

ARTICLES

WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN URBAN INFORMAL SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF VADODARA CITY

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ABSTRACT

The growing participation of women in the labour force, changes in the organization of work and intensification of work, and also the lack of policies reconciling work and family life, the decline in state provision of care services, the feminization of international migration and the ageing of societies have all increased the demand for care workers in the recent years. The occupation is feminized and women constitute a majority among domestic workers that comprises a significant part of the global workforce in the informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. The present paper is based on a primary survey of women domestic workers in the city of Vadodara. The study found that younger women are less inclined to take up domestic work. Due to the lack of alternatives the women from lower socio-economic background having low level of education/illiteracy are forced to work as domestic labourers. Domestic work has to be placed in the larger context of patriarchy and subjugation of women.

Keywords: *Women, domestic work, urban informal sector*

1. Introduction

The growing participation of women in the labour force, changes in the organization of work and the intensification of work, as well as the lack of policies reconciling work and family life, the decline in state provision of care

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services, the feminization of international migration and the ageing of societies have all increased the demand for care workers in recent years (ILO, 2009). The process of feminization of this occupation began in the mid-nineteenth century, a trend that has not halted to the present day despite global rise in educational levels among women (Lutz, 2011).

In the emerging global economic order, characterized by global cities, new forms of division of labour and change in demographic composition, paid domestic work, mainly supplied by the poorer families, in particular women, tends to substitute unpaid production activities and services within a family such as cooking, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, caring children and old aged and so on. This makes domestic work an important occupation in determining the linkage between family and the dynamics of open economy (Bino et al., 2011).

According to ILO's (2018) definition domestic workers are those workers in an employment relationship working in or for a private household/s. Rather than defining domestic work according to tasks, the distinguishing feature of domestic work is the workplace. Typically, domestic workers clean, cook and perform other household chores that are essential to personal care, in addition to providing direct care for children, older and disabled persons.

With the historical roots of domestic work intertwined with that of the institutionalized slavery of different oppressed peoples (most notably, people of African descent) and the societal slavery of women, the nature of work itself carries many social and political meanings and ramifications for those who perform it as a means of livelihood. First and foremost, domestic work is a kind of work that is essential to the world that we live in. As Anderson (2000) asserts in her book, 'Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour', domestic work is a necessary work without which humanity would not continue. We need to accommodate the raising of children, the preparation and distribution of food, basic cleanliness, and hygiene in order to survive individually and as a species. While this kind of work is indeed a basic staple of society, there is not a uniform job description for domestic work. It could include the cleaning and upkeep of a home and it could include child care and cooking or all the above. The problem of defining the concept of domestic work is experienced by domestic workers as a lack of job description with serious implications for their working conditions. There is a strong underlying notion that this kind of work is women's work, and, in congruence with the dominant social views of patriarchal society, these terms lead to the idea that domestic work is inherently demeaning (Bhattacharya et al., 2015).

1.1 Domestic Work and Informal Sector

Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in the informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers.

Domestic workers are crucial to the functioning of middle and upper middle-class households. Through them working women and housewives are able to reproduce class distinctions, both between poor and middle classes and lower and upper-middle classes. These domestic workers work for private households, often without clear terms of employment, unregistered in any book, and are excluded from the scope of labour legislation. According to ILO estimates¹, there are nearly 67 million domestic workers worldwide—not including child domestic workers, and the number is increasing steadily in developed and developing countries. Even though a substantial number of men work in the sector – often as gardeners, drivers, or butlers – it remains a highly feminized sector given the fact that 80 per cent of all the domestic workers are women. Their work includes tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing, and ironing clothes, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, and even taking care of household pets.

Paid domestic work is increasing in many economies worldwide but it remains a virtually invisible form of employment in many countries. Many domestic workers endure very poor working conditions, many are underpaid, have no social security coverage and work long hours in difficult and not always safe conditions. Some are vulnerable to trafficking or sexual, physical, or psychological abuse, especially when they are migrants (ILO, 2011).

1.2 Women and Informal Sector

A large mass of women work in the informal sector of the economy. They undertake income-generating activities for increasing the family income, in some cases even to the point that they are the only source of family income. They carry out all the family reproduction work and take part in all the non-salaried production work. The economic role of women is marginalized—even the statistics ignore them. The underlying reason is that these activities are in many cases the only option enabling women to earn an income, while assuming the tasks inherent in their reproductive function—and all this without any social and economic protection and in most cases under deplorable safety and health conditions.

This trend is growing as feminization of the informal sector is taking place. Women, who are the majority in this sector, are subject to a double marginalization: for one, the sector as such is considered marginal, for another, most workers are women occupying a marginal position. Theoretically though, women play an indispensable part in development and the principle of equal opportunities for men and women is recognized as a basic human right.

1 https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/WCMS_209773/lang--en/index.htm

Although women constitute a smaller number as compared to men worldwide in the overall labour force, the informal sector employs more females than males. Women are found in the informal sector more often than men because of lack of opportunities or other obstacles to formal sector employment. The informal sector in most countries includes a large number of part-time workers, especially from among women.

1.3 Women and Domestic Work

Poverty and unemployment are the factors that have created a way for the women to enter the informal sector. According to census report 2011, there were 41.3 lakhs domestic workers in India, of which, 27.9 lakhs were women. These women, mainly the migrants from rural area are exploited by their employers, as the placement agencies are yet to find out strategies for the protection of these women. Lack of proper legislations and legal support has also driven these women domestic labourers into more vulnerable conditions.

Domestic work is looked upon as unskilled and it remains undervalued and poorly regulated (Roberts, 1997). Domestic work has enabled many women to enter the labour market and benefit from economic autonomy. However, this has not translated into gender equality. Worldwide, household responsibilities and unpaid care work continue to pose significant barriers to women's labour market participation. On many occasions, ILO has argued the need to change the idea that care-giving is a private domestic responsibility unique to women.

