

The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Life Satisfaction

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Abstract The stratification system in India has resulted in the socioeconomic inequality in society and defines women domestic workers as one of the lowest segments of society. This qualitative and quantitative study aims at describing the problems of female domestic workers, the relationship of their employers with them, and exploring the impact of socioeconomic status mainly, occupation, education, and income on life satisfaction. We used ethnographic observation and in-depth interview over a 4 year period in Mysore (a city in the south of India). Furthermore, our quantitative research was guided by convenience sampling technique with selecting 125 (65 domestic workers, 60 employers). We prepared a structured questionnaire for gathering demographic information, i.e. age, education, marital status, occupation, and religion. To measure the degree of life satisfaction, we administered Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. *J Person Assess* 49(1):71–75, 1985). The data were collected during September and October 2011. The hypotheses were tested by applying Pearson correlation, regression, and *t* test (SPSS, version 18). The results of our observation and interview indicate that domestic workers suffer from various problems inside and outside their homes. The relationship between domestic workers and employers is a master–servant relationship. Domestic workers remain as an unorganized job group though in 2004 the Karnataka Minimum Wage Act was passed. Our quantitative findings reveal that there is a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and life satisfaction. This type of study displays that enacting law is not sufficient; it necessitates implementing and monitoring properly. This study suggests measures for supporting female domestic workers.

Keywords Socioeconomic status (SES) · Domestic workers' problems · Employers · Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)

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1 Introduction

Female domestic workers are the main occupations of many women worldwide. In India 90 % of domestic workers are women, girls or children ranging from 12 to 75 years old. It is estimated that 25 % are below the age of 14 (National Domestic Workers Movement).¹ Their working conditions remain unorganized; which means there is no formal employer-employee relationship, lack of bargaining power, lack of organization, inadequate welfare measures, and low legislative protection.

Their work situation and problems are generally invisible because they work in houses of private persons. Their earning is the lowest and they face physical, psychological and social problems. They are employed by an employer on a temporary, part time or full time basis for household tasks, i.e. sweeping, cleaning, mopping, washing clothes, and dishes, and even shopping and childcare.

These women work 8–12 h in 2–4 houses daily in order to make ends meet. They constitute the poorest group in the country; most of them are recruited from villages or tribal areas. In India the stigma of being a domestic worker is elevated by the caste system. As the task of sweeping and cleaning are connected to low castes; most of the people call them “servant”. These workers continue to be invisible, undervalued, denied rights, and they suffer from the low SES. In other words, their SES makes them vulnerable and their situations limit their abilities or access to their rights.

Since 1985 The National Domestic Workers Movement has campaigned for recognition of domestic workers as a form of labor and their efforts have caused legislation to be initiated by some states. For instance, in Karnataka,² Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan legislation has been passed to protect domestic workers, but it has not been implemented properly. With all this in mind, the objectives of this study are:

- To describe the problems of domestic workers in their work places.
- To describe the relationship between domestic workers and their employers.
- To explore the SES of domestic workers and their employers.
- To explore the relationship between SES and life satisfaction.
- To compare these two groups on the basis of their SES and degree of life satisfaction.

The following discussion is divided into three sections: First, we will review SES theories, poverty and problems of domestic workers based on existing literature, and the impacts of SES on health, education, and occupation. Then, we will address the methodology, and finally, we will lay out the findings of this study and make suggestions.

2 Theoretical Background of SES

There is no doubt that no one theory has a monopoly on defining SES. But SES refers to the position of individuals, families, and households base on dimensions of stratification. These dimensions comprise education, income, wealth, and prestige (occupational status). Among several approaches to the conceptualization of SES and social stratification, the most important is the distinction between Weberian and Marxist approaches. Weber (1995)

¹ The National Domestic Workers Movement is a NGO working and campaigning for domestic workers, child domestic workers, and migrant workers. <http://ndwm.org/>.

² Is a state in the south of India, Mysore is one of its cities.

emphasizes the labor market, by focusing on the market value of skills and other attributes that individuals bring to the labor market. Three attributes are important to Weberian approaches: the ownership of wealth producing materials and enterprises, skills (including credentials and qualifications) and lastly social prestige.

