

## A STUDY OF IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON DOMESTIC WORKERS

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### Abstract

*In India, domestic work has traditionally been considered the bottom of the occupational structure with low social status and institutional ignorance. Domestic work has remained unorganized, unrecognized and unrewarding for the domestic workers. Most of the domestic workers are migrants who have come from rural to urban areas in search of livelihood opportunities. There is no proper legislation as such to protect the rights of these domestic workers. Whatever amounts determine by employers, they are ready to accept without any bargaining hence, there is no proper standard of wages. The lockdown due to Covid 19 pandemic destroys the life of domestic workers. They have faced financial challenges and found difficulties to survive life. The main objectives of the study were to study the problems faced by domestic workers and impact of Covid 19 pandemic on their livelihood. The researcher was used secondary data for the study due to strict action taken by government against to fight and control on diseases and some information collected through telephonic conversation with domestic workers. The researcher provided some valuable suggestions after studying the problems faced by downtrodden and most neglected section of the society.*

**Key Words:** Domestic Workers, Unorganized, Covid 19 Pandemic, downtrodden

### Introduction

On 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, the Government of India announced a lockdown throughout the nation in an effort to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The first lockdown was declared on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020 which was the period of 21 days and closed on 14<sup>th</sup> April immediately after the curfew of 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020. The main goal was to control the spread of corona Virus outbreak in India. The different strategies were used by the Government such as ban on people from stepping out of their homes, all services and shops closed except necessity services which includes banks, hospitals, groceries shops and other essential services, closures of commercial and private establishments ( only work from home allowed), suspension of all educational and training and research institutions, closure of all places of worships, suspension of all non- essential public and private transport, prohibition of all social and political, sports, entertainment , culture academic , religious activities. Later, on 1<sup>st</sup> June the first unlock was declared by the Government of India which was extended to 30<sup>th</sup> June for 28 days wherein the majority of sector released slowly.

During lockdown, the majority lower income group people were suffered with starvation due to non-availability of essential things required to live life such as food and shelter. Most of them were gone to their native place. As their source of money was closed and arises problem of payment to rent of house and many other.

It is observed during lockdown that majority of people were discussed on the impact of Covid-19 on employees working on different sector such as hotels, transport and tourism, small scale business etc. But, we have witnessed the terrible effects on migrant workers and others in the informal sector however, domestic workers are one of the most unorganized and informal classes of workers in India which always neglected and whose work is often low paid, insecure and invisible. This group is suffered lot during lockdown period. Therefore, the present study has undertaken to find out, the impact of Covid-19 on domestic workers and their livelihood.

### **History/Background of Domestic Workers**

As per government estimates, there are approximately 4,000,000 domestic workers in India. Out of this, around 2.6 million workers (65%) are female. There are of course, different kinds of domestic workers in India. First there are those who shuffle between multiple houses in a day and may have fixed working hours and activities at each house. Then, there are those workers who live at the employer's house itself. Their work hours are 24/7 and they are required to do all household work that may possibly come up at any time of the day. The latter categories of workers are referred to as the 'live-in' workers.

In 2011, the then Ministry of Labour and Employment released the first 'National Policy for Domestic Workers'. However, this was held up in a Parliamentary Standing Committee and was ultimately retracted by the Ministry. In the same year, India signed the 'Domestic Workers Convention, C189' of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Article 5 of the Convention states that, each member shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence." Apart from this, the Convention aims to grant certain basic rights to domestic workers, such as fair wages, regulated working hours, equal bargaining power, access to grievance redressal mechanisms, social security and most importantly, a dignified and recognized employment identity. Unfortunately, India has not ratified this Convention to date, stating reasons that the national laws and practices in India are not in conformity with the provisions of the Convention. It is interesting to note that close to a decade after the Convention was adopted; only 29 UN member states have ratified it.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To study the problems faced by domestic workers in India
- To find out the socio economic impact on domestic workers
- To study the role of government towards support of domestic workers
- To provide suggestions to protect the interest of domestic workers.

### **Need of the Study**

The COVID-19 pandemic in India is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. The first case of COVID-19 in India, which originated from chine, was reported on 30 January 2020. Covid 19 has been particularly brutal to the migrant workers. Nearly 85% of them lost their employment and other means of livelihoods. Domestic workers were also part of it because majority of domestic workers lost their job during lockdown covid 19. It is also found that many of them fall in sick due to Covid 19 due to lack of

awareness of precautionary measures to be required of this diseases. Many of them died due to non-availability of essential treatment. Hence, it is necessary to find out the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on domestic workers and their livelihood. Therefore, the researcher has taken small efforts to find out the problems faced domestic workers during lockdown Covid 19 pandemic and socio economic impact on domestic workers of Covid 19 pandemic.

