



**WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN URBAN
ALIGARH: THEIR LIVES, PROBLEMS
AND ASPIRATIONS**

THESIS

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WOMEN'S STUDIES

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CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the profession of domestic worker or the need of domestic helpers is indispensable for the smooth functioning of any society or country in general and India in particular. According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) (2004-05),²⁵² there are 4.75 million domestic workers in India, of which 3 million are women in urban areas.

There is a positive shift in the employment status among the urban women. The women belonging to the relatively better off sections of the population are increasingly entering the regular/formal/organized sectors of the employment, while the poor women's employment opportunities are often a derivative of this increasing participation of the former section of women. This results into the increasingly passing of the household responsibilities and services of the working women in urban areas on to the hired service providers, which are mostly the women belonging to the poorer households.

The empowerment of women domestic workers is strongly dependent on many developmental factors, which includes access to economic opportunities, increase in their income or improvement in economic condition, their educational development, improvement in living condition, health and nutritional condition, social protection, etc. They all are interrelated, as improvements in one factor have the ability to boost other factors. However, there are significant gaps between chances to improve those factors and their empowerment, due to their low socio-economic background, the nature of their work, lack of employment legislations in their favour, etc. As with the expanding need for care services around the world, paid domestic workers deserve opportunities that address their various livelihood issues. Domestic help services (dominated by the women) have become inseparable to the functioning of the household units as well as of economies, which, therefore comes under the mutual interest of domestics and their employers that decent work must be guaranteed to the women domestic workers.

²⁵²NSSO (2006), *Employment-Unemployment Situation in India 2004-2005*, Round 61st, Report No. 515-I and II, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, New Delhi.

As the employers of women domestic workers should behave with them in decent manner, because they are also human beings and deserve the right to live their life. They also need to have a dignified job, and seek respect from their employer as well as from the family members and from the whole society who generally regards the job of domestic work as menial; and they must get payments rationally determined with respect to their job responsibilities and inflation, and also get some basic facilities of sanitation, rest, refreshment, social security benefits, etc. from their employers.

Against this background, the objectives of our study have been to provide an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic status of the women domestic workers in Aligarh, and also observe the factors affecting their personal as well as work life.

Major Findings of the Study

In the previous discussion chapter, we have listed the general findings of the study along with the reasons and implications of those findings. The findings of our study are more or less consistent with the broad characteristics that emerge from our review of literature. Here, on the basis of those extensive findings, we concluded some major points which have implications on their personal as well as on their work life and development, are as follows:

- Prevalence of general caste women as domestic helpers, illiteracy, large number of dependent family members, large burden of child education but low level of child enrollment, substantial proportion of women married below the legal age of marriage, some little proportion of child labour, old age labour, lack of social security measures, low standard of living, and heavy migrated population to support their families are some of the specific demographic characteristics of women domestic workers in Aligarh. This proves that poverty, heavy dependence of family members, economic compulsion, and migration, followed by lack of education and working skill forced them, despite of their age, to work as domestic workers.
- As majority of the respondents were illiterate or have only up to primary education, so it can be interpreted that illiteracy and low education and hence, low skill and capability, prevented them from joining the high paying and secured formal sector jobs. The wage level of the domestic workers is not enough to live

a quality and financially secure life, as even some of them were incurring debt to fulfill their basic consumption needs. The demographic characteristics like age, religion and caste, have significant influence over the income of the respondents. The respondents under the higher age group, though their proportion in the total number of the respondents is only one-fourth, are better off than the others in terms of earning. The proportion of Muslim respondents earning in the higher income range is somewhat better than the Hindu religion; and majority of the general caste respondents were also earning in the higher income range. There is also a significant association between the income and standard of living index of the women domestic workers in Aligarh, which shows that earning a better income can improve their living standard.

