

# Women Domestic Workers in Neo-liberal Era: A Study on Low Wage Employment

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**ABSTRACT:** Domestic workers are the part of the household management and also universal in nature and found in history of slavery, folk tales, international migration and highly demanded topic of discussion across the countries and human communities. However both the gender is in demand for the above specific jobs and help out the household chores. The globalization process and the development scenarios can't be completed without the reference to the status and the role of the domestic workers. The female domestic workers are the focused group here with regard to the feminization of the job and the stereotyped job requirements as females do manage in low salary and that's why they are more appropriate group to be chosen for household work. Most of the migrant people especially female population in the urban slums are engaged in this sector and domestic work is the prime source of income and the demand for their services are increasing. Taking the advantage, people are coming to the nearby urban centres to have a chance of increase in income and to experience a better life. The ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) calls for inclusion of domestic workers into minimum wage coverage and for effective measures for ensuring compliance. Nearly three-quarters of domestic workers around the world – more than 55 million people – are at significant risk of losing their jobs and income due to lockdown and lack of effective social security coverage, according to new estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The present paper is about wage problem of domestic workers in Odisha in the neo-liberal era.

**KEYWORD:** Domestic work, globalisation, wage, household, migration

## 1. Introduction

The feminisation of migration is a prominent reality in recent times although it is less explored. A large number of migrants today are females, travelling beyond the borders of their countries to escape from poverty or to improve the socio economic conditions of their families. Roughly half of the migrants in the world are females (IOM, 2000).

Asia is one of the world's greatest suppliers of female international migrants in various regions especially in the Middle East and Europe (Hugo, 1999). There are at least 53 million domestic workers, not including children. Eighty percent of domestic workers in the world are women. This number continues to increase in developed and developing countries (ILO, 2010).

While men constitute majority of the international migrants in Asia, there is an ever increasing number of female migrants in the region (Fawcett et al. 1984, Arya and Roy 2006, UNFPA 2006, UN 2006, Agarwal 2006). The demographic status of domestic workers has also undergone changes. During the 1970s and 1980s most female domestics were found to be the head of households, in particular widowed, deserted and older women (Banerjee, 1982). As family migration has increased, younger women have come to occupy a larger proportion of domestic workers (Banerjee, 1992). Unlike other forms of labour market activity, domestic work takes place in an unconventional place of work, i.e. the household. Gaining public acceptance of a household as a place of work is a challenge. Implementations of labour laws such as minimum wages and regularized work hours, which are essential elements of any kind of work, also remain a challenge. Such regulation is complex because the nature of domestic work is unique compared to other forms of work. The sector lacks effective means to regulate working conditions, for example, through streamlined job descriptions which could be offered through standard contracts. Furthermore, unlike work in a formal setting, domestic work is not guided by clear and agreed production or output goals. Enforcing labour laws remains a significant bottleneck. This is because privacy norms do not bode well with the idea of labour inspectors entering private households and ensuring regulations. Policymakers, legislative bodies and people need to recognize the existence of an employment relationship in domestic work. Such a view would see domestic workers as not just “helpers” who are “part of the family” but as employed workers entitled to the rights and dignity that employment brings with it.

## 2. Review of Literature

Chamraj K. (2007) in “Domestic workers in Silicon City” described struggle of domestic workers in Karnataka for decent wages and condition of work. It reveals that wages are fixed for a certain amount of work, but employers keep adding to the tasks and when asked for a leave the employer cut the wages. Women domestic workers are not allowed to touch the vessels in which the employers’ food is kept as well as women are not supposed to enter the kitchen. Some women employers wash all the vessels washed by the maid again by tamarind to purify them. The article further claims that the domestic work needs to be recognized and treated in human and dignified manner. The minimum wage notification specifies that for a six-day week: and one task for 45

minutes per day should receive INR 249, one hour tasks, INR 299, and 8-hour day INR 1.699 (all per month); 10 percent more for families larger than four persons, and overtime at double the rate. The article further mentions about the Stree Jagruti Samiti study recommended that the minimum wage should be easy to understand, time-based and adequate, and it makes the case for an hourly wage to simplify the calculation. The study also demands social security and a tripartite board of representatives of the government, employers and workers. Moreover, the article also suggests that the employer has no right to conduct his/her enterprise if he/she cannot pay his/her employee a minimum subsistence wage and that non-payment of minimum wages is forced labour under Article 23 of the Constitution.