### Literature Review

- ❖ **Dr.Jyotsnamayee(2020)<sup>1</sup>**: The researcher emphasized on the female domestic workers, whose work is always recognized as unskilled job. It is observed that female domestic workers are providing financial security to the socio economically poor families. The researcher tried to find out the impact of lockdown imposed due to covid 19 pandemic by collecting data from 100 female domestic workers as a respondents from Cuttack city of India. The researcher found that during pandemic covid 19, they have faced double marginalization.
- ❖ **ILO Report (2020)<sup>2</sup>**: The ILO estimates that, in the early stages of the pandemic, on 15 March, 49.3 per cent of domestic workers were significantly impacted. This figure peaked at 73.7 per cent on 15 May, before reducing to 72.3 per cent on 4 June. The pandemic has had a particularly dire impact on domestic workers around the world. As the number of cases and fear of contagion has spread, so too have confinement measures. To facilitate physical distancing, most countries adopted either full or partial lockdown measures to prevent transmission. While domestic workers have suffered many kinds of impacts resulting from the pandemic, one of the main consequences of COVID-19 has been a reduction of working hours and, in some cases, a loss of jobs, resulting from fear and restricted mobility associated with confinement.

### Research Methodology

The research paper is purely based on secondary data collected from different articles published in newspapers and also research papers published in various Journals. The website of different newspapers also used as a source of information.

### Problems faced by Domestic workers during Lockdown

- Employer has neither attended telephone call nor called domestic workers back since the Covid-19 lockdown that started on March 25. Hence, domestic workers did not receive payment from employer and they become unable to make payment to their landlords as majority of them stay on rent.
- Many domestic workers across the country are just abandoned by their employers in the hour of crisis, asking them not to come to their houses for work, denied full payment for March also.
- It is found that majority of these domestic workers are migrants and they migrated to earn money. Hence, they don't have supportive hands around.
- Due to lockdown, the domestic workers are not able to continue the education of their children. They are unable to spend higher amount of fees on the children education.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3628346](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3628346)

<sup>2</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/> (accessed on 11 June 2020)

- Majority of domestic workers were not able to get benefits of necessary of items provided by the Government of India due to non-availability of ration card and other documents required.
- It is also found that domestic workers are not treated as a good human being. They are illiterate, poor, unskilled and always considered as a vulnerable and downtrodden section of the society. During lockdown, these people were treated very badly. They were not allowed even to enter in society campus.
- Despite these vulnerabilities, domestic workers have no safety net or grievance redressal mechanism to fall back on. It is the people most in need of legal protection who are left without it.
- Domestic work in India falls under the category of unregulated and under paid work. Most of the domestic workers do not have any legal contract with their employers.
- These domestic workers also go unemployed when they go to their homes for longer duration.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_India)

### **Role of Government and Policies to be framed by the Government of India for Domestic Workers**

In 2011, the Ministry of Labor and Employment released the first draft of the “National Policy for Domestic Workers.” However, it could never find its way forward in the Parliamentary Standing Committee and ultimately had to be retracted. In the same year, India signed the “Domestic Workers Convention C-189” of the International Labor Organization, which specified that domestic workers would enjoy certain basic rights, such as fair wages, regulated working hours, equal bargaining power, and so on. Yet, the Indian government not accepted the convention, stating that its national laws and practices are not in conformity with the provisions of the convention. In June 2019, government took initiatives and made draft of national policy for domestic workers which would ensure the payment of minimum wages, social security and safe working conditions. But, it never became full-fledged legislation and there has been no word from the center regarding the issue since<sup>3</sup>.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

- The Indian government should consider bringing in new legislation to protect the rights of these domestic workers.
- Many domestic workers have been relieved of their jobs without adequate payment and there are others who have received pay-cuts for the subsequent months. Hence, there should be proper payment of minimum wages act.
- It is observed during lockdown due to Covid 19 that many domestic workers removed from work by their employers. Hence, there should be need to provide job security and specific act or policy to protect the job of domestic workers.
- There should be grievance redressal mechanism to protect the interest of domestic workers. It is the people most in need of legal protection who are left without it.

### **Conclusion**

COVID-19 has been particularly brutal to the migrant workers. More than 80 per cent of them lost their

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<sup>3</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/covid-19-lockdown-india-needs-laws-to-protect-domestic-workers/>

employment and other means of livelihoods. The domestic work falls under the category of unregistered and unregulated work. During lockdown, it is found that a majority of domestic workers are not even beneficiaries of the state government's food grain allotment program, leaving them with limited access to food-related benefits. In addition to this, the problems of income loss and lack of social security is the prospect of domestic workers having to face harassment from their rented accommodations. It is also observed that even after government ordered not single employers called them back to join the work. There are no specific policies framed by the government for their benefits such as security of job, payment of minimum wages act etc. There are no as such NGO's who can stand and fight for their rights. Hence, Government should take enough care henceforth and protect the interest of domestic workers.

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