

Issues And Challenges Faced By Domestic Female Workers In Chennai

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

The important challenges facing Chennai's informal domestic workers—such as low pay and unfavorable working conditions—are highlighted in this report. In India, private families employed about 4.75 million domestic workers, according to the National Sample Survey Organization. Approximately 3.05 million of these people are impoverished urban women. It is shown that women are increasingly choosing to work in India in home roles. A field study was conducted in 2022–2023 to gather information about the wages and work-related details of female domestic workers. Data were gathered from 173 respondents—all female domestic workers—who were chosen using a simple random sample and interviewed in semi-structured interview formats in eleven different parts of Chennai. In relation to their compensation, the working hours are quite long. Because domestic workers in the study area are paid on an hourly, weekly, and monthly basis, the domestic employer desired to finish maximum work in the shortest period. The majority of survey respondents (33.87 percentage) between Rs 2500 and Rs 3000 a month or less. Additionally, this study discovered that occupational health problems affect nearly all sample respondents.

1. Introduction

The current study highlights the significant concerns regarding the low pay rates and unfavorable working conditions faced by women employed as domestic workers in Chennai's unorganized sector. In Chennai, women are increasingly employed in the domestic work industry. There are no employment regulations, and worker organization is at an incredibly low level.

Though domestic work is viewed as "unskilled" labor, it typically serves as the main source of income for women, particularly young and immigrant women who enter the workforce through local connections. One of the main occupational categories for women in the urban informal economy is domestic work. Unorganized laborers make up the domestic workforce, which is still unregulated and susceptible. The domestic employees are not protected by any in labor legislation, primarily because of the nature of their job and the employment arrangement. One job category that appears to be in flux in Chennai and throughout India is domestic work (Coelho et al, 2013).

Domestic laborers are no longer eligible for the benefits and restricted working conditions, pay, and employment terms that are available to other classes of workers. This is usually due to the fact that domestic workers are started working in isolated households rather than being productive members of the larger economy. Under the existing well-being activities and plans for social safety, old age pension, fitness and motherhood fortification, etc., they work in appalling conditions with no care. Domestic laborers range in number from 4.75 million (from the Employment and Unemployment NSS 61st cycle, 2004–05) to 6.4 million (from the 2001 Census). Many domestic workers come from vulnerable populations and backward regions. The majority of domestic workers are underprivileged, vulnerable, uneducated, unskilled, and unaware of the local labor market. They also overworked, underpaid, and insecure due to the undervaluation and lack of boundaries around their profession. Many of them experience sexual abuse, and a variety of other forms of violence, oppression, assault, and maltreatment. Even though the government forbids the use of child laborers under the age of fourteen for domestic labor, there would still be kid domestic workers among the workforce.

The main issues surrounding domestic work are the lack of decent pay and working conditions, unclear work schedules, irregular weekly off schedules, isolation, violence, abuse, and sexual harassment at work, persecution by human traffickers and employment agencies, forced migration, a lack of social services (such as health insurance, maternity protection, and old age security), and a lack of skill development as a result of inactivity and lack of career development. This study is divided into three sections: the introduction, which defines and explains domestic workers, the study's aims, and the research methodology. The literature review is covered in the second section, and the primary study findings and an analysis of the sample respondents' socioeconomic circumstances are highlighted in the third section. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the socioeconomic circumstances of Chennai's informal sector's female domestic workers, to comprehend the study area's female domestic workers' working conditions, and to illustrate the occupational health concerns of these workers.

2. Literature Review

With the decline of the social support system in metropolitan nuclear families, hiring domestic help is no longer just for the wealthy; it is now a need for the middle class, including lower middle class families. Many middle-class and lower-middle-class women are choosing to work, either voluntarily or for financial reasons, as a result of rising living expenses and educated women standing up for their right to economic independence. Paid domestic workers take on the additional responsibility of handling household chores without causing any disruption to the patriarchal structure.

The International Labor Organization (2010) estimates that 52.6 million people worldwide were employed in the paid domestic sector in 2010, making it a significant source of employment. Since the mid-1990s, the number has increased by more than 19 million. This figure is likely underestimated because a significant number of people are unreported, concealed, and not included in labor force surveys and censuses. Domestic work made up 7.5% of all women's employment globally, and in some areas, it accounted for a significantly higher percentage. Only over 24% of urban female working population (over 15 years old) was employed in India in 2004–05, compared to 79% of male working population, according to data from the National Sample Survey. The percentage of working-age women in urban areas fell to 19% by 2009–2010. Domestic workers make up about one in seven new female workers, highlighting the significance of domestic work as a source of income for many metropolitan households. This type of employment could be considered as partially encouraging the movement from rural to urban areas.

