

RISING INFLATION AND WOMEN ADOPTION OF DOMESTIC WORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the research findings of the women working in the informal sector as domestic servants. Rising inflation in the country has led many rural families to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better jobs and living standard. Migration from rural to urban areas had played an important role in women adoption of domestic profession. Maids opt for this profession as it requires less time and comes with a lot of incentives. They were earning quite well than other women working in informal sectors. Their relation with spouse had improved; they were educating their children in a hope of their better future. The data presented in this paper is collected in Moran Nangyal, Islamabad, Pakistan by using qualitative anthropological research techniques.

Keywords: Inflation, maids, domestic work, migration, education.

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan people are migrating from rural to urban areas for a very long time, migration leads to breakup of joint family system which is mostly prevalent in the country. Pakistani women are seeking higher education and are pursuing various professions relevant to their fields; they are now working side by side with the male members of the society both at higher and lower level. To maintain luxurious lifestyle and to meet the household expenses demands women to come out of their houses and work with male members in the society. Today's hectic routine and outdoor activities lead them to employ other women who can take care of their children and can perform all duties of their houses.

People are migrating from rural to urban areas in search of better living and income. Women are found to be working in factories and as maids in other people houses. Lack of education and other professional skills leave them no other option than to work for others. They have to perform the typical household chores, like washing, cleaning, ironing, cooking, etc. The income they earn from this work is low but is more than other informal jobs as it involves other material incentives and require less time.

Maids adopt new cultural traits from their employers. After seeing their employer's children studying they started to educate their own children and were motivated by their employers. They do sometime feel insecurities in their work, and do not enjoy any legal protection. They opt for this profession for various reasons, including, less education, low family income, they consider it healthier than factory work, consider themselves safe at home. Other than these advantages they seldom enjoy holidays except for their fixed holiday on Sunday; on that day they gave proper attention to their own house and complete all the pending tasks of the week. If the employers were not satisfied from their work, it results in their job loss.

LOCALE OF STUDY

The locale of this research was *Moran Nangyal Sawan Camp*, Islamabad, Pakistan. Its distance from zero point (centre of Islamabad) is 30.4 km. It is among one of the oldest

village near Islamabad. Approximately it covers an area of 14 acres. Before partition British army troops used to reside in the area. Total population of the village was 1377 comprising of 613 males and 764 females. Among these people 736 were natives and remaining 641 were migrants from different areas of Punjab and Frontier province.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative anthropological research methods which include participant observation, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews were used to get empirical data. Snow ball and purposive sampling was used for the selection of respondents. In-depth interviews of 36 respondents were conducted and 11 case studies were conducted during research. Research was conducted between March to June 2011.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research were to find out the primary reason behind becoming a maid? To know about the tasks they were performing at their employer's house? To explore their living standard and the means they were using for travelling between work station and home? And the impact of their work and their absence from home was having on their families?

DISCUSSION

There was not any specific age limit for domestic work; women of different age groups were found to be working as domestic servants. Researcher found women ranging from ten to sixty years of age working as maids. Forty one onwards the ratio of working women was quite low as compared to other age groups. Researcher found both unmarried and married women working as maids, but the ratio of single women (27.7%) working was quite low as compared to married women (63.8%). Mostly women had started work after their marriage; only few of them were previously employed before marriage. Those women were found to be very sympathetic to their husbands and fathers, married women said that their husbands were trying but what can they do? They were unable to find better jobs. The unmarried girls were working as their fathers were not earning well and their brothers were also young and not employed. They do not keep their pay to themselves; they simply give it to their parents. Those maids were the regular earners in their families, as their husbands earned on daily basis and in such cases luck plays an important role whether they got work or not.

Women belonging to different castes were working in domestic sector, including *Nangyal*, *Malik*, *Khan*, *Syed*, *Rajpoot*, *Kiyani*, *Khokar*, *Bhatti*, and *Shiats*. The highest ratio of women working belonged to *Bhatti* caste. Those families had migrated from *Chakwal*, Punjab, their husbands (of married women) and father (of unmarried girls) were working as ragman. But the most interesting thing among most of the women working was that, their families did not know what they were doing. Their relatives were not living in the same area; whenever they came to meet them maids take a day off from work so that their relatives doesn't come to know about their work.

