

Issues and Challenges faced by Women Domestic workers in Thideer Nagar at Saidapet, Chennai City

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Abstract: *Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. They work for private households, often without clear terms of employment, unregistered in any book, and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. Currently there are at least 53 million domestic workers worldwide, not including child domestic workers and this number is increasing steadily in developed and developing countries. Even though a substantial number of men work in the sector often as gardeners, drivers or butlers it remains a highly feminized sector where 83 per cent of all domestic workers are women. Most of the women are working as domestic workers to earn their livelihood because of their socio and economic conditions, family backgrounds, early death of their husbands due to consumption of alcohol. There are a lot of deserted women working as domestic workers as their husbands have left them and are living with another woman. Therefore, this research work is being implemented for the women, who are domestic workers between the age group of 18 and 60 and above with sub-standard settlements in Thideer Nagar at Saidapet, Chennai City. These women are engaged in doing household works and they remain jobless otherwise. This research aims at empowering the domestic workers and enabling them with decision making skills. In addition, it also helps them to be engaged throughout the day and thus they can improve their economic standard with the help of the special schemes and welfare activities implemented by the Government for the betterment of their life. We can also educate them to utilize the welfare benefits and special schemes initiated by the Social welfare board. If the women are empowered and their economic standard is improved they will no longer receive any loan from the money lenders for higher interest and it also motivates the women to rise above their issues and challenges. Effective and rigorous empowerment programmes and decision making skills have been offered to all these women by the qualified experts who work in Domestic Workers Welfare Department. Establishment of a Service Centre which will help them to come out of their conditions pertaining to inequality and discrimination will be of great help. This research is aimed at studying the educational qualification of the workers and their involvement in work and it also lets us know the factors that affect the women in their workplace especially the problems caused by the house owners.*

Key words: Women, domestic work, education, welfare, Schemes, issues, challenges, labour legislation, hours, sexual abuse, vulnerable, service and social protection.

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Introduction

Domestic worker is “any person who is engaged in domestic works within an employment relationship”. Nearly 90% of domestic workers in India are women or children (especially girls), ranging from ages 12 to 75 and it is estimated that 25% among them are below the age of 14. The majority of domestic workers are illiterate. Domestic workers work in the homes of others for pay, providing a range of services they sweep and clean, wash clothes and dishes, shop and cook, care for children, the elderly, and the disabled, even taking care of household pets and they provide gardening, driving, and security services. In India, the stigma linked to domestic work is heightened by the caste system, since tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are associated with the people belonging to the ‘so-called’ low castes. Domestic workers are commonly referred to as ‘servants’ and ‘maids’ which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. This has further added to the undignified status awarded to the services provided by them and they are also highly exploited and denied just wages and humane working conditions. They are paid well below the minimum wages for unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Part-time workers often work in 3-4 different houses for nearly 8-10 hours every day. The working hours of domestic workers can go from 8 to over 18 hours a day. Wages, leave facilities, medical benefits, and rest time are at the employer’s mercy. Moreover, they are often victims of suspicion. If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction, and even dismissal. A great number of live-in domestic workers are women who are recruited from below poverty line category and underprivileged areas. At present, domestic workers often receive very low wages, they have to work for excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement. Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation, and it often reflects in discrimination along the lines of sex, race and caste.

Domestic workers in India

Domestic workers are comprised of three main groups like live-in domestic workers, part-time/live out domestic workers, migrant domestic workers, inter-state domestic workers and overseas domestic workers. The research study is focused on Part-time domestic workers who are generally locals as they come from the city where they are employed. They mostly live in slums and work in the houses of multiple employers to earn their livelihood. They are called part-timers not because they do only part time work but because they do not stay with the employer and are not expected to be on call 24 hours a day. They either work all day for one employer or repeatedly perform specific tasks. Part-timers are less dependent on their employers than full time workers. They live with their families and run their homes, as well as those of their employers. However, they are less dependent on their employers for their basic needs and are characterized with a greater degree of independence than the live-in domestic workers.

In some countries Domestic work is a growing sector for proving employment opportunities, especially for women. The latest conservative estimates find that the number of domestic workers has increased from 33.2 million in 1995 to 52.6 million in 2010 or 3.6 per cent of global wage employment. However, since domestic workers are undercounted in labour force surveys, the number could be farly higher in 2010. The domestic work was highest as a percentage of total employment in Latin America and the Caribbean (7.6 per cent) followed by the Middle East (5.6 per cent). Women are accounted for about 83 per cent of counted domestic

Issues and Challenges faced by Women Domestic workers in Thideer Nagar at Saidapet workers in 2010. However, in only a few countries are more than 1 per cent of men employed in domestic service.

