



## Domestic Workers in India: The Major Force of Unorganized Sectors

\*Prof. Uma Joshi \*\*Ms. Neena Thakkar

\* Dean (Research Guide) Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University Vadodara

\*\* Research Scholar, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University Vadodara

### ABSTRACT

*Domestic servants in India are routinely harassed and exploited by their employers in many ways. In spite of several steps taken by the government to improve their condition, even today they are treated as slaves and untouchables by many. This issue draws our attention every now and then, whether it is about the tragedy of domestic workers or a positive change in their conditions. The article focuses on the present trend of treatment received by the domestic servants from their employers. Under this study, thirty domestic servants were selected from the Vadodara city and information was collected through the questionnaires. It highlights the fact that the development of the community is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable and lays the importance on humanity as a moral of all the professions.*

**Keywords :** Domestic worker, treatment, employers.

### Introduction

Domestic workers form the biggest work-force of the unorganized sector. It is the emerging field of labour force of the developed as well as developing countries like India. The estimated number of domestic workers in India is 90 million but this is probably an underestimate. (Source: [http://southasia.oneworld.net/peoplespeak/domestic-workers-in-india-no-better-than-slaves#\\_UQqXTb9JP4s](http://southasia.oneworld.net/peoplespeak/domestic-workers-in-india-no-better-than-slaves#_UQqXTb9JP4s)) Domestic workers or servants as most people call them are those (men, women or children) who perform variety of household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing and other chores on daily basis as paid service.

### Importance of Domestic Workers in Social Life

This domestic work force has become 'an important element in the social life of a community, contributing to its general health and welfare. The wide varieties of tasks performed in the household by this class of workers are certainly vital to the conduct and well-being of family-life.' (A.B. Mehta, 1960) The domestic helpers share the burden of stress by performing the major daily tasks of the household and make the life of civilians more comfortable.

Despite the growing importance of domestic workforce, the domestic workers in majority of the countries are undervalued, denigrated, unseen and denied the human rights they are actually entitled to. They are perceived as something lower than the standard work of the society by both the employers and the workers themselves. Often, it is tragedy or rare positive development that heaves our attention to the increasing population of this spectrum.

### Need of the Study

Several researches and surveys have been conducted by the social scientists to analyse and improve the conditions of these domestic workers till now. Many writers and columnists have written about the status of domestic servants in the society of India. In an article by Sharma (2009) it was reported that domestic workers in India are no better than slaves.

The efforts have been made by the social workers, government as well as the non-government agencies to preserve their rights; many laws have been passed by the government for

their protection and security. However, no significant changes are observed in the disgraceful status of such large and important labour force of the nation. They are treated with 'No Terms and Conditions' attitude of the employers even today.

There is a long list of the issues highlighting the problems and mal-treatment of the domestic workers. There is a requirement to analyse the trend of treatment received by the domestic workers from their employers that can help to draw guidelines for the betterment of the group. Hence, a survey was conducted to study the treatment received by domestic servants from their employers in the year 2011-12, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

### Objectives of the Study:

- To study the present trend of treatment received by the domestic workers from their employers in the city of Vadodara, Gujarat, India.
- To draw the guidelines to enhance the status of the domestic servants of the city.

### Methodology:

Population: The population of the study consisted of the domestic workers of Vadodara city, Gujarat.

**Sample:** The sample of the consisted of thirty domestic workers selected through random sampling and snow-ball sampling techniques from the Vadodara city, Gujarat.

**Tool for Data Collection:** A structured questionnaire was prepared by the investigator divided into two sections. The first section included the closed ended questions related to the background information of the domestic servants. The later section involved the questions about how they were treated by their employers at work place.

