

Legal Protection for Domestic Workers in COVID-19 Pandemic Times in India: Employers' Perspectives

Amrita Ghatak & Kingshuk Sarkar

Based on data from Ahmedabad and Kolkata cities, this paper discusses how employers perceive domestic workers and how those perceptions influence the status of employment, wages and working conditions as well as the employer-employee relationships in the 'new normal' state post Lockdown phase during COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The results stand for deterioration in the terms of employment and employer-employee relationships. One of the main consequences has been the reduction of working hours or loss of job resulting from fear and restricted mobility due to confinement measures during Lockdown. Most of the gated communities have put unreasonable restrictions on the movement of domestic workers and resorted to extra-constitutional measures to prevent even willing households from engaging domestic workers going over and above the Govt. of India guidelines.

Amrita Ghatak is Assistant Professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad. E-mail: amrita@gidr.ac.in. **Kingshuk Sarkar** is Associate Professor, Goa Institute of Management, Goa Email: kingshuk71@hotmail.com

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly severe adverse impact on domestic workers around the world. As the number of cases and fear of contagion spread, so did the confinement measures. To facilitate physical distancing, most countries adopted either full or partial lockdown measures to prevent transmission. As one of the primary measures toward prevention of the COVID-19, the Government of India had announced complete shutdown of the economy on March 24, 2020 continued in various phases of locking and unlocking the economy leading to complete or partial restrictions on public movements.

Along with many occupations in the unorganized or unsecured workspace one group that was worst affected by the health-economic crisis, has been that of the domestic workers. In general, this sector is already characterized by no written

contract, no conventional method of wage determination, multiple household employers, absence of social security, limited government intervention, a distress livelihood option, and lack of decent work environment. The lockdown measures and subsequent economic crisis have further intensified and magnified their vulnerabilities. While domestic workers have suffered many kinds of setbacks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the main consequences of it has been a reduction of working hours and, in some cases, loss of jobs, resulting from fear and restricted mobility associated with confinement measures.

As the lockdown was enforced across the nation, many resident welfare associations (RWAs) and households of domestic employers exercised absolute discretion in restricting the entry (and mobility) of domestic workers in (urban) residential colonies and apartments. This made many workers lose out on day-to-day work with very few receiving any cash (or kind) support from their respective employers (Ghosh, 2020; Ghatak & Sarkar, 2020).

Given this scenario, this paper examines how employers perceive domestic workers and how those perceptions influence the status of employment, wages and working conditions as well as the employer-employee relationships during the weeks of a curfew-style lockdown and in the 'new normal' state post lockdown phase as unlocking process began in India. It focuses on the demand-side aspects of domestic labor market empirically, assuming there exists a huge

reserve army of domestic labor-force. The objectives are to: a) understand employers' perceptions of domestic workers; b) assess the status of employment, working conditions and wages during the pandemic; and c) explore the nature of employer-employee relationship and domestic workers' dignity post lockdown period. Thus, it not only addresses the attitude, perceptions and views of employers of domestic workers, but also attempts to understand the actual employment practices and the nature of employment relationships during the pandemic.

The Domestic Workspace

Although women's participation in different paid jobs can be traced back to 20th century, the options for them were limited because of their systemic deprivation from required education. While in the 20th century only very few women from the upper castes and classes had the opportunity for paid out-side work, gradually more and more women entered into the employment sector giving rise to the need for a supporting hand to work inside the home. Due to lack of education, economic resources and other opportunities women from disadvantaged castes have limited options to compete with the male counterparts in the outside paid job market preferred to enter into the domain of domestic work. Now, it is accepted as an important category of livelihood option for many women particularly from the lower socio-economic groups. Domestic service remains a highly personalized and informal service delivered in the homes of employers (Chandramauli & Kodandaram, 2018).

In India, 78.4 per cent of urban women workers are in the informal economy and about 9.4 per cent are domestic workers.

Economic liberalization and urbanization process brought a drastic change in the life-style of the people impacting on gender relations and gender roles transforming the 'feudal relationship' of domestic servants/laborers in the colonial period to the 'madam-maid' relationship in the post-modern times. The process of urbanization witnessed the emergence of the middle class wherein both husband and wife participated in the labor market. Joint family system in urban areas declined and nuclear families needed domestic help from outside. Also, decline of agrarian economy compelled many rural people to migrate to urban areas in search of livelihood and women to become domestic workers. Many domestic workers in urban areas are migrants, particularly from tribal or underprivileged areas. In India, 78.4 per cent of urban women workers are in the informal economy and about 9.4 per cent are domestic workers (Wiego, 2020). The count of women entering the 'domestic workspace' has risen by 120 per cent although they remain outside the ambit of social security and legal protection.

