

DIGNITY IN DOMESTICITY: DECENT WORK AND DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

BY

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Abstract

Over the years there has been an increase in the demand and supply of domestic workers worldwide. As a highly informal job, women are mostly engaged, which necessitates more engagement in this area. This paper analyses the demand, wage and societal outlook towards domestic work. The data was collected from a micro-level unit. Multiple regression, mean analysis and descriptive analysis were done to draw results. From the result, it is clear that the monthly household expenditure of those who are hiring domestic workers is positively related to the salary of domestic workers. Whereas the expenditure level crosses a higher limit the relationship moves negatively. The mean salary of domestic workers is higher than the wage mentioned in the Kerala Minimum Wage Act 2016-18. The monthly expenditure of the family, number of working women and man are the statistically significant determinants which determine salary of domestic workers.

Keywords: *dignity, domesticity, decent work, factors, domestic workers.*

Introduction

In any case, what is most common is that countries' labour markets witness changes. With all these changes, the job market will always be the face of many; there is an upgrading of the workforce through technology and, on the other hand, the existence of jobs that are anchored in history and culture which remain unnoticed, unregistered and rather represent a part of survival. In the Indian labour market, all these inconsistencies would be a reflection of our informal employment sector, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of the workforce. This would be one of the main reasons for engaging in discussions, studies

and policies in academic and government circles about this sector. But a large number of them are still behind the curtain; These are the people who not only work for personal gain or not to be a status symbol, but also those who hardly strive to protect their family from hunger, to give better education and health facilities to their children. To this group, they are highly vulnerable, invisible and mostly unregulated; Domestic Workers (DWs) are one among them.

From the very beginning, understanding how far domestic workers are being addressed is clear from the period that ILO had to take to frame a specific labour

standard for domestic workers. In 1945 ILO (International Labour Organization) had planned special attention to Domestic Workers but fundamentally they had to wait more than half a century to implement an international labour standard specifically designed for Domestic Workers i.e. convention 189 Decent Work for Domestic Workers in 2011. This convention has given a commonly acceptable definition for Domestic Workers in its Article 1: (a) The term "Domestic Work" means work performed in or for a household or households; (b) The term "domestic worker" means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship; (c) A person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker (ILO, 2011). This definition makes clear those who would include and exclude in the domestic workers category. The activities they have engaged in include mainly 3C's cooking, cleaning and caring activities. In a broad sense, it would convey cooking, cleaning, washing and caring for elders and children, tutors, gatekeepers, guards, gardeners, drivers etc. By its very nature, it is feminine in structure despite nominal male participation in cooking, gatekeepers, and gardeners with neutral value creation among the patriarchal in-built society. Domestic workers include live-in and live-out. Live-in means the workers reside in the employer's household premises and live-out workers back to their homes after the work is completed.

Astonishing contributions made by them make notable movements in the labour

market of a country in its double side effect, one which generates employment opportunities, and the second, they paved the way for others to enter into the labour market by allowing a better gateway to balance their work and life. By providing these necessary services, domestic workers allow individuals to pursue education, training, and employment opportunities, thus contributing to overall economic productivity. With the great transformation in demographic characteristics, family structure, urbanization, and increasing workforce participation of women, the demand for domestic workers to provide childcare, eldercare, and other forms of personal assistance is on the rise. Due to a lack of employment opportunities and very poor financial conditions, many women find this job as their livelihood. Thus, the economic value of domestic work is substantial for the growth of a country.

The rationale of the Study

In many aspects, Domestic Work is departed from other forms of work. The employer-employee relationship, the work they perform and the workplace itself cause some vulnerabilities and invisibilities in this work. Several deep-rooted unrevealed issues exist about their working conditions, rights at work, social security, and collective bargaining power. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyse the factors which determine the domestic worker's salary and how society has a general attitude towards these workers.

Objective of the Study

This study focuses on the demand side of domestic work. The prime focus is on the

factors which determine the salary of Domestic workers and how society's attitude towards domestic work.

