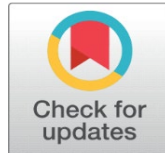# AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON EXPLORING EMPLOYERS' OUTLOOK TOWARDS DYNAMICS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE DOMESTIC HELP SECTOR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NAVI MUMBAI

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ABSTRACT

Domestic workers constitute a vital part of the informal labor sector globally and in India, where their presence has significantly increased, especially after economic liberalization. Predominantly female, this workforce plays a critical role in supporting households, especially in urban centers where dual-income families are common. Despite their importance, domestic workers often operate in unregulated environments marked by poor working conditions, job insecurity, and a lack of formal recognition. This study investigates the employer-employee dynamics in the domestic help sector, with a specific focus on employer perceptions in Navi Mumbai. Through a structured survey method and statistical analysis including logistic regression and non-parametric tests, the research explores how demographic factors such as age, gender, and profession influence employer behavior and attitudes toward domestic workers. The findings offer a balanced understanding of both employer and employee perspectives, aiming to contribute toward a more structured and equitable model for domestic employ.

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic workers represent a substantial portion of the global informal labor force and are one of the most commonly employed worker groups. Their responsibilities often involve household chores such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, dishwashing, childcare, elder or sick care, gardening, home security, driving family members, and pet care.

Currently, there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide and it remains a highly feminized sector where 80 percent of all domestic workers are women. In fact, 1 in 25 women workers in the world are domestic workers (Source: www.ilo.org)

Data indicates that Indian households saw a 120% rise in the number of domestic workers in the decade following economic liberalization. In 1991, there were approximately 7.4 lakh domestic workers, which grew to 16.6 lakh by 2001. Today, it is commonplace for families to rely on domestic help. According to figures from the Delhi Labour Organisation, India is home to over five crore domestic workers, the majority of whom are women. The common norm that household work is a woman's responsibility has seen a drift. In the last few decades, growing participation of women in office jobs

has boosted the income level of India's middle class. The needs of domestic workers have evolved over a period of time. Talking of big cities, young couples and single working professionals are dependent on maids or 'didis' as they are often referred to.

A lot of studies have indicated the informal employer-employee relationship that exists in the domestic help sector. Harmonious relationships between both depend upon the various factors such as mutual trust, safe working conditions, payment of wages or salaries on time, satisfaction of the employees. In case of poor relationships, there can be misunderstandings that lead towards conflicts, grievances, complaints and exploitation.

It is observed that workers often face problems like getting salary late and expectations of longer working hours and more work from the employers. Lower job satisfaction was observed in employees who are being called to work on all seven days of the week. The average relationships of domestic workers with their employers are not of satisfactory level and the reason for the deteriorated relationship is the non-regulation of the sector by the government. (Rajni Saluja, 2018)

Due to the lack of a formal or organized support system, many women working in domestic roles are compelled to accept the wages offered by employers without negotiation. They often fear that requesting a pay increase could result in job loss, as there is a surplus of workers willing to do the same tasks for whatever payment is being made (Irudaya, 2010). The employer-employee relationship gets very complicated as it is influenced by discrimination, domination, inequality and dependency (Ray and Qayum, 2009)

As domestic work has always been done traditionally by women without any payment, they usually devalue it. The presence of multiple employers and absence of a clear and unique employer-employee relationship also inhibit the development of a clear working-class identity.

The study focuses on exploring the perception of employers towards the various dynamics of engaging in a domestic help employee and analyzing the kind of relationship that exists between the participants of the domestic help market. The second portion of the current study handles the literature review which lays the foundation for the furtherment of the study. The third part of the study talks about the research methodology applied to serve the purpose which is followed by data analysis and interpretation. Finally, the findings are presented along with concluding remarks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Women employment and India's cultural complexities

India has witnessed a significant change in the role played by women in our society in the past two decades. As per Chakrapani et.al 1994, earlier women were treated on a low pedestal, depriving them of their rights but reminding them of their duties. In the current age women are no longer seen just as child bearers but they are contributing significantly to the financials of a family. Measures taken for political and social reforms, education, awareness, exposure to global cultures and government initiatives have played a vital role in bringing in this change.

Women are shouldering equal responsibilities with their male counterparts in the professional world but the household pressure still lies with her only. Upasana Sharma (2013) indicated that women still face various types of deprivations be it in kitchens or beyond, from the cradle to the grave and the phenomenon is visible round the globe. In his article, Abhay Shah (2017) highlighted that women have struggled hard to establish an identity of their own and are struggling to maintain it.

