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## **RESEARCH REPORT 4**

### **Paid Care Workers in India:**

### **Domestic Workers and Anganwadi Workers**

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**June 2009**

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<sup>1</sup> Without the assistance of members of the Janvadi Mahila Samiti, Rohtak, who conducted the survey of domestic workers in Rohtak this report would have been impoverished. Shruti Chowdhry worked through their field diaries as well as the diaries of Rekha and Savita, field investigators in a village in Rohtak District (Haryana), and Padma and Padmawati, investigators in a village in Vellore District (Tamil Nadu). We thank them as well as all those who translated the field diaries.

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In this report we look more closely at two categories of non-familial care workers and thereby explicate the care diamond further. Market-based care is studied through the situation of hired domestic workers and the nexus of state and community through Anganwadi Workers in the Integrated Child Development Scheme, initiated by the government in 1975 and expanded over the last decade or so. The growth in the numbers of such workers, their working conditions and pay, social dimensions and relations between the care workers and their employers/clients, care practices for their own children, features of unionisation and organisation are examined. In the process, the social and economic recognition and valuation of care in the market, in social discourse, and by the state are drawn out.

## 1. Paid care providers: Size and Growth

The number of non-household, paid or market based care providers is difficult to estimate as many are not captured by macro-data sources<sup>2</sup> or are spread across categories which are not well defined. The macro data on employment and unemployment gives a rough picture of the size of the sector as well as growth patterns. The industrial category *Community, social and personal services*<sup>3</sup> encompasses care providers such as teachers, health workers and domestic workers. As discussed in earlier chapters, the broad sectoral wise distribution of women workers shows the predominance of agriculture in total female employment.

Table 1: Distribution of female workers across various industrial categories (UPSS Total 000)

Industrial Category	1993-94			1999-00			2004-05		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</i>	94,536	77.4	39.5	91,202	74.9	38.7	107,965	72.4	41.6
<i>Mining and quarrying</i>	522	0.4	19.5	384	0.3	17.1	422	0.3	16.5
<i>Mfrg &amp; repair services</i>	12,099	9.9	29.1	12,336	10.1	28.2	17,404	11.7	31.1
<i>Electricity, gas and water</i>	52	0	3.7	36	0	3.6	49	0	4.1
<i>Construction</i>	1,648	1.4	13.6	2,034	1.7	11.7	2,802	1.9	10.8
<i>Trade, hotels and restaurants</i>	3,938	3.2	12.8	5,233	4.3	12.8	6,121	4.1	12.3
<i>Transport, storage and communication</i>	329	0.3	3.1	441	0.4	3	594	0.4	3.2
<i>Finance, insurance, real estate and business services</i>	449	0.4	12.1	469	0.4	9.6	915	0.6	11.7
<i>Community, social and personal services</i>	8,499	7	26.4	9,659	7.9	28.9	12,803	8.6	33.9
Estimated Workers <sup>4</sup>	122,072	100	32.6	121,794	100	30.9	149,075	100	32.5

Source: NSSO Employment and Unemployment Data, Various Rounds

Note: 1- Absolute number of workers (000s); 2 - Percentage of total female employment in the sector; 3 – Women workers as a percentage of total employment in the sector

In the non-agricultural sector, community, social and personal services is the second largest sector (after manufacturing) of female employment - 8.6 per cent. There has been an increase

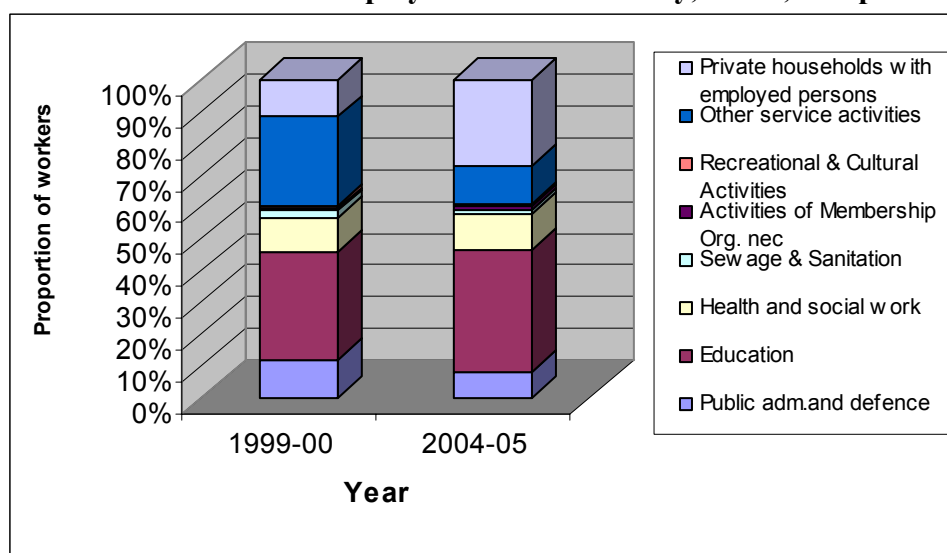
<sup>2</sup> The location of their sphere of work within the four walls of a house can make domestic workers invisible, just as domestic work has tended to be.

