



Impact of COVID-19 on Household Workers

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Abstract

Although the practice of social distancing and 'lock down' may help reduce the spread of the recent COVID-19 virus, its effect on the economy is deleterious and reaches the grass root level of the population of India as well as the world. Through this paper our main objective was to understand the predicaments faced by household workers, whose population mostly consists of the poor and illiterate. Our research also aims at providing the reader with an idea of the different needs and problems to be addressed in the lives of household workers. Changes in income and wages, effectiveness of government schemes and reliefs are some of the topics that are discussed. Various statistical tools, surveys and telephonic interviews were conducted to formulate conclusions and results.

Keywords : COVID-19, Lockdown, Household Workers, Domestic Workers, Government

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 has had the most dire consequences to human life in recent times. The whole globe is at a standstill, economic conditions are at a hiatus, health conditions all around the globe is in turmoil. UN's António Guterres says that it is a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations. The inactivity has affected us in many ways, both Economically and socially. While we are fortunate enough to not only work but live at peace with the comfort called 'home', there exists a section of the society who aren't fortunate enough to access such facilities like migrant workers, construction workers or household workers.

Domestic helpers are a highly marginalized community with insufficient social and economic security. They rarely get any political or legal recognition which makes them vulnerable to poverty and further exposes them to exploitation, discrimination and harassment. There is as of yet no data on the exact number of domestic workers in India. The estimates vary from 4.75 million (NSS 2005) to over 90 million according to different sources. While the former is a gross under-estimation, the latter may be exaggerated (2014). However, it can be safely estimated that the number is over 50 million in the country. There were many attempts for securing their rights and welfare after that, the last being in 2019 for framing a national policy for domestic workers to ensure the payment of fair wages, social security and safe working conditions. But it never became a proper legal protection (2020).

Domestic helpers belong to the unorganized sector which makes it really difficult for them to access governmental aids. According to earlier studies, most of the people belonging to

this sector are not beneficiaries to the various schemes of the government which leaves them with limited access for food and money.

The household helpers are a group of people who face high risk of contracting the disease because most of them work in multiple houses and live in cramped spaces with no proper sanitation facilities. From the article written by K.C.Deepika for The Hindu, we can understand that domestic helpers still go for work and there are employers who asks them to come for work even under such circumstances putting them as well as the helpers under a grave risk.

This study is aimed at knowing how the lockdown has affected the lives of the domestic helpers, understanding their needs and suggest action plans to improve their conditions.

Objectives:

1. To understand the effect of COVID-19 on Household workers .
2. To understand how Household workers survive in the face of COVID-19, and various motives they have to work in these times.
3. To know if the domestic workers have received any incentives from their employees during this lockdown.
4. To know whether the various government schemes have helped the sector in providing help. If yes, how.

Limitations:

1. The sample size of the study was considerably small due to monetary, manpower and travel constraints.
2. Unavoidable biases may cause inaccuracy in results.
3. Lack of previous research studies on the topic cause a lack of foundation to the study.
4. We chose survey and interviews as a way of primary data collection. Inexperience in primary data collection may have caused inaccuracy in results.
5. The study was centered around the workers of middle class and upper middle class families, this may have caused certain biases in the results presented. This constraint was mainly due to the inability to travel because of the current lockdown.

Review of literature

Sophie K Joseph in her article published on outlook, writes about how 93% of the working class belongs to the informal sector which makes them synonymous to low wages, long working hours, no social security protection, no emergency assistance schemes or welfare benefits(2020). It is these people who have borne the cross the most. In their lives, gendered familism has had a huge role to play and it directly relates to the non-recognition and undervaluing work such as this. The employer under his/her authority expects the worker to be reduced to a person lacking resistance and personhood a state of perpetual infantilism can be seen.

The article wrote by Shalini Sinha specifies how the lockdown has not affected the household workers in a gender neutral way (2020). While the women has the burden of taking care of people inside the house, they might also have to face domestic violence from home. With no social security, and schemes that favor mostly the organized section of workers, household workers are facing the worst side of lockdown. Women who are home-based are now jobless without any payment of advance which has caused a serious crunch of cash flow. Those who still go for work face a bigger threat of contacting the disease thus putting many in danger.