Aarti Verma and Mahesh (2018) noted that in spite of women empowerment and ever-increasing women workforce in the industry there are still grassroot level challenges which they face. Shivi Mittal (2015) identified that many a times they face gender discrimination at their workplace. Even there is discrimination related to the incentives they receive. Social security, mental and physical harassment, lack of proper family support, insufficient maternity leave are considered as major issues and challenges that working women face nowadays. As per a survey done by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, 44% reported their work-life balance as the toughest challenge in the workplace. As per Varsha Kumari (2014), lack of proper balance between employment and family care is leading to a stressful life for women. Adding to this, as per a liveMint report (Feb,2019), ILO data indicates that Indian men shoulder even less than 10% of the burden of unpaid housework in terms of time spent, which is a very poor figure as per world statistics.

Wentling (2003) emphasised that as women try to juggle with twin roles, it leads to stress and conflict because of our male dominant societal set up. Attitude of men is still conventional. Aminah Ahmad (2007) pointed out that women experienced more work interference with family than family interference with work. Supervisors are last on the list to provide any kind of support. Here comes the role of a domestic help, who can help and provide the required support so that the household requirements can be met.

2) Significance of domestic help

In the current demanding lifestyle, which is full of work stress and time constraints and the lady of the house juggling with multiple chores, dependency on the domestic helpers have gone up. As per ILO Convention 189 domestic work can be defined as "work performed in or for a household or households". Broadly, domestic workers are supposed to be engaged in providing personal and household related services and care.

As per International Labor Organization (ILO) records, currently about six million domestic workers are engaged in India. According to the National Sample Survey 2011-12, there were 2,38,92,791 domestic workers in the country out of which 4,05,831 were women and 21,79,403 were working in the city. As per an ILO article on domestic workers, it is majorly because of the labour of domestic workers that other women have succeeded in entering the paid labour market successfully and focusing on their career more. Thus, domestic workers' contribution to economic growth is substantial, enabling an increase in dual-income families.

Chandramouli K (2018) observed that the number of women domestic workers have gone up significantly in India in the last few years. Domestic service is now accepted as an important category of livelihood. The number of women domestic workers is constantly growing in the informal sector of urban India. Still, domestic work has remained unorganized, unrecognized and unrewarding for the domestic workers. With regards to a Business Standard article on social issues (2018), domestic workers are faced with multiple challenges at the place of work. The sense of insecurity and feeling of always been discriminated disturbs them at their workplace. Their work is not considered dignified, and their work is not given importance, and they are considered to be servants instead of workers. Challenges related to domestic work are part of an international solution to women's problems within a world economic system and makes it a predominate theme in a number of studies of domestic workers (Colen, 1989). The work done by domestic workers remains undervalued and poorly regulated. Domestic work is predominantly unrewarding, not satisfying and unrecognized for most of the domestic workers (Roberts, 1997). Women domestic workers often work at lower wages and continue accepting the same in fear of losing the job (Irudaya, 2010). In a country like India, domestic work is more physically taxing than elsewhere according to empirical evidence (Seetha and Iyer, 2010:32). The lack of unionization is a critical factor in the exclusion of domestic workers from labor laws and other protective measures (Neetha and Palriwala, 2011:24). A lot of studies have been done which highlights the plight of such workers and the need to make them a part of the organised sector. In order to have a holistic view of the complete model, a need to explore the employers' perspective also exists. The employer-employee relationship gets more complicated with the elements of domination, inequality and dependency (Ray and Qayum, 2009:29). But there are more facets to it and very few research have been done in this area.

3) Problems in employing domestic help

As per ILO, in homes, workers, employers, and care-recipients all face challenges due to the lack of integrated policies and clear guidelines. Employers hire long-term caregivers for a variety of needs, from light support and companionship to regular medical oversight. While these needs are sometimes met by publicly funded home health aids, in the absence of such policies, many households turn to workers in the informal economy because it is easier and more affordable. As a result, the ILO estimates that some 50 million domestic workers are working in the informal economy, in which there is a concentration of decent work deficits.

Usually, the employment terms are negotiated at an informal level with individual workers with some informal standards of salary and leaves being present at a local level for maids. As the employer is a household, they don't see themselves as employers and do not realise that they need to treat their workers as employees, this becomes one of the main issues in improving the working environment (Paivi Mattila, 2011).