Weber considered status to be prestige or honor in the community. He also regards status as having access to life chances based on cultural factors i.e. family backgrounds, life styles, and social networks. Another sociologist, Parsons, has been the most influential in describing the theoretical background of SES. Parsons (2005) argues that the idea of status is a position in the social structure and is a part of the social differentiation in society (different occupations, different family positions). According to him, social status is the main notion of social stratification, or rank. This differential evaluation in terms of honor and prestige is situated at the heart of inequality. In social relations with others, status distinctions affect how people interrelate. For Parsons, income and wealth are important, but secondary to social status or honor.

In contrast, Marxist approaches focus on the ownership and non-ownership of the means of production in defining employers and workers. Marxist and neo-Marxist measures of social class are always categorical, distinguishing at least three class groups: large employers, self-employed, and workers. Other Marxist approaches are less structural, emphasizing cultural factors. The most eminent cultural capital theorist (Bourdieu 1973) focuses on education because it leads to social reproduction and creation of a stratified society through honoring the cultural capital of the elite class. He argues that social reproduction is maintained by the education system. Favoring students from high status backgrounds through their dominant culture for them can attain favorable SES. Another prominent cultural theory is Coleman's concept of social capital. This approach focuses on social relations as an important dimension that has productive benefits. Indeed, the social capital theory is defined as the norm and the social network that are the value for the child's growing up (Coleman 1987).

The caste system as a type of social stratification is characteristic of Indian society; that is, the SES of people is determined by their caste. The low caste is a hurdle for social mobility and socioeconomic changes; in other words, this low status restricts individual's productivity and limits growth and progress. Social status is the prestige that is being attached to one's position in the society; an individual might acquire more power and privilege due to putting her/him in the high status.

In India, caste and social status are interrelated; an individual of higher caste is always looked up on with reverence. The Indian caste system has been a rigid and unchanged social institution whose members are trapped within a hereditary and hierarchical structure which influences their SES (Vijayendra and Radu 2007). Lal (1989) argues that caste impacts the development process which results in rigidity. Caste is strongly correlated with inequality. Deshpande (2001) argues that low caste groups encounter significantly more deprivation across India. Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) in their study show that low caste status causes lower incomes.

In spite of many changes that have occurred in modern India, the caste system is significant in social status and occupation (this is more significant in rural areas than urban). Although land reform has been implemented, most members of the low caste in rural areas have little land and have to migrate to cities where there are little job opportunities and resources. Hence, these low caste groups remain vulnerable and become a source of cheap labor in cities. Having low socioeconomic backgrounds, these poor people have to work as domestic workers or construction workers.

Therefore, the existence of discrimination among people becomes the basis of inequality. Discrimination is associated with different value, leading to unequal position in

society. In Indian society there is unequal distribution of privileges across the strata in India. Those occupying higher positions are more privileged than those who have lower positions and lower family backgrounds. Thus, in India, the upper caste can afford more expensive education than poor or lower caste, and the power, wealth and prestige pass on to the next generation.

3 Poverty and Problems of Women Domestic Workers

In India, there has always been concern about the reduction of poverty and inequality and various policies have been implemented that have brought about successful outcomes. But the debate on equality and poverty still remains alive. During the early 1990s the Indian government adopted neoliberal reform and the main focus was on economic growth. Although the results of the noted policy have led to some progress, the study of Singh et al. (2003) show the existence of regional inequality. Using national sample survey, Jha (2004) shows the inequality and poverty among rural and urban areas in India, particularly among women in rural areas. The majority of Indian women live in poverty, 75 % of women in rural areas live in poverty and reflect the socioeconomic position of the majority of rural peoples.

Poverty forces these poor women to look for job opportunities in cities, being a domestic worker is the most available job for them. Although the richer section of society benefited from post liberalization reform; there has been a stagnation of incomes for the majority, specifically for the bottom section of the population. Hence, the economic gaps between rural and urban, upper and lower segments of society have been increased. On the other hand, as a result of economic growth most of the women belonging to the middle and the upper sections of society work outside or they want to keep their upward status and withdraw themselves from household tasks. Therefore, most of the cities in India have become the centers to employ poor women as domestic workers.

Most of the women who work as domestic workers are illiterate or less educated with little skill and they have become the victims of exploitation. They fall in the unorganized sector category and their work condition is insecure. The most frequent problems of domestic workers are long working hours, little wages, lack of personal freedom, no weekly leave, poor food, blame for damage or loss of articles, physical and sexual abuse. Their employers are rich enough to evade legal actions.

