



RESEARCH PAPER

Doing the Dirty Work: The Experiences of Female Domestic Workers in Pakistan

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: February 25, 2022</p> <p>Accepted: April 10, 2022</p> <p>Online: April 15, 2022</p> <p>Keywords: Informal Employment, Informal Workers' Rights, Women Domestic Workers</p> <p>*Corresponding Author farah.naz@uos.edu.pk</p>	<p>Domestic work is one of the oldest occupations of the informal economy and the number of women in domestic employment is persistently rising. However, the nature of this work, and the problems associated with it, has undergone an immense transformation over the years due to changes in family structures and dynamics. This research is an attempt to examine the issues and challenges faced by domestic workers. A qualitative study of female domestic workers was conducted to achieve this goal. The study addresses several intersected themes such as socio-economic conditions, workplace environment etc. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted and the respondents were selected purposively through snowball sampling. Our findings suggest that paid domestic work is a neglected and highly exploited form of female employment in the informal sector. The findings suggest the need for a sound legal framework on the part of employers as well as for the employees in this sector.</p>

Introduction

At the onset of the global care crisis, with the increase in the aging population and the rise of female labour force participation, the issue of domestic work has gained a new resonance. The term “domestic work” generally refers to a wide variety of tasks that are related to care work and household maintenance. Historically domestic work has been treated as a part of the private sphere of the economy with low social and economic value, and it often falls outside the scope of general labour laws. It is one of the oldest occupations and has been the source of employment for millions of women both in developed and developing countries. Domestic work is perceived as less skilled work; it includes heterogeneous tasks like cooking, cleaning, and family care etc. The hidden and heterogeneous nature of domestic work makes it difficult to get accurate statistical data about its extent. This kind of work is mostly performed by women, and often entails an “atypical employment relationship”. In an International Labour Organization (ILO) meeting of experts in 1951, a domestic worker was defined as a “wage earner working in a [private] household, under whatever method and period of remuneration, who may be employed by one or several employers, and who receives no pecuniary gain from this work”.

There is considerable agreement among scholars that the demand for domestic workers has increased during last few decades due to increased female labour force participation. These women hire the services of other less privileged women to free themselves from the their unpaid domestic labour that they have to perform at home as part

of their gender role obligations (Glenn, 1992). According to the global & regional estimates of domestic workers published by ILO in 2010, there were nearly 53 million domestic workers working throughout the world. While in 2013 this figure showed a significant increase of twenty-five percent. At present, there exist around 67 million domestic workers world over (ILO, 2015). The International Labor Organization (2016) found that throughout the whole world, the vast majority of domestic workers are women. According to an estimate, 83% of domestic workers are women, and their participation in this informal sector is progressively rising in both developed & developing countries (ILO, 2016).

In developed countries, women labour force participation is higher and women are more career oriented as compared to women in developing countries. Existing studies (Glenn, 1992; Duffy 2007) confirm that in the history of United States, white women used to acquire the services of black women (i.e. the less privileged women) to keep themselves free from reproductive Labour at home. Reproductive labor is about performing domestic activities like cleaning the home, cooking, washing, and doing childcare etc. (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003).

According to Parrenas (2000), women pursue their careers because of the availability of cheap domestic workers who often step into the old shoes of their employers and manage their domestic tasks on little remunerations. However, *housewives working for housewives* (Kraamwinkel, 2016) are no longer a privilege of just any one specific ethnic or racial group. Besides racial-ethnic discrimination in paid reproductive labor (i.e. domestic employment), there exist other things, which matter as well. For instance, poverty, illiteracy, lack of other sources of income, gender-based discrimination in the labor market, are all reasons stated by D'Souza (2010) for which women join paid domestic labor. Now domestic employment is beyond colors, castes, and creeds, it's just a game of needs. Women join domestic employment to earn money so they could fulfill their needs.

The needs and future prospects of this kind of employment could be different for different groups of workers. However, invisibility, informality, the private character of work place and precarity are defining feature of this work. As a group of workers their work has been unrecognized and their social & labor rights have been violated (Oelz, 2014). Among different occupations of informal employment, the sector of domestic employment is considered an area where there is no certainty of the working hours and service timing is highly unpredictable (International Labor Organization, 2016).