In the literature, trends in domestic service have always been explained in terms of the process of industrialization and modernization (Katzman, 1978; Pahl, 1984; Saptari, 1999). A combination of cultural and economic factors is often seen as an explanation for the feminization of domestic service and the corresponding devaluation of domestic work. There is a close linkage between class, size of the family, cultural factors, and the nature of domestic employment. Cultural shifts which emerged out of economic transformations became the major force behind the domestication of women. The patterns of male employment and wages are found linked to the fluctuations in women's employment in domestic service. To maintain the family, women enter into domestic service at times when male employment becomes highly seasonal, insecure, and less rewarding. On the demand side, with industrialization, households became more inward oriented and nuclear. The feminization of domestic work is also associated with the advent of smaller households where the pattern became that of a single-servant household.

Accounts on Domestic workers have particularly stressed women's vulnerability, social isolation, depressed wages, long working hours, and degrading work. The experience and conditions of domestic workers in the 18th and 19th century in England and in the 19th century in America, Italy and France seems

to be repeating in many countries of the world (Katzman, 1978; Malos, 1980; Kessler-Harris, 1981).

In many studies the focus has been on women's labour participation in agricultural and allied activities, which is often erroneously considered as the only form of paid work available to the women of lower strata. In fact, in many rural areas female labourers work as domestic servant, often combining this employment with agricultural work on a seasonal and even daily wage basis (Kothari, 1991). Hence, domestic work contributes to a substantive type of employment and generation of earnings for many women. This is more so in the case of women migrating to urban areas with family. The sources of supply of domestic workers have also changed over time, with new classes and groups entering the service.

Although many studies in the literature have been carried out for workers in the urban informal sector yet studies on women domestic workers are scanty. Also, the studies from economic point of view are also few. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to trace the problems associated with the process of women's participation in the urban informal sector as well as the way the working women's lives are being affected by the process of economic development and social change. For this, we have chosen Vadodara city² as a case study to examine six pertinent issues such as: (i) What are the socio-economic conditions of domestic workers in Vadodara city? (ii) What is the education level of the women participating in domestic services? (iii) How are the working conditions of women domestic workers? (iv) What are the special problems that the women domestic workers face? (v) How do the women domestic workers combine wage work with their domestic responsibilities? and (vi) What policy measures could be suggested to bring these women domestic workers in the mainstream employment?

This paper is divided into five sections. Section two discusses the review of existing literature on domestic workers to understand the gaps in the literature. Section three outlines the research methodology. In section four, the findings of the study have been discussed based on survey data. And the last section draws conclusions from the study.

2. Domestic Work: A Review

The literature on domestic work refers to "commodification of care" in which the informal and unpaid assistance and care-giving of family and friends (typically women) becomes disaggregated into specific tasks and jobs,

2 Vadodara, also referred to as the "cultural capital" of Gujarat state, has rich traditions of composite culture. According to 2011 Census, there were more than 336 slum pockets housing more than 50,500 families and making up nearly 20 per cent of the total population of the city. The recent smart city project data show that there are 396 slum pockets with a population of 1,88,085, of which 84,015 are women.

performed in the market for wages (Zimmerman et al., 2002). In such a process, tasks are broken into discrete functions, and care becomes specialized and technical rather than holistic and embedded in human relationships (Zimmermann et al., 2006, pp. 20-21).

Domestic workers are not hired solely to perform household chores and to alleviate the double burden of working women. They are also hired as status symbols to provide luxury (Neetha, 2008). Hierarchies from the country of origin are often recreated in the country of destination (Pattendath, 2008), or as Romero (1992) explains, the relation between domestic worker and employer is a replication of the contradiction between capitalists and proletarians. As a result of the above-mentioned empowerment, however, while the domestic worker might lose social status in the country of destination, she often simultaneously gains social status in her country of origin (Anthias, 2000; Barber, 2000; Ozyegin, 2001, and Moors, 2003).

According to the ILO report (2018), “Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work”, domestic workers experience some of the worst working conditions across the care workforce and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Jobs in this sector are notoriously unpredictable and casual in nature, and are adversely affected by low labour and social protection coverage. Moreover, violence at work is pervasive in the domestic work sector.

According to the report (ILO, 2018), the gender stereotyping of unpaid care work and the association of care with women’s “natural” inclinations and “innate” abilities, rather than with skills acquired through formal education or training, lies behind the high level of feminization of care employment.

The situation of care workers (which constitutes a much larger category of which, domestic workers is a part), embodies many of the challenges faced by women workers in the overall labour markets, including gender segmentation, poor working conditions and pay, gender pay gaps, and violence and harassment in the world of work. Care workers close the circle between unpaid care provision and paid work (ILO, 2018).

Reflecting on indecent working and living conditions of women domestic workers, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2007) views: “working in the unregulated domain of a private home, mostly without the protection of national labour legislation, allows for the female domestic workers to be maltreated by their employers with impunity. Women are often subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks. They may be strictly confined to their places of work. The domestic workforce is excluded from labour laws that look after important employment-related issues such as conditions of work, wages, social security, provident funds, old age pensions, and maternity leave.”

Unni and Rani (1999) attempt to contribute to an understanding of developments regarding labour market participation and remuneration in the domestic work sector as compared to other sectors, drawing on the latest available household and labour survey data, and legal information from a diverse group of developing countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Turkey, and Vietnam). The paper looks at the basic characteristics of the female domestic workers, gaps in minimum wage coverage, compliance, and the extent of minimum wage violations. Presenting empirical evidence on labour market inequality along gender lines, the paper discusses the role of minimum wages for reducing gender disparity and addresses the questions of regulatory design. Finally, the paper examines the strategies for compliance and enforcement, arguing that there is a need for comprehensive and innovative approaches in order to ensure respect for minimum wage legislation in the domestic work sector. It concludes that minimum wages for domestic workers are indeed an important tool for promoting gender equality within a broader approach to addressing informality and worker's empowerment.