In 2007, the Minimum Wages Act was amended to include domestic employment in Tamil Nadu. In 2009, the state government was advised to set the minimum wage at Rs. 30 per hour by an advisory group that had been established to investigate the minimum wage for domestic workers. As of now, the suggestion has not been put into practice, and there is still no legal minimum salary in the industry. In Tamil Nadu, there are about 64 job categories that qualify for social security benefits, including domestic work. Despite their shortcomings in terms of implementation or enforcement, the numerous laws pertaining to the regulation of domestic employment nevertheless have the benefit of establishing industry demands and assisting workers in uniting behind these shared objectives. At the 100th International Labour Conference, the ILO adopted the Domestic Workers Convention (C189) in 2011. For organizations and advocacy groups fighting for the rights of workers in the domestic sector, the ILO Convention (C189) was a significant win. On September 5, 2013, the Convention went into effect, however India chose not to ratify it. Among its other requirements, the Convention calls for ratifying nations to guarantee domestic workers' protection against minimum wage. Regulations for worker social security and workplace health and safety are also recommended. Domestic workers in every area reported that they determined their work hours based on the needs of their families, both in terms of regular hours and overtime. Because of this, younger domestic workers had more demand to work since their kids were in school during daytime. They work harder because they have to work in more families for shorter periods.

In their study, Dithhi Bhattacharya et al., found that although none of the respondents acknowledged having experienced any form of sexual harassment, the participants said that harassment at work, including sexual harassment, was commonplace. Numerous employees reported that they frequently received reprimands for arriving late to work or taking time off. They occasionally asked us to wash clothes that we have already ruined. If the business considers that the bottom is not sufficiently clean, I even asked that it be smeared with a cloth after mopping. In many American cities, the paid domestic work is a source of optimal income for metropolitan women.

3. Methodology

In the years 2022–2023, a field survey was conducted in the Chennai city areas of Guindy, Maduravoyal, Pallavaram, Adyar, Besant Nagar, J.J. Nagar, K.K. Nagar, Mylapore, Mogappair East, Mogappair West, Ayanambakkam, Saligramam, Velachery, Vadapalani, and Arumbakkam to gather information on the

employment, working conditions, job security, and social protections for women employed as domestic workers. The basic random sample approach was used to collect data, and the survey region was restricted to a few key areas in Chennai. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to get the data. The information was gathered from 250 sample respondents in fifteen different Chennai neighborhoods. These are exclusively female domestic workers who do cooking, sweeping, washing dishes, mopping floors, and cleaning toilets. the gathering of data on factors including working conditions, family size, age, education level, wage determination, income and expense levels. The household survey and data collection from the respondents were conducted outside the workplace premises, close to the apartments.

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of Field Data and Findings

The following table (Table 3.1) classifies the female domestic workers according to their age. It is shown that 28.9 percent of domestic workers are primarily between the ages of 40 and 50. Furthermore, 7.5% of the sample respondents are older, falling into the 60+ age range. The remainder of the youthful female domestic workers falls into the younger age bracket of under 20. The table unequivocally demonstrates that just 23.1% of respondents are older than the 30–40 age range. And 17.3% woman’s are fall at the age group of 30-20 and 50-60 , younger and Oldest . Due to their inability to extract more labor at a lower wage, it is clear that domestic employers prefer to hire young and middle-aged women over older workers.

Table 3.1 Age-wise distribution of Sample Respondents

S. No.	Age Group	Samples Respondents	Percentage Obtained
1	Above 60	13	7.5
2	50-60	30	17.3
3	40-50	50	28.9
4	30-40	40	23.1
5	30-20	30	17.3
6	less than 20	10	5.7
	Total	173	100

