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Institute for
Human Development

PERSISTING SERVITUDE AND GRADUAL SHIFTS TOWARDS RECOGNITION AND DIGNITY OF LABOUR

A study of employers of domestic
workers in Delhi and Mumbai



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First published (2017)

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ISBN: 978-922-129677-5 (print)

978-922-129678-2 (web pdf)

978-922-129679-9 (epub)

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Printed in India

**PERSISTING SERVITUDE AND GRADUAL
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**ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia and
Country Office for India**

Foreword

Domestic work has emerged as the fastest growing sector of women's employment in urban India. It enables first entry to paid work, especially for women from low-income households. As such, it has become a characteristic feature of women in India's labour market, as in the case of many South Asian countries. Perceptions on the economic value of domestic work tend to be influenced by traditional gendered stereotypes surrounding unpaid work, and further compounded by other intersecting forms of segregation. In recognition of these challenges, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), sets international labour standards for domestic workers. While many studies have been conducted on working and living conditions, limited evidence is available on the demand side of domestic work and in particular about employers' attitudes on domestic workers. The purpose of this study is to bridge that critical gap. This study explains how domestic workers are hired, how wages are negotiated and how employers perceive workers. It's an important contribution to the sector as it will enable stakeholders to design and implement more effective strategies to promote decent work for domestic workers.

Panudda Boonpala
Director
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Country Office for India

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Acknowledgements

This study was possible with the generous support provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), as part of the ILO–DFID “Work in Freedom” (WiF) Programme, which offered the opportunity to look more closely into the issues of Indian domestic workers by building understanding on the perspectives of employers of domestic workers.

The research was guided by Igor Bosc, Chief Technical Advisor and Bharti Birla, National Project Coordinator, India of the WiF programme. Inputs were also provided by Ms Reiko Tsushima, Gender Specialist, ILO DWT/CO for India. The report was reviewed and edited by Igor Bosc and Bharti Birla.

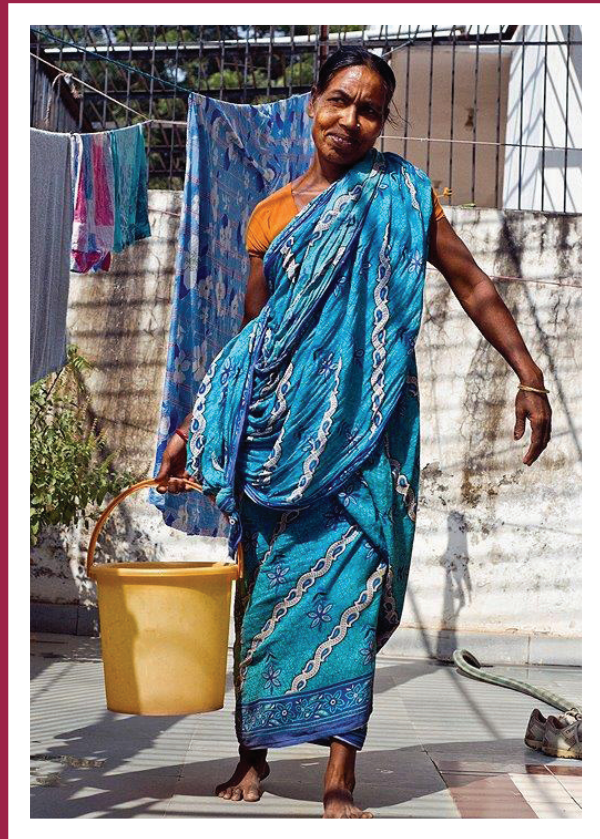
Special thanks to the Institute of Human Development (IHD), whose extensive research in the field was crucial for the elaboration of this study, notably Prof. Alakh Sharma and Preet Rustogi. The report has been written by Preet Rustagi, Balwant Singh Mehta and Deeksha Tayal. The field work for this study was conducted by members of IHD, Delhi, led by Balwant Singh Mehta, and Centre for Development Research and Action (CDRA) in Mumbai, led by Ritu Dewan.

Radha Sehgal coordinated the survey in Mumbai, along with Ashwini Maslekar, Neela Dharankar, Anjali Salvi, Meena Sawant, Nilima Katkar, Anita Bansode, Sushma Randive, Ashwini Deshpande, Toral Gala, Anupama Deshpande, Rugvedi Desai, Rashmi Datar and Amar Sehgal. The Delhi field work was supervised by Balwant Singh Mehta, along with Meghashree, Subodh Kumar and B.D. Bhaskar. The investigators in Delhi were Tejaswi Chhatwal, Shailesh Kumar, Madan Mohan Jha, Veena, Shraddha, Siddharth, Dilip Kumar Soni, Shalini, Sagari Sahu, Akanksha Chandra, Vandana Nanda, Prem Kumar and Razia Khan. Data analysis was ably undertaken by Balwant Singh Mehta and Deeksha Tayal.

Shivani Satija contributed to the literature review and the qualitative interviews, along with colleagues from CDRA; Swati Dutta helped in the qualitative survey and the preparation of the research tools; Gursimran Kaur, Tejaswi Chhatwal, Razia Khan, Pooja Sharma, Preeti Singh and Sandip Sarkar also made valuable contributions to the study. IHD Chairperson Prof. Hashim, Prof. Atul Sarma and Prof. Sheila Bhalla provided help and advice.

This study was not possible without the employer respondents, those who were supportive and also those who were difficult, for cooperating with the investigator team throughout the survey exercise.

Executive summary



This study is one of the first of its kind focusing on the employers' perspective to capture the demand-side story of domestic workers in the two metropolitan cities of Delhi and Mumbai. In 2015, the survey was conducted by the Institute for Human Development (IHD) in Delhi, while the Centre for Development Research and Action (CDRA) undertook the survey in Mumbai as a partner organization. In order to identify employers of women domestic workers, a listing survey of 6,010 households was undertaken in the two cities, from which more than 1,000 households were surveyed.

Domestic workers are increasingly becoming a large segment of the urban regular workforce, reflecting a rise in both the labour supplies and the demand for such work. Different factors are at play for these two dimensions, and while supply-side aspects have been studied previously by several scholars, including at IHD, demand-side perspectives have remained few and far between. The rise in demand for domestic workers is an outcome of several factors: available disposable income, aversion to undertake certain tasks, time poverty among working women and vacation of care spaces, which creates demand for other women who can undertake these chores. Additionally, the presence of young children, ill or aged persons in the household, reduction in state investments in social sectors and changing lifestyle patterns are all likely reasons for employers to hire domestic workers.

This study was undertaken with the objective of understanding who the employers of the women domestic labour are, how the labour markets for domestic workers function, what mechanisms of hiring are adopted, how wages are fixed, what, if any, rights women domestic workers have and whether there are legal provisions and if employers are aware of these. This project study focused on the demand side of women domestic workers – that is, employers’ perspectives from two metropolitan cities of Delhi and Mumbai. In the current milieu, wherein campaigns and movements towards ensuring workers’ rights for domestic workers are gaining momentum, understanding what employers’ viewpoints are can be interesting and pertinent to aid the process.

Paid domestic work is an informal-sector activity, which is highly and also peculiarly personalized in the sense that each contract is between an employer and an employee-worker and the workplace is the house of the employer. In case of full-time/live-in workers, the women workers often remain confined to the household, which is both their workplace and their place of stay till the duration of the work. This also means that they have limited opportunities to interact with other workers. Thus, although paid domestic work is indeed a legitimate labour market activity, often the employers and even the workers tend not to recognize it as such. The direct negative fallout of this is the invisibility of workers, non-recognition of workers’ rights and non-provision of any social protection measures.

The definition of who constitutes an employer of domestic workers for purposes of this study is “any household that hires a domestic worker for household chores, such as washing utensils, cleaning the house, sweeping and swabbing floors, washing clothes, cooking, taking care of the children, the ill and the elderly, is treated as an employer irrespective of the terms and conditions of such work, payment modalities or hiring mechanisms”. Other such domestic workers tend to be drivers, gardeners, tutors or garbage collectors hired by employer households but they are predominantly either men, skilled or engaged for very short durations for any one employer household, and is NOT included here for purposes of this survey since the focus was on the employers of women domestic workers alone.

Research questions and methodology

The project examined three questions and related issues. a) How do employers recruit domestic workers and what are the opportunities for change? b) Drivers of value and devaluation: what are the employers’ perceptions of domestic work in terms of skills required and opportunity costs? This entails understanding what employers are currently inconvenienced with in the domestic work sector and what changes they want to see. c) Are employers aware that domestic work is a legitimate labour market activity conducted in an employment relationship?

The study followed a mixed-methods approach, with a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of different types of employers across different socio-economic strata. A listing survey was undertaken as per the population proportionate sampling of wards based on the 2011 census. A total of 6,010 households were listed from both cities: 4,041 in Delhi and 1,969 in Mumbai. The employers sample of over 1,000 households were selected through a multi-stage stratified sampling (city stratification, locality/colony selection, household listing and identification of domestic worker employer household). Finally, the survey in Delhi covered 25 wards from all nine districts and in Mumbai selected 12 of the 24 wards from the two districts. In all, 33 localities were covered in Delhi and 64 in Mumbai.

Summary of survey findings

The study's findings bring forth employers' perceptions relating to the increasing demand for domestic workers and the recognition associated with it, the nature of activities for which women domestic workers are demanded, the patterns of hiring, employers' preferences and recruitment channels, working conditions, remuneration and treatment meted out to domestic workers, and regulation, awareness of legislative rights and provisions.

Of all the listed households in Delhi and Mumbai, among the middle- and higher-income localities, the findings revealed that 56 per cent of them were employers of one or more women domestic workers. There were several households which reported unmet demand for domestic workers, although this was not systematically calculated in this study. There was a clear association with income class, as the higher-income households reported a much higher proportion of demand for domestic workers compared to the middle- and lower-middle-income households. The age profile and household occupation were noted as factors among households that employed women domestic workers. The self-employed business households and those with retired elderly persons reported hiring the services of women domestic services relatively more than other households.

Profile of demand for domestic workers

A bulk of the employer households' demand is for women domestic workers as part-time workers (90 per cent), while of the remaining 10 per cent, half employed full-time live-outs while the other half employed live-ins. There tended to be more households employing full-time live-outs in Mumbai than in Delhi given the space constraints in the former, whereas households employing live-in women domestic workers were found to be more in Delhi. Employers expressed the growing need for women domestic workers and their dependence in several cases. The demand for part-time domestic workers tends to be much larger than for live-ins or even full-time live-outs.

Growing recognition of domestic workers

While the need for domestic workers is being acknowledged by employers, recognition of their work as that of any other worker, whose rights must be protected, remains low. Although gradual pressures are visible and some signs of change were noticeable, the relationship of the employer with their domestic worker is still not viewed as a legitimate labour market activity. This is especially so since the work remained highly personalized and is not regulated or moderated by any formal institutions or legal provisions. This non-recognition manifests in the low returns and wages paid for such domestic work. In turn, the low value attributed to such domestic work also becomes a factor for its non-recognition.

Recruitment channels

Most employers depend on recruitment channels that are informal, with only 2 per cent of employer households surveyed reporting the use of agents/agencies. The most common channel for recruiting and finding domestic workers tended to be neighbours (51 per cent) and other domestic workers (21 per cent). Other informal channels such as relatives and friends are also used by employers in both cities, although employers from Mumbai depended more on these social connections compared to those from Delhi. Thus, the popular mode for recruiting domestic workers tends to be informal channels, through friends, neighbours, relatives. Ironically, the trust in these networks supersedes the faith in identity checks and registration with the police.

The choice of recruitment channels and preferences for domestic workers vary by type of worker and the tasks for which they are being sought. In the few instances where formal or written contracts are being made between the employer and domestic worker, or where recruitment is through non-personalized channels. There is a difference in the treatment of the worker, with some space for recognition and even dignity.

Employers' preferences

Employers' preferences for their domestic workers are interestingly shifting away from traditional factors such as caste, language, religion and region of origin etc. to more work-related parameters such as efficiency, tidiness, punctuality, communication, attitude to work and nature of the worker. The preferences also vary according to the type of worker, caste or social background, for example, in the case of cooks is gaining some importance for some employers – although even here the skill at cooking gains prominence and can at times overshadow all other social attributes.

Segmentation by task

Domestic workers, especially part-timers, are often seen doing particular tasks and not available for others, leading to the demand for multiple domestic workers for the different tasks employers require to be done. The hierarchy of tasks in terms of wage returns places the washing of utensils and sweeping/swabbing at the bottom, while cooking and taking care of children and the elderly tends to be much higher in most cases.

Wages

Task-specific wages are mostly similar in any given locality, with the monthly wage rates/per household for washing utensils as low as 400 Indian rupees (INR), as low as INR300 for housecleaning and a similar sum for washing clothes, in both cities. The average wages for workers involved in these tasks approximates to INR1,000 a month. This also creates a need for the part-time workers to work in different households to meet their monthly income requirements. Wages for child care are a minimum of INR3,000–4,000 per month, while the care of elderly or the sick gets INR6,000 per month. The latter usually pertains to full-time workers or live-ins.

Weekly leaves

Although only a few employers provide for paid weekly leave for their domestic workers, most of them reported that the workers demand and in fact take at least two to three days off every month, if not four days. Employers are reluctant but end up granting the leaves. The practice of deducting wages for such leaves is now becoming less common.

Working conditions and treatment

The number of employers who treat their workers well and with dignity is gradually rising. The traditional employer households that have had families of domestics working with them over generations or for long periods display a distinct bonding and interpersonal relationship which is feudalistic but not abusive or exploitative. The workers may be servile and have less autonomy under these circumstances.

The employers keep the workers indebted in some form or the other. The recognition of domestics as human beings, with employers helping them out in times of crises, giving advance wages, helping educate their children and providing assistance during any medical emergencies are all examples of employers' patriarchal patronage that co-exists with the workers' servility.

In terms of working conditions, for a majority of the workers who work part-time, the employer-employee relationship is fairly well defined. Certain employers are free with sharing toilets, etc., though most still have a problem and try to provide alternative options. For live-ins, the provision of appropriate space, bedding, clothes, food, etc., and treatment on a daily basis by the employer in defining the work and getting it done varies from employer to employer. The increasing realization of the employers' dependence on their domestic workers is one factor that is having a positive impact on the behaviour and treatment meted out by employers to workers.

Verification and identity checks

In spite of the numerous cases of violence and thefts by domestic workers one comes across through the media and other communication channels, the incidence of verification of antecedents of the domestic workers by the employers (through the police) still remains low. It is among the younger employers, those who have been hiring domestic workers over the last decade or so, who are opting for verification or identity checks of the domestic workers.

Absence of regulation

The sector and work domain is functioning almost without any regulation by state institutions, except, for example, when some untoward incident compels the concerned people to file a case. This is also the reason why employers hire underage children or have workers who are underpaid. Varied forms of exploitation are prevalent in terms of not following norms of working and resting hours, especially for the live-ins, who are at the beck and call of employers throughout the day.

The procurement mechanisms followed by agencies/agents is akin to trafficking and often unscrupulous in exploiting the vulnerable, poorly educated migrants, tribal or people from Scheduled Castes, from poor, backward regions of the country. It is often difficult to acknowledge the positive contributions of the agents to the sector given the practices adopted.

Skill training for domestics

The employers hardly shared any inclination towards skill development since they were not interested in paying higher wages as appropriate for the same or similar work. The employers are mostly keen on a cheaper supply of labour and do not consider most of the menial activities worthy of any skill requirements. What is more important is that they do not think their workers should have avenues for upward mobility either in most cases.

Awareness of legal provisions

Given the low coverage of legal provisions in the first place for domestic workers, most employers have no idea about this. One of the major reasons for employers finding it difficult to treat domestic work as a legitimate category of the labour markets is the time spent by the worker in each household.

However, given the large numbers of women working as domestic workers in all urban cities, there is a need to capture it adequately. The manner in which some of these activities have evolved with time, resources and knowledge indicate the sector is clearly an employment category. But the employers have no sense of what is an acceptable working day or working hours, or what the minimum wages are and most of them were averse to any form of collective bargaining among their domestic workers.

Concluding remarks

The study reveals some signs of changes and labour market formation for domestic workers: a) increasing demand for domestic workers; b) changing preferences of employers; c) task segmentation and segregation; d) wage negotiations and annual increments; e) weekly offs or a few holidays every month being demanded by workers; and f) gradual improvements in the treatment of domestic workers by some employers. The decline in the practice of having domestic workers do additional tasks without compensation, and its replacement with the somewhat more defined nature of tasks and activities of work to be done by the domestic workers; and workers leaving their employers if they get a better deal are signs of the gradual formation of the labour market and decline in the feudalistic/semi feudalistic relationships. Thus, the survey's findings noted the most significant transition in terms of hiring, retention, replacement, firing, bargaining and negotiation for leaves and annual increments. Nevertheless, employers are also articulating their demands and unwilling to accept anything less than what they desire. Employers are seen replacing workers to try and get what they want and may also be willing to pay more if they are assured of getting a woman worker as per their specifications and preferences.

The findings from the survey of employers therefore reveals that employers with growing recognition of the demand for domestic workers are beginning to feel pressured due to their increasing dependence on their service providers. Therefore, the regulation of these activities through registration of both employers and workers can be initiated.

Many more studies of this kind are required to illustrate the actual practices adopted in different urban cities of India within the sector of domestic work. Most employers still do not consider domestic workers as legitimate workers because of the circumstances in which they work and the process through which they are hired. Use of recruitment and placement agencies changes this to some extent, since the workers have a contract with some defined duties and a fixed wage, work and rest hours, leaves and other employer obligations.

The realization that employers still continue to treat their domestic workers with disdain and even contempt, not perceiving the work worthy of commensurate returns even up to minimum wages specified for unskilled workers, aligns them with the bulk of the unorganized informal workers in the country. Tackling the issues of these workers calls for a major transformation in the employers' outlook towards the workers' dignity and human rights. Needless to reiterate, that a similar transformation among the placement agencies/agents, government officials and policy-makers is also required. A very slow and gradual shift was witnessed but the journey is long and will require concerted efforts on many fronts before we can achieve equal treatment of domestic women workers by employers. The state has to give a policy direction along with and a suitable regulatory framework to recognize domestic work as work, can play a significant role to play in inching towards attaining this.

List of Abbreviations

ATLMRI	Adecco TISS Labour Market Research Initiative
CDRA	Centre for Development Research and Action
DFID	Department for International Development
DW	Domestic workers
IHD	Institute for Human Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
NCEUS	National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OBC	Other Backward Class
RSBY	Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TIFR	Tata Institute of Fundamental Research
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
WiF	Work in Freedom

Introduction



This is a study undertaken to understand employers' perspectives with regard to domestic workers in two metropolitan cities – Delhi and Mumbai. The basic issues covered through quantitative and qualitative surveys in both the cities aim to capture the demand situation for domestic workers, and also the nature and kind of workers being hired, number of hours worked, wages paid, working conditions, employers' preferences, recruitment channels used and how employers perceive domestic work and workers' rights. The realization that demand for domestic work is on the rise and more and more families report the need for such workers, on the one hand, while most employers do not perceive this work as most other types of work and therefore have a poor awareness of domestic workers' rights on the other, highlights the need for such studies which concentrate on the demand-side situation and employer perspectives. It is with this understanding that the study was proposed and pursued.

From the employer survey, it is becoming clear that the urban haves, including the middle classes, have become quite dependent on their domestic workers. The practice of hiring domestic workers was traditionally associated with feudal propertied households. In the village milieu, the service-provider household was at the beck and call of the employer–landlord household. The relational ties continued over generations. In the urban milieu the scenario is quite different. The hiring of domestic workers began to become a commonplace practice with the rise of the middle classes. The demand for a domestic worker and the hiring of one is associated in many cases with a social status, since only those who belong to a certain income strata used to hire domestic workers. However, this is becoming quite common now, although considerations such as lack of space, need for freedom and trust deficits are all working against full-timers/live-ins. Thus, many more employers have part-time domestic workers, who typically come in once or twice in the day to do the designated tasks for which they are paid on a monthly basis.

One worker for each task is hired, so while a few tasks are commonly done by the same worker, who takes a little more time and wages, in other cases different workers come in at designated times during the day to complete their tasks, such as cooking, washing clothes etc. Each worker spends an hour or two in one employer household on average. Most domestic workers have two or three employers. On the demand side, women's education, work status and changing aspirations for themselves and their children together with the low cost at which workers can be hired to do these tasks have all been factors propelling the practice over the last few decades. On the supply side, lack of employment avenues, low incomes – inadequate to fulfil even basic needs – and women's inability to pursue any other job are all factors that have propelled entry of women into this occupation.

Through this survey of sample employer households, different aspects of demand-side perspectives such as the preferences of employers, recruitment channels, hiring patterns, working conditions and treatment meted out to the domestic workers are all elicited and analysed. How is domestic work viewed by employers? What according to them should these workers get paid – and are the current wages being paid more than what they deserve or less than the worth of the work they put in, according to the employers? Is there any scope for skilling or training domestic workers for this or any other activity – and what do employers think about this? Among those who feel the women workers could benefit from some training and skills, what are these? Also, once skilled and trained, would the employers be willing to pay an additional amount or raise the wages of their domestic workers?

Do employers consider the work put in by domestic workers akin to any other labour activity, which ought to provide them workers' rights? Should these domestic workers unionize and what do employers think about their collectivization and collective bargaining? The opinion of employers regarding the agencies through which some of them have hired workers was also sought, along with the relative pros and cons of hiring through known informal sources as compared to the formal agencies. All these aspects and dimensions will be explored based on the quantitative and qualitative surveys of employers in Delhi and Mumbai. A few other stakeholders such as trade unions and non-governmental organizations were also interviewed to develop a better understanding of the issues and concerns relating to domestic workers in metropolitan cities.

Background

Domestic work is one of the oldest forms of work and operates in deeply-rooted cultures of servitude (ILO, 2004; Ray, 2000). Although there have been efforts in the past few decades to situate various forms of manual work within the labour and human rights framework, domestic work still remains outside it and largely divested of basic rights. Its unique personal nature – both in spatial terms as well as in the nature of the labour – makes locating domestic work within the wider terrain of informal work difficult. Domestic work is usually characterized by low wages, often bonded work with no regular hours, and informal relations between the employer and worker without any guarantees of basic conditions of work (Ramirez-Machado, 2003).

The intimate nature of the work further informalizes the employer – employee relationship. “Intimate labours” have been defined as those that include caring for children or elderly and tending to the private lives and spaces of people (Boris and Parrenas, 2010, p. 2). These intimate labours defy the separations between the home and the world as well as paid and unpaid work that characterize dominant the understanding of labour in the global capitalist world. Qayum and Ray (2003, p. 521) problematize these divisions between the domestic and non-domestic/public world by saying, “Domestic servitude confuses and complicates the conceptual divide between family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the home and the world.” Understanding these spatial characteristics of domestic work is important to understand the changing relationship between the employer and the worker, as well as the perceptions of the employer toward domestic work.

Although domestic work has attracted much research and policy attention in the last two decades, there is little work done around the demand side of domestic labour markets and the changing nature of these labour markets in the globalized context, within rapidly growing metropolitan cities and smaller urbanizing towns. These processes of urbanization and globalization are contributing to the erosion of traditional joint-family structures, and the emergence of nuclear, even single-parent (often women-led) households. As viewed by Sassen (2006), when cities generate more high-wage jobs, primarily emanating from the globalization process, the demand for “support human resources” specializing in domestic services is likely to increase, generating a subsistence wage class that forms the base for “survival circuits” in the city. At the same time, these have also resulted in the construction of a global “care economy”. In this context, there has been a sharp increase in women joining the workforce, particularly in the informal sector, and domestic work is one such work where women and girls are overwhelmingly represented.¹ Concomitantly, the demand for domestic work has been increasing in cities as more and more women from upper-middle- and upper-class households are joining the paid workforce, resulting in a dearth of care-givers and home-makers. With women increasingly working outside their homes, the demand for domestic services has increased and become almost critical. Given that most men of the house do not engage with domestic work, or consider it “work” in the first place, it is difficult if not impossible for these women to go outside and work without the “quiet and often unseen” presence of domestic workers who run their homes (Ghosh, 2013). Domestic work that was performed out of a sense of duty and familial obligations by the women of the house is now mostly being performed by paid workers who are outsiders. Hiring strangers to perform work within the home brings up issues of trust, suspicion and insecurity among employers. These increase the stigma against domestic workers. At the same time, workers too find themselves in a vulnerable position inside a stranger’s home, and often become targets of exploitation, discrimination and abuse. These issues come into sharper focus

1 Domestic work has become increasingly feminized. There has also been an increase in the national urban female workforce, with the share of domestic workers among the total females within the services sector increasing over the period 1999–2000 to 2004–05 by over 15 per cent, according to the National Sample Survey (NSS). Ray (2000, p. 694) describes this process of feminization since the 1980s as a phenomenon that is accompanied by economic inequality. Domestic work thus constitutes one of the main sources of employment for millions of women and girls the world over, and in India specifically.

in the context of a lack of formal procedures and laws governing domestic work and associated work relations. Lack of formal work contracts, timings and tasks complicate the understanding of this work further, along with the insecurities that characterize it. Finally, a lack of research as well as the difficulty in conducting research in this area has clouded our understanding of how this work is viewed by employers.

This study aims to pave the path for conducting research among employers of domestic workers by exploring the demand side of this unique labour market in two Indian metropolitan cities, Delhi and Mumbai. The hiring and recruitment practices resorted to by employers, terms and conditions of work for domestic workers, wages, leave, increment and social protection measures, treatment meted out to domestic workers, due recognition of such work and workers, employers' knowledge of the legal provisions and rights of domestic workers are all dealt with in this report.

Structure of the report

The report provides a comprehensive literature review on domestic work, labour markets and employers perceptions, and a discussion on the emerging issues in Chapter 1, most of which are dealt with in this study. This is followed by the objectives and methodology adopted for this study on employers' perspectives, along with a presentation of selected locations and brief description of these in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides the study findings – socio-economic profile of the respondents, who hires and employer profiling, and details of the demand pattern. Chapter 4 deals with employer preferences and replacement and recruitment practices. Employers' attitudes and employment conditions are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the awareness of legal rights and perception regarding workers' organizations. Finally, in Chapter 7 some conclusions and recommendations are made based on the analysis and findings of the study. These include weaknesses and elements for the way forward in studies of this kind in the future.

1. Literature review



Most of the literature focuses on the domestic workers, with very few studies looking at the demand-side stories from the employers' perspectives. Why do households hire domestic workers? Is it a continuation of the traditional feudal culture of having servants for various menial tasks that was witnessed among royalty and colonial families in the pre-Independence era, and is an aspiration shared by the new rich as well as middle classes who would like to have domestic workers do various tasks for them and their households? Or is it more of an urban phenomenon, as increasing women's labour market participation vacates the care and household maintenance spaces within homes? The aim of this review exercise is not to present a hegemonic discourse,² but to try and capture the demand side of this unique labour market, a view that could not only unearth an understanding of the way this work is perceived by employers, but also how this perception has changed and evolved.

² Lived experiences of domestic workers have been recorded and studied by many, including the two research organizations that conducted this study.

Cities have witnessed the need for domestic workers increase with the pressures of urban living. Mumbai is known to have the tradition of the domestic worker who is addressed as the *bai*. This is still the common term by which several employer households reported referring to their domestic workers. Regional literature, as well as media, portray the *bai* as someone who is honest, strong, efficient, skilled and quick in her work. The labour and life of the city, given its primary character of lack of space and of households living in tiny and cramped rooms known as *kholis*, led to the emergence of a domestic worker who comes in for work for an hour or two early in the morning, so as to complete the work before the men of the household – and very often the women too – leave for their daily jobs. The *bai* therefore does a minimum of two to three jobs a day, punctuality and economy of work being the major characteristics. To trace the origins of the practice and spread may be difficult since so little has been written about the domestic workers. However, this has become a common mode, with all menial tasks of the household done through employing domestic workers, usually on a part-time basis. This is a cheaper, convenient system, both from the employers' point of view as also from that of the suppliers', since the domestic worker could dovetail this activity alongside her own other household maintenance and care work and also take this work up without having to seek her husband's or other household members' permission.

As Neetha (2004) states, paid domestic service is a necessity in almost every person's life in Delhi. Industrialization and urbanization are said to encourage the growth of domestic service, with a "servant-employing" middle class and a surplus of unskilled workers. The growth in domestic service is often attributed to increasing inequality both in the rural and urban areas, the shift from an agrarian economy to a manufacturing- and service-based one and the rise of an urban middle class. The sudden increase in demand for domestic workers can also be related to the emergence of dual careers as a new family norm. Employing domestics is no longer a symbol of wealth and aristocracy and it is now largely a middle-class and upper-middle-class phenomenon.

The demographic status of domestic workers has also undergone change. During the 1970s and 1980s, most female domestics were found to be the head of households, in particular widowed, deserted and older women (Banerjee, 1982). As family migration has increased, younger women have come to occupy a larger proportion of domestic workers (Banerjee, 1992). A survey conducted by the Indian Social Institute (ISI, 1993) indicated that only 20 per cent of all men who migrated to Delhi were engaged in domestic work. The survey also revealed that employers showed a preference for young women, particularly young tribal girls, as they were seen as more reliable, obedient and efficient in domestic work, especially in taking care of babies and the elderly. Further, these women also stick to the jobs for longer periods, agree to work for lower wages and can be controlled more easily.

The literature tends to refer to dimensions and the changing nature of domestic workers over time, which can be used to reflect on how labour markets for domestic work are currently shaping up. Examining the demand-side dimensions of domestic work and employers' perspectives has not been the focus of research studies, as most of these concentrated on the workers themselves and therefore tended to be focused on the supply-side aspects of the situation. This study attempts to fill this gap by approaching the employers and aims to understand their perspective on the subject.

1.1. Hiring domestic workers

In India, the ability to hire domestic work has often been considered a sign of prosperity and mark of status and was usually limited to royal and colonial families in the pre-Independence period, and to upper-class households' post-Independence. However, today employing domestic services is a practice that is no longer limited to upper-class families and is not seen as a luxury but rather as a necessity.