Although it seems that the position of the domestic workers is vulnerable and they do not have job security, but a study by ILO (2017), interestingly notes that most employers reported that workers themselves left the job due to dislike of the work or decision to move to a new employer, rather than the employer themselves removing the worker (for unsatisfactory work or any other reason)

4) Dynamics of engaging domestic help workers

The workers increasingly sell their labour power to employers through part-time arrangements. For the employer, it is common to allocate work to different workers who specialise in certain tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, or gardening. Throughout the research process, the employers time and again spoke about their fears and mistrust of workers and their dependency on the workers (Paivi Mattila, 2011). But the study was based out of Jaipur and the dynamics of the city is different from a metropolitan city like Mumbai. Studies bring out the uniqueness of this employer employee relation, that it is very personal and maternalistic. Maternalism is a central phenomenon in the framing of relations with workers by their employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Romero (2002, 138–139) argues that benevolent maternalism is a form of emotional labour which requires workers to manipulate their feelings in order to fulfill the psychological needs of the employers.

The criterion for engaging domestic helpers is seeing significant changes. Mehrotra (2010) in Delhi observed that now a days caste does not play a role, especially in the case of part time workers. There has been a positive shift in this regard. Tidy and competent workers were sought most. In certain areas, employers placed the most value on a reasonable rate of wages, and in general, many employers found commissions charged by agencies to be unreasonable. Regional/language preferences were also mentioned. Training did not figure prominently in most employers' responses, although some did complain that agencies sometimes claimed to send semi-trained workers who the employers did not find satisfactory in the end. Subba Rao and P Raju, in their study pointed out that 82% of the households recruit their domestic helper on the basis of ability and willingness of the helper to do all duties.

5) Need for the study

Households can be perceived as fundamental units of social organization (Hendon 1996, 48). Domestic activities and relations with domestic workers have great political and economic significance and are an integral part of our societal and economic setup (ibid, 47). Most middle class, upper middle class and rich Indian families employ domestic workers (Ray and Qayum 2009), directly indicating that the number of people involved in this system is significant and call for an in-depth study. Most of the research related to this area talk in an all too familiar tone of victimization which they adopted when talking about domestic workers, alongside their one-sided picture of Indian employers as abusive and exploitative. Interesting point is that practically, not all these households (employers) could possibly be ruthless exploiters (Paivi Mattila, 2011). The need is to bring out the true picture in the whole setup and it is possible only by listening to both sides which will eventually be a step forward to develop a functional model which creates a win-win situation for both the households (employers) and domestic workers (employees).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the earlier studies not much research has been done towards understanding the impact of demographic factors of employers on their perception. This study aims to understand the various dynamics of employers' perspective towards employee engagement in the domestic help market, as well as the effect of demographic factors (such as age) on this perspective. The employers' working status (primarily the leading lady of the house) may also have an effect on how they perceive the various dynamics of engaging household help. The study will help us to understand the real concerns of employing a househelp and the factors that play a major role in the functioning of an employer-employee relationship.

The study is conducted in the city of Navi Mumbai. Data for the study is collected by survey method where employers of domestic help have responded to questions set to assess the dimensions of employer-employee relationships. Nonparametric tests like Mann Whitney U Test and Logistic Regression were used to analyze the data. The following hypotheses were tested to meet the objectives of the study.

H1: Age, gender and profession affects the likelihood of engaging agencies for employing househelp.

H2: Age, gender and profession affect the likelihood of looking for immediate replacement in case regular house help is on leave.

H3 Positive image of domestic help employees differs with respect to working status of domestic help employers

H4 Negative image of domestic help employees differs with respect to working status of domestic help employers

H5 Perception towards structured/organized domestic help engagement differs with respect to working status of domestic help employers

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the current context logistic regression is used to confirm H1 and H2 wherein the likelihood of engaging agencies for employing house help and looking for immediate replacement of maid is checked.

In the current study, three demographic variables age, gender and profession have been considered as independent variables and their effect on the probability that they will engage agencies for employing house help and that they will be looking for immediate replacement in case regular house help is on leave.

Logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of age, gender and profession on the likelihood of engaging agencies for employing househelp.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	40.525[a]	.080	.125

Classification Table[a]

			Predicted		
			Have you explored agencies		Percentage Correct
Observed			no	yes	
Step 1	Have you explored agencies	no	34	0	100.0
		yes	9	0	.0
	Overall Percentage				79.1

a. The cut value is .500

Nagelkerke R^2 value is only 0.125 which indicates that only 12.5% variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables considered in our model. The model correctly classified 79.1% cases.

