

## **MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

# **A STUDY ON THE LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN MYSORE**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

A domestic worker is someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages. These services range from providing care for children and elderly dependents to cleaning and household maintenance. Responsibilities may also include cooking, doing laundry and ironing, food shopping and other household errands.

In India, the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized sector has estimated that there are 4 million domestic workers who work as helpers in the house of others and of them, 92 per cent are women, girls and children and 20 per cent are under 14 years of age. However, according to some non-governmental sources, these figures are under estimated and the number of domestic workers in the country could be as high as 20 million.

It is therefore clear that domestic work is an important source of income to a sizable section of the population. However, domestic workers remain invisible, unprotected and their contribution is often not recognized. Prejudice related to their social status is reflected very strongly at the workplace and the hidden nature of their work makes exploitation all the more easy. Women domestic workers who make up a vast majority of these workers are especially vulnerable.

### **Review of Literature**

Several studies have been carried out on the status of women in both unorganized and organized sectors. The researcher limited the review to the status of women in the unorganized sector, as it was relevant to the study. Books, journals and web sites served as sources of

literature review. The review of literature was extremely useful in gaining a deep insight into the status of women working in the unorganized sector in general and women working as domestic workers in particular.

To put the findings of the review in a nutshell, it may be said that, research specifically focusing on the conditions of women domestic workers is meager; existing research shows that the living and working conditions of domestic workers are quite deplorable with most of them being deprived of overtime pay, public holiday, and timely payment of salaries. Besides, they are also fired without a reasonable period of notice or any valid ground for dismissal. The conditions faced by these workers are poor not only in India, but globally, with conditions being only somewhat better in western countries. Lack of awareness of their rights and poor unionism serve as hurdles in efforts to improve their plight. Although non-governmental organizations are striving to alleviate the plight of these workers and various legislative measures have been initiated, real improvement in their conditions has not yet been seen and domestic workers are yet to be recognized as workers, and enjoy legal protection, rights and dignity.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study was undertaken to examine the living and working conditions of women domestic workers in Mysore city. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the socio-demographic background of women domestic workers in Mysore city, to know about their pattern of wages, range of tasks performed, psychosocial environment prevalent at the workplace, leave and social security benefits, if any, extended to these workers and to seek suggestions for the improvement of their living and working conditions.

The study adopted a descriptive design and made use of an interview schedule to gather data from a sample size of seven hundred respondents. Stratified random sampling method was used to select the respondents from four regions (Mysore North, South, East and West) of Mysore City which has a population of 7.8 lakhs and 114656 households. All women domestic workers working within the limits of Mysore City constituted the Universe of the study. Of the approximately 6300 women domestic workers in the city, 700 of them working in different parts of the city were chosen as subjects for the study.

While interview with respondents and observation served as important sources of primary data, secondary data were collected from books, journals and web sites. The pre-tested tools were used to gather data from seven hundred respondents and the process of data collection took six months with each interview lasting around 45 minutes. The interview schedule comprised three parts, Part-A dealt with socio-demographic conditions of the women domestic workers, Part-B was dedicated to their living conditions and Part-C examined their working conditions. The data were coded, decoded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The statistical methods used included Chi-Square test and Coefficient Contingency.

## **Results - Major Findings**

### **Socio-demographic Profile of Women Domestic Workers**

1. Most of the women domestic workers (67.00%) belonged to the age group of 18 to 40 years and a vast majority (82.29) of the women domestic workers were married.
2. Women domestic workers with no education (illiterate) emerged as the largest group at 48.29%. Those who attended class I to VII formed the second largest group at 32.29% and about eighteen percent of the respondents had a high school education.
3. Ninety two percent of the women domestic workers were Hindus while 1% and 7% were Christians and Muslims respectively. While 48.43% of the respondents belonged to the OBC (Other Backward Classes) group, 37.00% hailed from Scheduled Castes.
4. While a majority (72.57%) of the women domestic workers were local residents, a sizable proportion of 27.43% of them had migrated from surrounding districts. Among the migrants, most of the families had migrated in search of work.

### **Living Conditions of Women Domestic Workers**

1. A sizable percentage (59.00%) of domestic workers had ownership of their house. Most (78.71%) of the domestic workers lived in tin roofed houses. While 14.83% of the workers lived in thatched roofed houses, only 6.146% of them resided in pucca houses with a RCC roof.
2. Majority of the women domestic workers had water facility (90.82%), electricity facility (99.14%) and toilet facility (98.00%) at home. Most of them (75.71%) also had an LPG connection.

