

The Employers' Perspective towards Women Domestic Workers

Jyoti Gogia¹, Neha Sikarwar²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra-282005, U.P., India

²Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra-282005, U.P., India
jgogia07@gmail.com¹, bk.neha@hotmail.com²

Abstract

Home management is being considered as the prime responsibility of a woman. To raise the standard of living and to attain a sound economic base, participation of women in formal sector has increased. To create a balance between household and work, they have started looking for some helping hands. In this direction, domestic workers have become their hope to sustain life. It has been supposed that the household tasks can be efficiently performed by women only; therefore women domestic workers get priority over men to execute these responsibilities.

A sample consisting 150 employers, who have hired the services of women domestic workers, have been taken for the study. The data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire. A Five point Likert Scale(1= perfectly disagree to 5= perfectly agree) has been used. Averages and percentages were calculated to comprehend results.

The study reveals the factors responsible for the increasing demand for domestic workers in general, and demand for women domestic workers in particular. Further, it addresses the employers' perspective towards women domestic workers. It also highlights the problems which the employers have faced and the probable risks undertaken by them while hiring the women domestic workers

Keywords: Women Domestic Workers, Employers' Perspective, Market Demand, Problems, Threats

1. Introduction

Money plays a crucial role to improve the quality of life and enhance the standard of living. Thus, people do hard work to elevate and uphold their eminence in the society. Formerly, earning money and feeding family were considered as the responsibilities of the male members of the families; but presently the equation has been transformed. Earning income is no more merely a duty of men; rather women have started initiating correspondingly in nurturing their kin. Men and Women are moving forward together to triumph the pleasure of lushness.

Women's participation in paid employment has enriched their economic security and has heightened their societal eminence. The quest by most urban families to have improved quality of life and economic independence made them finding ways to enhance economic empowerment of women without compromising the needs of their family members. In such circumstances, the domestic workers have emerged as *knight in shining armor*.

Most families in pre-industrial and contemporary societies have had to engage domestic workers at one time or the other to assist with farm work, business, domestic activities, etc. Now, there has been an increasing trend of hiring domestic workers among career-centered families especially located in urbanized settings [1]. Thus, domestic workers' employment has been found positively correlated with female participation in labour force [2].

It is well known that every cloud has a silver lining. Likewise, the domestic workers who are savior on the one hand are perilous on the other. There have been many instances of employees' sinfulness towards employers and their folks. However, it would be obnoxious to allege every domestic worker with an impression of being an offender while hiring him/her, yet it is deemed to be a dicey charge. Employers' homes are exposed to domestic workers and there are possibilities where the latter can easily commit crimes like robbery, kidnapping which could further be extended up to murder. Undoubtedly, the support of domestic workers delivers a base for home management and

enhances the prospects for female labour participation, but to avoid mishap, it is required for employers to hire domestic workers with sufficient risk coverage.

Objectives

1. To analyze the demand determinants of domestic workers in general, and women domestic workers in particular.
2. To know the employers' perspective towards women domestic workers.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on primary data sources. To collect primary data, a self-administered questionnaire has been used. The data has been collected from 150 employers who have hired the services of women domestic workers. The respondents have been taken from the five localities of urban Agra viz. Dayalbagh, Kamla Nagar, Dhanauli, Khandari and Agra Cantonment. To know the problems and threats from women domestic workers to the employers, a Five point Likert Scale (1= perfectly disagree to 5= perfectly agree) was incorporated in the questionnaire. Averages and percentages were calculated to comprehend results.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Market Demand for Domestic Workers

Demand for domestic workers has increased globally because they provide essential services that enable working people to go out for job without worrying for their house chores. By becoming the part of labour force, domestic workers are supporting others to become the part of it. It has been found that the most of the employers in Agra have approached workers informally, and have not kept any written records of them. It reflects that Agra is still an informal market for hiring domestic services, which is a sign of risk for employers.