3. Research Methodology

Domestic service is a highly scattered and unorganized activity, hence, no scientific sampling techniques could be used in selecting the sample workers. In view of this, the scope of the study was limited to selected localities. The study is based on primary survey. A purposive sample of 200 female domestic workers from various parts of the city was selected based on random sampling method. This was also to cover different income localities and slums in Vadodara city. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire pertaining to the socio-economic profile of the women domestic workers' living conditions, working conditions, wages received, their participation in decision making process, etc. Data were analyzed through SPSS. Simple statistical tools such as measures of central tendency, chi-square test, correlation techniques, etc. have been used for analysis. The data were collected during May-August, 2019.

4. Findings of the Study

Female domestic workers are a neglected group among the unorganized sector workers. They constitute an exploited section within the informal sector. Globally, on an average, 30 per cent of female domestic workers are excluded from labour legislation, but a much greater number do not enjoy de facto minimum protection at work (Augustina & Singh, 2016). These women domestic workers constitute vulnerable section of the society. They belong to poorer section of the society and lack human capital formation.

4.1 Age Distribution

In the present study it was found that majority of the women, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents belong to the middle-age group of 29 to 45 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Women Domestic Workers by Age

Age group(Years)	Frequencies	Percentage
17-22	13	6.5
23-28	19	9.5
29-35	46	23.0
36-40	35	17.5
41-45	40	20.0
46-50	33	16.5
51-55	9	4.5
56 & more	5	2.5
All ages	200	100

Source: primary survey for this and all subsequent tables in the paper

The mean age is 38.5 years. Women in the younger age group are only 16 per cent. The percentile distribution of women domestic workers shows that 75 per cent of the women are in the age group of 17-45 years. It can be inferred that younger women are less inclined to take up domestic work. It is only the middle-age-group women who have entered into this occupation. This may be because younger women are either educated or there are other opportunities for these women, and therefore, they are less willing to take up domestic work. The contemporary demand for domestic workers is very much different from the traditional system of domestic help. Urbanization and industrial development are believed to have encouraged the growth of domestic service, as it produces a servant-employing middle class and a surplus of unskilled workers (Madhumathi, 2013).

4.2 Religion and Caste Distribution

Some of the studies have shown that domestic service is influenced by the social and cultural notions on the appropriateness of type of workers for particular work pushing the socially backward migrants into domestic service (Martin and Rani, 2015; Dutta, 2006; ILO, 2009; Jagori, 2008; Lutz, 2011). In the present study, however, women belonging to all the religions are taking up the domestic work, but majority of the women in the present survey were Hindus (Table 2). Total percentage of Muslim and Christian women is only 5 per cent. Similarly, women belonging to all castes: SCs, STs, OBCs and upper caste are found to be taking up the domestic work.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Hindu	189	94.5
Muslim	4	2.0
Christian	6	3.0
Other	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

The proportion of women belonging to SC, ST and OBC category are not significantly different. There are women from higher castes also (15 per cent). This means that the social factors such as religion and caste are not a factor in driving women into domestic work. This might also mean that there are other human capital or economic factors responsible for these women taking up domestic work.

4.3 Education Level

Poverty and unemployment are the factors which have created a way for the women to enter the informal sector. Due to the lack of alternatives the women from lower socio-economic background having low level of education or illiteracy are forced to work as domestic labourers (Vadegari&Soundari, 2016).

Majority of the women (68 per cent) in the present survey were either illiterate or educated up to primary level of schooling though 28 per cent of the women have studied up to elementary level. This means that women who have taken up domestic work have low level of human capital formation. It can also be argued that low level of education is responsible for women taking up domestic work. For a large proportion of such workers, domestic work is the only option available.

It is also interesting to understand if religion has any impact on the education of an individual. Table 3 explains that women belonging to all religions have extremely low educational level, i.e., only up to primary level. Nearly 31 per cent of Hindu women have education of more than primary level. There is no illiterate woman among Muslims and Christians.

**Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents
by Educational level and Religion**

Religion	Education level				Total
	Illiterate	Primary	Elementary	SSC/ HSC	
Hindu	19.5	43.5	26.5	5.0	94.5
Muslim	0.0	1.5	0.5	0.0	2.0
Christian	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
Other	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.5
Total	19.5	46.5	28.0	6.0	100

To understand if religion has any impact on education, a chi-square test was carried out.

H_0 : There is no impact of religion on the education of an individual.

Table 4: Chi-square Test for Educational level and Religion

Chi-Square Tests			
Particulars	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.100	9	0.208
Likelihood Ratio	10.695	9	0.297
N of Valid Cases	200		

The results show that the chi-square calculated is much higher than the critical value at 0.005 per cent significant level. However, the asymptotic significance (two-sided) value of 0.208 implies that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected (Table 4). It means religion as such does not affect the education level of the households. The chi-square test for caste and education also yields similar results, and thus, it can be said that factors such as caste and religion do not have much impact on educational level of women.

4.4 Marital Status

The cost of living in the urban areas has been increasing in the recent times. This is resulting into women taking up paid work. An emerging phenomenon for women in conditions of rapid economic development is that the rising costs of living necessitate their employment as wage workers. With undiminished domestic responsibilities, the result is a double burden of work and tasks at home (Vlieger, 2011). In the present study also, it has been found that as compared to unmarried women, more married women are taking up domestic work.

Table 5: Distribution of Women Domestic Workers by Duration of Work and Marital Status

Marital status	Duration of work					Total
	less than one year	more than 1-2 years	2.1-5 years	5-10 years	More than 10 years	
Unmarried	0.0	1.0	3.5	1.0	1.5	8.5
Married	0.5	2.5	9.5	22.5	40.0	77.5
Separated/ divorcee	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Widow	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	11.5	13.5
Total	0.5	3.5	14.0	24.5	53.0	100

As is shown in Table 5, majority of the women (77.5 per cent) are married and only a few (8.5 per cent) unmarried women have taken up domestic care work. 13.5 per cent of the women are widowed. Majority of these widows belong to female-headed households. In many of the cases they are the sole earners in the family or have children with extremely low contribution to family expenses. Married women have taken up this work because of increasing cost of living in the past few years. This is also reflected in the duration of work that these women have taken up the domestic work. More than 60 per cent of the women have been working for 5 years to nearly 15 years.

