



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THIDEER NAGAR AT SAIDAPET-CHENNAI CITY

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ABSTRACT

Domestic work is taken up by poor urban women who live in sub standard settlements (Slums) in Chennai. They are called as Velaikari in Tamil. Velaikari means a person who does menial job in the houses. Domestic workers are the most disadvantaged group in the society. Due to poverty and lack of employment in the rural villages they migrate to cities. Many women become domestic workers since they are not academically qualified. Many women take up this job since they cannot afford to run the families with small amount of income from their husbands. Many of their husbands go for work but their income is mostly spent on alcohol. The minimum amount which comes in may not be adequate to send their children for higher education. The income of the most of the domestic workers is below Rs. 5000 in a month. Most of them live in small huts and they spend a large amount of money for educating their children and it is a mounting burden on the family again as the living cost is high in the cities. They work for longer hours and working continuously without a day off is quite common in the domestic work sector. Due to fewer wages many Domestic Workers are urit forced to take up work in many houses and at the end of the day, struggle to cope up with the work. Even for any funeral or function in the families, they are not given leave. If they take leave, the next day they have to do double work. To cope up with the work, many domestic workers take their girl children along with them for work to assist them. Their girl children remain as potential child domestic workers. Often they are late to school andas they have a fear of being humiliated in front of other students, they do not say that they go along with their mothers for domestic work. Ten rooms and ten toilets to clean, staircases and corridors to sweep, plates and utensils to wash and a salary of Rs.3000 a month with no holidays, no Sundays and no benefits- this is the 'job' that Sarada(45) does in an upscale locality like Saidapet in Chennai. She says the 'going rate' is around Rs.1000 for each category of housework, but nobody follows the rate. Despite bringing the domestic workers under the purview of The Minimum Wage Act 1948 in 2007, Tamil Nadu has failed to fix a minimum wage for domestic workers. The life and livelihood conditions of domestic workers are pathetic because they are living in the slums and their work is insecurity like Lobour market, employment, job, work, skill reproduction, income and representation insecurity.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic workers in India

Women (Domestic Workers) in the family are forced to shoulder all the family responsibilities and commitments since their husbands are not bringing sufficient amount of money for running their family. Domestic violence incurs in the family due to the low income and also because of the husband's addiction to alcohol. Women in the families sacrifice their time in the family and work in different houses for their daily bread. Domestic workers are comprised of three main groups like live-in domestic workers, part-time/live out domestic workers, migrant domestic workers, inter-state domestic workers and overseas domestic workers.

The research study is focused on Part-time domestic workers who are generally locals as they come from the city where they are employed. They mostly live in slums and work in the houses of multiple employers to earn their livelihood. They are called part-timers not because they do only part time work but because they do not stay with the employer and are not expected to be on call 24 hours a day. They either work all day for one employer or repeatedly perform specific tasks. Part-timers are less dependent on their employers than full time workers. They live with their families and run their homes, as well as those of their employers. However, they are less dependent on their employers for their basic needs and are characterized with a greater degree of independence than the live-in domestic workers.

Present Status of women domestic workers: Domestic worker is "any person who is engaged in domestic works within an employment relationship". Nearly 90% of domestic

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workers in India are women or children (especially girls), ranging from ages 12 to 75 and it is estimated that 25% among them are below the age of 14. The majority of domestic workers are illiterate. Domestic workers work in the homes of others for pay, providing a range of services like sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes and dishes, shopping and cooking, caring for children, the elderly, and the disabled, even taking care of household pets and they provide gardening, driving, and security services. In India, the stigma linked to domestic work is heightened by the caste system, since tasks such as cleaning and sweeping are associated with the people belonging to the 'so-called' low castes. Domestic workers are commonly referred to as 'servants' and 'maids' which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority. This has further added to the undignified status awarded to the services provided by them and they are also highly exploited and denied just wages and humane working conditions. They are paid well below the minimum wages for unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Part-time workers often work in 3-4 different houses for nearly 8-10 hours every day. The working hours of domestic workers can go from 8 to over 18 hours a day. Wages, leave facilities, medical benefits, and rest time are at the employer's mercy. Moreover, they are often victims of suspicion. If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction, and even dismissal. A great number of live-in domestic workers are women who are recruited from below poverty line category and underprivileged areas. At present, domestic workers often receive very low wages, they have to work for excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement. Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation, and it often reflects in discrimination along the lines of sex, race and caste.

