

The Necessity of Policy Discussions Regarding Covid-19 and Female Migrant Household Labour at Delhi Nct

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Abstract - Millions of people all around the world were negatively impacted by the unusual socioeconomic predicament brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. On March 24, 2020, India declared a lockdown as a preventative measure to avoid the spread of the pandemic, which resulted in the loss of employment for migrant workers whose livelihood depended on daily wages. Many of these workers were women who were engaged in domestic work and relied solely on the income from their employment in order to make ends meet. This study sheds light on the situation of women who, because of the pandemic's economic effects, experienced significant psychological and social challenges. 25 migrant female household labors were sampled from Delhi city during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, and the study used a sequential explanatory design. The findings of the study shed light on the negative effects of economic hardship on the mental health and quality of life of the group under consideration. By demonstrating that state measures are insufficient to guarantee even the most basic needs of migrant female household labors, a critical analysis of the policies and programmes highlights the need for social action in the form of lobbying for more humanitarian laws that ensure social security for the underprivileged.

Keywords - COVID-19 , Employment , Explanatory Design , Humanitarian laws

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1. INTRODUCTION

Societies and labour markets have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. Within a matter of weeks, quarantines, border closures, and other forms of restricted migration were implemented. To what extent economic, social, and structural inequities harm some groups of workers and migrants more than others has been starkly revealed by the pandemic and the ensuing limitations on migration. One of these distinct characteristics is gender.

A variety of circumstances motivate people to leave their home countries in search of employment elsewhere. Many men and women leave their homes in search of better economic conditions and more promising futures for their families. Oftentimes gender-related issues in both the country of origin and the country of destination motivate women's labour migration. Gender discrimination and inequality are one set of circumstances that can make it harder for women to travel freely and earn an equal living as men, both domestically and internationally. In addition to men's under- or unemployment or the lack of an income source, structural reasons in countries of origin, such as insufficient social safety nets, the privatisation of health care and education, and levels

of poverty, drive women's migration. Outsourcing care jobs in destination nations has been a major factor luring women to migrate there. Figure 1 provides a clear illustration of this point by depicting the large gender gaps in the final destinations of migrant domestic workers. The gendered division of labour limits a migrant worker's career options because men and women tend to work in separate fields or take on different responsibilities even while employed in the same industry.

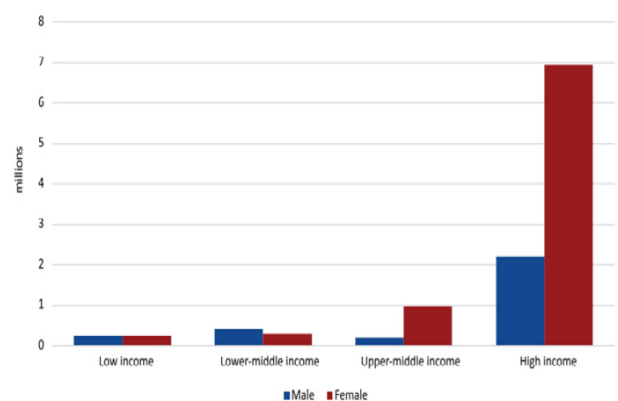


Figure 1: Migrant domestic workers by destination country income level and sex as of

2013 Source: IOM, 2017: 29, based on International Labour Organization (ILO) data.

Women, especially migratory women, are disproportionately represented in the lowest-paying occupations, which often involve culturally despised and legally unrecognised work. In migrant corridors where bilateral agreements are the primary mechanism of regulation, women are channelled into a small number of industries, primarily the domestic and nursing sectors. Migrant women are disproportionately represented in lower-paying, less-secure, and more unstable occupations. Eight, women are more likely to experience workplace violence; nine, migratory women, especially those working informally, may have trouble gaining access to sexual and reproductive health care and will be under less social protection. As a result, migrant women have less safeguards in place to protect them from layoffs and economic downturns. Women migrants send home a higher proportion of their earnings than males do, raising the question of how they manage their mental health on the road.