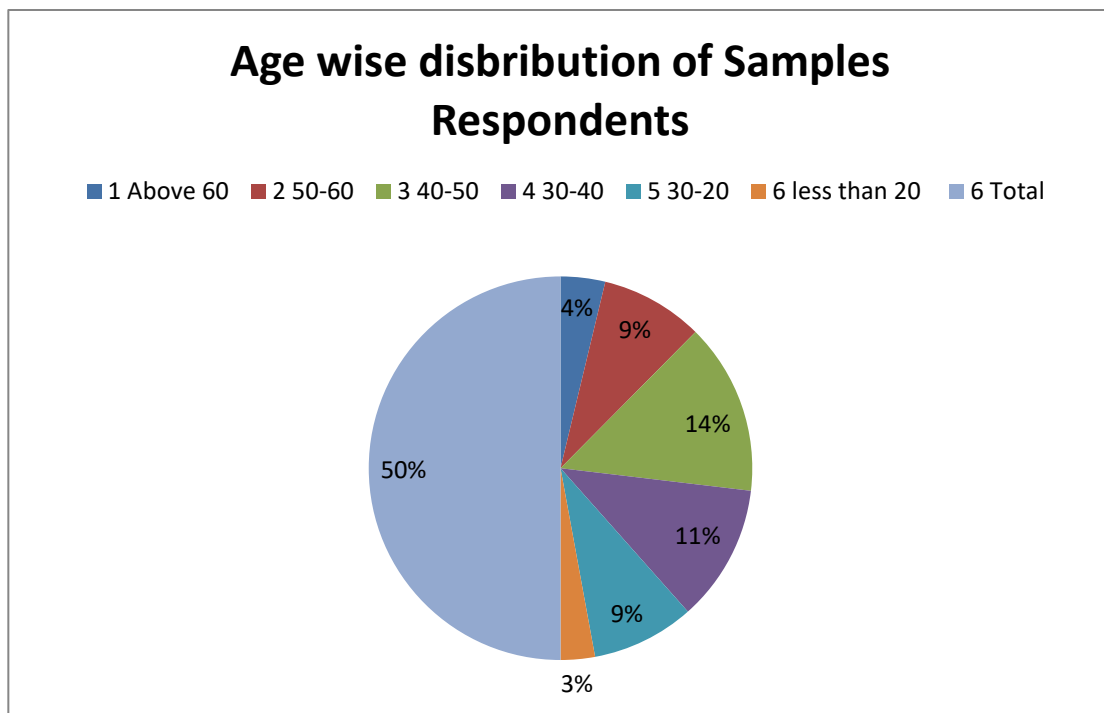


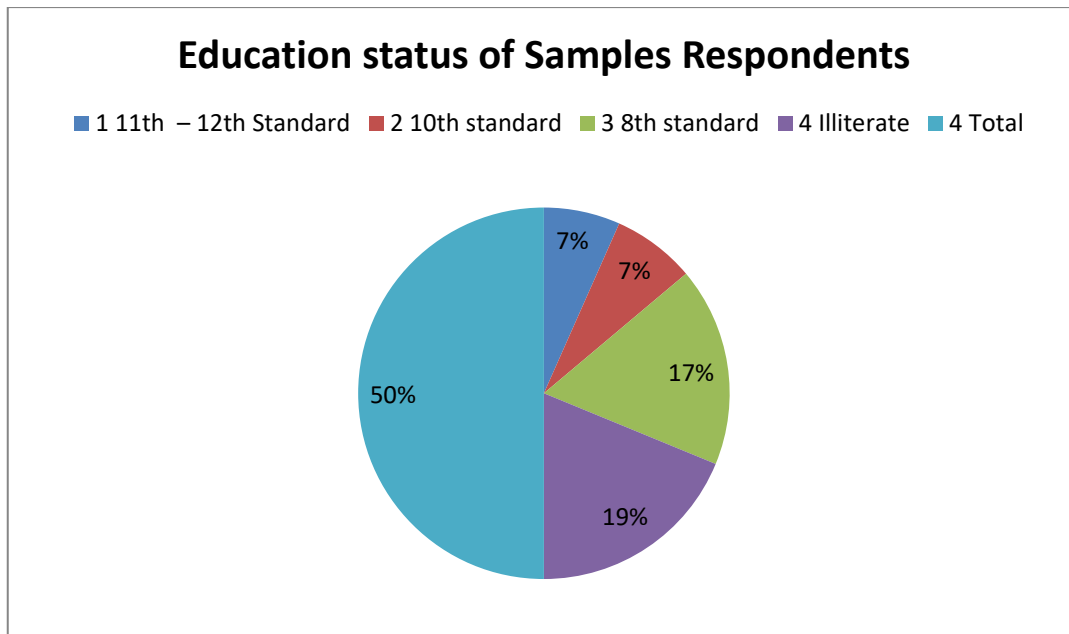
Figure 3.1 –Age wise Samples Respondents

Source: from Data Sheets Collected.

Table 3.2 shows that, of the respondents, 37.57 percent are illiterate, 34.6 percent have completed the eighth standard, 14.4 percent have only completed the tenth standard, and 13.2 percent have completed the twelfth standard.