Table 1. Global and Regional Estimates by the ILO of the Number of Domestic Workers, 2010

S.No	Countries	Domestic workers	As a percentage of total employment
1	Developed countries	3,555,000	0.8
2	India	408,246,900	1.0
2	Eastern Europe	595,000	0.3
3	Asia and the Pacific	21,467,000	1.2
4	(excluding China)	12,077,000	1.2
5	Latin America and the Caribbean	19,593,000	7.6
6	Africa	5,236,000	1.4
7	Middle East	2,107,000	5.6
	TOTAL	4,60,799,900	2.7

Source: ILO-WIEGO, 2013.

The Cooum River divides the Chennai city into a half whereas the river Adyar divides the southern half into two parts trisecting the city of Chennai. These rivers flow towards the East. A third river, the Kortalaiyar, flows through the northern peripheries of the city before draining into the sea at Ennore. Parallel to the coast, one can see the historic Buckingham canal running almost through the entire length of the city. The weather is equally hot and humid for eight months leaving the other four months (November to February). May is the hottest season with the mercury sometimes touching 42 degrees Celsius. December and January are the coolest months with a mean temperature of 24 degrees Celsius. The Chennai monsoon is from October to mid-December. Inequalities in

health, livelihood and housing have deepened with the environmental degradation that accompanies industrialization. Problems that were already pressing have worsened. These include a rapidly dropping water beds, inadequate sewage solid waste disposal system, increased water, and soil and air pollution. The recent flood in Chennai and other coastal districts of the state has affected agriculture and the life of the people. In some countries Domestic work is a growing sector for providing employment opportunities, especially for women. The latest conservative estimates find that the number of domestic workers has increased from 33.2 million in 1995 to 52.6 million in 2010 or 3.6 per cent of global wage employment. However, since domestic workers are undercounted in labour force surveys, the number could be fairly higher in 2010. The domestic work was highest as a percentage of total employment in Latin America and the Caribbean (7.6 per cent) followed by the Middle East (5.6 per cent). Women are accounted for about 83 per cent of counted domestic workers in 2010. However, in only a few countries are more than 1 per cent of men employed in domestic service. Most of the domestic workers are from the marginalized sections of society and a large number of them are migrant workers. Workers range from full-time to part-time workers, skilled and unskilled workers.

Challenges of Domestic Workers

Domestic workers are facing a lot of problems in their workplaces like low wages, lack of job security, longer hours of work, as there is no emergency leave benefit, discrimination in caste and untouchability. Poor women are forced to migrate to cities and foreign countries in order to supplement their families' meager incomes. Many women travel abroad to send money back home in an effort to improve their quality of life in India. However, in travelling abroad, they become vulnerable to corrupt recruitment practices, lack of work contracts, withheld salaries. Live-in domestic workers experience greater isolation, less privacy and more limited mobility. Living conditions are frequently sub-standard. They are also more vulnerable to physical/sexual abuse by employers. Migrant domestic workers often live in the employers' home, facing not only the challenges commonly associated with live-in domestic workers but also abuses within the recruitment system and from police and immigration authorities, including advance commission fees, withheld wages, and verbal, physical, or sexual harassment. Brokers face the challenges of domestic workers, but these are compounded by the "extra-legal" operations of their recruiters and the near-bondage conditions they may live in. Some recruiters keep the workers certificate for such a long time for their demands.

Rational of the study

The wages of domestic workers differs in the case of live-in workers, because of the types of work that they have to perform in their employer's household. Workers who are entailed with child care earn higher wages as compared to workers whose work entails household activities such as cooking, cleaning etc, since it entails taking care of a child, in a household where, the parents are away from the house during the day and hence they are willing to pay more money to the worker. Another contributing factor to their comparatively higher wages is that their employing households are located in rich upper class residential areas. Therefore the present study carried out their wage differentiation.

Primary Objectives

- To study the socio-economic status of women domestic workers.
- To empower their wards education.
- To analyze the working conditions.

Main objectives

- To understand social security needs of the domestic workers.
- To examine factors affecting life of women in domestic work.

MATERIALS AND METHEDS

The Thideer Nagar Slum in Chennai City has been chosen for data collection based on convenience. Most (38 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Therefore, we have selected a number of domestic workers from that particular locality for the study.