Legislative Protection

Domestic workers are often left out of labor protection laws and social security because they are historically perceived as a manual form of labor, expected to be given for free by women in

private households. They are left out of relief or assistance plans and thus facing multiple vulnerabilities. Having no recognition as a 'productive work' they are devalued, unnoticed, and under paid. The domestic workers in India are employed mostly through informal and are outside the scope of existing social security schemes run by the government.

Their work is denoted as 'help' and perceived as a social transaction when in reality it is an economic transaction. Their place of work is someone else's private space, therefore the violence meted out to domestic workers do not catch the public eye and is shoved under the rug as a personal and private matter preventing them from using their rights as laborers. The employee-employer relationship is informal, making it more difficult for the state to intervene with its laws and subject it to state regulation. Even existing laws such as Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013 fail to protect domestic workers.

Although in 2008, the Government of India passed the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act (UNWSS Act) extending to provide social security and protection to all unorganized sector workers, including domestic workers, it vaguely defined 'domestic work' as any work ranging from cleaning, cooking, caring for a child to nursing sick and old people. They could be classified ranging from unskilled to semi-skilled. The absence of a clear definition of 'domestic worker' or 'domestic work' dilutes possibility of their legal protection under this Act.

A comprehensive legislation for domestic workers is still awaited.

Attempts have been made by public representatives, civil society organizations and Domestic Workers’ Unions to have a comprehensive protective legislation for domestic workers in place. The two prominent attempts have been the private member bill introduced by Shashi Tharoor in 2016 – The Domestic Workers’ Welfare Bill and a draft compilation by National Platform of Domestic Workers (NPWD) called the Domestic Workers Regulation of Work and Social Security Bill, 2017. But, a comprehensive legislation for domestic workers is still awaited. Central government was also in the process of formulating a national policy on domestic workers. Draft was made and discussed as part of social dialogue with no concrete policy prescription emerged from the exercise yet.

Methodology & Sampling Design

The paper builds arguments based on data collected through a structured interview schedule canvassed online with the help of Google form among 131 employers of domestic workers from various parts of Ahmedabad and Kolkata cities during the period from September to December in 2020. Following a multi-stage stratified sampling the survey includes 70 respondents from Ahmedabad and 61 respondents from Kolkata city.

As it is described in figs. 1-2, age and pattern of settlements, level of development, sex ratio, and female literacy rate are considered as criteria to stratify and identify the sample respondents in both Ahmedabad and Kolkata cities. At least one from each type of building society including gated and non-gated multistoried apartments, row houses, villas and bungalows is chosen from each