<sup>3</sup> This category includes occupations that do not come under care work as defined in the study.

<sup>4</sup> Total workforce estimates may vary slightly across tables as they are derived by totalling sectoral estimates calculated from the proportions across industrial categories as given in the published data.

within this category both in absolute numbers and in the proportion of women from 26.4 percent in 1993-94 to 34 per cent in 2004-05. This is one category of services, with the highest percentage of women among the non-agricultural categories, in which one sees a process of feminisation. Thus, care work occupies a central place in the new employment opportunities for women. The sub-categories of this segment are elaborated in Figure 1 and Table 2. Due to definitional difference in the disaggregate classification in 1993-94 and the later rounds, the analysis is limited to the latter.

**Figure 1. Distribution of female employment in community, social, and personal services**



Education, health and private households with employed persons could be classified as workers involved in paid, direct care work, the concern of the present study. The category of 'other service activities' comprises of laundry workers, beauticians and other such workers who do not fall under any of the other defined categories .

**Table 2: Composition of *Community, social and personal service workers* (000)**

Categories	1999-00		2004-05	
	No. of female workers	Share of total female employment	No of female workers	Share of total female employment
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	1,144	0.9	1,067	0.7
Education	3,221	2.6	4,912	3.3
Health and social work	1,031	0.9	1,408	0.9
Sewage and Refuse Disposal, Sanitation and Similar Activities	215	0.2	181	0.1
Activities of Membership Organisations N.E.C.	72	0.1	145	0.1
Recreational, Cultural and Sporting Activities	68	0.1	106	0.1
Other service activities	2,676	2.2	1,508	1.0
Private households with employed persons	1,125	0.9	3,474	2.3
Total	9,556	7.9	12,803	8.6

Source: NSSO Employment and Unemployment Data, Various Rounds

Though education accounts for the largest segment in terms of growth and proportion in this category, private households with employed persons, which is second in terms of the proportion of workers, is of special significance. The share of workers in this category, predominantly domestic service, has increased from 11.8 per cent to 27.1 per cent of the total service sector employment. The number of women in the category has also grown phenomenally, about 2.3 million in a short span of 5 years, such that the female share in the category is striking. However, a substantial proportion of the increase (around 50 per cent) may have been due to more careful categorisation and enumeration as is evident in the drastic decline in the number of workers included in “other service” activities in the same period. All workers who do not come strictly under any other listed classification are included in this last category.

In the following sections, domestic workers and *anganwadi* are discussed separately. There is some macro data on domestic workers to examine their growth and broad characteristics. Such data on *anganwadi* workers are not available as they are clubbed into the category of social service providers and are spoken of as ‘social workers’ or ‘honorary’ workers or ‘volunteers’ in various official documents. However, we do know the total number of *anganwadi* workers and helpers and the increase over the last few years. Apart from this, there are a few micro studies which throw some light on the characteristics of these workers, the nature of their work and their lives.

## 2. Domestic Workers

### 2.1 Size and Growth

Partly because of the informal nature of domestic service and partly owing to its small size in terms of total employment, the information available for the early years of the growth of paid domestic work is scanty. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women documented the plight of domestic workers and recommended measures to ameliorate their conditions, but nothing came of this. Various studies in the 1980s found that women were between 65-90% of domestic workers.<sup>5</sup> NSSO Employment and Unemployment data<sup>6</sup> indicate a trend of steady and high growth in the total numbers and share of female workers in the categories that would fall into household-based and institutional paid domestic work. With this growth, their demographic characteristics underwent changes. During the 1970s and 1980s, most female domestic workers were found to be household heads, in particular widowed, deserted, and older women (Banerjee, 1982). As family and single women migration has increased, younger women have become a larger proportion of domestic workers (Banerjee, 1992). A survey (Indian Social Institute 1993) indicated that employers show a preference for young women as they are perceived to be more reliable, obedient, and efficient in domestic work, especially in taking care of babies and the elderly.