Hazarika, Ghosh, Chattopadhyay, Majumdar and Kumar (2009) have conducted a group survey on women domestic worker: their life, problems and dreams, in Mumbai. The study focused on the reasons behind selecting the job of domestic helper and examining the basic characteristics of these workers including socio-economic condition. The study also throws the light on their problem at workplace and home as well as their aspirations regarding their children. Study was conducted in five areas of Mumbai and total sample size was 50 women domestic workers. Interview was taken either at work place or at the place of the workers. The major findings of the study revealed that most of the domestic maids were working to earn their livelihood. According to them there is no other way to earn money with their little education and technical skill. High majority of the women were not satisfied with their present salary and expected more. Few of them expressed grievance for extra work when guest comes. They wanted at least one holiday per week, but 90 percent of the employers were not in favour of this demand as expressed by the respondents. 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.

John K. (2013) in his article entitled "Domestic Women Workers in Urban Informal sector," described poverty as main reason why many women and children engage in domestic work. The reasons for entering in domestic work were Family problems including rural and male unemployment; disputes at home, ill treatment and loss of parents have resulted in their leaving the house to work as domestic worker. Women those who were widow, separated from husbands or those with alcoholic husbands are compelled to work for the survival of their children. Sharma (2006) pointed out that there are no standard norms that decide working conditions for domestic workers. They work from 8 to 18 hours a day while live-in domestic workers are on call 24 hours each day. Article further discussed about legislation on protection of domestic workers that domestic workers are excluded from labour welfare laws. As such domestic works are currently not within the scope of most of the labour laws. So women domestic

workers cannot demand rights for their decent working condition minimum wages, social security, hours of work; weekly offs paid leaves or medical benefits among others. Article quoted SEWA survey which showed that live-out domestic workers do not have social security. Paul, Datta and Murthy (2011) in their paper on Working and Living Conditions of Women Domestic Workers: Evidences from Mumbai discussed working and living conditions of women domestic workers in Mumbai based on survey conducted by Adecco TISS Labour Market Research Initiative (ATLMRI), between September, 2009 and March, 2010, in collaboration with Jagrut Ghar KamagarSanghatan (JGKS), Mumbai. The core objective of this survey was to collect data on domestic worker who are members of JGKS, covering demographic profile, nature of service, consumption, health status, time use, assets and liability, habitat, gender profile and domestic violence. The findings revealed that only three of domestic workers have ever been suspected for theft by the employers. Most of them (90%) never faced sexual harassment at the work place. High majority of them do not have fixed weekly holidays and only thirteen percent of them get overtime payment. Most of people –two-third to four fifth access health facilities due to illnesses such as headache, giddiness, body pain, cough & cold and back Pain, while one–sixth of people visit health facilities because of diarrhoea. Further, work related injuries and back pain are commonly noticed among women domestic workers. respondents in the study view that trade union has brought enormous awareness on certain pertinent issues, for instance, making these workers aware about the domestic workers’ law, helping domestic workers in acquiring ration card and ensuring the availability of ration against ration card, and health information through trade union are few examples to imply how the role of trade union becomes vital in the process of fighting for social justice, with given enormity of political resistance towards bringing reforms to the life of domestic workers, the role of trade union becomes very clear. three-fifth of domestic workers spend 2-6 hours daily. Almost all of them spend less than four hours on each unpaid domestic activities. Moreover, half of the women do not make decisions on spending their own money. In deciding number of children, nearly forty percent of respondents viewed that decision is jointly made by husband and wife. Thus paper describes a vicious situation of lack of core entitlements which are required to enjoy freedom guaranteed by the democratic society and the necessity of appropriate alternatives to bring a positive social change, impacting lives of hapless domestic workers and their families.

Mohammed Y. (2011) concluded from the Mapping Study of Home Based Workers in Uttar Pradesh, that all Home Based Workers in three selected districts for the study have similar socio-economic conditions and are facing same problems like Health, Education, Child labour, Minimum wages, lack of awareness with regard to the Govt. beneficiary schemes for poor and BPL. All related govt. departments and boards have

not been playing their role effectively for the support of the Home Based Workers. Although the Trade Unions are available in three districts, they are not in an active condition; they are going on their way or are busy with their political interest. In all the three trades the Home Based Workers are living in a very low economic condition. They are getting little wages so they cannot even afford two meals a day for their families. Although the govt. has many social security schemes they are not able to access these facilities. Lack of awareness is the biggest issue or problem for the Home Based Workers.