### Findings

#### Table 1 Percentage Distribution of the Domestic Workers According to their Background Information. (N=30)

| Sr. No. | Background Information    | Respondents (%) |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 1.      | Gender:<br>Female<br>Male | 93<br>7         |

|    |  |                     |
|----|--|---------------------|
| 2. | Age:<br>6-25<br>26-45<br>46-65                                       | 17<br>53<br>30      |
| 3. | Social Status:<br>Married<br>Unmarried<br>Widow/Widower<br>Separated | 67<br>17<br>16<br>- |
| 4. | Type of the Family:<br>Joint<br>Nuclear<br>Extended                  | 40<br>40<br>20      |
| 5. | Type of the House:<br>Kaccha House<br>Semipakka or Pakka House       | 27<br>73            |

The Table 1 indicates that majority of the domestic servants were females whereas only 7 percent were males. Majority of the domestic workers were married whereas only 17 percent of them were unmarried and 16 percent were widows. Majority of them belonged to the age-group of 26-35 years and 30 percent were above 45 years of age. However, 17 percent of the domestic servants were below the age of 25 years. Furthermore, the type of the houses they lived was semi-pakka and pakka house with the basic facilities such as personal tap of drinking water, electricity and in-house toilets. Sadly, 27 percent survived in kaccha houses with less comforts.

Moreover, majority of them were illiterate or had only up to primary education. Furthermore, no more than 4 percent of them possessed high school education qualifications and barely any one completed graduation. The research shows that 47 percent of the domestic servants opted domestic work as their income source below 18 years of age.

**Table 2 Percentage Distribution of Domestic Workers According to Their Reasons to Work \* (N= 30)**

| Sr. No. | Reasons                         | Respondents (%) |
|---------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1.      | Supporting family financially   | 73              |
|         | Not qualified for any other job | 73              |
|         | Continued mother's work         | 6               |
|         | Language barrier                | 3               |
|         | Could not get any other job     | 3               |
|         | Lost the previous job           | 3               |
|         | Nearer to the house             | 3               |

(\*Multiple Responses- There can be more than one reason for an individual)

As revealed in the Table 3, most of the domestic workers were the victims of the financial crisis of the family and hence started earning from their early age to support family members. Due to lack of qualification and lower age they could not get any better job opportunity but domestic service. On the contrary, few people had to choose to be domestic servant because of the language barrier (who came from different state to Gujarat), redundancy from the previous job whereas a few took over the mother's work.

**Table 3 Percent Distribution of the Domestic Workers as per the treatment received from their Employers \*(N=30)**

| Sr. No. | Treatment Received from the Employers   | Respondents (%) |
|---------|---|-----------------|
| 1.      | When the workers call off, they are:<br>Not told anything.  | 70              |
|         | Excused in case of genuine reason.  | 47              |
|         | Scolded.  | 27              |
|         | Given less pay.   | 27              |
| 2.      | In case of illness or long leave due to health problems, the workers are:<br>Allowed you to rest. | 47              |
|         | Not attended.   | 44              |
|         | Offered medication.   | 27              |
|         | Asked to leave the job.   | 10              |
|         | Taken to the hospital.  | -               |

|    |  |                        |
|----|--|------------------------|
| 3. | In case of any problem at work or at personal level, the workers are:<br>Heard.<br>Helped and Guided for solutions.<br>Not attended.   | 74<br>67<br>44         |
|    | The workers are humiliated by:<br>Giving away stale or leftover food.<br>Insulting for not doing job properly.<br>Not allowing to enter in house except work area.<br>Treating as untouchable. | 10<br>6<br>3<br>3<br>3 |
|    | In case of stealing happened in the house, the workers are:<br>Not bothered.<br>Questioned for information.<br>Suspected   | 57<br>30<br>20         |

(\*The table indicates multiple responses of the questions)

The table 4 depicts that 70 percent of the workers are not told anything in case of calling off and 47 percent of the respondents were excused in genuine cases. At the same time, 27 percent of the domestic workers' salary is deducted for the same. In addition to it, majority of the workers had flexibility of time whereas other respondents had to follow the fixed schedule of time.

Furthermore, 47 percent of the respondents were allowed to rest during the illness and also offered medication or treatment by their employers, whereas, 44 percent of the domestic workers were ignored and no help was offered from their masters. Majority of the domestic servants were heard by their employers in case of any problem at work or even at personal level. Sixty-seven percent of the workers were guided and helped by their employers for the solutions to their problems.