Global and Regional Estimates by the ILO of the Number of Domestic Workers, 2010

S. No	Countries	Domestic workers	As a percentage of total employment
1	Developed countries	3,555,000	0.8
2	India	408,246,900	1.0
2	Eastern Europe	595,000	0.3
3	Asia and the Pacific	21,467,000	1.2
4	(excluding China)	12,077,000	1.2
5	Latin America and the Caribbean	19,593,000	7.6
6	Africa	5,236,000	1.4
7	Middle East	2,107,000	5.6
	Total	4,60,799,900	2.7

Source: ILO-WIEGO, 2013.

Why Women Do This Work

Many factors lead women to enter domestic work as the women are from poor households or disadvantaged communities and they often have few employment opportunities. They may face discrimination based on gender, caste or class, race or ethnicity. Cleaning, cooking, and caring for children and the elderly is almost universally regarded as women's work, so men rarely compete in this job market. Low levels of education and few marketable skills also play a role. However, rural poverty has increased in many countries, causing young women to move to urban areas in search of employment. Therefore, most of the women are employed in this work.

Challenges of Domestic Workers

Domestic workers are facing a lot of problems in their workplaces like low wages, lack of job security, longer hours of work, as there is no emergency leave benefit, discrimination in caste and untouchability. Poor women are forced to migrate to cities and foreign countries in order to supplement their families' meager incomes. Many women travel abroad to send money back home in an effort to improve their quality of life in India. However, in travelling abroad, they become vulnerable to corrupt recruitment practices, lack of work contracts, withheld salaries. Live-in domestic workers experience greater isolation, less privacy and more limited mobility. Living conditions are frequently sub-standard. They are also more vulnerable to physical/sexual abuse by employers. Migrant domestic workers often live in the employers' home, facing not only the challenges of live-in domestics but also abuses within the recruitment system and from police and immigration authorities, including advance commission fees, withheld wages, and verbal, physical, or sexual harassment. Brokers face the challenges of domestic workers, but these are compounded by the "extra-legal" operations of their recruiters and the near-bondage conditions they may live in. Some recruiters keep the workers certificate for such a long time for their demands.

Primary Objectives

1. To study the challenges of the women who are domestic workers.

2. To empower them and enable them with decision making skills.
3. To analyse the working conditions.

Main objectives

1. To understand social security needs of the domestic workers.
2. To examine factors affecting life of women in domestic work.

Methodology

One of the Thideer Nagar Slum in Chennai City has been selected based on convenience. Most (38 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Therefore, more number of domestic workers in the particular locality has been chosen for the study.

Aim of the study

The present study aims to assess the knowledge and practices related to domestic workers to understand their rights and government schemes and roles for their enhancement of life.

Materials and Methods of the study

A cross sectional study was conducted by the researcher. I visited the study area Thideer Nagar of zone 9 of the Chennai Corporation and interviewed the respondents. A systematic sampling procedure was adopted and interview questionnaire was used.

Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling techniques for the research which was based on the geographical location of the adopted areas of the study has been selected.

Field of Study

The study is pertaining to the Loyola College adopted Thideer Nagar area slum of Zone 9 in the corporation of Chennai. The domestic workers who are residing in slums of Thideer Nagar have been the samples for the study. This study has been analyzed to particularly find out the issues and challenges faced by the domestic workers.

Research Design

The descriptive designs are used for this study. In this study the researcher has attempted to find out the major issues and challenges faced by the domestic workers. Empowerment and decision making will be given for their betterment of life.

Statement of the Problem

Most of the domestic workers are uneducated, widows, deserted women and unaware to register their name in domestic welfare office. At present, domestic workers often receive very low wages, they have to work for excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement. Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation. These are the reasons for selecting the present study.

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Data Collection: Data collection consists of primary and secondary sources.

- a) The Primary Source of data is the interview schedule. The researcher will collect information from the respondents.
- b) The Secondary data will be collected from , Journals, magazines, periodicals, newspaper, books, and website, on line, Mobile phone, Internet, iphone, iPod, twitter, base book, libraries and digital libraries.