Aim of the study: The present study aims to assess the knowledge and practices related to domestic workers to understand their socio-economic status and their wards education rights and roles for their enhancement of life.

Materials and Methods of the study: A cross sectional study was conducted by the researcher. I visited the study area Thideer Nagar of zone 9 of the Chennai Corporation and interviewed the respondents. A systematic sampling procedure was adopted and interview questionnaire was used.

Sampling: The researcher used purposive sampling techniques for the research which was based on the geographical location of the adopted areas of the study.

Field of Study: The study is pertaining to the Loyola College adopted Thideer Nagar slum of Zone 9 in the corporation of Chennai. The domestic workers who are residing in slums of Thideer Nagar have been the samples for the study. This study has been analyzed to particularly find out the socio-economic status of the domestic workers.

Research Design: The descriptive designs are used for this study. In this study the researcher has attempted to find out the socio-economic status of the women domestic workers and empowerment of their wads education will be given for their betterment of life.

Statement of the Problem: Most of the domestic workers are uneducated, widows, deserted women and unaware to register their name in domestic welfare office. At present, domestic workers often receive very low wages, they have to work for excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement. Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation. These are the reasons for selecting the present study.

Data Collection

Data collection consists of primary and secondary sources.

- The Primary Source of data is the interview schedule. The researcher will collect information from the respondents.
- The Secondary data will be collected from , Journals, magazines, periodicals, newspaper, books, and website, on line, Mobile phone, Internet, iphone, iPod, twitter, base book, libraries and digital libraries.

Pre-Test: In view of the present study, the needs and necessity was found out through the questionnaire, the researcher has done pre-testing with 100 domestic workers. Pre-testing has given us more clarity for conducting the study and in order to finalize the questionnaire.

Interview Schedule and Data Collection: Pretested structured interview schedule was developed. Pretesting of the interview schedule was conducted in order to improve the clarity of the questions and response options. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information about the respondents, knowledge regarding socio-economic status of the domestic workers.

Method of Analysis: It was decided to collect the necessary information from approximately 100 respondents. For collecting the data, the respondents were contacted individually and given a brief about issues and challenges. Data required for the study were collected through an interview schedule and statistical tools were used for data analysis.

Importance of the Study: Domestic workers in Slums are uniformly characterized by inadequate provision of basic infrastructure and public services to sustain health such as water, sanitation, and drainage. Since many of these settlements are illegal, slum dwellers often have no official addresses and are commonly denied basic rights and entitlements including right to vote, public education and health care etc. Therefore the study has been selected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: Earlier Chennai was a land of greenery with trees and farming lands, and rivers were full of water. In today's situation Chennai is just the opposite because of the Industrialization and globalization. Today Chennai is full of Buildings and rivers are full of sewage waste. The houses mostly get sunk during rainy days and people are very vulnerable to all kinds of infectious and communicable diseases. From 8th November to 23rd Nov 2015 cyclone waves hit costal districts of Tamil Nadu. Chennai was also worst affected, flooded with sewage water. The houses of urban poor were flooded with sewage water. In this natural disaster, the families of Domestic workers lost everything and they have to start life once again. Slum dwellers are relocated at a very long distance from Chennai for beautifying Chennai. Domestic workers and other unskilled labourers have to travel a very long distance from the housing area. School and college students have to travel long from their new home. From their hard earning, one person has to spend more than Rs.40 and has to travel more than 4 hours in travel every day. Therefore people come back to the city and start living on streets and in existing slums for rent, which make once again the slum worse and congested.

Table 2. Profession of the husbands of domestic Workers

S.No	Profession	Percentage
1	Daily wages Labourer	10
2	Auto driver	9
3	Office Peon	2
4	Office Cleaners	4
5	Self-employed	
6	Driver	7
7	Widows	37
8	Deserted women	24
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2017

The above table analyses the profession of the husbands of domestic workers in the study. Most (37 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Thirty nine percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. At the most of 10% of domestic workers husbands are daily wage workers and followed by that, 9% of the respondents are auto drivers. Only 7% of the domestic workers husband are self-employed and other 7% are office cleaners and also 2% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are office peons.