3.1.1. Nature of Work Preferred

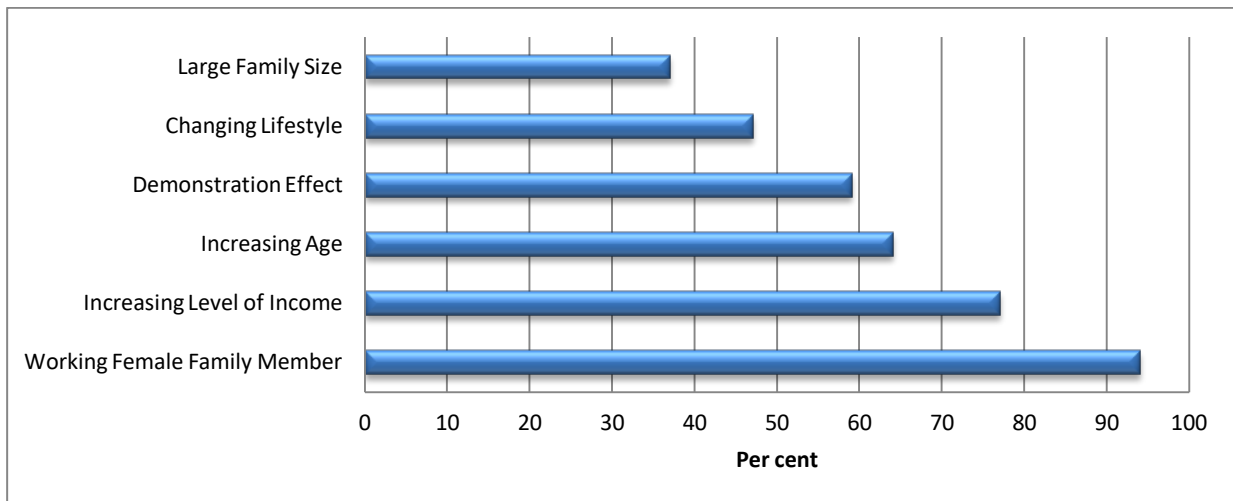
While hiring the services of domestic workers, people consider two important factors: the requirements of family members and the cost (wages) of workers. In this regard, the first and foremost decision they have to take is whether to hire a full-time or a part-time domestic worker. Eighty-two per cent employers prefer part-time workers whereas eighteen per cent employers desire to hire full-time workers. The domestic workers generally perform the routine household tasks like cleaning, mopping, and washing clothes, which are generally carried out for once in the morning hours of a day. Employers have revealed that full-time workers become a liability for them, as then, they have to provide them with all the necessary things like food, shelter, clothing, etc. This increases the cost of labour to the employers. They have also expressed that there is more risk with full-time workers because of their twenty-four hours presence at home.

3.1.2. Demand Determinants for Domestic Workers

Earlier, the female members of a family were responsible for taking care of household works. Hiring domestic workers was reserved for the rich segment of the society. Gradually, domestic workers have become need for many households. Their contribution in household management has reduced the excessive workload on female family members. There are various pull factors (Figure 1) responsible for the increasing demand for domestic workers.

It has been found that ninety-four per cent employers have hired domestic workers due to working of the female family members. Assistance by domestic workers has made them to work outside freely. Seventy-seven per cent employers have expressed that hiring domestic workers is positively correlated with their level of income. Earlier, when their income level was low, they were not able to bear the cost of hiring services of domestic workers. Increasing age is another prominent determinant. People need domestic workers as they become physically weak to perform household tasks at an older age. Demonstration effect, changing lifestyle, and large family size are other important factors responsible for increasing demand for domestic workers.

