



DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF FEMALE DOMESTIC WORKERS IN AN URBAN SLUM OF CENTRAL DELHI- A MIXED METHOD STUDY.

Dr. Akanksha Tomar*

Resident, Department of Community Medicine, Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi. India *Corresponding Author

Dr. Jugal Kishore

Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi. India

ABSTRACT

Background: Labour pool engaged in informal or the unorganised sector is still among the least investigated employment conditions in ambit of public health research. Present study aimed to assess the living conditions and physical health profile of female domestic workers in an urban slum of central Delhi.

Methods: A pretested questionnaire was used in a house to house survey of an urban slum to interview 100 women working as domestic help assessing their socio-demography and working conditions. Besides, in depth interviews were performed for key informants (n=10) to get detailed assessment of working conditions.

Results: A large proportion of female domestic workers in the study sample were in late thirties. Although majority were literate but found it as most apt job. Majority were currently married and supporting families ranging from 2-15 members. In about 15% of the families they were the only bread winner of the family. Majority were migrants in Delhi from other northern states of India and few were cross border migrants. Majority of the subjects live in insanitary environment. Job security and job satisfaction are very low. Often at times they are subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks.

Discussion: Participants in our study were all from low socioeconomic status living and working in deplorable situation.

Conclusion: More research in this issue as any other occupation in formal or informal sector is recommended.

KEYWORDS : Domestic female workers, urban slum, in depth interview.

Introduction:

Female workers engaged in domestic help make a large chunk in informally employed section. They back the country's economy in an imperative yet masked way. This labour pool not only provide economic abutment to their family but also capacitate another women work force engaged in formal sector. However they themselves lack the perks of vocation on work front as well as the shred of care and consideration required from family. The Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), defines "domestic workers" in Article 1: (a) the term "domestic work" means work performed in or for a household or households; (b) the term "domestic worker" means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship.[1] Although explicit work time regulation, minimum wages or in kind payments, maternity protection has been produced by International labour organisation (ILO), guaranteeing these minimum labour protections to the large and growing group of domestic workers and recognizing their rights as workers.[2] But the gap in implementation is by dint of ignorance at the part of employee and employer. The present study aimed to assess the socio-demography and working conditions of a group of waged housemaids in an urban slum of central Delhi.

Materials and Methods

The study area was a slum located in Central Delhi, consisting of total population of about 3000 comprising of about 450 families. The study group consisted of 100 women, chosen by house-to house visit, who were working in houses in the neighbourhood resettlement colony or elsewhere in the city, as paid housemaids. Only one female per family, who has been working as a domestic worker for at least past one year and currently working, was interviewed so as the sample be representative of more families from the study area. Data collection was done by house-to house visit in the slum. The women under study were interviewed after informed consent by a pretested questionnaire. It includes details about the socio-demography, occupational conditions and physical morbidity profile of the participants. In-depth interviews were performed for the key informants (women engaged as domestic help for > 10 years) so as to get varied comprehensive details of this waged group. Minimum three attempts were made to contact an identified female otherwise excluded from study. For participants who were willing to participate but unable to be interviewed at the time of survey, timings were adjusted as per their convenience. The study was ethically approved from institutional review board. Data was analysed using SPSS version 17.

Results:

Investigator surveyed 113 houses to obtain the required sample. Socio demographic details of the participants is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio demographic details of the participants:

S. No.	Characteristics	%
1.	Age	
	<25	17
	25-60	75
	>60	8
2.	Migration status	
	Local	28
	Migrated: From States	65
	Cross border	7
3.	Marital status	
	Unmarried	9
	Married	72
	Widow/Separated	19
4.	Residence	
	Own house	34
	Rented	66
5.	Type of family	
	Nuclear	42
	Joint	58
6.	No. of children	
	1	4
	2	37
	3 or more	50
7.	Education status	
	Illiterate	27
	Primary	36
	Secondary	22
	High School	15
8.	Monthly per capita income	
	<500	3
	500-1000	36
	1001-1500	43
	>1500	18

