



# Domestic Workers: Prospects and Retrospects

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**ABSTRACT:** According to the Census, female employees aged 15 to 59 increased by up to 17% between 2001 and 2011, making the term "domestic worker" synonymous with females. This situation was even worse in cities, it increased to over 70% between 2001 and 2011. This increase in numbers and proportions has not been for better, it has resulted in deteriorating situations for the female workers. The spectrum of domestic workers has reached its zenith and with it the exploitation. Most of the domestic working females are ready to work for minimum wage and in inhumane conditions of work, it has hence become easier to replace them. Not only this replacement is a problem but sexual harassment and exploitation has also been at an alarming rate. In fact, the workers especially the females who are employed in this sector are barely of legal working age. There are 11.5 million migrant domestic workers worldwide, according to the ILO's Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2015 study. This amounts to 17.2% of the estimated 67.1 million domestic workers worldwide. In India, women make up more than two thirds of the unorganized sector's workforce.

What is ironic is that the exploitation has been increasing but there are no particular strong laws safeguarding their rights, they have not been provided with maternity benefits, medical health facilities or even 'the surviving minimum wage'. Hardly any states have a fixed minimum wage, even if they have, the fixed rate is very arbitrary not keeping in mind the inflation or the development stage of that state. Every situation needs handling, an agreement must be reached between both the employer and the employee. Efforts must be made to reduce the stereotypic image of domestic workers as female only. A union like organization must be established where the workers have a say in their working, some slab rates and minimum working conditions should be setup to reduce the exploitation of the workers. This paper will cover the basic problem and challenges faced by the domestic workers especially by females and the paper will include suggestions and action plan for their upliftment.

**KEYWORDS:** Domestic Workers, Female Domestic Workers, Women Exploitation, Upliftment, Current Scenario, Issues and Challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

Human society is complex and has been both diverse and dynamic since inception. The idea of distinction serves as the foundation of society. Because the individuals that make up society are diverse, society demonstrates diversity. In patriarchal Indian society, men are still seen as the main source of income for their families. The quickest rate of growth is being seen in women's involvement in all socio-political, educational, economic, and development affairs. Although Indian women have begun to leave their homes, they still have a long way to go to influence society's attitudes in a favourable direction on a cultural, social, and economic level. Traditionally, Indian women were housewives, but in recent years, increased education and awareness, together with the rising cost of living, have encouraged them to pursue employment. Men typically do not offer any assistance with household chores, while women typically shoulder various responsibilities. Working women's lives are consequently incredibly stressful.

Paid domestic employment has now become a need for a sizeable portion of the urban population as a result of the social shift. A significant and expanding portion of the workforce today, particularly for women, is domestic work.

*Who are domestic workers?*

Under the ILO Convention 189, a domestic worker is “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship”. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) “classifies the following occupations as domestic labour: housemaid/servant, cook, gardener, gatekeeper/chowkidar/watchman, governess/baby-sitter, tutor, driver and others.” Domestic workers are particularly susceptible to violations of human rights because of the way that the concept of domestic employment has been gendered. They frequently put in unreasonably long hours of work for little to no remuneration, and they hardly ever have access to social protections. Domestic worker falls under the category of unorganized sector thus there is no prescribed regulations for checking up their conditions. Since they do not have legal contracts, they have no bargaining power, no legal protection, insufficient welfare programmes, and pitiful incomes.

*Gender and Domestic Work*

One in every 25 women workers worldwide, according to the ILO, is a domestic worker. Only a significant number of males work in the industry and take up employment as butlers, drivers, or gardeners, but it is still a largely feminine industry with women making up 80% of all domestic employees. This occupation has become a patent occupation for women. Domestic work is seen as an impure occupation and a job for menials, and is still dominated by the cast system and patriarchy. Official estimates of the number of domestic employees in India range from 4.2 million to more than 50 million, according to unofficial estimates. Domestic workers are overwhelmingly female and comprised of girls. Women were responsible for 75% of the rise in domestic workers in India between 2000 and 2010. More than two-thirds of all domestic employees in India were employed in metropolitan areas in 2009–2010, according to the 2014 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study. Compared to Indian males, Indian women perform around 15 times more housework.

Domestic workers are comprised of three main groups:

- Live-in domestic workers: worker who works full time for a single employer, lives on the business's property or in a rental unit supplied by the employer, and does not go home after work each day.
- Part-time domestic worker: a person who either works a certain number of hours per day for one or more companies or does a specific job each day for each of the many employers.
- Full-time domestic worker: worker who works a certain number of hours (often a full day) for a single employer each day and then goes home each day after work.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY DOMESTIC WORKER**

The real problem lies where people say, we will eat first and they later, they are not allowed to sit on the chair, floor is where they are meant to be, they are only allowed to address us by our title and never ever by names.

*Working Conditions:* There are no official contracts and no provisions for maternity leave, weekly holidays, or other benefits. Numerous rights of domestic workers have been violated as a result of this lack of oversight, including extended working hours. Sexual assault is a risk for female domestic employees, particularly those who reside with their employers.