4.5 Family Size

Family size plays a considerable role in the determination of women’s participation in economic activity, particularly in the poorer families. The process of globalization has also changed family structures and this global family model has also entered the Indian families. In the recent times family ties and structures have changed and the households are becoming smaller. The number of extended families living under one roof has decreased. This is also evident in the present study where the average family size is quite low.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Family Size

No. of family members	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	17	8.5
3-4	159	79.5
5-7	22	11.0
more than 7	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

As shown in Table 6, majority of the women live in a family size of 3-4. Though the mean family size is nearly 2, 11 per cent of the women have larger families with 5-7 members. The low family size is also indicative of a breakdown of

joint-family system in the country. Thus, rising cost of living in the urban areas is pushing women into the labour market. Because these women have low level of education, they have no choice but to take up low-paid jobs in the urban informal sector. At the same time, 11.5 per cent of the women domestic workers are the sole earners in the family. But nearly 80 per cent of the women have four earners in the family. This may be because these women belong to the poorer section of the society and their income being low, other family members have to contribute to the income of the family.

Majority of these women domestic workers live in the slums. 67 per cent of them live in their own house in the chawl which is generally pakka. Of late, under the slum clearance drive, new buildings are being constructed and allotted to these slum dwellers. But in the present study proportion of such women workers is quite low. Some of these women are still waiting for a house to be allotted to them under the scheme, and hence, they live in rented house though the rent is being paid by the builder to some of them in the transition till a house is allotted to them. Most of these women in the houses which are not covered under this scheme and live in their own houses. Most of these women that have not been allotted a house under the scheme continue to live in a rented house. There are a few women who live in kachcha houses with tinned roof.

4.6 Economic Conditions

Domestic work is considered as unskilled work. It is menial, has low prestige and is therefore usually performed by women from poorer families. What drives these women into taking up domestic work? One reason is low level of education or human capital formation of these women and another reason is their poor economic conditions. Table 9 and chart 1 show the total family income and the per capita income of the respondents respectively.

Table 9: Total Income of the Family

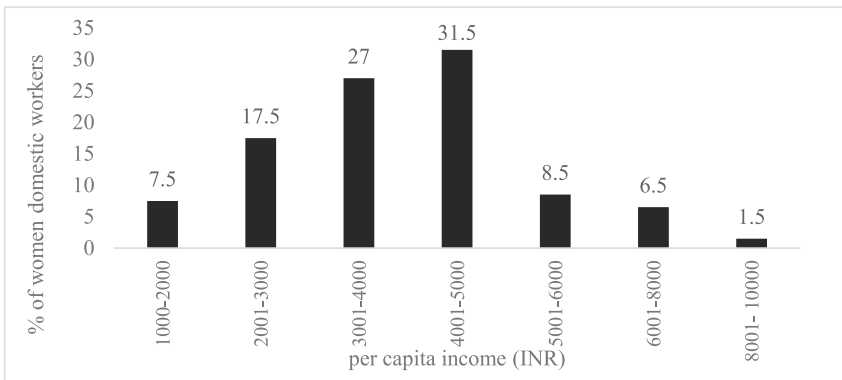
Income group (in Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage
less than 10000	43	21.5
10001-15000	111	55.5
15001-20000	29	14.5
20001-25000	9	4.5
25001-30000	8	4.0
Total	200	100.0

Rapid economic changes also majorly altered the lives of lower-income groups, with making two ends meet often being difficult for families if both spouses are not engaged in paid work. Skyrocketing of the price of household commodities, increasing cost of living, increasing prices of educational and health facilities, withdrawal of the state welfare mechanism from primary government services,

and increasing takeover of market forces resulted in an increasing number of women from such families entering paid labour. Being less educated or illiterate and unskilled, these women are often left with no option other than engaging in domestic work (Paul, 2011).

As shown in Table 9, 77 per cent of the respondents have a total family income of up to Rs.15000 per month. Only 4 per cent of the respondents have a monthly family income of Rs. 25,000-30,000. This comes to around 83.5 per cent of the families having a monthly per capita income of less than or up to Rs. 5000. This is much lower as compared to the average per capita income of the state of Gujarat. In fact, 7.5 per cent of the respondents having a per capita income of up to Rs.2000 are below poverty line considering an average daily expenditure of Rs. 47 per person per day for urban areas.

Chart 1: Per capita income of the family (in Rs.)



As discussed earlier, 11.5 per cent of the women are the sole earners in the family, these women are constantly under pressure for earnings. As shown in the table 9 and the chart 1, 83.5 per cent of the women have an average per capita income of up to Rs. 5000 or less. Of these, almost 50 per cent of the women have a per capita monthly income in the range of Rs. 3000-5000.

The per capita state GDP during 2018-19 was around Rs. 2.25 lakh per person considering an average of Rs. 13,000 per month. All the families in the survey belong to the income group below average state per capita income. Thus, low family income is another factor that pushes these women into domestic work.

4.7 Migrant Status of Women Domestic Workers

A growing phenomenon in the recent times is an increase in migration. Labour migration within the country is crucial for economic growth and contributes to improving the socio-economic condition of the people. However, in India migration after marriage has been the most important reason for majority of the women migrants. As per the 2011 Census, nearly 49 per cent of the migrants migrated after marriage. The other two important reasons are migration with

family and in search of job. In the present study also, it has been found that though these women have been staying in Vadodara for a long time they migrated to the city after marriage or with the family. In all, 65.5 per cent of the women have migrated either after marriage or with family. Only 7 per cent of the women migrated in search of job. 27.5 per cent of the women are non-migrants.

Table 10: Reasons for coming to Vadodara

Reason for migration	Frequency	Percentage
With family	47	23.5
After marriage	84	42.0
In search of job	14	7.0
Not applicable	55	27.5
Total	200	100.0

Majority of these women have come from within the state and only very few have migrated from other states like Rajasthan (2 per cent), Maharashtra (6.5 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (4 per cent) (Table 10). It is interesting to know that women from Uttar Pradesh have migrated after marriage or with family. Their husbands are engaged in either petty jobs such as working as driver or welder, etc. or are working as street vendors. Since their husband's jobs are uncertain, these women take up household work to supplement family income. Their economic condition in their native place is also extremely poor. Very few of them have land and income from the land is also extremely low, being around Rs. 5,000-50,000 per annum in a joint family which is just not sufficient for the survival.

