

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

**Dr Khalid Manzoor Butt and Arooj Khan**

### **Abstract**

In Pakistan, women are considered as a stigmatized community and beholden to different social and cultural norms. Though they are almost half of the population but it seems that they are restricted from having liberty, education, economic exposure and rights. As far as notion of working women is concerned, it is a general perception that in Pakistan, poverty stimulates poor women to work and support family otherwise Society does not accept the notion of working women. They are under male domination and very few women take part in economic activities. However, the women who work mostly work in informal sector which further exacerbate their problems. In urban areas like Lahore, domestic service sector is the major sector of employment for women. Due to toothless laws and lack of regulation of this work, these female workers confront numerous problems. This descriptive research will explore some crucial problems of domestic workers in Lahore; identify the underlying reasons that compel the women to join this sector.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, domestic workers, informal sector, underpaid, overworked, exploitation, abuse

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Study**

Since time immemorial to current ages half of the mankind i.e. women have been unprivileged strata of society in numerous spheres of the life. Generally, “Empowerment implies the creation of an enabling environment for individuals to fully use their capabilities and to take charge of their lives. Empowerment also implies the building or acquiring of capacity to accomplish certain tasks and attain specific goals” (Butt, Victor, 2014: 68). According to Keshab, types of women empowerment are numerous such as social, educational, economic, political and psychological empowerment as well (Mandal, 2000: 19). All types of empowerment are necessary and interwoven. After the emergence of United Nations (UN), efforts were made to empower the women in different spheres of life. At first, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) was framed that claimed equality of men and women. Later on International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Social and Economic Rights (ICESCR) came on the surface. Both of them advocated certain rights for women. In 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted and regarded as the cornerstone of women empowerment. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan is the

---

\*Authors are Chairperson and M. Phil Scholar, Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore.

signatory of all the above stated conventions and covenants but condition of women is not very heartening.

Although, the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality of citizens yet the picture of women empowerment is very bleak. “In Pakistan problems like illiteracy, poverty, instability and disparities persist” (Butt and Victor, 2014: 68) and these problems cause a serious blow on the marginalized community and they remain deprived. Generally, people in Pakistan do not encourage women to get education and take part in economic activities. Women are also victim of different social stigmata like early marriage, honor killing, *Watta Satta Wani*, *Swara*, *Karo Kari*, marriage to Quran. Due to different socio cultural constraints, they are restricted from getting access to health, education and employment. According to UN, “48% Pakistani women have no say in health matters.” (Dawn, 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2018)

As far as employment of women is concerned, usually women work in informal sector. However, it is pertinent to mention that the major informal sector where plethora of women works in urban areas; like Lahore, is domestic service sector. Although there is not any proper law that regulates this work in Pakistan yet this is highly feminized. So, this paper will attempt to explore the causes of the growth of this sector of employment vis a vis problems of these female workers. To be specific, Lahore has been selected area of study. Moreover, in this profession numerous rights of these women are being violated and they are unaware of it. In order to highlight the rights violation of these workers a framework from different articles of UNDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW and Constitution of Pakistan has been crafted.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Women Empowerment**

In Pakistan there is social, cultural and economic dependence of women on men which hinder later's growth and development. For bringing positive change in the lives of women and society as a whole they should be empowered. Keele explains empowerment in such words, “a process where people assert control over the factors which affects their lives” (Keele, 2011, 178). Empowerment is a way through which a person can control his/her life and enjoy different rights. As far as women empowerment is concerned, UN defines it, “women’s sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally” (“Guidelines on Women’s Empowerment,” 2017). Though women should be empowered at all levels but economic empowerment is very significant because If a women is economically empowered she will have some say in society on the one hand and on the other hand she will be able to take part in political activities as it is said that “election is the game of money” (Butt, Victor, 2014: 179). Siddiqi opines, “Political empowerment is

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

indeed highest level of women empowerment which results from socio-economic empowerment of women. Political empowerment of women can, however, ensure continuity of socio-economic empowerment of women in society.”(Siddiqi, 2016: 56).

### **Domestic Workers**

Domestic workers are considered as ‘unrecognized labor’ and in many parts of the world are devoid of legal protection which makes them feeble and more unguarded. “Their pay is among lowest in the world” (Fish,2017:18). They are among marginalized segments of society and have no voice for their rights. There are numerous definitions of domestic worker. However, Domestic workers convention of International Labour Organization (ILO) has defined it in following words, “The term domestic work means work performed in or for a household; the term domestic workers means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship; a person who perform domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker” (ILO Convention 189, 2011).

