

In-Household and Workplace Working Experiences of Housemaids Under Patriarchal Framework in Suburban Areas of Lahore

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Abstract

Although countless housemaids work in Pakistan, their working experiences are missing from published literature. Therefore, the present study explores the working experiences of housemaids in suburban areas of Lahore while employing the framework of patriarchy and women's autonomy. The researcher applied exploratory research design in the present study and collected data from 35 housemaids living in suburban areas of Lahore using a semi-structured interview guide as a data collection tool. The findings indicated that housemaids face negative consequences in-house and in the workplace. In the workplace, facing segregation of strict gender roles inside their household and a lack of autonomy and decision-making power despite financial contribution and masculine control over their mobility. They are facing patriarchal norms and values inside their families and facing verbal, physical and sexual bullying, mental health (depression & anxiety) and discrimination at their workplace. Housemaids were facing segregation of strict gender roles inside their household and a lack of autonomy and decision-making power despite financial contribution and masculine control over their mobility.

Keyword: Bullying, Mental Health, Patriarchy, Autonomy, House Maids, Work Experiences.

Introduction

The present study aims to explore the working experiences of housemaids in suburban areas of Lahore while employing the framework of patriarchy and women's autonomy. In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, the role of women in meeting basic household expenditures are largely less studied and it is considered the responsibility of the male member of household to work outside and earn livelihood for the family (Andersen et al., 2013). However, women are found working in both livestock and agricultural activities with male members of household in rural sites. On the other hand, literature women of urban areas are increasing in formal job sector and their workplace experiences are well documented by many scholars (Hashmi et al., 2007; Herrero et al., 2013). Urban well-off families and even upper middle class families need external support for fulfilling household chores (Grünenfelder, 2013). These tasks are performed by illiterate and less educated population living in urban slums. They after performing their own routine household duties, work as housemaid with one and/or more than one family in urban housing schemes. Most of the time, this population of housemaid include adults married women, young unmarried women and

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children less than eighteen years of their age (Shamim et al., 2014). There are multiple agreements between these employers and employees. Some of the housemaids return to their own home after performing their assigned duties i.e. washing clothes, cleaning the house, cleanliness of kitchen etc. On the other hand, housemaids also have fixed working hours and flexible working hours to perform their housemaid's tasks. However Zakir claimed that the number of housemaids is increasing day by day as there are countless housemaids working in Pakistan as only in Lahore there are more than 800,000 housemaids.

Housemaids are most of the time illiterate and belong to the poor families living in suburban areas and nearby villages. By working as housemaid, they contribute financially in their household income along with their male family members. For earning more and more money they work in many houses on different times and many of them work from dawn to dusk (Shamim et al., 2014). However, their duties are manual and include physical labor. Despite their contribution in household income, patriarchal norms and values operate over their gender identities. In addition, they might also face challenge of their autonomy because of patriarchal environmental factors (Gbaguidi & Kassin, 2018).

Housemaids have to perform multiple duties both inside and outside of their home. In their own homes, they have to perform household chores and outside of their home, they work to earn livelihood. However, their contributions both inside and outside of their homes are less regarded as compared to their male counterparts (Christensen, 2012). Literature indicates that such women face discrimination, lack of decision making power in their own houses. On the contrary, they might face abusive language, verbal and sexual bullying at their workplace as housemaid. It means that powerful patriarchal norms and values do not spare women inside their own home and outside at their workplace. They have to face gender role stratification and because of this stratification their workplace experiences tend to be different from the working women in formal jobs (Ayenalem, 2015; Ejigu et al., 2020).

Although, the working experiences of housemaid are missing in literature published in Pakistani context yet many studies had been conducted globally to investigate the working experiences of housemaids. Ayenalem conducted a qualitative study in 2015 and found that about 50% of the housemaids were the victim of rape. However, about 20% reported that they experience an attempt of rape. In addition, 30% of the housemaids reported that their body parts were touched without their consent in Ethiopia. The study also explored that housemaids were facing lack of trust, hopelessness, psychological disturbance, lack of job security and sexual assault too.