Pre-Test

In view of the present study, the needs and necessity was found out through the questionnaire, the researcher has done pre-testing with 50 domestic workers. Pre-testing has given us more clarity for conducting the study and in order to finalize the questionnaire.

Interview Schedule and Data Collection

Pretested structured interview schedule was developed. Pretesting of the interview schedule was conducted in order to improve the clarity of the questions and response options. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information about the respondents, knowledge regarding issues and challenges faced by the domestic workers.

Method of Analysis

It was decided to collect the necessary information from approximately 50 respondents. For collecting the data, the respondents were contacted individually and given a brief about issues and challenges. Data required for the study were collected through an interview schedule and statistical tools were used for data analysis.

Importance of the Study

Domestic workers in Slums are uniformly characterized by inadequate provision of basic infrastructure and public services to sustain health such as water, sanitation, and drainage. Since many of these settlements are illegal, slum dwellers often have no official addresses and are commonly denied basic rights and entitlements including right to vote, public education and health care etc. Therefore the study has been selected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Domestic workers earn an average of 40 per cent of the wages paid to other women workers, while the comparable ratio for men is 67 per cent. The proportion of domestic workers with labour contracts or social protections is negligible when compared to other occupations.

The below table indicates the profile of domestic workers in the research study. Most(34%) of the domestic workers are in the age group of 30 to 40 and followed by that 32% of the respondents are in the age group of 20 to 30 years in the study. There are only 4 percent of child domestic workers who were interviewed for the present study and they are in the age group of 15 to 20 years and 16 percent of the respondents are in the age group of 40 to 50 years. Twelve percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are in the age group of 50 to 60 years and 2 percent are above the age of 60 years.

Table 1: Age Profile of domestic workers

S.No	Age(in years)	Percentage
1	15-20	4
2	20-30	32
3	30-40	34
4	40-50	16
5	50-60	12
6	60 and above	2
7	Others	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

Table 2: Marital Status of domestic Workers

S. No	Marital Status	Percentage
1	Married	24
2	Widows	38
3	Never Married	2
4	Separated	10
5	Transgender	2
6	Deserted	24
7	Others	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

The above table shows the marital status of domestic workers in the study. Most (38 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Twenty four percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. Only 2% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are unmarried and another 2% of the domestic workers are transgender. Ten percent of the women are living alone in their houses without anybody to support them.

Table 3: Profession of the husbands of domestic Workers

S. No	Profession	Percentage
1	Daily wages Labourer	10
2	Auto driver	4
3	Office Peon	2
4	Office Cleaners	2
5	Self-employed	2
6	Driver	2
7	Others	2
	Total	24

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

The above table analyses the profession of the husbands of domestic workers in the study. Most (38 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives

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due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Twenty four percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. At the most of 10% of domestic workers husband are daily wage employees and followed by that, 4% of the respondents are auto drivers. Only 2% of the domestic workers husband is self-employed and another 2% of domestic workers husband is driver and also 2% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are other employed.

Table 4: Employment in Current Households

S. No	Number of years	Percentage
1	Less than 2years	46
2	2-4 years	34
3	4-6 years	14
4	6-8 years	4
5	8-10 years	2
6	10 and above	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

The above table indicates the employment pattern in current households in the research study. Most(46%) of the women are employed as domestic workers for less than 2 years and followed by that 34% of the women are working for 2-4 years and only 14% percent of the women employed as domestic workers were working for 4-6 years. Four percent of the women interviewed for the present study are working for 6-8 years and another 2% of the women were working for 8-10 years. Domestic work which is freely chosen and performed in an environment of equity and human dignity while promoting individual and collective rights at work, social protection and occupational safety and health.

Table 5: Leave Negotiated with domestic workers

S. No	Days of Leave	Percentage
1	0	76
2	1	12
3	2	6
4	3	4
5	5	0
6	More then 5	0
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

The above table shows the leave negotiated with domestic workers in the study. Almost (76 %) of the domestic workers have not taken leave as they have been denied leave for even one day and they have been told that they can take unpaid leave. Twelve percent of the domestic workers were given paid leave for one day and six percent of the women were given paid leave for two days. Only 4% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are given 3 days emergency leave in the study and none of the respondents have taken leave for five days and more.