Their chores may vary from place to place. “They may cook, clean, take care of children, the elderly and disabled, attend to the garden or pets, or drive the family car.” (Domestic Workers (The Care Economy), <http://www.ilo.org>.) They get their remuneration in form of cash or kind. Some employers work on full-time basis while some work on part-time basis. Generally, they are categorized in three groups. One of them is live-in workers such workers reside in employer’s house. Other category is task specific workers who perform her specific tasks and go to their employer’s house for few hours. Third category of worker is day-based workers such workers spend their whole day in employer’s home but get back their home at the end of the day. It is pertinent to mention here that a domestic worker is different from a home-based worker. A home-based worker is the one who perform work for remuneration in his/her own home and not in the workplace of employer.

### **Framework of Rights**

Pakistan is the signatory of Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UNDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESCR) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well. All these covenants and conventions are made to protect various rights to women. In addition to it, Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan also describes equal rights to women. So, it is the duty of state to ensure provision of equal rights to women without any discrimination. However, a framework of different rights has been drawn keeping in mind aforementioned conventions, covenant and Pakistan’s constitution. The framework consists of following rights; Rights to dignity and worth, Right of Equality, Right to education, Right to choose work, Right to form association, Right to protection of law, Right to property, Right to rest and leisure, Right of social

security, Right of family unit, Right to standard of living, Right to just and favourable Condition of work, Right of Equal pay for Equal Work, Right to protection during pregnancy, Right of liberty, Right of no torture, Right of privacy respectively. This research will try to analyze either these rights of female domestic workers are protected or not.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a descriptive research because it explains the phenomenon its conditions, environment and problems. As it is an ongoing phenomenon, it requires primary sources like observation and interviews. It includes the experiences and opinion of female domestic workers therefore; as a strategy of analysis, Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been used for data analysis in this research. This strategy includes double hermeneutics in which interpretation process is having two tiers (i.e the participant try to give his/her opinion on the issue and the researcher try to make a sense of participant's view). However, by using purposive sampling, sample of 54 female workers has been drawn for collecting data. This sampling is most frequently used sampling technique in qualitative studies. As Torchin said, "Purposive sampling can be used in situation where you need to reach a target sample quickly and where a sampling for proportionality is not primary concern" ( Torchin, 2007: 56). The sample has been drawn from nine towns of Lahore so that opinion and experiences of the workers of various localities of area understudy can be entertained.

However, data has been collected through semi-structured interviews. An average, duration of each interview was about twenty minutes. It was tried to conduct the interview at such place where interviewee could feel comfortable.. Thus, most of the interviews were conducted at workplace in conducive environment. In order to avoid any ambiguity and maintain continuity, all interviews were recorded with the consent of respondents. Moreover, for sake of establishing rapport the names and identities of all respondents are withheld with mutual agreement. In order to keep secrecy and sanctity, all interviewees were given fictitious names. Though interview questions were framed in English but questions were asked in Urdu and Punjabi so that respondents can understand and they can conveniently express their opinions. For coding, in the interview tables, separate column of Superordinate themes, Themes and verbatim statements were made. For the sake of clarity Superordinate themes have been given numerical (1,2,3....), themes alphabetical (a,b,c...) and verbatim Roman numerical numbers. Then an analysis of the interviews has been done. Moreover, the tables of interviews have been carefully prepared as references.

### **Significance of Research**

This research is significant in numerous ways. First of all no research on this topic has been undertaken earlier. Secondly, domestic workers are one of the most marginalized and a socially excluded community, there is a need to highlight their conditions and problems and press the stakeholders and policymakers to bring change in their lives.

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

This research will highlight their issue and help the policy makers to understand their issues and take some measures to empower these women. When the women are empowered it will enable the country to develop. "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women" (Vivekananda, 2017: 19). Thirdly, it will also give awareness to these female workers about their rights. Then, being sympathetic with women, exploitation of these female workers has been seen and this urges me to highlight their problems so that policy makers can take measures for the betterment of these women. Lastly, it will provide a conceptual framework to other researchers who want to conduct research on the other dimensions of this topic.