Mligo while talking about violence against housemaids by their partners reported that abuse by their employers. The researcher in his study explored that this violence is because of power relations and efforts of power gains. In addition, violence and abuse faced by the housemaids by their madam (employers) is because of the retaliation of violence faced by employers from their husbands and/or anyone superior to them. On the other hand, Christensen (2012) claimed that housemaids face many problems inside and outside of their house because of poverty which compel them to work in exploitative environment. Ejigu et al. (2020) reported that housemaids were facing mental health issues like depression and anxiety. About 44.6% of the respondents reported mild level of anxiety and depression while 6% of the housemaids reported severe level of anxiety and depression. Moreover, both anxiety and depression were found higher among young aged housemaids (16-20 years) as compared to other categories of age group. On the contrary, Moukarbel (2009) explored that Sri Lankan housemaids working in Lebanon were facing physical abuse by their employers and employers were found to control every aspect of their housemaids' lives. Moreover, Rajan and Sukendran (2020) revealed that Indian housemaids working in Gulf

region were facing workplace bullying by their employees. However, elimination of housemaids from labor laws and ineffective mechanism of detecting workplace abuse among housemaids is increasing the probability of bullying including Verbal, physical, sexual and psychological. A study conducted in Pakistan explored that the impact of housemaids on children development cannot be ignored. The children face many behavioral, language and socio-cultural problems because of their close relationship with housemaids (Moazzam & Haroon, 2019). On the other hand, Nasrullah et al. (2015) conducted their study of intimate partner violence in which the majority of the participants were housemaids. The participants reported verbal abuse, threatening, attempt to physical violence and physical violence by their partners. However, the authors did not explain the factor of being housemaid and their vulnerability to intimate partner violence. Nonetheless, Zakar claimed that housemaid in Pakistan face both verbal abuse and sexual assault. Moreover, these housemaids are powerless and voiceless. The probability of facing abuse and sexual harassment is higher among housemaids because they have to enter in the personal spaces of others i.e. bed rooms. However, their complaints about harassment are also not taken seriously because it is a public perception that housemaids usually talk and complain in such a way. As the literature indicates that housemaids have to suffer from many negative consequences at their workplace, still empirical findings from Pakistani context are missing and the present study, therefore, will add new insights in literature by adding working experiences of housemaids in Lahore, Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

To explore and document the demographic profiles, household experiences, and workplace experiences of housemaids, with a focus on gender roles, autonomy, and exposure to bullying, mental health and discriminatory behaviors.

Methodology

For achieving the study objectives of the present study the researcher used qualitative research approach because the nature of the researcher objective is exploratory. In addition, the researcher applied an exploratory qualitative research design hence; all the tools and techniques used in the present study are qualitative, interpretive and inductive in nature. The researcher will collect subjective and in-depth data in the form of words from the study participants using semi-structure interview guide.

Population and Sampling

The present study is conducted in the suburban areas of Lahore, a second largest city of Pakistan. Moreover, population of the present study includes all the women who work as housemaids in different homes. As, the study is focused on exploring working experiences of housemaids, who belong to a specific target population (based on their gender and nature of their profession) (Tongco, 2007; Rai & Thapa, 2015) or specific personalities (Obilor, 2023) and there is no reliable source of their exact numbers therefore, the researcher utilized purposive sampling technique to select research participants. At initial level, the researcher planned to select about 40 housemaids to collect data but after 35 in-depth interviews, the researcher attains saturation point therefore, total in-depth interviews in the present study are 35. Moreover, housemaids were divided into five categories as per their age i.e. 10-18, 19-26, 27-34, 35-42, 43-50 and more than 50 years. In each category, the researcher conducted seven interviews. However, those women who used to work as housemaids but currently were not working were not included in the present study

Tool of Data Collection

The researcher used semi-structured interview guide to select data from the study participants. However, for constructing semi-structure interview guide, the researcher used deductive codes from the literature about the workplace experiences of housemaids, bullying, abuse, violence, discrimination, autonomy, empowerment etc. These codes were transformed into subjective open-ended questions in the form of semi-structured interview guide. However, before collecting data, the guide was presented before two professors of sociology specialized in qualitative research methodology and a pre-test was also conducted. For collecting data from the participants, the researcher herself, along with one female research assistant visited the suburban area of Thokar Niaz Bag and Shah di Khohi to take appointment from the housemaids. The study participants were request to participate in the study as per their own convenience. However, all the in-depth interviews were conducted in the houses of housemaids and interviews were conducted separately from other family members because of the sensitive nature of the study. While conducting interviews, the researcher took permission from the participants to record the interviews and participants were assured that their information will not be shared with anyone but will be only used for academic purposes. In addition, the researcher assumed anonymity and confidentiality of the data to assure no harm to the participant because of their participation in the study.

