. They perform all domestic work, including cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, laundry, and caring for infants, kids, and the elderly. For basic necessities like food and shelter, they are

dependent on their employers. The majority of live-in domestic workers are women who have moved to cities in search of work, or who have been trafficked there. They mostly consist of young girls who are single or occasionally married, separated, or widowed, and children.

Part-time Domestic Workers: The majority of part-time domestic workers in the city where they are employed are locals or migrants. They primarily work in the homes of numerous employers while living in slums. They're known as part-timers. not because they only work part-time, but rather because they do not remain with the employer and are not required to be available on call around-the-clock. They either spend their entire day working for one employer or repeatedly doing the same jobs, such as washing clothes, doing the dishes, or cooking for various employers. Compared to full-time employees, part-timers are less reliant on their employers. They manage their own homes as well as those of their employers while residing with their families. In contrast to live-in domestic workers, they are less reliant on their employers for their basic needs and exhibit a higher level of independence.

Migrant Workers: Migrant Many women leave their rural communities to work as domestic servants. There are two types of this migration: Domestic Workers from Other States and International Domestic Helpers The domestic worker is placed in a foreign setting, away from her family, and must adapt to new languages, foods, and cultures whether she stays in India or travels to the Middle East or Southeast Asia. Migrants are frequently live-in domestic workers, making them particularly susceptible to violence, exploitation, and deprivation. Since many of them are from tribal areas, their ethnicity further exacerbates the traditional discrimination they experience as women and as live-in domestic workers. Despite these issues, underprivileged women are compelled to relocate to urban areas and other countries in order to supplement the meager incomes of their families.

Internal migration in India: Rural and male unemployment, poverty, sudden death in the family, and debt bondage are the usual causes of migration from rural to urban areas. Another "pull" factor for young girls and women to migrate is the glamour of city life. The majority of domestic workers face exploitative working conditions and low pay, but working in cities is seen as a way out of poverty, and villagers are unaware of this. Additionally, a significant portion of domestic workers are from communities that have been forced to leave their homes due to natural disasters or man-made crises (like insurgencies).

"Trafficking agencies" are increasingly playing a big role in encouraging internal migration. As villagers from the cities return to their home villages to recruit more women, girls, and children into this labor force, organized trafficking is occurring in the field of domestic work. When the girls reach the cities, their wages are frequently frozen or withheld to pay the traffickers a fee for getting them jobs.

Migration excluding India: Cheap, domestic, and menial labor is increasingly in demand from wealthier industrialized nations. Migrants from less wealthy, less developed nations, like India, can seize this opportunity because it doesn't call for advanced training or education. Thousands of Indian women leave their country in search of jobs with higher pay in the Middle East, South East Asia, and occasionally in Europe and North America. Even though they might be earning more than they would in India for the same job, these women receive the lowest pay of any foreign employees. In an effort to raise the standard of living for their families in India, many Indian women travel abroad to send money home. However, when they travel abroad, they are more susceptible to unethical hiring procedures, a lack of work

contracts, unpaid wages, and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at work. In many cases, their travel documents are also withheld, preventing them from returning home. The process for moving abroad for work is unregulated in India. An initiative by the Indian government to inform migrants of their rights before they leave the country was just recently put into action. Migrants are compelled to borrow sizable sums of money to pay broker fees, frequently at exorbitant interest rates, in order to travel abroad. The migrants are frequently the targets of fly-by-night brokers' scams because they are frequently illiterate and ignorant of the potential risks of entrusting large sums of money with strangers. These con artists fail to obtain the promised job abroad, provide them with fake tickets, or obtain the necessary paperwork for the women to be able to work as domestics legally. As a result, a lot of women find themselves without the proper documentation in a foreign country. They are particularly susceptible to not receiving the promised salary and being kept in slavery without a way to report it to the police. The employer frequently retains the domestic worker's passport, preventing her from departing or getting in touch with the Indian embassy to voice her grievances.