Fig. 1 Sampling Design for Ahmedabad

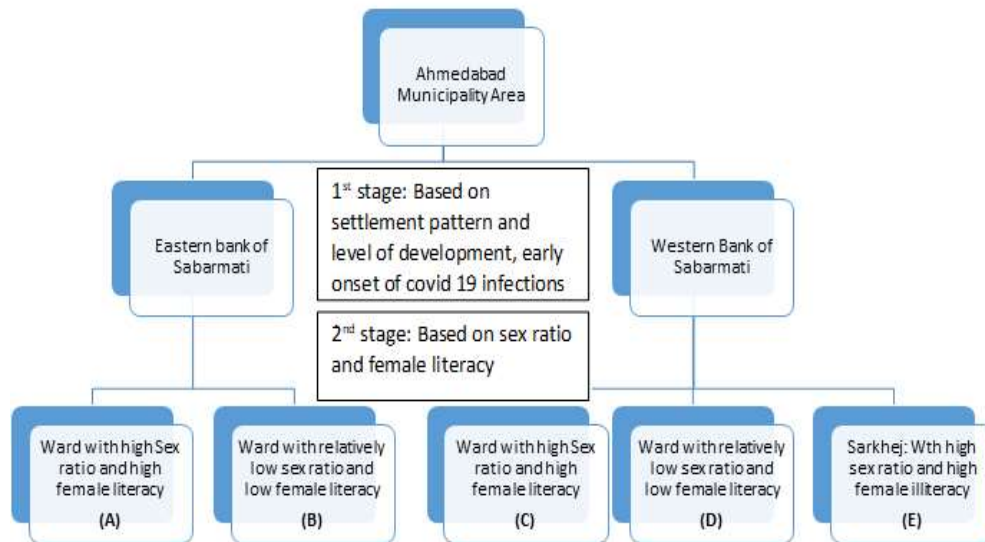


Fig. 2 Sampling Design for Kolkata

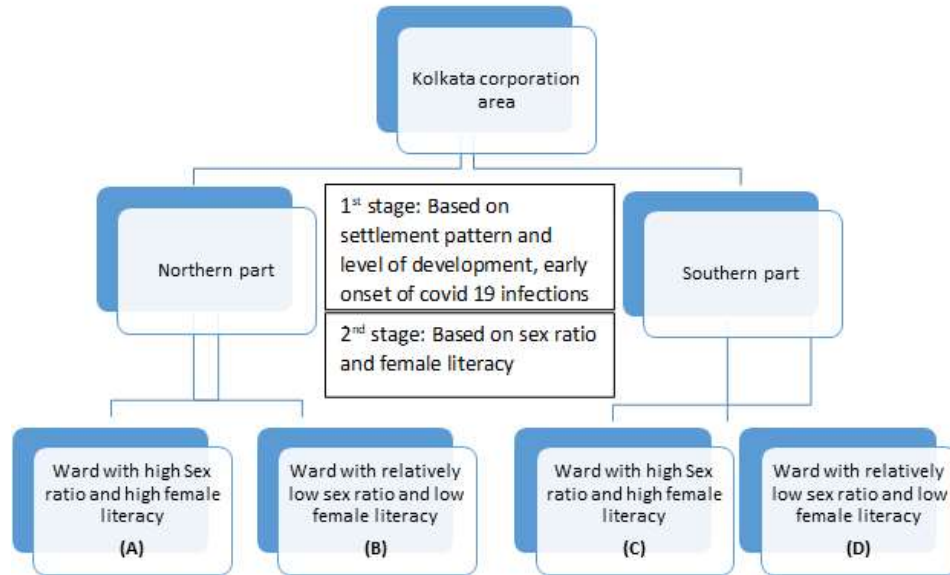


Table 1 Sub-topics Addressed in the Interviews in Connection with the Primary Objectives of the Paper

Main topics	Sub-topics	Issues
Working conditions and employment practices Formal employment practices, if any	The terms and conditions of work and employment of domestic workers	Remuneration; working hours; rest period; weekly rest; tasks.
	Written employment contract; passport withholding. Living conditions of live-in domestic workers	Access to the outside of the household and freedom of movement; mobile and internet access.
	Formal employment practices Recruitment	Written employment contract Formal and informal channels used by employers; references to agency fees.
The nature of the employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers	Contractual practices	Tasks assignment; whether the domestic worker was part of the contractual process; views about the usefulness of a written contract.
	Underlying perceptions and beliefs about the employment relationship	Meaning given to the notion that the domestic worker is, or should be treated, “like a member of the family”; how are domestic workers referred to in the household
	Grievances, disputes and conflicts	What are the main issues faced by employers; issues regarding harassments of workers, other issues such as stealing, absconding, etc.

Table 2 Employers' (Respondents') Profile Both from Survey and in-depth Interviews

City	Average Age of respondents	Proportion of female respondents (%)	If respondent is head of the household (%)	Average level of education	Monthly average income of household (Rs.)	Percentage of respondents experienced deduction in salaries due to pandemic	Average household size	Residing in gated apartments (%)	Residing in villas/bungalows (%)	Total Number of respondent
Ahmedabad	48	52.63	57.89	PG and above (91.66%)	160210.53	26.32	2.94 (approx. 3)	52.63	26.31	70
Kolkata	36	58	33.33	PG and above (84.21%)	85500.00	25	4.66 (approx. 5)	33.33	50	61
Total	45	52.77	48.38	PG and above (87.10%)	127187.50	25.81	3.61 (approx. 4)	45.16	35.48	131

Source: Online survey, 2020.

selected ward. At least 5 employers of domestic workers are included in the survey as respondents from each building society. Although we reached 185 individuals in Ahmedabad, the complete responses were received only from 70 of them. Similarly, 140 individuals were approached for the survey in Kolkata, but complete responses were received from 61 respondents.

The analysis also depends on the facts emerged from the discussions with the civil society organizations (*SAATH* in Ahmedabad and *Parichiti* in Kolkata) and Trade Union *SEWA* in Ahmedabad. In addition, five Focus Group Discussions (three in Ahmedabad and two in Kolkata) are undertaken with the domestic workers and NGO representatives to address various issues in this sector. As the literature suggests (ILO, 2015), the sub-topics that are discussed in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are mentioned in Table 1.

