

Problems faced by the domestic workers at workplace: A study in erode district of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The role of women in the development of economy and society is not less important than man, who constitutes almost the half of the total world population. Women work at a variety of tasks leaving little time for leisure. They have little control over the income they earn for the family. They also have little control over the productive resources. Women in the third world countries are found working in various spheres such as in the agricultural fields, in the plantations, in the orchards, in cottage and small-scale enterprises and in manufacturing and so on. In every sphere of economic activity they contribute lot but what they get in exchange is always less than what their male counterparts get for the same type of job. Over last few decades, there have been a rapid growth in the number of women employed in India with majority of them being engaged in informal sector of the economy where jobs are often low paid and repetitive.

Since the domestic service is considered as a tedious job, most of the women workers involved in this work are coming from economically poor families and also illiterate. As there is no minimum wage fixed and as the Minimum Wages Act does not cover the domestic workers, the employers are free to pay what they want, irrespective of quantum and hours of work. Verbal sexual harassment by the male employers is something that is generally very common. Most of the workers being less educated, the awareness to form a union is lacking among them. Hence, there is immense scope for exploitation of these workers, as there is no written contract between the employer and domestic worker. This scope for exploitation further expands with the fact that the bargaining power of these domestic workers is almost zero. Thus, it is necessary to identify the level of problems faced by the women domestic workers while doing their services.

Keywords: Domestic work, Welfare provision, Informal sector

1. Introduction

The role of women in the development of economy and society is not less important than man, who constitutes almost the half of the total world population. Women work at a variety of tasks leaving little time for leisure. They have little control over the income they earn for the family. They also have little control over the productive resources. Women in the third world countries are found working in various spheres such as in the agricultural fields, in the plantations, in the orchards, in cottage and small-scale enterprises and in manufacturing and so on.

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Since the domestic service is considered as a tedious job, most of the women workers involved in this work are coming from economically poor families and also illiterate. Domestic Workers are engaged in such tasks as cooking, washing, and cleaning, which are traditionally seen as women's work and are therefore looked down upon and treated as less than humans. In India, the stigma for domestic work is heightened by the caste system, as tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are associated with low castes. Domestic Workers are referred to as 'servants' and 'maids', which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. This has further led to the indignity inflicted upon them and their work. Domestic

Workers are highly exploited and denied just and humane wages. They are paid well below the minimum wage for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Labor laws do not cover Domestic Workers. They are not recognized as workers; hence do not enjoy legal protection, rights and dignity.

The domestic workers remained excluded from the scope of most of the labour laws because of the constraints in the definition of the 'workmen', 'employer' or 'establishment'. The nature of work, the specificity of the employee-employer relationship, and the work in private households instead of public and private establishments, made the coverage of domestic workers under the existing laws more challenging. Thus amendments of the definitions in existing legislations were the need of the hour

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2. Review of Literature

Nagaraj Badiger and Raghavendra Gudagunt¹ (2014) have examined socio-economic conditions of the domestic workers and their working conditions, the problems of domestic work and their limitations. The study concluded that women and children have been employed as domestic workers. They usually come from lower caste, with very little education and are often unaware of their rights. Within India, many women and children domestic workers are continue to suffer various kinds of abuses and violation of their human rights.

Ignatius^[2] (2014) has made an attempt to study the demographic details and the problems faced by the domestic workers during the work time. The required primary data has been collected from 26 respondents in Illuppur, Pudukkottai District. He adopted the simple random sampling method for the selection of samples. It was suggested that the women domestic workers need to organize themselves. They can become the members of the Federation of Unorganised Workers, Tamil Nadu. Through the membership, they can avail the pension and other welfare schemes for the Women Domestic Workers from the Government Board for Unorganised sector.

3. Objectives of the study

The present study is undertaken with the following specific objectives:

1. To study the problems faced by the domestic workers at workplace.
2. To offer suggestions for the welfare of the domestic

4. Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between various independent variables (Age, Educational status, Marital status, Size of the family, Nature of the family, Annual family income and no. of working hours) of the sample respondents and their level of problems.