International Labour Organisation (2014) supported the Employment and Social Protection Task Team and launched joint advocacy on the Rights for Domestic Workers to collectively promote decent work for domestic workers. In this line, the employment and social protection task team had facilitated public debate on the rights and equality issues of domestic workers which included safety, security, working conditions, wages, social protection, employer's expectations and employer-employee relationships. Public debates organised and argued that a greater sense of social co-responsibility must be developed towards assuming responsibility, society as a whole, for the process of reproducing the labour force; and towards unpaid care work between men and women, in line with the change that has already taken place regarding paid work. We must foster alternative models of maternity, paternity and masculinity so that we can break the popular assumption that women alone must balance productive work with family and care responsibilities. The financing of 'care' from the current model that relies on the households, the women and the domestic workers need to be changed. This can be exercised by making available good quality full-day child care especially for the marginalized communities and by facilitating the development of effective policies (for example, leave policies, maternity benefits, family health insurance, etc.) to enable workers to meet demands of unpaid work. Further, it is argued that decent work for domestic workers are two pronged approach, first, recognize the rights of domestic workers for fair terms of employment; second, promote active participation of the state and recognize structural inequality fostered by not recognizing the sheer weight of 'care work.'

The importance of the sector in our economy can be estimated from a careful analysis of its size and growth. Private households with employed persons who are largely domestic workers are next to only education in terms of the share in female employment in the service sector. The percentage of domestic workers in total female employment in the service sector increased from 11.8 per cent in 1999-2000 to 27.1 per cent in 2004-05, with a phenomenal increase in the number of workers by about 2.25 million in a short span of five years. The data shows a feminisation of the service with the share of female workers increasing sharply over the period (Neetha, 2007). Domestic work in itself has undergone tremendous changes. Domestic workers used to

be attached to one single household and undertook one or more work such as cleaning or cooking.

### 3. Feminist Debates on Public- Private Spaces

The commonsense understanding of the private sphere as activities of the home and the public sphere as everything outside the home belies the very slippery and complicated use of both terms. Historically, females and slaves were often explicitly excluded from this public associated with politics. Such explicit exclusions are less frequent today, and the use of public has broadened to denote not only the world of government but also the world of business (confusingly called the “private sector,” to distinguish it from the government) and civil society. Indeed, for Habermas (1989), the public sphere is the domain of civil society, conceptualized as bourgeois forms of social interaction in urban spaces such as coffeehouses, libraries, theatres, salons, societies, and lecture halls. For him, these spaces are governed by the norms of equality and rational, public deliberation, although he acknowledges that these may be “imperfectly realized.” Public is also used to indicate public action for the common or “universal good”— an ostensibly gender- neutral benefit to all members of the population that is nevertheless authored from an implicitly masculine position. Finally, public evokes the physical spaces where encounters between these varied actors take place. With industrialization, the household— previously also a site of production— was reconstituted as a site of consumption. Simultaneously, women’s labour within the household (previously recognized by the state as productive) was devalued, rendering women dependents of the male wage worker, the “breadwinner” and head of the household (Davidoff, 1998). The private sphere of the home came to be regarded as the site of reproduction, sexuality, nurturing, and emotional life— a man’s haven from the troubles of the world. For women though, as Joan Landes observes, it was no haven but rather “a site of sexual inequality, unremunerated work, and seething discontent,” often leading to “private despair” and “private isolation” (Landes, 1998, p. 1). Second- wave feminism’s slogan— “the personal is political”— was a fundamental challenge to the public- private binary, a repoliticization of the private sphere that simultaneously brought women out into the public.

Feminist economists have been at pains to demonstrate that women’s roles in social reproduction, while publicly invisible, are indispensable to the operation of the public sphere (e.g., Folbre and Hartmann, 1988; Folbre and Nelson, 2000). The social and economic importance of domestic and care work became more visible, and an issue of public debate. In particular, the increasing number of women entering the labour market in the 1970s in high- income countries produced what Sassen (2008) has labeled “professional households without a wife.” Despite this shift, women remain primarily

responsible for “homemaking” (Folbre and Nelson, 2000, p. 125), and there is little or no social or moral compulsion for men to undertake domestic and care labour, which has led to the increased commoditisation of such labour in these contexts. In addition, demographic changes have affected the demand for paid domestic labour: as a result of declining fertility rates and longer life expectancy rates, the need for professional caretakers of the elderly has increased.