Women also have to work to improve the standard of living of the family. With changing times some of the white goods are becoming necessities. Easy loans on consumer durables have enabled these lower-class families to buy these goods. Majority, rather mostly all women, have a television in the house. Two-wheelers and refrigerators are also not uncommon in these families as these are also available on easy EMIs. These women have been able to buy these goods and improve their comfort and standard of living due to easy consumer durable loans which is generally paid from their own earnings.

80 per cent of the women have water facility within the house. However, the other 20 per cent of them still have to depend on common municipal tap to get water. Similarly, a large proportion of women have been able to construct toilet in the house under the government scheme. But still, despite government policy of toilet in every house, 6 per cent of the families in the survey do not have toilet facility. At times they are ignorant about the government programmes or they are asked to make a part payment for construction of toilet which they cannot afford to pay.

As shown earlier, poor economic condition of the family is the reason for these women taking up paid work. It is also interesting to understand the economic support that these women receive from their husbands.

These women domestic workers have their husbands working in the informal sector. Majority of them are working for wages but their income is not regular (Table 11). Very few women have their husbands having a regular source of income. But because they are in the informal sector, their jobs are not secured and at times, they can be retrenched even without any notice.

Table 11: Nature of Husband’s Job

Nature of husband’s job	Frequency	Percentage
Petty jobs*	151	75.5
Driver	3	1.5
welding	1	0.5
Not applicable	45	22.5
Total	200	100.0

* Includes house painting, carpenter, plumber, etc.

During such transition times women’s earnings help support the family. In some of the cases, even if the husband is earning, he may not contribute to the family expenses. Hence, women have to struggle to make their two ends meet.

In almost all the cases (99 per cent), husband’s income is Rs. 15,000 or below (Table 12). With a family size of 3-4 and with high cost of living, these women domestic workers have no choice but to take up paid work. Thus, low family income is another factor pushing these women into paid work in the urban informal sector.

Table 12: Husband’s Monthly Income (in Rs.)

Husband’s monthly income	Frequency	Percentage
less than 5000	25	12.5
5001-10000	91	68.0
10001-15000	37	18.5
15001-25000	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Some of these women have incurred debt though their percentage is low (21 per cent). Majority of the women make efforts to manage within their resources. The reasons for incurring debt include buying consumer durables, unforeseen contingencies, and social reasons. Unforeseen contingencies include illness of a family member or urgent travel to their native place. Social reasons include marriage in the family or performing rituals during death in the family.

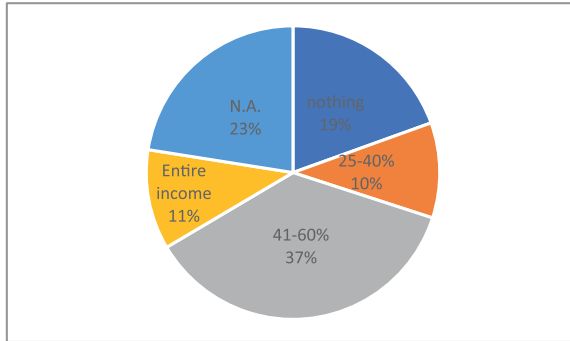
Generally, they borrow the money from non-institutional sources such as friends or neighbours/relatives but sometimes take some advance from their employer which is deductible from their salary depending on the amount of salary or the amount of debt. The amount that is deductible from the salary is based on an unwritten agreement between the employer and the employee. Informal agreement is seen as the characteristic of informal- sector job. For purchase of consumer durable goods the poor families have easy access to loans through the store who help them buy these goods through small EMIs. In majority of the cases, women's salary is utilized in repayment of debt. Though many women have some savings (more than 75 per cent), yet generally the amount of savings is very low (below Rs. 15,000). They save some money for unforeseen contingencies out of their salary without the knowledge of their husbands and other family members. They also save money round the year so that they can buy their annual stock of grains, spices (masala), oil etc. at a cheaper rate during the season in order to economize on their expenses.

These savings in majority of the cases are in the form of cash in hand and only in a few cases this money is kept in the bank. They are scared lest their husbands know about the savings if it is deposited in the bank.

Although few, there are women who take up other paid work as well to supplement the family income. Since the domestic paid work they have taken up is part time in nature, they take up paid activities such as stitching or repairing clothes or any other petty job that can help them earn some money to meet family expenses.

At times the husbands do not even contribute to the family expenses. In the survey it was found (Chart2) that in the case of 19 per cent women, the husbands do not contribute at all to the family expenses and it is the sole responsibility of the woman to meet the family expenses. They are either not working or if they are working then also their income is uncertain or many a times their husbands are addicted to liquor or other habits, and thus, exhaust their entire income for themselves instead of contributing to the family expenses. It is only in the case of 11 per cent of the women that the husbands give their entire income to them. In the case of other 47 per cent of the women, their husbands give 25-60 per cent of their income to meet family expenses. Thus, majority of the women have no choice but to take up paid work.

Chart 2: Husband’s contribution to family expenses



Unpaid household activities are the responsibility of the women even with paid work. Majority of these women also have to work in their own houses in addition to the paid work due to familial responsibilities. Since their contribution to paid work and unpaid work is significant, the attitude of their family members is generally good. However, though extremely low, there are very few women who are the victims of domestic violence (husbands beating, misbehaving after consuming liquor or due to extra-marital affairs). Despite this, they continue to live with their husbands either because they have no choice but to continue to live with them or because of the young children in the family. As they would mention “where do we go with small children? Our parents are poor and they do not have sufficient earnings for their own-self so how can we go there? We cannot buy another house so we cannot move out to live independently. Money that we earn from this domestic work is not sufficient to pay the rent of the house and meet all expenses.” They continue to live in a vulnerable situation – working throughout the day, doing all paid and unpaid work and at night bearing the husband’s torture, both physical and mental. There were women who even tried moving out but had to return back after sometime, only to make their life even more hell.