She also lists out various measures of reforms such as making income security a must by making it informal sector's right to have leave with pay. They should be provided with reliable health care and housing services. Recovery funds need to be set as done in the formal sector. Sectoral worker welfare boards can help doing the same.

Methodology

Participants

The online questionnaire was answered by 35 participants. Most of the participants were women. All the participants belongs to different cities in Kerala and Maharashtra. The respondents worked at houses of different socio-economic background.

Assessments and measures

Online questionnaire: The questionnaire contained 18 questions, all aimed at knowing the economic conditions of the surveyed group of people. Questions aimed to know the difference between the before and after lockdown situation of the informal household workers section. The questionnaire also throws light on the availability of the various Government schemes to the people.

Procedure

The survey was conducted on the Google forms platform, it was made to reach various people through social media platform. The survey was a form of convenience sampling. Most of the interviews for the surveys were done through telephone due to restrictions of lockdown.

Research design

This research was conducted with an aim of understanding how the lifestyle and economic condition of domestic helpers were affected because of the sudden loss of work due to lockdown. All the information were derived from the online survey that was conducted.

Primary data: The primary data of the research was collected through an online questionnaire and telephonic interviews

Secondary data: For secondary data we referred to online articles and research papers.

Tools used for analysis

The different tools used for analyzing the quantitative data in this research are t test, bar graph and pie chart.

Paired Sample T-Test. The paired sample t-test, sometimes called the dependent sample t-test, is a statistical procedure used to determine whether the mean difference between two sets of observations is zero. In a paired sample t-test, each subject or entity is measured twice, resulting in pairs of observations.

Bar graphs are used to represent data category wise with rectangular bars with heights and lengths proportional to values they represent and are used to compare things. A bar graph shown how the people have chosen between the different options given to them.

A Pie chart is a representation of data which is used to compare parts to the whole. A pie chart is divided to pie slices which will be proportional to the numerical data it presents. In a pie chart, the arc length of each slice (and consequently its central angle and area), is proportional to the quantity it represents.

Results

(i) Pictorial representation of data

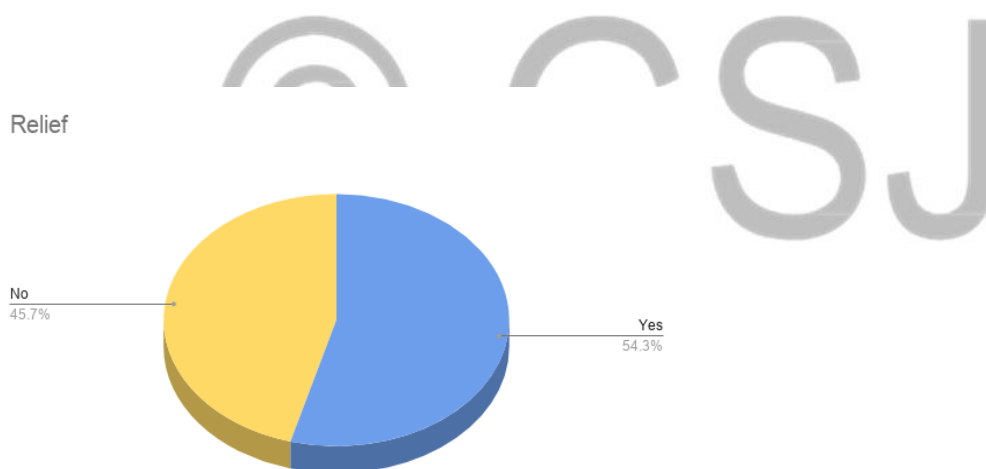


Figure 1 : This figure provides information regarding receipts of Government reliefs relating to Direct cash transfers or essential food grains/ food items(Rations) . Yes being the respondent has received one or the other and no being they have not received the same.