Initially, feminist advocacy for the recognition of care as a public rather than a private concern resulted in increased welfare and state provisioning of care services. However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the pressures on social expenditure following the shift from welfare state to a post-neoliberal, “social investment” paradigm have produced a degree of convergence on the marketisation of care regimes across high-income states, notwithstanding their diverse historical and institutional legacies (Mahon et al., 2012). State policies for cash benefits and the “reprivatisation” of care now stimulate a market for care services increasingly provided by a migrant care work force (Fernandez and Regt, 2014).

#### 4. Feminist Approach to Domestic Labour

In the 1950s and 1960s feminists defined household labor as being central to women’s oppression and domination regardless of race or class status. Some feminists argued that the shared experiences of housework actually worked to unite all women, and the burden of this responsibility was to many feminists “the first obstacle to liberation” (Romero 1992: 97). Feminine progress to self-actualization involved the freedom from this drudgery. Romero states that “domestic service reveals the contradiction in a feminism that pushed for women’s involvement outside the home, yet failed to make men take responsibility for household labor” (Romero 1992: 98). This all comes back to the idea of the double day, and working middle and upper class women could escape the syndrome by hiring poor women to perform child care and housekeeping services; and this was considered progress by many. The problem lies in the fact that the progress happened not by lessening the burden of housework on women, just by shifting it to another location. The system of gender domination still places the responsibility of housework on women, but middle and upper class women have the financial freedom to escape it. This still means that though that it is women who are concerned with the drudgery of housework, but there is an obvious class dichotomy as well. If we accept that house work is central to the oppression of women, then as feminists Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave have pointed out, “every time the housewife or working woman buys freedom for herself as a domestic, that very same freedom is denied to the domestic, for the maid must go home and do her own housework” (Romero 1992: 98). Columnist Viva from the *Village Voice* explains the complacency with which modern

women accept domestic service as a solution to the burden of being a “superwoman.” She says: Should it occur to you that nursing a baby, supporting one or two more other children, continuing your career, shopping, cooking, cleaning, and otherwise single-handedly maintain a family are incompatible activities, I will save you hours of anguish by saying definitively that a cleaning woman is the first form of help with which to start (Romero 1992: 98).

The domestic labour debate of the 1970s set out to theorize the relationship between housework and capitalism. Housework was understood broadly in the context of domestic labour. This was intended to include childcare as well as housework, and indeed other forms of care work and servicing that women did at home without a wage. Capitalists were seen to benefit from the nurturance and care of male workers who were more productive as a consequence, and also from the rearing of the next generation of well-socialized workers. The debate explored the extent to which it was possible to utilize traditional Marxist terminology and apply it to gender inequality, and the extent to which a new set of concepts was needed. In particular, they asked whether domestic labour was productive, unproductive, or non productive, of value, and surplus value. This was important to Marxist theory of capitalism, since labour that was productive of value and surplus value was considered to be more central to the workings of capitalism than work that was unproductive or non productive. These feminist writers thus challenged successfully the traditional Marxist assumption that women’s domestic labour was marginal to capitalism, as part of their argument that Marxist theory needed a better appreciation of the significance of gender relations and of women as a potential political force.

Feminists of the 1970s sought to identify the roots of the invisibility of unpaid domestic work, indicating its contribution to sex/gender inequality and female subordination, in the context of the 90s and in the first decade of the 21st century, a multiplicity of factors aroused new interest in the theme – the majority related to the growing, definitive entry of women into the labour market (BRUSCHINI, 2006).

## **5. Invisible and Unrecognized but Crucial for Women’s Livelihoods**

Domestic work occurs in isolated, largely non-regulated and privatised environment and most domestic workers negotiate job terms and pay on an individual basis. The pay of the domestic workers is often determined by the task performed, the locality, their social status and other labour market conditions (Neetha, 2003). Studies have shown that there is clearly a hierarchy among domestic workers in terms of type of work done that is reflected in the wage structure.