4.8 Women and Decision Making

Decision making is the study of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision maker. Making a decision implies that there are alternative choices to be considered, and in such a case, we require not only to identify as many of these alternatives as possible but to choose the one that best fits with our goals, objectives, desires, values, and so on (UN, 1997). Decision-making is a basic process that underlies all functions of family resource management. Women share abundant responsibilities and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the family, maintaining the households, etc. In spite of discharging all these duties, her involvement in decision-making process specially related to money matters is low (Raju& Rani, 1991). In patriarchal societies socio-economic conditions, among other factors, affect their decision-making.

It is, therefore, interesting to understand the role of these women domestic workers belonging to poor families and contributing significantly to the family in decision making.

Table 13: Women’s Participation in Decision Making

Decisions relating to	Self	Husband & wife together	Elders in family
Normal daily routine items to be purchased	23.0	63.0	14.0
Purchase of expensive items	20.0	58.5	21.5
Own income	15.0	67.0	18.0
Children’s education	14.5	69.0	16.5
Other decisions like children’s marriage	12.0	71.0	17.0

As shown in Table13, majority of the women participate in decision making equally with their husbands. This proportion is more than 50 per cent in all the decision-making processes. A cross-category comparison shows that women have an edge over in making decisions relating to the normal daily routine items to be purchased. This is because household is considered as women’s domain. They do consult their husbands (67 per cent of women) for their own income as well. But given the prevalence of the joint family system, elders in the family do have a say in the decision-making process. Thus, socio-cultural factors do have an influence on the decision-making processes.

4.9 Motivating Factor

Majority of the women take up domestic work on advice of the neighbours. More than 75 per cent of the women have taken up this work through neighbours (Table 14). In fact, sometimes, they work as mediator between the employer and the employee. They also initially help in fixing the wages as per the prevailing wage rate for the new entrants. If the new entrants in this occupation are desperate then they take up the work even at lower wages.

Table 14: Who suggested to take up the domestic work?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
No one, decided oneself	2	1.0
Neighbour	152	76.0
Mother	6	3.0
Husband	10	5.0
Family member/relative	10	5.0
Friend	20	10.0
Total	200	100.0

Gradually, once when they understand the work and the prevailing wage rate in the locality, they are able to bargain with the employers. The relationship between the employer and the employee is informal in nature. The neighbours and friends or relatives also help in job search or a job change. The role of the family members like husband or mother is also seen but percentage of such role is quite low. Thus, personal relations and contacts play a vital role in getting jobs in the informal sector and friends and neighbours are the motivating factors in determination of a job. This makes the relation between the employer and the employee also informal. There are no written job agreements and determination of wages is also a bipartite agreement between the employer and the employee.

4.10 Type and Duration of Work

As shown in Table 15, nearly 75 per cent of the women have been doing this work for more than five years. More than 50 per cent of the women have been engaged in this work for more than 10 years.

Table 15: Duration of Work

Duration of work	Frequency	Percentage
less than one year	10	5.0
more than 1 year-2 years	7	3.5
2.1-5 years	28	14.0
5-10 years	49	24.5
More than 10 years	106	53.0
Total	200	100.0

The proportion of new entrants in this work is quite low: only 5 per cent. This also endorses the fact that majority of the women belong to the middle age group, as shown earlier in the age profile of the women domestic workers.

Table 16: Type of the Work done

Type of the work done	Frequency	Percentage
cleaning utensils	2	1.0
washing clothes	1	0.5
cleaning house	17	8.5
cooking	47	23.5
utensils, clothes, cleaning	74	37.0
all of the work	58	29.0
from morning to evening	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

Hired domestic workers ease the burden of individual households by undertaking household chores in return for remuneration. Table 16 shows that they are being employed generally for household tasks which include washing utensils and clothes, sweeping and cleaning house along with a few outdoor tasks like irregular marketing, grocery shopping and even childcare activity. Because of the availability of washing machine for clothes, very few women are engaged for washing clothes. Domestic workers are generally not hired for washing clothes. Only one woman was found employed for this work. Thus, availability of machine may result in decrease in the demand for domestic workers at least for washing and cleaning. As shown in Table 16, majority of the women are employed for house cleaning and washing utensils. Their percentage is around 50. One-fourth of the women are employed in cooking work. Clearly, one main difference between paid and unpaid domestic work is that the former involves following a work routine, which is imposed by the employer's order rather than evolved for oneself (Cock, 1989). In fact, many of these women are looking after more than one household, spend more time, and work far more for their employers than in their own household (Table 17).

Table 17: Number of Houses where Respondent works

Number of houses	frequency	Percentage
1	18	9.0
2-3	104	52.0
4-5	62	31.0
6-7	11	5.5
8-9	4	2.0
10	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

4.11 Wages

Most of the women domestic workers work for more than one house. 83 per cent of the women work for 2-5 houses. Since all of them are part-time workers, they take up work in more than one house. Some perform only a single task or service for their employers, while others perform multiple tasks or services. In many cases, the employment relationship is informal unlike other informal wage workers who work for a firm, a contractor, or no fixed employer. Most domestic workers have a very personal relationship with their employer. Although personal, this employer-employee relationship remains unequal, often further exacerbated by differences in race, class, and citizenship – resulting in a range of conditions for domestic workers from paternalistic to exploitative (Chen Martha, 2011).

Table 18: Monthly Wages received

Wages received (in Rs.)	frequency	Percentage
less than 1000	2	1.0
1001-5000	1	0.5
5001-10000	21	11.5
10001-15000	47	23.5
15001-25000	67	33.5
Total	200	100.0

Wages of the women domestic workers are determined generally on the basis of number of family members, size of the house, area in the city, etc. Generally, the rate per work for cleaning house and utensils ranges from Rs. 600-700 per work (Table 18). For cooking, the wages range from Rs. 2000-3000 per work per meal depending on the number of family members. 33.5 per cent of the women earn around Rs. 15,000 to 25,000 per month. Their wages continue to be the same for years together with no increment. Generally, these women domestic workers demand a hike in their wages which most of the times goes unheard. If they insist on a hike, they lose their jobs too.