Table 3.2 Education status of the Sample Respondent

S. No.	Education	Samples Respondents	Percentage obtained
1	11 th – 12 th Standard	23	13.2
2	10 th standard	25	14.4
3	8 th standard	60	34.6
4	Illiterate	65	37.57
	Total	173	100

**Figure 3.2 Education Status of Sample Respondents**

Source: from Data Sheets Collected.

It is clearly seen that the majority of female domestic workers lack formal education and are illiterate. When compared to their pay, the working hours are comparatively long. Because domestic workers are paid on an hourly basis, the domestic employer wants to finish as much work as possible in the shortest amount of time. Of the sample responders, nearly 71% work fewer than eight hours every week. Ten to twelve hours of work a day are received by the remaining 29 percent of them. It is discovered that a domestic worker only receives 4.3 hours of job pay on average.

Table 3.3 Hours of Work by the Sample Respondents

S. No.	Hours of Work	Samples Respondents	Percentage
1	2 - 4 hours	33	19
2	4 - 6 hours	40	23.1
3	6 - 8 hours	50	28.9
4	8 - 10 hours	40	23.1
5	10 - 12 hours	10	5.7
	Total	173	100

Source: Data sheet collected.

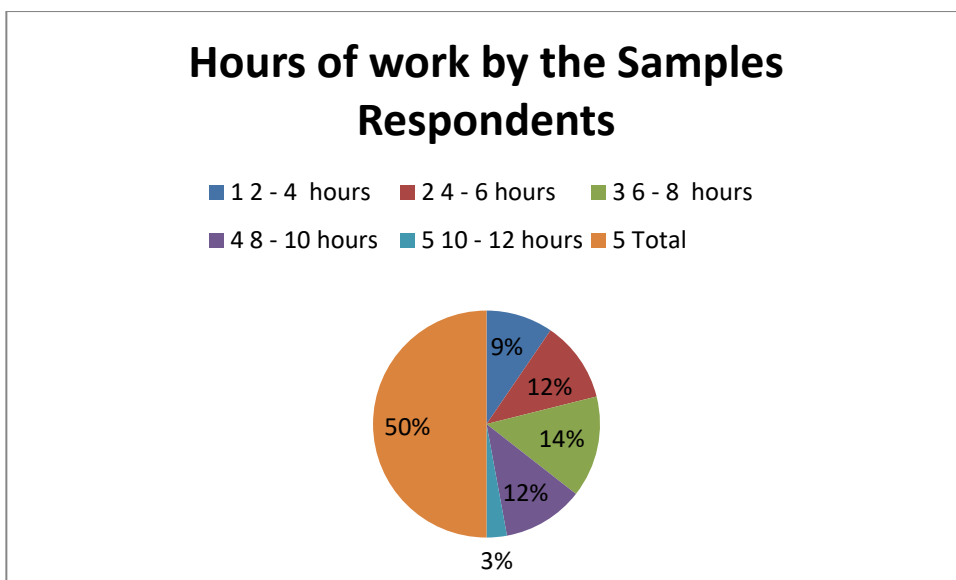


Figure 3.3 - Hours of Work by the Sample Respondents

Table 3.3 & Table 3.4 represents the income of the sample respondents calculated for on monthly basis for the study from hourly rates. The wages paid to the domestics workers are much lesser than the minimum wages act set by the government. It is exposed from the data that an average of 25 rupees per hour is paid as wages .Majority of 60 sample respondents (34.6 percent) are earning a lesser income of 3000 to 4000 per month. Among total respondents 43 (24.8 percent) are earning 6000 to 7000 rupees and 11.5 percent are earning rupees 5000 to 6000 per month. A diminutive of 14.4 and 12.1 percent of them are earning 4000 to 5000 and 1500 to 3000 respectively.