Although domestic workers are playing a vital role in economy and society, their work is not valued. There is high demand for domestic care work in advanced nations. However, this demand is also expected to rise in Asian regions as well. Due to demographic transitions, Asia is expected to become one of the "oldest" regions in the world in the next few decades. According to an estimate, the number of older people in Asia-Pacific is expected to increase from an estimated 548 million in 2019, to nearly 1.3 billion by 2050 (Baruah, 2019). Most of the existing literature deals with the issues of international migrant domestic workers in advanced countries, whereas problems of local domestic workers and their lived experiences in developing countries remains an under investigated research area. There is growing demand of domestic service in Pakistan as well. However, domestic workers in Pakistan, like many other regions of the world, are not getting due recognition of their contribution. Their work remains largely invisible, unregulated and, in many ways undervalued. Women domestic workers are marginalized in many ways in Pakistan, for instance, their wages are not fixed (Schedules of wages, 2015). This paper aims to fill this

gap by conducting a qualitative study of domestic workers in Pakistan. The major aim of this paper is to explore the issues faced by women domestic workers in their day-to-day lives.

Literature Review

Due to the continually increasing rate of female labour force participation, families often count on domestic workers to care for their homes, children, and aging relatives. Various estimates show that the care sector will grow over next few decades. According to UN estimates, the proportion of people aged 60 or above will increase by a factor of 1.8 by 2050 and by 2.3 by 2100, as compared to 2015 (UN DESA, 2015). International labour organization identified domestic employment as a greatly feminized occupation where women outnumbered the men. The challenges faced by these female domestic workers are not confined to a specific region rather it is a global issue. One of the biggest challenges faced by domestic workers as well as policy makers is the invisible nature of their work, which results in a lack of integrated policies and clear guidelines. Extending social protection to this most vulnerable group of workers demands the translation of 'domestic work' into a statistical concept that could be operationalized in-order to get comparable statistical data. However, domestic work is not a very clearly defined term. One reason for this ambiguity is the heterogeneous nature of domestic work, which entails a long list of tasks.

Domestic Work

The concept of domestic work varies from one place to another place according to the geographic & cultural context of that place (ILO, 2010a). Different people define this phenomenon in different ways. For instance, the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 189 defined the term "Domestic Work" as a kind of work that is performed in or for a household or many households whereas the term "Domestic Worker" stands for a person that is engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship. Armstrong (2012) defined a domestic worker as a person that is employed as a servant by an employer for getting his/her household activities done. Moreover, he highlighted the difference between the terms like the domestic worker, homemaker, housewife, and housekeeper. He clarified that a domestic worker is a servant performing household tasks, while a homemaker or housewife is the person that does his/her own home's chores, and the term housekeeper is specifically attached with a person who works in an institution like a school or a hospital.

The person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and does not work on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker (ILO, 2013). Tewathia (2017) classified domestic workers into two types i.e. live-in domestic workers and live-out domestic workers. The former is a category of workers that reside in the house of the employer either in a separate servant quarter or in a storeroom at the place of the employer. But they are not allowed to move back to their homes daily. They visit their homes on a monthly basis mostly. Live-out domestic workers are those workers who come at the workplace on daily basis, do their assigned household tasks and then leave the home of the employer upon getting their work done. They don't routinely stay at their employers' home for the night. Aside from live-in and live-out women domestic worker, there exists another type of domestic worker that is 'task-specific' domestic worker. As the name is referring task-specific domestic worker is such kind of domestic worker that is hired for time being. Domestic workers are also divided on basis of their gender, cast, ethnicity and locality

The Extent of Legal Protection for Domestic Workers

The pressing need to provide social protection and recognition to domestic workers has been widely acknowledged since ILO has adopted international labour standards (Tsikata, 2009) dedicated exclusively to domestic workers in The Convention (No. 189), and the accompanying Domestic Workers Recommendation (No 201) (Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012). ILO has the fundamental objective of promoting the basic rights of workers, ensuring decent work opportunities for men and women, ensuring social protection at employment, and strengthening social dialogue. This convention was an outcome of a long term negotiating process that was geared towards the recognition of domestic workers and their labour rights and entitlements (Pape, 2016). Its basic purpose was to regulate the terms and conditions of work for domestic workers. Both the convention and recommendation were considered as a landmark moment for domestic workers who were being recognized for the very first time within a legal document. Besides, it was a landmark moment for the international labor law regime as well. In short, this legislation by International Labour Organization convention number 189 served the purpose of setting out the global minimum standards for domestic work.

Apart from much legislation in the formal employment sector, ILO has introduced conventions in the area of domestic work. These conventions are basically the instruments or recommendations by an international labor organization for domestic workers (Klemm, et al. 2011).