Alternative Job options

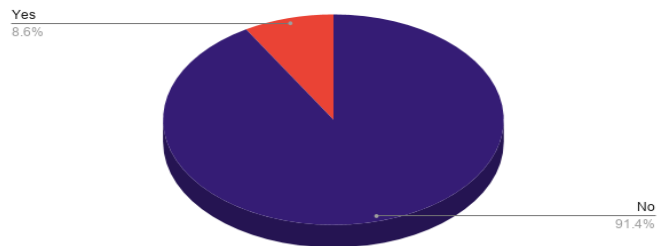


Figure 2.1: This figure provides insight as to whether respondents searched for alternative jobs (Examples: Home nursing, tailoring etc:-)Yes being they have searched for some alternate jobs (8.6%) and No being they had not searched for any alternative job(91.4%).

Sole wage earner

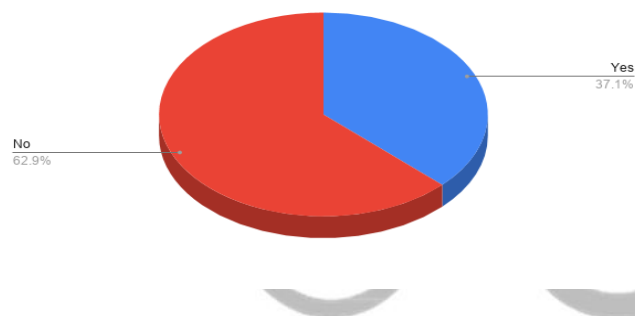


Figure 2.2: This shows whether respondents are sole income earners.

Yes being they are sole income earners (37.1%). No being they are not sole income earners (62.9%)

Financial problems and employer help

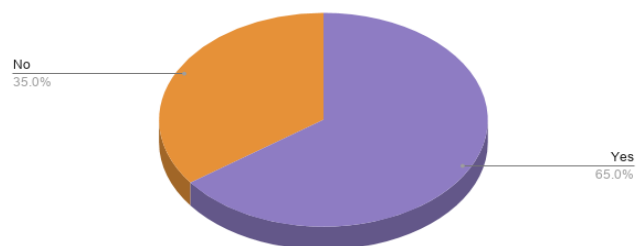


Figure 3: This figure shows number of respondents who were provided funds by their employers.

Yes being they were provided advances (65%). No being they were not provided by their employers(35%).

Work status

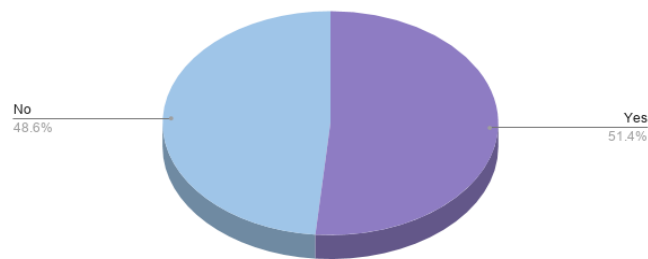


Figure 4.1: This figure provides information as to whether the respondents are still working or not.

Working over night

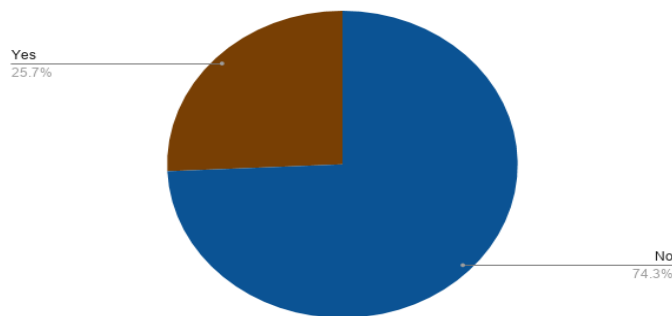


Figure 4.2: This figure provides whether respondents worked full time (over-night) or not.