Increasingly, middle-class³ households have been hiring domestic services, which is a departure from the traditional norm. Traditionally, women in middle-class households were expected to perform household work as they did not participate in “paid” work outside their homes.⁴ Inability, unwillingness or lack of desire to join the workforce, restricted mobility and a sense of status attached to women of the house not needing to work could be some explanatory factors. Thus, middle-class women are seen to have a lesser presence in the workforce. However, this situation has changed. Notions of middle-class femininity that at one point were characterized by notions of a loving wife, mother and home-maker began to be challenged in the 1970s, in the context of the strengthening women’s movement, followed by the advent of capitalism, which made the “working woman” a desirable form of femininity (Waldrop, 2011).⁵

John (2013) compares housework that the women of the house perform willingly out of a sense of duty and the low-paid domestic work that is performed out of necessity by women belonging to poor income and low-caste groups, in someone else’s house to then conclude that in both contexts, the work is deeply gendered and undervalued. Ray (2000) studies this relationship through the norms of “ideal middle-class femininity” of the *bhadralok*, (members of the “respectable” upper and upper-middle classes) and the subaltern femininity of labouring women belonging to the lower classes. “Ideal femininity” is considered to be a desired trait characterized by women staying within the confines of their home and not having to work outside. By this definition then, Ray proceeds to say that domestic workers can hardly hope to be known for this kind of respectability that the *bhadralok* commands, thus this notion of “ideal femininity” is denied to them. Through the institution of domestic labour, one can then see the interactions between “ideal” and “subaltern” femininities. Moreover, these domestic workers in turn are also involved in unpaid domestic work in their own homes, but they are largely perceived as workers with little regard to their personal lives and domestic commitments. This reflects the deep undervaluing of housework and the complete disregard of the positions of domestic workers within the wider context of women’s work.

There is a clear interaction of two distinct classes and cultures when a domestic worker works in an affluent home. What happens when women from two worlds, one of the middle/upper-middle class, and the other of the lower, labouring class enter a work relationship in the private realm of the former? What is the nature of this work and the power relations that accompany it? What are the rules of engagement and how are they negotiated? Studying how this affects the dynamics of work and home is important to understand the evolving relations of the domestic worker with the employer and the family.

1.2. Factors shaping employers’ demands and perceptions

There are multiple factors that shape the demands of employers hiring domestic workers today. To what extent are these factors different or similar to those of the past? To what extent do factors like caste, class and gender still influence the decisions of employers? How do notions of trust and suspicion

3 The middle class has always been the most intriguing and complex to capture in terms of who it constitutes and what it represents. The rising and aspiring middle class as upholders of social and sexual morality and guardians of tradition are some of the popular, though simplistic, notions associated with this socio-economic category. While many attempts towards understanding the middle class have been made, ranging from studying consumption and income patterns to cultural practices and occupations, it is generally understood today that the category of middle class is a heterogeneous and complex one.

4 According to Das (2011), cited in John (2013, p. 184), the statistical relationship between education levels and work participation among women is quite complex. Women belonging to poorer socio-economic backgrounds with little or no education have a higher presence in the workforce, while women belonging to middle-class income groups with education up till primary school are seen to be largely absent from the workforce. Women from higher-income backgrounds as well as upper-caste groups with higher education levels are found in larger numbers in the workforce.

5 Though later discourses on feminism began to deconstruct the “housewife” in the wider context of women’s work, both paid and unpaid, to understand the value of work within the home.

feature in the relationship of employer and worker? And how does informality shape domestic labour markets today? These are some of the points that this section will address.

1.2.1. Gender

Paid domestic work should logically bring along with it empowerment and agency for the women who perform it, but given the vulnerabilities coupled with the stigma of manual labour and overall devaluing of domestic work, this is not so. Domestic work is a form of intimate labour that is deeply stigmatized. There is a sense of inferiority and vulnerability that is experienced by the workers, and is further compounded by the intersection of caste and gender. John (2013) uses the lens of intersectionality of caste, class and sexuality (gender) to understand the overlapping and simultaneous vulnerabilities faced by women working in domestic work.

Though the domestic work sector is characterized by the overwhelming presence of women, it was not always so. Traditionally, men were preferred to carry out certain tasks like cooking and managing the house. Male domestic workers were seen as a marker of class status, as they demanded higher wages. Traditionally, Brahmins, mostly men, have been involved in cooking, while the cleaning tasks were performed by the lower caste groups (Mukherjee, 1977, cited in Qayum and Ray, 2003, p. 526). However, Brahmins have largely moved out of this work and non-Brahmins have become involved in cooking, although scheduled castes are still generally not welcome. While men, mostly Brahmins, were preferred as cooks, a task that required skill and high-caste status, part-timers were usually women who cleaned and swabbed, tasks that men would avoid because they were perhaps considered “women’s jobs” (Ray, 2000), indicative of the inferiority assigned to this work and those who have increasingly come to perform them.

Moreover, often families’ reluctance to take on the responsibility of female workers, particularly live-in workers, shaped the preference of some families, according to Mehrotra (2010). However, these preferences changed with time and with the rapid emergence of the nuclear family, wherein female workers were more in demand due to perceptions of them being safer as well as cheaper (ibid). In Ray’s study in Kolkata, men were preferred as cooks, but when better paying options began to present themselves to them, they were increasingly unavailable. Moreover, with the erosion of joint families and emergence of apartment cultures, the presence of male workers in proximity with daughters of the employers has made the demand for women workers stronger. Ray (2000) points out that women are preferred because of female members in the family. There are other reasons why this work has a significantly large female presence. A study conducted by Jagori in 2008-09 among part-time domestic workers in Delhi revealed many women preferred domestic work as it was done in houses and involved interaction and communication with the women of the house.

Another factor that propelled women and girls into part-time domestic work was the physical proximity of their workplace to their homes, thus giving them time to take care of their own children and household responsibilities (Mehrotra, 2010). On the other hand, many employers too prefer female domestic workers as they find them “safer” and more “obedient”. The study by IHD in 2013⁶ reveals that there is a preference for younger girls as they are easier to control and are more likely to obey their employers. Moreover, the barriers of entry into this occupation are relatively low (Neetha, 2008), thus rendering this as the only source of income for many poor migrant women and girls belonging to Scheduled

6 IHD conducted an ILO-sponsored study in 2012-13 in Delhi and Ranchi entitled “Building Knowledge on Adolescent Domestic Workers with Focus on Occupational, Health and Safety Issues”, to understand the nature of domestic work among adolescents, conditions and arrangements of work, reasons and compulsions driving them to work, channels and processes of entering domestic work and the impact it has on the lives of child and adolescent domestic workers.

Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups, who may lack “marketable skills” or sufficient education (Mehrotra, 2010) and often find themselves in vulnerable positions as live-in workers working in a stranger’s house⁷

Women workers are also paid less than the men working in the same household due to perceptions that shape men’s work as being more skilled (driving, gardening, etc.) as compared to women’s (cooking, cleaning, etc.). The stigma associated with domestic work is also gendered in India. This is part of widely prevalent and deeply entrenched patriarchal notions that devalue women’s labour in general, reflected in the undercounting of their enormous contributions both within and outside of their homes. Given that few male members of the household participate in household responsibilities, a large proportion of the burden falls on female members, who if working, pass it on to women workers often referred to as maids and *ayahs*, who enable them to work outside the home. The relationship between the worker and the employer in the context of domestic work is deeply gendered.

1.2.2. Caste and class

It is generally believed that associations between caste and labour weaken, although arguably, in an urban or urbanizing context, particularly in metros like Delhi and Mumbai. Moreover, due to the legal prohibition of caste-based discrimination, hardly any educated person is likely to admit that he or she intentionally or unintentionally discriminates on the basis of caste. However, daily household practices while dealing with domestic workers reveal the insidious processes of caste-based discrimination operating within homes. According to Froystad (2003) many middle- and upper-middle-class employers might discuss inequality between them and the domestic workers in terms of income, education and work, while avoiding the term caste in the conversation. However, the subtext is that caste inevitably will be associated with their (domestic workers’) unequal status. She draws from Pierre Bourdieu’s categorization of “reflexive and non-reflexive” actions and knowledge to understand how considerations of caste knowingly or habitually influence people’s beliefs and practices.

Dev (2015) cites Sarah Dickey, who talks about the anxiety employers go through while dealing with domestic workers, which manifests itself in ways of spatial control and discrimination. Entry and use of space in public and common spaces are also controlled for domestic workers. Dev (2015) writes about not allowing entry of workers in common areas in bars and clubs, elevators in multi-storey flats, and even toilets within the homes where workers work. The common reason cited for such discriminatory spatial practices is “security” and “crowding”, which is odd, given that most housing complexes have guards and CCTV cameras. These practices become normalized through everyday practices and are structured by deeply rooted caste norms.

Caste and its association with certain tasks have endured, even thrived through domestic labour relations. Given the “dirty and manual” nature of work involved, coupled with the socio-economic vulnerability of the workers who undertake it, caste relations do seem to structure this particular labour market, and are in turn sustained and reproduced through labour relations between the domestic worker and the middle- and upper-middle-class families (Bayly, 1999, cited in Froystad 2003, p. 74). Based on her interactions with several upper-caste Hindu employers, Bayly (1999) listed tasks in increasing order

⁷ The risk of abuse among migrant domestic workers is particularly high as they are usually from poorer contexts and constitute a cultural minority in the host area. Nearly half of the victims of exploitation and abuse are migrants, having left their place of origin to work abroad or in another place in their country. Moreover, migration is often forced, thus acquiring dimensions of trafficking. Over the last few years, forced labour and human trafficking have received increased international attention. In 2012, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that at least 20.9 million people are in situations of forced labour around the world, out of which nearly half are in Asia. Migration for domestic work in India can take place from neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh and internally from poor states such as Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha to better-off places like Delhi and Mumbai, and from poor areas/slums to richer parts of the same city.

of preference. While tasks such as cleaning toilets, swabbing floors, washing dishes and washing clothes stood at the lower end of this preference scale, and for which hiring of domestic workers was considered essential, others like cooking and cutting vegetables were considered tolerable, something that the employers might consider doing themselves. Even households with less money were seen to hire services to do those “less tolerated” tasks. Tasks were seen to be neatly divided between cleaning and cooking and the bodies that performed each of these were also usually kept separate. Thus the logic of caste and its associated “pure and impure” tasks revealed itself through this exercise.

The logic of caste is also played out in the ordering and use of space within the households, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Those who were involved in cleaning bathrooms and floors were generally not allowed near the kitchen and were served water, tea and so on in separate utensils. Thus, caste also structures the spatial organization of domestic workers in the form of separate bathrooms, entrances and eating rituals. Caste and associated tasks are seen to be a marker for poverty and vulnerability as workers involved in cleaning and least tolerated tasks are more often than not from lower socio-economic backgrounds (ibid).

Raghuram (2001) too speaks about the social stratification, mainly based on caste and tasks, and the spatial dimensions that structure domestic work through her study on part-time domestic workers in Nithari village in Ghaziabad near Delhi, an area that has undergone rapid urbanization and industrialization in the recent past. She talks about the traditional specialization of tasks, from child care and cooking to cleaning utensils and taking the waste out to sweeping and swabbing. While these specializations do exist, they are not so nuanced and are generally divided into “cleaning tasks” and “caring tasks”. Interestingly, she says that the part-time workers are usually given the cleaning tasks which entails little time and presence in the employers’ house. She also spoke of the caste hierarchies observed among workers. The transition of work from feudal to contractual, thus disengaging with the traditional *jajmani* system (p. 613) is apparent, but caste preferences remain strong. Caste and gender have intersected to reproduce social inequities among women who are involved in domestic work (ibid).

1.2.3. Age

The earlier IHD study (2013) on adolescent domestic workers revealed that most of younger workers were illiterate and paid less than minimum wages. They also belong to extremely poor families that require contributions from young labour. Many respondents from the study admitted that the younger girls were preferred as they were more obedient and pliable. The practice of hiring underage workers is not new and continues despite laws banning child labour. Many under age respondents in the study alleged that they were above the age of 18 years, despite looking much younger. Employers and recruitment agencies were also found to do the same while speaking of their workers. One recruitment agency in Lajpat Nagar said that they did not under any circumstance keep any information on girls below the age of 18 years. However, when one of the team members called pretending to be a client and asking specifically for a 16-year-old girl from Jharkhand, another agency said that this could be arranged easily.

In many cases, older women were preferred. Some respondents from the current Delhi–Mumbai study revealed that older single women who have no family responsibilities are preferred as they take less holidays. Thus, age is a factor in the recruitment of domestic workers.

1.2.4. Religion and region

Religion also structures this work as well as the demand for it, mostly because of the intimate nature of the work. This could stem from biases, fear or suspicion of people from other communities. Constable (2010, p. 41–42) conducted research among employers of Middle Eastern countries and found religion to be an important factor among employers seeking domestic work. The preference towards Indonesian Muslims among some families in Yemen was because Muslim women were considered to be “quiet” and “obedient”, unlike the Filipina women who were considered to be “outgoing, assertive, opinionated and hard to manage”. Some employers in her study felt that religion did not matter, what mattered was that “she should be god fearing” (ibid, p. 42). In her research, religion was not just an important socio-cultural factor, rather because they were more vulnerable and lacked social networks in the country they migrated to, Muslim women from Indonesia were regarded as more obedient and cheaper.

Region also plays an important factor in employment. Workers from the same region as the employer are preferred as they are likely to know more about the socio-cultural and culinary practices of the employer’s household. However, regional stereotypes played an important role in shaping the preference of employers. Most Hindu employers in the Mumbai study said that they would not hire Muslims. In the current study, most Hindu respondents in Mumbai said that they would be most comfortable with a Maharashtrian Hindu. Many displayed a lack of trust in Muslims and Biharis. In the ILO study conducted in 2013 in Delhi, some employers revealed a preference towards women from the tribal areas of Jharkhand, as women from these areas come from recruitment agencies and have few social networks in Delhi.

In Delhi, the employer is more interested in the attributes of the women domestic as a worker – that is, her efficiency, punctuality and honesty – compared to regional or religious factors. Preferences were formed based on the norms set over time about domestics belonging to certain regions, such as east and south Indian women workers being more efficient compared to north Indian domestics. The preference for tribal Christian girls is another such parameter that influences employers while hiring domestic workers.

1.2.5. Trust and suspicion

Besides the sex, caste, class, age and religion of the worker, there are several other factors that shape the demands of the employer. Qayum and Ray’s study of a set of employers in Kolkata reveals that many employers expected certain characteristics from their domestic workers (both men and women) – namely loyalty, subservience and lifelong service of the family (Qayum and Ray, 2003). Thus “trustworthiness” emerges as a major – if not the most significant – factor on which employers base their decision to employ a worker or not.

Domestic work is different from other forms of work as it is performed in the private realm and is based on mutual trust and dependability. Given that the work is being carried out by an outsider in the employer’s intimate space, concerns of privacy and security arise. Intimate labour complicates spatial and temporal limits that other kinds of work are bound by. Domestic workers as well as employers are constantly negotiating their positions in intimate spaces, where power and personal relations are entwined and no formal boundaries exist. Further, the spatial dynamics that structure domestic work are deeply gendered. Domestic workers, who are usually women, usually interact with the women of the house, with the men of the house mostly avoiding interaction with the domestic worker. Negotiations of work, space and timings are delicately carved between these women.

Each house has its own rules that order the use of space and time and these are expected to be followed by the domestic worker, be it part-time, live-in or full-time. Entry into the bedroom or kitchen is negotiated with the women of the house and the instructions are given by the employers (usually women). Qayum and Ray (2003) speak of the changing spatial dynamics of big houses and shared spaces giving way to small apartments where space is scarce and privacy has become important, resulting in more part-time workers and less live-in and full-time workers for whom providing a separate space has become difficult. This is especially true for Mumbai. Apartments today are being designed with separate toilets on each floor for the exclusive use of outsiders.

The study conducted by Adecco TISS Labour Market Research Initiative (ATLMRI) in Mumbai reveals some of the changes that are occurring in the relations between the employer and domestic workers, wherein the dynamics of the family are changing, resulting in a reorganization of space and routine within the household. Live-in and full-time workers need to negotiate time and space consistently, given that they spend the most time in the employer's house. They are often expected to be at the beck and call of the employer and the family and yet be "invisible" and minimize their presence, especially when guests are present. Moreover, in view of the fact that this work occurs within the privacy of the employer's home, the vulnerability of the worker is enhanced. According to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2007, p. 86), "Working in the unregulated domain of a private home, mostly without the protection of national labour legislation, allows for female domestic workers to be mistreated by their employers with impunity. Women are often subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks. They may be strictly confined to their places of work." (Cited in Paul et al. (2011).)

Trust is especially crucial for both the employer and the domestic worker. Credibility for both the worker and the employer is the one notion that shapes this informal labour market, where the dominant channel of recruitment is word of mouth. A respondent in Mumbai said that for some reason, her workers kept leaving the job and she was afraid how other workers might perceive her. While trust is essential in other informal as well as formal labour markets, it assumes a very different meaning in the private realm. The employer trusts her cook to follow hygienic practices, while a live-in domestic worker has to trust that the employer will not harm her in any way. This trust does not imply that there will be no betrayal of that trust; however, it is essential to the job. Moreover, there are degrees of trust as well and depend on each worker–employer relationship, how long the workers have been working and whom they have been referred by.⁸

Notions of trust, security and understanding tend to be different in different cultural contexts as well. In a study on expatriate employers of domestic workers by Shalini Grover (n.d), foreign employers raised concerns about dependability and trust as suing was not an option and their lack of local language and culture was an issue. Hence, they preferred English-speaking workers and depended on their friends or embassies to recruit workers. In this foreign domestic labour market, then, a bad reference can spread like wildfire in this community and hence credibility is everything. On the other hand, the workers too had a preference regarding which employer to work for based on nationality. British, French and US nationals were seen to be preferred employers as it was felt that working for them would enhance their future employability (ibid).

8 Some employers in Mumbai felt that the worker who had been with them for the longest time (usually a live-in) was the one whom they entrusted with important work and information, while recent part-timers were given peripheral jobs, both in spatial and labour terms.

The issue of trust emerges in other contexts as well. There are apprehensions among the employers of personal family information being leaked outside by the domestic worker, a fear that was not so strong earlier, when the loyalty and subservience of the worker were assumed on the part of the employer (Chakraborty, 1991, cited in Froystad, 2003, p. 75).⁹

Moreover, suspicion seems to shape much of employer–worker relations today, particularly when dealing with migrant workers who are largely criminalized. Employers usually avoid giving the household keys to their workers, even after locking valuables inside cupboards and lockers. Their entry and exit is closely recorded by security guards who are present in most residential complexes and housing societies 24x7. In the event of any incident, these workers are the ones who are immediately rounded up, questioned and even roughed up. There are closed circuit televisions (CCTV) cameras in common spaces as well as within private homes. An advertisement about CP Plus CCTV cameras (one of the leading brands) reveals the general attitude of mistrust towards domestic workers and the presence of technology to counter this. In it a domestic worker is caring for her employer’s child and is shown in poor light, but is immediately reminded of the fact that there is a CP Plus CCTV camera right on top of her and this makes her aware and disciplines her.¹⁰ Qayum and Ray (2003, p. 548), through the voices of employers of various age groups, explore their anxiety of the changing world and changing relationships and insecurities therein, which are often embodied in the domestic worker, who is seen through the lens of suspicion despite being viewed as a crucial service provider. In the modern context, thus, where both workers and employers can terminate the unwritten contract, notions of trust, obligations and privacy are transformed and reconstituted.

1.3. Global context of labour markets for domestic workers

The demand for domestic service also transcends nationality and class. The global nature of domestic work is becoming increasingly visible, in the form of expatriates in India employing Indian domestic labour, as well as Indian diplomats hiring domestic workers for their households abroad. Grover (n.d.), through an ethnographic study, explored the relations between domestic workers and foreign employers working as expatriates in India, to analyse the cultural dimensions and the global nature of domestic services. Domestic workers the world over constitute an enormous and dynamic global care economy which has arisen largely due to the state’s inability to provide care structures. There are cases of Indian diplomats stationed abroad who take Indian domestic workers and/or nannies along with them to work in a foreign country. The recent case involving Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade stationed in the US, who allegedly mistreated her Indian nanny and lied on her visa form about paying her minimum wage while paying her less than half of the legal minimum (Reuters, 2013) made national and international headlines. This case highlighted the deeply polarized views reflected in the assertion of national sovereignty on the one hand and the protection of human rights on the other. A Saudi diplomat reportedly imprisoned, enslaved and raped two Nepali women who were working in his house as domestic workers in September 2015, after which he escaped on diplomatic immunity (Burke, 2015). These cases shed light on the powerful culture of servitude which operates beyond national boundaries (Man-nathukkaren, 2013).

9 This apprehension was captured in an interview with a respondent in Mumbai, who shares her apartment with her boyfriend. Her parents do not know of her living arrangement or her relationship. Although she fears that the domestic worker might reveal this to her parents when they come to visit, she does not want to tell her domestic worker to keep this a secret. “I don’t want to give her the power of this knowledge, as she might then use it against me. Although I am sure she knows as she has heard our conversations about this.” She had a small disagreement with her domestic worker recently and now fears that she might reveal to her parents about her living arrangement.

10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77DGIFulmc>

The domestic labour markets operate somewhat differently when the demand side constitutes foreign employers. Grover (n.d.), while studying expatriate cultures and the practices of foreign employers of domestic workers in Delhi, drew comparisons between the local and the expatriate labour markets. While the former is characterized by a supply of mostly poor migrant women belonging to the weaker castes opting for this work for money and because of lack of marketable skills, the latter is dominated by a pool of English-speaking, educated women, who opt for a domestic work due to the perception that it is safe, offers exposure and potential foreign travel. “The image of the all-rounder nanny/*ayah* who is in demand is being valued for her decision-making, good-sense, and trustworthiness – *more of a partner in domestic enterprise*,” according to Grover (2013). Despite the notions of expatriate employers being fair, there is an understanding among workers that these employers are less understanding than their Indian counterparts. The foreign employers were perceived as less attached, although the working conditions were considered to be better. One can see that the expatriate domestic labour markets are marked by a higher degree of formality and are more closely guarded when compared to the local domestic labour market, which can be easily accessed. However, one similarity that binds the national and international domestic labour markets is the culture of servitude. This culture is characterized by a sense of entitlement and a belief that labour can be extracted from domestic workers at any time, at any cost, and without question.

1.4. Formalization and informality

Domestic servitude displays characteristics of modernity, even though it is deeply feudal and colonial in its origin. It has managed to survive, evolve and stands tall in a post-colonial, capitalist and democratic context. How do modern institutions, such as the nuclear family, social security, worker’s rights and democratic principles coexist with the feudal institution of domestic servitude? The institution of domestic labour offers simultaneously both an emancipatory potential for women, enabling them to enter paid work, as well as scope for exploitation, abuse and discrimination. Media reports in the recent past are replete with shocking incidents of physical and sexual violence as well as restriction of mobility of live-in domestic workers by employers. The alleged torture and murder of a 10-year-old girl who had come to work from Bhopal in the home of an upper-middle-class family in Mumbai in 2006, for using the employer’s lipstick, is a case in point. In Delhi, an 18-year-old migrant domestic worker from Bihar was locked in her employer’s house, exploited, physically abused and denied payment for work (Sharma, 2006). This ordeal continued for three years, till she was rescued by an NGO. These are among the many incidents reported in the media, which reveal the coexistence of slavery in the modern democratic context (Mail Online India, 2014).

Pre-capitalist norms of loyalty and protection still seem to characterize most of the relations between employers and domestic workers, even today. In her ethnographic research, Ray (2001) shows that both employers and workers felt an emotional obligation towards each other. Ray’s review of *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community*, by Tamara Mose Brown, 2011, exposes the deep contradiction between the arbitrariness and personalized nature of this work and its associated relationships and the demands made on the workers by the employer regarding professionalism. There seems to be a transition towards formality in some aspects and the growing pains are quite evident, while in other aspects a degree of informality is retained, even desired both on the part of the worker and the employer. While the employer tries to get extra work for the same pay from the worker, the worker is likely to get interest-free loans and extra days off if the relations with the employer are good. Formalization of the work is likely to erode these relations.

Though there are varying schools of thought regarding the relation between the employer and worker (or “servant”, as many use this degrading term even today) ranging from benevolence to malevolence, from exploitation to care and affection, the fact is that the relation is characterized by an obvious asymmetry of power (Ray, 2000). There is also a sense of an employer bestowing benevolence upon the worker by employing her in the household, thereby resulting in a sense of obligation and gratitude on the part of the worker and her family – reflective of a feudal relationship. This invites a unique form of exploitation comprising overwork and low wages. There are also situations wherein the families of child workers feel that the workers would receive protection from the employer and their family, without any such guarantee (ILO, 2004, p. 22). The blending of the feudal and professional aspects becomes apparent here.

The domestic labour market is thus evolving, portraying simultaneous characteristics of informal and semi-feudal relations, as well as an increased professionalization in a modern, post-colonial context.

Thus, the complex and coexisting norms of feudal, colonial and post-colonial, along with the democratic and modern times, and globalization constitute the cultures of servitude today. Qayum and Ray (2003) bring focus on this institution and culture of servility undergoing social transformations and struggling to retain some of the traditional notions such as unwavering loyalty and sense of duty, while opening up to notions of modernity such as impersonal work relations, time-bound tasks and market-driven professionalism.

1.5. Recruitment channels

Given the largely informal nature of this work, there are few formal channels of entry and these too are known to facilitate the entry of young workers, though informally. According to the Task Force for National Policy on Domestic Work (2011) and Neetha (2008), there are currently 800–1,000 agencies in Delhi. Although this is reflective of the increasing commercialization of domestic work, the corresponding formalization of the occupation has not occurred. Thousands of illegal placement agencies flourish in cities like Delhi, where there is a high demand for live-in maids, who can work at odd hours in accordance with their employers’ schedules (*Shakti Vahini*, 2012). Often, illegality is associated with malpractices or modus operandi for trafficking of women and girls, leading to the demand for legalization, although it is not clear whether legality of the recruitment channels ensures better working conditions and terms of contract. Very similar practices are very often witnessed since the recruitment channels (even if legal) cannot guarantee working conditions such that unacceptable forms of work such as forced overtime, no leave or underpayment do not occur. However, the survey in these two metros finds very low dependence on recruitment agencies by employers except in select locations and among a certain class of employers.

Other channels include relatives of the domestic workers as well as the domestic workers themselves. The need for legal provisions to domestic workers and workers’ rights is essential in countries where the demand for such services is on the rise. The study conducted by IHD in 2012-13 revealed that in Delhi and Ranchi, domestic workers were often the point of contact for both other workers and employers. In Mumbai, these agencies were not used as per the finding of the qualitative study. Employers relied on informal networks such as friends and neighbours to get domestic workers. Security guards emerged as dominant contact points between the employers and the workers.

However, some of this is changing with increasing use of the internet and social media, which are beginning to influence the way that domestic workers are hired today. Sharma (2015) states that the process of hiring has become more formalized, entailing formal paperwork and work contracts, in

order to ensure protection to the workers in the informal sector under the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 and the Sexual Harassment against Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013, besides the scheduled minimum wages schedules issued by state governments under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.

How does internet technology influence the recruitment process? Just to illustrate - Mr. Kamlani and his business partner Mr. David Perla have co-founded TrueProfile, a LinkedIn-style online platform for domestic workers, drivers and office boys who serve homes and businesses in India, to help them document their work experiences online in the absence of formal documents. This website enables verification of the employee as well. Interestingly, the service is free for the workers uploading their profiles, but paid for the employers looking to hire. Although, this service might not capture many workers who do not have access to smartphones or the internet, it does benefit a significant proportion of workers who have access to smartphones. Other such websites like BookMyBai.com¹¹ are being increasingly used by employers to recruit domestic workers and for domestic workers to place their profiles. This platform offers services in the following categories: cleaning, cooking, baby sitting and elderly care. It offers different types of workers: full-time, part-time or live-in as well as in terms of experience of the workers. It also offers timeline for the services: Immediately, within this week, within this month. Even the BookMyBai website's promotional campaign, "Diamonds are useless, get your wife a maid", upholds patriarchal notions.

However, even here, discrimination seeps in. Preferences of employers along caste and religion are very much prevalent. In fact, these online applications and websites are seen to cater to specific demands of the employers as they pay for them.

Box 1 Someone asks on a thread (on bookmybai.com as well as on babycenter.in websites)

What did you do? I just found out my nanny chews tobacco as well and by god she is addicted to it ... she is our cook too and I smell that gutka type smell as soon as she comes out of her room ... early in the morning around 5 a.m. I have been getting headaches recently and when I went to doctor she said it's an allergy might be due to some perfume ... Then I realized that it's due to the gutka smell ... She has been with us for a month now and I have confronted her several times to not use it in our house. Problem is she is a live-in maid and she is preparing at home by using our mortar and pestle. When I first confronted her she said it's not gutka, just betel nut ... I thought she left the habit but found out she started using Tic Tacs or mouth fresheners so that we cannot smell. My baby has a runny nose since a week and we went to doctor three times in past five days but doctor said it's not cold. Finally yesterday our pediatrician said it might be an allergy to something and we really think it's because of her and her smell!!!! I too agree it's really hard to get a nanny, let alone a good one ... but I think I do not have to pay someone and put myself and my baby at risk... so I have said to her to go back by the 1st.

Source: <http://www.bookmybai.com/Question/Nanny-trouble/4>
<https://www.babycenter.in/thread/51911/nanny-trouble?startIndex=10>

Similarly, issues of suspicion and lack of trust also emerged. On bookmybai.com, another asked: My baby is five months now, get a nurse, I then go to work. Do I need a camera to monitor babysitter? And received a reply: Ya, these days its best to have a camera installed. You can be double sure that the babysitter takes care of baby well. Cos I see in my apartments how careless few maids are with babies (sic).

