Chapter 5

WORK AND WORK CONDITIONS OF THE WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

The chapter deals with the nature of work of domestic workers, work conditions and their problems. Domestic work is one of the main occupations of women worldwide. For many women it is one of the very few options for paid employment. Most of the women come from the poorer sections of society. Domestic workers are not normally considered as workers and their working conditions remain unregulated. Their employment situation is considered not fit in the general framework of existing employment laws. This is because most work done by them is generally invisible, done in houses of private persons. These workers have no benefits of work contracts, social security, and security of employment, wage increment, paid leave or medical facilities. Domestic workers are employed for household chores like cooking, cleaning (dusting, sweeping and moping the house), washing (clothes and / or utensils), ironing ,shopping, running errands, child care, care of the aged or disabled etc (Bharat Jyoti 2008). Domestic work takes place in isolated and private environment, which itself insulates the occupation from many workplace-specific issues. The fragmented nature of their work, the manifold tasks, and the multiplicity of employers and the instability of employment pose challenges for these workers. There is no uniformity in the hours of work, number of working days and other conditions of work. Wages vary across regions and even by locality in the same town/city. Apart from the variation across larger divisions such as cook, cleaner and baby sitter, wage rates vary within these as well, depending on a number of factors, ranging from purely personal to market–related parameters (Neetha 2010). Most of the domestic workers work seven days a week with no concept of a day-off. There is no uniformity in the hours of work, the number of working days and other conditions of work. Even sick leave or negotiated leave often results in a cut in wages. There is no security of employment and they can be dismissed at any time for reasons

the employers know. There are no provisions for any social security in terms of provident fund, health insurance or pension (Neetha 2010). Most domestic work, especially by women is informal, that is, it is performed outside the realm of labour regulations and social protections. They have no access to any form of childcare services. They often leave their own children alone while they go to take care of others' children. In their study on paid care workers, Palriwala and Neetha (2009) note that domestic workers highlight their lack of access to institutional care facilities that provide quality care at affordable rates in their neighborhoods. Some of these women work as domestic workers over long period of time, but have little or no savings for their old age. They are not entitled to any old-age pensions, gratuity or bonus. They have no medical insurance and all expenses of illness, hospitalization of self and family are borne by the worker. Neither do they have any coverage for childbirth, injury at work place or loans to build houses or other social responsibilities. Such loans or grants, as all other benefits, depend on their relations with the employer and the employer's goodwill. No data is available on older domestic workers.

Though domestic workers have been included in the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 (Act 33 of 2008), they have not yet got any benefits. Even in Maharashtra, the Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act 2008 has not been implemented. Domestic workers seldom have an organised mechanism for collective bargaining. Last three decades have seen the emergence of organisations and social activists working with domestic workers to organize them (into groups and unions), empowering them and advocating for their rights. For example, the National Domestic Workers Movement has branches in 23 states in India. They focus on the dignity of domestic work, empowerment of workers through justice, abolition of child domestic labour, crisis intervention and prevention of trafficking. Organisations such as Vidarbha Molarkin Sangathana were established in1980 in Nagpur and today works in ten cities in Maharashtra. Pune District Molkarin Sangathan works with part-timers in the city on issues of weekly off, fair wages and increments. Relatively new organisations such as

LEARN and Mahila Kaamgar Sangathana are also state-specific and have branches in Mumbai, Nasik, Solapur and Nagpur. Both these organisations work with domestic workers to organize into self-help groups and formalise their struggle for wages, dignified livelihood and recognition as workers. Domestic Workers Rights Union in Karnataka undertook a study to conceptualize fair wages. Besides advocacy on the rights of domestic workers, they have a data base of workers in select areas, and handle cases of different forms of violence against domestic workers. Other organisations such as Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Union worked for the inclusion of domestic workers in Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Act. Manushi Domestic Workers Union and Arunodaya Domestic Workers Union in Chennai focus on, among other issues, registration of domestic workers with sectoral board and management of wage-related disputes. Organisations such as Rajasthan Mahila Kamgaar Union organize domestic workers in Jaipur with a focus on their empowerment, wage disputes, rescue of child domestic workers and violence faced by domestic workers at their workplace and home. Such organisations are working towards empowering domestic workers and ensuring that they are not without agency and can challenge the domination of employers. Besides the rights of workers, few organisations such as Astitva, Dehradun, provide childcare facilities for children of domestic workers. The efforts of such organisations and activists have led to the inclusion of domestic workers in Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982 and the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 (Act 33 of 2008) as well as the passing of the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act 2008. Notifications on minimum wages for domestic workers have been issued by states such as Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. There is a considerable debate among activists and experts on calculation of wages –whether wage should be based on 'need-based formula' or should it be a living wage, including in-kind payment or be based on time or piece-rate? Further, over the years, attempts have been made to have a national legislation for domestic workers. Currently,