Education plays an important role in one's life. There were people who wanted to seek knowledge but don't have enough resources to support their studies; it resulted in drop out from schools. During research the researcher find out that illiteracy was the main reason in their career selection. Most of the women were illiterate and had only read Quran in their early childhood. The most frequent comment heard by maids was that, "what can we do? We do not have any skill nor do we have enough education". They consider their lack of education as the reason behind their selection of domestic profession. 52.7% of maids were

illiterate, only 30.5% women had studied up to primary level. Educational level and occupation of the male members of the family also plays an important role in the working of females' members. It was found that the male members including father and husband were either illiterate or were under educated. They were not well educated so they were working in the informal sector where their income was quite low. A large proportion of them were either working as ragman or as laborers on daily wages, other than these there were some who were working as drivers. So to meet the rising inflation in the country women started working to help their husbands and the family. According to statistics 43.4% maids had illiterate husbands and the highest educational level among them was matriculation (21.7%). In contrast to this 80% unmarried girls had illiterate fathers and the highest educational level among them was up to secondary level which was found only 10%.

Nuclear family system was quite prevalent in the village. 72.2% of maids had nuclear families, and only 27.7% were living in joint families. Their children were young and one or two of them were working with them and the rest were studying. Their family sizes also vary, it ranges from two to seven people, but the average size was six members in the family. That involves parents and their three or four unmarried children. Exposure to modern way of life through their work had changed their point of view and they had started educating their children. Those who can afford were sending their children in private English medium schools to provide better education to their children.

Around 32% of female children were working with their parents and only 5.2% male children were working. The rest 48% children of respondents were not working, as they were younger and were getting education in schools. 72% of respondents left their small children in care of their family member. Those members usually were their eldest daughter who took care of her younger siblings. Around 16% of respondent's children were at school at the time of their work. 8% women lock their children in house and their neighbors keep a check on them until they return from work. Only 4% take their children with them on work. But employers do not like that type of behavior of maids, as when they took their children with them they do not give proper attention to their work and were always concerned about their children.

Maids belong to the lower class of society so we do not expect them to be living in large grand houses. They were living in small houses consisting of one to two rooms. Their housing was at a distance from the area they work. The native people do had possession of houses but their number was very small, only 27%. The remaining 72% were mostly migrants so they were living on rent. Those people were living in old and new houses; those who can afford to pay more rent were living in better conditioned house. The amount of rent ranged between fifteen hundred to three thousand rupees in the village. Native people had built one to two room quarters which they gave on rent. Around 50% tenants were paying two thousand rupees for rent. Those who had two or three room house were paying twenty five hundred to three thousand rupees. Very few people got room for fifteen hundred rupees per month. The amount of monthly rent also showed the housing standard of maids, those who were earning well and their husbands also had better jobs lived in better houses as compared to those who were earning less. The running water was not available in all houses. 77.7% of maids buy water tankers or had wells in their houses. The remaining 22.2% do not had any access to water, so they either bring water from village wells for their daily use or in some cases their neighbors provide them with water. For drinking and cooking purpose almost all people brought water from village wells except for those who had wells in their own house. Electricity was available to almost all the houses.

The husbands of maids were also equally employed and were working hard to earn better living for their families. Researcher found very few cases in which husbands were not

employed. Only 21% husbands of respondents were unemployed the rest of them were employed. Those who were unemployed had different reasons for it. Four of them were not working because of their health issues. One had heart problem, one had kidney failure, two were physically weak and were not able to work, and one of them was not working because of his idleness. So it was clear that the women were not the only earning member in the family, their husbands were playing their earning role very well. When women go out for work their household tasks remain ignored. As they were working women and had to work in the houses they serve, they need some help in their house chores. This includes getting help from their children, husbands, mother in law or other family members. There were some cases in which they do not get any sort of help and they had to do all the work on their own.

