

An anthropological study of working and living conditions among woman domestic workers in Kadapa and Proddatur towns in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

International Labour Organization stated that the 'Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers'. More or less all middle and upper class people employ preferably female domestic servant. They perform a bunch of work such as cleaning utensils, sweeping and cleaning rooms, washing clothes, fetching water etc. against this backdrop, the paper focuses on the problems which are faced by the domestic workers at the time of working as domestic servant. The present paper is also aims to explore the working and living conditions of the women domestic workers in Kadapa and Proddatur town of YSR Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: Women Domestic Workers, working conditions

Introduction

More or less all middle and upper class people employ preferably female domestic servant. They perform a bunch of work such as cleaning utensils, sweeping and cleaning rooms, washing clothes, fetching water etc. Sarkar.S (2005) has classified the female domestic workers in to three categories viz., i). Thika workers, ii). Full time workers and iii). Residential workers. The thika workers serve for 3-4 hours a day in a household. They work in 2-3 houses daily; however, number of households to be served by thika workers largely depends on their efficiency and capability to work. On the other hand, the full time workers serve in a single household for maximum duration of 8 –10 hours daily which includes a part of idle time.

The residential workers stay at employer's house and they are provided two time meal. The residential workers do all works of the employer's household. Apart from these three types of domestic maids, another type of domestic worker may be found. They are part time 'occasional or emergency' workers who serve for a few days on a purely temporary basis when any emergency arises in a household. The tasks performed by all types of domestic workers are almost same. The real wages in the form of food, cloth etc. is not sufficient. Sometimes quality of food provided by the employer is inferior.

Most of the employers serve unhygienic food to eat and provide old clothes to wear. The child domestic servants lack proper education. They are also suffering from skin diseases due to continued washing of clothes with different varieties of detergents. Mostly, the people from villages migrate to urban areas and their woman and female children work as domestic servants. They have to work and adjust at both master's homes and their own residences. Since it falls in unorganized sector, there are no proper regulatory and welfare measures for the welfare of woman domestic servants.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO) the Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. They work for private households, often without clear terms of employment and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. Currently there

are at least 53 million domestic workers worldwide, not including child domestic workers, in that 83 per cent of all domestic workers are women.

Against this background, the study was conducted in an urban area namely Kadapa and Proddatur towns in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh, India. The study region is one of the fast growing area in many aspects like different industries such as uranium, mines and educational institutions etc. The growing urbanization and necessity of employment creates rural-urban migration. Kadapa and Proddatur are the major urban centers in Kadapa district and it is main reason to choose these two localities for the present study.

The poverty and illiteracy among the woman is one of the reasons for work as domestic servants. Anthropological studies in the field of unorganized sector particularly on Woman Domestic Workers are very scanty. In this context, in this regard the study on women domestic workers in Kadapa and Proddatur Towns of Andhra Pradesh is being undertaken with the following objectives.

Objectives

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the socio-economic profile of the woman domestic workers;
2. To examine the factors that lead to rural-urban migration;
3. To study the nature of work assigned, payments, working conditions and facilities being extended to woman domestic workers at both master's homes and own residences; and
4. To examine the changing status and role, nature of social relations, extent of freedom at the work places and their houses, and

Importance of the Study

A number of studies have been conducted in view of enormity of the problem, such studies are descriptive, normative, specific, analytical and empirical studies. The present study is unique than the existing and also it is new in the sense it examines woman domestic workers through an anthropological view. The present study evaluates their

working conditions, their attitudes, behaviour, views and perceptions on various problems that confront them. It is in this context the study assumes importance and significance. Further, the study will be of immense field of enquiry to the social scientists and activists and policy makers in a way that it will make them realize the gravity of the problem and take necessary steps and measures to eliminate the grievances of the woman domestic workers in the district/country even in the world.

Methodology

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected through anthropological field work using the techniques like observation, interview schedule, case study method, focus group discussion, formal and informal interviews.

Through the using interview schedule, covered the information such as nativity, caste, religion, family structure, age, sex, marital status, traditional occupation and reasons for their rural-urban migration and socio-economic conditions of the worker. The data relating to nature of work, time and payments, working conditions, social relations, problems and adjustment at work place was also included in the schedule.