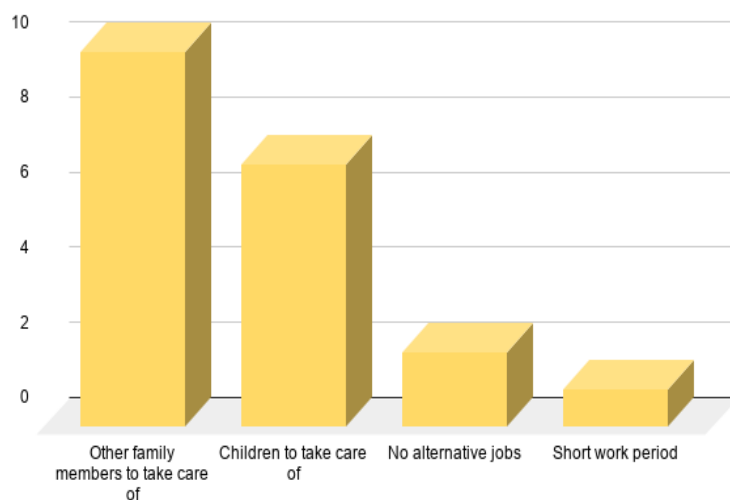


Figure 4.3: Figure provides reasons respondents provided as to why they were not working full time

(ii) Paired t Test

The approach is used because the sampling method was simple random sampling, the samples consisted of paired data, and the mean differences were normally distributed. The paired t Test was taken to shed light on the income situation of the Household workers.

Null hypothesis (H_0): There will not be a significant impact on the Income level of household workers due to the COVID-19 lockdown

Alternate hypothesis (H_1): There will be a negative impact on the Income level of household workers due to the COVID-19 lockdown

$\alpha = 0.05$ [95% confidence]

Null hypothesis (H_0): $\mu_{IBL^*} - \mu_{IAL^*} = 0$

Alternate hypothesis (H_1): $\mu_{IBL^*} - \mu_{IAL^*} > 0$

* [IBL= Income before Lockdown, IAL = Income After Lockdown]

The respondents were prompted to provide information regarding income levels, hence the following intervals were made,

0-5000, 5000-10000, 10000-15000, 15000<

During the lock down period many of the respondents did not have any income so we created a 0 interval.

For ease of calculation we converted the intervals into ranks ranging from 1 to 4 related to corresponding income levels i.e, 0-5000 as 1, 5000-10000 as 2 and so on.

$$\bar{x}_{IBL} = 2.5428$$

$$\bar{x}_{IAL} = 2.1142$$

	<i>INCOME BEFORE LOCKDOWN</i>	<i>INCOME AFTER LOCKDOWN</i>
Mean	2.542857143	2.114285714
Variance	1.078991597	1.515966387
Observations	35	35
Pearson Correlation	0.800945429	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	34	
t Stat	3.430631249	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000798714	
t Critical one-tail	1.690924198	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001597427	
t Critical two-tail	2.032244498	

Since the P value (0.000798714) < α (0.05) [,

H_0 is rejected and hence we conclude that there will be a negative impact on the Income Level of household workers due to the COVID-19 lockdown

Discussion

Government relief:

Through schemes provided by the government such as the PM-KISAN scheme, Deposit of money into Jan Dhan accounts as a direct cash transfer and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana which provides the poor with essential food grains and pulses, the government has started to reach out to the less fortunate but it is sort of a futile attempt. Through this study (Refer figure 1) we have understood that 54.3% of the respondents have received government reliefs in the form of free rations and a Corona kit consisting of Salt, pulses and other essential food items which barely lasted 2 weeks for a family of 4-8. One of the respondents has also received a Direct Cash Transfer of INR 1000 in two installments.

This study also showed that 45.7% of the respondents did not receive any Government relief which is a scary figure considering our small sample size of 35. Most Household workers had families ranging from 1 to 4. Many of the respondents in their telephonic interviews complained about having a zero balance in their bank accounts and pocket .