The International Labour Organization has held one hundred and eighty-nine conventions, which are further divided into three different parts: fundamental conventions, governance conventions, & technical conventions (ILO, 2017). All these conventions and recommendations highlight the problems that are solely based on the lived realities and experiences of the workers (Piler, 2015). The International Labour Organization has the agenda to promote decent work. Decent work means that workers (both male & female) must be working in decent work conditions that will ensure the prosperity and sustainable progress of all kinds of workers including domestic workers also (ILO, 2010).

Sengenberger (2001) stated that decent work involves the freedom of all kinds including freedom of expression and liberty of opinion, equality on the base of gender, fair and secure income, social protection including security of being exploited, getting workers involved in decision making, making of international policies in labor market and above all that decent work ensures human dignity in a sense that dignity of human can't be compromised in any situation. Decent work involves productive employment for all workers.

National Labour Legislation for Domestic Workers in Pakistan

Domestic work is part of a huge informal sector of Pakistan and according to an estimate, every fourth household in Pakistan hires domestic worker. The majority of domestic workers in Pakistan are females. According to the Labour Force Survey of Pakistan (2014-15), there are 0.464 million domestic workers in Pakistan. Of these, 0.1 million are live-in domestic workers whereas 0.364 million serve as day based or task specific domestic workers. There are two most common types of domestic workers in Pakistan, child domestic worker and female domestic workers. Some of these workers are working under debt bondage that was accrued by their families. In 2004 there were 264,000 children working as domestic workers in Pakistan (ILO, 2004). This kind of work is classified as hazardous and is prohibited for children under 18 by the ILO Convention 189 and its Recommendation (201). ILO Convention 189 requires the members to set a minimum age for domestic work.

So far as the question of Pakistan is concerned, Pakistan has ratified four fundamental conventions, two governance conventions and twenty-six technical conventions of ILO. ILO Convention 189 requires the members to set a minimum age for domestic work. However, Out of sixty-two conventions that have not been ratified by Pakistan yet, includes the convention 189 as well, that deals with the labor rights and standards for domestic workers particularly (ILO, 2017, Klemm, et al. 2011).

As for as constitution of Pakistan is concerned, The Provincial Employees Social Security Ordinance 1965 and the Minimum Wages Ordinance of 1961 includes domestic workers in the definition of workers. The Provincial Employees Social Security Ordinance define domestic servant as any “person working whole-time in connection with the work of any household for any consideration, whether in cash or in kind”. This legislation requires an employer of a domestic worker, to provide full medical care. However, despite these legislative provisions, government of Pakistan has not yet notified the minimum wages for domestic workers under this law and there is no mechanism provided to ensure its implementation. The Senate of Pakistan has passed the *Domestic Workers (Employment Rights) Act* in 2017, in order to bring domestic workers under the jurisdiction of labour laws in Pakistan. This Bill aims to protect the rights of the domestic workers, to regulate their employment and conditions of service by providing them social security, safety, health facility and welfare. However, there is no registration authority for domestic workers in Pakistan that could help them to come out of shadow.

Theoretical Debates about Domestic Work

Domestic work is performed within a private sphere of homes. Unlike other workplace where work is performed in a formal setting, homes are more emotive spaces. Consequently employment relations within private households are managed in a different manner than routine employee-employer relationship in so to speak ‘proper work’. Domestic work is a category of reproductive labour that refers to the diverse set of activities vital for the re/production of human life, communities, and cultures. Domestic work include, but not limited to the raising of children; caring for the elderly, sick, disabled; preparation of food; basic cleanliness and maintenance of hygiene.

Domestic work takes place in informal settings like personal homes that are totally different from the settings of a factory or an office where there are no team members or co-workers and the domestic worker is supposed to perform the domestic tasks behind the closed doors. Consequently, the status of domestic work as a category of employment has remained under valued and invisible so far (Armstrong, 2012).

Augustine & Kumar (2016) argued that due to their unorganized work patterns, domestic workers are neglected and left on the mercy of their employers. The women domestic workers have to suffer both economically and socially because they belong to a vulnerable kind of employment. Preliminary studies have mentioned this bitter reality as ILO (2016) reported that the work of women domestic workers is undervalued because of the cultural perceptions about the worthlessness of this employment and the employees. Domestic workers have weak labor protection because of their explicit exclusion from coverage of many labor protection rights like minimum wage, overtime, and workers compensation (Dresser, 2008). Domestic workers are invisible because of their lack of collective representation and the vulnerable social status of their work (Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012)

Material and Methods

This research adopted the phenomenological approach to explore the problems of female domestic workers. In the phenomenological approach mostly the researchers conduct interviews with a group of those people who have firsthand knowledge of a specific situation or experience. This study was conducted in Sargodha, Pakistan. Primarily the data was collected from women domestic workers who were live-out/ day workers and the secondary data was gathered from research reports, published articles, E-journals, and E-books. Twenty women domestic workers were selected through snowball sampling for in-depth interviews. All the in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interview and informal conversation with the respondents revolved around the following basic research question.