Analysis

For analyzing and interpreting qualitative data collected from the research participants, the researcher selected thematic analysis technique. For conducting, thematic analysis technique, the researcher first of all transcribed every in-depth interview in English language and for making familiarity with data it was read twice. At second stage of data analysis, the researcher generated codes and from codes different themes were generate. Later on, themes were re-reviewed and final themes were defined. However, the findings were presented in both pre-determined and emergent themes.

Ethical Considerations

The present study is conceived from a thesis conducted for partial requirement of MPhil in Sociology in Punjab University, Lahore. Board of study of sociology department performs the duty of ethical committee to assure no harm to respondents. Based on their recommendations, the authors took informed consent from the study participants in both written and verbal form. Moreover, authors assured participants that their data will be only used for study purposes and will not be share with anyone else before their written permission.

Findings

Findings of the present study are divided into three core sections i.e. demographic profiling of the study participants, in-household experiences (gender role in household, financial contributions in household, autonomy and decision making, masculine control over mobility) and in-workplace experiences (bullying, physical abuse and sexual harassment, depression and anxiety, discrimination) of housemaids.

Demographic Profiling

Among the participants of the present study, 22 housemaids claimed that they are illiterate and only 7 household reported their education above primary level. In addition, 21 housemaids were married and 14 were unmarried. Similarly, the majority of the housemaids were living in nuclear

family system while 12 housemaids were living in joint family system. More than half of the study participants reported their experience as housemaid more than 7 years and 10 participants claimed that their work experience as housemaid was less than 5 years. 19 study participants reported that their husbands/partners are illiterate and only 9 housemaids reported their partners' education above primary level. 21 out of 35 housemaids reported their family income less than 20,000 and only 5 reported that their family income is more than 30,000. More than 50% of the housemaids reported more than 7 family members and only 8 participants reported that their family members are less than 4.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristic of Study Participants (Base=35)

Variable	Frequency
Education	
Illiterate	22
Primary and below	6
Above primary	7
Marital status	
Married	21
Unmarried	14
Family system	
Nuclear	23
Joint	12
Housemaid since	
Less than 2 years	5
3-5 year	5
5-7 year	8
More than 7 years	17
Husband education	
Illiterate	19
Primary and below	7
Above primary	9
Family income	
Less than 20,000	21
20,001-30,000	9
More than 30,000	5
Family members	
Less than 4	8
5-7 members	9
More than 7 members	18

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In-Household Experiences Gender Role in Household

The study participants of the present study indicated a very strong stratification of gender role inside of housemaid's households. The majority of the housemaids were of the views that both their husbands and they work outside for earning livelihood. However, their job as housemaid is not regarded as a job and they also had to manage their routine household chores i.e. cleanliness, clothing, stitching, cooking and taking care of children. One of housemaid revealed that "I prepare breakfast in the morning along with cooking for lunch for the children and husband. After returning from madam's home I also prepare dinner and wash cloths". However, husbands were not helping their partners in managing household chores. One of the participant claimed that

I am working very hard since many years as I have to work both inside and outside of my home and my husband did not help me in completing household chores, it is not their duty to perform these tasks. Male cannot cook and take care of children. It is the duty of women to take care of their husbands too.

These findings indicate that housemaids are facing patriarchal division of gender roles inside their household. Although they earn yet their earning is not affecting their gender roles (Gamburd, 2000; Khalid & Razem, 2022; Samarasinghe, 2020).

Financial Contributions in Household

The majority of the housemaids (27/35) were of the views that they works as housemaids because it is their need. Their husbands cannot fulfill all the expenditure of their household. One of the housemaid claimed that "we have 6 children and my husband alone is a laborer and he cannot meet household expenditure. I am working sine 5 years in three houses still it is very difficult to fulfill basic needs". On the contrary, the majority of the housemaids claimed that their earning is appreciated by their husbands. One of the housemaid mentioned that "my husband says it is his duty to earn but he cannot work hard because of his disease and he is right women are not safe outside of their home". In addition, their financial contributions are not affecting their gender role. The majority of the housemaids reported that they hand over their earning to their husbands. Although they work still they are not equally treated in their households in term of gender role and responsibilities (Handapangoda, 2014; Shaw, 2010; Zakir, 2005).