At present, domestic work stands as a readily-available livelihood option for millions of women. While a large number of women are engaged in this sector, it



is important to look at the working conditions that exist in this sector. Fixing fair, minimum wages, providing weekly days off and paid annual leaves, protecting from physical and sexual abuse and ensuring social security, are key issues that need to be addressed by the government nationally, and across India's states. The number of female domestic workers in cities across India has been increasing rapidly since 1999. Yet, domestic workers occupy little or no place in most of the contemporary discourse on economic development. Domestic workers do not have the required collectivises or associations or popular spokespersons to voice their concerns. This is not to claim that domestic workers as a category is completely ignored in public discourse. It does figure in academic circles sporadically as a growing category of female employment, and their reference in intervention programmes is largely limited to their status as migrant workers. However, they are largely absent from state policy – be it labour laws or social policy.

The importance of the sector in our economy can be gauged from a careful analysis of its size and growth. Private households with employed persons who are largely domestic workers are next to only education in terms of the share in female employment in the service sector. The percentage of domestic workers in total female employment in the service sector increased from 11.8 per cent in 1999-2000 to 27.1 per cent in 2004-05, with a phenomenal increase in the number of workers by about 2.25 million in a short span of five years. The data shows a feminisation of the service with the share of female workers increasing sharply over the period (Neetha, 2007). Despite a long history of paid domestic workers in India, little documentation exists on the subject pertaining to the period prior to the present century. No comprehensive data on the number of domestic workers, their gender composition, and the profile of employers, wages and other conditions of work is available for this period. However, the available research and documentations point to varied and changing profiles of workers, the nature of service and relations of work. An important aspect emerging from these studies is the presence of male workers and its feminising profile over time. The Labour Bureau Survey of full-time domestic workers in Delhi (1981) found that neither sex had monopoly over this occupation. According to the Shramshakti Report (1988), out of 23 lakh domestic workers, 16.8 lakh are female workers. The study commissioned by the Catholic Bishops Conference in 1980 estimated that 78 per cent of domestic workers in 12 cities were female and in Bombay, 90 per cent were female. The study also pointed out the gender stratification in paid domestic work with the men concentrated in better paying jobs. All the diverse regional studies during the period, however, point to sub-standard conditions of work, largely based on feudal relations.

Domestic labour as a special category of workers did receive special attention during the last one or two decades, largely due to the rising prominence of the sector

in terms of female employment. Concomitantly, there has been a growing body of literature on the subject though it is largely in the form of regional studies based on a sample population. The growth of the sector during this period has been explained in terms of the process of economic growth and modernisation. Growth and urbanisation are said to encourage the growth of the domestic service workforce, as they produce an affordable class of employers and a surplus of unskilled workers. The agrarian crisis in rural areas and the loss of livelihoods have resulted in the sourcing of a regular supply of cheap workers, for whom this is the only promising option. The category 'private household with employed persons', which is popularly used to estimate the number of domestic workers includes five sub-categories such as Housemaid/servant; Cook; Gardener; Gate-keeper/chowkidar/watchman; Governess/babysitter, and others. Of these categories, gardeners and gate-keepers/chowkidars/watchmen are highly male-centred sectors and hence need to be separated from the rest of the categories to obtain an accurate picture of the feminisation process in the sector.

## 6. Wage Structure of Domestic Workers

Apart from the devaluation and feminisation of domestic service and the varieties in the nature of domestic labour market, an important aspect that warrants elaboration is the nature of domestic labour relations. In the erstwhile aristocratic set-up, the work relationships were based on unwritten agreements and expectations, in paternalistic line. Current situations show that in many societies, both patronage and contract-based relations exist simultaneously, this may differ across societies and regions. Work relations, thus, become the products of both economic and cultural factors. Domestic service is distinct from other wage-earning occupations, in terms of wage payments, working conditions and work relations, with informality being a dominant feature of domestic work. As per the data available from the NSS for 2004-05, 99.9 per cent of the workers engaged in private households are informal workers, based on the definition employed by the National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) (Raveendran, 2009). The work relations in these occupations cannot purely be captured in economic terms, as a considerable amount of subjectivity and personal dealings define the employment relations. The nature of contracts is mostly oral and informal, but heavily dependent on personal relationships. There is no uniformity in the level of wages, hours of work and the number of working days. As there is no minimum wage fixed for domestic work, it varies across employers, irrespective of the quantum and hours of work. Wages do vary across locations and geographical areas, depending on the economic and social characteristics of the employers and employees. It is difficult to arrive at a uniform daily wage rate for domestic work even for a specified locality (Neetha, 2004). As domestic work involves a number of activities, wages could