Sometimes these women have to carry out extra work for which no extra wages are paid. As such, there is no such norm prevailing for paying extra wages. When there are guests in the employer’s house, these women domestic workers have to work extra for cleaning utensils, or similar work. Similarly, though bonus is paid to them during festival time, once a year, they have to work extra time for cleaning the house, etc. The employer thinks it is her right to get extra work done that cannot be refused by these domestic workers when the bonus is being paid, which is considered as excess wage.

Since majority of the women work in 2-5 houses, they are able to earn Rs. 10,000-15000 in a month. As the wages paid for cooking work are relatively higher, their earnings are also high, but at the same time, these women work for longer hours. Some of these women work for more than eight hours a day. They leave their house in the morning, continue till afternoon. They return home to finish their own household chores and by evening again get back to work till late evening. They continue working with hardly any break for themselves during the long day. This is all being done only to meet the family expenses. They also aspire to send their children to good school so that their children do not have to take up these kinds of menial jobs. With a hope to secure a good future for their children, these women domestic workers have to sacrifice their present. They continue to work for the entire month, with no or one or two leaves. Those women who do not work for many employers are not able to earn enough for themselves and sometimes have to make compromises even with their basic needs.

4.12 Leave Benefits

Majority of the women (84 per cent) do get leave when they request their employer. Generally, they take leave during their own illness or their family member's illness, for social reasons or to visit their native place. Leave taken for illness is generally for a shorter duration but to visit the hometown, these women take leave for a longer duration. Under such situations these women provide a substitute with an assurance from the employer. 50 per cent of the women get two leaves in a month. 30 per cent of them get three leaves during the month (Table 19). For these women, there is no weekly off. They are ignorant about the same.

Table 19: Does the respondent get any leave?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	168	84.0
No	32	16.0
Total	200	100.0

This whole thought of no leave for the women domestic workers emerges from the domestic unpaid work where there is no holiday for women. Household work is unpaid and unrecognized work with no holiday for women in general and the same idea is reflected in the case of these women domestic workers when they demand for leave or weekly off.

There are no standard rules for payment of wages for the leave taken. It depends on the employer's wish. Some employers pay for the leave even if it is for a week or so whereas other employers deduct the wages even if the leave is for 2-3 days. But generally, if these women take 2-3 leaves during the month, the leave is a paid one but if the number of leaves taken is more, wages are deducted for the period. The number of leaves taken is explained in Table 20 which shows that majority of women, almost 50 percent, take only two leaves.

Table 20: Number of leaves the respondent gets in a month

No. of leaves availed	Frequency	Percentage
Not applicable (no leave)	32	16.0
1	4	2.0
2	100	50.0
3	24	12.0
4	22	11.0
as many as required	18	9.0
Total	200	100.0

An important aspect that needs to be understood here is that those women who take more leaves during the month are sometimes victims of retrenchment. They

frequently have to keep changing their employers. Those women workers who take many leaves are not acceptable to their employers who are women. This is because in that case they themselves have to perform all household chores.

These women domestic workers prefer not to send a substitute in their place for fear of loss of jobs. 87.5 per cent of the women do not send any one in their place. Sometimes this is also because the employers do not accept a substitute easily for various reasons such as reliability, spending extra time for explaining the task to be performed, or payment of extra wages, etc.

This is also reflective of the fact that these domestic workers are under the constant fear of termination from work. Employers let them work as long as they wish. Their services are terminated without any prior notice, if the employer is not satisfied. They even change their job when the employer changes her place of residence. Thus, these women domestic workers can be terminated even for petty reasons such as employer not satisfied with work, change of resident of the employer or even number of leaves taken by these women domestic workers (Adelle Blackett, 1996).

The very private location (employers' home) where the domestic worker works in the absence of public scrutiny and the lack of a supervision mechanism are the reasons for the insecure and unsafe working conditions. There is no supervision over the violation of labour rights or minimum work standards. Since there are no registered entries, it is also not possible to have supervision over payments.

Table 21: Does the respondent send someone else in the place while she is on leave?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	25	12.5
No	175	87.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 22: If the respondent sends someone then who pays the wage to the person replacing her?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not applicable	175	87.5
Self	22	11.0
Employer	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

As shown in Table 21, women generally do not send anyone in their place for fear of losing their own job. Only very few women send someone in their place. Generally, it is the woman domestic worker who has to pay the wages to the substitute as shown in Table 22. Only in very few cases (1.5 percent only)

the employers pay the wages for the substitute. Thus, these women domestic workers are much more vulnerable given the fact that they do not get any weekly off and if they take a leave then they have to pay money to the substitute working in their place. Majority of these domestic workers do not send any substitute for fear of losing their job. This insecurity is much higher when the woman who is being sent as substitute does not have much work. She tries to impress the employer by performing extra work. Thus, sending a substitute is in a way threat to these women domestic workers.

Virtually, all the women get their salary on time. Only in a few cases, they are not being paid regularly. This regularity in payment of wages may be due to the fact that if these women domestic workers realize irregularity in payment of their wages by their employers, they do not continue with such employers for long. Women in a particular locality meet often and discuss these matters among themselves, and if such employers are known to anyone in the group, then other women domestic workers advise their friends not to work with such employer. But those women who do not get it on time, in their case generally the delay is for a week or less.

4.13 Distance to Place of Work

Generally, these women workers take up a job in the vicinity of their house so that they can work and also take care of their own household chores. This also helps them in reducing their transport cost. They, in majority of the cases, prefer to walk down. Very few of them have a cycle. Moreover, the employers also prefer domestic workers from the neighbourhood so that the maids are approachable in times of need when there are guests in the house. Also, proximity to their place of residence provides flexibility to these women to make adjustments with their own household chores or their children's school timings.