Figure 1. Driving Factors of the Demand for Domestic Workers



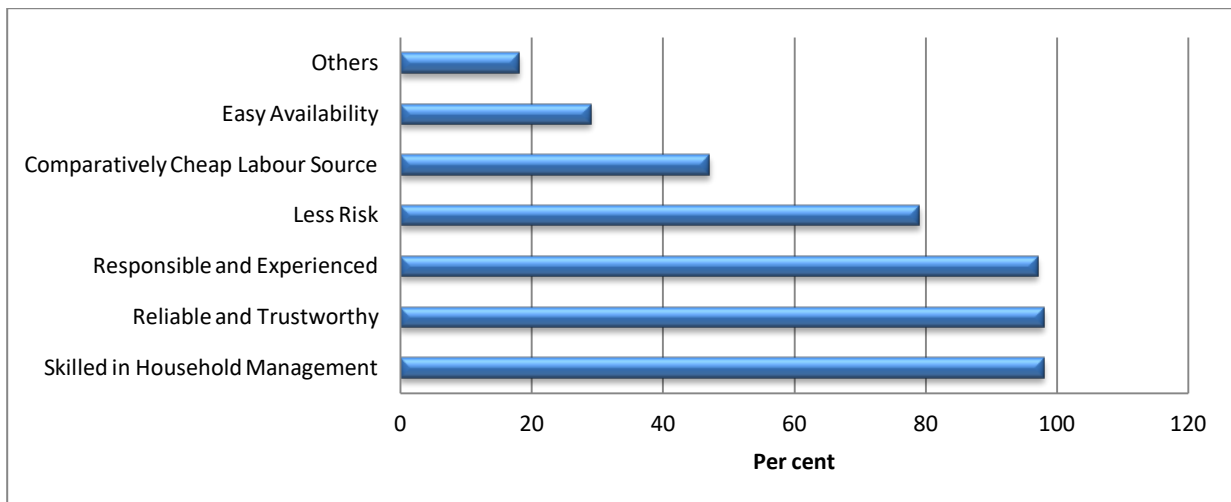
3.2 Demand for Women Domestic Workers

Demand for domestic workers has increased in general, but on analyzing gender-based demand, it has been found that demand for women domestic workers has increased significantly than that for men.

3.2.1. Demand Determinants for Women Domestic Workers

Employers are often gender biased while hiring domestic workers and they choose according to the nature of work. For typical household chores, people usually prefer women domestic workers. The various reasons behind this observation are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Factors Responsible for the Demand for Women Domestic Workers



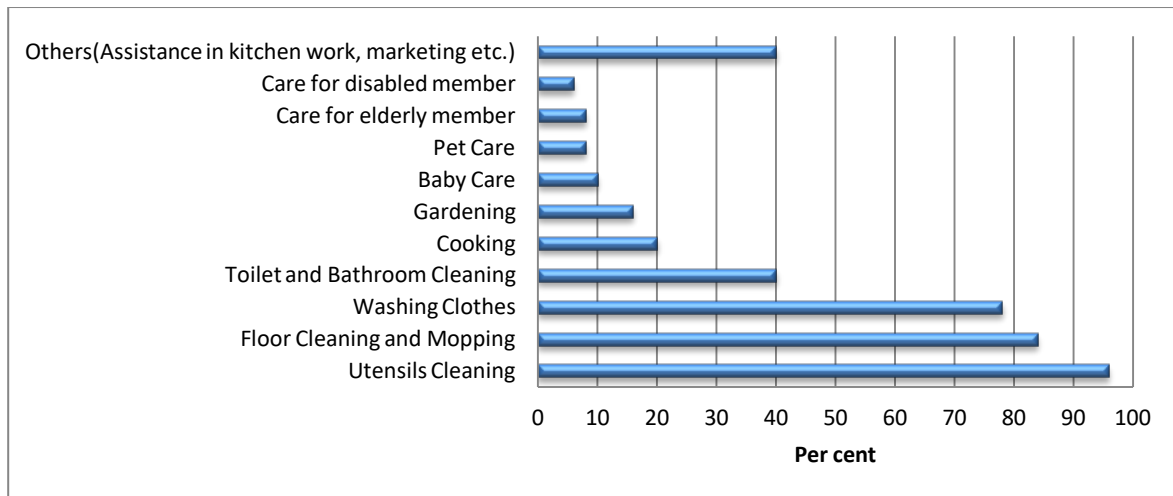
The employers opined that women domestic workers are skilled in household management. They do believe that only a woman can replace a woman. Most of the time, male members of the family are away from home for their job and there are females, children, and the elderly people that stay at home. Therefore, employers have found it appropriate to hire women domestic workers, as they have been considered more reliable and trustworthy. It has also been observed that women are more responsible and experienced in managing household tasks than men. Seventy-nine per cent employers believe that there is comparatively a less risk in hiring women domestic workers. Forty-seven per cent believe that hiring women domestic workers is relatively a cheaper source of labour. Employers

have also affirmed the statement that men are not easily ready to perform domestic works whereas women are easily available to share household responsibilities. Some other reasons, like, cool temperament of women domestic workers and their less revengeful attitude also support the women oriented demand while hiring the domestic workers.

3.2.2. Preferred Areas for Hiring Women Domestic Workers

People need assistance in performing day-to-day household activities such as cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, gardening, taking care of children and elderly people, etc. Figure 3 reflects the preferred areas of work for which the employers hire women domestic workers.