Income sources:

Most household workers live in poor households and lack basic resources. In our study we sought to find out in the period of lockdown where monetary resources are a luxury, how the household workers and their families survive. We asked our respondents whether they searched for any alternative jobs for survival. It was found that (Refer figure 2.1) 91.4% of the respondents did not even search for a job let alone get an alternative option of a job. This relates to the lack of facilities and hence opportunities. A mere 8.6% of the respondents searched for

these alternative jobs these included home nursing and working in parlors. Better education and resources which relates to a higher income group can be noted here.

A shocking finding (Refer figure 2.2) was that 37.1% of the respondents were the sole breadwinners of their families. And the rest of the respondents (62.9%) had spouses who worked in the informal sector and earned a small wage. These wages were not only small, they were unstable as well. During the lockdown these family members were jobless, which meant less income and hence deepening their state of poverty. One of the respondents complained about how the electricity bill as well as loan amounts were overburdening them and that both her husband and her were not given any advance payments by their employers.

Aid from workplace:

From the results of the paired t test conducted, we can understand that a considerable number of people have become jobless and thus losing their income due to this lockdown. People who got income also has experienced a decrease in income which is quite alarming considering the fact that this was a small sample size.

Some people had got an advance salary from their employees (65%) which has helped them to cope up with this lockdown to a certain extent; 72.7% of the people out of this group got advance for one month (Refer figure 3), 18.2% for a period two months and a fortunate 9.1% of people got paid for three months or more. While 35% of the surveyed population were not given any monetary incentives by their employees, the survey statistics show that 42.1% of the people were still employed even under such strict restrictions of lockdown putting them in grave danger of contracting the disease.

We could also decipher that a majority of the surveyed group had no problem in getting these funds provided by the employer which related basically to having no bank account or facing problems in transport.

81% of the surveyed group had faced no problems in receiving these funds provided by their employers and hence it is safe to assume that they either had bank accounts or the employer help facilitate the funding process through various means. 19% of the respondents had faced problems in receiving these funds relating to lack of facilities/resources such as bank accounts or transport facilities.

Work status:

The survey statistics (Refer figure 4.1) show that a major part of the respondents are still working (51.4%) while the others either lost their job or are no longer called for work. Though the people who were not going for work had many reasons for doing so like they were getting paid without working or were fired from work due to fear of the virus, majority said they quit themselves due to fear of contacting the disease (Refer figure 4.3).

Three quarter of the surveyed group (74.3%) were not working overnight (Refer figure 4.2). The main reason stated by people for not choosing to work over night were because they had children and other family members to take care of and thus couldn't stay away from them(47.6%); some also stated they had alternate jobs or that they were needed to work only for one shift.

The people who still went for work also listed out many reasons like loyalty towards their workers but the majority said they were under economic pressure (54.5%). We can derive from

this survey that not having enough money is the driving force behind so many people choosing to work even during such a situation.

Devising strategies:

- Providing household workers with economic benefits through cash transfers/bank transfers or handouts equal to monthly minimum wage which can be facilitated through schemes such as Jan Dhan Yojana for a minimum of 3 months.
- Continual provision of free COVID-19 relief kits which provides essential commodities such as food grains, free rations etc:-
- Establishment of welfare boards targeting benefit of workers through government and employer contribution.
- Government appeal/pressure must be made to employers as to providing household workers with advances and/ wages for months of lockdown when they are unable to work.
- Attempts to modify labor codes and measures to improve work environment of workers.
- Creation of health insurance policies and transfer of preventive and protective information to non-literate workers in informal sector must be facilitated.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has provided an unparalleled challenge for India. Given the gargantuan population of India and the fact that India's economy mostly relies on its informal sector, scaling up policy measures to combat the virus to safeguard this sector indeed is a need of the hour. Through this study, we have thrown light into the fraction of the problems faced by household workers. The issues faced by them are not confined to just economic ones, though this study focuses mainly on the same. We have tried to understand the various difficulties faced by them and devise appropriate reliefs/solutions that can be implemented to better their situation. We hope that the data provided in this study can be used for further research/ policy making.

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