Source: <http://theladiesfinger.com/welcome-to-the-new-safe-spaces-for-indians-who-want-maids/>

11 BookMyBai is India's only platform through which home owners can hire a domestic help online. <http://www.bookmybai.com/>

Thus caste, religion and gendered biases and discriminations are being reproduced and streamlined in these websites, enabling employers to find exactly “what” they need, thus objectifying domestic workers and their labour (ibid). Some examples of employers’ biases along the lines of class and caste towards domestic workers from Bookmybai.com as well as Babycenter.in website are listed in box 1 below.

These statements are reflective of the caste and class biases that still structure employer and worker relations in the context of domestic work and impede efforts towards formalization and constructing dignity of labour.

1.6. Mobilization

There are many cultural, social and political factors which influence the domestic labour market, as well as labour mobilization and movements. Qayum and Ray (2003) describe the culture of servitude in Kolkata as being influenced by the socio-spatial, economic and cultural forces that operated in the past as well as those operating in the present across public and private realms. These influence the ability and will of different labour groups to collectivize and assert their influence with various institutions to demand their dignity and rights. This can be seen in other urban spaces as well, like in Delhi and Mumbai, although in qualitatively different ways. Qayum and Ray’s study is based on Kolkata, a city which does still display some feudal and colonial elements. Mumbai is known for its thorough professionalism and impeccable work ethic, given its history of worker’s rights movements, a history that it shares with Kolkata. Similarly, Delhi, the political capital of the country, has witnessed numerous political and social movements.

However, mobilization among the poor informal workers has been declining overall in the urban context. In Mumbai in particular in the context of increasing pace of urbanization, the aspiration of building world-class cities and the advent of the new economic policy, representation of the urban poor has declined (Bhide, 2014). Moreover, the current political climate has also influenced the extent and nature of mobilization of the poor and informal workers, both in Delhi and Mumbai. The nature of urban planning has largely pushed out the urban poor, who are essentially the service providers of the city. Public spaces meant for protests and mobilization seem to be shrinking and the rise of multi-storied apartments seem to be dividing both the public and private spaces of the cities. The clampdown on street vendors and hawkers in Mumbai is a reflection of the weakening of mobilization of the urban poor in a city that has historically seen some of the most active workers’ groups in the country. Similarly, the socio-spatial restructuring of Delhi in preparation of the Commonwealth Games is reflective of the lack of representation of the urban poor in the policy spaces.

However, workers in Mumbai do come across as more mobilized and aware of their rights as compared to Delhi. Approximately 8,000 domestic workers, part of a collective called Maharashtra Rajya Gharkamgar Kirti Samiti, organized a protest rally and marched to *Mantralaya* (state administrative headquarters) on 16 March 2011 in Mumbai demanding that they be recognized as workers. The collective is a joint platform of domestic workers’ unions affiliated to other trade unions like the All India Trade Union Congress, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, the Indian National Trade Union Congress, the New Trade Union Initiative and the Sarva Shramik Mahasangh, formed in February 2011 to raise the issues of wages, conditions of work and access to social security. There are many organizations that are working for the cause of domestic workers in Mumbai such as Sarva Shramik Sanstha. In fact, domestic workers in Mumbai are set to be covered by the Minimum Wages Act, which will ensure that the monthly wages of domestic workers are calculated on the basis of the hours and volume of work undertaken and the size of the employers’ family. Thus,

for instance, if a woman works in a house for eight hours, she will earn a minimum of INR6,500 per month (Gangan, 2013). However, this is still to be implemented.

Although, Delhi has witnessed massive social protests in the aftermath of the 16 December 2012 gang rape, they have largely constituted middle- and upper-middle-class citizens who are essentially fighting for governance, civic issues and safety. The urban poor and their interests were hardly represented in these protests. This is not to undermine the protests, merely to bring attention to the lack of mobilization of the urban poor in Delhi. Delhi like Kolkata has vestiges of feudalism, and is also characterized by a deep patriarchal mind set coexisting uneasily with modern and capitalist institutions and practices. The degree of mobilization is relatively low.

There are organizations in Delhi that represent the interests of domestic workers such as Nirmala Niketan, part of the Nirmana Worker's Union, which is a union of domestic workers that provides work to them and also looks after their interests and formalizes their work and their rights as workers. At the national level too, there are efforts such as 'The Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Domestic Workers, which recommended and drafted a "National Policy for Domestic Workers" (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, 2011) along with suitable legislative framework to regulate domestic work. The main aim of the draft policy was to recognize domestic work as a category of regular work, and to recognize the rights of domestic workers as 'workers' and place them on par with other workers. It seeks to ensure minimum wages, welfare measures, social protection, health insurance and protection against exploitation and abuse, and provides for the registration of domestic workers as well as that of placement agencies or individuals that supply them. As a result of efforts at various levels, domestic work has been included in the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act 2008.

As far as the employers' perception of workers' mobilization is concerned, reports are mixed. Employers seem to be acutely aware of the downside of "unionization" that will not only impinge on their ability to make the worker work as per their wishes, but also empower the worker, thus making them more demanding of their rights and wages. They do understand the importance of providing rights and dignity to the worker, and are aware that this will make domestic labour more costly and formal, thus making it more difficult and complicated to recruit them. Although some kind of mobilization for employers is present in both cities, it is still not institutionalized.

1.7. Do domestic workers have dignity?

Unlike other kinds of work such as work in factories, shops or restaurants, domestic work and the labour relations therein are quite complex. This work is not regulated or set, and is characterized by particularities of work demanded by different employers across caste, class and region. These varied sets of individualized demands structure this unique labour market (Mattila, 2009). Post-colonial and modern discourses simultaneously shape relations between the employer and the worker reflected in the employer's perceptions of being fair and professional on the one hand and of being assuming and expecting unquestioned obedience and service from the workers on the other. Mannathukkaren, 2013 narrates instances of bureaucrats in Kerala demanding labour from their domestic staff beyond the hours of their duty, and being shocked when their demands were not met. The culture of servitude is thus prevalent and influences the relations and labour markets of domestic work.

There is a general sense among employers that this work is taken up by those who are desperate and hence can be hired at low wages and made to work in bad conditions. This not only weakens the position of the worker, it makes them seem expendable and easily replaceable. Moreover, there are several harmful stereotypes constructed around domestic workers (or servants, *naukarani*, *kaammali* and other

terms in local languages that most households use when referring to them). The manner in which they are represented in popular media, movies, advertisements, etc., often criminalizes them. There are jokes about them and their labour along lines of caste and class, which stigmatizes them further. At the same time the overwhelming dependence on them is quite apparent, reflected in the persistent anxiety that employers express when the workers go on leave.¹² Despite this, the domestic worker remains vulnerable and the employers continue to undermine their labour.

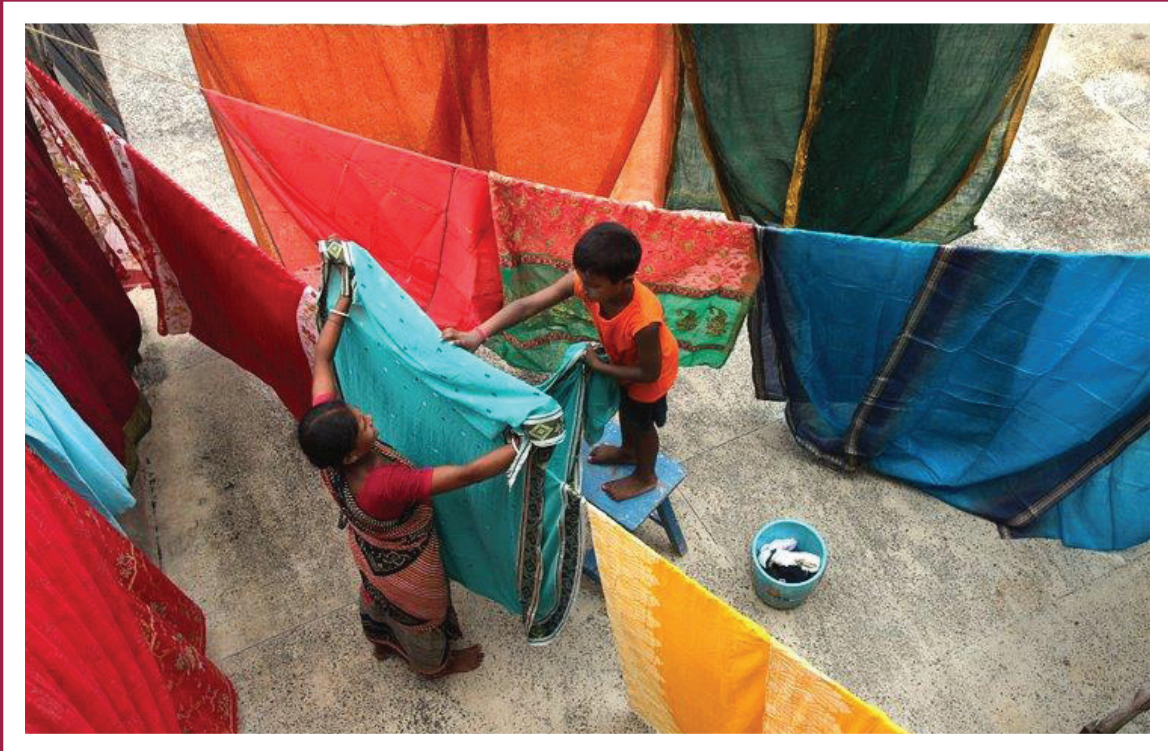
The fact is that there is a very high demand for these workers from the employers in the context of urbanization, erosion of traditional care structures and increasing number of women working outside of their homes (Neetha, 2004). Many workers are more aware now of their rights and their worth as compared to the past. They have begun demanding fair wages and conditions of work through unionization. However, the level of awareness is still low and exploitation by employers (both Indians and foreigners) is very much prevalent, as evidenced by regular media reportage. This is reflective of the cultures of servitude that exist today at a national and international level. In this context, there is a need to not only empower the domestic workers to become aware of their status as important contributors to the economy – thus building their capacity to demand more wages and better conditions – but also to spread awareness among employers about the rights of domestic workers as well as the work they do. Though there are international and national codes of conduct and toolkits for employers regarding the rights of domestic workers, these are absent in the Indian context. There is a need to build a code of conduct for employers in the country based on empirical evidence and cultural contexts, and this study seeks to do this.

Many feel that the professionalization and formalization of domestic work will be a key step towards improving the labour conditions of domestic workers. However, studies show that it is neither that simple, nor easily recommended. More empirical data and analysis is needed to understand how and to what extent this work and labour market can be formalized so that the workers maximize their benefits, without losing certain securities that accrue from the informal nature of their work. Processes of formalization are already under way, with online recruitment channels and reference checks emerging; however, even these are tailored to benefit the employers and their needs, rather than securing the workers and their rights. Thus, transforming employers' attitudes and behaviour and sensitizing them towards domestic work and domestic workers are key steps towards securing the latter's basic right to decent work.

Unfortunately, little systemic research has been done in India on how employers recruit domestic workers, their motivations and behavioural attitudes, their knowledge of domestic workers' rights and employers' obligations, and what the opportunities for change are. One primary reason for the lack of study in this area is the lack of entry points to access various employers, who might feel reluctant to share information. The study in 2013 revealed some important insights in this regard. As the study was concerned with adolescent workers, there was a general sense of apprehension among employers who had employed workers aged 14–18 years as they were worried about the law banning child labour. Another reason is that the work is carried out in their homes, and gaining entry into people's homes to enquire about the conditions of their employees runs the risk of invasion of privacy. The current study in Delhi and Mumbai also revealed challenges, both operational and methodological, that emerge while conducting a study such as this. There is a process of negotiation that occurs between the employer, agent and worker during the hiring process, which could provide critical insights regarding the supply and demand of domestic work. Thus, an in-depth study of the employers of domestic work may have the potential to reveal the nature of their demands and perceptions regarding the work itself, and help inform policies that could accord this work more security and respect.

12 <http://laughingcolours.com/calm-wali-16165.html>

2. Objectives and methodology



This study is about the employers of women domestic workers in two metropolitan cities, Delhi and Mumbai. The rise in women domestic workers as reflected and reported in the NSS data enumeration across India's states reveals that this is increasingly an option for women who are in need of an earning avenue and willing to undertake such personalized work within employer households. In the context of the large number of women working in the domestic work sphere providing personal services to households, it is important to understand who hires them, who the employers of these labour supplies are, and how the labour market is functioning, what mechanisms of hiring are adopted and how wages are fixed. What, if any, rights do women domestic workers have, is there a legal provision and are employers aware of these? In the current milieu, wherein campaigns and movements towards ensuring workers' rights for domestic workers are gaining momentum, understanding what employers' viewpoints are can be interesting and pertinent to aiding the process.

The rise in demand for such services from the employers' point of view is probably an outcome of several factors, among which increasing available disposable income, aversion to undertaking certain tasks, time poverty among working women and vacation of care spaces – which creates demand for hiring other women to undertake these chores – the presence of young children, ill or aged persons in the household, and changing lifestyle patterns. The availability of cheap labour supplies from the large numbers of migrant, near-illiterate, poor urban women is another added factor. In other words, both the supply- and demand-side factors are at play. While quite a few studies have focused on the supply side issues and dimensions, there are not many that have specifically focused on the demand-side perspectives of the employers.

Traditional households with feudal remnants/moorings tend to often have domestic workers, although they need not always be female since male domestic workers were more often the norm. Ray and Qayum talk of the shifts in hiring patterns from male to female domestic workers associated with the changing household dynamics, available employment opportunities for men and low returns of such work that gradually led to women becoming much more of a norm. It is interesting to note that among business households often one finds a male domestic who is a “man Friday”, a person of odd jobs. He very often doubles up as the shop assistant, a loader of sorts and even a driver for the business household. Such domestic workers are often found to be earning a higher wage than the average woman domestic worker. In Mumbai, one found instances of live-ins or full-timers who were being paid higher returns and looking after professional, business-related tasks as well as domestic activities. In other words, employers might be getting pecuniary gains from their domestic workers, although separating these out may often be very difficult.

The study aims to understand the employers' perspective that is the demand side of domestic workers – who demands and hires domestic workers, what preferences influence the selection of domestic workers and through what mechanisms or routes do employers hire domestics? However, this study focuses only on women domestic workers, so references to male domestics appear only wherever the employers mentioned it or investigators came across such workers.

2.1. Research questions

Specifically, the research questions proposed for the study were as follows.

Study question 1

How do employers recruit domestic workers and what are the opportunities for change?

- i. Examine the different forms of recruitment channels used by employers for live-in and part-time domestic workers and why that is so. Assess the level of employer understanding on fair recruitment practices.
- ii. Study the practices adopted by employers while hiring through recruitment/placement agencies and how the relationship is managed.
- iii. Would employers be willing to engage in ethical recruitment practices (e.g., recruitment through a registered agency, etc.)? If so, at what cost?

Study question 2

Drivers of value and devaluation: what are the perceptions of employers on domestic work in terms of skills required and opportunity costs? This entails understanding what employers are currently inconvenienced with in the domestic work sector and what changes do they want to see.

- i. Ascertain whether employers have specific preferences regarding their domestic workers other than experience and efficiency considerations (e.g., by age group, state and district of origin (if possible, block), caste, tribe, language, nationality, skill set and gender)?
- ii. Are these different and how, depending on specific needs (usual domestic work and child care, elderly care)? How have employers' expectations (honesty, sincerity, coming to work on time, softer skills), problems and satisfaction level regarding placement agencies and domestic workers been during the last three years?
- iii. What are employers most inconvenienced by in their current practice with domestic workers, and what changes do they want to see, and at what costs?
- iv. Would the employers encourage live-in workers to take skills training (and give time off to go for training) and would they be willing to increase her salary once the worker clears the assessment?
- v. Do resident welfare associations play any role in deciding the working conditions, remuneration of the domestic workers? Would they like to engage in the process of enabling access to different schemes?

Study question 3

Are employers aware that domestic work is a legitimate labour market activity conducted in an employment relationship?

- i. What are the behavioural patterns of employers and other household members towards the domestic worker (respect of rights at work, use of toilets by domestic workers, use of separate utensils, giving of stale food/leftovers, locking the workers in when going out, confiscation or delayed payment of wages, etc.)?
- ii. What are the different classifications of domestic workers and the nature of tasks performed versus the wages/remuneration earned?
- iii. Are there different labour conditions (tasks performed by domestic workers, hours of work, wage level and timely monthly payment, days off, etc.) and patterns of employment associated to different characteristics of employers (such as socio-economic level, etc.)?
- iv. What is the employers' knowledge on their legal obligations as employers (e.g. right to freedom of association, maximum working time, minimum wage, time off etc.)?

2.2. Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods using both a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of different kinds of employer categories. The research tools formulated both quantitative survey questionnaires and qualitative survey guides and were structured to cover/ address these questions. In addition to the survey, interviews of placement agencies/agents wherever they cooperated were carried out to elicit their viewpoints on these issues.

Any household that hires a domestic worker for chores such as washing utensils, cleaning the house, sweeping and swabbing floors, washing clothes, cooking, taking care of the children, the ill and the elderly is treated as an employer, irrespective of the terms and conditions of such work, payment modalities or hiring mechanisms. Other domestic workers tend to be drivers, gardeners, tutors and garbage collectors hired by employer households, but they are predominantly men, skilled or engaged for very

short durations by any one employer household, and are not included for the purposes of this survey. It is the personalized relationship between the employer and the domestic worker, the element of subservience associated with it and the social status attributed to such work – and thereby the workers – which takes on a different tone given its space of operation within the private spheres. Except for a few cases, the influence of legal or formal institutions remains limited in the way this work relationship tends to function. In Mumbai, investigators even collected data on the domestic workers who came for short periods to clean toilet for a small sum of INR200 per month. Similarly, among the tasks, employers also listed domestic workers who did dusting for the household. These factors increase the total number of domestic workers hired by an employer as multiple workers. Newer forms of hiring domestic worker services are gradually being shaped. For example, seasonal cleaners are one such category which came up during qualitative interviews of employers, wherein employer households would hire services for thorough cleaning of cobwebs, dusting, etc.

Personalized relationship-based hiring or engaging of domestic workers was also witnessed during the survey, wherein all forms of payment modalities were noted. In some cases, no payment was reported since the amount is sent to the household of the domestic worker directly, or where the employer lives in a government quarters/accommodation and provides free residence to the domestic workers' family in lieu of payment for domestic work done for the employer household.

2.3. Area selection/localities

The two cities of Delhi and Mumbai were chosen for the purpose of this study as areas where substantial demand for domestic workers are exhibited and therefore identifying employers of domestic workers as well as understanding their perspective on the subject would be feasible. The incidence of hiring of domestic workers in cities chosen for the study would generally be quite high, except perhaps in the locations where low-income households are concentrated. The study deliberately left the poorer locations such as very low-income households, slum and squatter settlements outside the coverage of this survey, since the objective is to examine the demand-side dimensions, from the perspective of the employers. There might be variations across employers of different class categories, which the study aimed to capture by ensuring appropriate inclusion of sample households from all backgrounds.

The area selection in both cities followed a slightly different stratification since the two cities of Delhi and Mumbai have a different set of information on districts and wards, and other information. Since there is no a priori knowledge or information of how many households hire domestic workers – and further, which of those hire women domestics – a listing of all available households in any chosen locality was undertaken. The listing exercise collected basic information on household size, employment, female working member/s, hiring of domestic workers, recruitment channels, frequency of changing domestic workers and type of domestics. Based on the listing information, selection of the sample households was done to cover as many live-ins and full-time live-out workers (since they were fewer in numbers across most localities) as possible. This was to also ensure requisite number and proportion of live-ins/full-time live-outs. The rest of the sample was systematically covered for employers of part-time domestic workers. Further details on the methodological aspects are provided in this section, which includes stratification and identification of localities in both cities, the listing survey, the actual sample selection and other aspects of the methodology such as qualitative survey dimensions, case studies and interviews.

2.4. Stratification of cities into wards/localities

In Delhi, the city was stratified on the basis of the property tax list classification.¹³ This was used as a proxy for the different class categories of high-, upper-middle- and lower-middle-income households. A random selection of areas as per the population to be covered was done. In Mumbai, the ward selection was based on a range of factors such as the total population and slum population from the 2011 census as well as a priori knowledge of the socio-economic characteristics of the locations in the city. The actual localities/colonies for the survey were selected so as to ensure the coverage of diverse populations consisting of older as well as newer habitations, households with the emerging middle classes, and those which were inhabited by Parsis, Muslims, the Koli community, etc.

The two metros display some differences and a few similarities across localities. While both have high-income residences and slums and shanties in the vicinity of the same areas and also present interspersed habitations of different household income levels, in Delhi, there are a few areas where this is not the case just as in Mumbai. The co-presence of high-income households with poor service providers characterizes the interlinked aspects of Mumbai much more than Delhi: The huge income inequalities, the “peaceful” coexistence, as it were, of plenty and poverty, its visual articulation in relation to the housing structure of the city and the nonchalant acceptance of said visual articulation.

The cleaning up of the city of Delhi has witnessed the removal/relocation of slums from central Delhi for instance; however, the housing conditions and other facilities are very poor in this district as per the 2011 census.

The new aspects that appear to be redefining the city in economic terms relevant to this study include the slum rehabilitation policy and the government’s resettlement schemes, which have pushed the poor and lower-middle classes out of the core city limits to the wider metropolitan region that includes far-flung suburbs that fall outside the jurisdiction of the wards that constitute these metropolises. Added to this, of course, is a process that appears to be gaining dominance – that of reinforcement of segregation according to social and religious groups, as manifested in ghettoization, particularly of the rich and the middle sections of the population, and perhaps slightly more in Mumbai than in Delhi.

Given the geographical area and size of the cities, Mumbai reflects a concentration of traditionally richer and upper middle classes in some parts of the city, while Delhi has a mix of high and middle-income households in the prosperous localities, and middle and lower middle in other parts.

While the survey in Delhi covered 25 wards from all the nine districts within the city, in Mumbai it selected 12 of the 24 wards that constitute the two districts that the city is divided into (lists provided in the annexures). The locality selection in case of Delhi was made from the three categories of the property tax classification as explained earlier. In all, 33 localities were covered in Delhi and 64 in Mumbai. The listing of households within the selected localities followed a combination of a priori knowledge from locals along with convenience in terms of having a contact or entry point of introduction.

2.5. Listing survey

The coverage of households was undertaken as per population proportionate sampling within the wards based on 2011 census data. A total of 4,041 households in Delhi and 1,969 households in Mumbai were covered in the listing survey. The incidence of employer households can only be estimated

¹³ The categories A and B were used as a proxy for identifying the high-income group, with categories C and D for upper-middle class and E and F for the lower-middle income group.

from this survey. Of all the listed households, how many have hired domestic workers can be calculated from this survey. In cases where the domestic worker is perhaps a child worker, investigators reported that respondents were reluctant and in some cases refused to divulge any information. There may be some underreporting under these circumstances. Obvious cases of a child domestic being visible to investigators and employer respondents answering in the negative the question whether they hire any domestic worker were noted from both cities, although this occurred a little more often in Delhi than in Mumbai.

Non-cooperation on the part of certain localities resulted in changing the areas in some cases in both the surveyed cities. In Mumbai, this included cases of non-permission, refusal for security reasons and so on; in Delhi, the choice of certain localities based on the property tax lists resulted in the identification of low-income colonies which did not have any employers of domestic workers. Such areas were changed/replaced with other similar localities in a few cases. The difficulties even during the listing survey in the two cities meant that almost 3-4 times more households/areas were covered in order to actually get 4,000+ in Delhi and close to 2,000 in Mumbai. Locked houses or no one being available to respond posed a problem in both Delhi and Mumbai.

The effort to make a listing of all households in the two cities proved extremely difficult given the time constraints, lack of interest in the subject, physical insecurity and lack of trust. From the first attempts to collect listing information it was becoming clear that this was going to prove difficult.¹⁴ In several high-income localities in both cities, employers were not interested in providing information. In Mumbai, in some localities such as Peddar Road, Marine Drive, etc. even the use of acquaintances did not always help. So, in some of these most difficult areas, the team took a collective decision that only select households will be included, especially in the select locations. Initially, Mumbai faced severe access problems, given the gated communities/apartments which deny access to outsiders. In several localities, some personal contacts were used to gain entry.

The difficulty in gaining access to upper-class employer households was experienced in Delhi too. Often, the investigators faced denial from the employer households and could not continue with such households in the sample. A replacement had to be sought in such cases. The instances of dropouts¹⁵, where employers refused to continue the interview, were also quite high in both cities.

2.6. Sampling of employer households

From the households listed, the employers of women domestic workers were sampled for the study. Given the low number of employer households who hire live-ins and full-time domestics, almost all the cooperating households were included in the sample. This often required tremendous persuasion and effort to cover. From the rest of the households –i.e., those hiring part-time domestic workers –, requisite sampling was randomly covered from all the localities in both cities. A total of over 500 households were surveyed in the two metros, making for total sample employers of 1,023, 506 from Delhi and 517 from Mumbai.

There are several other differences in the two cities which are reflected in the listing and survey as well, which is illustrated in the sample profile; for example, Mumbai had a much higher proportion of single-member, elderly retired-person households, as well as households with fewer young children and more

14 The research team communicated this information to ILO and sought an extension and were advised to also employ a larger number of investigators to take care of the high dropout rates.

15 In some localities in both cities of Delhi and Mumbai, the listing was discontinued or dropped after completion to change to a more appropriate one, since there were hardly any employers of domestic workers.

working women, and all of these factors influence the employer status. These are the defining characteristics for being an employer household in most cases.

2.7. Pilot qualitative case studies

As a pilot survey, the research team developed case studies of employer households across the different localities of the two cities which covered the various kinds of workers. About 25 case studies were covered in each city, which included households from different class backgrounds (upper-, middle- and low-middle-income categories). A total of 50 employer households were interviewed. An attempt was made to try and cover all kinds of employers – those who hire live-ins, part-timers and full-time live-outs. The focus in these interviews was on why domestic workers are hired, what recruitment channels are preferred and why, remuneration considerations, working conditions, other facilities, notions towards domestic workers and treatment meted out to them by the employers. The qualitative interviews revealed that irrespective of whether it is Delhi or Mumbai, the employers expressed the need for domestic workers.¹⁶ Given the shorter duration of work undertaken by the domestic workers generally (in the case of part-time workers) and the nature of such work, most employers do not consider this work as similar to other categories of work. Additional reasons which appear to influence these notions are perhaps linked to the fact that, first, this care-related work is an extension of a “woman’s job”; second, that this work does not require skills; and third, that this is not “work” in the typical sense of timing or other parameters which define work. All of this also influenced the recognition of workers’ rights or unionization for them, which is by and large considered undesirable. The findings of these qualitative surveys informed the questionnaire construction and are used in the analysis and interpretation throughout this report.

2.8. Interviews with other organizations/agencies

The study planned to also interview placement agents/agencies, including any NGOs and organizations engaged in providing domestic workers or fighting for their rights. Since the team could not find any placement agencies in Mumbai, despite a search for these, the placement agencies interviewed were entirely from Delhi. Even in Delhi, in spite of the longish list of names/ addresses made available to us by the ILO, only a few could be contacted and were cooperative. In Mumbai, there were instances of employers reporting that they hired domestic women workers from agents/informal agencies even for part-time and full-time workers. However, scant information was shared about the process through which this was done. No employer from Mumbai revealed the commission that was paid to the agent/agency through which the domestic workers were hired. Even in Delhi, some employers refused to divulge this information or simply stated that they were unaware of the rate. Insights into the placement agencies and agents were elicited from Delhi through the few consenting agents who gave their time and explained the procedures being followed by them to cater to the employers’ demands for domestic workers.

2.9. Difficulties and shortcomings

The challenges faced in carrying out a survey among the urban haves were some of the most difficult ones, given the lack of interest in or time for such activities among the respondents. Very often, em-

¹⁶ During the listing prior to the quantitative survey (which began immediately after the qualitative survey), it was noted that some economically well off employers stated that certain kinds of work, especially cooking and washing utensils, are to be done only by the womenfolk of their households. In such cases, the hiring of domestic workers for such activities did not occur.

employers declined to provide information or investigators had to make several visits before completing the survey. Male respondents in a few cases claimed that they were not aware of details relating to wages being paid to domestic workers. Similarly, women from relatively conservative families stated that the money matters were handled by the men and that they were unaware of what the wages were. Often, non-revelation of wages, payments and commissions to agents appeared to be a result of personalized, informal arrangements the employers did not want to fully reveal. It is possible that in some cases these arrangements may be quite exploitative too. Non-disclosure occurred on these issues.¹⁷ Even the reporting of wages of domestic live-ins appears to include the monthly commission being paid to the agent; however, we have no concrete basis to verify these (see Box 2).

Box 2 | Live-ins hired through informal agents – Disclosure of partial information

A seven-member business household in Delhi hired two live-ins reported to be from Kolkata. The ages of these two workers was stated as 18 and 20 years. The employer stated their salaries to be INR8,000 per month for eight hours of work a day. However, the waking hours of these two workers amounted to nearly 13-14; even if a couple of hours were for personal chores, in all probability these young women were available for work nearly 11-12 hours. The employer also stated that a commission of INR2,500 was paid every month to the agent. The amount quoted for the live-in domestic workers was perhaps inclusive of this commission amount. The employers preferred young women who were unmarried. Informal agents were the desirable channel for recruitment of domestic workers for them probably because their preferences have been satisfied. Interestingly these employers were among the few who considered the amount of commission paid to be reasonable.

The estimates of employers as a share of all listed households for the two cities as reported in this study in any case are higher estimates, as the share of the low-income areas and slums constitute a substantial one third of the city, if not more, and they are being left out for the purposes of this study.

¹⁷ With a couple of employers actually getting angry and even tearing up the questionnaire when questions on wages were being asked. Given the discussion in the newspapers of the minimum wages for live-ins and related issues, the employers were cautious and unhappy, as they felt the wages they were paying were already quite high compared to the work they got in return, since their own notions of this work remain highly undervalued.