3. Surprisingly, only 28.29% of the respondents had outstanding loans and most of them (67.68%) had an outstanding loan amount of less than rupees twenty five thousand.
4. Government hospitals were the most commonly accessed healthcare facility with 62.14% of the women domestic workers going to them when ill.
5. A sizable percentage (69.71%) of domestic workers was found to frequently suffer from minor health ailments. Commonly reported ailments being body pain, backache, headache, fatigue, frequent bouts of cough and cold.
6. When the issue of domestic violence was investigated, it was found that 2.29% of the women domestic workers had been subjected to physical abuse by members of their family. Scramble for the woman domestic worker's earnings was the most common (54.48%) reason for physical abuse.

### **Working Conditions of Women Domestic Workers**

#### **Nature of Service**

1. When the range of tasks performed at work was examined, it was found that cleaning (washing clothes and vessels, sweeping and mopping the floor) was the most commonly performed task. When the average wages earned by domestic workers per month per household was investigated, it was found that 67.10% of the workers earned rupees 500-1000 per month. It was found that while 55.79% of the domestic workers earned less than rupees two thousand per month from domestic work, 43.78% of them earned between rupees two thousand to five thousand.
2. A large majority (62.95%) did not receive any extra remuneration for extra work done. It was found that majority of the workers (81.83%) do not get a weekly off.
3. It was found that 76.54% of the domestic workers were not granted sick leave and had to invariably work even when sick. 18.17% of the domestic workers reported that leave is extended only on the condition of loss of the day's wages.
4. It emerged that no notice was given whatsoever in 97.14% of the cases. Job insecurity is significantly associated with being a woman domestic worker.
5. It was found that 86.53% of the respondents received no social security benefits. The small section of workers who received it usually received it in the form of small loans during difficult times.

6. It was found that 38.54% of the domestic workers were subjected to verbal abuse at work. It was found that physical abuse was a rarity for domestic workers with 98.93% of the workers responding that they had never been subjected to physical abused at work.
7. It was found that 73.68% of the respondents were not aware of the provisions of the Domestic Workers' Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010.
8. Areas in which they sought change and improvement include better wages, pay for extra work, weekly off and paid holidays, medical care and other social security benefits, strengthening of unions, job security and respect for their profession.

### **Suggestions**

1. It was found in the study that 48.29% of the women domestic workers were illiterate. It is therefore suggested that women domestic workers be made beneficiaries of adult/continuing education. This will empower them and make them better prepared to face the challenges of life.
2. Most of the domestic workers (46.47%) borrow money from local money lenders. They must be encouraged to become members of Self Help Groups and make use of Micro Finance Institutions. This measure will also contribute to the socio-economic empowerment of women domestic workers.
3. Just like all women in India, women domestic workers tend to neglect their health. They must be made be aware of the importance of a balanced and nutritious diet. Support may be extended to them through the provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013.
4. The wages they earn are less than Minimum Wages and woefully inadequate to meet daily needs, let alone plan for savings. In the light of the high cost of living seen in the present day and age, it must be ensured that employers pay the legally prescribed Minimum Wages so that domestic workers are not exploited and so that they may be able to lead a decent standard of living.
5. It must be ensured that they get extra remuneration for extra work done. A weekly holiday must be given so that they get to rejuvenate themselves once a week and also strike a work-life balance.
6. They must be granted paid holidays during major religious and national festivals. They must be extended 15 paid sick leaves per year. No social security benefits are extended to

workers whatsoever. They must be brought under the cover of all the social security measures that are extended to workers employed in the unorganized sector.

7. A considerable number of respondents reported that they did not feel respected at work. Domestic workers should not be referred to as servants. The traditional master-servant relationship must make way for a professional employer-employee relationship. The work done by domestic workers must be accorded dignity and respectability.
8. Measures should be taken to prevent verbal/physical/sexual abuse at the workplace. A local level Board should be set up to receive, examine and resolve complaints related to harassment. Employers must be made aware of the importance of developing and maintaining healthy employee-employer relations.
9. Unions are beneficial in fighting for the legitimate rights of workers. However, it was found in the present study that 87.54% of the respondents were not members of any domestic workers' union. Domestic workers must be made aware of the benefits of unionism and they must be encouraged to become members of such unions/federations.
10. It was found that 73.68% of the respondents were not aware of the existence of the Domestic Workers' Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010. Awareness will help them fight for their rights and bring about an improvement in their conditions. Awareness campaigns should be undertaken to spread awareness about the provisions of the Act.

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