- While a significant proportion of women domestic workers were facing the issues of no entitlement to paid leave and medical allowances, long working hours, large commuting distances, large numbers of houses to work, etc., still majority were satisfied with their job because they have no any other options and this is the only job which reduces their economic burden. Again some of the demographic characteristics like age, caste, religion and literacy level; and monthly income of the respondents are significantly associated with the type of domestic works done by the domestic workers. The majority of the Hindu respondents were engaged in moping and sweeping, while majority of the Muslim respondents were engaged in cooking and cleaning utensils; and while majority of the SC, ST, and OBC respondents were doing moping and sweeping; a higher proportion of the general cast respondents were cooking and cleaning utensils. As majority of the respondents under the lower monthly income range were mostly doing mopping and sweeping, and respondents under the defined medium income range doing cooking and cleaning of utensils, while the higher income range respondents were mostly involved in all type of domestic works and care services (as mostly done by the full time workers).
- On the work front, while some of the women domestic workers were facing the wage related issues, suspicion of theft, and harassment mostly in the form of abusive behavior of their employers, majority were feeling safe and secure at

their work place. However at their home place, majority were facing domestic violence.

- Majority of the women domestic workers do not have any aspirations for their life, while the rest of them have aspirations; and among those who have aspirations, improvement in the living and economic conditions are their major aspirations, while some want other better job also. Due to low earnings, lack of any savings and social protection measures, high consumption and medical needs, abject poverty, etc., their life became so vulnerable that they do not have any desire or even time to aspire for anything. For their children, most of them want schooling, marriage, and job.
- Majority of the women domestic workers were not consuming nutritious food as required for fulfilling the micronutrient needs of woman; and were facing digestion, bone, gynaec, blood pressure, etc. related health problems, and also going through anemia, bad dental hygienic condition, substantial expenditure on medical aid, etc. There is a significant association between the food group's intake of the respondents and their monthly income and Body Mass Index, as majority of the respondents earning lower or medium income and all the underweighted respondents, have consumed less than five food groups; however, the consumption of more than five food groups is somewhat better for the respondents in the higher income range and normal weighted respondent. As around 61 percent of the total respondents have incurred catastrophic health care expenditures, health is a major economic issue for them, which ultimately causes economic loss and increasing vulnerabilities.

On the whole, poverty is reflected in all the aspects of life of women domestic workers in Aligarh. With the help of our findings, we can also say that the employers of the respondents were biased with respect to the caste and religion of the respondents and make discriminations while assigning them the type of work and amount of salary. They were facing insecurities and vulnerabilities related to stable income, large family burden, nutrition, housing, other essential necessities, good health, working condition, exploitation and domestic violence, etc. along with poverty and no any options to flourish their life towards development and sustainability.

Recommendations

- Poverty is the first and foremost challenge or hindrance in the way of women domestic workers towards their development. So, it is the responsibility of the government in general and any type organization or person involved in the process of development to provide them safe and economically secured job opportunities, by considering the gap in their education and skill capabilities, because this type of gap cannot be filled instantaneously. It is intergenerational, as if we give stable opportunities (in the form of paid jobs along with some kind of trainings) to the mothers, which can make them financially capable to educate them.
- Education has the capacity to improve women's opportunities for remunerated work, building confidence, awareness regarding value of nutritious food, health and population control, etc. Women's education should be promoted as a powerful mode of empowerment. It needs to be valued by breaking the orthodox thinking and promoted by the government among the poor men and women through various ground level programs, telecommunications (radio and TV's), and most importantly the effective implementation of existing educational and employment policies at the ground level. So that education can be proved as having strong transformative capacity for women's empowerment.
- Unless realistic investments are made for women's education up to secondary and above levels, promoting vocational skills/trainings at the ground level, etc., their entry into regular and relatively better paying jobs will continue to remain low. Regarding the compulsive participation of women with no means of living, in the work field, it is foremost to focus on measures that can assist them in obtaining better avenues of work, along with other suitable job possibilities.
- As majority of the women domestic workers live under the most deplorable conditions, with little access to proper drinking water and sanitary facilities, hygienic surroundings, effective social and health care facilities, and are therefore more vulnerable to epidemics and developmental challenges. Poverty, low socioeconomic status, low level of education, high fertility, large migrated population, etc., all specify that they need special attention with regard to government housing programs, with adequate lifesaving necessities or urban planning, public health, family planning and reproductive health programs, etc.