different organisations and campaigns are working towards different draft bills. These are under the aegis of the National Commission of Women, National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Sector Workers, SEWA and recently by the Domestic Workers Rights Campaign (DWRC). Various draft bills deliberate on the registration of workers, employers and agencies, regulation of work and wages, social security and enforcement mechanisms. Exploitation of women domestic workers in foreign countries has been documented by organisations such as Arunodaya Migrants Initiative, Chennai. Those who migrate are often subjected to torturous conditions by their employers who keep their passports, leaving no option for these domestic workers. The problem is further compounded in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries as none of them cover domestic work under their labour laws. The Government of India has imposed an age limit of 30 years for women domestic workers to migrate overseas. The Government of India created a new Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2005 to take responsibility for Indian migrants overseas, especially the labour migration issues. Organisations working with migrant workers demand that there should be a comprehensive legal recognition and protection of migrant workers that includes employment contracts, bilateral agreements, national laws and regulations in both the sending and receiving countries besides international human rights conventions and treaties. With respect to domestic workers, 'home' should be recognised as work place and laws should address issues of confinement, withholding of documents, denial of access to communication, no breaks during working hours and denial of the right to free movement. MOIA has undertaken an awareness campaign about the rules and regulations for domestic workers in foreign countries on major television channels (Mehrotra 2010). Women's issues, of late, are receiving immense attention across the globe. Seminars, conferences, workshops etc, are being organised at various international, national or regional platforms. The focal point of such discussions often revolves around the subject of women's empowerment which has become a matter of serious concern for the policy makers. The focus of this chapter is upon issues concerning women's work

and work conditions with reference to Silchar town. It brings out various aspects related to the work and work conditions of women domestic workers in the town. The chapter is divided into two sections; viz; nature of work and work conditions. The domestic work comprises job status and types of work activities.

I
NATURE OF THE WOMEN'S DOMESTIC WORK

Women domestic workers enter this sector of economy either as part time workers or as full -time workers. Generally part-timers are live out domestic workers and live-in workers are full-timers. In Silchar town, most of the respondents work as part-timers and few work as full-timers, however, none of them are live-in workers. All of them are live-out workers because they belong to the same town of small size. The following table shows the job status among women domestic workers:

Table 5.1
Work –Job Status among Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Job Status	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
Part-Time	10 (100)	157 (100)	7 (87.5)	174 (99.43)	4 (16)	178 (89)
Full-Time	-	-	1 (12.5)	1 (0.57)	21 (84)	22 (11)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

The table explains that over four fifths (89%) of the women domestic workers are engaged on part time basis and the rest (11%) of them are full time workers. 84% of the Muslim women domestic workers work as full timers. It was

noticed that they spent the entire day in the employer's house looking after their household chores. They are treated as their own family members, therefore, even though there is no job description they carry on doing odd jobs like taking cows for grazing and in-between tying them at some other place where there is grass, cleaning courtyard, helping mistress in cooking, setting table and if guests arrive they do all the cooking since house mistress gives company to guests. They are paid very little but they are happy because beginning with the breakfast tea they get two meals from employers. Since the distance is not much, they pay a visit to their own house just to see what their children are doing or how the elderly persons stay in the house. Whenever they have some other engagement they are given leave the whole day or half day as per their need.