Figure 3. Preferred Areas for Hiring Women Domestic Workers



People primarily hire women domestic workers for cleaning of utensils followed by floor cleaning, mopping, and washing clothes. These three tasks are preferred altogether by most of the employers. On the other hand, care for pets, children, disabled and elderly persons are the least preferred tasks for hiring women domestic workers. On analyzing the cooking activity, it has been found that most of the people prefer to cook food for them because they are conscious on the part of their health and hygiene. For gardening purpose, people give priority to male workers rather than to females.

3.3 Employers’ Perspective towards Women Domestic Workers

The employer-worker relation primarily depends upon the employers’ perception towards employees. A healthy relation creates a positive environment and provides happiness to both. At the societal level, it is helpful to reduce the differences between workers and employers. The workplace for domestic workers is the house of employers; therefore, the work environment is quite different from other cases of employment. Apart from salary, every worker looks for other benefits and facilities. Hence, it is required to know the other facilities that workers receive from employers. The other important fact is to know that after spending many hours in a day with an employer’s family members at their home; how far domestic workers have succeeded to win the employer’s trust.

3.3.1. Facilities Provided to Women Domestic Workers

Every employer is supposed to provide certain facilities to their employees apart from the monetary income. Table 1 exhibits the extent of facilities, which are being given to women domestic workers.

Most of the employers invite their workers to participate in ceremonies. Eighty-six per cent employers have provided phone to make necessary calls any time. Seventy-four per cent give monetary help at the time of need, and approximately seventy-one per cent allow them to adjust tasks as per their convenience because they fear that if they would not permit then workers may quit their job. It has been found that sixty-one per cent do not allow watching television as they found it intrusive, when their workers sit with them to watch television; however, they

permit them occasionally. Forty-one per cent do not give freedom to eat whatever and whenever they like. Majority of employers have never allowed them to take shower at their homes. It shows that employers are helping workers monetarily, but they do not like to keep close relations with them (i.e. to consider them as a family member). Importantly, most of the employers do not have the provision of scheduled leaves for their employees (women domestic workers) which is a prominent sign of informal structure of work environment.

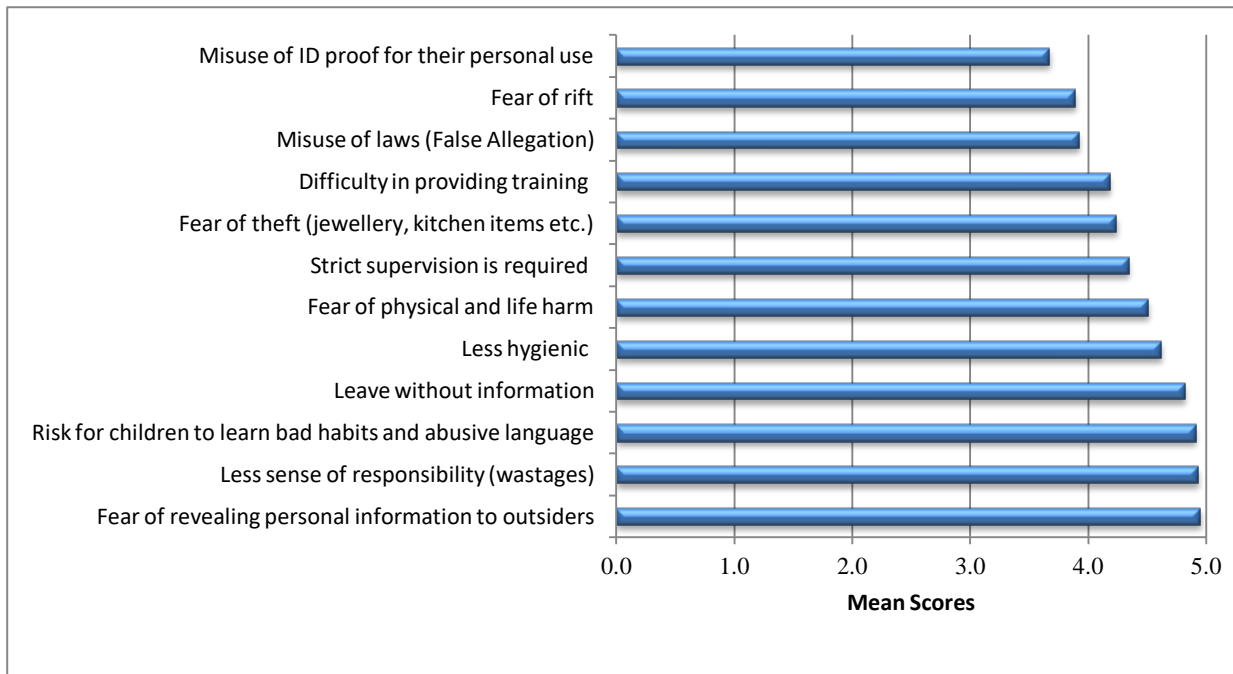
Table 1. Facilities provided to Women Domestic Workers