3. Socio-economic profile of employers



This section provides insights into who the employers of domestic workers are in the two cities of Delhi and Mumbai. It is only from the listing profile that we can decipher who are hiring domestic workers. The characteristics of these two categories explain several issues. As per the methodology provided in the previous sections, the listing exercise collected basic information on household size, employment, female working member/s, hiring of domestic workers, recruitment channels, frequency of changing domestic workers and type of domestics. Demand-side dimensions of domestic workers and employer characteristics could only be deciphered from the listing data. What factors appear to affect the hiring of domestic workers in these two cities is analysed based on this data, which was systematically collected from different parts of the city.

3.1. Employers' perspective on importance of and reason for employing domestic workers

As the ILO working paper by D'Souza (2010) points out, the growth of domestic work as a service sector is being continually fuelled by supply and demand factors. Demographic changes such as ageing populations, decline in welfare provision, increasing labour force participation of women and the challenges of balancing working and family life in urban areas contribute to greater demand for domestic workers. On the supply side, rural poverty, gender discrimination in the labour market as well as limited employment opportunities in general in rural communities and countries of origin ensure a continuous supply of workers into the sector.

The existing studies, most of which are oriented towards examining the domestic workers' perspectives from the supply side, also tend to capture some of the demand side aspects. Most of these studies also highlight that employers were of the view that domestic workers ensured smooth functioning of the household as they help in undertaking time consuming and tiring tasks. They added that the Indian custom of freshly cooked food, its daily preparation and the equally arduous process of cleaning up the utensils needs assistance (Mehrotra, 2010). The study also states that domestic workers become more important for households where women work outside the house and domestic workers take over the running of these tasks.

From our survey too we find that it is nuclear families, those with young children and working mothers and those with elderly members or old couples living alone who tend to hire domestic services. As Mehrotra (2010), also surveying part-time domestics in Delhi, finds, employers living in nuclear families or with young children are of the view that domestic workers are not only essential as support systems, but are also providers of emotional support as companions. This was something which came across in our survey too, especially in the qualitative interviews.

In many instances, employers believe that they are helping these poor women by not only giving them employment and income, but also by standing by through their household crises by giving advances and other forms of assistance. Very similar references are noted in Mehrotra (2010), when she mentions that some employers attributed an altruistic viewpoint to hiring domestic workers as they "help poor women earn money". Another employer said that "... employing them does not cost us much and it helps a poor person as well". Thus while some employers are demanding such workers due to the low cost at which they are available, others find that the social status that they derive from becoming employers is desirable.

Some employers also observed that employing domestic workers is now a lifestyle statement as it is considered odd not to keep one and instead do all housework oneself (Mehrotra, 2010). An employer of a middle-class locality also shared that it is a status statement to have a domestic worker. An upper-middle-class employer who observed that people view women who clean their own house rather oddly and assume that they cannot employ a worker owing to financial problems corroborates this statement. This aspect has also been noted by Ray and Qayum, who observe that domestic workers in India not only perform the undesirable work that would be in the "... purview of women of the household, but in so doing, make it possible for the employers to aspire to and maintain middle-class status" (Ray and Qayum, 2009, p. 9).

3.2. Survey findings

As mentioned earlier, the listing covered 6,010 households, 4,041 in Delhi and 1,969 in Mumbai. The respondents from the two cities were largely Hindu upper-caste households in both cities, with a small

share of Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis. In terms of social composition, while the bulk of the listed households belonged to the general castes, 183 households were of Scheduled Castes (SCs), 238 were from Other Backward Classes (OBC) and only 21 were of Scheduled Tribes (STs) (see Table 1).

Certain characteristics of the employers are elicited from the sample households such as asset ownership, size of house in terms of number of rooms, highest educational level and so on. The source of information is clearly specified to indicate whether the information is based on the listing or sample survey findings.

As mentioned earlier, household work is undervalued and considered of low significance, and so tends to be considered of low value even when carried out in the paid market domain, thereby providing very low returns for such labour. Among a few of the reasons for the low value attributed to domestic work are that it supplements women's unpaid work and the low opportunity cost for the labour supplies, given the low work participation of women.

Yet, there is a growing demand for such work in the urban milieu, both due to availability of cheap and abundant labour as well as the factors from the employers' demand side. Is the hiring of domestic workers already beginning to show signs of being formalized in certain ways? Are the traditional servitude-based relationships gradually paving the way for more market-oriented thinking and functioning of the labour markets? Some of these questions are explored in the study to gain an understanding of the employers' perspective.

3.3. Demand for domestic workers – Who hires?

The survey of relatively better-off sections of the population found only 56 per cent of the households reporting demand for domestic workers.¹⁸ The sense during the field survey was that several other households would have liked to hire the services of certain domestic workers if they were confident of the workers' trustworthiness and efficiency. An approximate guesstimate of at least 5 per cent prospective employers can be stated, although there is also a substantial proportion of seasonal or intermittent hiring based on the needs of the families. This unmet demand was not something that was systematically assessed, although any future study of this nature must definitely include this dimension.

3.3.1. Social composition

Table 1: Proportion of domestic worker (DW) employer households in the two cities by social group

Caste group	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	Employers (%)	No. of HHs	Employers (%)	No. of HHs	Employers (%)	No. of HHs
General	43.3	3650	88.7	1918	59	5568
SC	11.8	161	77.3	22	19.7	183
ST	56.3	16	100	5	66.7	21
OBC	9.8	214	95.8	24	18.5	238
Total	40.4	4041	88.7	1969	56.2	6010

Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

18 Another 5 per cent may be households which have demand but have not yet been able to hire a domestic worker, as respondents asked investigators during the survey if they could help in getting good, reliable, trustworthy domestic workers.

Of the households covered in the listing, while a total of 56 per cent reported themselves as employers of domestic workers, the share of households across social groups varied tremendously. Among the STs, who tend to be few in number (amongst the urban relatively well to do households), 14 of the 21 households (67 per cent) were employers of domestic workers. The share of employers of domestic workers among the general caste households was 59 per cent, while very few OBC and SC households reported hiring domestic workers (19 and 20 per cent, respectively).

The pattern and proportion of hiring also varies tremendously across the two cities, partly because of the listing procedure followed and the composition of the households covered. Mumbai saw relatively more upper-income households covered compared to the households in Delhi for reasons stated in the methodology section.

3.3.2. Income profile of employer households

The entire set of households listed was subdivided into three categories: lower-middle-, upper-middle- and high-income households. Of households covered in the overall listing frame, 44 per cent were lower-middle-income households, 31 per cent upper-middle and 24 per cent high-income. The distributions of Mumbai and Delhi were quite different and therefore it is important to analyse the information for both cities separately. The different structures of the two cities and availability of information bases required slightly different methods. The bulk of the households in Mumbai – 39 per cent – were high-income households, while in Delhi more than half (53 per cent) were lower-middle-income households and only 17 per cent were high-income households. This distribution of households influences several of the findings as will be seen in the sections ahead. The upper-middle categories of households are similar, with approximately one-third of households covered in each city belonging to this category.

Table 2: Proportion of DW employer households in the two cities by income categories

Income categories (INR)	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	% of HHs hiring DWs	Total no. of HHs	% of HHs hiring DWs	Total no. of HHs	% of HHs hiring DWs	Total no. of HHs
Up to 6 lakh	25.7	2 132	83.6	538	37.3	2670
6–12 lakh	50.2	1 204	88.1	671	63.7	1875
>12 lakh	68.1	705	92.8	760	80.9	1465
Total	40.4	4 041	88.7	1969	56.2	6010

1 lakh = 100,000
Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

As expected, the hiring profile is strongly associated with the income class the household belongs to. Of the 1,465 households in this income class, four-fifths are employers of domestic workers. In Mumbai, households with income levels above INR12 lakh per annum hire domestic workers in 93 per cent of the cases, while the share is 68 per cent in Delhi for the same category.

As seen, income does play a role, but there are households even in the lower-middle-income category who are employers. More than 37 per cent of all households in this category are also reported to be hiring domestic workers. It was noted that a lot more self-employed, single-member and retired households were covered in the listing for Mumbai compared to Delhi, which also affects their domestic worker hiring profile. Other factors that are at play influencing these employers maybe the household size, age profile of household members or working profile, especially that of adult women members of the household.

3.3.3. Household size and main earning member

Mumbai consisted of a lot more single-member households, young, old and retired. While the average household size of Delhi was five members, in Mumbai it was four. Almost half of the listed households were in the four to five member households. In general, Mumbai recorded a smaller family size, compared to Delhi, where some very large families were also part of the listing, with more than eight members.

Table 3: Distribution by household size

Number of members	Delhi	Mumbai	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)
1	2	6	3
2–3	25	37	29
4–5	50	42	48
6–7	15	11	14
8 and above	8	4	7
Total	100	100	100

Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Fifteen per cent of households in Delhi had main earning members as females, while the corresponding figure in Mumbai is 12 per cent. The proportion of employer households among the female-headed households tends to be slightly higher compared to the male-headed households.

Table 4: Proportion of DW employer households by main earning member

Main earning member	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	% of HHs	No. of HHs	% of HHs	No. of HHs	% of HHs	No. of HHs
Male	39.5	3442	88.1	1737	55.8	5179
Female	45.1	599	93.1	232	58.5	831
Total	40.4	4041	88.7	1969	56.2	6010

Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Among the listed households, a majority of the households are involved in regular employment – nearly 55 per cent. A larger share of these are in the private sector (32 per cent), as against government employees (23 per cent). More than one-third of the households are occupied in self-employed businesses or trading (35 per cent). The remaining 10 per cent are retired, rentiers and so on. The categories of households which reported the highest employment of domestic workers are the self-employed, retired and rentiers, etc. Less than half of the regular salaried households hire domestic workers.

Table 5: Distribution of employers by occupation of main earning member

Category of employer	%	Number of employer households
Self-employed, businessperson	67	1398
Regular – government/public sector	48	644
Regular – private sector	45	861
Retired	75	415
Others	78	59
Total	56	3377

Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

3.3.4. Education, assets and income profile

The bulk of employers in both these cities were highly educated, up to graduation and beyond. Almost 90 per cent of the sample households in both cities reported the highest education level in the family as beyond graduation.

Table 6: Distribution of employers by highest education level in the household

Education Level	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Literate	0.0	0	0.2	1	0.1	1
Up to middle school	2.0	10	1.0	5	1.5	15
Secondary school	2.4	12	2.7	14	2.5	26
Higher secondary school	4.5	23	7.7	40	6.2	63
Graduate and above	91.1	461	88.4	457	89.7	918
Total	100	506	100	517	100	1023

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

In terms of house ownership, most employers lived in their own houses, with the share of the sample households being more in Mumbai than Delhi (87 per cent and 80 per cent respectively). Only 9 per cent of the employers in each of these two cities were living in rented accommodation, while 11 employer households in Mumbai were living under the *pagdi* arrangement (a system of renting a house by paying a large amount upfront, wherein the renter also becomes the de-facto owner of the house, but not the land on which the house is built, subject to legal limitations). In Delhi, employers living in employer-, government- or university-provided accommodation were also quite a few, 57 households, which included lease arrangements as well.

Table 7: Distribution of employers by house ownership

Ownership	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Owned	79.8	404	86.8	449	83.4	853
Rented	8.9	45	8.9	46	8.9	91
Pagdi	0.0	0	2.1	11	1.1	11
Others	11.3	57	2.1	11	6.6	68
Total	100	506	100	517	100	1023

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Ownership of four-wheelers was reported by 65 per cent of employers, with a slightly higher share in Delhi (74 per cent) compared to Mumbai (57 per cent). Nearly 79 per cent of employers reported having an AC at home. Again, the share in Delhi was higher (85 per cent) compared to Mumbai (72 per cent). In terms of number of rooms, there are a lot more one-room tenements in Mumbai (27 per cent), while only three such households have been covered in our sample from Delhi. A bulk of the households in Delhi reported three rooms (43 per cent), while for Mumbai two-room houses were the most common (35 per cent).

Table 8: Distribution of asset ownership by sample households

Assets owned by employer	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Four-wheeler vehicle	74.1	375	56.7	293	65.3	668
AC at home	84.8	429	72.3	374	78.5	803

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Nearly one-third of employer households covered in the sample had four or more rooms. There is an apparent mismatch between the asset ownership, size of the house and income class reported between the two cities, which reflects the differences between them. The space available is one significant factor influencing the nature and type of domestic worker being hired in by the employers. Even if households have the resources to hire live-in domestic workers, lack of space can deter them from employing her full-time as a live-in. Mumbai therefore reports a higher full-time live-out category as shown in the section below.

Table 9: Distribution of sample employer households by number of rooms

No. of rooms	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1	0.6	3	26.5	137	13.7	140
2	28.5	144	35.2	182	31.9	326
3	42.7	216	29.8	154	36.2	370
4	18.8	95	6.6	34	12.6	129
5	9.5	48	1.9	10	5.7	58
Total	100	506	100	517	100	1023

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

From the qualitative interviews it appears that the size of the household, number of household members and their work status dictates the payment to domestic workers for their labour. While it is not possible for us to state whether the rooms in the house or household size in terms of person's influences the hiring of domestic workers, the aspect on which this clearly has an influence is the wages. Another aspect that affects wages is the number of times a domestic worker, in case of a part-timer, visits the employer household, the total time spent and tasks undertaken.

3.4. Pattern of demand for domestic workers: Segmentation and segregation

This section covers the profile of women domestic workers being demanded by employers, type of worker, tasks for which they are hired, and how many workers are hired. In the sample covered across the two cities, 90 per cent of the employers hired part-time domestic workers, while 5 per cent each hired full-time live-outs and live-ins. The live-ins tend to be a minuscule percentage of domestic workers in both cities, given the lack of space in the flatted accommodations/apartments of the middle classes.

The share of full-time live-outs covered in the listing survey reveals a relatively higher proportion in Mumbai (7 per cent) compared to Delhi (where it was only 2 per cent). The qualitative case studies of employer households highlighted the lack of space in apartments and flats where they live as a deterrent to hiring live-in domestic workers. The income levels also dictate which type of domestic worker an employer hires. However, even though several households can and would have hired a full-timer or

live-in domestic worker, the lack of separate space which they can provide for the domestic worker, separate toilets and their desire for freedom/privacy (i.e., not to have someone around all the time) prevents them from doing so. These constraints were operational in Mumbai much more strongly, given the lack of space, with a bulk of the households having less than three rooms. Even in Delhi this was an issue for several employers. Stories of misuse by live-in domestics of the household's facilities and space were also shared by some employers, which deterred them from opting for live-ins and instead hire part-timers.

The most common tasks for which domestic workers are hired tended to be washing utensils, cleaning the house and washing clothes. Other common tasks for which employers demanded women domestic workers were cooking, child care and care for the sick and elderly. These workers generally tend to be different from the larger pool of women domestic workers who undertake the menial tasks of sweeping and washing utensils. Since different employer households have specific requirements in terms of tasks of work to be done, at designated times during the day, this needs to be matched with the available labour supply of domestic workers together with their willingness to undertake these tasks as demanded by the employers.

In cases where this matching of demand of employers becomes difficult with the labour supply available, alternative arrangements ensue. For example, employers with working couples would require punctuality from their domestic workers and often end up replacing their workers if they are unsatisfied with the workers on this count.

The reasons for such segmentation of these labour markets are both demand- and supply-side factors. In a few cases, employers might not be in favour of having the cleaning-sweeping workers do the cooking, especially among households where there are remnants of the notions of untouchability and purity-impurity. Increasingly, both among the middle-class employers as well as the modern-minded foreign-origin employers, these concerns do not figure at all. Such employers may have little problem in combining different tasks and hiring one worker to do all of them; however, often the women domestic worker is unable to accept this, either because of time required, the nature of the tasks or socio-cultural, caste-related issues of acceptability. Some employers reported how they were compelled to hire several workers because of segmentation in the labour markets for domestic workers performing different tasks.

The gains from resorting to such practices of hiring were also mentioned by some employers, especially when one of the domestics goes on leave, as there are others to pitch in for essential tasks. This was expressed as a benefit for the employer households, although in certain cases, the employers stated that often the domestic workers are on leave simultaneously.

The cooks in most areas tend to be a different set of domestic workers who are not available for other menial tasks. In other words, there is a hierarchy of tasks and the wage rewards also tend to support this hierarchy most of the time.

The tasks of washing utensils and sweeping and swabbing the floors is considered a menial job, which any woman can do, in other words this is seen as requiring no skills. Very often the demand for such domestic workers stems from the fact that most employers tend to avoid having to do these tasks themselves. Therefore, accepting these women domestics for other chores such as cooking, etc., tends to be low, especially in Delhi. In Mumbai, it is observed that the domestic worker who comes to do the cleaning and wash utensils also helps with the cutting of vegetables or making *chapattis*, etc.

Washing clothes could be combined and undertaken by the women doing the menial tasks of cleaning, provided they had the time to spare from their other responsibilities. For example, there are cases where some domestic workers who wash utensils are not interested in taking up other activities due to lack of time given existing work obligations. In other cases, the women domestic workers also want to have the space and time for themselves rather than be restricted to one household where they do all tasks. Employers reported that some of the domestic workers express their inclination to do only one or two tasks in several households. This they can manage in half an hour per household and by working for about two to three hours they can complete these tasks in three to four households, earning INR500–1,000 per household.

The employer–employee relationship, sometimes with years of association, is also a significant factor, more so in Mumbai where households have had domestics for a long time. In such cases, they tend to help in several household tasks such as chopping vegetables, making *chapattis* and other similar tasks while the household women do the cooking. This was reported more in Mumbai. Even domestic workers who undertook these cooking related tasks were noted to be from the slightly better-off sections of Mumbai.

The task of cleaning toilets, associated with untouchability, was observed as a separate activity in Mumbai, while very few cases of this kind came up in Delhi. In some cases, it was noted that households would have a person come in to clean toilets daily/periodically for a small sum of INR200 per month. This involves work of 15 minutes to a maximum of half an hour per day or every alternate day, but in several of these cases, a separate person comes to do this work as it is associated with a caste specificity and other domestic workers will not be seen undertaking this work.

In both cities, but especially in Delhi, among households who have converted the toilets into modern, bathroom-cum- toilet arrangements and do not associate cleaning of their toilets with caste-related impurity notions, one finds domestic workers and also live-ins doing the cleaning, using improvised kits such as toilet brushes and toilet cleaning equipment rather than traditional brooms. Members of the employer households themselves also do the toilet cleaning if required, with no feeling of impurity associated with such work.

It is only among the traditional households with toilets that are separate or away from the household, and those in which the employers do not partake in cleaning these themselves even when the toilets are within the household, that separate engagement of domestic workers for cleaning of toilets is seen. In one instance of a Delhi household where the full-time live-in supervised all the household chores, the employer mentioned that she was unaware of the differential practices adopted in her own household, with a different entrance being used by the toilet cleaner and a separate cup being kept for giving her tea, etc.

Another task investigators in Mumbai reported relates to dusting. This task is largely undertaken by the domestic workers as per the employers' specifications. On days when the work pressure is relatively lower, generally employers tend to get such tasks done. Periodically cleaning the stairway, corridor, etc., are other tasks employers ask the workers to do. In some households, employees' wages are decided with this task of dusting included in the cleaning of the household.

In the selection and identification of domestic workers, it is the appearance, attitude and trustworthiness of the worker which influences the choice for employers. However, in case of cooks, and also other workers, skill and ability also counts. The traits of honesty and sincerity are also seen as critical. Long-term associations build on knowing each other and provide the basic amicability that helps sustain the employer–employee relationship.

Some employers reported workers coming back after having left the house earlier. The incidence of continuing with some workers for longer durations and getting them back after discontinuation shows that some value is attached by both the worker and the employer to tried-and-tested relationships.

In some housing societies/complexes in Mumbai, it was reported that the residents' organizations ensure that domestic workers of their complex remain confined to it and not take up work in other localities/societies. In fact, certain employers in Mumbai reported that each building had a specific worker assigned to, so a particular worker could not come to their house as he or she was already assigned to a particular building complex. Such mechanisms further strengthen segmentation and segregation.

3.4.1 Dependence on employers

Domestic workers are generally quite needy and some of them end up taking monetary assistance from their employers as advances or loans. The practice of taking salaries as advance payments was reported with greater frequency in Mumbai. This may also partially explain the relatively lower wages being paid for various kinds of work tasks undertaken by domestic workers. Support from employer households in various forms is witnessed whenever domestic workers themselves or their household members are in need or in some crisis.

3.5 Profile of domestic workers hired

A brief profile of who the domestic women workers are in terms of their age, education, location/place, and since how many years they are working is also provided. The total number of domestic-worker-hiring employers was higher in Mumbai than in Delhi given the locational coverage in the survey. In all the 1,023 sample households covered across the two cities, 1,250 women domestic workers were hired. Delhi reported 555 women domestic workers, while Mumbai had 695.¹⁹ Of the sample, 7 per cent of workers employed were live-ins and 5 per cent full-time live-outs. The rest –88 per cent – were part-timers. This proportion was sought to be maintained for the sampling in this study based on the listing profile information.

Table 10: Distribution of households by type of DWs

Type of domestic workers	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Live-in	7.7	43	7.1	49	7.4	92
Full-time live-out	4	22	5.3	37	4.7	59
Part-time	88.3	490	87.6	609	87.9	1099
Total	100	555	100	695	100	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Table 11: Place of origin of workers

State of origin	Delhi		Mumbai	
	No.	%	No.	%
Uttarakhand	16	3.3	x	x
Kerala	11	2.3	x	x

¹⁹ The higher numbers of women domestic workers are also partly because of the inclusion of small-time engagement of workers such as toilet cleaners in Mumbai, which was not considered in Delhi.

State of origin	Delhi		Mumbai	
	No.	%	No.	%
Haryana	11	2.3	x	x
Delhi	286	58.8	x	x
Maharashtra	x	x	314	61.0
Gujarat	x	x	120	24.1
Uttar Pradesh	66	13.6	12	2.4
Rajasthan	7	1.4	9	1.8
Karnataka	x	x	9	1.8
West Bengal	9	1.9	3	0.6
Punjab	24	4.9	3	0.6
Himachal Pradesh	8	1.6	x	x
Bihar	8	1.6	x	x
Others	40	8.2	27	5.4
Total	486	100	497	100

Note: x means not applicable
Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

The domestic workers are largely from the same state. In Mumbai, employers reported their workers being from Maharashtra in 61 per cent of cases. The other state from which the bulk of the domestic workers in Mumbai are is Gujarat, and in Delhi they are from Uttar Pradesh – i.e., basically the neighbouring states. Apart from this, there are a few more states from where the domestic workers came. Generally, employers were able to mention the place of origin of the domestic worker in both cities. However, out of 555 domestic workers in Delhi, only 486 mentioned the state of origin; similarly, in Mumbai, out of 695 domestic workers, 497 were able to give their state of origin. That is, employers in Mumbai were not always able to mention the state of origin for nearly 200 DWs.

It is very interesting to note that the employers in both cities were not aware of the caste of the domestic workers in nearly 40 per cent of the cases, as noted by earlier studies such as Mehrotra (2010), especially in the context of part-timers. In half of the cases in Delhi and 31 per cent in Mumbai employers stated the caste of the domestic worker was not known.

Table 12: Distribution of domestic workers by caste (as told by employers)

Caste of domestic worker	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
General	20.4	113	42.7	297	32.8	410
SC	23.6	131	4.5	31	13	162
ST	1.8	10	1.6	11	1.7	21
OBC	4.9	27	19.4	135	13	162
Any other	0	0	0.4	3	0.2	3
Not known	49.4	274	31.4	218	39.4	492
Total	100	555	100	695	100	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

However, in most cases the employer was aware of the religion of the domestic worker. Only in 3 per cent of cases were employers not aware of the religion of their domestic worker; this was largely in the case of part-time domestics. It is noted that this was much more the case in Delhi than in Mumbai,

where only in five cases did employers of part-time domestic workers not know the worker's religion. In Delhi, the religion of almost 30 domestic workers, or 5 per cent, were recorded as "not known".

Table 13: Distribution of domestic workers by their religion (as told by employers)

Religion of domestic worker	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Hindu	85.9	477	84.0	584	84.9	1061
Muslim	7.4	41	9.4	65	8.5	106
Sikh	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Christian	1.3	7	2.2	15	1.8	22
Buddhist	0.0	0	2.9	20	1.6	20
Jains	0.0	0	0.4	3	0.2	3
Others	0.0	0	0.4	3	0.2	3
Not known	5.4	30	0.7	5	2.8	35
Total	100	555	100	695	100	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

By and large, employers were able to report the educational qualifications of their domestic workers. Only in 12 per cent of the cases did the employer respond to this question with "not known". The proportion of employers not knowing the educational level of their domestic workers was similar across the two cities (12 per cent). Once again, the incidence of not knowing the educational level was much more for part-time domestic workers in both cities. Of the 151 such responses among the total of 1,250 in all, 144 were part-time domestic workers. There were two cases of domestic workers who were graduates in Delhi and one each in Mumbai of domestic workers with a graduate and a postgraduate degree. Of course, as may be expected, the bulk of the domestic workers were reported to be illiterate (41 per cent).

Table 14: Distribution of domestic workers by their education level

Education level	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Not literate	55.7	309	28.3	197	40.5	506
Below primary school	8.1	45	20.6	143	15.0	188
Primary school	12.4	69	18.8	131	16.0	200
Middle school	5.4	30	12.1	84	9.1	114
Secondary school	4.3	24	5.3	37	4.9	61
Higher secondary school	1.3	7	2.6	18	2.0	25
Graduate and above	0.4	2.0	0.2	2.0	0.3	4.0
Not known	12.3	68	12	83	12	151
Total	100	555	100	695	100	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

The marital status of the domestic workers is as expected – 76 per cent of them are married and 15 per cent are unmarried. About 8 per cent are widowed/ divorced/separated, with the number a little higher in Mumbai compared to Delhi.

Table 15: Distribution of domestic workers by their marital status

Marital status	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Unmarried	12.4	69	16.4	114	14.6	183
Married	80.9	449	72.4	503	76.2	952
Widow/widower	4.9	27	8.5	59	6.9	86
Divorced/separated	0.5	3	2.0	14	1.4	17
Others	0.2	1	0.0	0	0.1	1
Not known	1.1	6	0.7	5	0.9	11
Total	100.0	555	100.0	695	100.0	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

3.6. Nature of work for which domestic workers are demanded

The kinds of workers hired can vary depending on the services demanded. A majority of the employers hire domestic workers for the basic tasks of washing utensils and cleaning the house, while there are others who also hire domestic workers for washing clothes, cooking food, child care, care of the aged and ill and so on.

Table 16: Demand for domestic workers by nature of work

Purpose	Delhi	Mumbai	Total
Cleaning and washing utensils	71.2	74.1	72.8
Cleaning the house	78.6	70.2	73.9
Washing clothes	20.9	43.0	33.2
Cooking food	10.5	21.6	16.6
Taking care of the elderly	1.4	4.0	2.9
Taking care of the sick	0.9	1.9	1.4
Taking care of the children	2.7	2.9	2.8
Any other	1.1	5.0	3.3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Nearly three-fourths of all workers were hired for cleaning the house and washing utensils, the two most common household chores for which domestic workers are employed. Apart from this, other tasks include washing clothes and cooking, followed by taking care of the elderly, children and the sick. In case of full-time live-outs and live-ins, most of the household chores are shared and undertaken by the domestic workers.

The patterns of hiring and preferences of employers vary across categories of workers. The preferences for cooks, child-care and health-care providers can be very specific; however, the exercise of such preferences for the ordinary, most common domestic workers, who perform regular household chores is weakening. In other words, perhaps anyone could qualify for the latter category of worker for several employers, although there were a few employers who reported specific preferences.

Mumbai reported a higher proportion of households with multiple workers and several part-timers helping in small tasks of cooking without doing it all. Many of employers in Mumbai mentioned chopping vegetables to making *chapattis*, along with other cleaning, washing tasks. In that sense the payments being made to domestic workers in Mumbai tend to be lower.

3.6.1. Part-time domestic workers

Almost all kinds of workers are hired part-time, be it for cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, or taking care of the children, the aged and the ill. The demand for several tasks in most households tends to be for short durations and specific activities which can be undertaken by part-time domestic workers. Employers in Delhi and Mumbai often are not in favour of having a domestic worker full-time or someone who lives within the household unless there is a specific need for it. There is also a gradual change in social attitudes and interactions between different classes, with an increasing trust deficit. The increasing number of media reports mentioning elderly couples who face violence, with the implications that their domestic help are involved, add to the shrinking mistrust between the two classes. This is also perhaps the reason for the greater dependence on traditional and personal ties even for recruiting domestic workers, rather than opting for registered agencies.

Table 17: Hiring by type of domestic workers across income categories

Income category (INR)	Delhi			Mumbai			All		
	FT/LI %	PT %	Total %	FT/LI %	PT %	Total %	FT/LI %	PT %	Total %
Up to 6 lakh	9.4	32	30	21	17	17	16	23.8	22.9
6-12 Lakh	20	29	28	19	32	31	20	30.9	29.5
Above 12 Lakh	65.8	29.9	34.4	56	48	49	60	40.2	42.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	64	487	551	84	580	664	148	1067	1215

FT = full-time live-out; LI = live-in; PT = part-time, N=range
Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

There is an ease in hiring part-timers given the available supply of women workers who are willing to take up more work if the wage rates and demand for domestic work is reasonable. A bulk of women domestics hired in both cities were part-timers, who are generally speaking paid lower rates compared to the full-timers and live-ins.

It is this segment of the labour market of domestic workers which is witnessing the most significant transition in terms of hiring, retention, replacement, firing, bargaining and negotiation for leaves and annual increments. Employers are also articulating their demands and unwilling to compromise. Employers are seen replacing workers to try and get what they want and may also be willing to pay more if they are assured of getting a woman worker who matches their specifications and preferences.

3.6.2. Who hires full-time/live-in workers?

Some households demand full-time workers, either live-ins or live-outs. The need for a full-time worker and an employer's capacity to accommodate such a domestic worker tends to be very different from that of the majority, who demand part-timers. Only 5 per cent of the households listed reported hiring a live-in or full-time worker, i.e., 327 households. The proportion of live-ins and full-time live-outs are almost similar, with Delhi reporting more live-ins comparatively, while Mumbai has a higher share of full-time live-outs. As expected, the households who employ full-time and live-ins are the relatively better-off high-income households. The few among the lower-middle-income households and middle classes who hire full-timers tend to generally do so for very specific needs their households have.

