

A study on socio-economic status of women domestic workers (WDW) In Puduvayal, Sivaganga District

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Abstract

In India, a woman is considered and connected mainly with household. In well-off families, with the help of servants, women are spared from household works by providing servants. Educated mothers are expected to take care of the children's' education and working women need a support to be in time. Thus women's role in the smooth functioning and management of the household cannot be overlooked. At this point, it is important to note that it is the existence of servants within the household that allow the housewife or working women to perform well. Generally Domestic work includes cleaning, mopping, sweeping, washing, cleaning vessels, clearing the table after meal, cooking maintaining garden, taking the child to school as well as from school to house and other works. Neither House wife nor working women need a support to do the household. They employ domestic workers. This paper deals with the socio economic status of women Domestic workers in puduvayal, Sivaganga District.

Keywords: Women Domestic Workers, Socio economic status of WDW, women labourers

1. Introduction

The world of Women Domestic Workers has largely remained under cover. They have never come to front. The work expected from them may be part time or full time or call round the clock. The working hours of domestic workers are not fixed. They may vary anywhere between three to fifteen hours. The work may be continuous or in installments spread over time. The working hours depend on the demands and requirements of the employers. Very often wages are added along with food and clothes and the logic given by the employers that the monetary value of all these taken together would amount to a value equal to the efforts put in by the worker. They remain in the corner of the society.

The problems of EDWs derive from issues located at the intersections of various macro and micro dimensions of our economy and society. At the macro level, following independence, processes of industrialization led to nuclear households in the cities who needed domestic workers for different kinds of physical work within the house. At the same time domestic work is seen as one such avenue of employment by poor women from both rural and suburban areas as a way of earning an income. Since domestic work is not a skilled job it is an avenue of employment of poor, largely illiterate and semi-literate women and they continue to persist in domestic work even without substantial rights and benefits. To make aware of these Women domestic Workers and their socio economic status may give attention on them.

2. Review of related literature

V.T.Naik (1984) on women domestic workers in South India found that only 20 percent employed women were paid salaries, while 13 percent did not even know the amount they received as salary. The socio economic conditions of these workers indicate their helplessness. Most of the families of the women had incurred heavy debts. Accordingly, alcohol abuse and domestic violence were common practices in many families. Their families looked poor and ill fed. A study was conducted by Alphonse Miranda and Wadya

Mahadevan (1988) on the socio economic and health conditions of women in Chennai. The major findings of the study show that more than 50 % of employed women were part-time domestic workers and most of them were employed in more than two houses. Stomach ailments, menstrual problems, anemia and general weakness were the common medical problems reported by the women domestic servants.

Sing (2001), women Domestic Workers is an outcome of an investigation carried out into the dynamics of working life, family adjustment of maidservants and the approaches to be adopted for their resource development. The book deals with the socioeconomic background of workers being forced to take up domestic work, their present working conditions, family life and the effect of the work on their health.

Another article by Sara Dickay (2000) points out that servant' movements into and out of middle and upper class homes in the city Madurai create a mixing of outside and inside spaces. Employers feel that this mixing threatens the security of their homes and class standing. Yet because the presence of servants is a necessary marker of class, employers attempt to contain the threat by buttressing the symbolic boundaries of the household, controlling domestic workers movements through space and manipulating these closeness to and distance from the employers.

3. Objective

The objective of the study is to understand and explain the socio economic condition of Women Domestic Workers, their work nature and wage structures.

4. Methodology

For the operational point of view, different types of study designs are used in different situations. Here, multiple methodologies have been used for the studying Women Domestic Workers holistically. Sampling method is used for the selection of cases. Information has been collected from field sources through interview, questionnaire, and observation. Convenience sampling technique was followed for collecting response from the respondents. Data have been

collected, edited and classified under various heads with regard to find socio economic condition.

5. Area of the Study

The study was undertaken in Pudukkottai in Sivagangai District. There has been rapid population growth, migration and influx of labour from the neighboring villages like kallar, mithravayal and sakkottai to puduvayal in Sivagangai district. Pudukkottai is on the road towards further urbanization, but not yet completely urbanized. As a town, it is undergoing a stage-wise metamorphosis and fast transforming into a happening place

Sample Size

Total number of respondents 50 residing in and around Pudukkottai.