### **Historical perspective**

The history of domestic work can be linked back to the slavery. But as an occupation, domestic service sector gained momentum after industrial revolution. Before the revolution, women used to perform household tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for children and elderly family members. In addition to it, they were also involved in farm management and cloth making process. Although there were some women who worked as domestic servants (Joyce, 2008: 15), yet it was not common. But after the revolution machines replaced the man's work and rural women who were involved in hand spinning became unemployed. Many people began to migrate in urban areas and due to urbanization there were many opportunities of employment for women. Then women and children were employed in factories and mines as cheap labour but the working conditions were very harsh and women were discriminated. In such condition most women found it better to serve as domestic servants. The ratio of female domestic workers began to increase in Europe and "in 1851 domestic service of all kinds was the single largest employer of women in Britain" (Hudson, 2011: 8). With the passage of time this profession began to grow and in the words of John Burnett, "Throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century until first world war domestic service constituted the largest single employment for English women... yet is a largely unknown occupation. No Royal commission investigated it or suggested legislative protection of the workers; no outburst of trade union activity called attention to the lot of servant, as it did to that of the building workers, the cotton spinners and the dock labourers." (Burnett, 1974: 5)

British left the same tradition in India and drew a line between nobility and common people. However, Pakistan inherited same tradition from British India and created two classes' i.e, feudal lords and servants respectively. Gradually this tradition ingrained in Pakistan and then through urbanization and migration it began to flourish in urban areas as well. It is pertinent to mention here that initially this work was remunerated in form of kind but later on it began to be remunerated in form of cash as well. But throughout history this work under the umbrella of labour laws has not been recognized. In 2011 first ever convention on the rights of domestic workers was drafted by International Labour Organization (ILO). But still there are many countries including Pakistan who have not ratified it. It seems Pakistan has taken some

measures to empower the women but for these female workers there is not any specific law.

### **Position of women in society**

The issue of women empowerment is found all over the world but its magnitude and conditions varies from country to country. In developed countries women are in better position as compared to developing countries. In developing countries like Pakistan the picture of women empowerment is very discouraging. In the name of Islam, culture and societal norms they are restricted to enjoy even those rights which are provided them by the constitution. In Pakistan, patriarchy is deeply entrenched in society and male members of the family take decisions even about education, health, marriage, and most matters of women. Education of women is also restricted and Pakistan stands among those countries where female literacy and employment rate is discouraging. Another stigma that has great reverence in the heart of people is the notion of ‘honor.’ If a woman does anything against the established norms of society about her, it is regarded as damage for the honor of male family members. In extreme cases, women are just killed in the name of honor. This also contributes in making them economically and socially deprived. Then practices of forced and early marriage are also very pervasive which make them marginalized and dependent on men. Marriages of women are generally arranged by parents and male members of family. The young bride must be obedient to her elders, loyal to her husband and his family, and never discusses her marital problems with outsiders. A wife is taught that she must be ready to sacrifice her life for the honor of her husband and his family name.” (Peter and Wolper, 1995, 52). Generally, birth of baby-boy is preferred and celebrated. In many cases baby-girl is aborted and if a girl is born she faces discrimination in terms of her health, education and other matters. There is also gender bifurcation of labour force. Men are expected to work outside home and women have to work within home and look after the family. There are very few women who possess private property and personal bank accounts. According to World Bank, Pakistan’s women workforce ratio is 22.2% which is regarded as lowest in South Asia. On the other hand, although Yemen is war torn country yet it has 26.0% women workforce. Mostly, women in Pakistan do not take part in economic activity even if they do, mostly work in informal sector which is not recognized in national economy. There are 12 million women who work in informal sector in Pakistan (Akram, 3<sup>rd</sup>Jan, 2018). However, the major informal sector of employment for women especially in urban areas like Lahore is the domestic service sector. According to ILO there are 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan and most of them are female. These workers are one of the marginalized segments of society. It is a pity that there is not any concrete law that deal with the rights of these workers. There is no concept of minimum and fixed wages, social security, written contract, maternity leave, health care facility. There is also no minimum age limit for a domestic worker. They are under-paid, overworked, and verbally, physically and sometimes sexually abused. In addition to it, there is hardly any NGO that can give such women awareness and

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

highlight their issues. It is pertinent to mention here that there is hardly any research on the problems of these women. This shows the lack of seriousness in society about the rights of these women. The society cannot progress until it relinquishes biased approach towards women.