Table 3.4 Income of the Sample Respondents

S. No.	Income per month (In Rs)	Samples Respondents	Percentage
1	6000-7000	43	24.8
2	5000-6000	20	11.5
3	4000-5000	25	14.4
4	3000-4000	60	34.6
5	1500-3000	25	14.4
	Total	173	100

Source: Data Sheet collected

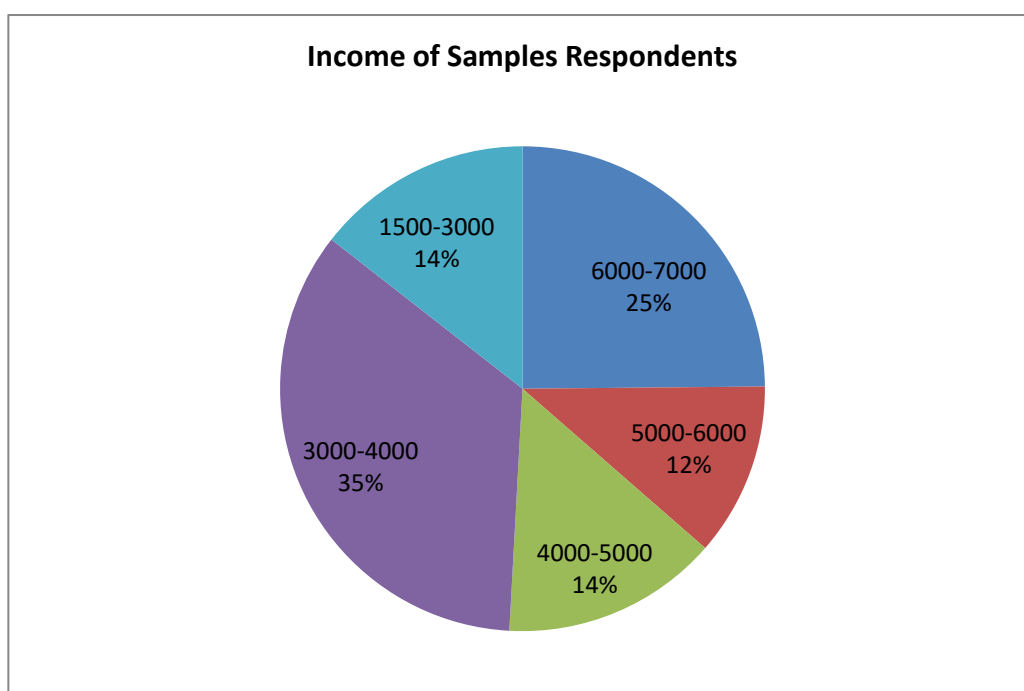


Figure 3.4 Income of the Sample Respondents

Numerous occupational health problems, such as knee discomfort, body aches, eye problems, and skin disorders, have a serious impact on domestic workers. The majority of survey respondents (46.24%) report experiencing physical pain instead of using powerful detergents and soap oils for household chores like hand washing clothes. Furthermore, the acids they use to clean bathrooms and floors are very hard on skin. The eye issues and the problems with body pain and knee pain is registered 17.34, 13.29 percent and 23.12 percent respectively. It denotes that all the sample respondents are affected by the occupational health issues.

Table 3.5 Occupational Health issues of Sample Respondents

S. No.	Health Issues	Samples Respondents	Percentage
1	Body Pain	23	13.29
2	Eyes Issues	30	17.34
3	Skin issues	80	46.24
4	Kness Pain	40	23.12
	Total	173	100

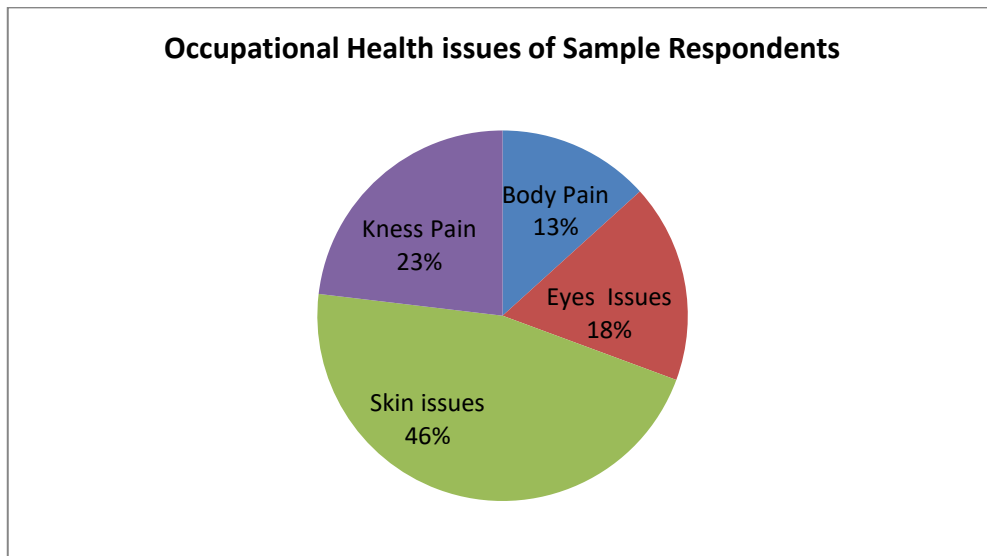


Figure 3.5 Occupational Health issues of Sample Respondents

Source: Data Sheet collected.

