

A study of the Problems of Female Domestic Workers in D.C. Colony of Karnal City

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1. Introduction

Domestic workers are the workers who are unskilled, semi-skilled or untrained and different names are used to address them such as maid, *bai*, *aii*, *kamwali*, *jhee*, *ayah* and *dai* etc. The nature of their work is temporary and used to do their work on monthly wages basis. The time and working hours are not fixed as their working hours depend upon the suitability of the owners of the house. Lot of definitions have been given to define the term 'domestic workers' from time to time. "Domestic servant means any person who earns his livelihood by working in household of his employer and doing household chores", and "housemaid means a woman servant who performs household chores for wages" (GOI, 2004). The International Labour Organization (ILO) comprehensively defines a domestic worker as "someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages" (quoted in Kundu, 2007). Apart from pitiable working conditions, the domestic workers have many problems such as low wages, problem in getting identity card, residence, disease, debt pressure, failure to give higher education to their children, strain for taking their kids with self, exploitation & abuses of human rights are major one. Various scholars attempted to depict their status in general and particular aspects such as Mehta's(1960) study also finds some problems domestic servants' such as imbalanced marriage and family life, their poor housing conditions, low wages, long working hours and ambiguous conditions of service, overall poor economic level, backward educational status, and lack of leisure activities & modes of relaxation. He also revealed that more than 50 percent were illiterate and the remaining had just primary education. Their salary was just only twenty rupees and the maximum was seventy rupees. Either more than half be miserable from some physical problems. Ravichandran(1979) also finds out in his study that 60 percent of women workers linked to scheduled castes. Drucker's (1980) study observes that the labour force participation of married women under age of fifty is now just as high as that of men. And also he states that most of the married women stay in the labour force after first child. Kanungo's(1981) study on domestic worker tells that only 60 percent were literate who could just read and write, and 20 percent of them had received formal schooling of two to three years. About 48 percent were recruited by their parents, 40 percent through middlemen and 12 percent by self –approach. Kanungo(1981) also depicts that average income of domestic worker girls were between thirty to sixty rupees per month. The health conditions of these girls were not satisfactory due to irregularity of food. Domestic worker's work often went on till eleven in the night. Caldwell's(1983) study also related to domestic servants satisfaction criteria about job favourably in terms of job characteristics, rather than in terms of variations in job dimensions, leading to differences in job satisfaction important

for female than for male workers, especially for married ones. Gathia (1983) related to the findings that female the domestic workers are seen busy in household tasks, which comprise washing, utensils, floor cleaning, washing of clothes, cooking, ironing taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family as well as some outdoor tasks, such as buy of vegetables, taking care of household pets etc. Rohila(1984) also found that the female sanitary workers of domestic arena work in an environment which is unhealthy, it may contribute to a sense of uneasiness and that work done in poor physical condition over a long period of time may result in dissatisfaction with the job. Karlekar (1987) in his study finds that domestic worker has taken some independent action and choice-making that is impossible for women who are belonging to the poorest classes and castes. Miranda and Mahadevan's (1988) study shows that Stomach ailment, menstrual problems, anemia, and general weakness were the common medical problems reported by the majority of the women domestic servants. Thomas's(1992) study pointed out that 70% women were sole bread earners while 60% had six to eight dependent children and in other side their husbands were unemployed or underemployed. They were facing normally quarrels in their houses. Gothoskar, (2005) observed that the middle and upper class in order to keep their upward mobility and status symbol have withdrawn themselves from household duties. Maximum of domestic worker comprise of women and children and they are always underprivileged in terms of monetary benefits, incentives, working hours and other benefits. Dinat and Peberdy(2007) also reported that domestic workers were still working as domestic workers was because they needed to provide education for their children. They saw domestic work as the only work available for them, given their lack of skills and education. The study by Dar & Rani(2014) also shows that reasons for their vulnerable condition are caste difference, unequal gender relations, poor economic background, irregular work, very little or no bargaining power, lack of credit facilities, drug addiction of their male partners, death of husband and lack of assets. There are four types of domestic workers:

1. Unskilled domestic workers
2. Semi – skilled domestic workers
3. Skilled domestic workers
4. Highly – skilled domestic workers

2. Research Design and Objectives

Present study was undertaken on micro level to have a more general profile of domestic maids at their workplace i.e. the urban area of Karnal City in Haryana. As the domestic workers represent the unorganized sector and their conditions are not much better in the society. Likewise, the domestic maids are also considered to the more vulnerable group of the society. The study is based on both analytical and descriptive

research design which aims to have an in-depth understanding of the following objectives –

1. To know the socio- economic conditions of the domestic workers (respondents).
2. To examine the problems being faced by the respondents.
3. To understand the relationship between employer and respondents.