The growing recognition of the significance of paid domestic work in female employment, by both scholars and activists led to the sub-category ‘private households with employed persons’ being included in the last two NSS rounds on employment and unemployment

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<sup>5</sup> These include one commissioned by the Catholic Bishops Conference in 1980 covering 12 cities and the Shramshakti report 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the National Classification of Occupations, 1968.

(1999-2000 and 2004-05). It included the sub-sections of Housemaid/servant, Cook, Gardener, Gate-keeper/chowkidar/watchman, Governess/babysitter, and Others, of which Housemaid/servant, Cook, and Governess/babysitter are direct care domestic workers and their distribution is given below. A major limitation of this data is that it is restricted to two points in time very close to each other, 1999-00 and 2004-05, and does not allow for a long-term trend study.

Table 3: Distribution of domestic workers across selected sub-categories

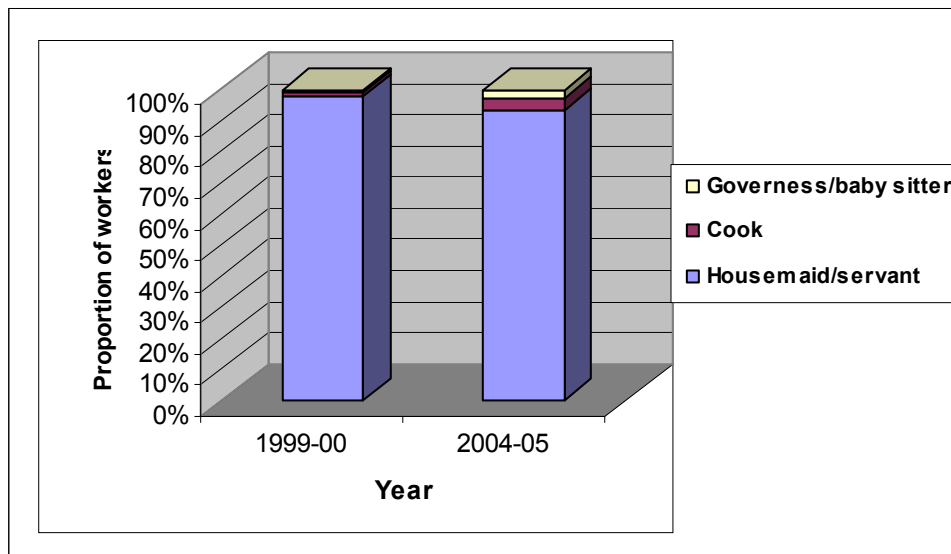
	1999-00			2004-05		
	Number of workers (000)	Percentage to total female employment	Female share	Number of workers (000)	Percentage to total female employment	Female share
Housemaid/servant	438,200	0.4	80.4	2,381,100	1.6	87.4
Cook	6,400	0.0	72.6	96,600	0.1	73.9
Governess/baby sitter	2,600	0.0	76.4	69,600	0.0	74.2
Total domestic workers	447,100	0.4	63.4	2,547,400	1.8	71.6

Source: Unit level Employment and Unemployment Data

The table again shows the phenomenal increase in the number of domestic workers and of women in these sub-categories, which the figures for the category as a whole also suggested. As mentioned, part of this increase may have been due to the greater recognition of this category of workers and more careful enumeration,<sup>7</sup> but this does not explain the phenomenal growth in recent years recorded by many micro studies (Moghe 2005). The sub-categories we have included under domestic workers is formed almost entirely of housemaid/servants - about 94 percent in 2004-05 (Figure 2) - which also shows a distinct increase of 7 per cent over the period. While survey workers may not have been sufficiently careful in their enumeration across sub-sections, there is reason to believe that the low proportion of governess/baby sitter indicates that domestic workers were rarely hired exclusively for child-minding and/or education and did not see themselves as child minders. Paid child carers would have the responsibility of the many indirect childcare tasks as well as other domestic work. Understandings of natural ability and safety of children incline employers to hire women where children are involved. However, it may also be pointed out that childcare was absent or a minor part of the duties of the domestic workers we observed and/or interviewed in our fieldwork (Section 3).