One of the primary services in the unskilled sector of the Indian economy is domestic work. In the past, it was common practise for wealthier families to employ maids to assist with housework. Since more and more working women are choosing to live and work in urban areas, the demand for domestic help like maids and housekeepers has increased. The demand for domestic employees is growing as the traditional job of a housekeeper shifts in many countries (Sarti, 2014). Due to its industrialization and progress, particularly in the Information Technology (IT), Education (mainly higher education), Construction (mainly commercial construction), and Healthcare (mainly hospitals and clinics), the city of Delhi in India is well-known for the immigration of a large population (Shashidhar, 2003). The increased population and the increased demand for domestic help are both consequences of the significant influx of professionals into the labour force. The growing popularity of urban apartment living and the nuclear family model have contributed to a surge in the need for domestic help. When both parents are in the workforce, it can be difficult to meet everyone's professional and domestic obligations. Therefore, they must rely on a service to take care of their domestic needs such as cleaning, cooking, caring for children, etc (Sinha et al., 2020).

These marginalised women workers have been exploited and discriminated against by their employers, who hire them for long hours at low pay, for decades. They are generally unappreciated and have no assurance of continued employment. In many cases, domestic workers' social security and wellbeing are overlooked by government initiatives (Armacost et al., 1994). According to the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM), these women are forced into domestic service due to a variety of factors, including a lack of formal education, early marriage, widowhood/separation from husband, unemployment, and poverty (Vadageri et al., 2016). Long hours for

poor income and lack of job stability is a major issue for many women who work outside the home. (Madhumathi,2013). Domestic servants under the age of 18 have been the victims of sexual harassment, rape, and even murder (Parameshwara, 2016). Moreover, caste and religious prejudice undermine their professional pride (Sahni et al., 2019). Many of the aforementioned problems are experienced by migrant women domestic workers in Delhi city who have travelled there from neighbouring areas and other states. The migrant women domestic workers' precarious situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic that devastated the Indian economy (Dev et al., 2020).

According to the 2011 census, out of a total of 98,301,342 unorganised migrant labourers in our country, women account for 3.2%, or roughly 31,45,643. In Delhi, it is believed that 5 lakh foreign workers are now working (Parameshwara, 2016). Census data from 2011 estimates that women make up roughly 30% of Delhi's migrant domestic workforce. This proportion of women works as domestic help since it is in high demand in urban families. Domestic helpers may work for a single family or for different families. Women may spend their entire day working in a single home, or they may split their time between several homes throughout the course of the day, as is frequent in densely populated areas. Most of these migrant workers' families live below the poverty level because they rely solely on their wages from domestic work (de Haan, 2011). The lives of domestic workers, whose families relied on their daily salaries as domestic householdhelp, were profoundly altered when, on March 24, 2020, a 21-day National lockdown was declared as a preventative measure to avoid the spread of the pandemic. Many were requested to voluntarily resign from their positions, while others were told to take a break and come back after the lockdown time. Therefore, there was a complete or substantial loss of income, making it difficult to afford even the most basic necessities of life (Agarwal, 2021). These ladies did not have the resources to leave the city and return to their hometowns, and they did not earn enough money to support themselves while staying there. There were a lot of people who were having trouble making ends meet and who really needed to find work so that they could provide for their families (Azeez et al., 2021). In a situation shared by all unorganised women migrant workers in India, these women were excluded from state welfare programmes and had no voice in state policymaking (Azeez et al., 2021). Female domestic employees in Delhi are the focus of this research, which seeks to shed light on the issues they confront on the job. Understanding the topic from the viewpoint of a migrant is a primary goal.

Migrant women in domestic work

Eighty percent of the world's 67 million domestic workers are women, and 11 and a half million of

them are immigrants. 40 Migrant women often make up the bulk of the domestic workforce in many nations, performing activities like cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, the old, and the sick.

Many migrant domestic workers (MDWs) already had "characteristics of insecurity and violence" in the workplace before the current pandemic.⁴¹ The domestic labour sector is one of the most marginalised, least protected, and least respected job sectors.⁴² Women MDWs are often put in even more dangerous situations now that countries throughout the world have restricted travel in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Many MDWs are losing their jobs as a result of households' concerns that they may have contracted COVID-19 from their employees. ⁴³ Borders have been closed, making it difficult for these women to find new employment or return home.