Previous Studies

Millions of women migrate to countries in Asia and the Middle East in order to find work as domestic workers, and Nisha Varia (2011) has made an effort to study this phenomenon. Alarming human rights violations, such as excessively long hours with no days off, nonpayment of wages, confinement in the workplace, physical abuse, sexual abuse, forced labor, and in some cases, slavery, have been made possible in host countries by a combination of weak labor laws, restrictive immigration laws, and socially accepted discrimination against migrant workers. While some governments began gradually raising standards, the majority have not implemented extensive reforms. The conditions of women workers in India's informal sector were examined in Mohapatra's (2012) study. Low wages, which are frequently insufficient to meet minimum living standards, including nutrition, lengthy working hours and hazardous working conditions, and a lack of basic services like first aid, drinking water, and sanitation at the work sites are all characteristics of unorganized sector employment. According to research, poverty is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a variety of factors, including a lack of options, a sense of helplessness, vulnerability, a lack of assets, insecurity, and social exclusion. The current study concludes that socio-economic determinants like education, health, and healthcare are descriptive about the fundamental minimum access to development by the stakeholders regardless of the type of occupation they have chosen based on the findings across the cross-cutting occupational response. Contextually, we discover that a sizable portion of female workers continue to lead lives that are characterized by compromises and subsistence, and the majority of their access to their own rights to life is subsidized. In her essay on "Minimum Wages for Domestic Work," Neetha (2013) wrote that in addition to labor market concerns that govern legislative interventions, the social understanding of household work was a crucial element in understanding the state's responses to the problems domestic workers face. The minimum wages for domestic workers in the informal sector are only adhered to in a few states of India. This demonstrated how low the value of housework was even when it first entered the market. Better legal minimum pay for domestic workers would not only help safeguard their rights but also have the potential to upend the social and political foundations of the industry, changing how it is valued. According to the World Bank, there are some barriers to advancing

women's participation in the Indian workforce, as stated by Mahua Venkatesh (2017) in his article titled "India Ranks 120th among 131 Nations in Women Workforce." They required both incentives and a secure, favorable environment. According to the World Bank's India Development Report, published in May 2017, India had one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation among the 131 countries for which data were available. India's main economic sector was agriculture. The report highlighted how India's potential GDP growth rate was influenced by the rise in the number of women working there. According to an analysis by Angel D (2017), there are four divisions that can be used to classify the workforce in India's unaccounted sector. In terms of profession, type of employment, especially distressed categories, and service categories, they were. There is a sizable portion of the unorganized labor force that is added to these four divisions, including cobblers, hamals, handicraft artisans, handloom weavers, lady tailors, physically disabled self-employed individuals, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, sericulture workers, carpenters, tannery workers, power loom workers, and the urban poor. The study by Ngozi ADELEYE et al. (2019) uses quarterly data from 1991 to 2017 and a combination of descriptive and econometric analyses to examine female vulnerable employment in India's informal sector and the impact on economic growth. Unfavorable effects on the economy as a whole result from the challenging working conditions that informal workers frequently face. Therefore, this study uses quarterly data from 1991q1 to 2017q4 and a combination of descriptive and econometric analysis (2SLS-IV technique) to investigate female vulnerable employment in India's informal sector and its impact on economic growth. Some of the compelling conclusions from the descriptive analysis are as follows: (1) more women are employed in vulnerable jobs; (2) more women work in India's agricultural sector than in its industrial or service sectors; (3) more women are self-employed; and (4) more women earn more money for their families as breadwinners. (5) India has the second-highest proportion of women in vulnerable employment among SAARC nations, trailing only Nepal. Similarly, the results of econometric simulations suggest that (1) contrary to expectations, increasing the proportion of women in vulnerable employment retards economic growth, (2) increasing female employment in the agricultural sector significantly slows down economic growth, and (3) increasing female employment in both the industrial and service sectors significantly accelerates economic growth. The COVID-19 pandemic, according to Yasmeen Sultana and P. Hazarika (2022), had a significant impact on the livelihood, security, and health of workers in the informal sector, particularly domestic workers, who are primarily women. After carefully examining earlier research works, it is clear that the majority of studies concentrate on issues related to labor in urban organized and unorganized sectors, but it is very difficult to locate studies that specifically address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women domestic workers, particularly in the Union territory of Puducherry. Both secondary and primary data have been used in order to achieve the same results. While primary data were gathered from the sample respondents, secondary data were gathered from books, articles, reports, and websites that had already been published. The information was gathered from 600 female domestic workers in two significant urban areas. The study will provide the government, the Central Ministry, and other financial institutions with pertinent recommendations for the growth of women's workforce participation. The socioeconomic situation of women who work as domestic helpers in India was examined by Ganesan, S., and Manikanthan, S. in 2023. Work done in or for multiple households is referred to as domestic work. In India, household duties are always regarded as falling under the purview or purview

of women. While it is now necessary for both the male and female family members to work in order to live better lives, there is a greater need to hire a woman to handle all household duties. These domestic workers are part of the unorganized labor force in India, and their working conditions are frequently depreciated, unprotected, and unregulated. The current pandemic situation has brought attention to the necessity of maintaining clean homes and surroundings as well as the need to recognize the existence and abilities of domestic workers. They do not have secure working conditions or minimum wage. This paper attempts to discuss their challenges, working conditions, and to highlight their rights to be protected against this background.