Table 3.6 Leave Negotiated with domestic workers

S. No	Days of Leave	Samples Respondents
1	0	83
2	1	82
3	2	4
4	3	4
5	5	0
6	More then 5	0
	Total	173

Source: Data Sheet collected

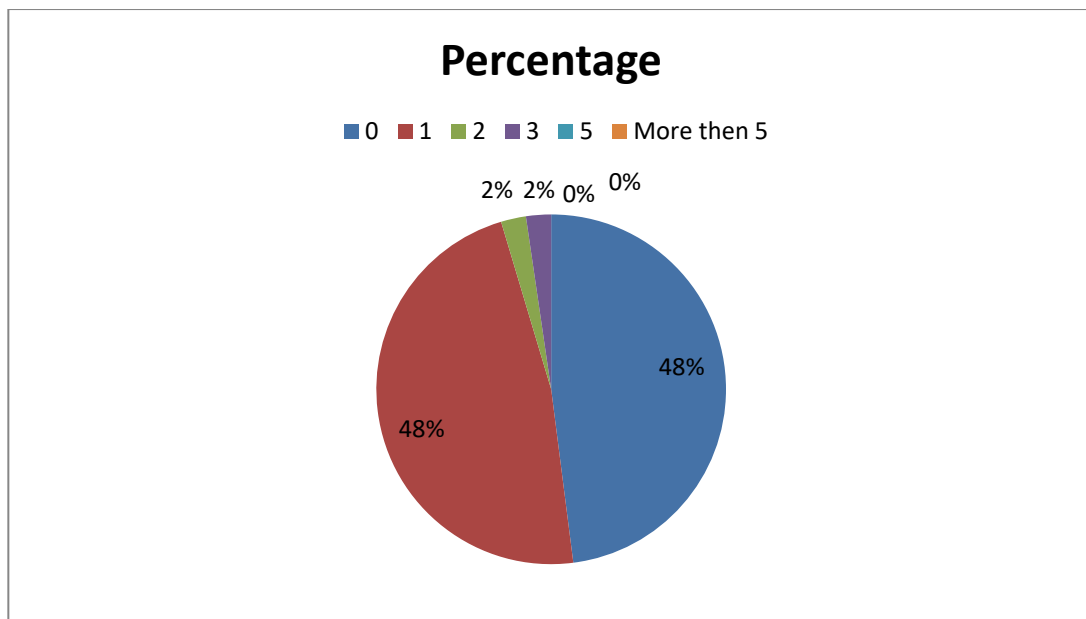


Figure 3.6 Leave Negotiated with domestic workers

The study's leave negotiations with domestic workers are displayed in the above table. Since they were informed that they might take unpaid vacation but were refused leave for even a single day, almost eighty-three percent of domestic workers have not taken any time off. Four percent of women received paid leave for two days, while eighty-two percent of domestic workers received paid time off for one day. Three days of emergency leave are granted to only 4% of domestic workers surveyed for the study, and no responder has ever taken a leave of absence lasting longer than five days.

Table 3.7 Harassment in the workplace

S. No.	Harassment complaint by womans at the age group	Samples Respondents	Percentage Obtained
1	Above 60	09	0.05
2	50-60	10	0.06
3	40-50	50	28.9
4	30-40	52	30
5	30-20	30	17.3
6	less than 20	-	0
	Total	151	100