The problems of child workers are more because the owners do not allow them to go out of the home. Although forced working of children under 14 years old is an illegal action, there are many children who work as domestic workers. But the police take action only if there is a complaint. Since housework has been linked to the lower caste, most of the domestic workers suffer from low pay and are scared of being fired if they request more wages.

4 The Impact of SES on Occupation, Education, and Health

It is well-documented that SES, races, parents' occupation, educational level, and parental expectation influence career choice (Khallad 2000); (Watson et al. 2002). The occupational status and educational level of parents have had an impact on career choice. Research supports that the more education a woman receives, the more likely she obtains a paid employment. Trusty (2002) argues that a low SES results in reduced and unrealized expectations, also lower SES individuals face more obstacles that limit their choices.

Regarding the theories of SES, socioeconomic disparities impact the health of individuals through three major determinants of health, i.e. health care, environmental exposure, and health behavior. For instance, chronic stress is associated with lower SES and may also increase morbidity and mortality. It has been well-researched that SES has direct and indirect influence on the social, mental and physical well-being of an individual. Wilkinson (1997) argues that inequality of income creates psychological stresses which lead to deteriorating health and higher mortality over time. In another study, Wilkinson (1996) argues that the low SES results in frustration, dissatisfaction and family disruption which increase the rates of crime, homicide and violence.

It has been known for a long time that the lowest income groups are more likely to suffer from risky health behaviors such as, drug abuse, crime, alcoholism, and family violence compared to their rich counterparts. This maladaptive behavior might be considered as coping behaviors to provide comfort or relief from stressful lives. Relationship between social status and mental disorders has been a main interest of researchers. Large bodies of studies reveal the association between mental illness and social class; for instance, a positive relation exists between SES and vulnerability to mood disorder.

Among individuals with lower educational and social backgrounds, alcohol and drug dependency has a high rate (Harrison and Gardiner 1999). One of the frequent effects of alcohol consumption is domestic violence, which enhances the problems of women. The alcoholic husband is identified as an important risk factor for domestic violence (Markewitz 2000). A study conducted by Gururaj et al. (2004) in India reveal the relationship between alcoholism and domestic violence.

The review of literature shows that in the course of history in North America as well as internationally, there has been a constant demand for domestic workers. Canada and the US have had the constant immigration history and have experienced a large number of racial, ethnic community studies. For instance, Clark-Lewis (1994) examines the complex relationship between Black domestic workers and their White employers. She comes up with the idea that the employers considered their maid as dirty, corrupt people, and slack looking. These women migrated to the urban North owing to deteriorating agriculture and social conditions. Their White employers put a lot of pressure on these women because they perceived the bodies of Black women had capacity to tolerate intense work. Tucker in her study notes that the relationship between domestic workers and their employers has exploitative nature, because this relationship is embedded in superior/inferior relations (as cited in Miranda 2007, p. 119).

It is well-researched that due to the gendered nature and extremely submissive feature of domestic work, it has always defined as a low status work in North American society. Over the course of time, domestic work in Canada has associated with women of “non-preferred” races.

Colen (Ibid p. 117) argues the state’s role in the migration of Caribbean women into domestic service in 1965. These workers were sponsored by employers as live-in domestic workers in the hope of obtaining citizenship in the future. Honagneu-Sotele (Ibid pp. 117–118) explores the experiences of a large number of Central American women and Mexican working as documented and undocumented domestic workers in present day Los Angeles. They worked as live-in workers because of limited options about where to live and they do not have enough money to spend on a room.

Most of the studies reveal that domestic workers both live-in and live-out have the common difficulties but live-in workers face more hard times because they are constantly on call and are not given extra pay for their extra work; moreover, they are expected to do everything and they have been deprived of living with their own families due to their

extreme poverty. Romero (Ibid p. 122) argues that live-out work provides the domestic worker with more power. She also notes that the workplace of these workers is a private home and it is often not seen as a workplace thus, the challenge among live-in and live-out domestic workers for improving working condition continue to position themselves in working class members. Romero argues that the relationships between domestic workers and their employers like other employee–employer relationships under capitalism are embedded in opposition and struggle for control.