### **Findings**

Throughout history women have been assigned low-paid, unrewarding and irregular work. Though their condition improved with the passage of time but still women have to go a long way particularly in developing countries like Pakistan where male chauvinism and social values are deep rooted and women are very much dependent on male family members. It is generally observed that the women in Pakistan are deprived most of their rights. Moreover, violations of their rights increase manifold when women work in informal sector like domestic service sector. Owing to its unregulated nature and poor working conditions it has become toil. There are numerous reasons that compel these women to join this profession. Pakistan is a poverty-ridden country and poverty entreats vicious circle of problems. By observing and interviewing different respondents, it has been found that poverty is the prime cause which forces the women to join this profession. Shagufta Imtiaz said, "I joined this profession because my husband's income was not enough to fulfill our basic needs." (Shagufta Imtiaz, personal communication, July, 27, 2018). However, Samreen, Qauser, Faiza, Ayesha and some others also expressed the same reason for their joining of this profession. It is pertinent to mention here that poverty does not include only food, clothes and shelter rather it is multidimensional. So, if someone is unable to pay fee for the education of his/her child it is also poverty. In some cases, women started this work to educate their children. Another respondent told, "I do not want my children to be like me. My husband's income is not enough to bear the expenses of my children's education that's why I am working as domestic worker" ( Shazia Parvaiz, personal communication, August 5, 2018 ).

Then lack of economic opportunities especially in rural areas is another reason. In villages, agriculture is the common source of employment and this work is usually remunerated in form of goods which does not enhance people's purchasing power so they migrate to urban areas in search of better earning opportunity thus join this profession. Nargis said, "We were living in village and my husband was only child of his parents we did not have any opportunity to earn a handsome amount in village so we migrated to Lahore and now both of us are earning." (Nargis Anjum, personal communication, August 4, 2018 ). Sundas and Sakeena also shared the same opinion. It goes without saying that among 54 respondents 74.1% said they migrated from villages to find work in Lahore. As this work is remunerated, it enhances their purchasing power. Fatima Asghar said, "when I started work I did not have anything my husband was also unemployed. Now after two years, I have everything and I have purchased a rickshaw for my husband through the money that I have earned" ( Fatima Asghar, personal communication, July 25, 2018).

Besides economic reason, there are some socio-cultural reasons as well that contribute in the growth of domestic service sector. In Pakistan, literacy rate is very low. According to Pakistan economic survey, women's literacy rate is 48% which is very discouraging. On the one hand provision of free and quality education is a misapprehension and on the other hand people do not give importance to the education of women due to socio-cultural norms. Fatima Shahid said, "My father did not allow me to get education as he used to say if I got education I would be able to write letters to any boy"( Fatima Shahid, personal communication, July 27, 2018). Naila also held the same views. So, when they are illiterate they have no option but to work as domestic servants. One of the respondents conveyed, "I was not educated so I did not have any opportunity to work except to work in the houses of other people" (Sana Hanif, personal communication, July 27, 2018). Women in Pakistan are generally dependent on men and this dependency has deep repercussion especially on uneducated women. It was observed and noted during interviews that women were dependent on their guardian and when due to some reasons like death, sickness their guardian did not fulfill their needs they had no other option but to work as domestic servants. One of the respondents named Sajida Ikram stated, "My husband paralyzed and no one was there to feed us. So, I started working in domestic service sector" (Sajida Ikram, personal communication, July 28, 2018). Moreover, Alishba, Sobia Karamat, Sobia Sohail, Amna, Sugran, Shamim and Parveen also gave the reason of their guardian's sickness or death. However, poor and illiterate women's dependency does not have serious repercussions on women only in case of death and sickness of guardian but divorce is also equally important in intensifying the problems of such women. According to Fatima, "My father went for polygamy and he disowned me and my mother. We were totally dependent on our father. When he disowned us we had no money. In state of bewilderment we came Lahore and started working as domestic servant as it was the only option for us" (Fatima Shahid, personal communication, July 27, 2018). Nadia and Asma also held the divorce responsible for their work. Then drug addiction and violence on the part of husband are other reasons that instigate the illiterate women to work as domestic servants. Another worker Hajra Muqaddas said, "My husband is a drug addict and beats me. He spends all his income on drugs and it becomes difficult for me to run house that's why I am working here as domestic servant" (Hajra Muqadas, personal communication, July 29, 2018).