72 woman's not answered for this question

Source: Data Sheet collected

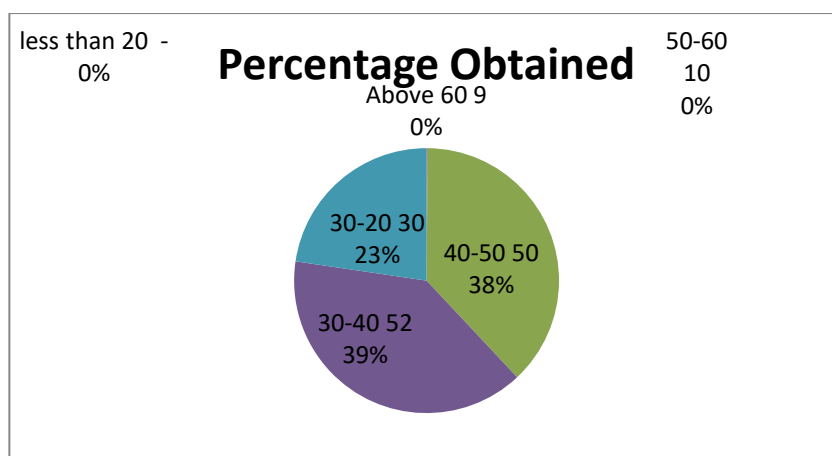


Figure 3.7 Harassment in the workplace

- Any unwanted behavior that causes a reasonable person to feel uncomfortable, humiliated, or mentally distressed—whether it be physical, verbal, or simply suggested—is considered harassment. The parameters and definition of what constitutes harassing behavior can differ slightly among states based on their legislation. These three forms of workplace harassment, together with examples and remedies, can assist you in

educating your staff on how to stop harassment at work.

- Verbal/Written.
- Physical.
- Visual.

According to the table, 30% of women in the 30–40 age group, 28.9% of women in the 40–50 age group, 17.3% of women in the 30–20 age group, and 0.06 and 0.05 of women in the 50–60 and over 60 age groups had experienced harassment.

Table 3.8 Work stress in the workplace

S.No	List of work stress	Woman's at the age group	Sample's Responded	Percentage
1	1.Less time heavy and more work	Above 60	07	0.4
	2.Presence of Relatives (more members occupied) so Dress washing , vessel washing , food preparation			
2	3.Any Functions	50-60	15	8.67
3	4. Special functions also no leave	40-50	50	27
4	5.Separate plates and Tumblers and treating them low	30-40	52	30
5	6. Job Insecurity	30-20	30	17.3
6		less than 20	19	10.9
	Total		173	100

Source: Data Sheet collected

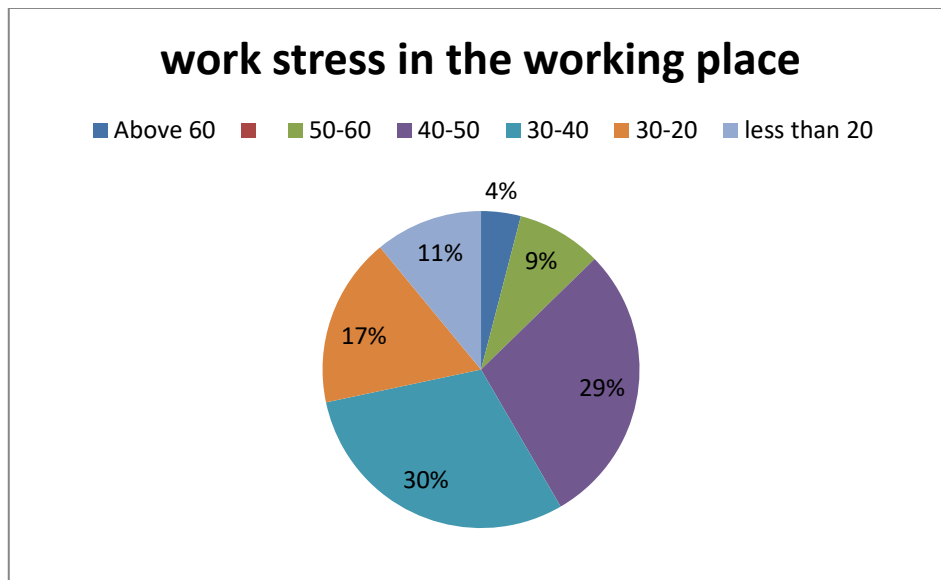


Figure 3.8 Work stress in the workplace

Woman's at the age group of 30-40 faced severe stress in the working place when compare the other age group woman's . It is found 30% of domestic workers affected over this.

4. Major Findings of the Studies

This report documents the difficult existence of domestic workers by revealing that nearly 90% of them work without a weekly day off and without the minimum wages set by the government. The study's conclusions about Chennai's domestic workers' personal and family profiles, working circumstances, and Salary administration are unsatisfactory. Among the particular demands is that labor be extended to household work. Some of the study's conclusions include the absence of respectable working circumstances, such as set work schedules, paid time off, holidays, protection from harassment, social security, and benefit access, as well as the lack of regulations around hiring and placement firms (brokers) that defraud clients.