Table 18: Hiring of live-ins and full-time live-outs across income categories

Income category	Share in population		Employers of FT/LI DWs		Employers of FT/LI DWs	
	No.	%	No.	% (across in-come groups)	No.	% (within in-come group)
Up to 6 lakh	2670	44	60	18	60	2
6–12 lakh	1875	31	99	31	99	5
>12 lakh	1465	24	168	51	168	11
Total	6010	100	327	100	327	5

Source: Listing Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

It is clear that the better-off sections account for the bulk of full-time/live-in workers, comprising about 51 per cent of such employers, while their share in the listing population was only 24 per cent.

As in the case of all domestic workers, employers emphasized the appearance and tidiness of even the full-time/live-ins. The aspects where employers lay emphasis when it came to live-ins or full-timers, especially when compared to part-timers, was with regards to their marital status and references from previous employers. This was similar across both Delhi and Mumbai. The payment for these workers who work full-time or even more, as in the case of live-ins, tends to generally be higher, with the maximum monthly wage payment reported to be INR8,000- 16,000. However, the range of wage payments reported begin from a low of INR1,500 - 2,500 for even live-ins and full-time domestic workers. These are perhaps situations wherein other arrangements are being made which were not reported adequately. In certain cases, where the employers bring the domestic workers from their home town or through relatives/other contacts, the payments are made to the family members or adjusted against payments in kind which employers may be reluctant to report. In some of the qualitative case studies, the investigators came across young unmarried girls being kept for all household work until they were due to be married, and all of the girls' expenses in terms of food, clothing, education (in case they were interested in getting educated) were handled by the employer household.

Coming to the notions of work undertaken by live-ins, in another case, it was reported that where a daughter replaced her mother who used to work earlier, the employers did not feel that she did any major work. The respondent stated that the daughter provides company to the employer and helps with light work like cutting vegetables and making chapattis and similar other tasks. She had been accepted as a live-in as the family as her mother pleaded with them to allow her to stay and gradually learn to work. These notions of the workers actually hardly being involved in any work and therefore not needing to be paid any substantial amount based on minimum wages were noted in several cases. In Mumbai, many employers viewed some domestic workers as being on the lookout for a good house to stay in – as well as free food and the opportunity to watch television, etc., – without any intention of actually working. Therefore, the testimony of previous employer(s) was generally given a great deal of consideration.

3.6.3. Employers with multiple workers

The employers with multiple domestic workers constitute nearly one-third of the total. The bulk – 24 per cent of all employers surveyed - hired two domestic workers. Seven per cent reported hiring three domestic workers, while another 2 per cent had more than three women domestic workers and a small number – 21 households – even have four domestic workers. Among employers with multiple domestic workers, while most have several part-time workers undertaking different tasks, in some cases there is a live-in or full-time worker along with part-timers. In the latter case, where the employers are preoccupied, the live-in worker often acts as a supervisor for all other workers.

In metro cities, where professionals and working couples live, the demand for domestic workers for cleaning the house as well as for cooking is common. The wage rates for different tasks tend to be different across locations. Wages are fixed very differently for distinct tasks, with the most common ones being the domestic workers who wash utensils, clean the house, about one third of all employers reported hiring DWs for washing clothes, while only 17 per cent of these employers are hired for cooking.

4. Employers preferences, replacement and recruitment practices



This section deals with the preferences of employers as reported in the survey. Apart from preferences in the context of domestic workers, we also enquired about the preferred recruitment channel of employers. To what extent have formalized recruiting channels made inroads into the actual hiring processes? Do employers check the identity of the workers or verify them? How many employers actually have some form of a contract for engaging these domestic workers? The bulk of the employers tend to follow informal channels and continue to trust traditional, personalized contacts to recruit and verify the antecedents of the workers, including their work performance and other desired attributes of punctuality, honesty and sincerity. How often employers replace their domestic workers was sought to be ascertained by asking employers whether they had replaced their domestic workers in the previous three years and the reasons for doing so. It is interesting to note that most employers reported the reasons to be the worker's dislike of the work or decision to move to a new employer, rather than the employer themselves removing the worker (for unsatisfactory work or any other reason), although there were a few cases of employers saying they had not been satisfied with the work.

With the growing demand for domestic workers, especially part-timers, in most localities there is a sense of greater bargaining power on the part of the workers. Instances of domestics shunning certain employers who were fussy or treated workers with indignity, shouted at them or displayed any other undesirable behaviour were mentioned in the survey. Such employers would find it difficult to get workers.

The study sought to elicit information on employers' preferences as reported by them. We noticed that often the actual demographics of the domestic workers hired by the employer are presented as their preferences as well. Either employers are able to select and build in their preferences while hiring domestic workers, or this is a convenient response. It should be noted that this survey has no way of verifying this, although some generalizations are feasible based on all the information collected.

4.1 Employers' preferences

Do employers prefer women domestic workers for the cleaning and washing tasks within their households? Increasingly as has been noted already, employers are increasingly hiring women domestic workers for tasks. Part of the reason is the supply of workers available, but it is also partly due to the lower wages at which women domestics can be hired given the low threshold and bargaining power among women workers, as well as the lack of alternative avenues of employment which lowers their opportunity costs too.

Most employers tend to prefer younger workers, who are seen as energetic and efficient in carrying out tasks for the employers. The preference for underage children, both boys and girls, as domestics is quite common and still put into practice. The growing awareness among the public, with media reports of raids on households that employ children and adolescent labourers, are factors that have driven these practices underground, with employers of such workers not cooperating with investigators. In both Delhi and Mumbai, investigators came across child workers who were not reported or declared themselves as being 15 – 16 years old.

Since it is illegal to hire child labour even below the ages of 18 years for domestic workers, most employer respondents gave the ages of their domestic workers as around 19 years and above. Some employers expressed a preference for married women in their 30s, as they are seen as guaranteeing greater stability, since the women would continue to live and work in the vicinity, and ostensibly not require longer periods of leave. Some of elderly women respondents said they preferred older women, even widowed or single women, with limited family responsibilities and obligations.

Tidy and competent workers were sought most. In certain areas, employers placed the most value on a reasonable rate of wages, and in general, many employers found commissions charged by agencies to be unreasonable. Regional/language preferences were also mentioned. Training did not figure prominently in most employers' responses, although some did complain that agencies sometimes claimed to send semi-trained workers who the employers did not find satisfactory in the end.

The labour market for domestic workers is getting more work oriented, with employers interested in the tidiness/appearance, competence, age, wages and experience/training of the domestic worker, rather than her caste, religion, marital status, region of origin or even education. An earlier study by Mehrotra (2010) in Delhi also found similar findings – i.e., that caste is no longer a factor, especially among employers of part-time domestic workers. In fact, there were cases of employers (employing other kinds of workers, as well) where the caste and other factors did not matter, and these employers preferred neat and clean, honest, sincere and hardworking person. It is these attributes which employers check out before hiring the women domestics.

Two-fifths of employers, in fact, reported appearance/tidiness as the first or main criterion while hiring domestic workers, followed by age. The perceived competence of the worker is the next response after appearance and age, while experience, training and wages were the other factors mentioned by employers as criteria for hiring domestic workers.

Table 19: Employers' preferences for recruitment of DWs

Parameters of the worker	Delhi	Mumbai	Total
Appearance/tidiness	37.8	32.5	34.9
Age	20.5	29.9	25.7
Competence	7.9	17.9	13.5
Experience/training	9.9	5.9	7.7
Wages	6.7	5.9	6.3
References from previous employers	5.6	2.7	4.0
Caste/ethnicity	2.3	1.9	2.1
Communication/language	2.0	1.9	1.9
Marital status	2.0	0.9	1.4
Education	1.4	0.1	0.7
Region of origin	0.5	0.4	0.5
Other	3.2	0	1.4
Total	100	100	100

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

That employers in Delhi and Mumbai are giving less importance to caste/ethnicity, education, communication/language and even region of origin in some ways is a reflection of the formation of labour markets for domestic work. In a modern context, employers are interested in the work being carried out to smoothen their daily routine, offloading time-consuming, tedious manual tasks. The question of who should be hired for this is shifting towards the potential worker's abilities rather than the socio-cultural attributes of the individual doing these tasks.

The preferences are different when it comes to live-ins or full-timers, since the requirements from these workers differ. From being able to communicate and understand the language and cultural requirements of the household members to being able to contribute to children's education and entertainment, the requirements of live-in domestic workers can be quite specific. Parents of young children, for instance, want their domestic workers to be clean/tidy, but also be young and agile as well as being educated enough to engage with the child in learning and playing.

One category of workers who most employers expressed a preference for as live-ins are young tribal girls. The perception of tribal girls from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh as well as the north-eastern states as being cleanly and zealous in their work is fairly common. Often these girls are sourced through the recruitment and placement agencies or through social networks. The placement agencies/commission agents, through whom these domestic workers are hired, are paid a onetime commission of INR 30,000 while the live-in domestic worker is paid between INR3,500 – 5,000 per month.

Other preferences witnessed for employers who were professionals or were of Foreign-origin, for instance, generally require a domestic worker who can understand English. And it is common for the employers looking for cooks to want one who can cater to their general tastes in cuisine. However, it is not uncommon for employers accepting a vegetarian cook even though they themselves are not vegetarian since the worker is known as a reliable and trustworthy person in the locality.

The qualitative survey elicited more insights into the preference factors since each individual household/employer can have different views and choices. The preferences for types of domestic workers vary from household to household depending on the socio-economic background, composition and size of the household, number of women members and their work status, the presence of infant children, ailing or elderly members, and occupational and income factors. All employers emphasized that cleanliness and personality/attitude are of paramount importance while selecting a worker. Besides this, some added that they note the tone and the way the worker speaks, as they expect domestic worker to speak politely. When employing a new worker, they negotiate rates according to usual rates charged by domestic workers in the area, number of days of leave in a month (leave generally has to be taken only with prior notice and permission), quality of work and the importance of punctuality and honesty. Almost all employers say they would like to have a worker who comprehends instructions properly.

There are some households which may not hire a certain domestic worker because of traditional or religious beliefs of purity that prevent them from having women belonging to lower castes cleaning utensils. These notions of touch and purity are slowly dying down but some of the older generation families still hold on to such beliefs. Very few such cases came up during the qualitative survey, which perhaps reflects the gradually changing norms in urban metros. Some instances of conflict between the younger and older generations of women within the employer households, especially where the younger woman was employed, were mentioned by our investigators. In some cases in Mumbai, employers reported hiding information regarding the religion or caste of the domestic worker in order to avoid objections from the older women in the family, especially mothers-in-law. Caste-related preferences were particularly common among the elderly women of employer households or some business families belonging to higher castes.

4.1.1. Caste and religion

Generally, employers were of the view that the importance of caste has declined over time, though religion may still be a criterion in selecting a domestic worker. Most of them were of the view that Hindu employers still prefer Hindu workers, and that Muslim employers would select workers of the same religion. In a few instances, though, it was reported that in fact a domestic worker from another religion was preferred, so that the festival dates did not clash. This is true especially of full-timers and live-ins, particularly those who are out-of-state migrants and would need several days or even weeks off at such times. Except in a few cases, the response to religion as a preference does not seem to be there.

While several Hindu families noted that they would not hire a Muslim woman as a domestic, hiring tribal or Christian is not uncommon. This is linked to two factors – one, that Christians are considered more conscious of cleanliness because of relatively higher literacy levels; two, that they often come through church organizations which train them and also ensure a reference and guarantee. What is also interesting is that in the case of a tribal employer in Mumbai, no relatively upper-caste domestic worker would work for her; thus she could hire only a tribal or an SC domestic worker. Efficiency, cleanliness and attitude towards work are more important than religion in the case of several urban employers. For working couples, it is necessary to have an efficient and dependable worker, which is given priority over the worker's caste or religion. Thus, there were several cases of women domestics of religions or caste that did not matter to the employer household.

For selecting a cook some employers mentioned that they preferred if the cook knew the regional food taste of the employers. There are also issues of taste and whether the cook is well versed with the kinds of food they prefer, in terms of different cuisines, etc. In short, there are very varied preferences operational among the employers and differ from case to case. However, it is interesting to note that in

the case of cooking even reverse preferences operate as employers reported instances where vegetarian domestic workers did not want to work in non-vegetarian households, or made it clear to the employer that they would not cook non-vegetarian dishes.

4.1.2. Language

Further, some of the employers stated language as an important criterion for selecting the domestic worker as it is important to communicate the task to them. In a few households where full-timers and live-ins are employed, and where women employers are working and there is no one at home, a knowledge of English and also numeracy was preferred so that the domestic worker could sign papers relating to couriers, gas bills, speed post, laundry accounts, etc. Since hiring continues to follow traditional and informal channels, it is often not an issue to take several considerations into account. Regional and language factors, for instance, are often accounted for in case the recruitment sources are the employer's relatives or from their own villages.

4.1.3. Space

The choice and type of workers hired also depended on the household space, especially when hiring live-ins. Households with a smaller accommodations, particularly in apartment buildings, tend to opt for part-timers instead of live-in workers. This is particularly a concern in Mumbai, reflecting the very different urban and housing planning of the vertical, less spacious city when compared to Delhi.

4.1.4. Age and marital status

Since most employers are aware of the illegality of child labour it is rare to find them expressing preferences for underage workers. Otherwise, employers reported mixed preferences regarding age and marital status. Some prefer married women above the age of 30 because she would have some experience and be more disciplined than a younger woman. On the other hand, some employers specified that, given a choice, they would always prefer to hire a younger girl who can complete the task speedily and effectively.²⁰

The hiring of a younger woman, even child labour, is generally witnessed in the case of child-care services. Most employers tend to view the domestic worker or nanny as a companion for their child who can play and run around with the child.

For live-in or full-time domestic workers, some employers prefer to employ young girls, aged 15 – 16. There are different concerns employers have with respect to the younger unmarried girls versus those who are married and have household responsibilities. A few also said they preferred to employ unmarried girls, while others feared that young unmarried girls of having boyfriends or getting into physical/emotional relationships. Some other employers preferred unmarried girls because they felt that married women domestic workers often end up talking with their husband during working hours.

There was a slightly different preference pattern for the age and marital status in the two cities – in Delhi, employers preferred younger unmarried girls, while employers in Mumbai gave precedence to middle-aged married women. The stability and continuity factor was important for employers in Mumbai, and hence they were not interested in the younger unmarried girls who might quit once they were married.

²⁰ In the quantitative survey, while listing was being done, the investigators noticed domestic workers (often younger girls or even boys), but the employer household members denied having any domestics.

4.1.4. Punctuality and timing

For lower-middle-income households who hire domestic workers only for basic tasks such as washing utensils and sweeping and swabbing floors, or even for the other tasks in some cases, there is no apparent preference except for the suitability of timing in case the members of the family all have jobs outside the home. In cases where both husband and wife are out during the day, an important requirement is that the domestic worker be able to come either early in the morning or in the evening hours after the employers return.

In some houses where no member was home during the day, the keys were left with the domestic worker who was working for them from several years and lived nearby. In one case in Mumbai, the individual member of the household left the keys with the domestic worker to come in at her convenience and do the work. Since there was so little work to be done for one member, the domestic worker undertook the tasks of cleaning cupboards, replenishing stocks of food items in the fridge etc. which were beyond her brief as well. These were cases where the domestic worker is from a nearby known area and the employer has complete trust on the domestic worker. These were also factors that counted in the recruitment process preferred by the employer households in the two cities. Very often these were also the reasons for replacing workers if they do not turn out as desired or cannot keep to the timing etc.

4.2 Replacement of domestic workers

When asked whether they had replaced their domestic worker in the previous three years, 481 employers, 267 from Delhi and 214 from Mumbai, said yes. In the majority of cases, it was reported that the change was due to personal reasons on the worker's part (33 per cent) or due to the worker gaining employment elsewhere (24 per cent). In another 14 per cent of the cases each, the reason was because employer moved or the domestic worker did not like to work in the employer's household. In about 34 cases, the employer felt she was not performing, while in another 35 instances the employer terminated the relationship due to dissatisfaction with the worker's work (i.e. 15 per cent).

Table 20: Proportion of employers who replaced DWs in last three years (%)

Response	Delhi				Mumbai				Total			
	LI	FT	PT	Total	LI	FT	PT	Total	LI	FT	PT	Total
Yes	51.2	36.4	48.4	48.1	22.4	51.4	30.2	30.8	35.9	45.8	38.3	38.5
No	48.8	63.6	51.6	51.9	77.6	48.6	69.8	69.2	64.1	54.2	61.7	61.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Response	Delhi				Mumbai				Total			
	LI	FT	PT	Total	LI	FT	PT	Total	LI	FT	PT	Total
Yes	22	8	237	267	11	19	184	214	33	27	421	481
No	21	14	253	288	38	18	425	481	59	32	678	769
Total	43	22	490	555	49	37	609	695	92	59	1 099	1250

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

In other words, it is interesting to find that an almost equal number of replacements occurred due to employers being dissatisfied with their domestic workers and due to workers being unhappy with the employer household. We need to remember that this survey is from the employers' perspective, and yet we are seeing them reporting the reason for replacement as the workers' dissatisfaction. So, both demand and supply side factors are at play to some extent. Even more interesting, perhaps, is that in

the majority of cases the employers reported, it was the domestic worker who chose to leave, either for personal reasons or because she found another job.

Table 21: Distribution of DWs by the reason for replacement

Reason for replacement	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
She did not like to work here	15.4	41	11.7	25	13.7	66
She got some other work	21.3	57	27.6	59	24.1	116
She had to leave for personal reasons	40.4	108	23.8	51	33.1	159
Employer moved	15.0	40	11.7	25	13.5	65
She was not performing well	6.0	16	8.4	18	7.1	34
Terminated due to unsatisfactory work	6.7	18	7.9	17	7.3	35
Any other reason	6.0	16	15.0	32	10.0	48
Total	100	267	100	214	100	481

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

This reflects the presence of substantial demand for workers in the market, which allows the labour suppliers to choose their employer households. Comparatively, Delhi saw a greater share of cases where the replacement of a domestic worker was a result of the worker's decisions than in Mumbai, though even in Mumbai the majority of replacement cases were due to worker-oriented reasons. The labour market for women domestic workers is relatively more formed in Delhi. Elements of bargaining for better returns, weekly leaves and annual increments were visible more in Delhi, especially among the younger and more recent entrants into the labour market.

It is the households involved in business and /or those in private sector employment that report the major share of replacement of workers. Expectations mismatch can also create problems for employers. It is not clear which category of employers have trouble in retaining employees? Do women domestic workers shy away from nagging, fussy employers or excessive demands being made from the domestics for additional support work which they feel obliged to do and cannot refuse? Are some employers too demanding and find it problematic to accept domestic workers who are not vulnerable and subservient?

4.3 Recruitment channels

The most common channel for recruiting and finding domestic workers tended to be neighbours (51 per cent) and other domestic workers (21 per cent). Other informal channels such as relatives and friends also are used by employers in both cities, although the employers from Mumbai depend more on these social connections compared to Delhi. Thus, the popular mode for recruiting domestic workers tends to be informal channels, through friends, neighbours, relatives. The other mode is through domestics and watchmen employed in gated communities and housing societies. Watchmen in particular are seen as trustworthy providers of security, and so employers find their recommendations useful.

In Mumbai, it was found that watchman or security guard of a building complex serve as an important informal recruitment channel. Watchman is like a link between workers and the employers. *As per an employer - each building has specific workers so Building A worker cannot come to my house, as he or she is already assigned to a particular building complex.* A form of labour market segmentation is operative with labour supplies being demarcated to specific contexts of demands and the worker not being free to switch or change allegiances or place of work easily. With the spread of gated communities, an interesting power dynamic has developed between the watchmen and the domestic workers. This is also stemming from the fact

that the latter are often un-protesting women and young girls, while the watchmen have the function of taking care of the security of the residential area they work for. The watchmen's position as gate-keepers gives them control over access to employers as well as making them privy to information on both employers' demands and preferences and the qualities of the domestic workers who work in the vicinity. Very often the social milieu from where the watchmen and domestics live tend to be the same or similar, and hence lends itself for an easy relationship and bonding. The nature of the watchmen's work is also such that they have all the time to perform the middlemen's role between the demander and supplier.

Hiring domestic workers through other domestic workers is also a common channel of recruitment, since the women domestics are generally from the same locality and socio-economic milieu. The women workers also are aware of the availability of other women seeking employment in the area and can easily act as intermediaries between household employers and the jobseekers.

The formal recruiting agency is used by very few employers as of now, although there was a sense from the qualitative survey at least in Delhi that for certain categories of domestic workers, employers are beginning to utilize the services of registered agencies. The unregistered local agent/agency too was the recruitment channel for only a handful of the live-in domestic workers in both Delhi and Mumbai.

Table 22: Recruitment channel of DWs (%)

Recruitment channel	Delhi	Mumbai	Total
Neighbors	65.9	38.7	50.8
Relatives	4.7	12.4	9.0
Friends	5.0	11.5	8.6
Watchmen	4.0	8.6	6.6
Other domestic workers	15.1	26.5	21.4
Unregistered local agent/agency	0.7	0.1	0.4
Registered local agent/agency	3.4	0.0	1.5
Registration with website	0.2	0.4	0.3
Any other channel	0.9	1.7	1.4
Total	100	100	100

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Delhi reported using the services of a registered agent/agency in quite a few cases (19 in number). While in general it appears to be a recruiting channel used to hire live-in workers by employers in certain specific cases – such as when there is a young infant/child to look after or an aged person who is ill or requires a companion and similar situations of specific skilled needs. In Delhi we actually covered a few part-time domestic workers and full-time live-outs as well who were recruited through the registered agent/agency. The reasons for using the recruitment channel of agencies tends to be the fact that the agency takes surety of the domestic worker, who is likely to be semi-trained and well versed with the tasks for which she is being hired. The domestic workers from agencies are placed as per requirements of the employers. In some instances, up to three chances are given to the employer to substitute/replace the domestic worker placed at their household, if the worker is found to be unsuitable for any reason. The fact that these employees are coming from an agency does not imply that their identities are verified. Agencies request the employer to have the police verification of the domestic worker done to satisfy themselves if they feel the need to do so.

From among the employers surveyed for this study, there were a few cases of recruitment through the online websites as well. This channel of recruitment is a relatively newer channel which is beginning to

be used for recruitment or knowledge of what is on offer in the market for services that one requires as an employer. This was used by our research team as well to identify agencies for our qualitative interviews after the list of addresses we had did not result in many cooperative agents; however, the agencies found were involved in a combination of activities, including providing personnel for other establishments such as hotels and the entertainment industry, as well as service providers such as sweepers in other kinds of offices/shop floor/eateries, etc. The salaries for such work are generally higher than that earned from work done by women domestics in personal households.

4.4. Verification of domestic workers

In most cases, employers do not bother to verify their domestic worker's identity or authenticity before engaging their services many times because the workers are hired through known sources or on recommendations of someone. Employers also said that as recruitment of workers, whether part-time or full-time/live-in, was done on the basis of their contacts (neighbours, relatives, other domestic workers, etc.) it was not necessary to check the identity of the worker or frame any written contract. They feel that it is more convenient to employ a worker through references from an acquaintance than through a formalized process, while still being safe, even though, the nature of work, hours, leaves, wages, etc., are negotiated in the form of an oral contract.

Other reason is ignorance of and a lack of trust the institutions and their ability to actually provide assistance, which are formed based on stories heard on such matters. Another reason is that there is also reluctance to get the verification done due to employer's lack of time, motivation or considerations of its appropriateness. For example, in several cases, employers commented that since the workers are familiar and have been known to them for a long time, they feel reluctant to suggest verification as it may appear to be insulting. Workers' concerns also have to be viewed in light of the association of the police for their verification and its role to tackle crime and theft. Part of the reason for all this is the role police authorities play – that of a force of power, rather than a monitoring and disciplining body – in most localities from where the domestic workers come. Fears are further accentuated in the case of women workers, who largely tend to be more vulnerable to exploitation by those who can exert power. These concerns influence the attitudes and behaviour of both employees and employers. No doubt the purpose and intention of such verification and the advertising for generation of its demand from household employers is primarily safety and security, but positioning it thus somehow seems to malign the acts of verification as it introduces suspicion, mistrust and even opposition very often from the domestic workers, thereby affecting the employer-employee relationship. Perhaps alternative mechanisms for the verification process are likely to be more effective conducted by civic authorities perhaps. This would, however, work only if the purpose was indeed the regulation and recognition of domestic workers and the prevention of exploitation and abuse of domestic workers. However, as of now, the system is completely oriented towards ensuring the security of the employers from unverified workers entering their homes.

The absence of civic authorities functioning as facilitators of processes in various social domains – in this case informal labour market operations of hiring domestic workers and unregulated work undertaken within households– is noteworthy and calls for a change.

Box 3 | Verification of domestic workers by the Parsi panchayat in Mumbai

Cusrow Baug in Colaba is an entire society belonging to the Parsi panchayat. All the residents in the society are from the Parsi community; mostly single, retired and senior citizens. Therefore, it becomes even more essential to have a verification done of all the domestic workers entering the building considering security and safety of the residents.

All the domestic workers are mostly live-in or full-time workers. They have been working in Cusrow Baug for years. Some of them have their families too living with the residents. Verification of all the domestic workers, live-ins, full-timers and part-timers are done by the Parsi panchayat themselves. No ID cards are allotted to the workers though. Even if there is a domestic worker requirement, the Parsi panchayat provides it to its residents either from the domestic workers who are verified and registered with them or after carrying out their verification.

Quantitatively, less than 15 per cent of employers reported checking on the identity/authenticity of their domestic workers, with the city-wise numbers being 20 per cent in Delhi and 10 per cent in Mumbai. It is also in the case of live-in workers that employers are more likely to resort to verification. This now being advertised actively by the police, and even made mandatory in a few housing societies/apartments in Mumbai and Delhi.

Box 4 | Recruitment through different channels for live-in domestic workers - domestic worker of foreign origin, agency and church

Ms IH has had several varied experiences with her live-in domestic workers, having hired foreign domestic workers, workers through agencies and through a Church.

Ms IH, 65, lives alone in a 2BHK flat in Colaba, Mumbai, and belongs to the middle class category. She has a private-sector job, though she declined to give any details about her work. She has had live-in domestic workers from different communities, but said she felt that Catholics from Mangalore were the best and most efficient workers. There was one interesting Live-in Domestic Worker who offered herself for the job as she could give company to Ms. IH. Ms. IH believed that she was too demanding. Her main purpose was to find a place to sleep with food, access to TV and phone plus INR 300 per day salary. After a month Ms. IH asked her to leave the job.

Ms IH was the only person we found who had employed foreign live-in domestic workers. She had three Nepali domestic workers, at different points of time. These women workers were all in their early 20s. These were decent workers but in the absence of Ms. IH all had got men in her house. As this was unacceptable to her and she had to terminate their services. She didn't keep any Nepali domestic worker after that.

With Recruitment Agency Ms. IH had the same experience which most of the other respondents had who employed domestic workers through agencies. She contacted an agency through a reference. They had sent one girl, in her twenties, who was good but left on her own and there was no sign of her later on. Agency did not pick up her calls too.

As there are certain Churches who provide Domestic Workers, Ms. IH contacted one of those Church in Byculla. Ms. IH was denied Domestic Worker by the Church. The Church's reason for it was the fact the Ms. IH is a senior citizen and if there is any problem the domestic worker will not be able to take care of it as these girls are quite young.

In all, Ms. IH did not have pleasant experiences while recruiting a Live-in domestic worker. For her they were expensive as they demanded at least INR10,000 per month plus other demands of using TV and phones, holidays, separate bed and toilet, etc. were impractical. Now Ms. IH has kept two full-time workers and she is satisfied with their work.

Many workers today are clear that the work they are doing is for the income they earn and are no longer interested in being given leftover foods, used clothes or similar other items/goods. We came across workers who throw away the leftover food given by their employers by the roadside as soon as they are outside the society complex they work in. The employers in many cases however still believe that they are being benevolent and do not ill-treat their domestics. The issue of human dignity from the work they undertake which is fundamentally derived from the way they are treated by their employers and other household members is not entirely understood.

4.5. Recruitment agents/agencies

Employers surveyed expressed the opinion that the presence of recruitment agents/agencies is increasingly becoming more visible, yet we found few takers, as the stories of bad experiences seem to dominate the narrative. Interviews with these agents/agencies, even when they had websites with addresses and contact details, proved difficult. However, the research team managed to meet with a few placement agencies/agents in Delhi after several failed attempts to have a meaningful discussion with them, or because of changed addresses, while some had ceased operations, or were physically non-existent.

Most agents/agencies function as informal or unregistered offices, with limited functions that include the supplying of domestic workers. Some basic training imparted to these workers in order to familiarize them with the kinds of daily tasks employer households would expect of them is imparted; following this, the agent places the worker in an employer household. Most agencies let employers try working with up to three domestic workers, in case the first one doesn't work out.

The sourcing of workers is often undertaken by the agents/agencies and involves close working with the police and local authorities in source villages and in the cities where the workers are being placed. Interviews with the agencies elicited this information.

Most employers, however, were reluctant to hire domestic workers through the agencies. In our survey, very few employers preferred agencies as the source for hiring domestic workers – just 2 per cent. It was only in Delhi that some employers of full-time domestic workers – live-ins and also live-outs to some extent – reported registered agencies as their preferred recruitment channel. A total of only 30-odd employers from our entire sample – almost entirely from Delhi – were inclined to hire through agencies. Part of the reason for this preference pattern relates to the lack of trust in the unknown; most employers are far more familiar with the informal sources. Another reason is that the exorbitant amount of commission to be paid to these agencies puts off several employers.

In Delhi the commission amount varied from INR10,000 to INR30,000 (in Mumbai, no respondent was able to give an estimate of commissions charged). The vast majority of employers did not consider this payment reasonable or acceptable. It was only the high-end employers, with specific requirements from the domestic worker as well as from the agency, who were willing to pay this commission. Generally, this happened in households with children to take care of or with elderly individuals who need care and/or company, and in case the main woman of the house was employed or not available.