<sup>7</sup> The increased awareness on the growing importance of this category and thus some conscious effort to capture these workers could be one factor in the growth in numbers.

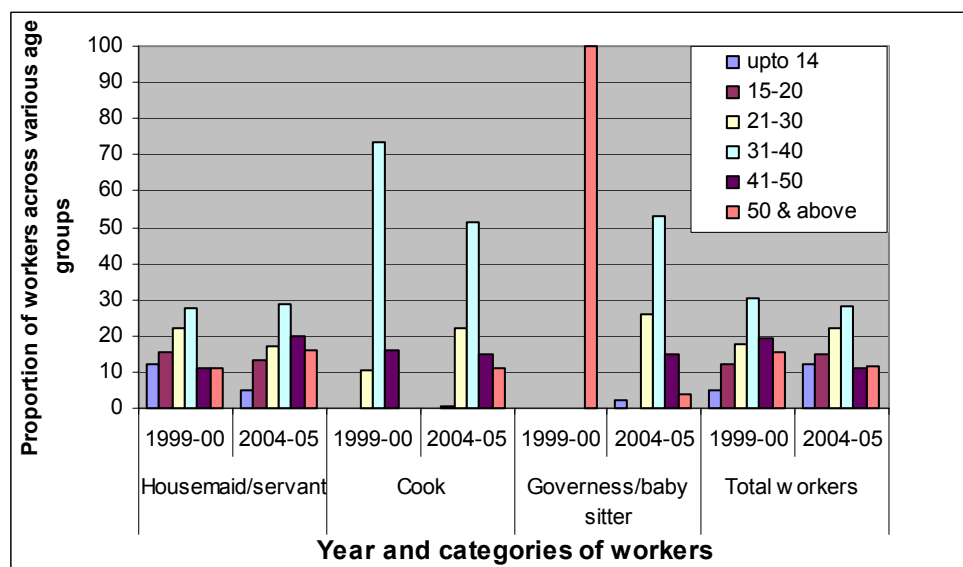
**Figure 2: Categories of Domestic Workers**



## 2.2 Social and demographic characteristics

Paid domestic workers have been largely an urban phenomenon. In 1999-00, 83.4% domestic workers were urban-based with the slight decline in 2004-05 indicating the growth of paid domestic work in rural areas. This had as much to do with the replacement of family labour in housework among the better off sections in rural areas as with the increasing fragmentation of work and pay (separation of housework, animal husbandry, and agricultural work) among hired workers by farming families.

**Figure 3: Distribution of various categories of Domestic Workers by age groups**

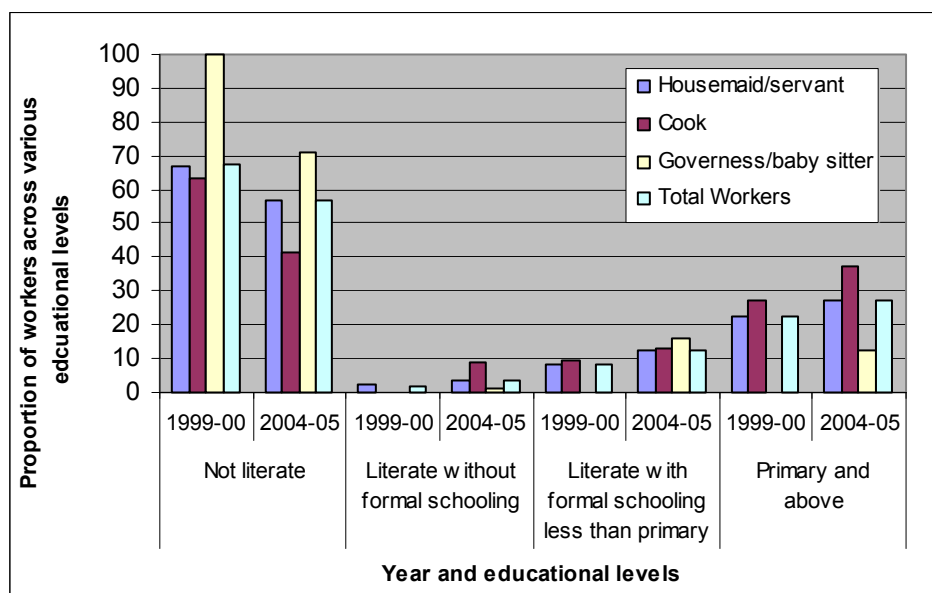


A large proportion of domestic workers are from the age groups 31-40 and 21-30, with some change in the age profiles across the period. The proportion of child housemaid/servants (ages up to 14) has declined from 12 per cent to 5 per cent over the period and the upper age