The menace of dowry is deeply entrenched in our society. In order to marry off their daughter's people go to any extent. Serving as domestic worker is a glaring example in this case. According to Ayesha, "I have to save money for dowry of my daughter that's why I am working." (Ayesha Aslam, personal communication, July 30, 2018). In addition to it, large family size is another reason that contributes in the growth of domestic service sector. Guddo, Maryam, Amna and Rabia gave this reason. However, some cases were identified when joint family system forced the women to work as domestic servants. According to Akhtar Naseem, "I lived in joint family system. My brother in law was financially better than my husband and his children



## Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community

had better standard of living than my children. When his children had some toys or any other thing my children also demanded same from us. Being mother it was not bearable for me to see my children deprived so I began to work as domestic servant because that was only option for an illiterate person like me”(Akhtar Naseem, personal communication, August 1, 2018) In Pakistan, there is bifurcation of roles between males and females and even urban areas like Lahore Is also not immune from it. Women are ascribed to work in private sphere and public sphere is considered as a domain of men. According to Hira, “I was matric qualified I asked my husband that I want to work so that I can support you. My husband did not allow me to work anywhere and asked me to serve as domestic worker because it is done within house which is considered as private sphere”( Hira Iqbal, personal communication, August 5, 2018). However, this research found some other causes as well. For instance, there were some cases when women joined this profession because it was their family occupation. In another case, a worker said that she joined this profession to economically empower herself. Nusrat states, “I was totally dependent on my husband and in order to earn my own money I started this work without letting my husband know that I am working. Now I feel satisfied”(Nusrat Sheikh, personal communication, July 26, 2018).

After joining this profession, these women have to confront numerous problems. Among many issues one is the lack of respect. They are always look down upon in society and people do not want to interact with them on equal basis which makes them socially beloveted group. In the words of Naila, “We have no respect. The children of employers call us with our names. They do not like it if we touch any of their things” (Naila Amjad, personal communication, July 25, 2018). Bashir, Shahzad, Iqbal, Ahmed and some others also held same opinion. Then verbal and physical abuse is also a common practice that is associated with this profession. During research it has been found verbal abuse is widespread but there are some cases when physical and sexual abuse is also committed particularly in case of child domestic workers. It goes without saying that such cases are under-reported due to social norms. This point corroborates from this fact that 79.6% respondents have said they are verbally abused by employer.

In this profession, there is lack of job security which makes these workers more vulnerable of exploitation at the hand of employer. Due to uncertainty of job they remain under pressure. According to Shakila, “No one understands our problem. Employer does not care if we are ill or have any issue in home. They are only concerned with work otherwise they will fire us”( Shakila Imran, personal communication, August 5, 2018). Then due to their poor standing in society these workers have to be vigilant about their honor. Maryam states, “We remain conscious about our ‘*izzat*’ and when the husband of my employer is at home I ask my employer to say her husband to go in separate room so that I can clean his room. I do not work when he is present near me”(Maryam Jutt, personal communication, July 30, 2018). In addition to it, due to absence of fixed and minimum wages and written contract these

workers remain poor and their self-esteem, confidence and dignity also hurt. Sakeena Afzal expressed this issue in these words, “Our wages are not enough. We work whole day but we not get fair wages as other employers get. There should be a respectable profession for us” (Sakeena Afzal, personal communication, July 31, 2018). Likewise, issue of overworked and underpaid is also rampant. There are many respondents who have expressed this problem. Then due to absence of weekly holiday their family life gets disturbed and they become homesick. According to Maria, “My employer does not go to office on Sunday but she does not allow me to have weekly holiday. I want to spend time with my family on Sunday but I am helpless”(Maria Masood, personal communication, August 2, 2018). Another problem that these workers confront is health issues. Due to long time work in water containing detergent and phenyl some workers like Amna, Shakila and Maryam have complained about hand allergy. Then issue of joint and muscular pain is also stated. Sana says, “Due to nature of my work I am to suffer from joint and muscular pain. Now If I sit in an environment where air condition is on, I will have joint pain” ( Sana Hanif, personal communication, July 27, 2018). Maria Masood also said she came to workplace after taking multivitamin capsule.

There is no health care facility by employer in this profession which makes it difficult for such poor women to get medical treatment of their illness. According to 1965 Pro Employer Social Security Ordinance, it is mandatory for employer to provide health care to domestic workers but it is just a written rule and no mechanism of its implementation has been observed. One of the respondent said, “Employers do not bear our medical expenses. They give us little money for checkup. They are not concerned with our illness they just want work from us.” (Naila Amjad, personal communication, July 25, 2018). However, the problems for pregnant domestic woman workers further intensify. Because there is no maternity leave for that matter either they have to leave job in pregnancy or in some cases their employer fire them. As a result their economic condition further deteriorates. Shagufta shares, “I left this work during pregnancy and started knitting at home because if I continued this work it would be harmful for me. It was a very difficult time for me”(Shagufta Imtiaz, personal Communication, July 27, 2018). This issue has been highlighted by sana, Ayesha, Batool and some other respondents. In addition to it, issue of time management is also very common. As their salary is not fixed and handsome that is why these workers try to work in as many homes as they can so that they can get maximum amount of money. In this quest, it becomes difficult for them to remain punctual which annoys their employers and disturbs these workers. Similarly, their employers approach them anytime and do not think about the private life of these workers. According to Amna, “Whenever I do not go to my employer home for work she came to my home and takes me with her so that I work for her. She does not understand my problems no matter how much I try to persuade her. Sometimes she does not allow weekly holiday”(Amna Majeed, personal communication, August 4,