vary depending on the type of domestic work that a particular worker performs. The wages received by domestic workers show a large dispersion across tasks. Apart from the variation across larger divisions such as cook, cleaner, and carers, wage rates vary within these divisions as well. A domestic worker under the category 'cleaner' may only perform house cleaning or can take up other cleaning work, such as washing of clothes and/or dishes. For urban, part-time workers, wages even vary with the exact task for which they are engaged, reflecting the socio-cultural hierarchy of the work. The number of times that such a task is performed during the day and the time required to complete the task is also variables that enter wage calculation (Palriwala and Neetha, 2009). The extension of the minimum wage legislation to domestic work provides for situating the state's understanding of the occupation and the nature of work involved in it. Though there are variations across states in the method of wage fixation, the definition of domestic work, the statutory wage rates, and their enforcement, The inclusion of domestic work under the Minimum Wages Act in different states has not only differed in terms of when it happened, but also in terms of the impetus behind it. Among the states studied, in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, unions and organisations working among domestic workers were instrumental in bringing the sector under the Act. In all these states, there was intense campaigning by unions and organisations, which pressured the political leadership and bureaucracy, and resulted in the notification of minimum wages. These unions and organisations were also a part of the process of wage setting, though indirectly. Contrary to this, in Bihar and Rajasthan, it was a direction from the Union Ministry of Labour that initiated the process of fixing minimum wages. Under the Act, two methods are provided for fixing and revising minimum wages – the committee method and the notification method. None of the states followed the committee method for fixing minimum wages. The government adopts the committee method when it feels that it does not have sufficient knowledge or information about the scheduled employment. The processes in all the states were characterised by the absence of domestic workers, employers and organisations. The wage rates prescribed by the Act do not suggest any clear method of calculation, though minimum wages are to be notified taking into account the skill component of the tasks as well as the requirements of the worker and his/her family to maintain themselves. The arbitrariness in fixing minimum wage rates for domestic work has been pointed out by various organisations. There is variation across states in the minimum wage rates. Kerala has the lowest rates and Karnataka has the highest if daily and monthly wage rates are considered. The variations in the minimum wages between states defy explanation. In Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, all tasks have the same minimum wage rate. Karnataka has two separate wage rates, with higher rates for housework with childcare. However, cooking is missing from the list of tasks. Kerala differentiates wage

rates for various tasks in accordance with the social understanding of their hierarchy, but the rates do not differ much across these tasks. Thus, cleaning work has the lowest wage rate, though the difference in wage rates between routine cleaning work and non-specialised care work for an hour is just 50 paisa. Cooks, security guards, and workers engaged in gardening activities share the same minimum wage, but it is higher than that of cleaning and care workers. Drivers, gardeners, and home nurses have the highest wage rates. However, the difference in wage rates between the highest paid task and the lowest paid task for an hour is just Rs 2. This makes it clear that more than monetary differences in wages it is the social understanding of a given task that the notifications exemplify. The task-based differentiations in minimum wages are more complex than suggested when the social profile of workers performing these tasks is analysed. The differential rates across tasks assume a class hierarchy in establishing minimum wages. There is a considerable segregation in terms of tasks along caste lines in all the states, though the degrees to which such notions exist vary not only between states but also by rural/urban distinction and local parameters. Cleaning is considered to be one general task, though sometimes cleaning utensils and washing clothes are considered better in terms of status than sweeping and mopping floors. The over-representation of lower castes in cleaning operations is well documented (Raghuram 2001; Neetha 2009) and true of all states. But in many states, they are also cooking, though to a lower extent. The presence of upper castes is reportedly the lowest in sweeping and mopping, though some combine these tasks with cooking. Interestingly, wherever the wage rates are differentiated, this social hierarchy is reproduced. A lack of understanding of the specificities of the sector and the ambiguities involved in setting minimum wages across states become more apparent if one calculates the differences. The duration for which minimum wage rates are fixed further reveals the states' regressive approach. Minimum wage rates for domestic work are fixed either for an hour or a day as opposed to for a month, which is the general norm. Kerala provides for monthly wages but differentiates daily wages rates into different categories on the basis of working time. In the Kerala notification, wages rates have been fixed differently for the first one hour and for additional hours up to a maximum of five hours. The payment for additional hours is less compared to the first hour. However, it provides for an eight-hour wage if the worker works with one employer continuously for more than five hours.