- Apart from poverty and other low socio-economic vulnerabilities, lack of awareness regarding the importance of nutritious diet, existing health facilities as well as health benefits, etc. are also the important factors for their deteriorated health conditions. Therefore, a strong and realistic commitment from the government, medical professionals, NGOs, policy makers, teachers, organizations associated with the health issues, etc. are needed to improve the women's health at the ground level.
- Effective monitoring the implementation of the existing national and state level laws and policies as well as making of new amendments is needed, to regulate child labour, domestic workers' labour rights, violence against women at the workplace and also at their homes, access to various subsidized provisions, access to various social service benefits, access to police or law enforcement agencies, etc. So that the essence behind their formulation could be achieved in the form of restricting the various developmental challenges in the way of domestic workers.
- As we found that out of pocket expenditures on health is a major economic issue for the women domestic workers, access to free health care services, provision of essential medicines, etc. can reduce their economic burden. From time to time, though the government has initiated various health schemes such as National Health Mission Free Drugs and Diagnostics Services Initiatives, timely allocation and efficient implementation of these schemes is very much needed.
- Since most of them were in reproductive age group but they barely taking the benefits of nutritional supplement programmes of the government. Therefore Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and ASHA workers should make extra efforts to include them as confectionery.

Scope of the Study

The present study has analysed the various demographic, economic, social, working, personal, health, etc. issues of domestic workers, and found that they were facing various type of vulnerabilities. Their status and conditions are more or less same all over the country, as the findings of our study are consistent with the broad characteristics emerged from our review of literature. So, the present study can be utilized by the government agencies, ministries, NGO's, social organisations,

researchers, and etc. for the formulation of policies or programs for improving their circumstances.

The present study is restricted to only Aligarh city; however, more precise understanding regarding the socio-economic condition of women domestic workers is needed to develop well-targeted interventions that can meet the needs of the women. Therefore, it is very much required to collect data on domestic workers and their working conditions at the national level and state level by focussing research on so many districts and making of comparative inter district and interstate studies, by aggregating the collected data, so as to find out the conditions of women domestic workers, prevailing in the different pockets of our country, and the factors affecting those conditions.

The present study is a quantitative study, and while we have chosen a number of parameters to overview their socio-economic conditions and vulnerabilities, these quantitative parameters could not encompass their overall life vulnerabilities, because we cannot access their emotional side or vulnerabilities from which they have suffered or have been suffering, as the selected parameters (which is from our perspective) can only give the quantitative numbers, and not highlight the issues from their perspective.

So, it is also very important to conduct more and more qualitative studies, like case studies on women domestic workers, etc., so that they can explain their problems and more importantly their aspirations. Likewise, it is also important to highlight some of the social issues attached with the occupation of domestic workers, like issues of untouchability (which is a product of the caste system) and the subsequent division of domestic works on the basis of caste and religion, which causes discriminations by the employers while hiring the domestic servants, as in our literature review, we found that before hiring the domestics most of the employers make sure the caste and religion of the domestic workers, which sometimes results into hiding of their caste from the employers to get the job.

Moreover, it is also very much important to study the conditions of women domestic workers from the perspective of their employers, by conducting surveys on the employers of domestic workers, so as to know their view point or mentality regarding their employees. Last but not the least, as we have found that health is one

of the major issues for the domestic workers, and also we have not inculcate all the significant parameters related with their health as well as nutritional aspects, because these aspect covers wider parameters or issues; therefore, conducting of independent studies on the health and nutritional aspects of women domestic workers would surely add significance to existing literature in general and for the formulation of social programs and their effective implementations.

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