Part time work or full time work, these women domestic workers had to serve for their employers and simultaneously manage their own family affairs. The widows and divorcees in particular have total responsibility of their own housework. The following table shows the number of houses they work to earn their daily living:

Number of Houses Daily Served

It all depends on the amount of money the women domestic workers receive in the form of salary, their family income and the need of monetary help to their families which drive them for undertaking this job as well as number of houses taken for rendering service. The following table shows the women domestic workers by number of houses they daily visited to deliver their services:

Table 5.2
Women Domestic Workers by Number of Houses Where They Delivered Daily Service by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

No. of Houses Delivered Services Daily	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
One	4 (40)	60 (38.22)	3 (37.5)	67 (38.29)	21 (84)	88 (44)
Two	3 (30)	40 (25.48)	2 (25)	45 (25.71)	4 (16)	49 (24.5)
Three	3 (30)	33 (21.02)	3 (37.5)	39 (22.29)	-	39 (19.5)
Four	-	15 (9.55)	-	15 (8.57)	-	15 (7.5)
Five	-	9 (5.73)	-	9 (5.14)	-	9 (4.5)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012

The table highlights that 44% each of the women domestic workers work in one house daily 24.5% of them work in two houses daily; 4.5 % work in 5 houses daily and over half (56%) work in more than one house with the intention of earning more income to support the family, to look after the needs of the children and their own needs. Since they are paid very low wages the situation compels them to work in more than one house daily, besides the same work done for their own family.

Thus, majority of the women domestic workers work in 2-3 houses a day. And a very few of the domestic women workers are engaged as full time workers in one house and their wages depend on the number of working hours.

Types of Work-Activities

Types of work-activities carried out by the women domestic workers depend upon the employer's economic status. If the employer belongs to upper class, then, he is capable of employing more than one worker and divides the domestic work between/ among them accordingly. The women enter into the work not according to their taste but according to the need of the employer. The following table shows the types of work-activity done by women domestic workers:

Table 5.3
Types of Work –Activities Done by Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Work-activity	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
Washing clothes, cleaning utensil, sweeping and mopping etc	8 (80)	109 (69.43)	4 (50)	121 (69.14)	4 (16)	125 (62.5)
Washing clothes , cleaning utensil, sweeping, mopping and Cooking	2 (20)	48 (30.57)	4 (50)	54 (30.86)	21 (84)	75 (37.5)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012

The table reveals that 62.5% of the women domestic workers do washing clothes, sweeping/ mopping, cleaning utensil etc and the rest (37.5%) are engaged

in washing clothes, sweeping/ mopping, cleaning utensils and cooking. Normally full time women domestic workers are engaged in cooking.

It was reported that from among the Hindu women domestic workers who are engaged in cooking or helping the mistress in kitchen normally do not clean bath rooms/toilets. To do this menial job, employers engage someone else. Therefore, in some employers' houses there are two or three domestic helpers. It depends on the size and/or economic status of the family. If both the persons go to office or are doing other job , or there is a new born baby in the family, then, house mistress has no time to take care of the kitchen etc. and in such circumstances they employ more than one domestic helper .

Of the Hindu Scheduled Caste community, 30.57% are engaged in cooking which also tells these employers are quite broad-minded in the sense that they have no problem if a Scheduled (low) caste helper enters their kitchen and cooks or helps in cooking food for them. If the house mistress is ill or has some other job, then, these women domestic workers are allowed to perform worship in the Puja Ghar of the house and burn incense sticks.

Of the Muslim women domestic workers, 84% are engaged in cooking food and they are full timers who have to do all the household works. They do not have any prescribed job. They are engaged in any of the household works deemed important by the employer.

Length of Domestic Work-Job

The length of domestic work depends upon the satisfaction of the worker as well as the employer. If the women domestic workers are not happy, they leave the job on their own and if the employer is not happy with the kind of work done by the women domestic worker or for any other reason s/he may turn off the women domestic worker. The following table shows the domestic service experience of women domestic workers:

Table 5.4
Domestic Service Experience of Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Length of Domestic Work (in Years)	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
< 5	3 (30)	57 (36.30)	3 (37.5)	63 (36)	7 (28)	70 (35)
6-10	1 (10)	54 (34.39)	2 (25)	57 (32.57)	3 (12)	60 (30)
11-15	4 (40)	21 (13.38)	2 (25)	27 (15.43)	6 (24)	33 (16.5)
16-20	2 (20)	8 (5.10)	-	10 (5.71)	6 (24)	16 (8)
21-25	-	17 (10.83)	1 (12.5)	18 (10.29)	3 (12)	21 (10.5)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012

The table reveals that of the 200 respondents over one third (35%) have taken up this job as maids in less than 5 years ago, nearly one third (30%) have joined this sector of economy 6-10 years ago and nearly one fifth (16.5%) have joined this sector more than 11-15 years ago and one tenth (10.5%) have been working for about 16-25 years.