Methodology

The current study was conducted at the micro level in Tamil Nadu State's Chennai City. The survey was conducted between January and July of 2023. Both primary and secondary data were used to inform the study. The researcher used non-probability sampling and a convenient sampling method to collect the sample because the population of Chennai City was initially divided into fifteen zones. In Chennai, Tamil Nadu, 150 domestic workers were chosen as respondents. With the aid of a schedule, 150 domestic workers in Chennai City provided information about the socioeconomic status of the respondents. All of the respondents in this particular study, which only examines female domestic workers in Chennai, are female. The researcher doesn't have a separate table or conversations about this specifically for this reason.

Socio-economic well-being index of Women Domestic Workers

- The socioeconomic circumstances of the respondents in this study area are examined using this wellbeing index. The analysis of the functioning of the well-being index uses a variety of specific indicators. The following socioeconomic indicators have been created: amenities for the home, kitchen amenities, hygienic conditions, education, housing, healthcare, income, and spending. The well-being index is a composite index that is built using eight clearly defined parameters, making it clear that it measures the happiness of domestic workers in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Here, the respondent's weighting of various parameters is noted. According to the different characteristics of the domestic women workers, the well-being index measurement reveals that they are in good shape with regard to kitchen and hygiene amenities at home. In terms of housing, healthcare, and education, the state of well-being is also subpar. The overall well-being index summary is only 46.28, which indicates that the socioeconomic conditions of domestic women workers are extremely poor, particularly in terms of their access to healthcare and education.
- More than half of the respondents were in the 31 to 35 age range. This makes it abundantly clear that these women hold a special place in her family.
- Among the respondents, 86 percent identified as Hindu, while 14 percent identified as Muslim.
- Married people made up the majority of respondents. Most respondents were illiterate in terms of education level.
- 78 percent of respondents said they preferred nuclear families to joint families, and 52 percent of respondents had families with more than four members. 58 percent of respondents said they lived in their own homes, four respondents lived in rented

homes, and the remaining respondents lived in rental homes. More than half of respondents, or 52 percent, said they had a nuclear family. A drinking water facility and drainage facilities were present in the homes of 78% and 84% of the respondents, respectively. LPG was the preferred cooking fuel among 72% of the respondents. In all of the homes of the respondents, amenities like mixer grinders and wet grinders were available. More than 72% of the respondents and their family members watched television and used cars, and 32% of them used laptops or desktop computers at home.

- 68 percent of the respondents had an increase once a year, and 86 percent of the respondents believed that their socioeconomic status had improved as a result of this domestic work.
- In terms of household expenses, 40 percent of the respondents had a nominal expenditure of between Rs. 3501 and 5000 per month.
- All of the respondents were having the housing assistance program. All of the respondents used the option of receiving an advance from their employer, and 70% of them did so for a sum between Rs. 1001 and 2000 per month.
- 32% respondents were of the opinion that their level of personal social problems was high, 36% were of the opinion that their level of family problems was high, and 44% were of the opinion that their level of problems at work was high.

Conclusion

Due to housewives' lack of time and physical capacity as well as the emergence of a modern lifestyle among city dwellers, the demand for domestic help has increased in urban areas. These domestic workers are in great demand today, but neither they nor their work are given the respect they deserve. Therefore, the importance of domestic workers in an economy cannot be overstated. However, their job is not valued. Domestic workers' work is not valued by the economy. The domestic workers themselves had no idea how valuable and important their work was. Another job that needs to be acknowledged, valued, respected, and considered to follow an organized pattern is this one. Therefore, the government must take the necessary action to regard this job as respectable. Additionally, it is up to the nation's populace to treat these domestic workers with dignity and respect. The employment strategy for the future, which encourages labor-intensive and capital-saving technology in general and revitalizes the growth of the unorganized sector in particular—which currently accounts for more than 93 percent of the nation's employment and enjoys higher labor intensity per unit of production than the organized sector—are all necessary to achieve the planned employment goals. According to this study, domestic work is a major source of income for women who are living below the poverty line (BPL). It demonstrates how poorly women are treated in Indian society. Due to their flexible schedules, female domestic workers encouraged other workers to participate in this domestic work. Their time limit is not set in stone. The government should effectively implement the Minimum Wages Act to enhance the living circumstances of female domestic workers. Employers may reduce employees' salaries and grant them casual leave.

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