Methodology

The data was collected from Thalakad Grama Panchayath, Tirur municipality of Malappuram district. Among the 19 wards, B.P. Angadi was selected randomly. 16 per cent of the total population was selected as a sample (N=266). Participants were required to read and sign the consent form before the questionnaire. The questionnaire had 24 items. Questions were designed in such a manner that if the respondents decided to hire a domestic worker how much would they pay for them, which are the factors they would consider while paying salary etc. Items were written with care, to ensure clarity and ease of understanding on the part of participants. The questions intended to measure the respondent's attitude towards domestic workers, measured using a five-point Likert scale, each item in the Likert scale questionnaire was assigned a numerical value corresponding to the response options provided by the participants. These numerical values ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 representing 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 representing 'Strongly Agree.' The qualities of domestic workers that respondents expect from domestic workers measured by using rank varies from 1 to 10. The factors which determine the salary of domestic workers were analysed through multiple regression analysis. To ensure that the data was suitable for multiple regression analysis, a series of preprocessing steps were performed. First,

normality tests were carried out on the data set, which revealed significant deviations from the normal distribution. To address this issue, 11 outlier samples were identified and subsequently removed from the dataset. This decision was made to improve the normality of the data distribution, a requirement for multiple regression analysis. It is important to note that the exclusion of these samples was based solely on statistical criteria and was not influenced by specific characteristics of the data points. After this preprocessing step, the remaining data set was deemed suitable for further.

Findings of the Study

Samples were approximately balanced by gender. The percentage of women is 53% and men is 47%. Age is an important variable in this study. The largest proportion of respondents fell in the age categories of 18-25, and 26-33. Ninety per cent of the respondents are in the age group of 18-41. The mean age is 30, for males it is 30.38 and for females it is 29.84. When hiring domestic workers employer's education may influence preferences or expectations about the wage, qualities which have to be possessed by workers and shape attitudes towards the value and importance of domestic work. They may prioritize certain skills, qualifications, or professionalism, which could influence their hiring decisions. Education often correlates with higher income levels and socioeconomic status. Individuals with higher education may have greater financial resources to afford domestic help, making them more likely to hire domestic workers for tasks such as cleaning, childcare, or eldercare. Only 3.8

per cent have an educational qualification of 10th class or below. 85 per cent possess an education level above higher secondary. Graduates, post-graduates, and engineering together constitute 63.2 per cent of the respondents. Household income is a very important factor influencing the demand for domestic workers. For this study, monthly

household expenditure has been taken as a proxy of income, which reflects the financial capacity and priorities of households.

Table 1. shows the comprehensive breakdown of the monthly expenditure of respondents offering spending habits among them.

Table 1. Monthly Household Expenditure

Monthly Expenditure	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Below 5000	11.3	11.3
5000-15000	27.4	38.7
15000-25000	27.8	66.5
25000-35000	12.0	78.6
35000-45000	1.9	80.5
Above 45000	19.5	100
Total	100	

Source: Primary Survey

As shown in the table 1 around 41.7 per cent of respondents' monthly spending is between 15000-45000. Only 11.3 per cent have monthly expenditures below 5000. Taking a look at the mean salary intended to be paid for their domestic workers by respondents associated with each expenditure class, it is apparent that the increase in mean salary of domestic workers

is more profound while increasing monthly expenditure from below 5000 to 5000-15000. Further increase in the respondent's monthly expenditure leads increase in the mean salary of the workers up to 35000-45000 expenditure class. Whereas the monthly expenditure is crossed above 45000, it can be seen that the average salary is decreasing from 10600 to 6057 (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean Salary across the Expenditure Group

Expenditure Class	Mean	Std. Deviation
Below 5000	5275.57	3327.002
5000-15000	7513.7	3717.426
15000-25000	7652.7	3044.25
25000-35000	8250	4060.033
35000-45000	10600	2607.681
Above 45000	6057.87	2801.638
Total	7161.94	3488.525

Source: Primary Survey

In Kerala, the average MPCE (Monthly Per capita Consumption Expenditure) is Rs.2284.18 in rural and Rs.2700.53 in urban. In Malappuram, the average MPCE for rural

is 1864 and for urban it is 1963 Ramachandran (2018). From the data calculated MPCE for rural is 4512 and for urban it is 5323.

Table 3. Monthly Salary of Domestic Workers

Salary	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Below 2000	2.6	2.6
2000-5000	38.7	41.4
5000-8000	32.0	73.3
8000-11000	17.7	91.0
11000-15000	9.0	100
Total	100	

Source: Primary Survey

If the respondents are hiring a domestic worker, by considering all their expenditures and income how much they would pay for their domestic workers monthly? 2.6 per cent reported they would give below 2000. Only 9 per cent are willing to give 11000-15000. Altogether 73 per cent among them are willing to pay below 8000

only. The salary and the duties of the workers are closely related. The most demanding duties are cleaning the home (including washing utensils, and dresses), Cooking, and cleaning surroundings together constituting 78.6 per cent (Table 4). The need for domestic workers for caring duties is meagrely represented.