To check out the working environment and working conditions of maids their employer were also interviewed. That does create some problems for researcher as some of the maids were reluctant to introduce the researcher to their employer; they feared that it would have an impact on their jobs. On contrary some of the maids showed great interest to it as they were ready to arrange meeting between researcher and their employer. In some cases maids were willing but employers were not ready, they strictly said to the employees that they would not allow any outsider in their house to conduct interviews on the subject. So in such circumstances the researcher adopted two strategies, those employers who were willing to meet personally were directly interviewed and those maids who were reluctant to arrange meeting with their employers were given questionnaire related to their work to be filled by their employers. It took a long time to return but researcher do got positive response through it. She was able to get the opinion of thirty two employers on the subject.

Maids and employers keep on changing each other; sometime employers seems unsatisfied with their maids so they emit them, sometime maids were not satisfied with their employers because of work overload, less salary and too much accost by them, so they quit the job. Those maids, who got along with their employers get permanent job. Maids also knew that the employers do not had any other choice and need them for their work, so they sometimes do exploit them by coming late on work or not doing work properly.

Employer preferred to hire maids through some reference, either through their neighbors or some family members living nearby. After viewing their work for a few days or a week they employ them permanently. They prefer those women for work who do not interfere in their matters, are regular in work, and are not greedy. Researcher do not found any maid who was employed through a hiring agency neither found a lot of maids changing their jobs; if they find nice families who cooperate with them, they try to complete their tasks on time.

Highest ratio of maids had joined the profession in recent years. 27.7% of maids had started work only one year ago, 22.2% were working for two to three years, 16.6% were working for four to five years and above 10 years, 11.1% were working for six to seven years and only 2.7% were working for the last nine to ten years. Some of the maids were doing other additional jobs with domestic service but their ratio was very low, only 8.3%. They stitch clothes when were given by the employers. Some of them were doing factory work which was done in home, it involves doing embroidery on shirt collars, but they were not satisfied with it because it was very time consuming and they did not had enough time for it as they had taken more houses for work.

Maids do work in many houses for various tasks. The number of houses served depends on their capability, the amount of time they can spend outside their home and also their need for money. Maids mostly had nuclear families, so the responsibility of their own home was also on them as they did not have any others person to help them. Those whom children were

grown up and had elder daughters remained relaxed as they knew that they do not had to work after going back home.

Maids did not have to perform all the chores of one house. In one house they may be doing cleaning and sweeping and in the next they may be doing dish washing with it. There were some cases in which they were employed for all the tasks, so they spend the whole day in that house. Those who had one or two tasks at one house had taken many houses. Some of the employers prefer to employ one maid for all household chores and others prefer to keep separate maids for each of it, because in this way they properly concentrate on their work and in case of absence of one among them they can take that work from other. 30.5% respondents were working in only one house and around 27.7% were working in two houses. These two were the majority figures of respondents working in houses. Other than this 19.4% respondents were working in three houses, 11.1% were working in four houses, 8.3% in five, and only 2.7% were working in six houses. Those women who were working in five houses do not work their regularly. As in some houses they were only employed for washing of clothes and it was done twice a week, so they do not had to go their regularly.

Women were doing different type of chores at their employer's house. 94.4% women were working as cleaner and sweeper, 80.5% women washes clothes, 38.8% work as dish washers. A small proportion of women also do ironing and cooking at their employer's house. This shows that people usually employ maids for cleaning and washing purposes, most of the women like to cook personally without taking help of their maids and they also want to save money by doing work themselves.

Their monthly income depends on the number of task for which they were appointed at employers place, and the number of houses they were serving. On certain occasion they earn more money than their regular wage by their employer, like working on parties, marriage ceremonies, Eid festivities, etc. Around 41.6% of respondents were earning between six thousand to ten thousand rupees per month, 36.1% were earning one thousand to five thousand rupees per month, and 22.2% were earning between ten thousand to fifteen thousand rupees per month. The average income they get from one house for one task was fifteen hundred, it was fixed rate in the employer's area and among maids. Those who were employed for two tasks earn three thousand rupees from one house and simultaneously the income increases with the increase in chores done. Other than money maids were also given other material things including food, clothes, sometime tea and also school fee of children. There was a case in which the maid told that she daily eat breakfast with her employer as her employer waits for her maid and they take breakfast together and had a chit chat in friendly atmosphere, they were like friends to each other.