- What are perceptions of domestic workers about their work and employment conditions?
- What are the workplace experiences of being a Women Domestic Worker?
- What are the major factors that led women to opt for domestic work?

All interviews were conducted at respondent's homes. The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. This method is used by the researcher to identify, analyze, and generate themes within data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). After transcribing & coding the in-depth interviews in manual documentation, the researcher organized data according to predefined major themes.

Results and Discussion

In-order to get overall picture of lived experiences of women domestic workers in-depth interviews were conducted with respondents from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds (see Tab 1). The demographic and socioeconomic profile is a tool that provides a birds-eye view of a particular collection of people with some commonalities. It is useful in identifying unique and shared characteristics of a group being conducted.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

No	Name	Age	Religion	Caste	Education	Marital Status	Family Size	Monthly Income in Rupees
1	Andleeb	40	Islam	Joiya	No	Married	05	4,000
2	Kaneez	46	Islam	Bhatti	No	Married	10	9,000
3	Shamma	45	Islam	Khokhar	No	Widowed	04	7,000
4	Nuoreen	25	Islam	Shahotaray	No	Married	08	7,000
5	Gulshan	42	Islam	Khokhar	No	Widowed	06	8,500
6	Zulekha	40	Islam	Mughal	No	Married	05	8,500
7	Ulfat	70	Islam	Muslim sheikh	No	Married	07	12,000
8	Shagufta	60	Islam	Khokhar	No	Married	07	10,000
9	Fakhira	40	Islam	Khokhar	No	Married	06	10,000
10	Zeenat	23	Islam	Rajputt	No	Married	06	6000
11	Laila	35	Islam	Khokhar	No	Married	05	8,000
12	Hajira	45	Islam	Chohaana	No	Divorced	04	7,000
13	Gulbano	30	Islam	Muslim sheikh	No	Married	05	8,000
14	Yasmeen	30	Islam	Bhatti	No	Widowed	06	7,000
15	Majida	21	Islam	Sheikh	No	Married	05	6,000
16	Tehmina	70	Islam	Sheikh	No	Widowed	07	7,000
17	Najma	35	Islam	Sheikh	No	Married	07	5,000

18	Rudaba	32	Islam	Muslim sheikh	No	Married	08	5,000
19	Ghazala	20	Islam	Joiya	No	Married	05	3,000
20	Irum	55	Islam	Muslim sheikh	No	Married	04	3,000

Work and Employment Conditions of Domestic Workers

There is a set of internationally recognized core labour standards outlined in various conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) namely; the effective abolition of child labour (ILO conventions 138 and 182), the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (ILO conventions 100 and 111), the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour (ILO conventions 29 and 105), as well as the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (ILO conventions 87 and 98). These principles laid the foundation of minimum requirements for decent work. However analysis of data reveal that the conditions of women domestic workers are far from satisfactory and fall short in terms of most of the above-mentioned decent work parameters. This finding is also supported by Augustine & Kumar (2016) who categorically stated that domestic workers are most vulnerable in informal employment particularly in terms of their unsatisfactory work conditions and they are vulnerable with respect to human right abuses. This is because the workplace of this job (i.e. domestic employment) is unlike an office rather the homes of employers are the workplaces, where domestic workers are prone to different kind of abuses due to the informal environment of the home where such kind of abuses are not questioned (Swepston, 2010). It was clear from verbatim of seventy-year-old Tehmina.

We do all their dirty work, we even clean and wash their toilets and they don't consider and treat us like humans (Interview Transcript: Tehmina)

It was clear from verbatim of a responded that they are aware of their exploitation but due to dire economic needs and fear to lose their jobs; they tolerate offensive behaviour of their employers.

Many times my wage was deducted upon little things but I never questioned the employers on deduction of my wage because I had the fear that they will dismiss me from work (Interview transcript: Noreen)

Although right to minimum wage for domestic workers is now widely acknowledged but Table 1 clearly reflect that overall wages of domestic workers are very low and domestic workers are not able to support even minimum standard of living for themselves and their families. Ghai (2002) supported that workers in any sector either formal or informal must be given the desired amount of remuneration in order to achieve at least a minimum standard of living. Low wages, long duration of work, abusive behaviour of the employer and uncertainty about work, lack of social protection is reported as major problem faced by the respondents who were interviewed during the fieldwork.