While employers in Mumbai reported very low incidence of recruiting domestic workers through agencies, even those who acknowledged this as the source of hiring, do not disclose or were not aware of the commission paid. Employers' generally avoided using formal recruitment channels because of the high commission rates that are charged by them.

Box 5 | Negative Experiences with formal agencies

Ms RN was in urgent need of a full-time domestic worker for her elderly mother's care work. She needed two full-timers, one for the day and the other for the night. She came across four agencies through different sources but faced issues with all of them.

She found the first agency through a website. She liked its advertisement, and it was also in the neighbourhood, which she believed would be convenient. People from the agency came home and spoke about the entire procedure of getting a domestic worker and they seemed professional, Ms RN says. Though the agency claimed the girls were smart and had references for each one it sent, Ms RN was not happy with their work. They were never on time, she says, and each day a different woman/girl came, so Ms RN would have to explain again what work had to be done. The domestic workers would come for a few days and then take a few days off, she says; and one day they just stopped coming.

The second agency was not technically an agency but a hospital community centre. Ms RN says she felt the centre was reliable and that their workers would have good training. The workers were paid on a daily basis, and The centre would deduct INR50 per day as commission from the salary. They stayed for a few weeks but then Ms RN asked them to leave as they were not as well trained as she had thought they would be.

The third agency she tried was recommended by one of her acquaintances. However, the agency's workers were as irregular and inefficient as those from the first agency, Ms RN says.

The fourth agency approached her saying that they had heard she needed domestic workers to help take care of her mother. But her experience here was even worse. She paid an advance of INR1,000 but the agency never sent any domestic worker.

In short, Ms RN has had a thoroughly terrible experience with formal recruitment agencies. The agencies never delivered what they promised. The workers were not efficient and they made what Ms RN saw as unnecessary demands, such as covering their travelling expenses, better bedding when they were not supposed to sleep at all, and food when they were supposed to bring their own.

In the end, Ms RN decided she would never approach any recruitment agency again, and shifted to the informal channel.

Several employers requested the investigators that they put them in touch with some reliable agencies who supply domestic workers. In Delhi, employer households who were having trouble finding an appropriate worker or unable to retain a DW were keen that we help them in this respect. This is a reflection of the growing demand for domestic workers on the one hand and the need for having trustworthy sources through which reasonable employees can be sourced/recruited.

Case 1: An employer in Delhi who had the past experience of hiring a domestic worker through formal recruitment channels explains the entire process:

Agencies work through a network of people/middlemen. Some people are based in the villages, from where they bring females/males who work as domestic workers. Such people are familiar with local language and local circumstances, which helps them in relocating people from their native places. Another set of middlemen bring/relocate domestic workers to cities and towns and place them with various placement agencies. Every agency takes a commission from the employer, which then gets distributed among the entire network of middlemen.

The employer said that two years back, the employers had to pay around INR20,000 as commission to these agencies but it has now increased to INR30,000. The commission only covers the cost of providing the worker for a total of 11 months. And not all agencies maintain a written contract. Conditions of pay and work are generally decided orally between the agency and the employer. Police verification of the domestic work is also done by the agencies themselves.

Agencies provide domestic workers divided under three categories –fully trained workers with a monthly pay of around INR5,000–6,000, semi-trained workers with a salary of INR3000–5,000 and untrained workers with a salary of INR2,000–4,000. In other words, while the commission of agencies is fixed, the monthly pay of the worker depends on the type of the worker employed. The domestic worker is unaware of this entire process and procedure. Besides, most agencies have a condition under which monthly salary of the worker is collected by the agency itself and it is not handed over to the worker hired. Hence, there is no surety of whether the domestic worker ever gets his/her complete salary after completion of the 11 month contract.

After completion of the contract, the domestic worker is allowed to go back to his/her village for a couple of weeks. If the domestic worker leaves the house of the employer before this term ends, the responsibility lies with the agency to provide a replacement. Thereafter, a fresh contract is made for the replacement provided by the agency. If the agency is unable to do so, six months' commission has to be given back to the employer. Another condition is that, if an agency provides the workers, the workers have to be sent for a 2 days get together, organized by the agency, atleast three or four times in a year. Apart from this, they are not entitled to any other leave.

Some common problems in recruiting domestic workers through an agency, as pointed out by the employer, are: most of the agencies are not registered. They do not have any permanent telephone number or office address. An assigned person from the agency always prefers to approach the employer at the employer's house whenever needed. Some agencies have some form of registration, but its validity is doubtful. Despite being one of the clauses of the agreement, most agencies refuse to take responsibility if the worker leaves (due to any reason) the employer's house before completing his/her term. Complaints against the agency are difficult in absence of a regulatory framework for the regulation of such agencies. Besides employers, domestic workers are also subjected to exploitation by these agencies. They are often not paid their entire salary. There have been instances of abuse and exploitation of domestic workers by middlemen/agents/agencies and employers.

Hence, it is rightly suggested by the employer that no recruitment channel, whether formal or informal, is reliable when it comes to hiring a live-in domestic worker. The entire system should be formalized and monitored by the government under some legislative framework in order to ensure prevention of exploitation of both employer and domestic worker.

Case 2: Another employer in Delhi has been hiring domestic workers through an agent for the past ten years. She shares differing views on formal recruitment channels.

Earlier this employer preferred employing untrained live-in domestic workers so that she can train them in the manner she liked. She feels that untrained young girls listen to what is being told to

them and don't argue/retaliate. But now, with her children growing up, the responsibilities and amount of work has also increased. Hence, she now prefers hiring semi-trained young workers who are aware of at least the basic work of cleaning and dusting.

The agent works independently and is not associated with any agency. He hails from Jharkhand and brings young girls (mostly relatives) from there, whom he then sends to different employers. No written contract is maintained by the agent with the employers. He takes a commission from the employers every year but doesn't set any fixed duration for which the worker will be allowed to work in the same house. The employer said that some girls have worked for more than four years in her house, while a few left in less than eight to nine months. The worker's monthly wages are decided between the agent and the worker herself, based on familiarity with the work and the amount of work assigned. However, the employer hands over the wages to the agent and not directly to the worker. There is no fixed number of leaves in the oral contract. The agent comes and meets the worker once in a month or two months, to collect wages and to interact with the employer and domestic worker.

The employer said that she always prefers recruiting workers through this agent rather than through an agency. She finds this person to be reliable and has had no issues with him. If she doesn't like a worker, she calls him and asks for a replacement. In case he is unable to provide a replacement, he returns some of the commission, depending on the number of months the worker had worked in the employer's house. Though the agent was the one who took the worker's monthly payment, he always handed it over to the worker's family in her village, claimed the employer.

While narrating her experience, the employer claimed that agencies are not a dependable source of recruitment. They charge a very high commission (up to INR30,000, she said) and refuse to take the responsibility of the worker provided by them. Most agencies are unregistered and don't have a permanent office address or contact number. So it becomes difficult to trace them when needed. A domestic worker she recruited through an agency had left in under 11 months, but the agency couldn't provide her a replacement and also refused to return the commission paid. In addition, it is difficult to say if they pass on the monthly payment of the workers to their respective families.

Case 3: A well-functioning, registered placement agency in Delhi provides the details of its operations.

The agency is registered under the Department of Labour, Government of Delhi, and has been operational for eight years. The owner and his wife look after the daily operations. The agency has a website, www.maidservicesdelhi.com, which details services offered and types of workers provided by the agency (housemaid, nanny, patient care, nurse, cook, driver, labour, receptionist, pantry boy, labour, governess), apart from general information about the agency, contact details, etc.

Getting registered as a recruitment agency with the Delhi Labour Department was a straightforward and easy and so is the renewal of the registration, said Mr P, the owner of the agency. He had to submit a form along with the required documents (PAN card, proof of identity, etc.) and a registration fee of INR6,000. There is no further costs involved except he has to get the renewal

of registration done every year, which does not involve any additional cost. Officials from the Department of Labour visit his office to check records and other paperwork, and along with this, his police verification is also been done.

The agency mainly recruits domestic workers from states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal (Darjeeling) and Nepal, said Mr P. Since the agency has been working for eight years now, it has a good network in different states/regions. Many domestic workers approach the agency directly or through reference from a worker placed with an employer by the agency. Mr P said that when a worker goes back to her village, she brings her acquaintances along. Besides this, the agency also works with five or six agents who are responsible for bringing the domestic workers from different regions. This mainly works on the basis of demand and then finding the domestic workers according to the demand. Whenever an employer contacts the agency for a domestic worker, Mr P calls his agents to ask for availability of the worker. A commission of INR15,000 is given to the agent for every worker provided by him/her. This basically covers the costs (travel, food, etc.) borne by the agent in bringing the worker/s to the agency along with the commission for the sub-agent.

Mr P said that he always prefers to recruit workers from either Nepal or Darjeeling. According to him, they are clean and responsible workers. They generally complete their full term of 11 months with an employer. At the same time, they can be trusted in terms of security concerns. Most workers recruited from these two states know and understand Hindi, unlike workers from Jharkhand or Chhattisgarh. Since it is a registered agency, the workers provided are always above 18 years of age. According to Mr P, married workers often leave in between without completing their full term. Therefore, he mostly prefers recruiting unmarried workers, except if specifically asked for a married worker by an employer. The worker's educational background becomes an important criterion depending on the type of work. For a babysitter or nanny, minimum education should be 8th to 10th standard. However, if the worker is required only for domestic work like sweeping and mopping, education is not that important. Mr P said that with respect to nannies, medical history also becomes important. According to him, employers don't like to hire nannies with medical problems.

Both the domestic workers and the client are asked to fill in a form containing basic information. When asked about domestic workers abandoning their job placements, Mr P said that it happens only occasionally (10–12 per cent, he estimated). If the worker is dissatisfied with the employer, he or she mostly returns to the agency. In such cases, employers are also called to the office for mutual discussions and agreements. If the worker still refuses to work at the same place or there is dissatisfaction on the employer's side as well, a replacement is provided to the employer without charging any extra commission as per the contract. In the absence of an adequate replacement, the agency returns part of the commission already levied based on the number of months left for the termination of the contract with the employer. Service tax is also deducted for that period. Most employers prefer a replacement to getting their commission back, Mr P said. Some are even willing to wait for a month or two. In case the worker doesn't return to the agency, a complaint is lodged with the police for further enquiry. Mr P said that he personally tries to contact the worker (in case he or she has a phone), the worker's family and the agents who had brought the worker to the agency.

Domestic workers, especially untrained workers, recruited by the agency undergo training for a week. The workers stay at Mr P's house during this period. His wife helps them learn basic do-

mestic work, including dusting, cleaning the house and washing clothes. They are also trained in kitchen work like using gas stoves, preparing tea, cutting vegetables, preparing chapattis and rice. Trained workers who have already worked with different employers do not need this, according to Mr P. Just as with the employers, the workers are informed about the terms and conditions, and usually a written contract is signed with the employer at the time of their placements. No fees are charged from the workers for training, or for housing or food while waiting for the placement.

With respect to commission taken from the employers, Mr P said that as per the contract made with the employer, a commission of INR25,000 is taken for placing the worker. This fee remains the same irrespective of type of worker provided or background of the worker. Mr P told that many employers negotiate the commission amount if they are employing a fully trained worker who needs to be paid a higher salary. Many workers want to get placed with the same employer after completing full term of 11 months. In such cases too commission fee remains the same despite the renewal of contract.

The agency pays a commission to the agents who recruit the workers; in addition to this, the agents also keep the workers' first monthly after they get placed somewhere. The commission given to the agents depends on the area where the agency is located. In areas like Rajouri Garden, Shakarpur and Punjabi Bagh, Mr P said, agents charge around INR20,000 per worker as commission, while in places such as Chirag Delhi, the fee is around INR15,000.

The worker's salary and frequency of payments is decided between the employer and the worker without much involvement on the part of the agency, said Mr P. Trained workers are paid anything between INR8,000 and INR10,000 per month, he said, based on the experience of the worker and type of work to be done. If the worker is completely untrained, the starting salary is around INR5,000 a month. The employers directly pay the workers either every month or on the completion of their term.

Mr P said that the agency's office number and his mobile number are available on Justdial – a commonly used dial in service directory and online website for sourcing of information on goods and services; apart from its own website www.maidservicesdelhi.com. Employers mostly call and ask for the availability of domestic workers as per their needs, he said. Many approach the agency based on recommendations from old and regular clients. The agency doesn't maintain any profile of the domestic worker to be showcased to the employer. Placement is mostly based on the needs and expectations of the clients. However, bio-data forms are filled up for all domestic workers recruited by the agency. This also helps in the placement procedure. According to Mr P, it takes around one to one and a half weeks before final placement happens.

Mr P said that his agency serves clients from different areas in Delhi and the National Capital Region, including Vaishali, many places in South and West Delhi, Gurugram and Noida. Many employers also approach him from Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Demand was highest for babysitters, cooks and housemaids, Mr P said. With respect to the clients' preferences, he said that employers who want babysitters or workers for patient care prefer married and experienced workers. For babysitters, people also prefer workers who can speak English. If a worker is required only for housekeeping though, employers tend to prefer unmarried girls. Working couples would rather hire a trained worker, while families where the wife stays at home mostly hire untrained workers, Mr P said. Most employers express an aversion to recruiting Mus-

lim workers owing to their austere religious customs and traditions which are unacceptable for many employers, he said.

On problems faced while dealing with employers, Mr P said that some employers refuse to give the workers any leave, despite it being clearly specified in the terms and conditions of the agreement. This mostly happens where a worker is hired for taking care of babies or small children. And some employers ask for an immediate replacement if there are dissatisfied with a worker, which becomes difficult for the agency to provide.

Additionally, Mr P said, despite taking care of security concerns of the domestic workers before placing them with any household, there have been incidences of abuse, non-payment of wages and other forms of exploitation of the workers. In one case, a worker was being physically abused by the employer's wife; Mr P tried to contact the girl three or four times, but the employer's family refused to let her talk to him. It was then that he lodged an official complaint with the police against the employer. A police enquiry was made and a week's notice was given to the employer, following which the girl was sent back to her village in Siliguri, West Bengal. Another time, a bogus cheque was given to a worker on completion of her full term, Mr P said. In this case too, the police had to intervene to solve the matter. In cases of instant termination of the worker by the employer, Mr P said that the responsibility lies with the agency to find another job for the worker. No additional amount is paid by the employer in cases of instant termination. However, Mr P said, such cases occur only occasionally; most employers inform the agency in case they are dissatisfied with the worker.

Mr P said he felt that the entire system should be better regulated by the government. Defined rules and regulations should be laid down for the agents involved in the recruitment process, and the registration of agents is also important, he said. Besides this, there is a need for stronger supervision and monitoring by the government, he added.

Box 6 | “We cannot stop migration, but we can stop trafficking” – Creation of a model placement agency (Interview with Nirmala Niketan, Delhi)

With this approach Nirmala Niketan²¹ aimed to set up a model placement agency. In the course of the training work they undertake in Jharkhand, for example, they find several women who are interested in moving to the cities in search of work. Information about their organization attracts more such women who are working in difficult or unhappy circumstances, seeking help for release and replacement with better terms and conditions.

The spokesperson of the Nirmala Niketan said that registration of employer is important since the worker is a weaker part of the relationship. The idea is to create a model placement agency with proper laws in place, so that it can serve as an example for other placement agencies to follow. In our placement process, there is a formal written contract and a consent form where the terms and conditions are properly laid out and the employer must agree to all of them before taking any DW.

Regulating placement agencies is important although starting and operating these are fairly easy. Placement agency is the hardest link to regulate. Someone can start a placement agency with just a phone from any corner. This is why we stress on starting from the employer, and on the regulation of the employer. Someone's privacy is the workplace of another. The issue is to deal with this matter. Employers have to recognize the distinction between workers and the women of the house. They cannot expect them to work in the same fashion. The idea of a model placement agency was envisioned as modelled on a cooperative. So that whatever extra the cooperative earns goes to the girls.

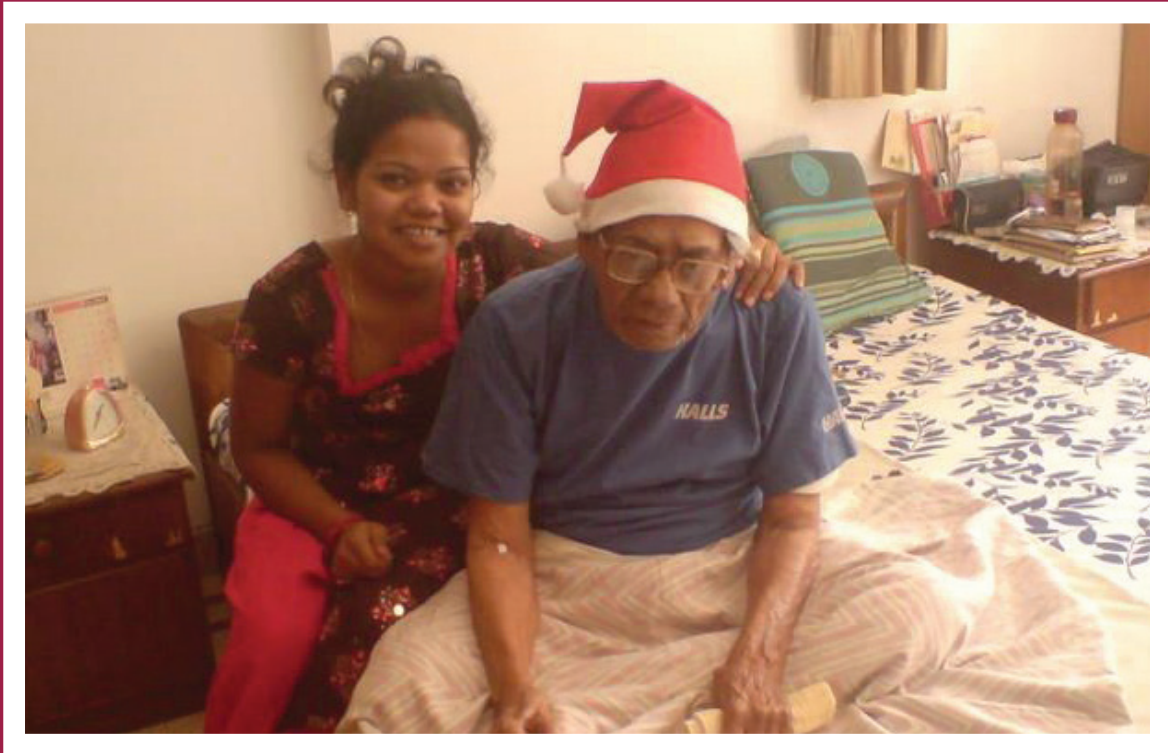
We cannot stop migration, but we can stop trafficking. The model placement agency works with this idea. There should be safe and healthy migration. Our concern is that the worker should inform their families/relatives back home of their whereabouts. The families ought to possess the details of their member's employment details. The people back in their place of origin must know where the individual is unlike in cases where they are just picked up or manipulated because they find themselves in a situation/fix they can't resolve. Their registration should be done at block/district level, with their gram sabha/panchayat, so there is proper information on where the individual is going, with whom, the amount of wages they'll be earning with photographs etc.

The intention of the tripartite board is similar. The contact and registration details of the worker and their source area should be with the government. In that situation, if someone wants to hire a domestic worker, they should first approach the board. The board should have all the details of the worker and the employer. The employer needs to lay out their needs/requirements in front of the board in terms of the wages to be given, the number of rooms, the nature of tasks, duration of worker's contract etc.

The idea of the tripartite board with members and representatives of the employer, government and worker's side was originally conceived for construction workers. The same sort of board is demanded for domestic workers as well. However, the tripartite board is still in the petition stage. Even for the construction workers law as it exists in its present form, it took all of the efforts of various central trade unions to come together and create and sustain pressure on the government over the years. Several governments have changed over time, and each one edited the law according to their own interests. So the policy is usually patch work effort and never implemented holistically.

21 In 1998 Nirmana, a society set-up to provide support to the National Campaign Committee demanding rights and social security of construction workers was set up at Delhi. The same society set up Nirmala Niketan as a Cooperative Society of Domestic Helpers. Since separate registration of Nirmana Niketan as a cooperative society was difficult, it was decided to integrate it with the Nirmala Sundharam Memorial Apna Nirmana Mazdoor Cooperative Society Ltd., which was registered by the same group a few years earlier.

5. Employers' attitude towards domestic work, workers and employment conditions



This section deals with wage rates, terms and conditions of work, facilities provided and treatment meted out to domestic workers by employers. The nature of the contract or personalized relationship between employer and employee and its consequences on the functioning of the domestic work is discussed.

Theoretically, labour supply tends to be associated with returns in the sense that as wages increase, more workers would be interested in taking up these tasks. Is the domestic workers labour market displaying such trends? Is the response of labour supplies an offshoot of rising wage returns or is the rising demand for women domestic workers among employers facilitating the enhancement of bargaining power among these workers thereby leading to a gradual upwards shift in the wages over time?

Given the personalized nature of these contracts, women workers who have been associated with an employer for a longer period of time tend to have relatively lower wages generally. It can be seen that the younger/newer workers are able to bargain for slightly higher wages. This is not witnessed as a rule, but glimpses of such trends are noted. Women domestic workers who have been hired over the last three to five years generally appear to report higher wages compared to workers who have been with employers for longer. Although several employers are also seen to be good natured and look after their domestic workers and their family's needs as well.

Some points that were noted in the qualitative and also got reported during the quantitative survey especially from Mumbai, is that several domestic workers were in need of funds, the employers pay advance wages for a few months to up to a year. Such practices are in favour of the traditional feudalistic employer, dissuading or diminishing the bargaining power of the domestic workers. In Delhi, in comparison, especially among the part-timers, is noticeably moving towards a more market-oriented relationship wherein the women workers are able to bargain for their wages, which are based on a number of factors such as the locality, tasks, time spent at work and household size, the going rates as well as at times the employer's reputation in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, employers negotiate payments based on the going rates for each task and the urgency of their need for domestic workers help, apart from their purchasing power and felt need for the worker.

Several of the households reported that their domestic workers have been working with them for multiple generations, especially among the well-off employer households. Such domestic workers are viewed as part of the household, and they have the employer's trust and considered loyal. All needs of the domestic workers' families are taken care of by the employer household, just like in the feudal relationships, combining both exploitation and patronage. The survey threw up a few cases that indicated a gradual movement towards a market- or contract-oriented relationship.

Notably, differentials in wages paid to women and men as domestics, is noted in the existing literature on the matter, and was also noticeable in the field survey in both Delhi and Mumbai. The studies from Bengal note the entry of women displacing male domestics; however, amid growing unemployment and large-scale male migration to urban centres from rural areas, some trends of these migrant men also taking up domestic work is noticed. For example, in Mumbai, a new trend of male domestics was noted by the research team. Groups of migrant men lived together and worked as domestic workers, filling in for each other in case of any contingency, sickness or other leave requirements. Even in these cases, it was noted that the wages paid to the males tended to be higher than that paid to the female workers. Perhaps it is the notion of male breadwinner and having dependents that continues to have a role to play in setting of the wages. To some extent it is also the better bargaining power and the physical strength/abilities which are being compensated by paying higher wages. The opportunity cost of their labour supply amid a labour market that offers many options is also a major factor for this variation in wages paid to male domestics compared to the women in these two metropolitan cities.

5.1 Wages

The wages are fixed based on a range of dimensions and varies widely across cities, locations and employers, and are also affected by factors such as terms and conditions of work, such as tasks specification, time spent and number of visits per day to the household, and can also be affected by number of household members, size of the house and so on. The informal and personalized nature of the labour market for domestic workers (which includes the recruitment channels), employer preferences, apparently low significance of education or skills in most cases, the nature of the tasks largely being menial and their association with low value and social status aids in keeping the wages low. However, the per-

sonalized nature of the relationships between employers and employees leads to the “peculiar nature of the services giving birth to ‘affective’, ‘quasi-familial’ and ‘asymmetrical’ or ‘stratified’ relations” especially with full-time or live-in domestic workers (Chakravarty and Chakravarty, 2016, p. 9). This nature of the work relationship also appears as gainful to workers at certain junctures, when they have no support from formal institutions or anyone else in times of crisis. However, on the employers’ side, the relationship ensures stability, regularity and loyalty by provision of additional assistance and treating the domestic workers as “part of one’s family”.

Table 23: Monthly wage rates of different tasks – minimum and average (INR)

Task	City	Minimum	Average
Washing utensils	Delhi	400	995
	Mumbai	400	903
House cleaning	Delhi	300	1044
	Mumbai	300	1652
Washing clothes	Delhi	400	1056
	Mumbai	300	808
Care of elderly	Mumbai	6000	9000
Care of sick	Mumbai	6000	
Child care	Delhi	3000	4333
	Mumbai	4000	5500

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

The labour market for domestic workers is segmented and personalized, with different tasks being hierarchized. The tasks of washing utensils, sweeping and swabbing the floors are at the bottom of the ladder, while babysitters, cooks and healthcare workers are at the higher end. The minimum and maximum wage rates of all domestic workers by tasks are quite widespread since some workers are paid higher rates which are outliers. While the average monthly rate for washing utensils tends to be below INR1,000, the minimum paid in both cities is INR400. The lowest rate is for housecleaning in both cities at INR300 per month, while the average is around INR1,500 in Mumbai and INR1,000 in Delhi. The rate for washing clothes tends to be a little higher in Delhi than in Mumbai. Workers taking care of children, the elderly or the sick tends to be paid higher wages, as shown in table 23. While the child-care monthly wage rates range from INR3,000 to INR5,000 in Delhi, it is INR4,000–7,000 in Mumbai. This work tends to be done by full-time or live-in domestic workers. The domestic workers hired for the sick tend to be medically trained and are paid around INR6,000. Elderly care requires full-timers and Mumbai, given the larger proportion of the retired and elderly population in the city, reported a lot more of such workers, who are paid in the range of INR6,000–9,000 per month.

Table 24: Number of part-time DWs in Delhi and Mumbai by monthly wages

Wage range (INR)	Total	Delhi	Mumbai
< 1 000	400	233	167
1000 – 2000	476	188	288
2000 – 5000	188	56	132
> 5 000	21	6	15
Total	1085	483	602

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

On average, for each domestic worker hired as a part-timer the employer pays around INR1,500 per month, while a full-time live-out or live-in worker is paid about INR5,000 per month. Tremendous variations are witnessed across the cities, locations, employers and by kinds of tasks for which the workers are hired as shown above.

Table 25: Number of full-time/live-in DWs in Delhi and Mumbai by monthly wages

Wage range (INR)	Total	Delhi	Mumbai
< 5000	83	36	47
> 5000	56	17	39
Total	139	5	86

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

The wages paid to part-timers for a single task by each employer in both cities is by and large less than INR1,000 per month; employers who hire workers for multiple tasks or multiple workers' pay anywhere between INR1,000 and INR2,000. A few employers even pay their part-timers more than INR5,000 per month; this category of workers essentially comprises those hired by the rich and affluent in Mumbai and Delhi. A total of 21 employers reported paying in that range, with 15 of these being from Mumbai.

Wages for full-timers and live-ins also vary substantially, with a few employers reporting pretty low wages as well. There are also different arrangements under which the live-ins work in both cities. In Mumbai, there were instances when employers reported that workers accept such work so that they can get a place to stay. Similarly, in Delhi, when the employer lives in accommodation provided by the government or a university, wherein a servant's quarter is provided, the domestic worker accepts the job in view of the good accommodation that can be used by the family of the domestic worker and other facilities which come with that. In some of these cases, there is a very small amount paid (between INR1,000 and INR2,000) for a few tasks performed by the domestic worker, while the rest of the work is undertaken in lieu of the accommodation provided.

5.2. In kind payments

In-kind payments are difficult to measure in monetary value but most employers make a notional calculation. Nearly 72 per cent of employers reported providing tea and some light snacks to their part-timers in the mornings; the proportion was slightly lower in Delhi than in Mumbai. Nearly 9 per cent of employers acknowledged giving leftovers to the domestic help. The employers of full-timers/live-ins and also those who have had the same workers for a longer duration generally provide clothes too; almost 90 per cent of employers hiring live-ins or full-time domestic workers reported providing one or two articles of clothing every year.

Although no earlier estimates exist to verify whether the practice of providing tea and snacks is undergoing any change, in the course of the survey, while the majority of the employers reported following these practices, there were a few who mentioned that the worker declined or was not able to accept these due to restrictions on time and the number of households they worked at every day. Therefore, it appears as if the practice is also gradually reducing, especially in Delhi, with the workers going to several (at least three or four) households. The lack of time and pressure to reach the employers household in time since several members of the household have to leave for their respective jobs early in the morning is also one factor. The differences in taste and habits may also influence the employees' refusal or declining of such offers from their employers.

A radical response to decline the benevolence of employers in kind is witnessed at times when the workers throw away leftovers given to them by the employers. In some exceptional cases, women workers have refused such “acts of benevolence” and demanded that wages be entirely paid in cash terms.

5.3. Basic facilities

Most employers were unwilling to allow their domestic workers to use the same toilets and bathing spaces, but alternative or separate facilities were provided to them. In half of all cases of full-time live-outs and live-ins, the employers had provided separate facilities for their domestics. In some cases, housing societies made provisions for separate facilities of toilets for the domestics outside the employers' houses in a common space. Delhi's employers provided separate facilities for their workers in 65 per cent of the cases, while the proportion is only 40 per cent in the case of Mumbai.

Employers of part-time domestic workers in general do not provide any meals and toilet facilities to their workers, and this is true for both Delhi and Mumbai. Also, employers of such workers did not report making any specific arrangements for these facilities. One of the employers, Ms LC from Mayur Vihar in Delhi, said that her family had no problems in sharing their toilet with the worker. However, several employers in the two cities expressed discomfort with such a thought.

Several employers mentioned that since the work undertaken by their domestic worker involves the use of the bathroom (to wash clothes, etc.), they are not sure if the worker uses it as well. However, most employers are reluctant to permit their workers to use their own bathrooms and toilets, fearing that it will somehow jeopardize their families' health.