As per a 2011 estimate, if the poverty lines allowing nutrition norms of 2,200 calories in rural and 2,100 calories in urban areas are to be met, it requires at least Rs 1,085 a month (Rs 36 a day) and Rs 1,800 a month (Rs 60 a day) per person, respectively (Patnaik, 2011). If each full-time worker has to support at least two dependents, this corresponds to a minimum daily wage of Rs 108 and Rs 180, respectively. Even this is an underestimation as no margin exists for medical emergencies, other cultural and

life cycle necessities, or old age. Thus, it is quite evident that the statutory wage rates are far below what is required by domestic workers. Moreover, the difference between market wage and minimum wage could have been addressed to some extent if the state governments had given due attention to the specificity of the sector and its workers. Explicit comments on the nature of housework as “light”, in contrast to “hard manual work”, were common when the issue of poor wages was raised, by male-dominated trade unions. More worryingly, such views were shared by some state male trade union leaders who were involved in organising domestic workers.

The present research findings show that more than 70% of female domestic workers are underpaid. Although minimum wage is not fixed for domestic workers in the state of Odisha, according to the pay structure for unskilled labourers, the percentage has been calculated. The situation of female domestic workers is worst because of unauthorised and unregulated employment structure. Wage structure of female domestic workers need to be restructured in the state and many other states of India. So that domestic work can be categorised as a well paid and structured job. The present research is based on the research findings which depict that the regularity of payment is not satisfactory among female domestic workers. They are poorly paid which is quite disproportionate to the strain and heaviness of their work. Domestic work appears to be irregular employment with monthly pay received by the workers. Their monthly income depends upon nature of work, number of households, size of family, distance between workplace and home, duration and frequency of visits to workplace. Although some of the workers agreed that they are paid regularly but not fully paid all time. The plight of domestic workers is that their work is not regulated and well paid. More than eight percent of the domestic workers in the study area are found to be underpaid. Payment is not satisfactory as per the daily work hour and type of work.

## 7. Policy Frameworks

The difficulty in recognizing and regulating domestic work as work pales in comparison to the difficulties entailed in inspecting for compliance with regulations. These difficulties are observable in the regulation of domestic work globally (Kerbage and Esim, 2011). These exclusions are justified by the argument that domestic work cannot be regulated or monitored in the same manner as other work, because this would violate the privacy of the home (Varia, 2011). However, as Johnson and Wilcke observe, sanctifying the “privacy” of the household in this way allows states to simultaneously abdicate responsibility for any violations occurring within the household while being centrally involved in constructing and policing the public and private divide. In the past decade, international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Human Rights Watch, have been working on ways to protect and legislate domestic

work worldwide. The ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 (adopted in 2011) is a major step forward in the process of turning domestic work into “real work,” yet convincing governments to ratify the Convention has proven to be a major challenge. A number of governments have verbally acknowledged the importance of protecting domestic workers, yet ratification of the convention in the near future appears unlikely. Regarding low wage of domestic workers, the central government has included them under various policies and schemes for having a fair wage labour status. Commenting upon the rampant exploitation of domestic workers, Neeta N criticises states for ineffective legislation which, apart from not enforcing minimum wage, refuses to close loopholes surrounding work hours. For example, even if eight hours is the stipulated daily work time, such a provision only applies per employer, meaning that someone who works in more than one home could work well beyond the prescribed time (EPW Engage, 2018). In the absence of a national policy, domestic workers are freely exploited: since the sector is largely unorganised, these workers are at the mercy of their employers and suffer under abject poverty, little to no education and a competing demand for jobs which results in depressed wages. The impending national policy framework for domestic workers—if and when it is passed in Parliament—needs to provide social protection, mandate a minimum wage and fix maximum number of working hours per day. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 prescribes the basic procedure for setting minimum wages. The first step in setting wage rates under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 is the inclusion of the occupation under the list of scheduled employment. Once the occupation is included in the scheduled list of employment, the state is bound to fix, wages for this employment. In (Section 5 of) the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, two methods have been provided for fixation/revision of minimum wages.