Table 3. Marital Status of domestic Workers

S.No	Marital Status	Percentage
1	Married	39
2	Widows	37
6	Deserted	24
7	Others	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2017

The above table shows the marital status of domestic workers in the study. Most (37 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Thirty nine percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. India is known as the second biggest country in population. At present Bharathiya Janata Party rules the country and gives importance for the project clean India. Providing Aadhar card is one of the biggest achievements in the country. The country promulgates various legislations but the approach towards the domestic workers needs to be more explicit. This project is being implemented in 11 districts in Tamil Nadu. ADMK (Anna DravidaMunnetraKazhakam) is the ruling party in the state. The present government takes initiatives for the development of poor and disadvantaged, but the schemes for the domestic workers are not highly appreciative. Domestic workers in the working areas are neither ward members nor councilors as the key role is concerned in the administration.

Table 4. Employment in Current Households

S.No	Number of years	Percentage
1	Less than 2years	46
2	2-4 years	34
3	4-6 years	14
4	6-8 years	4
5	8-10 years	2
6	10 and above	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2017

They are mere spectators in political rule and have no chances to raise their voice against the plights that they undergo in their daily lives. Higher education among the children of domestic workers is very low in number. The state does not have any statistics regarding this population.

The above table indicates the employment pattern in current households in the research study. Most(46%) of the women are employed as domestic workers for less than 2 years and followed by that 34% of the women are working for 2-4 years and only 14% percent of the women employed as domestic workers were working for 4-6 years. Four percent of the women interviewed for the present study are working for 6-8 years and another 2% of the women were working for 8-10 years. Domestic work which is freely chosen and performed in an environment of equity and human dignity while promoting individual and collective rights at work, social protection and occupational safety and health. The high rate of literacy and the degree of worker mobility have contributed to the process of industrialization in Tamil Nadu. As a result of a planned economic programme a wide range of industrial products are manufactured in Tamil Nadu creating an incredible range of industrial and consumer products and large-scale cement, fertilizer, refining and automobile industries. The latest addition is the construction of an atomic power plant to meet the energy needs of a growing society.

Table 5. Number of times that a workers works in a Household

S.No	Number of Times	Percentage
1	Once a day	50
2	Twice a day	30
3	Three times a day	0
4	Half-day	6
5	Full day	4
6	Others	-
	Total	100

Source: Data collected from the respondents, 2017

The above table shows the number of times that a worker works in a particular household in the study. Almost (50 %) of the domestic workers were working once a day and followed by that 30% of the domestic workers who were working twice a day under the study and followed by that, 6% of the respondents are working for half a day(3 to 4 hours) . Only 4% of the respondents are working as full time workers in the study.

Table 6. Living Conditions of Women Domestic Workers

S.No	Satisfaction with living conditions	Level of Satisfaction
1	Occupational life	Satisfied
2	Economic life	Satisfied
3	Housing Conditions	Dissatisfied
4	Family life	Satisfied
5	Health life	Dissatisfied
6	Social and Community life	Dissatisfied
7	Children Education	Satisfied

Source: Data collected from the respondents.

Social and community life of trained women gave a native response their community life because of insecurity in the slums. This is negative indicator of poor housing conditions. Above table mentioned that positive response of occupational life of the respondents because of no problem for their family daily bread and butter. Most of the respondents gave a negative response about their satisfaction level of their political involvement. At most of the respondents gave positive response for their children higher education.

Major findings of the study: The hard life of domestic workers has been documented in this study as it shows that almost 90 percent of them work without government stipulated minimum wages and without a weekly day off. The findings of the study of the personal and family profiles, working conditions and wage administration of domestic workers in Thideer Nagar are not satisfactory. Some of the specific demands are that domestic work should also be considered as labor. Lack of decent working conditions, including specified working hours, leave, paid holidays, protection against harassment, social security and access to benefits and also no regulation of recruitment and placement agencies (brokers) who cheat people are some of the findings of the study. Most (37 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Thirty nine percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. At the most of 10% of domestic workers husband are daily wage workers and followed by that, 9% of the respondents are auto drivers. Only 7% of the domestic workers husbands are self-employed and 7% office cleaners and also 2% of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are working as office peons. While (34%) of the domestic workers are in the age group of 30 to 40 and followed by that 32% of the respondents are in the age group of 20 to 30 years in the study. Most(46%) of the women are employed as domestic workers for less than 2 years and followed by that 34% of the women are working for 2-4 years and only 14% percent of the women employed as domestic workers were working for 4-6 years. Four percent of the women interviewed for the present study are working for 6-8 years and another 2% of the women were working for 8-10 years. Domestic work which is freely chosen and performed in an environment of equity and human dignity while promoting individual and collective rights at work, social protection and occupational safety and health. Most (37 %) of the domestic workers are widows as their husbands have lost their lives due to alcoholism and followed by that, 24% of the respondents are deserted women as their husbands have left them and are living with another women. Thirty nine percent of the domestic workers interviewed for the study are married and are living with their husband and children. Almost (50 %) of the domestic workers were working once a day and followed by that 30% of the domestic workers are working twice a day under the study and followed by that, 6% of the respondents are working for half a day(3 to 4 hours) . Only 4% of the respondents are working as full time workers in the study. Almost (50 %) of the domestic workers were working once a day and followed by that 30% of the domestic workers are working twice a day under the study and followed by that, 6% of the respondents are working for half a day(3 to 4 hours) . Only 4% of the respondents are working as full time workers in the study.