Fudge (Ibid p. 123) argues that due to ideologies of domesticity and privacy, their isolation with in private homes, racial, and ethnic prejudices, domestic workers were excluded from Ontario's first collective bargaining legislation in 1943. It was, not until 1993, under the new Democratic Party there were included in Labor Relation Act, which gave them the same collective bargaining. The victory was reversed in 1995 when new Conservative government again excluded domestic workers from collective bargaining rights.

Ehrenreich (2001) conducted a qualitative research in order to write a book on work condition of low-wage and unskilled workers. She used participatory observation to collect information over a 3-year period in Florida, Main, and Minnesota. Ehrenreich argues that workers earn \$1,000–\$1,200(\$6–7 an hour) while the Economic policy Institute after reviewing dozen of studies came up with an average income of \$30,000 a year for a family of one adult and two children, this figure is over twice of workers' wage.

Also the workers experience disrespect in their work places, for example, the managers can search the purse of the workers at any time. The workers are subject to be fired without explanation; for instance, Ehrenreich notes that some workers were fired due to participation in Union organization though it is illegal to dismiss people for Union activity. She argues that the workers suffer from their low wages and work conditions, but they are unwilling to change their situation. She concludes they are helpless of being a wage slave, the poorer they are, the more constrained their mobility.

The review of literature on domestic workers in India reveals that most of the studies reviewing the situation of these workers have been limited to activities of the National Domestic Workers Movement and some of the NGOs. As noted earlier, in some of the states legislation has been passed for reducing the problems of unorganized workers. But studies have found out that the unorganized workers face a lot of problems; for instance, Siddhatha (2005) conducted a study on women as paid domestic workers in a district of West Bengal. The results show that the domestic workers suffer from low wages, extra work load, lack of job security, and sexual abuse by male employers.

Another study in Calcutta reveal that both genders of the domestic workers work for 12–16 h a day cooking, sweeping, mopping, dusting twice a day, washing clothes by hand, and taking care of children. Their work is unorganized and they face extreme stigmatization of the occupation (Raka 2000). The research on the problems of domestic workers inside their homes as well as their work places in India has received little attention; therefore, there is a lack of literature, particularly the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. We felt that illustrating the domestic workers' problems would be a social responsibility for us as social researchers.

5 Method

This study is a qualitative and quantitative research. Ethnographic observation and interview were undertaken in order to document the socioeconomic aspects of domestic

workers' life and their problems in their workplaces. The ethnographic observation involved not only visual observation in the field, but also verbal interactions. Informal interview with domestic workers and their employers provided us a range of extremely important data though it will not normally be possible to develop these interviews systematically. We also used quantitative method to gather information for assessing the degree of life satisfaction.

In February 2008, at noon when I got home I found all my neighbors in the hall way and I saw my owner's maid crying and insisting that she did not steal money from their home. I established rapport with that maid and asked her to come to my home once in a week for an hour to help me cleaning my flat. That event motivated me to observe and learn about the life of domestic workers in Mysore a city in the south of India where I have lived for 6 years. I shared my experience with a friend of mine we decided to collect the data from the area where we live through ethnographic observation and interview.

This area has approximately 4,000 households with 25,000 population. Majority of people in this area live in a big house or a big flat. This area divides into two sectors. One sector which is located in the North, most of the people are well-off and has a maid. The other sector comprises of a dilapidated and crowded area where the most of domestic workers live in one room or two small rooms. I had lived close to the residential area of domestic workers for 2 years. Overall, we conducted our observation and interviews over a 4-year period. During this period we talked with 50 domestic workers and 50 employers. Of 50 domestic workers, 2 are live-in workers and 48 are live-out.

The youngest and the oldest are 14 and 48 years old respectively; the average age of workers is 31. All of them are Hindu, 5 domestic workers are illiterate, 2 of them have 10 standard, and the remaining hold 3 and 4 standard. All of the domestic workers live in a rental home, but 95 % of the employers have their own houses. Of 50 workers, 3 are single, 4 are widowed, and 43 are married. We decided to assess the degree of life satisfaction of domestic workers and compared to their employers' life satisfaction. Thus, our second method for collecting data was survey, the technique of sampling was convenience sampling not due to ease of access, but because of willingness and trust of participants. This method proved to minimize people's distrust of the survey, produced a sense of collaboration and increased the sample size. The size of the sample was 125(65 domestic workers and 60 employers), the data collected based on a questionnaire written in English for employers and Kannada (local language) for workers. Questions started with demographic questions such as, age, education, marital status, income, and type of housing. The rest of the questions related to the physical pain of the workers and violence or alcoholism in their families. Regarding the employers, the questions related to having electrical appliances and if they have them, do they use them or not.