In order to prevent their MDWs from becoming contaminated, employers are locking them inside the homes. Female MDWs are often subjected to domestic violence because their employers keep them at home all day. Part-time MDWs face a unique set of challenges, but none less serious. In addition, because part-time MDWs frequently switch employers, they are more likely to contract the virus as they travel from family to family. The risk of penalties, immigration detention, and possible deportation is heightened for MDWs who labour irregularly during the epidemic since many MDWs work informally (without employment contracts and work permits).

Migrant women in need of services and support

The work of migrant women is essential to the functioning of the health and social care systems and homes in many countries during this crisis. However, migrant women themselves have needs during the COVID-19 outbreak that must be met. There has been a significant rise in domestic violence as a result of the pandemic and the resulting restrictions on transportation, job losses, confined living arrangements, and economic demands on households; yet, many support agencies remain temporarily closed.

Due to language and knowledge obstacles, migrant women are more susceptible to abuse and exploitation in these settings. Barriers to health care and maternity protections previously existed for migrant women, especially those in insecure and informal employment or with an irregular immigrant status. Since a result, migrant women's health is being further compromised by these obstacles, as they may be afraid that seeking medical help may risk their jobs, or that if they are illegal, doing so will result in penalties or even arrest, incarceration, and deportation. Migrant women in domestic and care work are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the virus because they may feel pressured to continue working while being ill if they do not have access to social protections like sick leave or unemployment payments.

The pandemic is having a devastating effect on migrant women sex workers because they are unable to work and support their families because of travel restrictions. There are significant difficulties for this "hidden" workforce to receive health care and unemployment benefits. Migrant women are especially susceptible to these situations due to language and information barriers, and those who continue working are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the intimate nature of the work.

The spread of COVID-19 has decimated the incomes of millions of migrant workers. The majority of migrants in South and Southeast Asia and South America work in the informal sector, putting them at increased risk of losing their jobs with no severance pay or social security. Migrant women, who make up a disproportionate share of the informal economy, are especially vulnerable because they are frequently the first to be laid off, and they have limited access to social services and unemployment benefits. The World Bank (2020a) points out that unlike the last global financial crisis, where unemployed migrant workers often were able to switch sectors, this crisis may make switching sectors less viable due to the skills and expertise needed for key areas like health care.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

With a focus on realism, the researchers behind this cross-sectional study opted for a sequential explanatory strategy. Purposeful sampling was used to select 30 female domestic workers from the city of Delhi, all of whom were migrants. Volunteers received no compensation for their time or effort in conducting the research. All subjects provided informed consent, and their identities was protected.

Tools to be Used

The research had adhered to the International Federation of Social Workers' code of ethics. In-person interviews were done utilising a structured questionnaire and an interview guide for the quantitative and qualitative phases, respectively. The survey asked participants questions about their background and lifestyle. SPSS 25 was used to examine the data, which revealed the respondents' demographics and standard of living. The respondents' day-to-day lives during the pandemic and, in particular, the lockdown were documented through in-depth interviews performed during the qualitative phase. The purpose was to determine the degree to which the respondents' already dismal lives were made worse by the pandemic. Voyeurism tools were used to analyse the data, and a content analysis was performed on the results.

Table 1: Participant's Socio-Demographic Profile

Age Group	Frequency	%
30 and > 30	9	30
31 -35	5	16.67
36-40	13	43.33
41 and < 41	3	10
Total	30	100

Employees Per Family Size	Frequency	%
Single Households	12	40
Multiple Households	18	60
Total	30	100

Marial Status	Frequency	%
Single	5	16.67
Married	13	43.33
Divorced	3	10
Widowed	9	30
Total	30	100

Educational Qualification	Frequency	%
Illiterate	10	33.33
> 10 th	16	53.34
10 th -12 th	3	10
12 th plus	1	3.33
Total	30	100

Table 2: Respondents' Employment Data

Respondents' Employment Data	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experience in domesticwork (in years)	9.2276	4.5678
Number of days of work in a week	6.3456	2.1347
Hours of work in a day	3.89	2.9644
Salary per month (in INR)	3107.87	1154.08

The statistics indicate the intense work conditions of the respondents and the meagre remuneration they make. There are no standardised pay scales for domestic workers, and hence they are often exploited by employers.