Recommendations and suggestions

- It is commercialized in the globalized market. Education is considered as a commodity to be bought against value of education and knowledge to be passed on.
- The Government makes number of policies in the field of higher education. The formulation of policies encourages the middle class and high class people in the region.

- Like any other city in India, in Tamil Nadu also Education is no more service. So the urban poor (*children of Domestic Workers*) are alienated from mainstream.
- The number of students enrolling for higher education in TN is 18%. This project is going to help them to have access to higher Education and raise the ratio.
- In any bank, the student is to submit property documents for surety, the families of Domestic Workers do not possess any property and thus the children of Domestic Workers can not avail the bank loan for their educational financial support.
- The students who score high marks are only eligible for scholarship and other financial assistances during their higher education. Apart from this the government is giving minimum amount as scholarship for schedule caste and schedule Tribes in the region. This amount will not be enough for continuing their higher studies.
- Domestic workers' children are first generation aspiring for higher education. The families are in general women / single headed with minimum wages and in many cases, the head of the family; Domestic Workers are not in a position to support their children for higher education, as they themselves are semi-literate / ill literate.
- The children of Domestic Workers mostly study in Tamil medium in school and in Higher education the medium in English. It is a big challenge for them to cope up with the education and it needs time and determination. Mostly the educational institutions function from morning to evening. So the children of Domestic Workers are not in a position to take up a part time job to support their higher education.
- Domestic Workers in general are Schedule Caste (Dalits). The so called Dalits and women are denied of opportunities in higher education in India and therefore in professional jobs, like teaching.
- Creating a conducive atmosphere for a better learning by providing an enabling ambience. Promoting a team of human capital for nation building, establishing a human resource base to sustain and to strengthen similar experiments tomorrow.
- Reducing the roots of inequalities in the social systems due to illiteracy, Identification and Selection of students- receiving of application/ processing /appearing for the interview and selection in the college.
- Remedial programmes: self-motivation/ self-esteem/ self-confidence / communication/ Inter personal relationship / team building/ analytical skill/ leadership/ problem solving / Human Rights: Child Rights – Workers' Rights / Social Analysis.

Future Plans

- Community resource centers should be established.
- Implementation of alternative livelihood programs and providing employability training.
- The Government officials will consider providing loans for their children's education.
- The Government will form a committee to regularize wages.

Conclusion

To improve the economic situation of Domestic Workers, it is important that their children are given quality education which

could lessen their burden in the future. If the college Students or NGOs can develop the skills of the children of widows by imparting English training it could help them in their studies. Other training programmes would develop their children with capacity to withstand any situation of their life. Parents understand the importance of encouraging their children to participate in various other training programs. Widows motivate children to learn English, personal relationship, leadership skill, and parents on enabling their children in participation for a social cause. There are various educational institutions, which are privatized, which require hefty fee, donation, hostel fee, etc. Besides the number of educational institutions, children of domestic workers and unskilled or semi-skilled labourers do not pursue their higher studies due to lack of money.

Domestic workers from the low economic background cannot afford from the minimum income. Many domestic workers children are belonging to the first generation of learners Many domestic workers are single or separated or widow and they are the primary bread winners for their family and as they have to take care of the needs of their alcoholic husbands at times There is no possibility for the labourers to get educational loans in the banks, as they lack supporting documents for surety; like property documents which is mandatory to avail loans. Domestic workers mostly receive advance from their employers and to repay the debt they are forced to work for the same employer without day off and for less wages. They mostly become unseen bonded labours. Technical and hard skills are alien to the children of domestic workers as they are deprived of educational rights.

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