groups (41 and above) increased. There is also a shift in the age profile of governess/baby sitter – from predominantly older women to middle aged women and a spread over age groups including children. Since a large proportion of domestic workers fall into the reproductive age groups, concerns regarding childcare needs in such households arise.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 4: Distribution of various categories of Domestic Workers by educational levels**

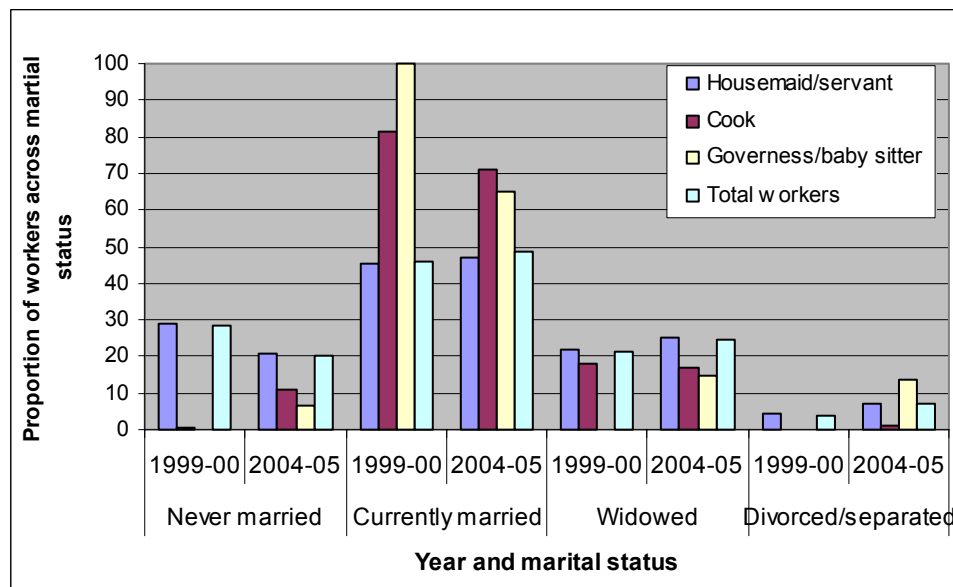


Domestic workers, especially women workers, have low educational levels. A very large proportion of domestic workers are ‘illiterate’, though this declined from 67 to 57 percent. This correlates not only with improving literacy overall, but suggests also the increasing pressure for paid work. Thus, people who earlier would not have accepted working as hired domestic workers are entering the occupation. Most domestic workers with primary or above primary education are cooks, more prestigious work than that of housemaids.

A large number of domestic workers are married (Figure 5), as would be expected from the near universality of marriage, the low average age at marriage, and the age distribution of domestic workers noted earlier. The share of widowed women increased and the number of never married declined. Again, this has implications for childcare responsibilities in the households of domestic workers.

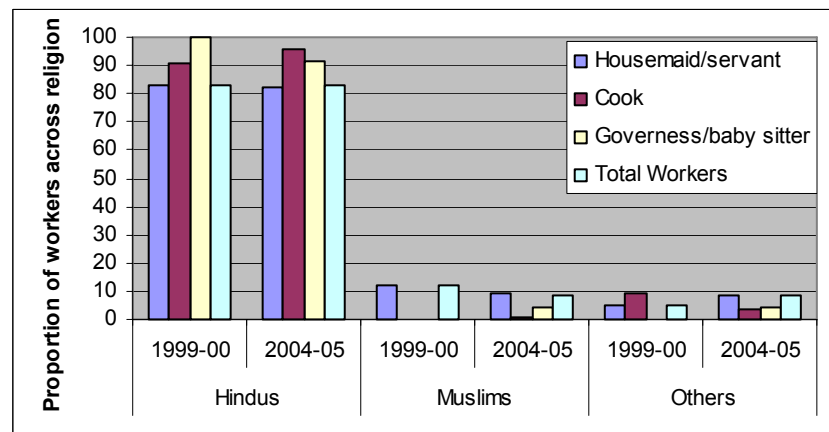
<sup>8</sup> The disaggregated data has to be read with caution as the figures in some cells are very small, leading to large variations.