3. Sampling Profile and Tool

For present study, the D.C. Colony in the urban area of the Karnal Municipal Corporation in Haryana was chosen as the universe of the study. Here, 90 women working in the houses of the other as domestic workers (including children) were selected by using snow ball & purposive sampling methods. The data was collected with the help of interview schedule technique which was designed in two parts, the first was related to the socio-economic profile of the respondents and the second was associated with the other objectives of the study. With a view to have more relevant information from the respondents and to avoid subjectivity, up to some extent, the observation method has also been employed. For having proper classification, tabulation and analysis of the raw & zigzag data, duly filled up responses of the respondents in interview schedules were set and feed in SPSS (Statistical Packages in Social Sciences).

4. Findings

The study tries to know about the nature of the problems of domestic workers in the context of the socio- economic background of the respondents. Here, in context of age, the study shows that half (1/2th) of the respondents belong to 31 to above 40 years and the majority of respondents 74.4% are married & approx. 2/3rd respondents are living with their husband.

The findings are similar to the study of Thomas(1992) who pointed out that 70% women were sole bread earners while 60% had six to eight dependent children and in other side their husbands were unemployed or underemployed. The majority (52.2 %) of the respondents have only two earning hands in their family. In context of caste, the majority of respondents i.e. (45.6) % is from backward castes. These finding resembles with the results of Karlekar (1987) that domestic worker has taken some independent action and choice-making that is impossible for women who are belonging to the poorest classes and castes.

A fair majority of respondents (68.9%) are engaged in the works as cleaning & washing of utensils etc . Similar findings are traced out by Gathia (1983) that female the domestic workers are seen busy in household tasks, which comprise washing, utensils, floor cleaning, washing of clothes, cooking, ironing taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family as well as some outdoor tasks, such as buy of vegetables, taking care of household pets etc. The study depicts that the majority i.e. 72.2% of respondents are engaged in their present work due to their lower economic condition followed by 22.2% respondents who are doing this work due to the bad habits of their husband (i.e. drunkenness and such like other etc.). About 41.4% respondents reported to have spent less than 6 years & only 3.3% have spent a longer

time i.e. above 20 years in the present work. The data reveals that approx.1/3rd respondents reported to spend whole day in their present work. In this context the findings of Kanungo(1981) depicts that domestic worker's work often went on till eleven in the night.

The data represents that the maximum of domestic workers/ respondents (83.3%) reported that they do not have their own residence and are residing in a rented house. The stunning fact revealed from the data is that majority of respondents (86.7%) are compelled to live in a single room house.

The study further highlights that 74.4% respondents used to earn Rs.800-1200 per month from each house. According to data, the majority of the respondents (58.9) do earn Rs. 3000-4000 per month, 27.8% respondents do earn Rs.5000-6000 & only 2.2% respondents are able to earn more than Rs.7000 per month. It is clear that approximately3/4th respondent's monthly income is Rs. 3000-6000. A fair majority of respondents i.e. (94.4%) reported that every year they used to increase their wages by themselves and the rate of annual increment of all respondents is Rs.50-100. The present findings are similar to a way back study of Ravichandran(1979) who find the average salary of female domestic workers between 20-70 rupees and as per Kanungo(1981), it was between thirty to sixty rupees per month

5. The problems being faced by the respondents

The study examines the problems being faced by the respondents and in that the collected data represents that 23.4% respondents used to come at their work place from a distance of 3km to 4 km from their dwelling house. A fair majority i.e. approx.4/5th of the respondents are working in four and more than four houses. 1/3rd of the respondents have reported to suffer from health problem. Here 66.7% respondents reported to have the problem of different types of disease. These findings have the similarity with the study of Rohila(1984) who found that the female sanitary workers of domestic arena work in an environment which is unhealthy, it may contribute to a sense of uneasiness. Further Miranda and Mahadevan's (1988) study also shows that Stomach ailment, menstrual problems, anemia, and general weakness were the common medical problems reported by the majority of the women domestic servants.

