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## WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS: THEIR LIFE, PROBLEMS AND DREAMS

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**ABSTRACT :** A number of studies have been done on female construction labourers but little effort has been made on the domestic maid. So, an attempt has been made to know about the history, experiences, emotions, feelings and aspirations about children of this vulnerable group of the society having negligible safe guards.

The present research was conducted to know domestic maids' problems in day-to-day life and also their daily routine. The respondents were requested to recall their past life from which the reasons for choosing the job and their basic characteristics came out automatically. To know socio-economic condition questions were asked on their monthly income and expenditure, contribution of other family members, relation with husband, behavior of the employer, their leisure time and also dream about their children.

**INTRODUCTION :** "Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country." – Margaret Thatcher

Women in our society so far have had only a secondary status. It is well known that the economic dependence of women upon men is one of the primary reasons which has pushed them into the background and resulted in their having only a secondary status both within and outside the family (Wadhera, 1976). In spite of the fact that the fair sex has proved their mettle in every walk of life, their contribution is not given due credit in most cases. In India, women constitute nearly half of the total population and they play a vital role in domestic sphere, in the rural field and also in urban economy. Yet, their economic status is still low as reflected by the census data itself that present a distorted picture of women particularly of those who are engaged in the informal sector of urban economy (Tripathi, 1991).

It is found that among all categories in the informal sector, domestic servants' income is the lowest and the problems are many (Sundaram, 1966). They are engaged in household tasks, which include washing utensils, floor cleaning, washing of cloths, cooking as well as some outdoor tasks such as purchase of vegetables etc. Most of them live in slums, lead a monotonous life without any color, struggle every day for their survival and face numerous problems in their day-to-day life like long hours of work, insecurity regarding jobs, low status within the house as well as in the outside world (Gathia, 1983).

**OBJECTIVES :** The main objectives of our study are:

- 1) to know the reasons behind selecting the job of domestic helper;
- 2) to examine the basic characteristics of these workers including socio-economic condition;
- 3) to know their problem at workplace and home; and
- 4) to study their aspirations regarding their children.

**LOCATION OF STUDY AREA :** The study has been conducted in two areas of Mumbai, MALAD & GOREGAON.

**METHOD :** Total sample size was 75, out of which 3 case studies have been done to gather detailed

information. Samples were chosen randomly. Interviews were conducted either at working place or at the residence of the domestic maids.

A questionnaire was prepared having a combination of structured and unstructured questions.

- To know the incidence of the respondents' life, their feelings and ideas emphasis had been given on unstructured interviews. 3 case studies were conducted to know all aspects of life of the domestic maids in details, giving due emphasis on the emotional side, which could have not been extracted by structured interview techniques.
- To fulfill the first and second objectives researchers applied a particular technique to know their life history (UNFPA, 1994). The respondents were requested to recall their past life from which the reasons for choosing the job and their basic characteristics came out automatically.
- To know their problems in day to day life and also their daily routine we have adopted an approach which had been adopted by the Swedish International Development Agency to outline a typical day for a man and a woman in Africa (UNFPA, 1995). To present information in a tabular form respondents were requested to tell their daily routine.
- To know socio-economic condition questions are asked on their monthly income and expenditure, contribution of other family members, relation with husband, behavior of the employer, their leisure time and also dream about their children.

**RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING THE JOB :** Two types of domestic maids can be easily identified from our survey work. One group of women is not the bread winners of their family but willing to do the work for 'additional income'. On the other hand, most of the domestic maids are working to earn their livelihood.

The first group of women started working mainly after giving birth to their first child.

According to them they enjoy and like this work. But most of the respondents are forced to do this job to feed their family. According to them there is no other way to earn money with their little education and technical skill. In other words, 'we are familiar with this type of work, it does not extract our energy totally as it happens in construction or other factory-works, we get at least some time to look our family'. Our study showed that, out of the total respondents 60% are migrants (migrated either due to marriage or family movement). Most of the maids started working after marriage when they realized that their husbands' income is not enough to meet their basic needs. From the family history, it is very clear that most of the respondents' fathers were engaged as agricultural laborers or construction workers. No respondents have been found in our study who are working presently along with their mother, willing to take their children to help them in work place, hence indicating a gradual social change.

**BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOMESTIC HELPERS AND THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION :**

Age	Marital Status			Avg Ch	Family Type		Mig Sta	
	U	M	W		NU	JO	N	M
10-19	8	1	0	0	2	7	2	7
20-35	0	28	4	2.6	29	3	17	15
36+	0	4	5	4	9	0	1	8
Total	8	33	9	-	40	10	20	30
% Total	16	66	18	-	80	20	40	60

% Total 166618 -80204060 Foot Note: U: Un-married, MA: Married, NU: Nuclear, JO: Joint, W: Widow  
M: Migrant, N: Non-migrant, Ch : Children.

**Characteristics of the Sample :** Fifty respondents have been taken for this survey. Out of this 50, as Table reveals, currently married women constitute 66 percent, widowed and unmarried constitute 18 and 16 percent respectively. Among the currently married women most of them belong to the middle age group. The middle age group is having 2.6 children on an average, the same for the old age group is 4. Sixty percent of the respondents are migrants and mostly from Ratnagiri, Thane, Raigarh and Pune Districts.

