NAVIGATING ADVERSITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF HOUSE MAIDS IN HYDERABAD AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The Covid -19 Pandemic has affected almost all sectors of work. It has opened up new challenges which the human race has never faced before. Informal sector of the labor force always faces a major challenge of no work no pay. The issue becomes more challenging when it comes to house maids. House maids who are essential parts of your life, do not get facilities like formal sector jobs. The most common challenges are no work no pay, no maternity leave or child care leave etc. The pandemic which kept people house arrest with the slogan of 'social distancing' made lots of women lose their jobs because of the Covid protocols. As house maids consists of the informal labor force, in most cases their payment got restricted. This sociological examination, titled "Navigating Adversity: A Sociological Examination of House Maids in Hyderabad Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic," delves into the multifaceted challenges faced by housemaids in the wake of the global health crisis. Through a comprehensive sociological lens, the study aims to illuminate the intricate web of social, economic, and health-related impacts on this vulnerable segment of the informal sector. The abstract begins by setting the stage, acknowledging the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for marginalized communities. It outlines the specific context of Hyderabad, emphasizing the significance of housemaids in the local socio-economic fabric. The study explores how the pandemic has exposed and intensified pre-existing vulnerabilities within this workforce, shedding light on issues of job insecurity, health risks, and socio-economic disparities. The research methodology involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, including interviews, surveys, and observational analysis. This allows for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of housemaids during the pandemic, capturing both the individual narratives and broader societal patterns. The sociological framework employed draws on theories of social stratification, labor dynamics, and resilience to analyze the intricate interplay of factors shaping the housemaids' responses to adversity. Key findings are presented, highlighting the resilience strategies employed by housemaids to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic. Recommendations for policy interventions and social support systems are also discussed, underscoring the study's potential impact on shaping more equitable and resilient societies. In conclusion, "Navigating Adversity" not only unveils the intricate sociological dimensions of housemaids' experiences in Hyderabad during the COVID-19 pandemic but also serves as a call to action for informed policy responses that address the systemic inequalities laid bare by this unprecedented global crisis. In the light of the present context the research aims to find out the major challenges faced by women house maids living in Hyderabad. It also aims to find out how they coped with these challenges and how far the governmental measures were successful in reducing the burdens. The research is an exploratory study based on 30 house maids within the age group of 25-45, living in Hyderabad. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques are used for the purpose of the research. The data collected will be analyzed with the help of secondary data as available in books and journals

Keywords: Housemaids, Covid-19, Informal Labor force.

Introduction.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected almost all aspects of your lives. The economy of the world got shaken due to pandemic and lockdown which came along with it. The informal sector which the most vulnerable sector got affected the most specifically in the developing countries like India. The Domestic workers who serve us daily and make our lives comfortable and easy are always exposed to various risks like insecurity of job, no fixity of payments, no leaves etc., got affected by the pandemic in large scale. International Labour Organization (ILO) in its

latest assessment on the impact of the ongoing pandemic on workers of the world estimated that more than two-third of the 67 million workers of the world are adversely affected by the pandemic. The challenges faced by the domestic workers are wide ranging, starting from transport which was a challenge during the lockdown to being stigmatized for being the carrier of the virus. These challenges harden their economic condition, which was not much stable from the beginning. The governmental schemes though helpful for some so totally fruitful for the domestic workers during the pandemic.

Objectives and Methodology of the Study.
In the light of the present context the research aims to point out the major challenges faced by the domestic maids of Hyderabad and to analyze how far the governmental schemes were beneficial for them. The research is an exploratory study based on 30 respondents. All the 30 respondents are women domestic work, living in Hyderabad or outskirts of Hyderabad connected by train. The respondents worked in areas like Sealdah, Gariahat, Jadavpur, Ballugunge in Hyderabad, all connected by local trains. Purposive judgmental and snowball sampling techniques were used to collect data. The research instrument was semi-structured face to face interviews. The research is based on both qualitative and quantitative techniques with more emphasis on qualitive side. The data collected was explained with the help of secondary data as available in books and journals.

The Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents.
India has about 7.79 million domestic workers of which more than 85% are women. The Socio-Economic character of this segment of the informal labor market of India is essential as they are a significant part of the countries economy. For the present research the age of the respondents was from 20 to 50. However, 13 of the 30 respondents that is 43% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 30 to 40. Their marital status was married or separated. Secondly 23% of the respondents do not have a husband therefore they were the solo earning member of the family, along with it even the women living with their husbands become solo earning members during the lockdown due to discontinuity of their partner's job. Thirdly, 17 of the 30 respondents that is 57% of the respondents came to the city from the surrounding fringe connected by train. Thus, during the total lockdown period that is from 15th April to 3rd May 2020, reaching out to the workplace became impossible. Even during the second phase of lockdown trains were not working hence the problem pertained. The other 43% of the respondents mainly came from the nearby slums and hence the fear that they may be the carrier of the virus became an issue. Fourthly, the income slabs are very poor. In India there is no fixed salary for the domestic workers rather than for the informal sector workers. As a result, they are exploited in terms of wages. On an average they worked in 3-4 household with an income of 5000 to 7000 per month. Domestic workers are one of the rare groups who are not covered properly under the Minimum Wage law in India. Karnataka was the first state to implement minimal wage law for domestic workers in 2004, followed by Andra Pradesh in 2007 and then by Rajasthan in 2012. There no such amendments still in Telangana(Banerjee and Mukherjee, 2021). Hence the challenges of the domestic workers got more intense during the lockdown as no work no pay is the matra for this segment of the workforce. Therefore, cutting down on the number of houses they were working also implemented the cutting down of their ages. The respondents who were working in 4 household before the pandemic and earned an average income of 7000 rupees per month worked in one or two house maximum cutting down their wage to 4000 rupees per month. The ones who were working in 3 or 2 houses came down to 2 or 1 or even nil, reducing their income to 2000 to even 500 rupees per month. Lastly, the number of family members of the respondents were also taken into account. They mainly belonged to a family of 4 to 6, with 2 or more children. Hence the number of dependent members on the respondent was significant. 33% of the respondent said that they have 3 dependent members including their husband and their children during the lockdown, in this case they became the solo earning of the family.

The Impact of Covid on Domestic Workers of Hyderabad.
Though the first case came to India in 30 January 2020 in Kerala, its spread to the entire nation by the middle of March resulted in the first lockdown from 24 March to 15 April 2020, in which people were not allowed to go out of their houses and work. Thereafter, with the greater pace of the spread the lockdown period was extended from 15 April to 4 May 2020. After 5 May 2020, domestic workers were allowed to go to the colonies for work by the authorities, in almost all states, despite rise in cases. However, the fear that the domestic maids were the carrier of the virus resulted in restrictions of work of these domestic maids.

Transportation as the Major Challenge, for the Domestic Workers during the Pandemic.
Local trains are the cheapest, easiest and the fastest mode of transport, connecting different parts of Telanganato Hyderabad. 57% of the respondents coming from the surrounding fringes of Hyderabad uses the local train as their means of transport. Thus, during the period of total lockdown when all kind of transport was stopped coming to the workplace was a major challenge. 28 of the 30 respondents failed to come to their workplace due to unavailability of proper transport, as result the hardship of their lives got enhanced. This also affected their total monthly income as well. Their narratives showed how the lack of transportation during the lockdown especially local train became a major challenge. As local train remained closed for a long time, even during the unlock period the challenge persisted. As an alternative the respondents opted for other local transport such as bus or auto but the number of houses allowing them to work decreased and their wages got reduced paying extra money to reach the work destination became unfruitful. Taking advantage of the situation the local transport also charged them double which neither the government nor the local authority had any control or check. Lakhi a domestic maid coming from Bujbuj of South 24 Parganas of Telanganato Jadavpur for her daily work by train narrated that:
"Amar 30 minuites lage train e… r mashe 120-taka khorcha, train bondho auto kore gele 70 take per day tai ami kaje jai na" (It takes me 30 minutes to reach Jadavpur by train, with a monthly expense of 120 rupees and now that the trains are closed it takes 70 rupees per day to reach the destination, so I stopped.)
Malati and Subora shared the same narratives they both come from Barasat of North 24 Parganas of Telanganato Sealdah by train costing them 120 to 150 per month, which got triple during the lockdown by bus and the time became 1 hour from 30 mins. But they strived the situation as they were the only earning members of their family. Such similar narratives were shared by most of the respondents, as all the 100% of the respondents admitted that due to lack of transportation it was impossible to reach the workplace during the total lockdown period. When vendor's train started it came as a partial relief. However, as vendor trains are mainly filled with men it was uncomforting for these women, but their need was much more than their comfort. Out of the 17 respondents who used train as a local transport 12 of them that is 71% admitted that they were uncomfortable travelling with men, 19% admitted they faced harassment while traveling but they narratives showed that they were left with no choice. In this respect these women are mainly migrant workers whose problems are not being able to get back home but to come out of their homes and join their work place. When asked about the
fear of the virus two popular sentences came from the respondents – 'Poor people are not contaminated by the rich people's virus' and 'Either we will die by the virus or by hunger'.