The work experience in this sector of economy has nothing to do with the wage or any other benefit to the women domestic workers. Working as a maid servant for about 16-25 years has not made any improvement in the living condition of the women domestic workers and has not changed their life style either. Even then, the children or parents themselves have no great ambitions in life. Majority of them are of the opinion that poor people have no dreams of better tomorrow.

II

WORK CONDITIONS OF THE WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

Work conditions of the domestic workers include work hours, wages, leave, benefits, medical treatment, meals received in a day and so on. These are being analysed in case of the women domestic workers in Silchar town.

Working Hours

Number of working hours depicts the women domestic workers' vulnerability and also weak bargaining power. The following table shows the daily working hours of women domestic workers:

Table 5.5
Daily Working Hours of Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

No. of Daily Working Hours	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
1-2	3 (30)	38 (24.20)	1 (12.5)	42 (24)	4 (16)	46 (23)
3-4	-	22 (14.01)	1 (12.5)	23 (13.14)	-	23 11.5)
5-6	1 (10)	39 (24.84)	1 (12.5)	41 (12.57)	-	41 (20.5)
7-8	6 (30)	58 (36.94)	4 (50)	68 (38.86)	-	68 (34)
Whole day	-	-	1 (12.5)	1 (11.43)	21 (84)	22 (11)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012

The table shows that nearly three fourths (68%) of the women domestic workers work for 7-8 hours a day, one third (34%) of the women domestic workers work for 7-8 hours daily and about one fourth (23%) work for 1-2 hours daily. Only over one fourth (11%) of them are working whole day as full time workers.

The workers who work for 7-8 hours a day said that the houses in which they work are not located closely, due to the distance between the houses they work it takes more time to go and come back. They count the hours from the time they leave their house until they return.

Of the 68 women domestic workers who work for 7-8 hours, 58 (36.94%) are Hindu SCs and the rest are Muslim.

Monthly Income

Income decides the social status and living standard of people. It helps people avail facilities and comforts of life. The following table presents the income groups of the women domestic workers:

Table 5.6
Monthly Income of Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Income-group (in Rs.)	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
< 500	-	27 (17.20)	1 (12.5)	28 (16)	16 (64)	44 (22)
500-1000	5 (50)	41 (26.12)	2 (25)	48 (27.43)	6 (24)	54 (27)
1000-2000	5 (50)	82 (52.22)	5 (62.5)	92 (52.57)	2 (8)	94 (47)
2000-3000	-	7 (4.46)	-	7 (4)	1 (4)	8 (4)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

The table shows that (47%) of the women domestic worker's monthly income is between Rs 1000-2000 and 27% earn Rs. 500-1000. Over one fifth (22%) earn less than Rs.500 per month and only 4% earn Rs.2000-3000.Thus, half of them earn up to Rs 1000/- per month and almost all earn up to Rs 2000/-

Around two fifths, each, of the SC and OBC and Over four fifths of the Muslim workers earn up to Rs.1000/- per month. Only among the SC workers over a half earns Rs.1000-2000/- per month.

Meals Received

Condition in which these women domestic workers are exposed is revealed by the treatment that is meted out to them by the employer. If they get any meal for the labour that they give speaks of the good will and understanding and also the attitude of the employer towards the workers. It is reasonable that women domestic workers should get refreshment like tea, bread etc. and minimum one time food at work place, irrespective of their nature of work. Some of the workers received one meal a day and some of them received two meals a day. Generally they are given rice, dal and vegetables; On the other hand, breakfast is common for all of them, i.e., tea and biscuits or sometimes roti with tea. So, the following table shows the number of time that the women domestic workers take meal in the employer's house. The following table reveals the number of daily meals received by women domestic workers:

Table 5.7
Number of Daily Meals Received by Women Domestic Workers at Employer's House by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

No. of Daily Meals Received	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SCs	OBCs			
Once	5 (50)	67 (42.68)	3 (37.5)	75 (42.86)	15 (60)	90 (45)
Twice	4 (40)	62 (39.49)	1 (12.5)	67 (38.29)	7 (28)	74 (37)
Thrice	-	4 (2.55)	3 (37.5)	7 (4)	3 (12)	10 (5)
No meal	1 (10)	24 (15.29)	1 (12.5)	26 (14.86)	-	26 (13)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012

The table reveals that over two fifths of the women domestic workers received a single meal a day in the employers' houses, 37% received two meals daily 5% received three meals daily and only 13% did not receive meal in their work place for personal reason of their own. Women domestic workers are generally engaged in two types of works; namely, washing and cleaning and some others are engaged in washing, cleaning and cooking. They do have grievances against the employers. Many employers treated their domestic maids as family members. Of 200 respondents 131 (65.5%) said that the employers treated them like their own family members

III

PROBLEMS OF THE DOMESTIC WOMEN WORKERS AT WORK-PLACE

For the millions of women and girls in exploitative domestic work- overworked, underpaid, isolated, constantly belittled, often violently punished, sometimes raped, and even pushed to suicide - the recognition and defense of their human and labour rights is an urgent necessity. A new international standard is on the anvil that will socially recognise domestic work as work and regulate the rights and duties of household workers and employers. At its 301st session in March 2008, the Governing Body of the ILO responded favourably to the call of the international trade union movement to put the issue of domestic work on the agenda of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2010. Indeed, the exploitation and abuse that many domestic workers face stems from the non-recognition of domestic work as work, from the hidden nature of the workplace and from the informality of the employment relationship. In the case of female domestic workers, it is rooted in gender discrimination, replacing as it does women's unpaid work in the houses. The tendency to undervalue work performed by women is accentuated in the case of domestic work by its low social status and the myth that no special skills are required to perform it. The non-recognition and lack of social protection that is characteristic of domestic work is a major obstacle to achieving the International Labour Organization's (ILO) goal of decent work for all men and women. The Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights of the ILO applies to domestic workers as to all other workers. So do several other conventions relating to employment, working conditions and social security. However, in the absence of a specific instrument on domestic work and the inherent difficulty in controlling working conditions in the private sphere of the household, many states either expressly exclude domestic work from the ambit of labour legislation or make no provisions to address the specific needs of domestic workers and their employers (D'Souza 2010). In 2010, the National Commission for Women drafted the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act to address the various problems faced by domestic workers. Taking cognizance of the issues particular to domestic work, the Act notes," Only a Comprehensive

Central Legislation specifically designed to meet the working condition of the domestic workers…can ensure the end of the exploitation of these domestic workers." Another important step towards the protection of domestic workers is the inclusion of domestic work under the schedule of protective statutes applicable to other categories of workers. The Final Report of the Task_Force on Domestic Workers (2011), commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the ILO, calls for domestic work as a category to be included in the Central List of Scheduled Employment. Doing so would enable the setting of standard measures for domestic workers that is applicable across all Indian states. This is especially useful for states that do not currently specify minimum wage levels for domestic workers. This recommendation could prove to be crucial to reforms, but is yet to be implemented. The lack of adequate alternative means of employment available in the labour market is worsened by the largely informal, and therefore unobservable, nature of most domestic work arrangements. Many times, poor women are left with no choice but to take up employment in unprotected, demeaning conditions. Given that all work is performed within the largely private space of a household, domestic workers are vulnerable to abuse and harassment. Sexual abuse, in particular, has become widespread: sexual abuse of domestic workers has become so rife that it took protests by the National Domestic Workers' Movement before the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Bill was updated in 2012 to include domestic workers as a category of employees under its protection.(website). Some of the work related problems are such as no special laws to protect the rights of domestic and household workers, no job description, excessively long working hours and too many things to do in one day, low pay and no overtime pay, limited access to social security, various forms of abuse from some employers - emotional, sexual and physical abuse, most of the physical abuse is from children of employers, some workers face sexual harassment and physical violence on the job, some workers are subject to forced labour, employers not contributing to statutory deductions such as contributions to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and wrongful dismissal: when a domestic worker is wrongful, one is dismissed. They have no legal means of redress except where the case represents a violation of