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

2018). Moreover, when they are discriminated, abused, and receive bad treatment in society, it has psychological impacts on them which impede their growth.

### **Situational Analysis**

Employment of domestic workers in homes is very common in Lahore. Generally, this work is undertaken by females from 6 years to 70 years. In this profession, neither special skills are required nor is fixed age limit. Some people employ child workers while some employ young and aged women. In daily routine, female domestic workers wake up early in the morning. After preparing and taking breakfast with their family members, the workers whose children are enrolled in school get their children ready for school. However, there are many workers who have employed their children as domestic servants and such women take their children with them and drop them on their workplaces. When the children undertake this work from dawn to dusk, it becomes impossible for them to go school which is the basic right of every person. There were some respondents who said they wanted to get education but due to their family pressure they could not do so. So, this work violates their right to education which is upheld by article 26 of UNDHR, article 13 of ICESCR, article 10 of CEDAW and 25 of the Constitution. It is pertinent to mention here that during interviews, it has been informed by some respondents that they are forced by their family members to work as domestic servants. When these women particularly girl children are employed by their guardians in this profession, it violates their Article 23 of UNDHR, Article 11 of CEDAW, Article 6 of ICESCR and Article 11 of Constitution Article 8 and 3(a) of ICESCR which provide right to choose work and discourage force labour.

Generally, these workers reach their workplaces between 8 to 9 am in morning. Although some workers are dropped off by their family members yet there are many workers who have mobility issue. Most of the workers confront harassment on their way to workplaces and sometimes at workplaces as well. Another respondent Rabia Aslam stated, "I travel on local bus to reach to my workplace and face incidents of harassment during travelling which is very painful for me" (Rabia Aslam, personal communication, July 28, 2018). It was also informed by some respondents like Amna, Shakeela, Sakeena and Guddo that when they want to file any complaint against harassment, police officers also do not take them seriously only because they are poor people. According to Akhtar Naseem, "Law does not protect poor people like us. It is always for the protection of rich people. Rich people use money and they get off scot free" (Akhtar Naseem, personal communication, August 1, 2018). This practice contradicts article 7 of UNDHR, article 15 of CEDAW, article 26 of ICCPR, and article 4 of the constitution as well. At workplaces, these workers perform numerous household tasks such as dusting, cleaning, washing clothes and washing dishes etc. even in the tough weather conditions to facilitate their employers but they have no respect and their work is also not recognized. This is against the right of dignity and

worth which is written in the preamble of UNDHR, ICESCR, ICCPR, article 5 ,6 and 9 of CEDAW, and article 14 of the constitution.

When they perform these tasks they feel tired but during this work they are not given any break. There is also no specific place for them to rest during this work. It has been informed by respondents that they work eight hours or more than that and on many instances they are called on weekends as well. However, it is pertinent to mention that live-in workers suffer more than other workers because the former are given holidays after few months. This practice violates their right to rest and leisure. This right is upheld by article 4 of UNDHR, article 7 (d) of ICESCR, and article 38 (b) of constitution as well. Some respondents complaint about joint pain, muscular pain and hand allergy etc. due to this work. The research revealed that 80% workers left job during pregnancy. Sometimes, if the pregnant worker cannot perform her duties properly, employer fires her instead of giving her maternity leave. This practice is against article 10 (2) of ICESCR , 37 (e) of Constitution, 11 (2) (b) and 11 (2) (d) of CEDAW. When it is lunch time, employees are given free lunch by most of the employers. Generally, fresh food is given to them but there are some cases when stale food is provided. The issue of stale food has been highlighted by Zara, Fatima, Halima and two other workers. They are also not given food in same plates as are used by their employers. This shows the discrimination that these women face due to nature of their work. A respondent said, “We are not allowed to use their plates and spoons. They have given us food in separate plates and we are advised to use them only”(Nusrat Sheikh, personal communication, July 26, 2018). This issue was also highlighted by Razia, Bushra, Erum, and Raheela as well. Such attitude contradicts Charter of UN, UNDHR, article 2 (2) (3) of ICESCR, article 7 of CEDAW, and article 25 (a) of Constitution. At workplace various abuses are also quite common particularly verbal abuse. As it has been expressed by Sana, Naila, Farzana, and Sundas that such abuse mentally tortures them which is violation of article 5 of UNDHR, article 7 of ICCPR, and article 14 (b) of constitution.