Table 3: 'Satisfaction with Life' reported by the respondents

'Satisfaction with Life'	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
5-10	10	33.33	15.333	6.3464
11-15	13	43.33		
16-20	7	23.33		

Life satisfaction of the respondents was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). The lowest possible score on the scale is 5 and the highest is 25. Table 3 shows the life satisfaction scores of the respondents. It was found that the mean score was 15.33, which is considered low. The majority of the respondents had a score below 30. Only 23 percent had reported a score between 16-20. The low score indicates the poor satisfaction with life of the respondents.

Table 4: Quality of Life (QOL) of the Respondents

Domain	Mean	SD
Physical	59.9860	15.6864
Psychological	43.6408	15.9998
social	40.7765	28.0865
Environmental	46.7114	13.1121
Overall QOL	48.0086	15.6565

The quality of life of the respondents was measured using WHOQOL-BREF (World Health Organization, 1996). The scale has four domains viz. physical, pyshological, social and environmental reflecting the quality of life in each of the domains. Each domain is scored in the range of 0-100. An overall quality of life score ranging from 0-100 is also provided by the scale. The findings suggest that the respondents experience poor quality in general. The situation in the social, psychological and environmental domains are deplorable.

Perceived Difficulties of the Migrant Women Domestic Workers during the Pandemic

A) Financial Restriction Caused by a Pandemic:

The initial quantitative survey found that people had to put in an average of 3.89 hours per day across an average of 6.34 days per week. The lowest monthly pay they received was 3107.87 rupees. Respondents' pay was low considering the number of hours they put in. The respondents already had a tough time before the virus hit. Many of them have been laid off, at least temporarily, and are struggling to make ends meet as a result. Here are a few examples of the answers we received:

3rd Respondent: As a result of covid-19, my employers have asked me to stay home from work. They didn't pay me for the five months I was out of commission. During the epidemic, I had trouble making ends meet and fell behind on my rent.

5th respondent says: Unfortunately, I was unable to settle the outstanding rent on the residence. I'm currently making a little repayment. I am still in the town, awaiting a call from my bosses. I intend to return to Delhi as soon as possible and either inquire about moving back in with the current landlord or look for a new job opportunity.

The respondents' accounts illustrate how the pandemic exacerbated their preexisting financial woes. They couldn't earn a living because they couldn't work. The circumstance sheds attention on the financial disparity between the wealthy and the poor in our society and how the pandemic exacerbated this divide. While businesses were able to weather the financial storm, their employees were hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Policymakers must do more to reduce economic disparity, particularly by expanding access to social security for those employed in the informal economy.

B) Discrimination Caused by the Pandemic

They face many forms of discrimination due to the fact that they are migrants, women, and domestic workers all at once. This group's situation has been exacerbated to an unprecedented degree by the pandemic context. Their bosses continued to keep them out of the office even after the lockdown ended because they were worried about the spread of disease. As a result of their stigmatisation as potential virus carriers, communities shunned them and shop owners treated them differently. Here are a few accounts that touch on this topic:

Respondent 1: I worked there for four years and was let go without being asked how I planned to make ends meet. After the lockdown was over, I contacted to see whether I might return to work. They said no, warning me that it was too dangerous to invite me over.

Respondent 4: It's not our home country, thus Delhi is not our first stop. During those first several days of the lockdown, we had a lot of difficulty. There was no one around to aid us. The shops wouldn't even let us in while there were already customers inside.

Respondent 6: In the midst of the lockdown, my spouse and I both lost our jobs. We were taking care of the children while having no way to support ourselves. Numerous work opportunities were explored on our part. No one would have us because they deemed us unsanitary.