To find the age vs. likelihood of engaging agencies for employing house help relationships, the maximum likelihood method was used for estimation of coefficients of the model. Maximum likelihood estimate of slope is -0.0274 and intercept is -0.2172. With increasing age the likelihood of engaging agencies reduces. The chance that a person with age 'x' will engage agencies for employing house help is given by the formula:

$$\frac{e^{(-0.2172 - 0.0274x)}}{1 + e^{(-0.2172 - 0.0274x)}} = p$$

Again logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of age, gender and profession on the likelihood of looking for immediate replacement in case regular house help is on leave.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	56.192[a]	.076	.101

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table[a]

	Observed		Predicted		
			Do you see replacement in the absence of regular maid?		Percentage Correct
			no	yes	
Step 1	Do you see replacement in the absence of regular maid?	no	14	8	63.6
		yes	7	14	66.7
	Overall Percentage				65.1

a. The cut value is .500

Nagelkerke R^2 value is only 0.101 which indicates that only 10.1% variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables considered in our model. The model correctly classified 65.1% cases. Further analysis showed that females are 2.706 times more likely to seek replacement in absence of a regular maid as compared to men. Also, businesspeople are 3.708 times more likely to seek replacement as compared to homemakers and service people.

To find the age vs. likelihood of seeking replacement in absence of regular maid relationship, maximum likelihood method was used for estimation of coefficients of the model. Maximum likelihood estimate of slope is -0.0314 and intercept is 1.2557. With increasing age the likelihood of seeking replacement in absence of regular maid reduces. The chance that a person with age 'x' will engage agencies for employing house help is given by the formula:

$$\frac{e^{(1.2557 - 0.0314x)}}{1 + e^{(1.2557 - 0.0314x)}} = p$$

In the current study Mann-Whitney U test is used to find out whether the two classes of employers (with respect to their working status) differ in their perception towards the domestic help employees and their structured or organized work engagement. The image of the employee is taken as positive with respect to his/her sensitivity towards employers' needs, performance, punctuality, trustworthiness, skillfulness and overall satisfaction with the help.

Similarly, the negative image of the employee is studied with respect to his/her unwarranted paid leaves, casualness, unprofessional conduct and cost prohibitive. The perception towards the structured or organized work engagement is studied with respect to factors like regularized leaves and payment system, and fixed time schedule.

Null hypothesis Testing: Positive image of domestic help employees does not change with respect to working status of domestic help employers:

	Service	Homemaker
Count	27	16
Rank sum	610.5	335.5
U	199.5	232.5
U = Min (U1, U2)		199.5
U (Critical value)		137
μ		216
σ		39.79
z score		-0.414677055
p value		0.339189166

Therefore, *at 5 percent level of significance the Null Hypothesis stands and is accepted.*

Null hypothesis Testing: Negative image of domestic help employees does not change with respect to working status of domestic help employers:

	Service	Homemaker
Count	27	16
Rank sum	609	337
U	201	231
U = Min (U1, U2)		201
U (Critical value)		137
μ		216
σ		39.79
z score		-0.37697914
p value		0.353094553

Therefore, *at 5 percent level of significance the Null Hypothesis stands and is accepted.*

Null hypothesis Testing: Perception towards structured/organized domestic help engagement does not change with respect to working status of domestic help employers:

	Service	Homemaker
Count	27	16
Rank sum	562.5	383.5
U	247.5	184.5
U = Min (U1, U2)		184.5
U (Critical value)		137
μ		216
σ		39.79
z score		-0.7916562
p value		0.214280585

Therefore, *at 5 percent level of significance the Null Hypothesis stands and is accepted.*

For each hypothesis, the calculated value of statistic 'U' is greater than the critical value and p-value greater than the level of significance, we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the perception of the two samples of employers.

5. CONCLUSION

There is no significant difference in the way the different classes of employers (based on their working status) perceive the various factors affecting employee engagement in the domestic help market. Moreover, the two sets of employers also don't differ in the way they perceive the structured or organized engagement of employees in the domestic help market. With age the propensity to engage in more formal recruitment structure like hiring through agencies reduce as they are more comfortable with conventional ways. Again, females are more inclined towards seeking immediate replacements in absence of regular helpers. Occupation-wise businesspeople are more inclined towards quick hiring replacements in absence of regular helpers. This shows that in current demographic structure of the society, the employers will appreciate the presence of a formal entity handling the hiring and managing process of housemaids. This finding gives a future direction to a business model of building an organized and regularized platform for employer-employee engagement in the domestic help market.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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