Almost all the respondents get their salary on monthly basis but economic exploitation is very common because their salary is deducted on different pretexts. Anjum, shaista, Rabia and Iqra also showed their reservations about low wages and lack of overtime remuneration. Owing to this their standard of living does not improve. So, it can be said that in this profession their right to adequate standard of life is also violated. This right is recognized by article 25 of UNDHR, article 11 and 7 (2) of ICESCR, and article 38 (a) of Constitution. During the interviews, it has been unearthed that most of the respondents join this low paid profession because there is lack of shelter homes, unemployment allowances, and social security. It is the failure of social security system in Pakistan that compels people to join such low-paid profession. This state of social security system is the violation of article 2 UNDHR, article 9 of ICESCR, article 11 (e) of CEDAW, and article 38 (C) of Constitution as well. Moreover, when the women remain outside home whole day and get back in the evening it badly affects their family life. Parveen Batool said, “I want to look after my children and

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

remain available to them at home but I am helpless. if there is any other work that I can do at home I will be happy because when I leave my children in morning and get back home in the evening it disturb me and my family a lot” (Parveen Batool, personal communication, August 4, 2018). So, this violates their right of family unit which is prescribed in article 16 (3) of UNDHR, article 23 of ICCPR, article 10 of ICESCR, and article 35 of Constitution. These workers are also approached anytime by their employers as revealed by research thus their right to privacy is not observed which article 12 of UNDHR ensures.

These workers can be fired any time. There is no concept of sick leave and maternity leave. In addition to it, mostly money is deducted from their salaries if they take leave. The situation further deteriorates because of absence of law and regulation. Furthermore, there is no complaint cell for these female workers. So; keeping in mind such working conditions of this profession, it can be said that this work does not offer just and favourable condition of work to its employees which is the violation of article 7 of ICESCR, 11 (1) (f) of CEDAW, and article 37 (c) of constitution.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To cap it all off the above discussion, it can be deduced that there are numerous socio-cultural and economic reasons that compel the women to join this profession. Moreover, the exploitation of these workers is increasing due to rapid expansion of this sector but no stakeholder has paid heed to the issues of these workers. If this profession is continued without any legal cover, it will pose serious question on the credibility of Pakistan’s commitment to the international community of taking measures to empower women and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In this profession, these workers face problems like overworked, underpaid, discriminated, abused etc. This research has also found the violation of different rights of these women in this profession such as right to dignity and worth, right of equality, right to education(in case of employment of girl child), right to choose work, right to rest and leisure, right to social security, right to family unit etc.

Though women are already one of the marginalized strata in Pakistan yet they become more vulnerable for exploitation when they work in this sector. Their problems cannot be redressed unless government pay attention to their issues and regulate this work through law and its proper implementation. It is pertinent to mention here that during interviews, when they were asked about their future they showed believe in fate. This shows that there is lack of pragmatic approach among them. It was also noted that there was also lack of awareness among them. So, only laws cannot empower them there is a need of pragmatic approach and eternal vigilance on the part of these women otherwise their fate will not change. If the social and economic conditions of woman are better, it will not only create a just society but also improve economy of country. As the conditions of women in general and female domestic workers in particular are intricate and critical, it needs a multi-pronged solution. The problems of domestic workers can be solved through preventive, regulating and rehabilitating measures.

### **Preventive Measures**

During the research, it has been observed that poverty and lack of resources are very important reasons that push the women to join such under paid sector i.e., domestic service. In order to prevent women from joining such professions different efforts should be made. Programs like Benazir Income Support program, low interest loans, free education and health facilities should be provided to the women. However, provision of education is very important because on the one hand it will give awareness to the women and on the other hand it will give better opportunities of work to these women. In this connection, enactment of laws for the education of young girls and women and awareness campaign should be initiated. Apart from it, through joint ventures employment opportunities for women should be provided because when there is no other economic opportunity, woman especially migrated and illiterate ends up in joining domestic service sector. As it has been informed by respondents that they want some other jobs so, vocational training is very important will help them in getting some respectable jobs with decent wages. In addition to it, a consensus should be made among different segments of society about population control because large family size is another important factor that forces women to work as domestic servants. Print and electronic media should be used for spreading awareness among people about population control. However, migration from rural areas should also be controlled by providing good economic opportunities in rural areas. As 74% of the respondents were migrants from villages to Lahore.

