

A Study on the Working Environments of Home Workers in Salem District

Indumathi .C

MBA, Department of Management Studies

Bharath Institute of Science and Technology,

Selaipur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600 073

Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research

ABSTRACT

Domestic work, in general is undervalued and poorly regulated, and many domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected. Unlike other forms of labour market activity, domestic work takes place in an unconventional place of work – a household. Limited resources and heavy workload may aggravate exposure to stressful working conditions and adversely affect family lives. With the objective of examining the problems faced by domestic workers in Salem District a qualitative study was undertaken in four schedules during November-December 2015. The observations of the focus group discussion were tabulated and reported. Percentage analysis and chi-square test was used to give a better idea about the state of affairs. The problems that informally employed domestic workers encounter start with the vagueness in their job description, heavy workload and longer working hours.

Keywords: Domestic worker, live-in worker, Focus group discussion

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic workers are persons who provide domestic services paid in cash or kind in one or more housing units. A domestic worker is any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship. The two central elements of the statistical definition to domestic workers are:

- It is performed within an employment relationship and
- It is performed in or for a household.

Thus a domestic worker is employed in or for a household rather than on the type of task he/she performs.

“Domestic work” means household work like sweeping, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, cooking and such other manual work as is mutually agreed between the employer and domestic worker carried out at the work place (Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act No 1 of 2009).

“Domestic servant” means any person who earns his livelihood by working in the household of his employer and doing household chores (The Housemaids and Domestic Servants (Conditions of Service and Welfare) Bill 2004, Rajya Sabha).

Domestic workers are not a homogeneous group - they perform tasks varying from cleaning and washing, looking after the older people of the household and the children, guarding the house, driving children to school, gardening, cooking and the list goes on. Many of the occupations listed for a domestic worker can also be performed outside a home- a cook can work in a hotel or a restaurant or a hostel, a gardener in a flower nursery.

NSSO data on employment and unemployment reveals that the number of domestic workers increased by 68 percent in the decade between 1999-2000 and 2009-2010. Domestic work has enabled many women to enter the labour market and benefit from economic autonomy.

Domestic work, in general is undervalued and poorly regulated, and many domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected. The risks they face are generally of a chronic, long lasting nature, herewith implying negative health consequences. In addition, limited resources and heavy workload may aggravate exposure to stressful working conditions and adversely affect family lives.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Unlike other forms of labour market activity, domestic work takes place in an unconventional place of work, i.e. the household. Gaining public acceptance of a household as a place of work is a challenge. Implementation of labour laws such as minimum wages and regularized work hours, which are essential elements of any kind of work, also remain a challenge. Such regulation is complex because the nature of domestic work is unique compared to other forms of work.

Hired domestic workers ease the burden of dual – career households by undertaking household chores in return for remuneration. Despite the benefits this work brings to individual households, the working conditions of domestic workers are worse. The working conditions of the persons engaged in domestic work are largely dependent on the location in which they work and the society that surrounds them. The problems and issues in the workplace for this neglected unorganized sector were considered pertinent.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine the problems faced by domestic workers in Salem District

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

It was proposed to analyze

- The demographic dynamics of the workers in domestic sector.
- The conditions of work prevailing in the domestic sector.
- The issues in work place that lead to occupational stress among the domestic workers.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study was a qualitative study. The participants were selected at random and after winning their confidence, qualitative surveys were organized in Salem District in four schedules during November 2018 and December 2018. The observations were noted, tabulated and analyzed. Percentage analysis was applied to get the big picture of the demographic details and the type of domestic worker.

6. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The researcher facilitated the sessions and observed the casual conversations that happened between the domestic workers. The observations were tabulated for meaningful deductions.

DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Male	24	40
Female	36	60
Total	60	100
AGE		
20-30	18	30
31-40	33	55
Above 40	9	15
Total	60	100
MARITAL STATUS		
Married	42	70
Unmarried	18	30
Total	60	100
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION		
Illiterate	18	30
No formal Education	30	50
School Education	12	20
Total	60	100

TABLE NO 1

Table-1 represents the demographic profile of the domestic workers who were made to participate in the focus group discussion. As depicted in the table, male constituted around 40 per cent of the respondents. With respect to the distribution of the age, it was evident that 55 per cent of the respondents were in the age group between 31 years and 40 years. Out of 60 respondents, 50 per cent had no formal education and 30 per cent are illiterate.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE RESPONDENTS BASED ON THEIR WORKING TIME

PARTICULARS	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
WORKING HOURS		
Less than 8 hours	28	47
8 hours	22	37
More than 8 hours	10	16
EXPERIENCE IN YEARS		
Less than 5 years	14	23
5-10 years	15	25
More than 10 years	31	52
PRESENCE OF BREAK IN BETWEEN WORK		
Yes	31	52
No	29	48

TABLE NO 2

Table-2 is the summary of the observations pertaining to working hours per day, the experience of the respondents in years and the duration of breaks. From the table, it is evident that 37 percent of the respondents worked for 8 hours a day and 25 per cent of the respondents had an experience ranging between 5 to 10 years and 52 per cent of respondents had more than 10 years of experience. With regard to the presence of breaks between works, 52 per cent of respondents agreed that they had breaks.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE RESPONDENTS BASED ON THE TYPE OF DOMESTIC WORK

TYPE OF DOMESTIC WORK	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Part-Time Worker	45	75
Full Time Worker	10	17
Live-In Worker	5	8
TOTAL	60	100

TABLE NO 3

Based on the hours of work and nature of employment relationship, the domestic workers can be classified as part-time worker i.e. worker who works for one or more employers for a specified number of hours per day or performs specific tasks for each of the multiple employers every day, Full time worker i.e. worker who works for a single employer every day for a specified number of hours (normal full day work) and who returns back to her/his home every day after work and Live-in worker i.e. worker who works full time for a single employer and also stays on the the employer premises of the employer or in a dwelling provided by the employer and does not return back to her/his home every day after work.