The profile of employers (or respondents) is presented in Table 2.

Working Conditions & Employment Practices

In both Kolkata and Ahmedabad domestic workers are generally employed through local informal channels. Although employers started hiring domestic workers once the lockdown started getting relaxed, some households (near about 26 per cent in Ahmedabad and 17 per cent

Domestic workers are generally employed through local informal channel.

in Kolkata) still do not employ them. Most households are found to employ part-time workers who work for less than six hours daily in one household and therefore are employed by multiple

households for multiple tasks. However, a few households are also observed to employ full-time workers who work for over six hours daily in one household and thus are employed by a single household. Although Kolkata has slightly more number of households that have allowed domestic workers the overall wage rates are relatively on the lower side compared to that in Ahmedabad (Table 3).

Table 3 Employment of Domestic Workers and Their Wages

City	Percentage of respondents employing domestic workers at the time of survey	Percentage of full-time workers (at least 8 hours a day)	Percentage of part-time workers (less than 8 hours a day)	Average monthly wages paid to full time workers (Rs.)	Average monthly wages paid to part-time workers (Rs.)	Total number of respondents (employers)
Ahmedabad	73.68	26.09	73.91	11400	2665.79	70
Kolkata	83.33	13.33	86.66	8000	1692.31	61
Overall	77.42	19.35	64.51	9125	2270.31	131

Source: Online survey, 2020.

The work-load as indicated by hours of work is substantially high. For instance, domestic workers are found to work for at least 69 hours in a week, an hour more than the average hours of work in a week by workers in other occupations in the unorganized sector (Ghatak & Sarkar, 2020). Interviews with SAATH and SEWA in December, 2020, reveal that the work-load for an individual worker is intensified during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic as the employers did not want to expose themselves to the contagion by allowing multiple workers. Hence, the tasks that earlier used to get distributed among two or three workers are now being undertaken by one worker. This is observed to be a common practice among the single em-

ployer households in which case a domestic worker is hired by one household for whole time and such workers also reside at the employers' residence. Although their salaries are on the higher side¹ compared to market rates for part-time and full-time domestic workers; because of the non-employment of other workers the whole-time workers are now subjected to much higher work-load compared to pre-lockdown scenarios in Ahmedabad.

On one hand the support rendered by employers towards the domestic work-

¹ Full time workers residing with the employers are paid between Rs. 17,459 month and Rs. 25, 675 per month.

ers (Table 4) imply the advantages of ‘pragmatic intimacy’ during lockdown, but on the other the increased daily workload implies the disadvantages of informal labor arrangement within the private sphere of a household. The negotiation between formal arrangements of ‘labor’ versus notion of domestic work as an act of care and love is thus observed even in the cases wherein the workers are employed through some

agencies based on written agreements. However, the employment through written agreement with the help of an agency is not a common practice in both the cities. In the absence of legal recognition of domestic workers as ‘labor’ the NGOs and trade unions run their programs only by training the workers and bridging the gaps between employers and employees through negotiations and mobilizations.

Table 4 Support Provided by Employers During Lockdown

Cities	Provided Salary(%)	Provided additional support (Mask, sanitizer, soap etc.) (%)	Didn't provide any support (salary or others)(%)	Total number of respondents
Ahmedabad	26.32	73.68	26.32	70
Kolkata	16.66	66.66	33.33	61
Overall	22.58	70.96	29.03	131
NGOs' opinion	The support from employers varies between 8 days in the month of March to three months until June, 2020	Yes, the NGO provided one set of each item including mask and sanitizer. However, some employers provide those items later on. A few employers don't provide any such item.	Yes, there are a small number of such employers.	The NGO is aware of total 445 employers in Ahmedabad and Kolkata

Source: Online survey, 2020.

The observation in Ahmedabad and Kolkata reveals that many employers allowed paid leave and non-monetary benefits for one month but as the duration of lockdown continued beyond a month, employers gradually stopped paying the salaries. After the month of June, 2020, all kinds of support towards domestic employees subsided and stopped. This implies the limitations of ‘pragmatic intimacy’. Since deduction of wages because of absenteeism is a common prac-

tice (Ghatak & Sarkar, 2020) in both Ahmedabad and Kolkata, the prolonged absence because of lockdown combined with the fear of contagion led to not only the deduction of wages, but also the loss

After the month of June, 2020, all kinds of support towards domestic employees subsided and stopped.

of jobs of domestic workers in many instances.