All of the cases were collected from Mysore; the average age of domestic workers is 34 with the youngest being 16 years and the oldest being 53 years old. Among domestic workers 10 are single, 7 widowed and 48 are married, among employers 53 are married, 2 single, and 5 widowed. With regard to the educational level of domestic workers, 12 are illiterate, 38 of them have 1–5 standard and 15 hold 6–10 standard. 16 of employers have PUC (pre university degree), 23 Bachelors, 14 Masters and 4 have PhD degrees. All of the population of this study is Hindu; most of the employers belonged to the higher caste; while the domestic workers belonged to the lower caste.

Considering the income of the family, monthly family income of the domestic workers is between 3,000 and 8,000 Rupees, while monthly family income of their employers is between 40,000 and above 80,000 Rupees. Income of domestic workers is 3,000–4,500 Rupees monthly if they work in 3 houses, otherwise it reduces to 2,000 Rupees monthly.

Also, 52 % of domestic workers report that they suffer from shoulder, back, wrist pain and have allergies i.e. coughing and sneezing because of daily exposure to dust. Of domestic workers 28 report violence in their family and 26 have alcoholism in their families, while employers do not have violence and alcoholism in their families.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) measures the degree of general satisfaction of both domestic workers and employers. This scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985) for measuring life satisfaction as an overall judgment of life. SWLS is a five items inventory, an example of an item is: in most ways my life is close to my ideal, and I am satisfied with my life. The SWLS is measured on a rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), the highest score reporting high satisfaction. There are different scales for evaluating life satisfaction, but they focus on a specific domain. SWLS is one of the components of subjective well-being and the highlight point of this scale is that it emphasizes a person's own judgment, not the criteria which are important to researchers (Diener 1984).

Reliability and validity of scale: For favorability of the psychometric feature of SWLS, the Cronbach's alpha was .87. The total correlation for the five SWLS items were .81, .63, .61, .75, and .66 showed a good internal consistency (Diener et al. 1985).

6 Results

The results of the quantitative section of this study reveal that the socioeconomic factors such as, family income and education as independent variables influence the degree of domestic workers and employers' life satisfaction. In other words, family income is the first influential socioeconomic factor on life satisfaction follow by education (see Table 1). Also the results confirm that the scores on socioeconomic factors, i.e. occupation, education, family income, occupation of husband correlate positively and significantly with the degree of life satisfaction, all the observed correlation coefficients are found to be significant at .000 levels (see Table 2). Moreover, the life satisfaction of domestic workers and employers are different. The mean scores of domestic workers and employers are 13.61 and 28.21 respectively. It means the domestic workers of our study express lower levels of life satisfaction (see Table 3).

7 Discussion

The domestic workers of the current study have low caste backgrounds with low levels of education. And they report lower levels of satisfaction with life compared to their

Table 1 Relationship between socioeconomic factors and life satisfaction

Model		Un standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients β	t	Sig.
		B	SE			
1	(Constant)	8.739	.763		11.452	.000
	Family income	3.846	.211	.854	18.205	.000
2	(Constant)	8.298	.723		11.481	.000
	Family income	2.768	.322	.615	8.601	.000
	Education	1.526	.359	.303	4.245	.000

Table 2 Correlation between socioeconomic factors and life satisfaction

	Total LS	Occupation	Education	Family income	Occupation husband
Pearson correlation	1	.697**	.788**	.854**	.666**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
<i>N</i>	125	125	125	125	125
Pearson correlation	.697**	1	.799**	.712**	.623**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
<i>N</i>	125	125	125	125	125
Pearson correlation	.788**	.799**	1	.788**	.732**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
<i>N</i>	125	125	125	125	125
Pearson correlation	.854**	.712**	.788**	1	.607**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
<i>N</i>	125	125	125	125	125
Pearson correlation	.666**	.623**	.732**	.607**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
<i>N</i>	125	125	125	125	125