On the contrary, some were humiliated one or other way by their employers. Treating as untouchable, not allowing entering in the house except work area, giving away stale food, using abusive word etc. were some of the traits of humiliation. Ten percent of the domestic servants were given away stale food, six percent of the servants were insulted using abusive words for not doing the task properly, three percent were not allowed to enter in the house and treated as untouchables. The table suggests that 57 percent of the helpers were not disturbed in case of any stealing in the employers' house, whereas, 30 percent workers were questioned for the related information and 20 percent of them were suspected for the stealing.

**Analysis**

The findings related to the treatment received by the domestic servants from their employers revealed that majority of the workers received fair treatment from their employers. Majority of the domestic servants were:

- Given salary on time.
- Given advance on demand.
- Given bonus every year.
- Provided a day off in case of need.
- Offered flexibility in adjusting time.
- Offered food.
- Not suspected in case of stealing or theft.

On the other hand, some domestic servants reported the negative trend of treatment received from the employers. The domestic servants were:

- Humiliated by giving stale food.
- Treated as untouchables.
- Not allowed to enter in the kitchen.
- Forced to quit the job even in case of severe health issues.

- Not given the salary on time.
- Suspected for stealing.
- Insulted by using abusive words.
- Exploited by giving extra hours of work.

Thus, the selected group of domestic workers highlighted both positive and negative trends of treatment received from their employers. It draws our attention to the fact that domestic servants are still undervalued and hold low esteem in the society.

### Implications

The following solutions can be offered on the basis of the study to enhance the status of domestic workers in the society.

- The domestic workers are also humans. They must be treated humanely by the employers and deserve fresh and good quality food.
- The Moral Empowerment is the need of the hour. Not only employers should respect the workers and consider their contribution in social life but also the workers themselves should respect their own self and the work they do. The workers must be sensitised to develop sensitivity and self-esteem.
- Illiteracy is another major barrier. So literacy programs can be a rigorous step to help the workers to get better jobs. Apart from that, functional literacy can also help to avoid cheating by the employers.

- The legal system should be stricter and laws must be implemented effectively to improve the conditions of domestic workers. Further, new laws should be made to overcome the loopholes of the current system and can reach to the grassroots.
- Ignorance is the biggest hindrance for the pitiable status of the domestic workers in the society. Therefore, the domestic workers must be made aware about the laws constituted for their betterment.
- Being an important element of social life, domestic work force should be formalised so that the laws and regulations can be implemented effectively and efficiently.

### Conclusion

The status of the domestic servants in the society is enhanced with the passage of time. Still, there are many households where the servants are considered slaves and untouchables even today. There are several cases of maltreatment and exploitation which can be removed by spreading the awareness of equal rights and humanity. The effective implementation of legal laws can also bring social change to improve the conditions of domestic workers. Beyond that, things can change only when the society accepts the domestic workers as humans and not as 'servants or slaves'. Surprisingly, we can leave tips in the restaurant for the great service provided for a few hours but we cannot even behave or treat liberally with the humans who provide their constant support for making our life better.

### REFERENCES

1. Rao P. Subba, 'Human Resource Management Environmental Influence', Chugh Publications, Allahabad, 1989. | 2. Raaj Neelam, Maid to Order in India. Times of India, 21 June, 2009. | 3. Gopalkrishnan V., On treating Our Domestic Servants. 31 May, 2010. | 4. Sharma K., Domestic Servants in India No Better Than Slaves. 17 February, 2009. | 5. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic\_worker | 6. v-s-gopal.sulekha.com/blog/./on-treating-our-domestic-servants.htm | 7. southasia.oneworld.net/./domestic-workers-in-india-no-better-than-slaves#... | 8. www.forbes.com/./the-help-2011-domestic-worker-abuse-widesprea... | 9. http://southasia.oneworld.net/peoplespeak/domestic-workers-in-india-no-better-than-slaves#.UQqXTb9JP4s | 10. http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/c-p-chandrasekhar/changing-patterns-of-domestic-work/article4091075.ece | 11. http://sanhati.com/excerpted/2898/ | 12. http://wiego.org/informal\_economy\_law/domestic-workers-india | 13. http://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/info/WCMS\_141187/lang-en/index.htm