The difficult existence of domestic helpers has been chronicled in this

1. The Woman's at the age group of 40-50 are domestic workers from the studies and found many are widows , husband left and some husbands are drunkard . so bread making is in the hands of these woman's workers.
2. Many that is 37.53% of Women domestic workers are illustrate so they can be easy cheated and they are not aware of government's policies.
3. The highest responds from the studies show that they are working for 6 to 8 hours (28.9%).
4. Most of samples respond is earning very less salary 3000-4000 (34.6%) with maximum period of 8 hours working.

5. The majority of survey respondents (46.24%) report experiencing physical pain and skin allergy using powerful detergents and soap oils for household chores washing clothes in hands.
6. They were informed that they might take unpaid vacation but were refused leave for even a single day; almost eighty-three percent of domestic workers have not taken any leave off.
7. 30% of women in the 30–40 age group are faced harassment in their working place.
8. 30% of domestic workers affected over stress in their working place.
9. Job Insecurity also makes the workers feel down in these studies.
10. More nations, including India, are implementing policies aimed at enhancing the living and working conditions of domestic employees. In order to guarantee that domestic workers everywhere have the same rights as other workers and receive a living wage, more needs to be done.

5. Recommendations and Suggestions

Like in many other places, Chennai's domestic worker problems can be complex and difficult to resolve. To address these concerns, consider the following advice and ideas:

1. Awareness of rights and legal protections. Make sure domestic workers understand their rights and safeguards as stipulated by current labor laws. Educate them on minimum wage rules, working hours, and other pertinent legislation by holding workshops or training sessions.
2. Establishing Associations for Domestic Workers. Promote the establishment of unions or associations for domestic workers so that they may jointly defend their rights and bargain with employers for improved working conditions. Additionally, these associations can offer workers solidarity, support, and direction.
3. Encourage the use of standardized employment contracts in the relationship between employers and domestic workers. The job duties, pay, working hours, and clauses pertaining to vacation, sick leave, and other benefits should all be spelled out in detail in these contracts.
4. Obtaining Social Security and Healthcare. Encourage the provision of social security benefits and reasonably priced healthcare services to domestic workers. This can entail making it easier to sign up for pension plans and healthcare programs funded by the government.
5. Education and Talent Acquisition. Give domestic workers the chance to learn new skills and seek training that will improve their employability and open doors to higher-paying positions down the road. Programs for vocational training in childcare, elder care, cooking, or housekeeping may fall under this category.
6. Inclusion of Finance. Make it easier for domestic workers to obtain financial services like bank accounts, savings accounts, and microcredit options. They can accumulate assets, save money, and guard against financial shocks by doing this.
7. Secure Workplaces. Make sure the workspaces used by domestic workers are clean and safe. Assign employers policies and materials that address upholding safety precautions, appropriate ventilation, and hygiene in the home.
8. Networking and Community Support. Encourage a sense of camaraderie among domestic workers by planning frequent get-togethers, support groups, or meetings where they can talk about their experiences, trade knowledge, and offer one another assistance.
9. Education and Awareness Programs against Harassment and Discrimination. To stop abuse, harassment, and discrimination against domestic workers, start public awareness campaigns. Encourage companies to handle domestic employees with dignity, respect, and fairness.
10. Policy Reform and Government Intervention. Promote legislative changes and government action to enhance domestic workers' rights and working conditions. This can entail passing certain laws to safeguard the rights of domestic workers, setting up procedures for handling grievances, and encouraging social communication amongst interested parties.

The lives and livelihoods of domestic female workers in Chennai and elsewhere can be improved by tackling these problems using a mix of social, legal, and economic initiatives.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to highlight the issues that Chennai's domestic workers deal with. The study's main findings include that female domestic workers face several challenges, including low pay, a demanding workload, exploitation by their employers, unfavorable working conditions, and health problems related to their jobs. The post-liberalization Indian economy has severely damaged women's vitality, and their involvement in the labor force has significantly decreased (Singh et al, 2020). The younger female domestic workers fall within the under-20 age bracket. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that just 28.9% of respondents are older than 40–50. Since they are unable to extract more labor for less money, it is clear that domestic employers prefer to hire young and middle-aged women over older workers. The government's minimum wage act is far higher than the wages given to domestic workers. The data reveals that wages are paid at an average rate of 25 rupees per hour. The majority of 60 sample respondents (34.6%) make between 3000 and 4000 per month less than the median salary. Of the total respondents, 43 (24.8%) make between 6000 and 7000 rupees, while 11.5 percent make rupees 5000 to 6000 per month and 14.4% and 12.1 % of them are earning Rs

4000 to Rs 5000 and Rs 1500 to Rs 3000 respectively.

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