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Table 3 Difference between domestic workers' life satisfaction and their employers

	Occupation	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SE mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Life satisfaction	Domestic workers	65	13.6154	4.11435	.51032	-19.278	123	.000	-14.60128
	Employers	60	28.2167	4.35342	.56202	-19.234	120.735	.000	-14.60128

employers with higher levels of education. According to Reynolds and Ross (1998) education plays a crucial role in well-being because well-educated people have greater access to well paid jobs, high status, and they experience less economic hardship. There are other claims that education can impact health because well educated individuals are able to develop habits and skills that shape their life style which in turn affects their health and satisfaction with life. Social stratification theories have argued the role of education in eroding and perpetuating social inequality (Reynolds and Ross 1998, p. 222).

Originally most of the domestic workers of this study migrated from rural areas to urban areas. The majority of the domestic workers express their resentment that they chose their job due to lack of skill, low education, and poor family backgrounds. They also report that they suffer from workloads and low wages; daily they work for 3 houses and they spend 3–4 h in each house. They wash the bulk of the dishes and clothes by hand, cleaning, dusting, mopping, shopping and taking care of children. Their employers impose more work, especially when guests come.

The main reason for imposing a lot of work on domestic workers is that their tasks are not defined and properly regulated. The employers in India consider a domestic worker as a “servant” rather than an “employee”. According to the results of this study, most of the

domestic workers have to work to earn the livelihood for their families. On the basis of our quantitative data, of 65 domestic workers, 7 are breadwinners for their families, 26 have alcoholic husbands or fathers, but their husbands earn low wages; therefore, they have to work to support their families. Our interview reveals that of 50 domestic workers, 3 have alcoholic fathers, 22 have alcoholic husbands.

These women also have full responsibility for the housework in their own homes. In India, though there has been some improvement related to gender discrimination, the women are a particularly disadvantageous group suffering from gender discrimination. It is well-documented that violence against women affects the quality of their life, as our study reveals that domestic workers experience violence at their home, they are beaten by their husbands or fathers or brothers.

However, those women who report no violence in their families express their grievances against their husbands that they are not supportive and the women have to bear all responsibilities at home. Both genders in India often live together in poverty but they live differently because the burden of poverty is more on shoulder of women. Also the inferior SES of women in India results in a disparate impact on poverty on women; hence, women continue to have unequal access to family resources and they suffer from physical, psychological, and social problems.

Most of the domestic workers in the current study report that they have shoulder, back, and wrist pain. Some of them suffer from allergy because of regular exposure to dust. In our interview with employers, 90 % of them have a washing machine and 50 % have a vacuum cleaner, but their maids wash the clothes by hand and clean the house with a broom. We asked the employers when they used their electrical appliances. They replied when their maids are not around, but when they are on duty they wash clothes by hand because it is cheaper. We asked the employers if they had to pay their maids more due to them doing a lot of work; they said all of their neighbors paid the same wage.

With regard to the issue of trust, the domestic workers claim that their employers do not trust them because they are poor and they might steal money or objects from their homes. On the other hand, the employers report that all of the persons who work as servants are not trustworthy and they had negative attitudes towards the poor people. Some of the employers believe that because they belong to a backward group, they are not reliable. It is clear that this attitude is rooted in the extreme stratification of the caste system though the law and convention oppose this discrimination.

Our finding through interview reveals that both employers and domestic workers believe in “*karma*”. We asked the employers, were they ready to create a better work condition for their workers? They said nobody could help because they were born as a worker and their present situation was the consequence of their previous life. Of 50 employers, 90 % believe their maids deserve this life due to their family backgrounds and their karma.

On the other hand, 95 % of domestic workers believe that it is their karma to work and suffer, but 5 % of the domestic workers believe that effective implementation of law and social support can help them to have access to a better job condition. Karma is a system of belief that focuses on the action; it means all actions have good and bad outcomes that impact the quality of one’s life (Herman 1991). According to Johdka (2002), the identities, i.e. caste, religion, migrant status, and gender affect employment and exclusion in India.