Focus Group Discussion will be conducted among the child domestic servants in each town to collect qualitative information relating to nature of work, working conditions, problems being faced at master’s place and suggestions for their welfare. Case studies will be prepared wherever necessary to integrate the qualitative data with quantitative data for intensive understanding of the work conditions and problems of the domestic servants.

Area and Sample

The data for the present study collected from the domestic

women workers in urban areas namely Kadapa and Proddatur town of YSR Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh. Five municipal wards having maximum number of woman domestic workers was identified with the help of concerned municipal officials. Door-to-door survey was conducted to identify woman domestic workers. From each ward, the data was collected randomly from 15 women domestic workers. The total sample from each town consist 75 (5x15=75) and the total sample is 150 (10x15=150).

Discussion

The socio-economic details of the woman domestic workers like age, literacy, marital status, average number of children, migrant status, number of working hours are discussed here.

Status of Migration

Migration is one of the peculiar things to force as domestic servants. According to the sample respondents the migration from rural to urban areas mostly occurred due to lack of labour in their own villages. The villages economy mainly depends on the agriculture and allied occupations. Due to unseasonal rainfall the farmers left their lands fallow. In this regard the farm dependent families and labours not getting work. In this regard some of the villagers migrating to urban area for searching employment. Among 150 respondents 60% of the Women domestic workers were migrated from rural areas and the remaining were born in the same towns.

Out of the 150 woman domestic workers under study, the data on marital status reveal that 66 percent are married, 18 percent are widowed and 16 percent are unmarried. Among the married women most of them belong to the age group of 18-35 years. This age group has an average of 2.6 children and the respondents who above the age of 35 years are having 4 percent of children.

Table 1: Family type wise marital and migrant status of sample women domestic workers

Marital Status			Type of Family		Migrant status		Total
Unmarried	Married	Widowed	Nuclear	Joint	Settlers	Migrants	
8	1	0	2	7	2	7	27
0	28	4	29	3	17	15	96
0	4	5	9	0	1	8	27
8 (16%)	33 (66%)	9 (18%)	40 (80%)	10 (20%)	20 (40%)	30 (60%)	150 (100%)

Source: survey Schedule

The data show that as most of the women are from nuclear family. Women from the younger age group reported maximum contribution by their family members as most of them belong to joint family. Their expenditure is also high which acts as a push factor for their involvement in work.

Literacy Levels

Table-2 highlights the levels of literacy and number of working hours among the sample woman workers. The levels

of literacy reveal that 22 percent of the women are illiterates and 42 percent studied primary education and the rest are the dropouts at secondary level. The woman workers belonging to the age-group 18-35 years work hard by spending more than 5 hours per day in their masters’ houses. This indicates their increasing responsibility to their family by working in more than one house and earning more wages. The wages range from Rs.1,500/- to Rs.4,500/- per month. In addition to small wages, few master women provide leftover food to them.

Table 2: Age Group wise Levels of Literacy and Working hours

Age Group	Literacy			Working Hours	
	Illiterates	Below 5 th class	Above 6 th class	Upto 6 hours	More than 6 hours
10-18	1	3	5	3	3
18-35	5	15	12	19	6
Above 35	5	3	1	1	7
Total	11 (22%)	21 (42%)	18 (36%)	23 (46%)	16 (32%)

Source: survey Schedule

The data were collected relating to the behaviour of father and husband towards the woman domestic workers in their traditional patriarchal families. Though most of the woman domestic workers work hard in both masters' houses and their own houses and earning mostly on par with their male counterparts, they are not receiving much respect from them. Data were collected by using some indicators regarding their behaviour in the following table.

Domestic Relations

The data reveal that only 70% domestic workers belonging to the age-group 10-18 have expressed their father's behaviour is bad as they consume liquor and abuse frequently. The remaining age-groups have no fathers in their families but they have husbands and 75% of respondents have expressed that

their husbands are bad and worse respectively as they consume liquor and abuse frequently and sometimes even beat them in intoxication.

Daily Work Profile

The domestic servants have to work at both their masters' houses and their own houses. The work in masters' houses include normally sweeping, washing utensils and clothes. Sometimes they also assist in cooking. Some of the respondents work in 2 to 4 houses for more earnings. Besides, they have to sweep, wash and cook and serve the food in their own houses in addition to looking after their babies/children. Thus most of them work hard than their male partners in the family. The following chart shows the distribution of daily work among the woman domestic workers.