Employer-employee Relationships & Dignity

The employer-dominated work relation is characterized by low, stagnant wage rates, illegal confinement, rampant physical and verbal violence, and the practice of ‘no-entry’ by which employers debar a domestic worker from entering the residen-

tial complex so as to regulate working for other employers. Such practices are manifested by the containment measure of physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been observed that over 50 per cent of the employers don’t share utensils for eating and drinking purposes in Kolkata. Similarly, over 57 per cent respondents in Ahmedabad and over 58 per cent respondents in Kolkata don’t allow their domestic workers use their toilets (Table 5).

Table 5 Dignity & Safety of Domestic Workers at Their Workplaces

City/group	Allow using same toilets (%)	Allow using same utensils (%)	Opinion about sexual harassment(%)
Ahmedabad	Yes (57.89)	Yes (68.42)	Regarded as an absolute offense
Kolkata	Yes (58.33)	Yes (50)	Regarded as an absolute offense
Overall	Yes (58.06)	Yes (61.29)	Regarded as an absolute offense

Source: Online survey, 2020.

The FGDs with domestic workers and NGOs’ representatives also reveal that discrimination in the use of toilet, utensils, sitting or resting places has been a common practice in both the cities. What the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced is the recruitment of domestic workers based on criteria such as complexion, physical appearance, religion and caste. Fair skinned, conventionally good looking Hindu upper caste women get employment relatively easily compared to others after the lockdown was lifted gradually in August 2020 (Table 6).

Discrimination in the use of toilet, utensils, sitting or resting places has been a common practice in both the cities.

Although the nature of tasks remains the same as before, the ‘new normal’ has brought a few changes into domestic workspace. For instance, depending on the benevolence of the employer and the inter-personal relationship between the employer and employee, the cost of the employers’ elevated concern for hygiene often falls on the workers as the workers have to buy masks, sanitizer and soaps for themselves. While the eastern part of Ahmedabad is found to be more dependent on the informally derived relationship of ‘pragmatic intimacy’ the western part of Ahmedabad city shows inclination toward formal arrangements between the employer and the employee. As an advantage of formal setup the workers in the western side of the city receive higher wages; but they

Table 6 Aspects of Workers' Dignity Discussed in FGD and In-depth Interviews with NGOs

Group	Use of toilet	Use of utensils	Use of same sitting/resting places	Sexual abuses and harassments	Primary criteria for recruitment of domestic workers	Freedom of mobility
FGDs with domestic workers and NGOs' representatives	Mostly employers designate separate toilet for the workers. Rarely do they ask workers to use common toilet meant for watchmen in the building of a multi-storeyed apartment.	Mostly employers keep separate utensils for the workers. In case of part-time workers or full-time workers (excluding live-in workers) the agreement doesn't include provision of food from employer's side. So the entire remuneration that the worker receives.	Many employers also don't allow the domestic workers to sit on their sofa or chair.	Although less in number, but there are cases of sexual abuses and harassments that are reported with the NGOs. The NGOs help in changing the job, but cannot help much with the legal and police support unless the victim wants to come out.	Conventional perception of beauty, fair skin and perfect body shape are the primary criteria for selection of domestic workers. Religion and caste are other two important factors particularly in the Hindu household. These criteria have become more important now as employers often perceive fairness and social status (in terms of caste) along with religion are indicators of good hygiene practices.	The workers were generally allowed to go out for their essential requirements, but it is now restricted by the employers due to covid-19 pandemic. Workers are now allowed to go out once in 3 or 4 months.

Source: FGDs, 2020

also miss out many other non-monetary benefits such as food, ration and supports in their need. In line with the literature (ILO, 2012) and particularly in the context of Ahmedabad and Kolkata (Ghatak & Sarkar, 2019), many benevolent gestures from the employers seem beneficial in the short run; however, in the long run they may create the room for feudal relationships leading to reinforced means of exploitation of the domestic labor.

The restricted mobility of daily commuters also leads to dampen their possibilities of employment, since the respondents completely stop hiring daily domestic helps for over five months starting from March 24 to end of August in 2020. During this period, as one of the coping mechanisms, the workers try to get engaged as the full-time live-in workers. The wages for whole-time live-in workers are increased from around Rs. 15000/- per month to over Rs. 17000/- month in Ahmedabad city.