| Parameters | Per cent | | |
|---|----------|------|-----------|
| | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| Facility of scheduled leaves | - | 97.3 | 2.7 |
| Facility to take shower/bath | 2.7 | 96.0 | 1.3 |
| Facility to eat food | 34.7 | 40.7 | 24.6 |
| Facility to watch television | 8.0 | 61.3 | 30.7 |
| Facility to use phone | 86.0 | - | 14.0 |
| Facility to borrow money | 74.0 | - | 26.0 |
| Facility to adjust tasks as per convenience | 70.7 | 29.3 | - |
| Facility to participate in ceremonies | 90.0 | - | 10.0 |

3.3.2 Problems and Threats from Women Domestic Workers

It would be unjust to undermine the role of domestic workers, but in some cases, they have been proved to be double edge swords. People hire workers for assistance but sometimes it turns out to be a very risky deal. Workers may cause various problems and threats to employers which have been examined through Figure 4.

Figure 4. Problems and Threats from Women Domestic Workers



The major fear of a professional mother is for her child that he/she might learn bad habits and abusive language from nannies and other helpers in her absence. The fear has extended up to the possibility of committing an offence like kidnapping and murder which is a high life risk. Domestic workers find easy route for such unlawful activities because they have full access to employers’ homes and family members. With the course of time, workers become familiar with the place of keeping jewelry, cash, and important documents. Thus with a criminal plot, they can easily

steal expensive belongings and identity proofs for further carrying illegal activities. Apart from the discussed risks, a major jeopardy that almost all employers face is leakage of personal information to outsiders and neighbours. On one hand, this increases the possibility of criminal offence and on the other hand, it leads to misperceptions and chaos with the neighbours, thereby creating rift in relationships. The core of the problem suggests that domestic workers are fascinated by the lavish lifestyle of employers and they often commit crimes in a haste to earn that prosperity with less time and effort.

Employers have perceived that domestic workers are less hygienic and have less sense of responsibility that fallout in wastages of soap, detergent, water, etc. Therefore, often-strict supervision is required, which is again stressful and time taking. Women domestic workers generally take leave without any prior information, which forms complicated situations for working employers to manage spontaneously. Providing training to domestic workers as per the culture and environment of the family is another strenuous task as their intelligence quotient is not so high to understand and learn things easily and quickly. In addition, by the time they are trained, they switch over to another job.

4. Conclusion

In developing and developed countries alike, the domestic work sector absorbs significant numbers of workers, many of them belong to the poorest segments of society with little access to other work or employment, generally as a result of limited educational opportunities [3]. Undoubtedly, women domestic workers have brought comfort to the working women by looking after their homes in their absence. With the increasing demand of domestic workers, especially women domestic workers, the government and policy makers are paying attention to the conditions of workers and their rights. The image of exploited, underpaid and overloaded women domestic workers have been highlighted through some studies, but the employers' perspectives, their problems and threats have been absolutely ignored.

Domestic workers' market is completely informal in nature. Furthermore, there are less formal agencies that by regulating the work environment are taking care of the welfare of both the domestic workers and the employers. If it is needed to uplift the domestic workers by providing them better life and preventing them from employers' exploitation; then it is also required to provide safe and smooth life to their employers.

5. References

1. G.Tayo. Domestic Employment in Career Centered Families: A Case Study of Covenant University Ota, Nigeria. Nigeria: *IFE center for psychological studies, ILE-IFE*, 2008; 6(1), P172-1730.
2. A.Fakih, W.Marrouch. Determinants of Domestic Workers' Employment: Evidence from Lebanese Household Survey Data.ftp.iza.org/dp6822.pdf. Date accessed: 2012.
3. ILO. International Labour Organisation, Report of the Committee on Domestic Workers, Provisional Record No. 12, *International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010*, 204-211.

The Publication fee is defrayed by Indian Society for Education and Environment (www.iseedyar.org)

Cite this article as:

JyotiGogia, Neha Sikarwar. The Employers' Perspective towards Women Domestic Workers. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development*. Vol 4 (5), May 2016.