Daily Work Profile of the Respondents

Time	Age-group 10-18 years	Age-group 18-35 years	Age-group 35+ years
05.30A.M	-	-	Rises
06.00	-	Rises	Fetching water
06.30	Rises	Feeding baby	Prepares/takes food
07.00	Takes food	Cooks/eats food takes child to school	Attends WP-1, washes utensils & prepares food
08.30	Goes to WP	Attends WP-1, washes utensils & clothes	Attends WP-2, washes utensils & clothes
10.00	Works at WP	Leaves WP, takes child to home, feeds the baby and cooks food	Attends WP-3, washes utensils and cooks food
12.30	Helps in cooking	Leaves WP, takes child to home, feeds baby and cooks food	Returns to home
01.00	Takes food	Works at WP-2	Washes cloths, cooks/ takes food
02.30	Returns home	Attends WP-3, washes cloths, cleans flooring	Does other household work
03.30	Takes rest	Attends WP-4, washes cloths, cleans flooring	Goes to WP again
05.30	Goes to WP	Returns to home, feeds the baby	Works at work place
07.30	Returns to home	Washes cloths	Returns to home
08.00	Helps mother	Cooks food,	Interacts with neighbours
09.30	Takes food, watches TV	Takes food, Watches TV	Cooks/take food
11.00	Goes to bed	Watches TV	Goes to bed
11.30	-	Goes bed	-

Note: WP = Work place

The above chart shows daily work profile of women of different age groups. The adolescent girls usually work at a particular place for a long time in a day as helping hands for all kinds of domestic works. The chart also shows the tight schedule of a mother working as a domestic maid. Their main activities at work place include washing utensils, clothes, cleaning floors etc., however, their activities do not go against the health of their infants as they perform the crucial task of breast feeding regularly. The chart also highlights a day of a woman worker belonging to the age- group above 35 years. Women in this group are mostly found as cooks at both work places as well as at their own home.

Problems Faced by Maids at Work Place and at Home

Problems at work Place

The major problems faced by the woman domestic servants at work place are as follows:

1. Low wages: 80% of the women are not satisfied with their present wages and expect more. On an average they get Rs.200- 250 per month for cleaning floor and washing clothes; Rs.400-500 per month for cooking food twice a day, but they expect at least Rs.100-200 more.
2. Extra work: 10% of the respondents expressed their grievances for doing 'extra work' during visits by guests.
3. No wages during absence: Wages are reduced proportionately for their absence in work. However, they absent if they fall sick and inform the employer.

4. Lack of holidays: They want at least one holiday per week. But 90% of the employers are not in favour of this demand as expressed by the respondents.
5. Poor Relation: They wish their employers to be friendly, cordial, helping them by providing free breakfast, tea, clothes and medicines.
6. Health: Most of them suffer from chronic skin diseases due to washing clothes and utensils by using detergents and continuous wetting of their feet and hands.

Problems at Home

Adolescent girls suffer less from unpleasant behaviour of their respective fathers whereas most of the women have husbands addicted to alcoholism. Some of them suffer very much due to the violent attitude of their husbands. However, most of them watch TV to forget stress and strain of their daily work.

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 in household-work. Though they usually go to Govt. Hospitals, some of them prefer to get treatment from private practitioners as the latter requires less time. Hence, their expenditure increases whenever health deteriorates. They also face problems in fetching drinking water as they usually stand in long queues for hours together to get two buckets of water. Most of the respondents expressed their inefficiency to look after their

children in providing proper education because of their inadequate knowledge and time. Very few of the male parents spent time in teaching their children during their leisure time and mostly in the evening.

Aspiration about Children

Mothers who are working as domestic maids do not want their daughters 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 the age 19 years. 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. They are free to marry after they attain the age of 20 years if they become self-sufficient.

Conclusions

The domestic servants 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 more work load with less remuneration. They want to make their children educated but an increasing cost is a great concern. They do not getting sufficient wages. However, concentrating on their interest, they are working very hard for a better future. Majority of sample Respondent's family women playing a major role in catering their family and educating their children.

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