Exposure to Contagion

Going beyond the health risks associated with Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictions imposed on the movements of domestic workers imply insecurities prevalent among middle and upper middle income groups in the society (Ghosh, 2020). There are over at least 80 per cent of the respondents who bar domestic workers to enter in their household premises or residential building premises (Table 7). Most of the gated communities in the cities have put unreasonable restrictions on the movement of domestic workers by framing rules like COVID-

19 diagnostic test report regularly, carrying own sanitizer, masks, and so on. They also adopt extra-constitutional measures to prevent even willing households from engaging domestic workers going over and above the Govt. of India guidelines.

Gated communities in the cities have put unreasonable restrictions on the movement of domestic workers.

At least 54 per cent of the respondents in the survey have reported that the entry barrier has been imposed either by the local governing authority (Municipality/Corporation) or by the residential welfare associations managing the gated communities in the cities. While restrictions on public mobility under the Disaster Management Act (2005) aim at containing the spread of the contagion during the initial phase of lockdown in March and April, the government also started issuing guidelines regarding resumption of economic activities including those in unorganized sector from May, 2020 with various safety measures². Because domestic work is not included in the schedule of occupations, there is no mentioning of the domestic workers in any phase of locking and unlocking of the economy.

² MHA DO Ltr Dt. 28.12.2020 to Chief Secretaries of states regarding extension of Guidelines for Surveillance, Containment and Caution upto 31.1.2021; accessed on What's New | Ministry of Home Affairs | GoI (mha.gov.in) on December 30, 2020

Table 7 Entry Restrictions Imposed on Domestic Workers

City/group	Entry barrier imposed by the respondent at the time of survey (in percentage)	Entry barrier imposed by respondents or others during the lockdown? (in percentage)	Entry barrier imposed by the respondent or others after the lockdown started getting relaxed from and partially withdrawn from August? (in percentage)	Restriction imposed on domestic workers other than wearing masks, using sanitizers, washing hands, maintaining physical distances, etc at present? (in percentage)
Ahmedabad	Yes (15.78)	Yes (89.47)	Yes (52.63)	Yes (5.26)
Kolkata	Yes (3.11)	Yes (83.33)	Yes (8.33)	Yes (8.33)
Overall	Yes (9.67)	Yes (83.87)	Yes (19.35)	Yes (9.67)
NGOs opinion	Yes, still, as on the date of survey in December there are building societies that bar domestic workers commuting daily.	Yes, no residential societies allowed domestic workers commuting daily. But they allowed live-in workers based on medical report of Covid-19 infection.	Yes, there are many building societies and employers didn't allow entry of daily commuting domestic workers. But they allowed live-in workers based on medical report of Covid-19 infection.	Yes, the daily commuting workers are asked to change clothes. The live-in workers are not allowed to go out.

Source: Online survey, 2020.

The perception about the risk of exposure to contagion through domestic workers is indicated by the employers' self-reported assessments of the possibility of contacting the contagion by allowing domestic workers in the households. Employers' responses are recorded on a scale of 1 to 10 wherein 1 represents 'No additional exposure compared to any other daily activities' and 10 represents 'Severely high exposure compared to other daily activities'. It is observed that approximately 87 per cent respondents believe that the risk of contacting the contagion through the domes-

tic workers is low or moderate (Table 8). While nobody believes that the entry of domestic workers is the only exposure to the contagion compared to the other contacts, around 13 per cent of the respondents perceive that the presence of domestic worker in the household allows high exposure to the contagion (Table 8).

There is a reduced demand for domestic workers evident in the cities (Table 9). Evidently, there is a drop of over 19 per cent in the households that earlier used to employ domestic workers but have stopped it ever since the pandemic has set

Table 8 Percentage Distribution of Households by Perceived Risk of Exposure to the Contagion Through Domestic Workers as Reported by the Employers

Levels of perceived risk of exposure to the contagion through domestic workers	Percentage of households
Low risk (1-3)	22.58
Moderate risk (4-6)	64.51
High risk (7-9)	12.9
Total number of households	131

Source: Online survey, 2020.

Table 9 Change in Demand for Domestic Workers as Reported by Employers

City/group	Percentage of respondents stopped employing domestic workers due to Covid-19 pandemic	Percentage of respondents look forward to machines and technology replacing the manual labor in domestic workspace
Ahmedabad	26.32	10.52
Kolkata	8	8.33
Overall	19.35	9.67
NGOs	87	0

Source: Online survey, 2020.

in. Combining data from both the cities it is observed that there has been a sharp fall (by 87 percentage points) of employers who used to employ domestic workers through NGOs during the peak period of the lockdown with a slightly improved scenario after it was relaxed. At least 18 households in Ahmedabad and 7 households in Kolkata are found to prefer replacement of manual help by machines and automation in the near future.