An employer of a full-time domestic worker in Delhi said that the worker had separate room with a toilet of her own, and that the worker ate whatever the other family member did. The employer also reported providing clothes twice a year. For recreation the worker was allowed to watch TV, and she is also allowed to talk with parents over the phone. Visiting temples or shopping was allowed as long as the worker went along with other family members of the employer household.

In Mumbai as well, in case of full-time workers, all the employers reported providing meals. However, the quality of said meals provided is not very clear. In one case, a 53-year-old employer said that they used cheaper quality grains for the domestic worker's food. All employers claimed that they allow their workers to take rest, but also that there was no specified time for rest and that a break was given only after the completion of work.

There were also some employers who defined norms of cleanliness for their domestic workers. One employer reported that she insisted the domestic worker wash and clean her hands and feet as soon as she entered the household. The workers were reluctant initially and told her that no other household demanded this from them. But she insisted upon it from all her domestic workers and also provided separate footwear for them to use within the household.

In most households, the practice of leaving footwear outside the house is witnessed, especially for domestic workers. In some households, this is a general practice for all members of the employer household. But even in households where this is not the practice, the domestic workers remove their footwear outside the household. In Delhi, even during the winter months when floors are cold, most domestic workers are seen following this practice, unless the employer allows that she wear socks or bring her footwear inside, or if the employer provides a pair of footwear for use inside the house while working.

5.4. Hours of work and rest

Since the bulk of domestic workers are part-timers, they work for a period ranging from half an hour to two hours at each household. Nearly 73 per cent of the part-time workers were categorized within this time slot by employers. About 11 per cent domestic workers were reported as putting in less than half an hour. While these may be those who perform a single task, such as washing utensils, it could also be underreporting by employers who feel their workers have hardly any work to do. Another 14 per cent of employers reported their domestic workers as working from two to four hours, while 2 per cent fall within the category of four to eight hours. The situation for the full-timers and live-ins is, of course, distinctly different.

Table 26: Time spent working in a single household by part-time DWs

Time spent per day (hours)	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 0.5	31	6.3	86	14.2	117	10.7
0.5–1	148	30.2	261	43.1	409	37.4
1–2	219	44.7	175	28.9	394	36.0
2–4	88	18.0	70	11.6	158	14.4
> 4	13	2.7	13	2.1	17	1.6
Total	490	100.0	605	100.0	1095	100.0

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Generally, full-timers and live-ins work for more than eight hours per day. Working hours depend very much on the nature of tasks to be undertaken, household composition and other factors such as whether the domestic worker has a separate space for herself or not. Most live-ins in Indian households are at the beck and call of the employers throughout their waking hours. They can even be woken up beyond these hours to carry out additional work. Full-timers generally have specified hours, ranging from eight to ten a day. However, different arrangements are made by the employers depending on a host of factors, including supply- and demand-side factors. More than three-fifths of full-timers and live-ins work for more than eight hours.

The rest hours for these workers are also related to the households' daily routine. Entertainment in the form of television is commonly accessible. Since most domestic workers watch TV along with the other household members, if the timing does not clash with their peak work activities. In a few instances, the employers have an understanding with their workers and arrange work around the favourite shows to allow free time for the domestic workers to watch these too.

Table 27: Time spent by full-time/live-in DWs

Time spent per day (hours)	Delhi		Mumbai		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 4	8	12	27	31	35	23
4 – 8	8	12	15	17	23	15
8 – 9	34	52	17	20	51	34
10 – 11	12	18	14	16	26	17
12 or more	3	5	13	15	16	11
Total	65	100	86	100	151	100

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

5.5. Weekly offs and leaves

Although different versions of the Domestic Workers Bills (none has been tabled in the parliament yet) and the proposed National Policy for Domestic Workers, specifies a weekly off for all workers, the employers rarely displayed awareness of this provision or the need for providing a weekly off to their domestic workers. Only a handful of employers were aware of this provision, but even among them the issue of their own holiday versus the day off for their domestics came up as a conflicting one. Among Christian workers placed through agents/agencies, it is mandatory as per the terms of the contract to provide Sundays off for their weekly church visits and for meeting up with other domestics. So, most employers have come to accept this and work around it in various ways. In several cases, employers try to compensate for the period when the worker is away by overworking them just before.

Many employers reported that domestic workers demanded an increase in their wages periodically, and also demanded weekly off days etc. One of the factors that came up again and again in Delhi much more than in Mumbai was that workers would demand two to three off days per month while negotiating the work. Employers kept mentioning that most workers state they will take two to three leaves every month, and that even if they do not say so in advance they inevitably end up taking these days off. In Mumbai, there are a few housing societies that have specified days in every month during which the domestics will have to be off work. However, these are the outliers. The majority of employers in Mumbai did not report their domestic workers taking weekly offs.

5.6. Employer – employee relationships

The conflict between family-like relationships and a more formal, market- or contract-based association is witnessed constantly across households. Employers are not happy with workers becoming impersonal and casual about their work; although there are several instances of how employers define these spaces and draw lines of conversation and relationships between their employees and themselves. It appears that, increasingly, employees are strained for time and stressed about earning more, leaving little space to socialize or spend time chatting and sharing their life's woes with employers which some employers are looking for.

Employers want something more than contracted from their employees and expect them to behave in a personalized and sensitive manner, understanding what the employer expects from them, while employees are gradually moving towards being more and more professional and doing only as much as they are contracted to (even though said contracts are most often only oral). Workers are beginning to be less servile and although the services they perform tend to be one of servitude. Domestic workers are gradually accepting this space with dignity and moving towards exercising their own choices and preferences in the personal domains of eating, clothing and so on.

For any additional work that the employer asks the domestic worker to do, workers are increasingly making it clear that the requisite compensation should be given. The employers report giving monetary compensation for any additional work asked of their domestic workers. In some cases, employers complained that domestic workers today do not have any additional time for performing extra tasks and therefore often decline. Few of these employers were inclined to engage other workers to undertake any of the additional tasks. While live-in domestic workers have little space or scope to decline any extra work, part-timers are definitely increasingly seen as being in a position to do so.

In response to the question of what they do if the domestic worker makes a mistake, most employers reported that they explain the error to the worker in a dignified manner. However, we did hear from a

few of the employers that they might beat or shout at the employee. In the earlier IHD study of child and adolescent domestic workers, we came across several employers who felt physical abuse was a method of disciplining and teaching the domestic workers proper behaviour, just as they would their own children, since the workers were often young girls. Incidents such as expensive flower vases being broken while dusting or cleaning would result in abuse or shouting by the employers, along with threats to cut the cost of the damaged item from the worker's wages.

Although most employers reported how it is now no longer possible to physically or verbally abuse domestic workers, who will leave the household if they are not treated well, even now, 40 employers reported having shouted at the employee over mistakes made – 27 per cent in Mumbai and rest in Delhi. A few employers even threatened domestic workers with termination of contract, and a very small set of employers reported beating the domestic worker if they suspected her of “mischief”.

Often, old televisions and other consumer durables - computers, furniture, coolers, are offered to the domestic workers if they are interested when the employers are due for a change. In times of crises especially for health or children's education, employers generally pitch in and really help the domestic workers. It is these favours that are attractive for the employees and perhaps prevents them from bargaining or operating like market players with their employers. In other words, the relationship as Chakravarty and Chakravarty (2016) described “domestic service is not only isolated, poorly paid and associated with low status”, but as several scholars have pointed out this is a peculiar service which gives birth to affective, quasi familial, asymmetrical relations between the employers and employees, especially in case of the live-in full-timers.

5.7. Forms of address for workers

The employers surveyed for the most part did know the name of their domestic worker, although there were a few who used generic terms such as “aunty”, “didi” and “bai ji”. Most employers reported calling the domestic worker by her own name in the household. In a few instances, the employers used nicknames that appeared to be affective and quasi-familial. The generic names were associated with the region they came from, age of the worker, households' practices and so on. Some of the names reported by employers to be used were bai ji, aunty, Bhabhi, amma, behenji, didi, Munni, Gudiya, and so on in a few employer households.

Employers who hire domestic workers to take care of their children are concerned of also inculcating the appropriate values in their children and usually use an appropriate way of addressing the worker. These were also used as a way of instilling an affinity and creating a family like bonding between the worker and the employer household. A shift towards using the workers' name instead of referring to them by a generic term to denote domestic workers, is perhaps a sign of changing practices, wherein employers acknowledge the workers' identity and treating them with dignity.

Box 7 | Elderly Pensioners hiring a Nepali Domestic Worker

An old Gujarati couple in Mumbai who are pensioners recently hired a Nepali domestic worker as a full-timer. She is with them from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and works for about 10 hours. The employers are not aware of her name. She is called “tai” and is 59 years old. She was hired through neighbours. She works to clean the house and wash utensils and clothes, for which she is paid INR1,300 per month.

5.8. Compulsion to trust and employers' dependence on workers

Employers who hire domestic workers to take care of their children or clean or cook while they themselves are away have to necessarily evolve ways of functioning such that the worker can have access to their households. Employers in some settings have to give the workers access to the keys to the house; this was noted in 15 per cent of the cases surveyed, and was more common among employers in Mumbai than in Delhi. In the case of live-ins or full-timers, the practice of giving them the household keys in the employers' absence was more common.

Bachelors and single individual households have little alternative but to depend on their domestic workers. In most cases, even the domestic worker is happy to work in such households as there is no to order them around and they can peacefully complete their work in the household. The low burden of work in such households is an additional factor and employers often commented how the workers showed self-initiative in doing more than contracted for very often.

Generally, the employers define the dos and don'ts for their household. In general, employers are seen complaining about the workers not being professional on the one hand, while they still hanker for personalized indulgences. In the case of part-timers, not having the terms and conditions specified and decided between the employer and the worker is seen to be a cause of disgruntlement, with employers often complaining about domestic workers not being loyal or sincere, and in spite of constantly asking them to inform in advance if they will be taking a day off, not giving any prior notice, leaving several employers in the lurch. Among a few employers, for whom the task of the domestic workers is critical, such experiences have motivated them to resort to hiring through an agency, whereby they are not exposed to such exigencies.

It is interesting to note that employers are sensing changes as their employees are becoming less servile over a period of time. Even the live-ins, are now more clear of the terms and work arrangements and cannot easily be bullied or put under pressure. That is also the reason why some employers to prefer younger women/girls, since they are comparatively easier to pressure and are seen as easy to train to do the bidding of the employers, and to perform extra jobs which are beyond the negotiated tasks.

Employers often mentioned how they find it increasingly difficult to shout or lose their temper with domestic workers over mistakes, perceived or otherwise, since several the workers are now more likely to leave the employer on grounds of abuse. The bulk of employers reported that if the domestic worker makes a mistake, they would explain the situation to the worker with dignity. Only 40 employers in our survey reported shouting at their domestics.

Box 8 | Advertising agency employer of multiple domestic worker

Based in a 2BHK house with six members, this advertising agency in Mumbai hires four domestic workers (including one male worker). While the male domestic has been working with the family for 30–40 years and takes care of the dog, there are two women live-ins who also partake in the office work, suggesting that they are treated more as employees than as domestic workers. The live-in workers are Christians from Jharkhand and Karnataka. Each one of them is paid INR10,000, reported the employer. It was also specified that they work for eight hours a day each. The third woman domestic worker is a cook who is paid INR6,000 per month.

Employers' general comment was that they trusted their domestic worker. However, none of them were ready to give the keys of the house to the worker in the absence of any family member in the house. In addition, all of them said that the continuous monitoring of a domestic worker is a necessity and that all valuables must be locked away to avoid letting the workers know where they are.

In Mumbai, many employers stated that they had no choice but to trust the domestic worker as the employers had to go out for work, and hence, the keys to the house have to be handed over to the worker. Additionally, employers of live-in workers and full-time workers expressed a greater degree of trust in their workers, given the longer period of interaction between the two.

5.9. Employers' expectations of workers

In Delhi, hygiene and punctuality of the domestic worker were the two most important concerns of the employers. Besides, those households that employed domestic workers for cooking were specifically concerned with the cooking skills of the workers in terms of preparing food that satisfied all the family members. Some employers also showed a preference for young girls who were seen as being able to complete the task speedily and effectively. There was also some kind of regional preference depicted by employers' in Mumbai. Additionally, employers in Mumbai reported a preference for domestic workers fluent in Hindi, and some said they made sure that the worker hired was not a Muslim.

In Mumbai, most employers spoke of honesty and punctuality as the two most important criteria. The other commonly desired characteristics were cleanliness, loyalty, commitment, self-motivation to do quality work, experience, not too young and not too old, preferable single and without young children – overall, women without much personal baggage to distract them from work. In terms of skill levels, the employers focussed on cleanliness, efficiency, a minimum level of education so as to handle accounts, ability to use electronic gadgets and ability to do good quality work were outlined. Young working employers also wanted that the domestic workers should be flexible in terms of time of work so that they could match the employers' own work timings.

5.10. Problems/complaints

In Delhi, employers felt that workers required constant supervision to ensure the completion of work in a proper manner. One employer said that despite giving clear instructions, their current worker often leaves parts of the house such as the balcony and the stairs unclean if her work is not being monitored.

Most commonly, employers in Delhi had complaints regarding frequent demands for money and gifts during festivals as well as birthdays and any other personal/family celebrations. One employer gave the example of a worker who demanded they give her a pressure cooker for Diwali. When dissatisfied, she clearly told them to replace it with something more valuable. The worker would also frequently tell them about the gifts/monetary help she received from other households, the employer said, adding that it becomes difficult for employers to meet such demands.

Some employers in Mumbai complained that domestic workers in general lacked motivation. A 30-year-old couple said that “this work differs from skilled/professional work and we also feel that domestic workers do not like this work so they try to do *kaam chori*” – shy away from work/lazy worker. Some others said that workers now take too many leaves, are not punctual and do not perform their duties well. A 49-year-old employer supported this argument by saying that the demand for domestic workers is exceeding the supply. Girls taking formal education are now interested in taking skill-based jobs and

only illiterate, vulnerable women take up jobs as domestic worker. At the same time, the workers are able to find work in new localities, where employers are ready to pay more for the same work. As a result, domestic workers have become “non-adjusting”, “ill-mannered” and quick to quit if their demands are not fulfilled, this employer said.

Another common perception found among employers in Mumbai was that they perceived domestic work as unskilled and a job of last resort for less educated and vulnerable women. They said that training is not required for undertaking daily household work. Skills of domestic worker are restricted to gaining experience and understanding the nature and requirements of an employer. A 70-year-old employer said that domestic work is important but that the worker and the work is not valued and respected in the manner as it is in Western countries.

On the other hand, interviews with several employers in Delhi showed that employers feel that domestic work is above all other work. It is an important part of life and cannot be ignored. The domestic worker acts as a helping hand for the person (mostly females) who is responsible for looking after the house. Therefore, one can never undervalue domestic work and it is the responsibility of the employer to treat domestic workers respectfully. *An employer in Delhi said that no matter wherever we go, at the end of the day, everyone wants to be at home which is clean and tidy. In today's time, employing a domestic worker has become a necessity than a luxury. She is of the opinion that every work is equally important be it doing household chores or working in a factory or shops. It is the education/skill of a person which determines the kind of work he/she chooses to do.*

As far as training and skills are concerned, employers feel that workers must be taught hospitality skills. This includes teaching the way in which they communicate with the people, and not just family members but also visitors. Every employer expressed a desire to hire a well-mannered and soft-spoken domestic worker.

5.11. Skill training for domestic workers

Majority of the workers do not think that domestic workers require any training. The question “Do you think your domestic worker should be given any training?” elicited blank responses from most employers. A common response would be along the lines of “What is there to teach in such work? All women know how to do these tasks.” The rest of the specification of how to do it in any given house, is anyway provided by the employer.

Only a few employers, 40 in number, responded to this question. It is worth noting that the employers by and large were thinking of what kinds of training/skills would help them in some of the tasks employers would need domestic workers to perform, such as assistance with banking related work, use of household machines, cooking, English speaking and communication, child care, little knowledge about medical issues, and so on. Only those employers who have young live-ins mentioned skill/training for tailoring (mending clothes), beautician course, application of henna/hair colour, and so on. In some cases, employers felt that the domestic workers were too old and therefore not amenable for any training at that stage. In another case, the employer mentioned that she enquired of her live-in domestic whether she would be interested in learning how to operate machines and work in a factory but she was not interested at all.

The gender differences are also prominent with male domestics very often learning to drive or cook and moving up the ladder in terms of wages earned and status, as opposed to women who have much fewer

chances of moving up similarly. Thus, while women are hired for all the menial tasks for which they are paid low wages, male workers are rarely hired for these similar tasks. The earlier IHD study on child and adolescent domestic workers clearly reflected the stagnation and extremely low opportunities for mobility or change. Several women and girls continue to remain tied to this low paying work throughout their working years. The only potential for change is witnessed at times in the next generation's pursuit of education and also choice of employment, when the women domestic workers ensure that their daughters are not under compulsion to remain in the sector.

The absence of any prospects for upward mobility or transition from domestic work given its poor returns is a major drawback of such work. This form of engagement remains less than employment for most of the domestic workers in spite of the grind and effort. At best what some of the women manage to do is ensure that their daughters receive education and aspire to move into a better future.

Ironically, most employers are really not concerned about any of these issues. They are interested in having commitment from their workers and willingness to continue working at the prevailing terms and conditions. The response to the question of whether they would be willing to pay a higher wage to a skilled/trained worker was also largely in the negative. Employers are not generally prepared to pay a higher wage for the kinds of menial work for which they demand domestic workers, with 62 per cent of employers saying "no" and more than a quarter saying they did not know; only 10 per cent weakly said "yes".

Skill training has not been found to be important for a domestic worker by most of the employers. This perception stems from the traditionally followed practice of devaluing of domestic household work carried out by women. The paid work of domestic workers simply seems to be an extension of the unpaid work of women in the house. For instance, Mrs M said that part-time workers are employed for basic domestic work like cleaning and washing the dishes and that no special skills are needed for this work; skills are more important for those working in factories, shops or restaurants. However, all employers, whether of part-time or full-time workers, said that any worker should be able to cook so that this can be utilized during any emergency.

Only a few employers were interested in skilling/training the workers. Training cooks to prepare specific dishes or cuisines and improving the worker's communication abilities, especially in speaking English, to take messages and respond to phone calls while the employers are away were mentioned with a weak concurrence to preparedness to pay higher wages. Implicit in the discussion with employers were issues of why would workers remain interested in doing such menial, low-paying jobs if they were trained and could get better jobs. It is perhaps the soft skills in terms of language, behaviour, attitudes and so on that the employers value in their domestic workers as described by most employers in the qualitative interviews.

6. Regulation, workers' rights and legal provisions



The regulation and formalization of the domestic employment relationship is in the interests of both workers and employers. Specifying the rights and duties of each party will remove many of the difficulties that employers sometimes face, ranging from frequent absences, poor-quality service and quitting without notice to crimes such as theft, kidnapping and even murder.

Employers' organizations in certain countries have adopted codes of conduct for employment of domestic workers. The potential for employer organizations to engage with their members on this issue is great, but as yet largely untapped. So far, informal groups of employers organized on a neighbourhood basis have been more active than employers' federations.

D'Souza (2010) cited a study on trafficking to report on the resistance to regulation. Domestic work is in many countries beyond the reach of labour law, either because it is expressly excluded or because compliance with the law in the private sphere of the household is difficult to monitor. Employers generally do not see a need to formalize relations with their domestic workers. They expect that, in the home, services should be exchanged out of respect, affection or duty, not on the basis of a contractual relationship. Thus, the private sphere is typically considered to be outside of the mercantilist logic of the labour market as well as of state surveillance.

Forty-eight per cent of employers in a survey conducted in four countries – India, Thailand, Italy and Sweden – did not think that a domestic worker was entitled to a contract, while 70 per cent said they should not have the right to join a trade union, 52 per cent were opposed to a minimum wage and 45 per cent said that fixed working hours should not apply (Anderson and Davidson, 2003, p. 33).

A not very varied picture emerges from our survey, with a majority of the employers not recognizing domestic work to be work like any other. Apart from the shorter durations of the work, especially in the case of part-timers, reasons for considering this work as different include that it is seen as an extension of a “woman’s job”, that this work does not require skills and that this is not “work” in the typical sense of timing or other parameters which define work. Also, recognition of workers’ rights or unionization remains limited and is by and large considered undesirable by most employers.

6.1. Legal provisions for regulation of domestic work in India

In India, labour legislations do not provide protection to domestic workers and their rights. The prime reason being the fact that it was believed that those engaged in “personal service” cannot be covered by such laws because the household or home is not considered an “industry” to which labour laws could apply.

Paid domestic work continues to be excluded from the central list of scheduled employments under the Minimum Wages Act of 1948. It is not covered under either the Payment of Wages Act 1936 or the Workmen’s Compensation Act 1923 or the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 or the Maternity Benefit Act 1961. Hence, domestic workers are currently not entitled to any minimum wages or social security benefits, and their working conditions or hours of work are also not regulated.

In the past, several attempts at framing “umbrella legislation” by the central government for domestic workers have failed. A Domestic Workers (Conditions of Service) Bill (a private members’ bill) was drafted as early as 1959, but was never enacted. This bill, together with the All India Domestic Servants Bill, provided for a minimum wage, maximum hours of work, a weekly day of rest, 15 days’ annual leave with wages, casual leave and the maintenance of a register of domestic workers by the local police. In 1972 and 1977, two further private member bills the Domestic Workers (Conditions of Service) Bill 1972 and the Domestic Workers (Conditions of Service) Bill 1977) were introduced in the Lok Sabha, which provided for the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 to be extended to domestic workers. These bills lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Subsequently, the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector in 1988 recommended a system of registration for domestic workers (Sankaran et al., n.d.).

Besides, several state governments have taken initiatives to protect the rights of domestic workers. Tamil Nadu included domestic workers in the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1982 in 2007 and the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board was constituted in the same year. Similarly, in Karnataka and Maharashtra, for the first time domestic

workers received legislative recognition after the passing of the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act in 2008. The definition of a “wage worker” under this legislation includes a domestic worker. The Act thus identified domestic work and domestic worker within the ambit of the unorganized sector and also recognized the household as a place of work. The Act further recognized the employer–employee relationship in the context of paid domestic work within private households.

In 2010, the National Commission for Women prepared the draft Domestic Workers (Registration Social Security and Welfare) Bill. It claims to put in place a comprehensive central legislation designed to register and meet the working conditions of the domestic workers. Thus, it proposes to bring the domestic workers under the ambit of an organized sector. However, its final enactment is still pending.

Subsequently, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment constituted a task force on domestic workers. The task force adopted a two-phased approach, with the first phase focusing on welfare measures and the second focusing on regulatory mechanisms. The final report of the task force, titled “Realizing Decent Work”, was submitted to the ministry on 12 September 2011. In the report, a draft national policy for domestic workers was framed.

6.2. Key features of the draft national policy for domestic workers

At the outset, the task force felt that it was necessary that the fundamental principles of right to livelihood and rights at work enshrined in the Indian Constitution are applied to all women and men engaged in economic activities, including domestic workers. Also, given the general lack of public awareness of domestic work as a legitimate labour market activity, the ultimate goal of the policy on domestic workers should be to realize decent work for domestic workers through a rights-based approach.

i. Domestic workers like other workers should have the right to:

- recognition as workers;
- minimum wage protection;
- normal hours of work, including compensation for overtime and suitable rest periods;
- paid annual and sick leaves;
- social security benefits including maternity benefits;
- safe and healthy place to stay and sufficient food;
- protection against sexual harassment at the place of work;
- safe work environment and protection from hazards and accidents at workplace;
- work with dignity and respect;
- access to schemes and benefits which are available to other categories of workers.

ii. **Legislative inclusion:** Suitable amendments may be made in all the relevant legislations applicable to workers generally to explicitly include domestic workers.

iii. **Right to register:** Domestic workers have the right to register as workers within the aegis of the Ministry of Labour and its state labour departments so as to certify them with worker status. This will facilitate their access to rights and benefits and enable them to seek legal remedies in case of dispute relating to wages and conditions of work.

iv. **Right to organize:** Domestic workers have the right to form their own associations and trade unions or join an organization of their choice.

v. **Right to fair terms of employment:** This provision relates to minimum wage protection, access to social security, establishing normal hours of work and rest periods, work in safe and healthy workplace, protection from abuse, harassment, etc.

- vi. Rights to skills development:** Domestic work is recognized as a skilled activity which requires skills ranging from basic to highly specialized skills. Under this, state governments are encouraged to include domestic work as one of the occupations in the state level implementation of the National Skills Development Initiative.
- vii. Regulation of placement agencies:** The central government shall establish a mechanism for this and till this mechanism is in place, the agencies should mandatorily be registered under the Shops and Commercial Establishments Act 1953.
- viii. Grievance redressal:** The Ministry of Labour shall set up an appropriate mechanism to protect the rights and welfare of domestic workers and this mechanism shall provide a single-window access to domestic workers for all their complaints.
- ix. Awareness creation on employers' obligations:** The Ministry of Labour in collaboration with workers, employers' organizations, etc., will develop a code of practice for domestic workers and their employers and work towards creating public awareness on this.

In addition to all these, the inclusion of domestic work within the framework of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 is also a significant development in legislation concerning domestic work.

However, all such legislative measures aimed at protecting the rights of domestic workers do not outline any obligations or code of conduct for the domestic workers. In other words, in the absence of clear-cut guidelines, any such legislation may result in exploitation of the employers by domestic workers, placement agencies and their unions. Also, the legislation must take into consideration the massive inter-state migration of women and children as domestic workers due to their poor socioeconomic conditions.

In the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Kerala, domestic work is now included under the minimum wages notification. Also, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha have also notified minimum wages for domestic workers.

6.3. Findings of the employers survey

It is the large numbers of women who work as domestic workers in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai that leads to the activity being recognized as a separate one. The lack of organization and collective action among these workers is an offshoot of the fact that they remain isolated and work for different employers, even multiple employers. The employers in turn do not consider this work as an activity requiring recognition and protection of domestic workers' rights as workers.

Employers tend to view any form of organization and unionization as being disruptive of the delivery of work and thereby have are opposed to this. Very few employers responded positively to awareness about their own domestic workers being a member of any kind of union/association. Only three employers of more than 1,000 surveyed responded positively to this question.

Table 28: Employers who responded positively to questions on awareness of legal provisions

Legal provisions	Delhi (%)	Mumbai (%)	Total (%)	Total number
Legally permissible working hours per day	10.3	1.5	5.9	60
Minimum wages for DWs	8.9	1.5	5.2	53
Minimum legally permissible leaves	15.4	0.8	8	82
DW being a member of union/association	0.4	0.2	0.3	3

Source: Sample Survey, IHD-CDRA 2015

Nevertheless, there appears to be a gradual increase in the bargaining power of domestic workers, with increasing demand for their services among the middle classes. Added to this is the fact that locally the group of suppliers tend to congregate and discuss some of the issues and at times to decide on the minimum wages below which none of them will work, or demands for weekly offs, and so on. The operation of social forms of pressure by positioning different employers against each other or pointing out the good-natured behaviour of some employer to other employers are among new tactics domestic workers use to get their demands met, according to the employers surveyed in Delhi and Mumbai.

Only 8 per cent of employers in these cities were aware of the provision of any permissible leaves for their domestic workers. In Delhi, almost 15 per cent of the employers reported awareness, but the bulk of the employers surveyed said that workers take leave in any case, often without notifying the employer.

Box 9 | Notions regarding unionization of domestic workers

Almost all employers have been found to be against the formation of workers union because such unions are seen as raising unnecessary demands and exploiting the employers. Again, in an exceptional case, Mrs M, who hires a part-time worker in Janakpuri (New Delhi), thinks that the formation of unions will be beneficial for domestic workers. She said that in India, no one takes care of their rights. Those who are exploited have no system for registering their complaints, she said. Hence, unions can act as agencies/institutions protecting the rights of such workers, she felt.

In Mumbai as well, the general sentiment among employers about unionization of domestic workers was not positive. A 45-year-old male employer was noted as saying, “Jahan union baazi hoti hai wahan kaam nahi hota (Where unionisation occurs, no work is done).” Also, employers in Mumbai felt that even though there is no formal union of domestic workers, there is some form of understanding among the workers regarding the prevailing wage rate, number of leaves, conditions of work, etc.

6.3.1. Differing norms of formality and informality

In Mumbai, an interesting finding was that employers would flexibly apply the norms of formality and informality to domestic workers and their work, depending upon whose interest was at stake. Domestic work was considered an informal job while talking about the recruitment process, wage rate and conditions of work. However, the number of leaves granted per month to a domestic worker is often decided based on a comparison with formal work. Similarly, discussions on workers’ rights and their unionization are denied based on the argument that this is informal work, while norms of formality are applied when employers expect professionalism, punctuality and quality work from their domestic workers.

Instances of providing ID cards to all domestic workers in some selected colonies/housing complexes were noted in Mumbai. Similarly, there are instances of some residents’ welfare associations even in Delhi that have moved towards registration of domestic workers. Various organizations working for the welfare of these workers have been campaigning for the regulation, identification and registration of the workers. The NCEUS explicitly included domestic workers in the Unorganized Workers (Social Security) Act 2008 and subsequently they have come under the coverage of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) – the national health insurance scheme for vulnerable workers, after the recommendations of the task force on domestic workers in 2011.

Box 10 | Case of ID cards: Satyam shivam sundaram housing society

The Satyam Shivam Sundaram housing society, a huge society of more than 150 flats, initially had no ID cards for domestic workers. However, due to increasing awareness and for safety purposes the society started providing ID cards for the workers.

All the domestic workers, whether live-in, full-time or part-time, are issued an ID card after police verification. All information related to the domestic worker is with the society office and is updated according to changes that take place. Only full-timers and part-timers have to display their ID cards while entering the building and are returned to them while leaving. They are also asked to sign the register with time of their arrival and exit.

Most of the domestic workers live in the vicinity of the housing complex and have been working there for years. A small number of these workers are from outside the area, but have also been coming to the society for years.