### **Regulating Measures:**

This sector accommodates large number of unskilled and illiterate women and can be a good source of employment. It becomes a nuisance due to unregulated nature of this work. So, In order to regulate this work laws should be enacted. Laws will give protection to these women from exploitation because then it will not remain a private matter of employers and employees. However, only enactment of laws is not sufficient rather they should be implemented in letter and spirit. Then effective and speedy judicial system is also equally important so that these women can instantly get justice in case of any abuse or exploitation. As these women lack awareness about their rights, there should be awareness campaign through media and NGO's. People should also be sensitized about the exploitation of these woman workers. In addition to it, there should be a proper written contract between employers and employees and a copy of this contract should be sent to police officer of that area or to social welfare office. Their payments should be electronic or documented so that they cannot be economically exploited. Then there should be strong networking of these workers because it will give them strength. Though in 2015, a trade union has been made yet amongst 54 respondents there is not even a single woman who knows about it. In addition to it, labour inspection system should also be strengthened so that nothing wrong can be done against such women workers. For true empowerment of women awareness and solidarity among women are very important.

## **Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community**

### **Rehabilitating Measures**

As far as rehabilitating measures are concerned, there should be shelter homes for women in case they are homeless or divorced. During research, it has been found that there are some workers who are victim of violence and some are divorced and due to lack of resources they have joined this profession. So, these shelter homes will thwart them from joining exploitative work. These shelter homes should give vocational training to the women so that they can do some decent jobs. Then a helpline for domestic workers like 15, 1122 etc., should be established so that they can instantly report any abuse or exploitation. Refresher course for the staff of labour department should also be arranged particularly to address the problems of this segment of society. Furthermore, these women should be provided free legal assistance. As these women are already poor it becomes impossible for them to file any case and pay for legal assistance even if there is any exploitation by their employer. So, free legal assistance can help them to speak against any injustice or exploitation by their employers. If stated measures are not taken then these women will continue to be abused and exploited and never be an empowered person of the society.

## References

- Akram Mubashir . (3 Jan, 2018,). “Let the women work,” *Daily Times*.
- Burnett John, (1974). *The Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working Class People, 1820-1920*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Butt Khalid Manzoor , Victor Tabita. (2014). Women empowerment by local representation: A case study of Lahore. *Journal of Political Science*, vol. XXXII, pp: 68
- “Domestic Workers (The Care Economy )”, <http://www.ilo.org>. accessed on 10 August, 2018.
- Fish, Jennifer N. (2017). *Domestic Workers of the world Unite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- “Guidelines on Women’s Empowerment” [www.un.org>guide>idthwemp.gdl.html](http://www.un.org/guide/idthwemp.gdl.html). Accessed on, 1 September, 2017.
- “(History crunch “Role of Women in Industrial Revolution”)” [www.historycrunch.com](http://www.historycrunch.com). Accessed on 10 June , 2018
- Hudson Pat. (2011). *History-Women’s Work*, BBC 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011. Retrieved from: [www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorian/womens\\_work](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorian/womens_work). accessed on 5 September, 2018
- Joyce, Burette. (2008.) *Women Workers in the British Industrial Revolution*. EH.Net, Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/women-workers-in-the-british-industrial-revolution/>. Accessed on 8 september, 2018.
- Keele Rebacca. (2011). *Nursing Research and Evidence Based Practice: Ten steps to success*. London: Jones and Barlett Learning press.
- Mandal Keshab Chandra. (2000). *Concept and Types of Women Empowerment*. international forum of teaching and studies, vol. 9, issue-2, pp: 19
- Peter J. & Wolper, A. (Eds). (1995). *Women Rights human rights international feminist perspective* London: Routledge.
- Rao, V.K.R.V. (2017). *Swami Vivekananda: Builders of Modern India*. India: Publication Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Pp-3
- Retrieved from: ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189, 2011.
- Siddiqi Usman Amin, (2015). *Examining Women Empowerment through Representation in Pakistan*. In UP Sinha (Eds.), *Exploring the Engagement and Empowerment of Women* (pp.56).New Delhi: Concept publishing Company.
- Torchin William M.K. (2007). *Research Method Second Edition*. New Dehli: Biztantra Atomic Dog Publisher.