This hypothesis has been tested by using Chi-square test at 5% level of significance.

5. Classification of respondents on the basis of their level of problems

The sample respondents are classified as Low and high based on their level of problems and the details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of respondents on the basis of problem level

Problem Level	No. of respondents	Percentage
Low (15-44)	66	33
High (44-75)	134	67
Total	200	100

Table 1 indicates that 67% of the sample respondents on overall basis have been found to be in high level problems and 33% found to be in low level of problems. Hence, it can be concluded that more number of respondents are having high level of problems while doing their service.

6. Findings

Age and the level of problem

It is found that 77% of the 21 years to 35 years, 69% of the 36years to 50 years 61% of the above 50 years age group and 41% of the below 20 years are having high level of problems while doing their services.

Educational status and the level of problem

It is found that high percentage (78%) of the Illiterates faced high level of problems as compared to Higher Secondary (62%), Primary level (55%) and Middle School (46%).

Marital status and the level of problem

It is found that 71% of the Married expressed High level of problems compared to the Divorced/separated (70%), Unmarried (63%) and widow (57%).

Nature of the family and the level of problem

It is found that 60% of the Joint and 85% of the nuclear family respondents are facing high level of problems.

Size of the family and the level of problem

It is found that the 77% of the Medium (family with 3 to 5 members) category are facing high degree of problems.

Annual family Income and the level of problem

It is found that a high percentage (79%) of the Low income respondents felt more problems as compared to the respondents belonging to Middle (66%) and high (49%) annual family income group.

Duration of the work and the level of problem

It is found that the Group C disclosed more problems (79%) compared to Group B (74%) and Group A (49%).

7. Suggestions

In the present study, while examining the problems faced by the women domestic workers at work place, it is found that 67% of the sample respondents have high level of problems while doing their services.

Associations and unions among the domestic workers will definitely make them to fight for their rights. So, programmes can be evolved and see that every domestic worker is a member of some union. Through the unions, lectures can be arranged by eminent lawyers, feminists as members of human rights commission.

This effort will also enable them to enjoy their strength, unity and also satisfy their grievances towards their employers through different kinds of pressure building and bargaining strategies.

It is suggested that the voluntary organizations and NGOs can organize loans for the domestic workers through banks or credit unions. So, it will relieve them from paying hefty interests.

¹ Nagaraj Badiger, and Raghavendra Gudagunti (2014), "Problems And Prospect Of Domestic Workers: A Critical Approach", Indian Streams Research Journal, Volume 4, Issue 9, October.pp.7-13.

² M.Ignatius (2014), "A study on domestic workers in Illuppur, Pudukkottai District", International Journal of Advanced and Innovative Research, Vol. 3, Issue- 7, pp.47-49.

It is suggested that the domestic workers can perform their work in more organized way. If they have training in all the important aspects of domestic work, it will benefit them to improve the quality of service. It will enable them to increase their bargaining capacity.

Education will change the life of domestic workers. So, awareness programmes should be conducted to stress the importance of education among domestic workers.

8. Conclusion

The domestic workers are forced to work long hours for meagre wages. There is no job security for them. At times of crisis like physical illness, the domestic workers struggle a lot to meet their basic requirements. Therefore, the government has to design appropriate policies and programmes to protect their job, to ensure fair wages and extend credit facilities suitable for them. Domestic workers are not aware of their legal rights. So, legal awareness programmes must be implemented to protect their rights.

At the present situation, it is very difficult to lead one's life without the help of domestic worker. It is the most wanted service in the present situation. If it is done in an organized way, this job will get its due recognition. Domestic work is an open job market which gives income with job for any number of people. The joint efforts of NGOs, domestic workers and employers will uplift the quality of the life of domestic workers.

9. Reference

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