Loss of Job or Wage Cut.
Domestic workers face tough working conditions and are left without any social security protection. They are unprotected by labour legislations except for the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 (Ghosh, 2013), the benefits of which mostly do not reach the workers due to the informality of the contracts and ignorance about the social security provisions. Some of common challenges faced by the women domestic workers are: Low wages and lack of Legal Protection (Netha and Palriwala, 2011), poor bargaining power, unpaid leave (Moghe, 2013), exploitation in the working condition (Chandramouli, 2018) are some of the problems described in various

literature and is the reality. The rising inequalities faced by the domestic workers across the country during the pandemic added to the existing inequalities and right violations especially in the urban areas. (Sumanlatha, Bhat and Chiita, 2021). The data from the present study also highlights the same story. 93% of the respondents noted that there was job loss, specially during the total lockdown period. As this sector of the labour market followed the ritual of no work no pay, the situation was really troublesome. Out of the 30 respondents only 4 respondents 21% of the respondents got paid when they are not being able to work. Of the 4 respondents 1 of them was paid only half the salary. The remaining remained unpaid hence no fixation of payment is a major problem associated with this sector of the labour force, which got enhanced during the pandemic.

During various phases of unlock when the domestic workers resumed to work most of the houses refused them to re-join work, and stigmatized them as the carrier of the virus. The respondents working in 4 household with and average monthly income of 6000 to 7000 rupees per month were now reduced to two household or even one. As a result, their income got slashed down to half or even less. The housing complexes in Hyderabad also laid down various restrictions to the entry of the domestic workers. All these made the situation more stressful for the domestic workers. Thus, insecurity of work, fixity of wages and lack od social security remains a major problem of these workers, along with transportation.

Table No: 1
Payment during the Pandemic Months

Payment during the Pandemic months	Frequency	Percentage
Full Salary	5	17%
Half Salary	14	46%
No Salary	11	37%
Total	30	100%

Stigma of being the Covid Career.

Most women found it difficult to get back to work because of the general fear and panic created by government and media propaganda on the one hand; and the reluctance of employers and resident welfare associations to allow them to work again. An important factor that influenced this trend was the stigma associated with being COVID positive; many women were denied work because their employers were under the false impression that workers who came into the house were 'COVID carriers. Workers faced stigma and discrimination (57%) during the period where they were projected as carriers of virus and were humiliated in many instances. All of them responded that there was no effective intervention from the state to curtail the stigma.

Table no: 2
Reasons for Losing Jobs During the pandemic

Reasons for Losing Jobs During the pandemic	Frequency	Percentage
Employer terminated	11	37%
Risk of own health	02	7%
Transportation restrictions	17	57%
Stigma (included other reasons from above	10	
Total Respondents	30	100%

Despite the several challenges there were supportive employers as well. Though the percentage is very low, but many extended their helping hands in many ways.

Table No: 3
Employers Support during the Pandemic.