*Unregulated and underpaid:* They are not paid accordingly and they are paid less, the wages of domestic employees depend on a variety of elements, including their productivity, working hours, social standing, skills, their need for flexibility, and other labour market variables. They frequently put in extra hours yet are not compensated enough.

*Task division determined by caste:* Besides patriarchy, caste structure is a governing factor which decides the nature of the work to be done by the worker. If a worker belongs to a low caste family, he/she won't be allowed to touch kitchen or she won't be hired for the care of the baby. The higher caste women are into kitchen while the backward ones are for cleaning.

*Non-recognition of skills:* As a domestic work is considered as unskilled work so women are opting it as an option for employment. The irony of the society lies in the fact that household cooking is considered unskilled while cooking as a chef in a restaurant is a skilled task. The wages are in accordance with the skill.

*Will to continue as a domestic worker:* Most of the domestic workers are doing their jobs only to earn as they don't have any other means, they don't work willingly but as a mere responsibility to let the household meet its basic needs.

*No formal leaves and benefits:* The domestic workers do not enjoy any benefits of leaves and even if they skip a day or two, they are charged for their absence. They get other benefits on basis of their performance or on some occasion life festivals. They don't have any fixed number of leaves which they can take, even during maternity leave are not given, despite they have to leave their jobs during that time.

*Sexual harassment:* The domestic workers are major victim of this, where they are pushed into such assault and they are not even heard just because of their profession. They are even given option to earn more money if they get indulge into physical relation.

*Health problems:* The domestic workers are easy target of getting attacked by diseases due to improper maintenance of health and prolonged ignorance about the symptoms of the disease leads to major health issues. They have poor access to health services, generally falling prey to non-registered doctor/practitioner which further endanger their health and wellbeing.

There are many problems which the women domestic workers are facing day to day without any one there to listen to their grievances. The profession is seen as an impure profession, they don't have any respect in the society as a member. They are often objectified according to their work and they not only face problems at their workplace but also at their household. People want to have help but no one is ready to accept them as reputed member of the society.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

To study about the problems faced by the female domestic workers in their day-to-day life.

### **NEED OF THE STUDY**

The need of the study arises due to the fact that domestic workers face many problems not only in their professional life but personal life also. The domestic workers are striving hard to achieve a better status. Through this study the researcher will focus on the major issues faced by them and not only discussing them but also will conclude with suggestions to uplift their status in the society.

#### *Objective of the study*

- To prepare the profile of the respondents
- To study their educational status

- To highlight the problems faced by the respondents.

### *Operational Definition*

Domestic worker- The term "women domestic workers" in the survey refers to any woman over the age of 18 who lives with them and has been hired, either part-time or full-time, to do household responsibilities.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### *Scope of the study*

This study was carried out to learn more about the situation and future of domestic workers employed in houses. The study's goal is to learn more about the difficulties domestic workers have while doing their jobs and how, in light of social work expertise, such difficulties might be resolved. The study's focus is on domestic employees' future prospects and an analysis of the type of work they now conduct in the past.

### *Area of the study*

The study was conducted in Triveni Nagar area of Lucknow district.

### *Research design*

A descriptive study is one that aims to describe anything, including any relationships, opinions, or processes that exist. Due to the researcher's description of the issues facing female domestic workers, the study's research design is descriptive.

### *Population*

Population is the number of total units out of which a sample of a study is selected. In this study, the population comprises of the female domestic workers who are working in the selected area.

### *Sampling procedure*

Sample size: 15

Sample technique: Purposive sampling technique

### *Sources of data*

Both primary and secondary sources were used to gather the study's data, with primary sources being the respondents themselves. Newspaper stories and academic papers were used to gather secondary data.

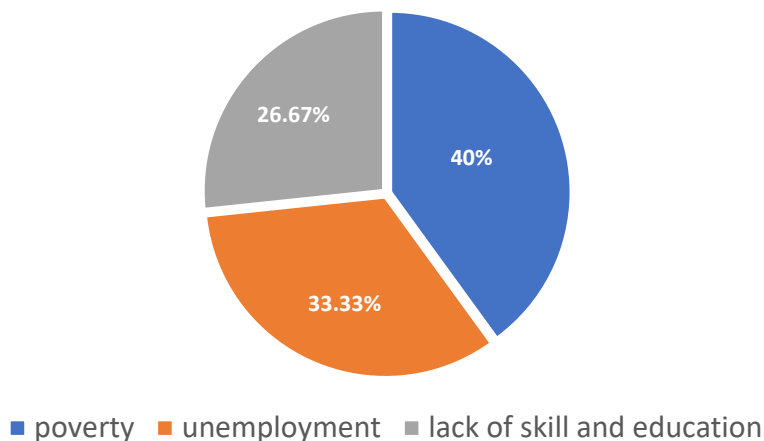
### *Tools of data collection used*

The researcher used interview schedule as tool for the data collection. Interview schedule: An interview schedule is a guide that the researcher will be using while conducting the interview.