Being a Domestic Worker: Voices of Women Domestic Workers

Although domestic work is foundational for survival of human societies, yet it is not given the rights and respect that it deserve. Rather domestic workers have to face discriminatory behaviour of their employer and wider society. Majority of respondents reported inhumane work conditions. They particularly complained about the disrespectful behaviors of their employers, which make their work experience emotionally agonizing for

them. Verbatim of interviewees draw a painful picture of lived experiences of being a female domestic workers in Pakistan

At workplaces (i.e. in homes of the employers) people care for each other while nobody cares for us, it's the duty of employers as well to treat us with respect instead of looking with abhorrence. (Shamma)

People do not trust us. They hide their precious or expensive things from us (domestic workers). Once I entered the house, I unintentionally heard the whispering of the employer; she was saying her daughter to cover the baskets of fruits hurriedly. And look at the irony of fate that some days later I saw many rotten fruits in their garbage (Irum).

My employer snubbed me by saying that you the poor (domestic workers) should be beaten with shoes." (Zulekha)

It was clear from responses of the WDWs that discriminator behaviour of their employers adds misery to their lives. Despite working for many years the employers don't trust them and exploit them. Young (2001) found that in domestic employment actually both the employee and employer depend on each other. So the employers should not neglect the dignity of their employees. The employer-employee relationship was a major issue faced by the majority of domestic workers.

Following are some of the significant quotations from interviews that will reflect the respondents' workplace challenges that include the behaviors of employers, uncertainty of job duration (as domestic workers could be replaced at any moment), excessive amount of work, lack of trustworthiness of domestic worker by employer and ignored emotions of domestic workers are all the issues they encounter at workplace.

"We are poor domestic workers & what is the future of poor's! It's long-lasting poverty; because we don't have enough resources or assets that can give us the certainty of a bright future or at least a future that is free of poverty." (Najma)

Drivers for Domestic Workers

It is reflected from respondent's socio-demographic profile (Table No. 1) that none of them are literate. The data shows that these domestic workers do not have any other marketable skill. In absence of any other viable options, they are left with no other option but to utilize skills which they learn as part of their gender role training at their homes, like cleaning, washing, care work, and many other tasks required for normal functioning of a household.

"I feel sorry for my children whenever I see others' children enjoying a perfect life. What else I can do for them! I'm neither literate nor skillful enough, so doing domestic work is the only option for me." (Zulekha)

Thus major reasons for adopting domestic work as an employment includes the absence of any other source of earning and to meet the expenses of their families. Following are some of the significant quotations from interviews that will reflect the respondents' economic challenges that include insufficient wages, poverty, the absence of basic needs, multiple economic compulsions of domestic employment, socio-economic reasons of staying in this job and the demand of increment in wages. However, despite working for long hours they are not able to fulfill their basic need from income that they get from domestic work.

We even don't have proper meals like others have, as most of the times I buy half kg potatoes and cook them in gravy and then we eat that potato gravy in breakfast, then in lunch and then in dinner as well. We (domestic workers) are lacking in our very basic needs unfortunately.” (Kaneez)

Domestic workers have to work hard to earning money in order to change their circumstances. Unfortunately, the purpose, for which they tolerate exploitations, is not fulfilled the way they imagine. Their wages are considerably low and there are no collective bargaining mechanisms available to them. The collected data from in-depth interviews indicates that only a few respondents succeed in gaining at least fifty percent of their needs. Their living wage ranged between 15,000-25,000 rupees per month. They demanded enhancement in their wages and they asked for quite a reasonable amount of money. The amount of their demanded wage indicates that they need money to fulfill their basic needs because it is quite challenging to survive in this time of growing inflation.

Conclusion

Domestic work is one of the biggest sources of employment in the informal sector of Pakistan. Although it is hard to get reliable statistical data about domestic workers due to the invisible nature of this work, it is estimated that there are approximately 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan. Our research findings indicate that domestic workers are unrecognized, invisible, vulnerable, neglected, and left solely on the mercy of their employers. Their earning is much lower than the national minimum wage of Pakistan. Despite facing exploitative work conditions the women domestic workers' are unable to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, this study concludes that for the betterment of domestic workers, such mechanisms are needed where the domestic workers could lodge their complaints about the violation of their labor rights. A system is needed which can shift the label of domestic employment from a vulnerable sector to a valuable sector. The government should play its role for the socio-economic welfare of domestic workers both in terms of providing better work conditions and starting new schemes for them; as Families and Work Institute (2006) observed, low-wage employees could be advantaged noticeably from the support of government and workplace policies.

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