The study reveals that 48.9 % respondents have to go to their work when they do not feeling well. 1/4th respondents are also facing the problem of their kid's health. The study depicts that approx. 31.1% respondents used to take their kids with themselves at the time of work. The data depicts that the majority of respondents i.e. (88.9%) do not have the knowledge about govt. policies for their welfare & only 10% respondents have found known about govt. policies. 88.9% respondents could not take their meal at proper time.

6. The relationship between respondents and their employer.

According to collected data 43.3%.respondents reported that they do not have permission to seek leave from the owner. Therefore, it is clear that approx.40 respondents have burden

to go daily on work and they do not have the time to take rest. The study further found that a majority of respondents i.e. approx. 60% told that they have to do the pending work of the leave availed. 42.2% respondents reported to face the problem of comments from the house owners.

The maximum respondents i.e. 72.2% do not have the problem of deduction of wages in case they avail leave. The study denotes that 40% respondents do not get advance in their urgency and 34.4% respondents reported to get advance in urgent situations. Only 58.9% respondents to receive any gift etc. at any festivals or other occasions. The data denotes that 76.7% respondents used to get extra wages, while 23.3% are not getting extra wages for the extra work done by them. A fair majority of respondents i.e. 82.2% used to reach their home between 3pm-7pm. Only 20% respondents found satisfied by doing this job and a fair majority of respondents i.e. approximately 80% do not want to continue this work. The study reveals that the majority of respondents are interested to leave their present job if they get superior job from the present job. It is also found that the majority of respondent's owners used to get their household work done by the respondents in their presence only.

The majority of respondents doing present work due to their low economic condition according to different age groups. According to the study 21.4% respondents are doing this work from more than 20 years. The present study concluded that higher is the age of respondents and higher is their work experience.

The study shows that the majority are doing their present work for 3-4 hrs in a day. The study highlight that the majority of respondents are getting maximum wages i.e. between Rs.1000-1200.

According to the study the satisfaction level of respondents as per their age, whereas in case of 10-15 years age group 90.9% respondents are not satisfy with their present work. According to caste the majority of respondents in all three castes are doing present work due to their lower economic conditions. So, the data concluded that the majority of respondents have the long working hours per day at their present work place. The study denotes that the majority of respondents irrespective of their castes perform the works pertaining to cleaning the houses & washing the utensils. According to the study, low economic condition is the dominant reason as reported by the majority of the respondents of all marital status. The study concluded that the majority of married, unmarried and widow respondents have the work experience of 1-10 yrs., 0-5yrs and 11-20 yrs & above respectively. The study highlight that the majority of widows and unmarried respondents have the distance of a radius of

2kms.from their work place to residence. The study shows that there is no significant relationship between the marital status and the wages. The collected data concluded that the majority of the respondents as per their marital status are not satisfied with their jobs. The study shows the majority of the respondents from all marital status cover 4 and above 4 houses daily for their present work. The present study depicts that the majority of respondents irrespective of their marital status do not attend to their present work when they are not feeling well. According to study the majority of the respondents, irrespective of their marital status, perform the works pertaining to cleaning of the houses and washing the utensils. The study represents that the majority of respondents of all marital status used to reach their home between 3pm-7 pm and later. According to the study the low economic condition is the dominant reason as reported by the majority of the respondents of all irrespective total monthly wages respondents & the majority of respondents have been working present work for 1-20 years. The study concluded that the majority of respondents used to work for 5 to 7 hours in a day. The data denotes that the majority of respondents are getting Rs.1000-1200 as a monthly wages from each house & the majority of respondents cover four houses to five houses daily. The study represents that the majority of respondents of all categories of monthly wages used to reach their home between 3pm-7pm and later. The collected data shows that the majority of respondents increased their wages own their own, and not by the owner. According to the study the majority of respondents in all irrespective categories of wages are getting increment after one year. The study concluded that the majority of respondents in all categories of monthly wages are not getting advance in urgency. The study depicts that the majority of respondents, irrespective of their total monthly wages, perform the works pertaining to cleaning of houses and washing utensils. The collected data shows that the majority of respondents are not familiar about the government policies in all irrespective monthly wages.

7. Conclusion

On the perusal of the data collected above, it may be concluded that the majority of the domestic workers have to get engaged in their present work mainly due to their poor economic condition. They have been overburdened with work at both places i.e. owners' house and their own as well. They are poorly paid and their living condition is not much hygienic. They have long working hours and their livelihood depends upon the mercy of the person in whose house hold they have been engaged. In most cases, it has been found that rarely any house owner use to infuse faith in them. Apart from them, they are un-organised and mostly un-aware about the welfare policies of the govt.

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