Table 4. Duties Intended to Give Domestic Workers

Category	Percentage
Cleaning Home (including washing utensils and dresses)	48.1
Cooking only	0.8
Cooking and Cleaning Surroundings	30.5
Caring Elders	1.1
Caring Child	1.5
Cooking, Cleaning, and Caring	12
Tuition	4.1
House Driving	1.1
Driving, Watchman	0.8
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

Kerala is a far-runner in the framework of policies for workers' social security, specifically, for informal sector workers. It is one of the few states in India which includes domestic workers in their minimum wage act.

Table 5. Comparison of Domestic Worker's Mean Salary across Category of duties with Kerala Minimum wage 2016-18

Domestic Workers Duties	Mean calculated from the Survey	As per the minimum wages in Kerala 2016-18
Cleaning Home (including washing utensils and dresses)	6299	5070
Cooking only	7712	5538
Cooking and Cleaning Surroundings	8500	5070
Caring Elders	5000	5226
Caring Child	7125	5226
Cooking, Cleaning, and Caring	8688	5226
Tuition	7727	Not in that report
House Driving	9189	5964

Source: Primary Survey

Minimum Wages in Kerala 2016-18, Department of Labour and Skills, Government of Kerala.

While computing the mean salary under each category of domestic workers duties and try to compare it with Kerala government minimum wage 2016-18, one thing is evident is that both from the study and the government report the monthly salary of house driver is higher. This is the male concentrated job in domestic work. Neetha (2013) pointed Gender patriarchal characteristics in Kerala minimum wage act. In every category calculated mean wage is higher than that of minimum wage under Kerala government.

Table 6. Factors Considering while making Payment

Category	Percentage
Time in which they have taken for work	13.9
Number of Works they have Done	12.8
Efficiency and Cleanness in Job	73.3
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

Demand and the supply are the cornerstones in the determination wage. At the same time Productivity, skill, efficiency in job etc. are highly crucial while fixing wage. Efficiency and cleanliness in the job is the main factors considered while making payments (73.3%). Time and number of work they have completed come as the next two determinants of wage. The history of

domestic workers is upturned from slavery, the working conditions and wages all are tied to slavery in history (Moosvi, 2003). In present context it moves in to commonly accepted system of payment. About three fourth of them willing to pay their domestic workers in both cash and kind. While those who prefer to pay in cash only is 26.3 per cent.

Table 7. Method of Giving Salary

Method of Giving Payment	Percentage
Only in the form of Money	26.3
Only in the Form of Kind	3.8
Both Money and Kind	69.9
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

Table 8. Interested in Finding Domestic Workers

Sources	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Agency	7.9	7.9
From the recommendation of Family and Neighbouring Place	51.5	59.4
From the familiar place	40.6	100.0
Total	100	

Source: Primary Survey

Nowadays agencies are playing pretty much a role in the domestic workers' labour market by connecting employers and employees. In some cases, they offer different training for them. Whereas some agencies itself turns to become a cradle of mistreatment against them (Ghaddar, Khandaqji, & Ghattas, 2018). But, respondents are very reluctant to hire

domestic workers from agencies (7.9%) instead, they are interested in hiring domestic workers from the recommendation of family and neighbouring places (51.4%) and from the places which are most familiar to them (40.6%).

Understanding how individuals perceive housework can reveal implicit biases,

stereotypes, or discriminatory attitudes. Addressing and correcting such attitudes is crucial to promoting fair treatment, equality and social justice for domestic workers.

When asked whether they agreed with the argument that domestic workers receive little attention in the workplace and society, 82.7 per cent agreed (Table 9).

Table 9. Response to the argument that Domestic Workers do not receive consideration from working Workplace and Society

Low Status in Society	Percentage
Completely Agree	33.5
Agree	49.2
Neither agree or disagree	11.3
Disagree	3
Completely Disagree	3
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

The key reason for this low appreciation comes from the job itself. Housework is still the most important aspect of unpaid work, so its impact is also noticeable on paid housework, which is why 24 per cent cited it as the main reason for the low consideration of domestic workers because it is not treated as work. The next two reasons for the low esteem are that they come from the lower

strata of society and this job still seems to be a part of slavery. Apart from these three reasons, another reason is that this profession is heavily populated by women (Table 10). These reasons together account for 79 per cent. These four reasons reflect society's bias towards this job. The institutional factors from the authority side are among the least chosen reasons.