Most of the employer agreed that they do gave material things to their employee, like leftover food, clothes, *zakat* money and the things which they do not need and may be valuable for maids. When the maids were in need their employers helped them according to their mascot. In *Ramzan* grocery items were given to them, clothes on Eid, and books for children were given. They try to help them in the least manner with the things they can easily afford.

The village was situated in an area where it was surrounded by different private housing societies. Those maids were lucky in a sense that they got more chances of getting work and they do not had to go far away. Some of them prefer to walk on feet for going on work and some hire transport service for that purpose; that also depended on their affordability. The majority of them were working in *Bahria Town* phase 1, 3, 4 and 6, eight of them were working n phase 8 and two of them were employed in Model Town. Those who had hired van service still had to walk back home as it only dropped them in the morning. They do not had any public transport available inside the town, they took lift from cars passing by or

sometimes their employer's drop them near the entrance of the town, and from there they walk to their home. They do not take lift when they were alone. These women do face some problems, sometime they were harassed by the males' labor working on construction sites, and there was not any shade on their way back to home so in summer they had to walk under open sky. One maid reported that she and her fellow maid used to keep ice cubes on their head in summer so that they do not get dehydrated. Those who were pregnant got tired very easily and had to take rest on their way back home, so it took them a long time to reach their house. 72.2% of respondents walk to their work place, and only 22.2% of respondents had hired van service in the morning, in the evening they walk back home or take lift from the cars passing by. And only 5.5% of maids go to work with their husbands as they were taxi drivers, they provide pick and drop service to their wives.

Researcher does not found maids giving any negative comment about their employers. Their usual comment about them was that their employers were very nice, however they do not share the same feelings for their previous employers, whom they believe to be strict, as they took more work from them and were paying less, so they left those houses. When the employers were asked to tell about their maids their frequent comments were that they were faithful, loyal, honest, and hardworking, comes on time and work without annoying anyone, some of them said that they were honest and hardworking but still they had to look after them in their work.

The usual treatment of employers was very smooth with their maids. They do not hover around them, they just leave them on their own, and so they feel more comfortable in their work. In case of late arrival at work maids had to face different situations. Mostly the employers asked them once and do not bother to go in depth of it. Whereas there were some situations in which they show their wrath by scolding on them without listening to their reasons, but their ratio was very low only 16.6%. The rest 83.3% said that they do not had to face any problem on late arrival. One of the maid said "why should they be said anything by employers, in case they do went late on work, they were still responsible for doing their work, it doesn't happen that employers would complete the work in their absence, the work was still done by them (maids)." Most of the maids had cell phone; they had given their numbers to their employers. In case they got late from their usual time they inform their employers or sometime their employers call them to know the reason for their delay. So it had become easier to coordinate things properly without creating havoc. They had one fixed holiday in a week on Sunday.

A small proportion of 11.1% employers deduct wages of their servants in case of absence from work. Maids leave such houses in which their wages were deducted. As there was no formal rules in the job, so it was entirely up to the employers, whether they wanted to deduct wages in case of absence or not, the employer usually deducts wages of those maids who were in habit of taking more leaves, so they try to control them by deducting their wages, it does had positive result, as maids either became regular or they left that job.

Other than their regular tasks domestic servants were often hired on special occasions like marriage ceremonies and parties held in houses. For working in such occasions till late night they get extra money apart from their wages. Their employers also provide them transport service in such situations. They drop them home after party at late hours. 55.5% maids do work at night hours on special occasions and 44.4% do not work as their children were very small and they can't leave their responsibility to other people for the whole day, so they had informed their employer at the time of their hiring that they would not be able to work on such occasions, such situation do create problem for employers as they had to find other women for such work.