#### **PROBLEMS FACED BY MAIDS AT WORK PLACE AND AT HOME :**

**(A) Problems at Work Place :** The major problems faced by the women domestic servants at work place are as follows:

- 1) 80% of the women are not satisfied with their present salary and expect more. On an average, they get Rs. 200- 250 per month for cleaning floor and washing clothes; Rs. 400-500 monthly for cooking food twice a day, but they expect at least Rs. 100-200 more, that is, Rs. 300-400 for cleaning and washing and Rs. 600 for cooking.
- 2) 10% women expressed their grievances for doing 'extra work' when guests come.
- 3) Salary of 20% women get reduced for their absence in work. However, all of them get leave if they fall sick and inform the employer.
- 4) They want at least one holiday per week. But 90% of the employer are not in favor of this demand as expressed by the respondents. Women working to add to the family, as mentioned earlier, are satisfied with their present job. They praised their employers being friendly, cordial, helping them by providing breakfast, tea, clothes, medicine and valuable suggestions.

**(B) Problems at Home :** Table 3 reveals domestic environment. Adolescent girls suffer less from unpleasant behaviour of their respective fathers whereas most of women have drunkard husbands. Some of them suffer very much due to the violent attitude of their husbands. However, most of them watch TV to forget stress and strains of their daily life. Their problems in details are discussed below:

- 1) Most of the women are the bread winners of their family and getting less economic support from their kith and kin. Out of this 45% women's husbands drink and 30% faces severe problems as their husbands drink as well as torture them.
- 2) 16% of the respondents are unmarried. Out of which 12% started working as their father expired, 50% started this work to cope up with poverty. While 38% respondents' fathers of this group are drunkards and instead of contributing anything, they create problems.
- 3) Most of the women after returning back to their home repeat the same work as there is no helping hand to reduce their burden of work. However, a very few respondents reported that their daughter-in-laws or mother help them doing household-work.
- 4) Though they usually go to Shatabdi Hospital, some of them prefer to get treatment from private practitioners as the latter requires less time. Hence their expenditure increases when health deteriorates.
- 5) They also face problems to collect drinking water. They usually stand in long queue for hours together to get two buckets of water.
- 6) Many of the respondents express their inefficiency to look after their children in study because of their inadequate knowledge. A few of their husbands spent time to teach their off springs and the rests, in spite of having free evening hours watch television hours watch or spend time by playing cards and taking drinks.

**A WOMAN'S DAILY WORK PROFILE :**

Time	YOUNG AGE GROUP	MIDDLE AGE GROUP	OLD AGE GROUP
05.30	----	-----	AWAKE
06.00	----	AWAKE	FETCH WATER
06.30	AWAKE	BREAST-FEED THE BABY	PREPARES/ TAKE FOOD
07.00	TAKES FOOD	PREAPRE FOODS	ATTEND WP1 WASHES UTENSILS PREPAE FOOD.
08.30	GOES TO WP	ATTENDS WP 1 WASHES UNTENSILS CLOTHES CLEAN FLOOR	ATTEND WP2 PREPARE FOOD , WASHES CLOTH
10.00	DOES DOMESTIC WORK AT WP	LEAVES WP TAKES CHILD HOME BREAST FEED THE BABY , PREPARE FOOD	ATTEND WP3 & REPEAT AS ABOVE
12.30	HELPS COOK	ATTEND WP 1 REPEAT AS WP1	RETURNS HOME WASHES CLOTHES PEPARE FOOD
01.00	TAKES FOOD	WORKS AS WP2	
02.30	RETURN HOME	ATTEND WP 3 WASH CLOTHES & CLEAN FLOOR	DOES OTHER HOUSEHOLD WORK
03.30	TAKE REST	ATTEND WP 4 AND READ ALL ABOVE	GOES TO WP AGAIN
05.30	GOES TO WP	RETURN HOME BREAST FEED	WORKS AT W PS
07.30	RETURNS HOME	WASHES CLOTH	RETURN HOME
08.00	HELPS MOTHER	PREPARE FOOD BREAST FEED THE BABY	INTERACT WITH NEIGHBOUR
09.30	TAKES FOOD WATCH TV	TAKES FOOD WATCH TV	PREPARES TAKE FOOD
11.00	GOES TO BED	WATCH TV	GOES TO BED
12.00	-----	GOES TO BED	-----

**ASPIRATION ABOUT CHILDREN :** Mothers who are working as domestic maids do not want their daughter to become the same. They want to educate their girls. Some of them do think about higher education. However, they are very much concerned about the increasing cost of education. Most of the mothers agreed that girls should not be married before age 19. Boys are free to make their own fortune. If they want to continue study mothers will be supporting them. Most of the young mothers want their boys to become technicians or mechanics. And they are free to marry after age 20 if they become self-sufficient.

**CONCLUSION :** After doing analysis of the survey data we can say that the socio economic condition of the respondents is not good. Their life histories also reveal that they experienced the same condition at their young age. They face problems both at home and at work place. At home, they do not get the pleasant atmosphere what they want. At work place they have a very work load with less remuneration. They want to make their children educated but an increasing cost is a great concern. Migration is a big concern from our point of view as studies show (UNFPA, 1996) that many of the urban dwellers, in unorganized sectors particularly women and their children will become the poorest people in the world. However, concentrating on their interest, they are working very hard for a better future.

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