There are two major changes observed among the employers: one is the reduction of their monthly income and another is the change of their workplaces from office to home. The 'work from home' norm has intensified monitoring and repetition of the same task at the household, but it also has reduced the number of tasks. For instance, Sejalben (a working woman, employer, residing

with her husband) in Ahmedabad says, "My maid used to clean clothes twice a week, wash utensils twice daily and cook once daily. She used to make eight rotis, two sabjis and two cups of tea since we used to eat lunch at our respective offices. Now, because we both are working from home, she makes two cups of tea at least two times, 16 rotis and three or four types of sabjis and daal, and occasionally rice. Also, now she cleans clothes daily and cleans more number of utensils daily than what she used to earlier, due to our presence at home all the time. Because of the pandemic however, we don't allow her to go inside bedrooms and hence, she doesn't mop the rooms any longer. Although she doesn't mop the rooms anymore, we have not reduced her salary." This implies that the task-based wages remain same despite the effort required for each task is increased.

Although around 26 per cent households in the survey experienced deduction in monthly income due to the economic shutdown, it is the overall pre-existing economic status of the household that influences the decision regarding recruitment of domestic workers during the pandemic. It is evident that the households that bar domestic workers during the pandemic are also the ones that fall in the lower or middle bracket of per capita income (Table 10). The per capita income of households without any working female member varies between Rs. 6250/- and Rs. 33,333/-.

Despite the fear of contagion, around 75 per cent of the employers are found to allow domestic workers

to the households, mainly because of the presence of working women members (Table 11). This reinstates the cultural perception of domestic tasks that include men with limited roles and women with huge burden. The lockdown has not only pushed the domestic workers out of the job or with inferior terms of employment, it has also pushed the women in the employers' households to shoulder higher burden of household works.

There are 25 households reporting in favor of restricting domestic workers even after the lockdown is lifted. These 25 households also do not have any women family members employed

Table 10 Summary of Monthly per capita income of the Households that Don't Allow Domestic Workers After Lockdown Relaxation

Variable	Observations	Mean (in Rs.)	Std. Dev.(in Rs.)	Min(in Rs.)	Max(in Rs.)
Monthly per capita income	25	20000	10056.26	6250	33333.33

Source: Online survey, 2020.

Table 11 Percentage Distribution of Households Employing Domestic Workers by Employment Status of Women Members and Perceived Risk of Infection Through Domestic Workers and the Decision to Employ Domestic Workers

Levels of perceived risk of exposure to the contagion through domestic workers	Status of regular employment of women household members			N
	Households with working women employing domestic workers (%)	Households without working women employing domestic workers (%)		
low risk	100	33.33		30
moderate risk	100	50		84
High risk	100	0		17

Source: Online survey, 2020.

with a regular job. Absence of working women is significantly correlated (with a negative coefficient of -0.61) with the willingness to allow workers (Table 12).

Absence of working women is significantly correlated (with a negative coefficient of -0.61) with the willingness to allow workers.

Table 12. Correlation Between Unemployed Women in the Household and the Household's Decision to Allow Entry to Domestic Workers

	Allowing entry of domestic workers	Presence of unemployed women
Allowing entry of domestic workers	1	
Presence of unemployed women	-0.61	1

Source: Online survey, 2020.

Concluding Remarks

The impacts of lockdown on female domestic workers, who are vital to the smooth functioning of homes, are enormous. When some employers have not allowed them to work because of the fear of COVID-19, others are expecting them to continue. When they are not reporting to work it is treated as forced holiday leading to cuts in wage payments or dismissal from the job. Fear of termination from work sometimes also renders them to continue their work. When the lockdown is relaxed almost all female domestic workers report in their work (excluding dismissed cases).

Majority of employers are found to try to minimize entry of outside persons in their homes and in the process shift from multiple to single domestic workers. As a result, not only the work-burden has increased, but many workers have lost their jobs also. It is a fact that because of COVID-19 Pandemic additional workload is falling on them to en-

sure cleanliness in the employer's house. It has increased the burden of unpaid care work on them. As shared by the respondents those who are taking care of children and other elderly family members, cooking etc. the employers are providing sanitizers and masks to them before assigning them any work. Some domestic workers are paid their salaries and some additional cash-support from their respective employers for the first two months of the lockdown period notwithstanding the fact that they could not report at work.