It is evident from Table-3 that 75% of the participants were part-time workers.

GENDER – WISE CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS BASED ON THEIR SATISFACTION WITH REGARD TO WORKING CONDITIONS

RESPONSES	YES	NO	TOTAL
Male	8	16	24
Female	13	23	36
Total	21	39	60

TABLE NO 4

- Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender and satisfaction with regard to working conditions.
- H₁: There is significant relationship between gender and satisfaction with regard to working conditions.

The calculated value 13.2966 was greater than the table value (3.84). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant relationship between the gender and the satisfaction with regard to working conditions and work environment.

GENDER – WISE CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS BASED ON THEIR SATISFACTION WITH REGARD TO NON-MONETARY BENEFITS

RESPONSES	YES	NO	TOTAL
Male	11	13	24
Female	16	20	36
Total	27	33	60

TABLE NO 5

- Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender and satisfaction with regard to non-monetary benefits
- H₁: There is significant relationship between gender and satisfaction with regard to non-monetary benefits.

Since the calculated value is less than table value, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant relationship between gender and satisfaction with regard to non-monetary benefits.

7. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

The qualitative study carried out in four schedules in two months brought to light the following problems faced by domestic workers in the workplace:

LONG WORKING HOURS

Since the daily and weekly working hours of domestic workers are not regulated, long working hours is the main point of complaint with respect to working conditions. As mentioned above the working day is very much lengthened by assigning works other than the routine work in houses visited for daily cleaning. Live-in domestic workers in particular, worked much longer than the legal 8 hours a day.

LACK OF CLEAR JOB DESCRIPTION

Domestic workers tend to have no clear job description. There is uncertainty as to the scope, method and time period of the work to be done. Many domestic workers, who visited for full-day cleaning work, were asked to do such things as rinsing walls; washing, ironing and re-fixing curtains; washing beds and quilts etc. which should be paid as extra work. A few Workers who were engaged for taking care of elders were asked to do household chores as well.

HEAVY WORKLOADS

There are three aspects of workload that can be stressful. Quantitative workload or overload is a situation where the worker has more work to do than can be accomplished comfortably. Qualitative workload is a situation where the worker has to do a work that is too difficult. Fifteen out of sixty domestic workers who participated in the focus discussion agreed that they were given heavy qualitative workloads in the household. A few workers stood up for their rights asking for extra remuneration for such works.

LACK OF SOCIAL/ NON-MONETARY BENEFITS

For live-in domestic workers, food and lodging has been looked upon as a form of such in-kind remuneration. Those who work on a transitory basis in domestic services are legally left out of the coverage of social security. The expectations with regard to non-monetary benefits were almost uniform among the workers in the domestic sector. The humanistic consideration played a decisive role in the satisfaction with regard to non-monetary benefits. Those who are employed on a monthly basis in domestic services are covered by the security scheme; however many domestic workers and their employers prefer to maintain informality due to various reasons. Further, there is no social security inspection for domestic workers.

HOUSING CONDITIONS

More than 50 per cent of part-time domestic workers were agriculturists and lived in their own dwellings. Income from domestic work was only to supplement their monthly expenditure.

WORKING CONDITIONS

There is a significant relationship between the gender and the satisfaction with regard to working conditions and work environment.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Current initiatives in India like expanding access to health insurance and organizing domestic workers are significant steps towards ensuring decent working and living conditions for domestic workers. Physical and sexual abuse of domestic workers in rural areas which remains unreported in most cases is a major challenge to be addressed.

NGOs can organize various training and capacity building programs for strengthening domestic workers' solidarity in the rural areas. Domestic workers can be organised in groups in their living areas and regular meetings can be held where domestic workers interact with each other to share their experiences. These meetings can also be used to make domestic workers aware of their rights, legal provisions and strengthen their collective bargaining for rights and entitlements.

9. CONCLUSION

In rural area considered for the study, though the workers are unaware about their rights, they are not subject to mental or physical abuse in most cases. Occupational safety is not ensured in certain household jobs as they seem to be safer outwardly. The contribution of domestic workers should be recognized and Continuous education and training programs directed to Occupational Health and Safety by professionals, policy makers, employers and workers, should be regularized. A comprehensive framework including psychosocial risk factors besides the most traditional hazards to initiate a number of integrated actions should be designed to improve working conditions and prevent work-related stress.

10. REFERENCES

- [1] Decent work for domestic workers, Report IV, International Labour conference, 2010
- [2] ILO: Working conditions laws 2006–07: A global review (Geneva, 2008).