Minimum Wage Law. Most domestic workers have no job description. More or less all middle and upper class people employ preferably female domestic servants in their households. The female domestic works can be categorized as part time workers, full time workers and residential workers. Part time workers serve for 3-4 hours a day in a household. They work in 2-3 houses daily. However, number of households to be served by part time workers largely depends on their efficiency and capability to work. On the other hand, the full time workers serve in a single household for maximum duration of 8-10 hours daily which includes a part of idle time. The employers normally provide them one time meal. Often, part time workers demand for one time meal while there is a heavy workload. The residential workers stay at employers' houses and they are provided meal two times. The residential workers do all works of the employer's households.

In Silchar town, women domestic workers face many work-related problems like poor and unregulated terms and conditions of work; treatment given to them is contrary to the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the concept of "Decent Work for Domestic Workers". Some of the work –related problems are: No special laws to protect the rights of Domestic and Household Workers, No job description, excessively long working hours and too many things to do in a day, low pay and no overtime pay, limited access to social security, various forms of abuse from some employers- emotional and physical etc, most of the physical abuse is from children of the employers, forced labour, wrongful dismissal when the domestic worker is wrongfully dismissed they have no legal means of redress. The major problems faced by the women domestic servants at work place in Silchar town are as follows:

1. Low Wage Payment

All the women domestic workers are not satisfied with their present wages. By their dissatisfaction over the existing wage structure and desire for change in it these workers may be divided into two categories. First, the women domestic workers who are not satisfied with their present wages and they want increase in the wages for the work they carry out for their employers. Second, the women

domestic workers who are not satisfied with their present wages but they cannot express anything about the existing wage structure. The distribution of the women by levels of their dissatisfaction is given in the following table:

Table 5.8
Levels of Dissatisfaction over the Existing Wage Structure among Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Dissatisfaction	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SC	OBC			
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers	7 (70)	133 (84.71)	7 (87.5)	147 (84)	15 (60)	162 (81)
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers but not sure about any change required in wage structure	3 (30)	24 (15.29)	1 (12.5)	28 (16)	10 (40)	38 (19)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

The table reveals that 80% of the respondents clearly expressed their dissatisfaction over the existing wage structure and desired for increase in wages. The rest though dissatisfied with the existing wage structure did not express anything about change in their wage structure. In general they get Rs. 200- 250 per month for cleaning floor and washing clothes and Rs. 400-500 monthly for cooking food twice a day, but they expect at least Rs. 100-200 more per month for cleaning and washing, i.e., monthly wage of Rs 300- 400 and for cooking they expect a monthly wage of Rs 600/-, i.e., Rs 100- 200 more than the existing wage.

Thus, their wages are quite low and most of them want increase in their wages. However, they are helpless to demand the increase as it is up to the employers to consider the increase in wages. That is why a section of them does not even express any desire for increase in wages. This shows their helplessness; they have to work at employers' mercy for survival of themselves and their families.

Besides, these levels of dissatisfaction can be seen distributed over the two types of the work-activities; viz., (I) washing clothes, cleaning utensil, sweeping, moping etc and (II) washing clothes, cleaning, mopping and Cooking which require different amounts of time and labour. The distribution is given in the following two tables:

Table 5.9
Levels of Dissatisfaction over the Existing Wage Structure for the Work-Activity Type I by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Dissatisfaction	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SC	OBC			
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers	5 (71.43)	91 (57.96)	4 (57.14)	100 (57.14)	2 (13.33)	102 (62.96)
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers but not sure about any change required in wage structure	5 (50)	66 (42.04)	4 (50)	75 (42.86)	23 (92)	98 (49)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

Table 5.10

Levels of Dissatisfaction over the Existing Wage Structure for the Work-Activity Type II by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Dissatisfaction	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SC	OBC			
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers	2 (20)	42 (26.75)	3 (37.5)	47 (26.86)	13 (52)	60 (30)
Not satisfied with the present wages and want increase in the wages for the work being carried out for employers but not sure about any change required in wage structure	8 (80)	115 (73.25)	5 (62.5)	128 (73.14)	12 (48)	140 (70)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