The efforts of a number of organizations, trade unions and institutions, which received a boost in the recommendations made in the first report of the Task Force on Domestic Workers 2011, is seen as pushing towards recognition of this category of work as an important economic activity, so that the constitutional rights that are guaranteed for workers become applicable for domestic workers too. Some states have notified minimum wages for domestic workers under the Minimum Wages Act 1948. Maharashtra is among one of the states where the domestic work is included in the schedule of minimum wages, and these are specified by the hour and on a per day basis.

Box 11 | TIFR complex

TIFR Housing Complex in Colaba, Mumbai, is a society of all the scientists and researchers who work for Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR). Entering the society is only possible through contacts within the society.

All domestic workers in the TIFR complex need proof of identity to enter the complex. Only after police verification are they allowed to work in the complex. While entering the complex, they submit their ID cards to the guards and they are returned to them while leaving. A list of all the domestic workers working in the complex and also the houses to which they go for work are with the guard. All the domestic workers come from the nearby chawl (housing complex inhabited mostly by relatively poor but usually gainfully employed working-class families or labourers).

All of the workers are part-time domestic workers; many of them have been working for years and also in different houses in the same complex, with a wage INR500–600 per task.

The complex also had a “Read and Write” training programme for the domestic workers arranged by Pratham, a civil society organization.

It may be observed that the interest in fixing wage rates and other basic conditions of work among employers is emerging in the context of the domestic workers gradually gaining the upper hand in negotiations given the increasing demand for domestic workers and employers’ dependence on them. In order to avoid being pushed into bargains which are favourable for the domestic workers, employers would rather have some of these parameters strictly regulated.

In the field, across Delhi and Mumbai, very few employers even responded to the questions in the section on awareness of legal provisions. The questions related to hours of work per day, minimum wages, leaves and the right to unionize. Even those who responded to these questions were often uncertain and incorrect, with barely a handful of the employers specifying eight hours of work, for instance. The ranges of minimum wages specified were quite varied and rarely based on any knowledge of the actual rates. Most employers were unaware and asked the investigators of our team to tell them what the rates were. Far more employers from Delhi than from Mumbai responded positively to this question, even if though most did not actually know the correct answer. Only eight employers in Mumbai said that they knew of the minimum wages; obviously then, the actual wages being paid are not aligned to the minimum wages specified within the state of Maharashtra.

Initially, the low status attributed to the work meant that even the workers were embarrassed and participated in such work out of total vulnerability and desperation. As the sector and activity is gradually becoming more acceptable and workers are beginning to bargain for their returns and dues, employers are finding it difficult to negotiate. This is creating an appropriate platform for working towards regulation of the sector as employers are beginning to see this as beneficial for them too.

Those employers who can afford to pay the commission charged by placement agents and find the system conducive are inclined to be in favour of placement agencies being regulated and allowed to function to facilitate the matching of the demand for and supply of domestic workers. The agents in turn would also like to be allowed to operate without the fear of being branded illegal and are therefore keen to be regulated and have the permissions required to function.

On minimum wages, the majority of employers are not paying their workers what is specified by the law, with only a few exceptions. Meanwhile, there are debates on how should the wages be fixed amongst the domestic workers organizations and the employers. It is imperative to specify and make public the wages that are to be paid for domestic work.

The fact that employers were not interested in skill development for their workers is also associated with the disinterest in paying higher wages. No employer engaged with the subject of willingness or inclination to pay better returns once workers are trained. These are the factors that keep domestic work low paid with poor skill development and little in the way of prospects for upward mobility.

7. Conclusions and recommendations



The demand for domestic workers is clearly established, but movement towards the recognition of such work remains very slow, with employers reluctant to acknowledge the legitimacy of domestic work. Among wealthy and middle-class households, a bulk of them hire the services of at least one domestic worker. The issues and concerns relating to domestic workers is fundamentally to recognize this work as a legitimate labour market activity and move towards the realization of decent work for domestic workers through the protection of their rights. The Task Force on Domestic Workers 2011 states that the ultimate goal of the draft national Policy on Domestic Workers is to “realize decent work for domestic workers through a rights based approach; thereby protecting domestic workers human rights and fundamental principles and rights at work on matters of minimum wage, hours of work, rest periods, social security, safe and healthy workplaces, protection from abuse, harassment and violence, access to skills development, grievance redressal and creating public awareness on employers obligations under the law” (p. 5).

The first and foremost point that emerged from this study, as also from earlier ones and as recognized and documented in the report of the Task Force on Domestic Workers 2011 as well, relates to the general lack of public awareness of domestic work as a legitimate labour market activity, compounded by the low social status unfairly accorded to the occupation, which is reflected also in the poor payments made to them for their services. It is not only the informality associated with this work, but also the personalized and isolated nature of the domestic work which adds to the peculiarity of these activities.

Legal provisions of existing labour legislations were inapplicable to these occupations since the employer was not a factory, industry or unit, but a private household. The challenges posed by the informal sector in general are applicable to domestic workers too. The regulation of a vast number of private households who hire the services of domestic workers seems difficult under the existing frameworks. Thus, hardly any of existing legal provisions are applicable to domestic workers, leaving them vulnerable to severe abuse and exploitation, with little opportunity for redressal of grievances and disputes.

Basic human rights such as being treated with dignity, not facing physical or emotional abuse/violence, protection of workers' rights (payment of minimum wages, balance of hours of work and rest periods, provision of weekly offs and so on) are only now being spoken of among some of the concerned groups. The Domestic Workers Bill and the Task Force's recommendations have been acted upon in a few instances, such as the inclusion of domestic workers in the RSBY, and, in a few states, a specific inclusion of domestic workers in minimum wages provisions with hourly rates, piece rates and a monthly one is noted, and some states attempting to regulate domestic workers recruitment and placement agencies to ensure transparency and accountability.

The draft National Policy for Domestic Workers provides for substantive provisions to design a specific legislative mechanism to ensure their legislative inclusion, through rights to register domestics as workers, to organize, to fair terms of employment, social protection and labour welfare, to skills development, regulation of placement agencies, grievance redressal, protection for those who seek work abroad, and awareness creation about employers' obligations.

This study only strongly re-emphasizes the need for such provisions, since even today most employers consider such work to involve the engagement of domestic workers for short periods of time, for specific tasks, as in the case of part-timers, who are in perceived by employers as not being workers who require rights and social protection. Ironically, the personalized relationship viewed as a benevolent act by the employer towards a poor, needy domestic worker contrasts against the notions of a worker with rights.

7.1. Summary of main findings

The issues stemming from the findings of the survey of employers' perceptions are related to recognition, preferences, regulation, recruitment channels, working conditions, remuneration, treatment and awareness of legislative rights and provisions. Some of the features emerging strongly relate to the fact that domestic service is an heterogeneous sector; elements of segmentation within and specialization of tasks are noted, with a hierarchy among domestic workers depending on the tasks they are hired for that is reflected in the wages paid as well; worker characteristics are gaining prominence over other factors such as caste, especially among part-time domestic workers, who form the bulk of the domestic work labour market. Interesting instances of practices adopted by gated communities and the role of the resident welfare associations working in favour of employers' interests were witnessed. There is a gradual shift towards the formation of a labour market for domestic workers, especially part-time workers.

Recognition of demand: Employers are beginning to express their need for domestic workers. Demand for such work is being clearly articulated, but the workers themselves and the employee–employer relationship is not entirely viewed as a legitimate labour market activity by those who have employed live-ins and part-timers through traditional and informal channels of recruitment. The personalized relationship and terms and conditions which are not moderated or regulated by formal institutions or legal provisions tend to further restrict the recognition of domestic work. The low value or wages at which such labour is supplied is also a factor for its non-recognition.

Thus, while the tasks which are care-related and considered menial are being demanded by employer households, the recruitment channel for hiring, the manner of execution of these tasks and the highly individualized, personalized relationship and its lowly compensation prevents domestic work from being treated as any other labour market activity. In the few instances where formal contracts have been made, or recruitment is through non-personalized channels, there is a difference in the treatment of the domestic worker, in the mutual expectations from the employer and the employee, with some space for negotiation – and to some extent, even dignity.

Change in the nature of preferences: Employers are increasingly expressing work-related preferences on efficiency, tidiness, punctuality and so on, and even communication, attitude to work and nature of the domestic worker, rather than the traditional factors of caste, language, religion and region. Although in certain contexts employers might still retain preferences along traditional lines, as when an elderly person is to be provided company and so on, by and large there is an interesting change in the preferences of employers. This was noted a little more in Delhi than in Mumbai. It is construed as a signal of some kind of formation of a labour market for domestic work wherein women workers and their labour supply traits gain significance over their social aspects. The preferences also vary as per the types of workers, with caste or social background gaining some importance for some employers in the case of cooks; although, even here the skill at cooking gains prominence and can at times overshadow all social attributes. Employers are seen as accepting the workers' choices and preferences in a sense that accepts them as individual entities and treat them with dignity.

Absence of regulation: The domestic work sector is functioning almost without any regulation from state institutions, except when some untoward incident compels the concerned persons to file a case or complaint. This is also the reason why employers hire underage children or have workers who are underpaid. Varied forms of exploitation are prevalent in terms of not following norms of working and resting hours, especially for the live-ins, who are at the beck and call of employers throughout the day.

The procurement mechanisms followed by some agencies/agents is akin to trafficking, and they are often unscrupulous in exploiting the vulnerable, poorly educated migrants, tribals, Scheduled Castes or from Other Backward Classes and from poor regions of the country. It is often difficult to acknowledge the positive contributions of the agents to the sector given the practices adopted. Even in cases where they are registered with the concerned ministry or department, the cases witnessed illustrate how unregulated and without checks they operate.

Informal recruitment channels are still the norm, though there is a gradual shift to the use of placement agents by employers with specific needs. A majority of the employers reported and are seen hiring domestic workers through informal and personal networks, such as friends, neighbours, relatives, etc. The use of other domestic workers and watchmen was also reported. Ironically, employers' faith in these networks supersedes the faith in identity checks and registration with the police.

Verification and identity checks low: In spite of the numerous cases one comes across through the media and other channels of violence and theft by domestic workers, the incidence of ensuring verifi-

cation remains low. It is among the younger employers, those who have been hiring domestic workers over the last decade or so, which the incidence is gradually improving, with more of them insisting on registration of the agency or identity checks of the domestic workers.

Remuneration slowly improving, workers' bargaining ability on the rise: Overall, it may be stated that the remuneration on an average remains low and exploitative, yet over time there has been an improvement in the rates of payments being made. More importantly, women domestics are increasingly able to bargain for their dues, increments, leaves, etc. Workers, especially part-timers, have also begun to refuse to carry out additional work without any extra compensation.

Working conditions and treatment: The number of employers who treat their workers well with dignity is on the rise. The traditional households of employers who have had families of domestics working with them over generations or for long periods have a distinct bonding and interpersonal relationship which is feudalistic but not abusive or exploitative. The workers, though, may be expected to be servile and have less autonomy under these circumstances. The employers keep the workers indebted in some form or the other. The recognition of domestic workers' human rights is also seen with employers helping them out in times of crises, giving advance wages, helping educate their children, providing assistance during any medical requirements, are all examples.

In terms of working conditions, for the majority of the workers who work part-time the employer–employee relationship is fairly well defined. Certain employers are free with sharing toilets, etc., while most still have a problem and try to provide alternative options. For the live-ins, the provision of appropriate space, bedding, clothes, food, etc., and treatment on a daily basis by the employer in defining the work and getting it done varies across employers.

The increasing realization of employers' dependence on their domestic workers is one factor that is having a positive impact on the behaviour and treatment meted out by employers. In cases where the worker is an efficient and caring one, the employers naturally treat her well. Some cases of employers who are professionals and their relationships with live-in domestic workers are illustrations of some of the good practices, though it may still not be a norm.

Skill training for domestics: The employers surveyed hardly expressed any inclination towards skill development since they are not interested in paying domestic workers higher wages for the same or similar work. Employers are mostly keen on getting cheaper labour and do not consider most of the menial activities domestic workers carry out as worthy of any skill requirements. What is more important is that they do not think their workers should have avenues for upward mobility in most cases.

Awareness of legal provisions: Given the low coverage of legal provisions in the first place for domestic workers, most employers have no idea about this. One of the major reasons for employers finding it difficult to treat domestic work as a legitimate category of the labour market is the time spent by the worker in each household.

However, given the large numbers of women working as domestics in all urban cities, there is a need to capture it adequately. Given the manner in which some of these activities have evolved – with defined time, resources and knowledge – the sector is clearly an employment category. But employers were found to have no sense of what is an acceptable working day or hours or what the minimum wages are, and most of them were averse to any form of collective bargaining on the part of domestic workers.

7.2. Recommendations and suggestions

Many more studies of this kind are required to illustrate the actual practices adopted in different Indian cities within the sector of domestic work. Almost similar treatment is meted out by employers who still do not consider domestic workers as legitimate workers because of the circumstances in which they work and the process through which they are hired. The use of registered recruitment agencies changes this to some extent, since the workers have a contract with some defined duties and a fixed wage, work and rest hours, leaves and other employer obligations.

The suggestions are aligned with those proposed in the national policy on inclusion of domestic workers in labour legislations: improve awareness of employers' obligations; regulation of placement agents/agencies; fair terms of employment and social protection; labour welfare; right to registration; right to organize; and grievance redressal.

The main findings of this unique study which focused on the perspective of the employers, who only reluctantly accept the work undertaken by their domestic workers as a legitimate labour market activity, in spite of its being a paid one, calls for several recommendations.

To begin with, as acknowledged earlier also, the National Policy for Domestic Workers has been drafted and its recommendations have been proposed based on deep reflections of the concerns of domestic workers, which must be effectively put into practice. Several of our recommendations and suggestions flow from the survey findings of the two cities of Delhi and Mumbai, although these may be overlapping or even similar to what is already proposed in the final report of the Task Force on Domestic Workers, titled "Realizing Decent Work".

7.2.1. Due recognition of domestic work

Ensuring that domestic work is duly recognized is one of the basic concerns, since employers continue to treat this work as some form of engagement but not a legitimate labour market activity. In several cases, despite the growing expression of demand for domestic labour, the work – and therefore the worker – is not included in any legal provisions, thereby denying workers their legitimate rights. Exposing the perceptions of employers was critical to realize how essential it is to focus upon ensuring due recognition of domestic work and workers to protect them from being exploited, abused, underpaid, undervalued and treated with indignity.

Regulating hiring practices: The majority of the employers used and also preferred using informal hiring channels for recruiting domestic workers, with very few depending on the formal or partially formal mechanisms of agents and placement agencies. A few cases of using websites to hire domestics or gain appropriate information on the preferred demands of employers were noted. However, the bulk of the employers hired their domestic workers through friends, relatives, neighbours and other domestics.

The use of these channels and the continuation of informal sources for hiring domestic workers easily lends itself to the entry of other factors into the deal and negotiation, with very little in the way of options for bargaining by domestic workers, who are largely illiterate or poorly literate women with weak social status or influence in comparison to the employers.

A gradual shift in the priorities of employers of part-time domestic workers away from the traditional or social attributes of caste, religion, region or language (noted more in Delhi than in Mumbai) and

towards work-related attributes such as tidiness, efficiency and punctuality hints at a particular kind of change. Should the state intervene and advocate for equality of opportunity and non-discrimination? As soon as this is accepted as a legitimate labour market activity, the other norms of appropriate behaviour also kick in.

Ensuring minimum wages: Defining and notifying minimum wages per task, or as an hourly rate, is indeed strongly desirable. The inclusion of domestic workers in the schedule of occupations notified under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 is desirable. While there may be a few employers who have been paying better wages, the averages for any given task tends to be only around INR400–500.

Take the example of Rajasthan, where eight hours per day has been set as the maximum for domestic work. Working beyond that would require overtime payments by the employer at double the minimum rates. For the tasks of cooking, washing, babysitting and other daily chores, a minimum of INR5,642 per month has to be paid to the worker. For a family of four, domestic workers hired for dishwashing and laundry will be paid INR705 per month, with an additional 10 per cent per head if the number of family members increase. The order also specifies that the minimum wage excludes clothes, food and accommodation provided by the employer.

Similar specifications can be formulated for the most common tasks combined by employers based on an understanding of what factors matter, as is witnessed in the labour markets, while assessing how wages are set. Instances of per dish rates, per chapatti rates or menu offers for party dishes are noted for cooking; the number of household members are counted for laundry and washing utensils, while rooms or area matters for cleaning the house.

Specifying the tasks and time rates, as well as an overtime rate and monthly wages, is possible and needs to be done. A set of specifications which are basic ought to be put in place and this will help in the process of recognizing domestic work as a legitimate labour market activity and also ensure that the terms of employment are not too exploitative. Given the abundant labour supplies in the context of large-scale migration to urban centres, widespread poverty, high unemployment/underemployment and poor avenues for acceptable employment for even men, the vulnerability of the women workers who accept or enter into the labour market for domestic work exposes them exploitation by the employers. Introducing checks and regulating this activity is therefore essential.

Specification of work-related basic conditions: Apart from specification of wages, hours of work and rest, overtime, any additional tasks (i.e., not laid out in the contract), etc., moving towards a contract which is at least written or documented, and which thereby formalizes the employer–employee relationship, is desirable. Preventing the overworking of domestic worker by specifying the tasks and terms of the contract is essential. Appropriate remuneration being specified for a period, with periodic increments and other work-related aspects, can aid transform domestic work into an acceptable labour market activity. The placement agencies/agents often do this in most cases, especially those that are registered.

Regulation of domestic work beyond mere registration; monitoring mechanisms or involvement of other parties also required: Mere registration of the agencies/agents does not ensure their following the codes of conduct such as disclosure of full information while recruiting women for domestic work, or while fixing a contract or placing them with employers, for example. These are the instances which often come up in media reports, when some workers are compelled to do work they are not inclined to do. Often it is under these cases that the workers might run away from employers' households or even resort to committing a crime or theft.

Mechanisms to ensure that proper procedures with full disclosure of all information are followed must be put in place. The involvement of the worker in the negotiations between the employer and agent is required. The women domestic worker should be aware of the commission being paid to the agent/agency as well.

Stringent mechanisms to prevent unscrupulous practices being followed are required: Legal provisions and advocacy to make these acceptable and known to all concerned requires campaigning and publicity. Failure to adhere to these would, of course, call for penalties. Several employers resort to informal recruitment channels to avoid these stringent requirements. Some form of registration of both domestic workers and employers is required to make the transaction transparent, with basic information in terms of the contract such as tasks, working hours, wages and so on specified.

Non-criminalized and work-oriented approach: Aversion to the registration of domestic workers is partly an offshoot of the low trust in institutions such as the police, and particularly its association with criminality. Several employers feel that registering their domestic worker at the police station is tantamount to treating her as a criminal. Recognizing that domestic workers are indeed workers, labour departments or some similar civic authorities ought to register both employees and employers. This can only be operational if we move towards some kind of a contract system, which specifies basic details.

Treating the domestic worker as an individual with dignity and rights: Fundamentally, one of the most critical issues to be addressed in this sector is to treat every individual with dignity. And second, the worker must be recognized as one, the protection of their rights, especially basic social protection measures, must be advocated and ensured. Domestic workers are like the rest of the informal economy workers in this respect, but given that they are for the most part women workers and working on tasks which are undervalued and traditionally unpaid work activities which women undertook with little or nothing in the way of recognition, domestic workers are further marginalized. The socio-economic milieu from where these women workers come and the low human capital endowments generally possessed lowers their bargaining strength; the workers' vulnerability and need gives employers an upper hand in continuing to hire domestic workers at cheap and exploitative wages. Changing these by defining the terms and conditions of work such that it is non-exploitative and ensuring social protection for women domestic workers will definitely help transform this scenario.

Introduction of skill development/training which can also facilitate mobility: Working towards the development of skills or training domestic workers is currently not something employers, or even the domestic workers, even consider most of the time. The introduction of these measures can provide some bargaining strength and also help women domestic workers consider mobility into better avenues of employment, and perhaps also some forms of decent work.

Appropriate mechanisms for grievance redressal: There is a need to reflect on mechanisms for grievance redressal, since the work activity operates in a highly personalized domain, and can be prone to several misunderstandings – some minor, some major. Not all grievances require formal institutions to intervene, perhaps. Suggestions to set up just and fair mechanisms are required.

Right to organize and collective bargaining: Women workers are sometimes formally and informally organized in some small pockets, some of them with the help of few organizations working for their rights. But a more systematic approach may be desirable for all those workers who are interested and feel the need for it.

Role of different stakeholders: Different stakeholders can assist in making domestic work a legitimate labour market activity and help in moving towards ensuring domestic workers get their rights and are

covered under basic social protections, thereby moving towards decent work for domestic workers. This requires the involvement of employers, placement agencies, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, domestic workers, labour departments, resident welfare associations and other socio-cultural organizations as relevant (as in the case of Parsis, for example), institutions/similar bodies (such as universities and institutions with residential accommodations) and so on. There can be several non-threatening, more amicable and mutually thought-out provisions put in place which aid in domestic work being appropriately recognized, and gradually becoming decent work.

Residents' welfare associations: Residents' welfare associations and housing societies, where they are active, can play a critical role in regulating the domestic work activity by getting basic information from both employers and workers and defining some norms as per the requirements specified in the national policy or what is desirable for decent work with basic social protection. Instances we came across in the survey of employers included where IDs were given to domestic workers and leaves were specified for two fixed days every month (rather than a weekly off); there were also employers' associations which put restrictions on the supply of domestic workers.

Non-governmental organizations: NGOs working on the cause of domestic workers can provide insights into the current practices and assist in mobilizing women workers as well as their employers if need be to advocate for appropriate behaviour and the protection of basic rights. There is a potential for developing conditions for a model placement agency. They can also develop training and skill development modules/courses to improve the human capital endowments of the supply of domestic labour.

Trade unions: Trade unions have been working on the unorganized sector and inclusion of domestic workers has been taken up by them. What challenges domestic workers who are women pose for this needs to be reflected and addressed.

Employer associations/collectives: Campuses or institutional residential accommodation can be easily monitored and regulated for domestic workers rights and to take care of social protection measures.

Worker associations/collectives: The workers if collectivized can articulate their demands and needs better, and can also expect to get some response from employers all around. If these bodies can work for their interests in grievance redressal and in ensuring that all the workers' dues are provided and there is no wage theft, apart from ensuring social protection.

Cultural/social organizations: Societies in most cities are ghettoized and divided based on factors such as religion, community, etc. Since such societies tend to have alternative organizations for themselves, some of these may be expected to work for the provision of decent work.

Placement agencies: The placement agents and agencies play a very important role of a labour market service provider facilitating connect between the domestic worker and the employer. However, there are many agents/agencies who are seen exploiting the poorly educated, poor and vulnerable working masses by pushing women into the sector without full information on the kinds of work to be done, etc. Regulating this recruitment and placement activity to ensure transparency and accountability is needed.

Government bodies: The labour department would perhaps be a more appropriate authority than the police to carry out registration and identity checks of domestic workers as 'workers'. In cases of abuse or illegal activities, the police can step in as appropriate, as done in case of any crime. But for mere registration as a worker, which ought to be a routine activity within the labour departments, the use of criminal institutions, such as police, is not desirable.

Workshops and discussions: The organization of workshops by bringing together all stakeholders is desirable to share the positive and negative stories from surveys. Reflections and suggestions for what is to be done can be articulated from the discussions, and this can inform policy formulation.

More research and data: Data on domestic workers is still not easily available. Only one occupational category of persons working for private households is collected, which includes all workers who are demanded and employed. Research on the qualitative dimensions shows the different practices among employers of women domestic workers, which can inform the campaign for improving conditions and moving towards decent work for them.

Working towards some kind of clearing house: As opposed to employment exchanges, informal workers require an informal clearing house which protects the women workers' human rights.

The realization that employers still continue to treat their domestic workers with disdain and even contempt, not perceiving the work worthy of commensurate payment even up to minimum wages specified for unskilled workers, aligns them with the bulk of the unorganized informal sector workers in the country. Tackling the issues of these workers calls for a major transformation in employers' outlook towards workers' dignity and human rights. Needless to reiterate that a similar transformation among the placement agencies/agents, government officials and policy-makers is also required. A very slow and gradual shift is witnessed, but the journey is long and will require concerted efforts on many fronts before we can achieve equal treatment of the women domestic workers by employers. The state and legal provisions definitely have a significant role to play in inching towards attaining this.

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Annex I:

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Annex II:

List of wards and areas surveyed – Delhi and Mumbai

Delhi – 25 wards and 33 localities/colonies

S.no.	District	Wards	Localities/colonies
1	Central	Jama Masjid	Chawri Bazar
2		Mandawali	Vinod Nagar
3	East	IP Extension	Madhu Vihar
4		Mayur Vihar	Madhu Vihar Phase I
5	North	GTB Nagar	Mukherjee Nagar
6	New Delhi	Ramakrishna Ashram	Ramakrishna Ashram
7		Yamuna Vihar	Yamuna Vihar
8	North East	Bajanpura	Gorakh Park
9		Dilshad Colony	Dilshad Garden
10		Pitampura North	Pitampura
11		Shalimar Bagh	Shalimar Bagh
12		Model Town	New Gupta Colony, CC Colony
13	North West	GTB Nagar	Bhai Parmanand Nagar
14		Adarsh Nagar	Adarsh Nagar
15		Karol Bagh	Inderpuri
16		Rohini North	Rohini Sector 5
17		Chirag Delhi	Sheikh Sarai
18	South	Chattarpur	Chattarpur Colony, Rajpur Colony
19		Mehrauli	Ber Sarai
20		Haus Khas	Green Park, Sarojini Nagar
21		Mahipalpur	JNU Campus, Andheriya Mor
22	South West	RK Puram	Nanakpura, RK Puram Sector 12
23		Chattarpur	Arjan Garh
24		Moti Nagar	Punjabi Bagh
25	West	Rajouri Garden	Vishal Enclave, Raja Garden
26		Tagore Garden	Tilak Nagar
27		Paschim Vihar North	Paschim Vihar

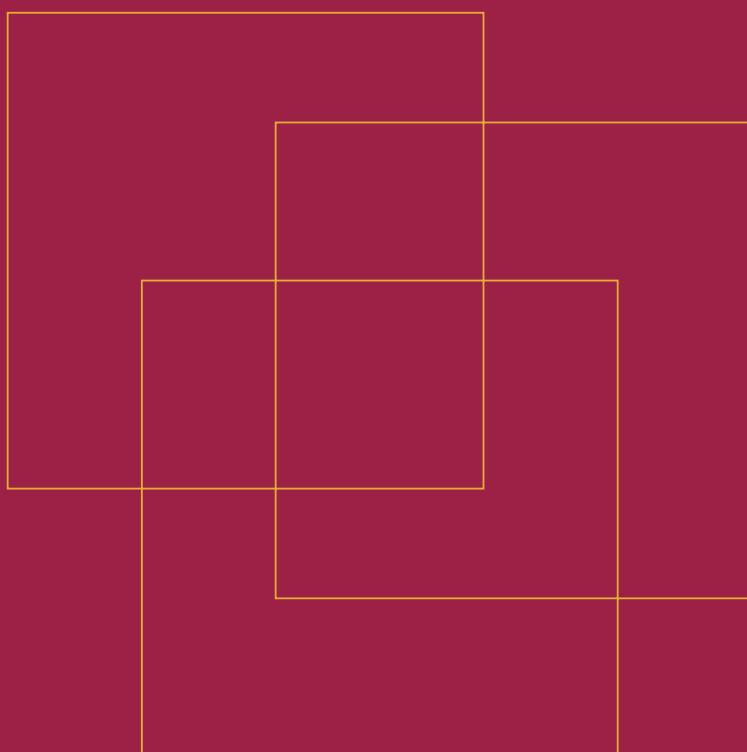
Mumbai – 12 wards and 64 locations

No	Wards	Locations surveyed
1.	Ward A (Colaba)	TIFR, Colaba Market, Church gate, Colaba Causeway
2.	Ward D (Grant Road)	Nana Chowk, Napean Sea Road, Tardeo, Peddar Road, Altamount Road, Grant Road (East), Grant Road (West), Breach Candy
3.	Ward E (Byculla)	Clare Road, JJ Road, Belasis Road, Hansraj Lane
4.	Ward F-N (Matunga)	Sion (East), Wadala Station Road, Bhakti Park, Sion Circle, Sion (West)
5.	Ward G-N (Dadar)	Swatantrya Veer Savarkar Mar, Shivaji Park, Dadar (West)
6.	Ward H-W (Bandra)	Carter Road, Bandra (West), Band Stand, Khar, Turner Road, Pali Hill
7.	Ward M-W (Chembur)	Subhash Nagar, Suman Nagar, Sindhi Society, Chembur (East)
8.	Ward P-N (Malad)	Pushpa Park, Upper Govind Nagar, Liberty Garden, Marve Road, Bangur Marg
9.	Ward R-C (Borivali)	Gorai MHB, Satya Nagar, Shree Nagar
10.	Ward T (Mulund)	Malviya Road, Chaphekar Bandhu Marg, Goshala Marg, Tambe Nagar, Sindhi Colony, Vaishali Nagar, JS Dosa Marg, Mithagar Road
11.	Ward K-E (Andheri)	Tejpal Road, V S Khandekar Marg, Veer Sawarkar Garden, Hanuman Road, Park road, Parleshwar Marg, Nehru Road
12.	Ward L (Kurla)	Nehru Nagar, Everard Nagar, Chunabhatti, Mohan Nagar, Kurla (West), Kurla (East)

Persisting servitude and gradual shifts towards recognition and dignity of labour

A study of employers of domestic workers in Delhi and Mumbai

Domestic work has emerged as the fastest growing sector of women's employment in urban India. It enables first entry to paid work, especially for women from low-income households. As such it has become a characteristic feature of women in India's labour market. While many studies have been conducted on working and living conditions, limited evidence is available on the demand side of domestic work, and in particular about employers' attitudes on domestic workers. This study explains how domestic workers are hired, how wages are negotiated and how employers perceive workers.



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