4.14 Working Hours

Working hours of these women domestic workers change over the time. There are many factors responsible for this. Firstly, the speed of every individual woman domestic worker of performing the same task is different from others. Thus, the time spent on the same task may differ. Moreover, the quantum of work also differs and the same woman domestic worker may take a longer time in one house for the same task. But generally, a woman worker on an average works for around 5-8 hours a day. Around 41.32 per cent of the women work for a longer time (for 8-10 hours a day).

They continue to work in some households over a longer period of time, but they have to leave if the employer moves house or, in a few cases, when employer does not increase wages. Despite the toil and disgrace of domestic work, these women domestic workers felt that their work provided them the flexibility of making adjustments in accordance to their family's needs.

4.15 Other Benefits

Some of the domestic workers got old utensils and/or clothes from their employers. Some got food articles on a regular basis while few got left-over food. Employers often gave medicines for common ailments. A majority of households offered tea and snacks to domestic workers.

89 per cent of the women reported to be getting bonus. Generally, it is paid only if the women domestic worker has been working with the employer for a long time. Also, payment of bonus is considered as the employer’s prerogative and not the worker’s right. In a few cases, the employer retrenches the worker if they insist on payment of bonus to them. Sometimes the employer gives some utensils or clothes during the festival time instead of cash payment of bonus.

Some of these women (13 per cent) take some advance or extra money in times of their need which is generally returnable and is without interest. Many of the women reported that they get help from their employer as and when they require but this is generally monetary in nature. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no uniformity in the other benefits that these domestic workers receive from their employers. Getting those benefits depend on the goodwill of the employer.

Table 23: Any other help received from the employers

Benefits received	Frequency	Percentage
Bonus	178	89.0
Clothes & similar goods	40	20.0
cash returnable without interest	26	13.0
any help as & when needed	67	33.5
all of the above	53	26.5
none of above	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0

Nearly 10 per cent of the women are not getting benefits of any kind from their employers as shown in Table 23.

4.16 Work Satisfaction

Majority of the women are satisfied with their work whereas a few (9 per cent) are not satisfied with the present work they are engaged in. These women are better educated and young. If an opportunity comes to them, they are willing to take up a “better work.” Domestic work for these women is a menial job. According to them, their present job is socially belittling. Even if they get low wages in another occupation, they would prefer to take up any other occupation rather than working as domestic worker. According to them, their children are looked down upon in the school because of their occupation. As one of the respondents mentioned, “women domestic workers do not get any respect in

the society. Even if they have money, they do not get any respect as they are working as domestic workers....*akhirhai to kamwali bai hi na* (After all, she is working as domestic worker).” In short, domestic work as an occupation is a disregarded job. This whole notion of disregard for the occupation emerges from the fact that women’s care work and household chores are not considered as work– a patriarchal attitude to women’s work.

5. Concluding Remarks

Paid domestic work is increasing in many economies worldwide but it remains a virtually invisible form of employment in many countries. It is also generally seen as unskilled work, a natural extension of women’s work in their own homes.

The present study has found that the young generation is less inclined to take up domestic work. Poverty and unemployment are the factors which have created a way for the women to enter the informal sector. Due to the lack of alternatives the women from lower socio-economic background having low level of education and illiteracy are forced to work as domestic labourers.

The cost of living in the urban areas has been increasing in the recent times. This is resulting into women taking up paid work. In the present study it has been found that as compared to unmarried women, more married women are taking up domestic work.

The study also found that the relationship between the employer and employee is informal in nature. The neighbours and friends or relatives help in job search or a job change. Thus, personal relations and contacts play a role in getting jobs in the informal sector. At times friends and neighbours are also the motivating factors in determination of a job. Hired domestic workers ease the burden of individual households by undertaking household chores in return for remuneration. They are being employed generally for household tasks which include washing utensils and clothes, sweeping and cleaning house along with a few outdoor tasks like irregular marketing, grocery shopping and even childcare activity. The employment relationship is informal unlike other informal wage workers who work for a firm, a contractor, or no fixed employer. Most domestic workers have a very personal relationship with their employer. Although personal, this employer-employee relationship remains unequal.

Wages of the women domestic workers are determined generally based on the number of family members, size of the house, area in the city, etc. Their wages continue to be the same for years together. There is no increment in their wages. Generally, these women domestic workers demand a hike in their wages which most of the times goes unheard. Sometimes these women have to carry out extra work for which no extra wages are paid.

Household work is unpaid and unrecognized with no leave for women in general and the same idea is reflected in the approach towards these women domestic workers in their demand for leave or weekly off. Those women who take more leaves during the month are sometimes victims of retrenchment. These domestic workers are under the constant fear of termination from work. Employers let them work as long as they wish. Their services are terminated without any prior notice.

Domestic work as an occupation is a disregarded job. This whole notion of disregard for the occupation emerges from the fact that women's care work and household chores are not considered as work— a patriarchal attitude towards women's work. Domestic work has to be placed in the larger context of patriarchy and subjugation of women. Patriarchy hands over controls of women's mobility, economic resources, productive and reproductive power to men. Both biological and social reproduction is carried out by women in most societies. Although these are necessary for human survival, these are neither considered work nor economic in nature and hence are invisible, unrecognized, and unpaid. Usually, it is women and girls who perform socially reproductive work all across the world. The endless and repetitive labour provided by them is not acknowledged as valuable work (Jagori, 2010).

The proposed National Policy on domestic workers³ recognizes the importance of domestic workers and the problems of the market faced by these workers, and has emphasized the need for 'inclusion' rather than 'exclusion' of domestic workers in the existing legislations as well as "supplementing these with legislations specific for domestic workers" (ILO, 2011). Regulation and protection of domestic work result in the improvement of conditions in the short term, but the way to banish inequality and vulnerability in the long term must be the collectivization of domestic tasks and also the equal sharing of such tasks between women and men (Duguid & Weber, 2019). Such changes, however, must involve a wider section of society, including a generous provision of good public childcare, social services and health care, parental leave shared by women and men, and also gender equality in wages and income tax regulation. Finally, it requires that everybody who is physically capable of cleaning should take this task on for themselves (Calleman, 2011).

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