3. DISCUSSION

The demand for domestic workers is rising in cities like Delhi, which is experiencing rapid economic development. The benefits include the freedom to choose between a single or multiple households, the rising demand for domestic help in families with working women, and the opportunity to build relationships in a familiar environment. But the lack of job security and a defined scope of work for these women are major drawbacks. They are responsible for a wide array of tasks, from basic housekeeping to the care of infants, toddlers, and the elderly. Because there are no formal requirements for the position, they are exploited by being asked to do more for less pay.

In order to better the working class's working and living conditions, several laws have been passed (GOI, 1991). There are many such laws, including the Trade Union Act of 1926, the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, the Employees State Insurance Act of 1948, the Industrial Disputes Act of 1949, the Industrial Disputes Decision Act of 1955, the Payment of Bonus Act of 1955, the Personal Injuries, (compensation insurance) Act of 1963, the Maternity Benefits Act of 1967, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970, the Bonded Labor Systems (Abolition).

The covid-19 lockdown compounded the working class's despair (formal and informal sector). Instead of ending the economic and social crisis, the state policies that were put in place to deal with it only served to exacerbate existing disparities (Miyamura, 2021). All of the women who participated in the study were worried about losing their jobs because of the pandemic, and they all reported feeling more vulnerable than ever. While some businesses paid their employees in full for the month of the lockdown, the majority of employers either let their domestic help go or asked them to return about two months later without pay. The state viewed these women as second-class citizens, and there were no protections in place for them (Neetha et al., 2011). One in four women in India who work in the unofficial economy lost their jobs as a result of the shutdown (Chakraborty, 2020). Many of the women who responded were divorced or widowed and raising children alone; others said their partners were

violent. They needed to find work to support their families, but most of them were illiterate, so they ended up taking jobs as undocumented workers, most commonly as housekeepers. Those who'd lost their jobs during the pandemic lockdown complained that they couldn't afford basic necessities like rent and medical care, leading them to borrow large sums of money from money-lenders and banks that they would have to work hard to pay back with interest. Despite the stress of paying back loans they took out to cover basic living costs, these mothers stressed the importance of sending their children to reputable educational institutions. To make ends meet during the lockdown, many of them had to take on menial tasks like garbage clearing in flats. Those who wanted to go home during the lockdown felt helpless because they couldn't because of the travel ban (Narayan et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

The difficulties encountered by women domestic employees who have relocated to Delhi from rural areas prompted the study. The results of the initial quantitative inquiry showed that the respondents were living in appalling conditions. They have a bad quality of life and are therefore dissatisfied with it. Restrictions on their resources and social interactions as a result of the pandemic added further stress to an already trying circumstance. Since the government didn't care about their condition, they had to work hard just to get by. The participants recounted facing substantial obstacles such as a financial crisis, unemployment, a lack of family support, job uncertainty, a travel ban that prohibited them from returning to their towns, and medical emergencies. These ladies were fighting the pandemic and their own personal demons at the same time. In terms of the work-to-pay ratio and the extraction of labour, migrant women labourers are one of the most exploited groups. They help the local economy and community, yet they are often denied benefits like social security and guaranteed employment. The pandemic highlighted the growing economic disparity and social exclusion of those at the bottom of society. Legal reforms are needed to improve the lot of the unorganised sector's workers, such as the migratory women who conduct domestic work.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Defense of the Social Order: States must extend the same level of aid and social protection (unemployment benefits, sick leave, income support, and pay subsidies) to displaced migrant workers, including domestic workers, as they do to their own citizens. As an exemplary model, Canada has extended wage protection and eligibility for employment insurance to temporary foreign workers in the agricultural industries of that nation who have lost their jobs, become ill, or have to quarantine because of the virus. To provide migrants and asylum seekers access to essential social protection programmes, Portugal has granted

them temporary resident rights with open residency applications.

Relating to medical care : There should be no distinction in the services available to migrants testing and treatment for COVID-19 medical care on par with that provided to citizens. COVID-19 testing and therapy must be easily accessible and inexpensive. If migrant workers can't access medical treatment or take time off when they're sick, it could spread through the community more quickly.

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