We have observed the extreme of not allowing the lower caste enter into homes. We have witnessed the working condition of a 14 year old girl who worked as a live-in maid for 1 year in the area where the study was conducted. Her family live in a village, her father abandoned the family, her mother sent her to Mysore to work as a maid and sent

money back for her mother and 2 siblings. She worked from 7 am to 11 or 12 pm. Her employer seems to have obsessive–compulsive disorder because she washed everything even the wall of courtyard every day. The employer of this girl did not allow her to go out and she was treated like a servant; she was on call and worked a lot with little food and no fruit. When the owner left the home she had to stay outside until they came back home and once a month when her mother came to visit her, she had to stay in the courtyard and drink a cup of tea as she was not allowed to go inside. When her mother requested for an increase in the wages of her girl due to economic problems, the employer fired the girl.

8 Conclusion

In seeking to develop a broader approach to the study SES of domestic workers and its impact on developing various problems including social, physical, and their dissatisfaction toward life, qualitative research can offer important insights. It provides a framework of analysis research finding on domestic workers. We used quantitative method as an additional resource in order to enrich this study.

Domestic work as an occupation has structural elements around the globe. It has been associated with migration (rural to urban and country to country), and with poverty and low SES. They are poor women who experience long working hours, low wages, disrespect, and have little or no benefits. Poverty in rural areas in India push poor people to search a job in cities, being a maid is open to these unskilled women. The findings of the current study reveal that most of the domestic workers originally belonged to rural areas; they left their villages due to poverty and hunger in order to find a job to make their ends meet. The upper class people exploit these women because they are in need of minimum wages.

Most of the domestic workers of our study are not aware of existence of Minimum Wage Act in their state and they are always afraid of losing their job because they are deprived of social and economic support. Most of the domestic workers express their physical pain, i.e. shoulder, back pain, and itching skin because they wash the bulk of cloths and dishes daily. Moreover, they express their grievances that their husbands are alcoholic or have little wages that cannot support the family. These women suffer not only at their workplaces, but also at their own homes.

The relationships between employers and domestic workers of our study are a “master–servant” relationship. The employers do not respect their workers due to their insight toward low SES people. The employers define their domestic workers dishonest and untrustworthy, most of the employers believe in karma and do not have a guilt feeling of exploitation. The employers believe if they behave in a friendly manner with their servants, they slow down their pace of work and take an advantage. We come up with this idea that belief in karma is a barrier to change. Employers believe domestic workers have to work due to their family backgrounds and their fate; hence, they are reluctant to change their attitudes towards these workers whose rights have been denied. On the other hand, domestic workers accept their current situation because they believe they are helpless and it is their fate.

But it seems that the function of belief in karma for domestic workers is paradoxical. We presume if they believe they deserve this suffering and it is their fate, they might be happy and satisfied. But our results indicate that their life satisfactions are low due to their long working hours, low wages, lack of job security, and violence at home. In other words, the degree of life satisfaction of the domestic workers is influenced by the social factors, i.e. income, educational level, and occupation.

The results of the current research are supported by the study of Siddhatha (2005), Ehrenreich (2001), Clark-Lewis (1994), and Romero, Fudge, and Colen (as cited in Miranda 2007). Since India is a diverse country with many religions, languages, cultures, and castes, comparisons studies in different states would be promising. Regarding the characteristic of social science, it is important to bear in mind that the results of this study cannot be generalized to those beyond the sample.

9 Suggestion

The major problem of domestic workers in India is that the employer–employee relationship is avoided. The employers look up on them as a “servant”. Thus, an awareness program for changing the public opinion towards domestic workers is a must. Awareness programs try to change individual’s behavior and attitude that lead to social problems and promote behaviors that lead to improve individual or social well-being. Authorities of labor office (LO) can mobilize public opinion for respecting domestic workers through the media, particularly TV and texting via cell phone. An effective awareness campaign can shape attitude and behavior of employers towards desirable relationship with their workers.

At present the public opinion in India is in favor of abusing the domestic workers due to their low SES. As such our study shows that the employers do not regard their domestic workers as employees. Therefore, this attitude needs to be changed through public opinion campaign. People are able to change their attitudes towards exploiting poor people. Along with awareness programs and changing the public opinion, legal action such as, proper implementation of the Minimum Wage Act, social security support for domestic workers, and monitoring the employers are effective measures. As employers are not monitored by LO, they are benefited from exploiting the domestic workers. The authorities take action if there is a complaint, but domestic workers do not complain because they are scared of being fired.

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