6. Findings of the study

i) Age

Age	Respondent	percentage
Below 25	12	24
26-35	12	24
36-45	15	30
46-55	5	10
56 and above	6	12

As regards the age of women domestic workers, 24% are in the age group of below 25 and 26-35, 30% of them belong to the age of 36-45, in 46-55 age groups there is only 10% and 56 and above age is 12 percentage. It is clear that the workers belong to a wide range as far as age groups are concerned. The minimum age is 15 and the maximum age is 59. The age of entry into the profession of domestic work is quite early. Young girls are most wanted for domestic work.

ii) Caste

Women belonging to the general caste are just 2 percentages only. 82 percentage of women domestic workers belong to backward classes, rest of the 16% of domestic workers belong to scheduled castes.

iii) Religion

Of the domestic workers, 68% of them are Hindus and 32% are Christians. There is no one belong to Muslim.

iv) Educational Status

Education	Respondent	percentage
Uneducated	28	56
Primary	13	26
Secondary	8	16
Higher Secondary	1	2

As regards the educational status of the workers, 56% of them are illiterate, 26% of them have primary education, 16% of them have secondary education and only 2% of the Women Domestic workers have higher secondary qualifications.

It is evident that illiteracy is highly prevalent among the domestic workers. Very few have received basic knowledge of alphabets and numbers. There is a correlation between illiteracy and the lack of opportunities for the socio economic mobility of the Women Domestic workers.

v) Marital stage

As regards the marital status of the domestic workers 40% of them are unmarried, 34.5% are married 12.5% are widow, 3% are legally separated and rest of the 10% are separated but not legally separated. The separated Domestic workers legally and not legally had been separated by their husband's family. The workers are of the view that a wife is often deserted because she is not the husband's choice. Sometimes bride price or dowry can also be a cause of a girl being separated.

vi) Leave

Another thing that all domestic workers need is some holidays every month. In the case of Women Domestic Workers, the concept of regular holidays does not exist. Many workers who were interviewed mentioned that there are no specific rules for leave.

Leave available	Respondent	Percentage
Nil	16	32
If needed	26	52
2-4 days	6	12
N/A	2	4

What has emerged from the data is that if there is an understanding at the time of engagement of 2-4 days' leave, such leave is paid. Leave if needed also implies paid leave. At the same time, those who get leave if needed as well as those who have had no negotiation about leave at the time of engagement are open to rebuke, threats (of future cuts in wages)and actual retribution. The point to be noted here is that the leave is paid or unpaid according to the individual employers' inclination that is the problem when no right of the worker is recognized. For example, one Women Domestic Worker who works in three houses, may be allowed paid leave from one household in a time of trouble, but would be forced to come to work because the other two houses will not allow.

vii) Wages Received

It is observed that 67% of Women Domestic Workers are part time workers and work more than 2 places. Remaining 33% of Women Domestic Workers work from morning to evening in a same place. The part time workers receive 2200-3600 per month. Other women Domestic workers get 2000-2800 per month. Apart from wages they get food for two times with coffee or tea. It is known that part-time workers often work in more than one household to supplement their income.

viii) Minimum wages Act: Awareness

The awareness level of the domestic workers quite low. Lack of awareness as regards their rights is one of the chief causes of their socio economic condition. It is observed that 98.5% workers do not know or have not heard of the Minimum Wages Act and its clauses. Only 1.5% of the Women Domestic Workers say that they have heard of the Minimum Wages Act that has been passed by the government.

7. Summation

Through this study, a picture of the lives and work of a small cross section of women Domestic Workers who come from various suburban areas to work in different households of

Puduvayal. This study tries to show in some detail the kind of familial, social and economic background which the domestic workers come from, the kind of constraints that these factors create for them and the ways in which it forces them to become part of an unfair and harsh labour market.

The economy sucks them in and yet makes them invisible reducing the value of their work and their lives. These women have very low levels of literacy and other skills to fall back on and as a result they cannot think of any other occupation. Many years in this profession makes them realize that they are exploited, but they are not yet in a position to demand their rights. They have to build relations of trust and goodwill with their employers that they hope will translate into some benefits or concessions during times of crisis. This study also will draw the attention of authorities to the fact that there is a need for recognition of Women Domestic Workers as a category and have provisions for social security.

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