Table 10. Reasons for the Low Consideration from Working Workplace and Society

Reasons	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Domestic work is not considered work	24.1	24.1
Most of the workers are women	16.2	40.2
The workers from lower strata of society	21.1	61.3
Their poor bargaining and lack of union	9.8	71.1
The government is not ensuring work dignity for them	11.3	82.3
Still, people consider it as slavery	17.7	100
Total		100

Source: Primary Survey

An employment contract is an important element of decent work. Much domestic work occurs through informal arrangements, such as directly hiring a housekeeper without formal contracts or through word-of-mouth referrals. This informality makes it difficult for regulators to keep track of legal standards such as

minimum wage implementations or limits on working hours. 72 per cent are not interested in employment contracts. And only 15 per cent are interested in a contract with a term of less than a year. Whereas 76.7 per cent are willing to give one day leave in a week with a salary.

Table 11. Willingness in Job Contract

Type of Contract	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Not interested in Contracts	72.2	72.2
Interested in the contract which is less than one year	15	87.2
Interested in the contract which is less than two years	7.1	94.4
Three or more years	5.6	100
Total	100	

Source: Primary Survey

Table 12 encapsulates the key qualities and attributes that employers typically look for when hiring domestic workers to ensure a close working relationship and the effective

functioning of their household. Domestic workers often have access to the employer's home, personal belongings, and sometimes sensitive information.

Table 12. Ranking the Qualities of Domestic Workers

Qualities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Good Education	10	11	13	16	12	24	28	77	75
Low Salary	8	13	12	12	41	59	47	38	36
Neatness and Efficiency in Job	86	83	47	39	7	1	1	1	1
Trustworthiness	104	71	45	34	5	1	5	1	0
The Person who Nearby	1	5	4	19	47	45	62	51	32
Use of Modern Machinery	1	7	23	26	69	65	42	17	16
Good Personality	30	41	73	64	20	25	8	4	1
Experience	26	35	41	54	42	18	22	17	11

Beauty	0	0	8	2	23	28	51	60	94
Total	266	266	266	266	266	266	266	266	266

Source: Primary Survey

Employers need to trust that their domestic workers will respect their privacy and property. Trustworthiness is essential for ensuring the safety and security of the household. 39 per cent of the respondents have given their first rank to trustworthiness which has the least mean value of 2.22. In Table 6 we have seen neatness and efficiency are the important factors they have taken into consideration while the payment of salary. Coming to

quality as well 86 respondents which means 32 per cent give the first rank for this with a mean value of 2.31. This good personality is the next best-chosen quality. The lowest rank respondents were given to beauty (Mean 7.51) and good education (Mean 6.86). These three qualities with a high mean value show that beauty and education are the least-ranked qualities for domestic workers.

Table 13. Mean Score of Qualities

Qualities	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Good Education	6.86	266	2.324
Low Salary	6.14	266	2.058
Neatness and Efficiency in Job	2.31	266	1.307
Trustworthiness	2.22	266	1.365
The Person who Nearby	6.52	266	1.68
Use of Modern Machinery	5.63	266	1.664
Good Personality	3.51	266	1.653
Experience	4.29	266	2.173
Beauty	7.51	266	1.545

Source: Primary Survey

Factors Determining Wage of Domestic Workers

- Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the salary of domestic workers and any of the independent variables in the model.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between the salary of domestic workers and at least

one of the independent variables in the model.

MODEL

$$\text{Salary} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Children} + \beta_2 \times \text{Elders} + \beta_3 \times \text{Rooms} + \beta_4 \times \text{Age} + \beta_5 \times \text{Expenditure} + \beta_6 \times \text{Family_Members} + \beta_7 \times \text{Working_Women} + \beta_8 \times \text{Working_Men} + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Salary: Salary is the salary of domestic workers (dependent variable).
- Children: Children is the number of children in the family.
- Elders: Elders are the number of elders in the family.
- Rooms: Rooms are the number of rooms in the house.
- Age: Age is the age of the domestic worker.
- Expenditure: Expenditure is the monthly expenditure of the family.
- Family Members: Family Members is the number of members in the family.
- WorkingWomen: Working_Women is the number of working women in the family.
- Working_Men: Working_Men is the number of working men in the family.
- $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_8$ are the coefficients to be estimated.
- ϵ is the error term.

