

Girl Child Workers at Domestic Works: an Overview



Social Science

KEYWORDS :

**Sunita Shivashankar
Yelwantagi**

Research Scholar Department of Sociology Gulbarga University Kalaburagi: 585 106
Karnataka

Dr. Jaikishan Thakur

Associate Professor Department of Sociology Government Degree College Mahagaon
Cross, Kalaburagi Karnataka

ABSTRACT

Women working in unorganized sector have many problems and challenges due to their poverty and illiteracy. Women domestic servants are most weaker groups, who are not protected by any of the legislations and legal safeguards. Further, though there are legislations to safeguard the child labour, but none of the legislations were passed to protect the child labourers working at domestic works. Further, the girl children are more participated in domestic works and due to weaker gender, these girl children are facing many of the problems such as abuse, exploitation, sexual harassment, deprivation from education, long working hours, etc. The paper highlighted the status of women domestic servants in general and girl child workers at domestic works in particular. The paper also discussed the legal and ethical safeguards for the protection of girl child workers at domestic works.

Introduction:

The women working in unorganized sector are poor and have less economic power and status in the society. It is emphasized that the women working in the unorganized and informal sector are facing exploitation and sexual harassment from the owners or from male workers. Women workers doing informal work include all those women who work and who do not have any legal or social protection. These would include at least Agricultural workers, Forest Workers, Fish Workers, Rag workers, Construction Workers, Home based Workers, Domestic Workers or Helpers, Street Vendors, Casual or Temporary Workers, Contract or Dispatch Workers, Workers in Very Small Enterprises and Part-time Workers (Gothoskar, 2003).

It is very difficult to define the term "domestic" because it is very vague. The term "domestic" denotes a class of "menials" which includes many types of workers, like ayah, kitchen helper, cook and sweeper. So the term Domestic Servants as "those servants who do cooking, care the children, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, cleaning and sweeping the houses in return for the payment of wages".

There are two types of domestic servants – **Part-time servants** and **Full-time servants**. Part-time servants are those who are employed at one or more than one house to perform some definite duties and go away when the assigned work is over. They are not residential helpers. Full-time servants are attached to one house only. They are present for the whole day at employer's house and do whatever work is assigned to them.

The demand for domestic work stems from households with sufficient income which might hire a domestic worker or from households where the members are not able to conduct their housekeeping. Domestic work occurs frequently in case of a dispersed wage distribution, when the households in the higher layers of the wage distribution can afford hiring a domestic worker whose earnings are in the lowest ranks of the wage distribution.

Domestic workers take care of the household and its dependent members. They perform domestic chores such as washing, ironing, buying foods and drinks, accompanying the head of the household for grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning the house. For many domestic workers, a large part of their job is taking care of the children. If there are elderly or disabled people in the household, domestic workers may care for them as well.

A substantial number of women in rural areas have little skills

and practically no education. One of the low-ranking occupations assigned to the poorest classes of society is "domestic service". Employment of servants has become very common in the urban areas of any cities where a large number of house wives going out for jobs. The employment of servants saves much of the time and energy for the working house wives of modern cities. Women Domestic servants have proved to be a necessity for non-working housewives also. In urban areas, they commonly engaged domestic servants to keep them in carrying out their household chores, partly due to physical inability and partly due to lack of time. Moreover, in nuclear families there is no standby in the family, if the housewife falls ill. Now it is the new trend for the new middle classes to have developed a life style which has increased the demand for domestic servants.

Human Resources Development Report points out some common problems faced by the domestic servants are deplorable wages, high level of insecurity, illiteracy, lack of marketable skills, lack of confidence in securing other productive jobs, long and unregulated working hours, no paid holidays, no paid sick leave, immense work load, no maternity benefits, health problems and social exploitation.

Now in urban areas, there is increase of the demand for children between 10 to 18 years to work as domestic workers, especially girl children are demanded to look after household chores. Under such circumstances, the human rights of child domestic workers such as education, freedom, food, etc. will be violated. Hence, child domestic work is social problems needed to be intervened.

Child Domestic Workers:

The working children are often deprived of the opportunities childhood should offer for schooling, nurture and personal development under the protection of those who love them and have their best interests at heart. Among the largest groups of child workers are those working as domestics in the households of people other than their own families. The practice of employing children, sometimes very young children, to help around the house is widespread in many countries including India. But although millions of children, mainly girls, are involved, their situation is often overlooked. They may even not be seen as 'child workers' at all. The term 'child labour' is usually applied to children working in factories, mines, sweatshops, and other organized places of wage employment created by industrialization. But these are not the only workplaces where children are found.

Children who work as domestics outside the family home are

amongst the most vulnerable and exploited. They begin work at an early age, shoulder excessive responsibilities such as caring for babies/infants, handling fuel, stoves, sharp tools amongst others, work for long hours with no rest period, with little or no remuneration, work at the mercy of the employer and frequently suffer from gender and sexual violence. They are deprived of access to schooling, play and social activities and the affection and support of their family and friends (Save the Children, 2006).