With the relaxation of lockdown in June, 2020, domestic workers start returning to work, but a few of them are not allowed to resume work as employers are apprehensive. Some of these employers decide to discontinue domestic workers. Many domestic workers in Kolkata cannot not return to work as suburban trains are not plying. Their employers stop paying salaries and have recruited domestic workers from nearby sources. While few employers pay addi-

tional money to their domestic workers to take care of increased travel cost or to buy bicycles, some are found to curtail working days from usual six to three days or ask domestic workers to work on alternative days. Employers not only ensure the necessary precautions including the use of sanitizers, soaps, gloves and masks when they allow entry of domestic workers in their homes; they also advise the workers not to report at work even for minor health issues. The fear and insecurity of the contagion among the employers in the cities like Ahmedabad and Kolkata have not only caused loss of jobs and deterioration in terms of employment in the domestic workspace in the short run, it has also paved the way for reliance on machines and automation to conduct the household chores in the long run.

Overall, domestic workers suffer heavily during the lockdown induced by Covid-19 pandemic. Many have lost their jobs and suffered wage cuts. Employers in certain cases support domestic workers in various ways. However, even though such gestures benefit domestic workers in small ways but could not provide holistic protection otherwise available in full-fledged legal structure. Also, in an extremely informal workspace, benevolent gestures from the employers may perpetuate the feudal nature of employer-employee relationships (Guha-Khasnabis, et. al., 2006).

Domestic workers suffer heavily during the lockdown induced by Covid-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and its aftermath reveal the precarious nature of domestic workspace and once again reiterate the need for a holistic protective coverage. It is high time that India formulate a comprehensive welfare legislation for domestic workers. Such a legislation should provide among other things minimum wages, social security, trade union recognition at par with the other workers of the unorganized sector. As forerunners in the care economy, domestic workers need protection from social stigmatization and spread of COVID 19.

References

- Bhattacharya, Shrayana & Shalini Sinha (2009), *Domestic Workers in India: Background and Issues*, ILO, Geneva.
- Chandramauli & Kodandaram (2018), "Women Domestic Workers in India: An Analysis", *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE)*, 8(1)::1-5
- Ghatak, Amrita & Kingshuk Sarkar (2019), *Status of Domestic Workers in India: A Tale of Two Cities*, Working Paper No. 255, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad, India
- Ghatak, Amrita & Kingshuk Sarkar (2020), "Perils of Lockdown and Informal Sector Workers: Reflections in the Time of Covid-19", *Vikalp: People's Perspective for Change*, available on https://www.vikalp.ind.in/2020/04/perils-of-lockdown-and-informal-sector.html?m=0&fbclid=IwAR3S7ZmVwTGKx_WYvdmu3cAZQN_hU66neCazkbF_KC5J4Cqp4LTRkLAz2sZNI
- Ghosh, Sagarika. (2020), "Covid-19 Has Exposed Middle Class Paranoia and India's Class Faultlines", *The Times of India*; available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/bloody-mary/covid-19-has-exposed->

- middle-class-paranoia-and-indias-class-faultlines/;(accessed on July 3, 2021).
- Guha-Khasnobis, Basudeb, Ravi Kanbur, and Elinor Ostrom (eds), (2006), Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concepts and Policies, *WIDER Studies in Development Economics*, available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199204764.001.0001>, (accessed 28 July 2022).
- Hirway, Indira & Darshini, Mahadevia (2020), "Why Is Gujarat A Hotspot of Covid 19virus?", *Science: The Wire*, available at <https://science.thewire.in/health/why-is-gujarat-a-covid-19-hotspot/>,(accessed on July 28, 2022)
- ILO (2012), Effective Protection for Domestic Workers: A Guide to Designing Labor Laws, International Labor Office, Geneva
- ILO. (2015), Employers' Perspectives Towards Domestic Workers in Kuwait: A Qualitative Study on Attitudes, Working Conditions and the Employment Relationship, *Working Paper*, ILO Regional Office for Arab States
- Mahadevia, Darshini, Renu Desai & Suchita Vyas. (2014). City Profile: Ahmedabad, *CUE Working Paper 26*, CEPT university, Ahmedabad, India
- Sen Samita & Sengupta Nilanjana, (2016), Domestic Days: Women, Work, and Politics in Contemporary Kolkata Samita Sen and Nilanjana Sengupta, Oxford Scholarship Online,
- Wiego (2020), DOMESTIC WORKERS: Frontline Care Workers Face COVID-19 Challenges, accessed on <https://www.wiego.org/domestic-workers-frontline-care-workers-face-covid-19-challenges> on 13 Dec 2020