There were various appliances which were used in household; they had made the work easier. In case of carpeted floor vacuum cleaners and for washing clothes washing machine was used. 88.8% of respondents said that they had access to household appliances. They do wash clothes in washing machine but they still had to wash them by hands as some of the clothes were delicate and need to be handled carefully. When employers were asked about this they said that some clothes were of delicate and fragile material like silk and ivory clothes, they need to be washed by hands and the rest can be washed in washing machine, while others said washing machine should be used for all type of clothes. 11.1% of maids said that they were not allowed to use washing machine as their employer wanted them to wash clothes by hand, firstly to save electricity and secondly they thought that if they have hired women for washing then why should machine be used for the purpose.

Maids spend almost half of their day at employer house. They keep on doing the same work throughout the day without getting proper rest, so they got tired and fatigued. As those maids were doing such physical demanding tasks at employer's house, so they do need rest between their works. The rest was often granted by employers and also by maids themselves, whenever they feel they need it. They take a break from work for a very short time as they were always in a hurry to reach other work place. The employers said that they do allow them to take pause or rest between works, but the maids were always in a hurry so they do not take rest if they did not have enough time. In those houses where they were appointed for two tasks they take a pause for five to ten minutes before starting the next task.

Employer adopt different criteria for maids, some of them closely supervised their maids while other leave them on their own as they thought that they work better when they feel relaxed and comfortable, constant check made them uncomfortable and nervous and they do not perform their duty well. But they do agree that a certain amount of check was needed. Some of them daily guide them what to do and then leave them on their own. Newly appointed maids were closely supervised and guided and once they got familiar with their work, they were left free with a little bit of daily guidance. Some of the maids told that when they go to their employer house they usually sleep so they do their work while their employer slept and after informing them that the work was done they leave the house. This also shows employers faith and trust on their maids and to some extent employers' careless attitude.

Around 44.4% of respondents got advance pay when they need. But in majority cases (55.5%) they were not given advance money and neither they had demanded. When employers were asked about this, they seem to be in favor of giving them advance money but after proper investigation of the reason for which they were asking for money. If they genuinely seem to be in need than they should be given money, but in opposite case where they seem to be in a habit of taking advance money and then not coming to work, they should not be given.

Other than their wages the employer do help them when they fall ill or had any other issues and emergencies in their house. 61.1% of respondents said that they got financial help from their employers in time of need, when they got sick they were given money for medicine. In case of wedding in maid's house they were given money, clothes and other items. There was a maid whose daughter was getting married, she expected that her employer would gave her money for the wedding, and she did got gifts for her daughter and money from them. The rest 38.8% do not got any type of help from their employers.

Whether maids were satisfied or not satisfied from their jobs? Researcher found maids to be reluctant on giving answer of this question. Their usual comment was that what satisfaction? It's our need, we did not have any other choice, and our living depends on our work. 91.6% of them said that yes you can say that we are satisfied, and the rest 8.3% of them said that

they were not satisfied from their work because they know that “it’s not a reputable profession, people do not give us the respect we deserve, we do not like to work for others nor our family like so we had to work secretly, we cannot tell them because when they will come to know they will not allow us to work”. All of them do agree that they were better than those women who beg on streets to earn money. They said that they were at least earning legitimacy money. Almost all of the employers do treat maids as their own family members as they came in daily contact with each other; they knew their problems and helped their maids.

They wanted to change the life of their children; they do not want them to spend the life in the same way as their parents had spent. One of the maid, Fareen said that she was enjoying her job as she had developed a ‘*chaska*’ (taste) for work, she loves to keep herself busy and she had developed friendship with her employers. Humaira said that she did not like her profession and she wanted to change it, she was planning to get beautician training and open her own beauty salon. Other than these two, other woman were totally depending on their children, that after completing their education they will get better jobs, they dreams for their children future, they wanted to see them working in better positions.

CONCLUSION

Housemaid is one of the growing professions in the world nowadays. Women were too busy in their life that they were unable to give proper attention to household chores, so they employ other women for this purpose. Maids adopt new cultural traits from their employers. After seeing their employer’s children studying they started to educate their own children and were motivated by their employers. They do sometime feel insecurities in their work, and do not enjoy any legal protection. They were paid in cash as well as in kind. Their relations with their husbands were improving with increase in their financial status. They were not able to give proper time to their children because of their busy schedule, so their children lack proper care of mothers.

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