From the test result of the hypothesis test using multiple regression, it was found that the overall regression is statistically significant ($R^2=0.22$, $F(8,247) = 8.745$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that 22% variability in wage is explained by the model. Thus, we reject H_0 , which means there is significant relation between salary of domestic workers with at least any of the independent variable in the model. It was found that monthly expenditure ($\beta = 132$, $t = 6.174$, $p = 0.000$), number of working women ($\beta = 907.3$, $t = 3.08$, $p = 0.002$), number of working men ($\beta = 332.4$, $t = 2.4$, $p = 0.01$) are statistically significant factors in the determination of wage. Whereas number of rooms in the

family ($\beta = 150.49$, $t = 1.84$, $p = 0.06$), Number of elders in the family ($\beta = 249.36$, $t = 1.16$, $p = 0.244$), Number of children's in the family ($\beta = 210.149$, $t = 1.12$, $p = 0.261$), Age ($\beta = 14.55$, $t = 0.59$, $p = 0.55$), Number of members in the family ($\beta = -165.3$, $t = -1.21$, $p = 0.227$) are the variables did not significantly predicting the monthly salary of domestic workers.

Interpretation & Conclusion of the study

Domestic work is an important contributor to the informal sector, particularly urban female employment. This study was conducted in an educated comparatively young group. It can be seen that the domestic worker's salary is related to the monthly household expenditure. At the same time, the positive relationship between expenditure and domestic workers' salary is not profound at a higher expenditure level. The persistence of traditional duties of cooking and cleaning assigned to domestic workers reflects the deep-rooted societal structure and existing stigma. The peculiarities of the workplace and work necessitate a great deal of privacy. That is why it is said that trustworthiness should be a quality for a domestic worker. Besides that, efficiency in work is a particular factor to determine that wage and it is also seen as the second-best quality required for domestic workers. At the same time, it was seen that beauty and education are not appealing qualities for this job. Society's perception of education and beauty as unnecessary for domestic workers stems from entrenched biases and a historical devaluation of certain types of labour.

Domestic work has long been associated with tasks considered menial or less skilled, leading to the undervaluation of the profession as a whole. Consequently, educational qualifications are often not prioritized for domestic workers, perpetuating a cycle of limited access to higher education and professional development opportunities. Similarly, societal standards of beauty often prioritize outward appearance over the intrinsic value of an individual's skills and contributions.

Coming to the determinants of the salary of domestic workers, instead of household monthly income, household monthly expenditure and number of rooms in the house were taken as proxies. The number of working women and men, age, number of children, number of elder people and number of total members in the family were the other factors considered as determinants. The number of children and elders was included to meet the caring needs of the family by hiring domestic workers. Results from the multiple regression show that monthly expenditure and the number of working women and men are the significant factors in determining salary and the variation in domestic workers' salaries is explained by these factors. So, there might be other factors which have more influence on domestic workers' salary want to explore it.

The average salary of domestic workers in the government minimum wage act is lesser compared with the average salary of domestic workers that they are willing to

pay them. This misalignment highlights potential issues of underpayment and undervaluation within the domestic work sector. Despite government regulations intended to protect workers' rights and ensure fair compensation, the discrepancy suggests that minimum wage standards may not adequately reflect the actual value of domestic labour or meet the financial needs of workers. Addressing this gap requires a comprehensive reassessment of minimum wage policies, taking into account the cost of living, the nature of the work, and the fair compensation expectations of both employers and employees.

The preference for domestic workers from nearby places due to trust issues can have a significant impact on agencies that supply domestic workers. This could limit the pool of available workers and potentially decrease the agency's competitiveness in the market. Additionally, agencies might need to invest more resources in vetting and background checks to reassure clients about the trustworthiness of workers from farther away. The responses about the reasons behind the poor consideration of domestic workers from society and working place indicate society's general understanding of domestic workers. This perception contributes to the undervaluation of domestic labour and the marginalization of women in the workforce. Individuals from the marginalised sectors with low education see this job as a better avenue for their livelihood. The combination of gender bias and economic inequality perpetuates a cycle

of devaluation and exploitation within the domestic work sector, highlighting the need for broader societal changes to address

gender inequality and socioeconomic disparities.

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