A large proportion of female domestic workers in the study sample were in late thirties (range 15-68). Although majority were literate (73%) but only about half (37%) of them had attained secondary or

higher level of education. Majority (77.5%) were currently married and supporting families ranging from 2-15 members (Median 6). In about 15% of the families they were the only bread winner of the family. About 40% of our subjects were migrants in Delhi from other northern states of India and few were cross border migrants from Nepal. Majority of the subjects live in rented single room pucca houses, with no separate kitchen, and with inadequate ventilation, dampness and lack of natural light. The source of drinking water in the area was through supply from Delhi Jal board. About 8-10 houses share a common water connection. There was one sulabh complex in the area, accessed by all the families.

Female workers were of two types: 1) those who work in one house for the whole day and go back to their homes in the evening and; 2) those who work in different houses during the day, performing one or more tasks in each household and go back home in the evening or night.

Details of their working conditions is as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Occupational details of the participants:

S. No.	Characteristics	% (N=100)	Mean#/Median*
1.	Years in occupation		8*
	<5	26	
	5-10	47	
2.	Distance travelled to workplace (kms)		3*
	< 1	27	
	1-5	58	
3.	Time taken to workplace (hrs)		0.75#
	>5	15	
4.	Mode of travel to workplace		
	Walk	58	
	Personal conveyance	19	
5.	Working hours per day		6.2#
	Public transport	23	
	<4	19	
6.	Work days off		
	4-8	42	
	>8	39	
7.	Minimum guaranteed	32	
	On demand	68	
	Yearly increment in wages	47	

These workers often have hectic schedule, with no rest during day time. At night, the average resting period was about 7 hours. They often have to accept deductions from their salaries for the costs of housing and food – even when living in the employer's household is a requirement that primarily benefits the household. Those working in a single house for whole day found their job a bit less hectic and more secured, however perceived it as a constrained earning opportunity. About one fifth travel to far-off workplaces on their own expenses using public transport, where the fare took a considerable amount of their wages. Often at times they are subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks beyond explicit terms without any compensatory monetary or leave privilege. Only about half of them reported yearly increment in wages that too a meagre amount as no stipulated terms are there. Altogether majority of the females (87%) were not contented with their working status taking into account one or the other factor- job security, job satisfaction, authority, self-respect.

Discussion

As shown in results many of these females were the only bread winner of their family, economic handicap is the main driving force behind bearing these oppressive work conditions. Occupation needs more physical labour and insecure for earning after an age so a large number of migrated young female joined the wage work to earn livelihood.[3,5] Although majority were literate but found domestic help as the most apt job as it often needs no skill as women have traditionally been considered capable of doing the household work and these skills are perceived to be innate. However, they work without clear terms of employment, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and job insecurity.[5,6] So all it warrants is recognition and respect and calls for regulation.

Inter-state or the cross border migrants were often those who were engaged in agriculture but shifted to capital as cultivation output was not enough to meet both the ends or non-availability of work throughout the year specifically for cross border migrants. But here too they are striving hard to have bear minimum to lead life of dignity and secure the future of their children.

Studies involving the labour pool of informal sector are in harmony with our findings as this sector invariably belongs to low socio economic strata even after years of toiling.[7-10] It reflects their anguish of a discontented life, however cause of their misery lies in adjunct conditions of oversized families, the social and gender roles of women, access to information and services, substance abuse in families, low importance to education, considering children as a helping hand in earning as soon as possible rather than investing in their education which would pay in long run to pull them out of this vicious cycle of poverty.

Conclusion:

Housemaids represent a major contingent of the unorganised work force in India. Participants in our study were all from low socioeconomic status, living and working in deplorable situation. More research in this issue as any other occupation in formal or informal sector is recommended. Research on attitudes and behaviours of employers towards domestic workers is required too, so as to sensitize towards just and human behaviour.

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