Children engaged as domestic workers is regarded as a worst form of child labour as too often the conditions they work in fall within the international criteria for child labour (World Education, 2009):

- Slavery or practices similar to slavery including debt bondage
- Physical, psychological or sexual abuse
- Work with dangerous machinery or goods
- Work under difficult circumstances including long hours and during the night
- Unreasonable confinement to the employers' house
- Work that is likely to harm health, safety and morals of children.

Features of Domestic Child Work:

Wherever it occurs, child domestic employment has features in common. The invisibility and inaccessibility of the child workers have already been noted. Some of the other common features are as follows (Blagbrough, 2002):

- ❖ Domestic work is arguably the lowest status and almost certainly the poorest paid of all childhood occupations;
- ❖ Most child domestics live in, are under the round-the-clock control of the employer, and have very little freedom or free time;
- ❖ About 90 per cent of child domestics are girls, and many are vulnerable to sexual exploitation;
- ❖ Given the nature of the work, those who enter it may be very young, very poor and/ or ill-educated, and correspondingly powerless;
- ❖ Many child domestics are unpaid or underpaid; those who are paid may not handle their earnings themselves;
- ❖ Domestic servants are often recruited from particular areas or ethnic groups, which reinforces discrimination against them within the household;
- ❖ Child domestics are often cut off from their own families and have little or no opportunity to make friends or socialise with peers.

Legal Safeguards:

The 1956 United Nations (UN) Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery specifically prohibits: "... *any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his Labour*" (Article 1 (d)).

In analyzing the situation of child domestic workers, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) provides a set of useful norms to determine how far their childhood is actually or potentially being abused. The rights set out in the Convention which child domestics do not, or may not, enjoy are as follows:

- ❖ Non-discrimination, on grounds of ethnic or social origin, birth or other status (Article 2);
- ❖ To be cared for by his or her parents (Article 7);
- ❖ To preserve identity, nationality, name and family relations

(Article 8);

- ❖ To maintain regular contact with parents if separated from them (Article 9);
- ❖ Freedom of expression (Article 13);
- ❖ Freedom of association (Article 15);
- ❖ To be brought up by parents or guardians whose basic concern is his or her best interests (Article 18);
- ❖ Protection from physical or mental ill-treatment, neglect or exploitation (Article 19);
- ❖ Conditions of living necessary for his or her development (Article 27);
- ❖ Education (Article 28);
- ❖ Rest, leisure, play and recreation (Article 31);
- ❖ Protection from economic exploitation and from performing any work that interferes with his or her education or is harmful to his or her mental, spiritual or social development (Article 32);
- ❖ Protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34);
- ❖ Protection from abduction, sale or trafficking (Article 35);
- ❖ Protection from cruel or degrading treatment, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Article 37).

Many of the studies were conducted on child workers and domestic servants and only few of the studies have been conducted on female child workers at domestic works. They have revealed that many of such workers are suffering acutely from gross abuse or exploitation. However, it is not the case that gross abuse is intrinsic to all employment of young domestic workers. Where this occurs, it is due to the particular behaviour of the employers. In few countries, children of more than 14 years are allowed to work outside. But, these children are facing many problems and challenges, such deprivation from their education and childhood, exploitation and abuse from employers, lack of freedom, etc. Now, it has become essential to ban child workers at domestic workers and improve the following conditions of child workers at domestic works:

- ❖ Attractive pay;
- ❖ Limited working hours;
- ❖ Opportunity for play, rest or recreation or education and learning;
- ❖ Permit to Attend School;
- ❖ Non-Discrimination;
- ❖ Control of Exploitation, Abuse, Violence, Punishment, etc;
- ❖ More Privacy and Adequate rest;
- ❖ Healthy food;
- ❖ Care in case of ill health;
- ❖ Opportunity to maintain contact with parents and relatives.

Concluding Remarks:

It is highlighted from the above discussion that child labour at domestic works has been increased due to increase in dual income households, that is where both husband and wife are going for work or even in joint families in urban areas. Of course, few of the legislations were already passed to control child labour, but not specifically the female child domestic workers at households. Hence, it is essential to study the extent of child workers working in households and domestic works and formulate welfare schemes to rehabilitate these workers. Further, it is essential to strictly ban child workers, especially female child workers at domestic works.

REFERENCE

1. Blagbrough, Jonathan (2002): A Handbook on Advocacy- Child Domestic Workers: Finding a Voice. W. Sussex: Ajahma Charitable Trust, 2002.
2. Gothoskar, Sujata (2003): Globalization forced to do their work: Globalization and Women Workers in the Informal economy- A Perspective. Combat Law. Vol. 1. No. 5. January 2003.
3. Save the Children (2006): Abuse Among Child Domestic Workers: A Research Study in West Bengal. Kolkata: Save the Children, Centre for Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse, 2006.
4. World Education (2009): Children Working in Private Homes. World Education Report, 2009.