Autonomy and Decision Making

Housemaids (29/35) were of the views that their financial contributions and earning did not change their autonomy and decision making about their earning inside their homes. They are even not allowed to spend their money as per their desires. They have to take permission from their husbands to spend their money even for purchasing grocery for the household. On the contrary, few housemaids (5/35) claimed that they are free to spend their money as per their desires. They only consult their partners and other family members to spend their money if they think it appropriate. One of the housemaid reported that "I purchase my cloths, makeup items and shoes first from my salary and I hand over leftover to my husband". On the other hand, one of the housemaids claimed that "my husband threatens me to handover my salary to him because he says women are not good decision makers and they waste most of their earnings". These findings further indicate the coercive forces of patriarchy operating over housemaids in term of their autonomy and decision making power (Abdullah Yusof & Duasa, 2010; Lont, 2020).

Masculine Control Over Mobility

The majority of the study participants were of the views that (24/35) that they have to take permission to go to workplace and visit bazars for shopping. They are not allowed to freely move according to their wishes. They are not allowed to even dress as per their desires both inside and outside of their homes because it is not honorable to move freely and fashionably dress. One of the housemaid claimed that “my husband ride motorbike to give me pick and drop services. I am not allowed to go outside without his company”. However, there are some housemaids who reported that their partners are not strict and they only inform their husbands to go outside. They are allowed to visit bazar for shopping. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants are under masculine control over mobility. They cannot freely move and visit their families, relatives and friends (Anwar et al., 2018, Kareem, 2014; Tyszler, 2019).

In-Workplace Experiences

Physical, Verbal and Sexual Bullying

The research participants reported incidents of physical, verbal and sexual bullying by their employers. However, housemaid had to bear verbal and physical bullying by female family members of the employers and sexual abuse and unwanted touch by male family members of the employers. One of the housemaid reported that “my baji (employer) is very strict and she cannot tolerate any mistake. She verbally abused me many times and I have to bear because there are no other jobs available for me”. One of the young housemaid revealed that “the brother of her employer used to touch her on and off and he tried many times to seduce her. However, she reported his sexual abuse but her employer kicks ask her to leave her house immediately”. About 1 out of three participants reported the incidents of sexual abuse and more than 50% of the housemaid reported physical abuse by their employer. On the other hand, 33 participants out of 35 reported some sort of verbal abuse by their employers. It means that housemaid have to face verbal, physical and sexual abuse at their workplace (Ayenalem, 2015; Gezahegn et al., 2021; Huang & Yeoh, 2007; Zakri, 2005).

Mental Health of Housemaids (Depression and anxiety)

The majority of the housemaid reported many experiences of mental health at their workplace. About 29 out of 35 participant reported that they always feel guilty and unlucky to work in others' homes to earn money. One of the housemaid explained that “I am working since many years as housemaid. It is not honorable job. Whenever, I speak and enter home everyone laughs and it makes me feel inferior”. Another research participant claimed that “working as housemaid means you are not honorable women”. One of the young housemaids reported that “at home I have to face tension with my husband he thinks that I am not loyal with him. At workplace, I have to face many males who think that I am a honorable women”. She further added that “I usually suffer headache and high blood pressure because of the worst experiences I have to face at workplace”. These findings are consistent with previous literate that housemaid had to face anxiety and depression at workplace by their employers (Ejigu et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Sales & Santana, 2003).

Discrimination

The majority of the housemaids reported that they have to face discrimination by their employers. About 23 housemaids out of 35 revealed that they are not considered equal human beings by their employers. One of the housemaid reported that “I cannot eat with family members of my

employers. After their meal I usually eat leftover but I have to prepare their meal in lunch and dinner”. Another housemaid reported that “my employers strictly warned me to not bring my children in her house because she says her children are learning local language from my children”. Another participant explored that ‘we cannot eat on dining table and even cannot take shower in our employers’ bathrooms’. A senior housemaid of about 55 years of age claimed that “I am not allowed to enter in kitchen and touch any kitchen utensils. I have to take my lunch from my home. I am also not allowed to chat with children”. This implies that women face many types of discrimination at their workplace because of the nature of their job. However, these findings of the present study are consistent with previous literature on discrimination faced by housemaid at their workplace (Hall et al., 2019; Rajan & Sukendran, 2020; Sales & Santana, 2003).

Conclusion

The present study aims to explore the working experiences of housemaids in suburban areas of Lahore while employing the framework of patriarchy and women’s autonomy. For achieving these research objectives, the researcher applied exploratory cross section research design and collected data using semi-structured interview guide. The findings of the present study are divided into two major sections i.e. in-household and in-workplace experiences of housemaids. Housemaids were facing segregation of strict gender role inside their household, lack of autonomy and decision making power in spite of financial contribution and masculine control over their mobility. Conversely, housemaids working in private households often faced physical, verbal and sexual bullying, leading to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression as well as various forms of discrimination.

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