Table 6: Number of times that a workers works in a Household

S. No	Number of Times	Percentage
1	Once a day	50
2	Twice a day	30
3	Three times a day	0
4	Half-day	6
5	Full day	4
6	Others	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2016

The above table shows the number of times that a worker works in a particular household in the study. Almost (50 %) of the domestic workers were working once a day and followed by that 30% of the domestic workers are working twice a day under the study and followed by that, 6% of the respondents are working for half a day(3 to 4 hours) . Only 4% of the respondents are working as full time workers in the study.

Major Findings of the Study

The hard life of domestic workers has been documented in this study as it shows that almost 90 percent of them work without government stipulated minimum wages and without a weekly day off. The findings of the study of the personal and family profiles, working conditions and wage administration of domestic workers in Thideer Nagar are not satisfactory. Some of the specific demands are that domestic work should also be considered as labor. Lack of decent working conditions, including specified working hours, leave, paid holidays, protection against harassment, social security and access to benefits and also no regulation of recruitment and placement agencies (brokers) who cheat people are some of the findings of the study.

- While (34%) of the domestic workers are in the age group of 30 to 40 and followed by that 32% of the respondents are in the age group of 20 to 30 years in the study.
- Most (38 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Twenty four percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children.
- Interestingly, 10% of domestic workers husband are daily wage employees and followed by that, 4% of the respondents are auto drivers. Only 2% of the domestic workers husband is self-employed and another 2% of domestic workers husband is driver and also 2% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are other employed.
- The study also showed that (46%) of the domestic workers are less than 2 years of service 46% and followed by that 34% of the respondents are in the 4-6 years of service under the study.
- Almost (76 %) of the domestic workers were daily worked without any leave facilities and also was not pay for emergency leave under the study and followed by that, 12% of the respondents were taken leave for a monthly working days.
- While (50 %) of the domestic workers were worked once a day and followed by 30% of the domestic workers worked twice a day under the study and followed by that, 6% of the respondents were worked half-day time period. Only 4% were worked as a full time basic under study.

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- A growing number of countries are taking measures to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers. The momentum needs to be stepped up to ensure that domestic workers worldwide enjoy labor rights just like other workers and are paid adequately.

Recommendations and Suggestions

1. The Government should introduce new laws and policies as well as schemes to protect domestic workers and regulate the sector.
2. Required minimum standard contracts for domestic workers.
3. Strengthen a basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, with a binding mandate to protect domestic workers in India.
4. The Government should introduce domestic Servant Service Policy to monitor contracts and working conditions.
5. Labor Department needs to enforce labour laws regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions for domestic workers.
6. Child domestic workers, have to be provided special care and attention to safeguard their future.
7. The Government needs to regulate benefits like pension, sick leave, and maternity leave for the domestic workers.
8. Strengthen welfare board to safeguard unhealthy and hazardous working conditions for the domestic workers.
9. Domestic workers are hired by third-party agencies or brokers. There are sometimes linked to criminal activity, and charge the domestic worker a lot of money, promising services which are never delivered. Therefore, the government should establish an employment bureau for recruitment of domestic workers.
10. The Government should inspect private households frequently through the Police department to ensure the safety of domestic workers. (Vulnerable working conditions, physical, or sexual abuse)
11. Tasks involved in domestic work are seen as “women’s work”, and so are considered of low status and value and tasks such as gardening, driving, or guarding have higher status and are typically performed by men.

Conclusion

A growing number of countries are taking measures to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers. The momentum needs to be stepped up to ensure that domestic workers worldwide enjoy labor rights just like other workers and are paid adequately. The rights of domestic workers should be protected by the Government and legislations should be enacted. Knowledge sharing forum on domestic workers may be established through domestic welfare board in regional level and we need to raise awareness among domestic workers about their rights. Domestic workers should be educated about their rights. The Government should bring about legislations and reforms and enact welfare measures to strengthen the domestic and employers’ organizations, support rectification and implementation of policies in connection with the Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2008. Domestic workers should be considered like other workers, and they should be entitled to the promotion and protection of human rights, fundamental principles and rights at work, terms and conditions of employment, working time, remuneration, occupational safety and health, social security,

groups with special risks for child domestic workers and dispute settlement, complaints and enforcement. Women employed in domestic work receive lower wages than women working in most other jobs, and lower wages than men working as domestic workers. Empower domestic workers to fight against all forms of injustice and discrimination. Government should establish networking at local, national and international levels for policy and legislative induction of domestic workers. Need based training on capacity building and empowerment of domestic workers for participation in the struggle for justice.

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