The above tables (Type-I and Type-II) show levels of dissatisfaction among the WDWs in their work activities. The work-activities of type-I involves, washing clothes, cleaning utensil, sweeping, mopping etc and type II involves, washing clothes, cleaning, mopping and cooking which require different amounts of time and labour. The Data shows that out of 200 respondents 102 respondents

are in type–I work activities i.e. washing clothes, cleaning utensils, sweeping, mopping, etc., and 60 of the respondents are in type II work activities ,besides washing clothes, cleaning utensils, sweeping, mopping they do cooking also. Both type I and type II expressed that they are not happy/ satisfied with their present wages and they want increase in the wages for the work they carry out for their employers and they expect more.

Of 200 respondents 162 of the respondents are not satisfied with their present wages. Three fifth (62.96) of them are in type I work activities and one third (30) of them belong to type II work activities. Women who expect more wages in type I work activities, belong to Hindu General Caste category and type II work activities are Muslims.

2. Extra, Non-remunerated Work

Of the total respondents, 20 (10%) expressed their grievances for doing 'extra work' when guests come, for which they are not paid extra wage. Their distribution into the categories of extra work is given in the following table:

Table 5.11
Types of Extra Work Done by Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Extra Work	Hindu			Grand Total
	General	SC	OBC	
Washing clothes, cleaning utensil, sweeping and mopping etc	2 (50)	1 (7.14)	1 (50)	4 (20)
Washing clothes, cleaning mopping and Cooking	2 (50)	13 (92.86)	1 (50)	16 (80)
Total	4 (100)	14 (100)	2 (100)	20 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

The data show that out of 200 respondents, 20 have to do extra work whenever guests come. By extra work they mean more clothes to wash, more utensils for cleaning variety of food preparation etc. Four fifths (80%) of them have to cook, apart from washing cleaning , sweeping etc and the rest (20%) do washing, cleaning and sweeping etc. Majority of them belong to SC category.

3. Problem of Leave

All of the respondents get leave if they fall sick and inform the employer. However, they are granted leave by employers with much reluctance and sometimes even with threatening to cut wages or actual wage cut. The following table distributes the respondents into various categories of leave granted to them:

Table 5.12
Leave patterns among Women Domestic Workers by Religion and Caste Category

(Percentage in Parentheses)

Leave Pattern	Hindu			Total	Muslim	Grand Total
	General	SC	OBC			
Leave with wage	2 (20)	10 (6.37)	5 (62.5)	17 (9.71)	17 (68)	34 (17)
Leave without wage	1 (10)	2 (1.27)	-	3 (1.72)		3 (1.5)
Leave with threatening of wage cut but actually not cut	7 (70)	144 (91.72)	3 (37.5)	154 (88)	8 (32)	162 (81)
No leave at all		1 (0.64)				1 (0.5)
Total	10 (100)	157 (100)	8 (100)	175 (100)	25 (100)	200 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted from 1 July 2011 to 3 March 2012.

Out of 200 respondents majority (81.8%) of them reported that they get their Leave with threatening of wage cut but actually not cut. Nearly one fifth (17%) of them get their leave with wage and a few (1.5%) of them were given leave without wage, as a result of which these women domestic workers discontinued their work to that particular employer and just started working for another employer at the time of collecting the data. And only one respondent who left the work/job because she was not given the leave at all but she is looking for it. None of the employer is ready to part with their daily chores. They depend too much on the women domestic workers that they are reluctant to give leave even when it is a dire need. There is no job security; some of the employers keep on threatening every now and then, that the wages will be deducted. It is a mental torture since they are at the mercy of their employers.

4. Problem of Maltreatment

Women domestic workers who work in Silchar town are often victims of mal treatment of various types, like

(a) After their heavy work some of the employers do not give them food; even if they give it is of low quality or stale food so they do not eat (table no.5.7).

(b) Low wage: Women domestic workers are not satisfied with the wages they get, they expect more from their employers so that they are able to look after their children and other members of their families (table no.5.8).