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 prescribes the basic procedure for setting minimum wages. The first step in setting wage rates under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 is the inclusion of the occupation under the list of scheduled employment. Once the occupation is included in the scheduled list of employment, the state is bound to fix, wages for this employment. In (Section 5 of) the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, two methods have been provided for fixation/revision of minimum wages. Five norms for fixing minimum wages were established by the 15th Indian Labour Conference (ILC) in 1957 – that minimum wages should be high enough to meet all basic needs of a worker’s family, including food, clothing, shelter and other amenities. According to the 15th ILC, in calculating the minimum wage: • the standard working class family to be taken as three consumption units for one earner, which is two adults and two children; 23 Cost of living index number in relation to employees in any scheduled employment in respect of which minimum rates of wages have been fixed, means the index number ascertained and declared by the competent authority by notification in the Official Gazette to be the

cost of living index number applicable to employee in such employment. Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 66 17 • minimum food requirement to be taken as a balanced diet of 2,700 calories per day per consumption unit; • clothing requirement to be based on per capita consumption of 18 yards per annum, which gives 72 yards per annum for the average worker's family; • for housing, the rent corresponding to the minimum area provided for under the government's industrial housing schemes should be taken; and • fuel, lighting and other items of expenditure should constitute 20 per cent of the total minimum wage; • the Supreme Court fully upheld these criteria in the case of *Unichoy vs. State of Kerala* in 1961. In the later *Reptakos Brett vs. Workmen* case in 1991, the Supreme Court held that minimum wages should also include a sixth component, amounting to 25% of the total minimum wage, to cover children's education, medical treatment, recreation, festivals and ceremonies. It is recommended that hourly wage rates are very important as a large section of the domestic workers are part-time workers, who may work for a particular employer only for short durations. As per the situation in the state of Odisha, India the domestic workers are vulnerable. Majority of the workforce earn too little which is just hand to mouth. The minimum wage legislature has not mentioned domestic workers separately for getting the benefits. Women are often subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks. They may be strictly confined to their places of work. The domestic workforce is excluded from labour laws which look after important employment-related issues such as conditions of work, wages, social security, provident funds, old age pensions, and maternity leave." Theory of the 'domestic mode of production', in which women are considered a class exploited by men argued that the left-wing construction of stay-at-home wives of the bourgeoisie (whose 'stay-at-home' status excluded them from participation in capitalist relations of production) as class enemies of working-class women deny the existence of the domestic mode of production, within which all women are exploited, and hence created artificial divisions among the female class (Delphy, 2013). There are provisions like Domestic Workers (Registration Social security and welfare) Act in 2008 was there to regulate payment and working conditions and also to check exploitation and trafficking of women. It has a mandatory provision that all registered domestic workers should be paid minimum wages as per the Minimum Wage Act, 1948 (Section 22). Besides this, they are also liable to receive pension, maternity benefits and paid leave that is paid weekly off. The workers living in the house are entitled with wages for at least 15 days during the year. But unfortunately domestic workers are not getting these facilities and living a life of a vulnerable category. They are not included in the job category under unskilled workers. there is a need to interfere in the employee employer relationship to break the tradition of slavery and make women feel proud to as domestic workers with their income and space.

## 8. Conclusion

Domestic work is a highly personalised and informal service, where the workplace is the employer's home. In such a work situation, a worker from a poor social and economic background is likely to find it difficult to contest her/his employment conditions. Domestic workers are largely drawn from sections of the population who have been oppressed and made voiceless. In a context of growing inequalities, they are not easily able to demand much public attention. What makes matters worse is that they are engaged in housework, which is socially devalued. These specificities of the sector must be taken into account if any legislative interventions are to benefit these workers. Though the recent interventions have helped in accepting domestic workers as "workers", their actual wage situation and other conditions reflect continuing devaluation. Women domestic workers are undergone various problems in neo-liberal era including low wage. Their work is invisible, undervalued and insecure, that is why more work is needed to make their economic contribution into consideration while calculating per head income and revise their wage. Equal wage and domestic workers are always walking in opposite directions. There should be strong guidelines to ensure their wage as per the government norms and provide them opportunity and space to work with satisfaction and dignity. In reality all provisions and policies gone failed to meet the actual need of women domestic worker. There should be proper implementation of policies that can regulate their work structure and employment conditions. And of course domestic workers should be united and stand against all discriminations as an unorganised workforce and invisible paid care workers.

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