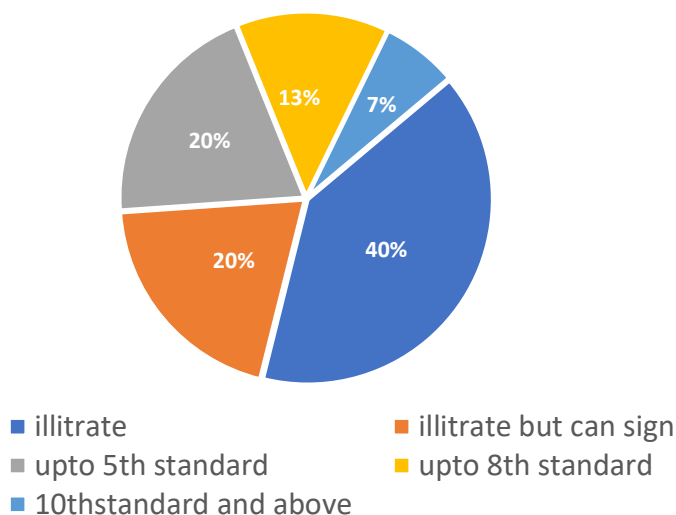
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Figure 1 reveals that poverty is the main cause why these people have opted domestic work as their occupation. About 40% people claimed poverty as the main reason behind their situation. The study also directs toward the social problem of unemployment as a major factor which led them to in the pool of domestic works. 33.33% domestic worker blamed the lack of opportunity in providing service and ended up unemployed. The rest 26.67% lacked any special skill or education so they have ended up being domestic workers. Figure 2 shows that the majority of the respondents were educationally backward. 40% were illiterate while 20% knew only to write their names and could sign. 20% studied up to 5th standard while 13% crossed 8th

standard. Only 7% were high school pass. The importance of education has raised so the younger ones are into studies while the aged ones are satisfied with their level of education.



**Figure 1: Contributing factors which ended up respondents in this occupation**



**Figure 2: Education level of the respondents**



**Figure 3: Problems faced by the respondents**

Figure 3 shows that all the respondents faced some or the other occupational problems. The majority of the respondents were facing the problems of low wages about 33.33% respondents, as they work for long hours still the payment is too low. 13.33% respondents conveyed that ill treatment was the problem faced while 20% were burdened with the heavy workload. 26.67% respondents revealed that they were not given any formal leaves and were given leave on the basis of wage cut.

## **CONCLUSION**

The level of awareness about the importance of the education have been increasing and if we see though the research the new generation is into education more than the previous generation. The respondents in the age group of 35 and above were mostly illiterate but the younger one at least knew how to read and sign. The attitude towards education varied from respondent to respondent, few had zeal to continue with further education. They were not satisfied with their level of education. They mostly live in rented houses and pay nominal rent monthly, while other live in slums or thatched houses (jhuggies, jhopadi). The condition of the houses in which they live are not up to the mark they are working to improve their living condition. All the respondents were in the opinion that they will not let their future generation to work as a domestic worker and are willing to anything for the same cause. The hardship they have faced will never be faced by their children is a promise to themselves. And the maid driving force for them to work in such condition despite facing problems daily is their family and children. The respondents in the area are not known to any union of domestic workers neither they are willing to come up and be a leader and form one. They are interested in some kind of advocacy that too which is not self-advocacy. They want their issues to be raised and want their conditions to be improves.

### *Suggestions*

- The domestic workers should be paid fair wages and their wages should be linked to inflation rate in the economy.
- There should be frequent revisions in their wages as per the exigencies of time.
- Wages of the domestic workers should be paid to them on time to them so that they are able to pay their dues on time.
- Wages of the domestic workers should be market linked and not on demand-supply based.
- Domestic workers working in the home-setting require certain special skill which makes them eligible as a working professional and thus being a professional they have certain rights. Their right to leave should be respected accordingly.
- Workers should not be subjected to pay-cuts for their forced leave and the society should be sensitive and sympathetic towards them.
- Ill-treatment meted out to workers is another area of concern, such that most often they are not treated as humans and their human rights are encroached, and they are subjugated to bear harsh behavior of their owners for some silly mistakes. This practice should be abolished and the owners should be made more sensitive towards them.
- Workload of the domestic workers should be lessened so that the quality of work is improved. It is in the mutual interest of both the worker and the owner that domestic helpers are no put to unnecessary work which is outside their work domain.
- The jurisdiction and nature of work should be well defined and if possible, should be documented and counter signed by both the parties to contract.

- Physical, mental and sexual harassment of the domestic helpers should be dealt with on priority basis and zero tolerance policy should be adopted by the concerned authorities upon receiving complaints regarding any such incidents. The domestic helpers should receive fair treatment in matters concerning redressal of their complaint regarding harassment and they should not be pressurized to take their complaint back.
- A committee should be formed at colony level or ward level incorporating the local corporator and the representatives of both the parties be it owners and the helpers which can look into the issues concerning domestic helpers and their owners.
- This committee should also issue registration certificates to the helpers and in the process it would have a record of the domestic workers employed in the concerned society. The complete profile of the helpers will be maintained and a copy of that record should be attached to local police stations.

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