Employers Support During the Pandemic	Frequency	Percentage
Extra Payment	1	3%
Material (Grocery Support)	11	37%

Assuring Work after Lockdown	8	27%
No Support	10	33%
Total	30	100

The above table shows that how humans can help humans at the time of crisis. With 3% support in terms of extra payment and 37% support in terms of materials goods made the problem little easy. However, a significant number of 10 of the 33 respondents that is 33% of the total responses of no support showed how the problem as not of equal degree to all. Despite the laws the social responsibility becomes and remains the most significant aspect associated with this challenge.

Role of the Government and NGOs in Coping with these Challenges.
Both the central government and the state came up with various policies, like the free subsidies, transfer of 500 rupees, through the Jan Dhan Yojana, and the NGOs also came up with free food counters etc.
Table No: 4
Received Free/Subsidized Ration

Received Free Ration	Frequency	Percentage
Received	21	70%
Did not Received	04	13%
Partially	05	17%
Total	30	100%

The above table showed that a greater number of the respondents gained support from free or subsidized ration by the government, many narratives explained that the corrupt ration sellers
use to give them partial ration which accounts to 17% of the total respondents. Lack of governmental control and check was a significant factor in this respect. The amount of ration was also not sufficient of the family members as well. Only individuals with ration card were provided with free ration but in case of families having more than three children ration became inadequate. Ration included rice, wheat and potato. No cooking oil or nutrient food like dal or soyabean was not included. Therefore, though the free ration was a significant step to cope with the problem but it was not without flaws.
Not having a ration card was also an issue. Many domestic workers who came from the nearby slums stated that the did not have a ration card as they did not require it before. Out of the 13% of the respondents who failed to receive free or subsidized ration 12% of them did not have a ration card. Therefore, the governmental awareness programs need to made to make the citizens learn the importance of these identity cards.

The Government Schemes – Jan Dhan Yojana and other State Government Schemes.
 Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is a financial inclusion of the Government of India launched in 2014. The program was of great help during the pandemic to the domestic workers. 24% of the respondents claimed that the transfer of Rs 500 in their account was really great help at a time when they were left with nothing. Though not covered under the objectives of the study the respondents' shared narratives where they got loans of small amount from this scheme which made them set up their own small business. In respect to this scheme the government can set up more awareness programs so that more and more individuals take help of this scheme.
The State Government of Telanganalaunched to popular schemes like the 'Lakhir Bhandar and 'MA'. The 'Lakhir Bhandar' (2002) aimed at transferring Rs 1000 to all non-working women and 'MA' (2022) provided food for Rs 5. However, the scheme came at the end of the pandemic by which most of the domestic workers resumed back to work. However, these schemes can be treated as a guiding star for future endeavor.

Role of NGO's

Non-Government Organizations plays a great role in many aspects of your lives. 11% of the respondents supported the fact they received immense help from the NGO's. Bandhu Foundation a Sealdah based small NGO provided food to all on basis of first come first server, for 500 heads per day for three months. All the respondents coming to work from the slums
nearby said that this was of great help as their one meal cost got reduced. There were various other voluntary organizations as well. These organizations showed the actual path as they worked without any interest.

However, all these plans and schemes are for the common people in general and not about the domestic workers in particular. No schemes still came out in terms of fixation of the wages, paid leaves etc. The All-India Domestic Workers Organization is trying its best with these agendas but it is of no use as lack of awareness among the employer and the members of the society as well.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the spread of the pandemic along with unplanned lockdown, and weak infrastructure has led to both economic devastation and social stress for a large section of the women interviewed in this survey. Job loss, wage cut, transportation are some of the major challenges discussed by the respondents.

Policy Recommendation.

Fixation of Pay for Domestic maids. Government supported transportation, Check on the applicability and transparency of the schemes. Role of NGO's and awareness on the part of the employee. Ratification of ILO Convention 189. A system of registration and recognition of Domestic Works.

Limitations of the Study

1. As the study was conducted during the 3rd phase of the lockdown getting the interviews was a major challenge.
2. As India, and the world faced such challenge for the very first getting academic literature was also a challenge.

Scope of Future Study.

1. Dimension like Domestic Violence and health issues can also be added up with larger sample size if the study is conducted once again.
2. Cross sectional study based on regions caste and other social criterions can also be conducted.

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