(c) Non-remunerated work: when the employers give /engage them for extra work on certain occasions they do not give them any extra wage. They take these women for granted and are not kind and sensitive to their poor health, low financial condition etc (table no.5.12).

(d) Employers met out ill-treatment to their employees by not granting them leave when it is of great urgency, and treat them very rudely, and threaten them of deducting their wages, removing them from job, etc.

Thus, we can see the ill attitude the employers have towards their employees whose service is of great worth and value to them yet they do not want to acknowledge that they need these women domestic service to do every kind of work to them .Therefore they treat the women domestic workers in an inhuman way. On the other hand it is the ill- fate of women domestic workers that they are not treated with human dignity and have often become easy prey to the employer's ill treatment or mal- treatment. The women domestic workers' work condition in Silchar is not better than the rest of the country's domestic workers. The general problems faced by the women domestic workers at work place too are similar in nature. Most of the workers being less educated or illiterate the awareness among them to form union is lacking among them. As there is no such domestic servants' union, they cannot raise their voice against employer's exploitative attitude. The wages of the domestic workers may vary from one region to another. It is found that rate of wages in semi-urban areas is comparatively lower than urban areas. Economic compulsion is the main reason for taking up the job as domestic servant. The socio–economic condition of the respondents is not good and their life histories also reveal that they experienced the same condition at their young age. They face problems both at home and work place. At home they do not get the pleasant atmosphere which they need. At work place they have a heavy work load with less remuneration. They want to make a better future of themselves and their children. If not all the unorganized workers, all the women domestic workers and their children become the poorest people in the world.

In sum, all domestic women workers irrespective of their caste, religion, age etc have to work amidst all odds of life in their work place. Sometime, the employers as well as their children use very rude language. During their illness, there is no consideration or feeling of sympathy expressed by the employer. They

have to do the same work and for the same length of time. If they express their pain and agony and the need to go home early etc, the only solution the masters have is 'you can leave the job, I will get a new maid'. Therefore, they do not wish to tell the employer about their sufferings or problems at home. Domestic work is one of the main occupations of the poor women who are easily available. For many women it is the only option. Women who are illiterate and come from poorer section of the society look for some work to earn for their survival. Since the women domestic work has not yet been considered as work, they do not come under any labour laws. Their work is not regulated; there is no uniform law for the domestic workers. Therefore, even when they are not paid, ill-treated, abused, dismissed etc. no law can protect them. They have no security. No old age benefits as other workers receive after their retirement. As a result, this section of the society suffers much in the hands of the rich and middle class of the society. Due to lack of education & lack of awareness, lack of unionization, they are left to the employer to treat them like puppets in their hands. These poor, oppressed and neglected people of the society need to be taken care of by the Govt. Though they contribute to the national economy, it is not at all recognized or valued by any one. Only in the absence of their presence their importance is felt, otherwise they are not dealt with human dignity. This segment of the society faces a lot of problems in life both at work place and at their own homes. Therefore, it is right and just that the Government takes initiative to enact certain laws for the upliftment of unorganized labourers in general and women domestic workers in particular. The minimum wage should be given to them which will enable them to take care of themselves and their families. Work contracts should clearly specify the terms and conditions of the women domestic workers. Certain benefits should be given to the pregnant women and paid leave to those who give birth to babies. It will enable both the mother and the child to grow in an atmosphere of peace and love. Only then, the poor and the neglected sections of the society will feel that they are cared for and recognized and respected as human beings. Thus, all of them can live a peaceful and harmonious life in the

society. Domestic workers are highly exploited and denied just wages and humane working conditions all over the world. Domestic workers are paid well below the minimum wages for unskilled or semi-skilled workers. The working hours of domestic workers can go from 8 to over 18 hours day. Wages, leave facilities, medical benefits, and rest time are at the employer's mercy. Domestic workers are victims of suspicion and threat. If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction and even dismissal. Thus, it can be said that the woman domestic workers who contribute a lot to the national economy is paid back with unjust wages, inhuman treatment, and suppression and oppression in all possible ways. There is a need to help them to make their voice heard by all concerned particularly law makers of the nation, only then will it be possible to elevate them from the present condition of life.

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