**Figure 5: Distribution of various categories of domestic workers by marital status**



The percentage of Hindu domestic workers is higher than the percentage of Hindus in the population. The percentages of Muslims have declined over this period. Given that the proportion of Muslims who are below the poverty line is higher than for Hindus, that they are not entering paid domestic work in the same proportion needs to be explained in socio-cultural terms.

**Figure 6: Distribution of various categories of domestic workers by religion**

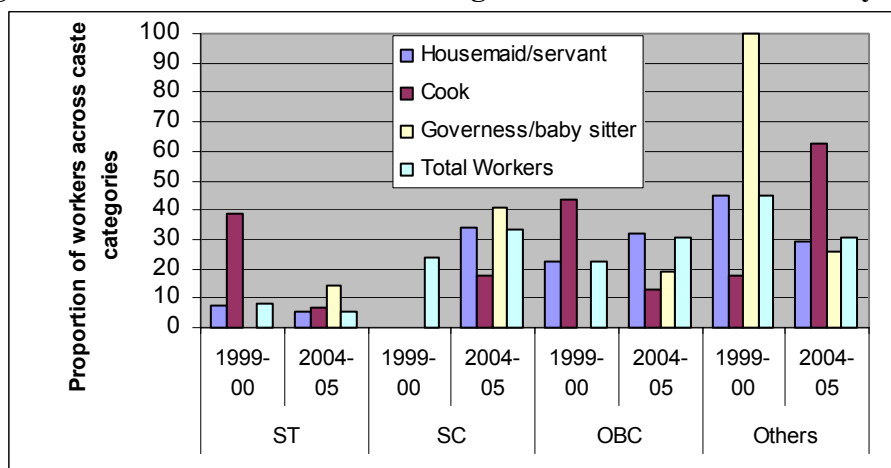


The caste distribution of domestic workers shows a related but somewhat different pattern. The largest proportions of domestic workers are from Scheduled Castes (SC) (33.4).<sup>9</sup> While the proportions of SC women are very high in the categories of housemaid/servant and governess/babysitter, they form a smaller though increasing proportion among cooks. The sharpest increase is seen in the category governess/baby sitter. This is related to the strength

<sup>9</sup> Scheduled Castes are those castes who have suffered severe discrimination and deprivation as 'Untouchables' in the traditional Hindu hierarchy and continue to suffer it to a greater or lesser extent. Scheduled Tribes denotes categories of people who are distinguished by their 'tribal characteristics' and by their spatial and cultural isolation from the bulk of the population. While they are outside the caste categories, on the average they are more deprived economically. Both SCs and STs can avail of specific Constitutional provisions of positive discrimination. Other Backward Castes (OBCs) are a middle category in the caste hierarchy and can avail of a more limited range of statutory measures.

of ideas of purity and pollutions, wherein Hindu, upper caste households did not allow a lower caste person or Muslims to enter the kitchen. However, as the supply of upper caste workers has not kept pace with the demand for domestic workers, employers have not been as strict on this count.

**Figure 7: Distribution of various categories of domestic workers by caste**



Flexibility with regard to caste rules is aided by the fact that a substantial proportion of domestic workers are migrants. This last feature emerges in many micro level studies, including a survey conducted by us in Rohtak town. The shift in caste norms is two-sided. On the one hand, people who would not enter domestic work in their place of origin due to concerns of caste and social status are prepared to do so elsewhere, as Kasturi (1990) found in her study of Tamil domestic workers in Delhi. On the other hand, those who would not be hired as domestic workers in their place of origin were so employed in their place of migration (Raghuram 2001). Thus, the majority of domestic workers from Tamil Nadu are Scheduled Castes (Kasturi 1990; Neetha 2003). In N. Neetha's sample, 80.7% of the live-out workers belonged to the Scheduled Castes and 14.4 % to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. Kaur's (2006) study of slums near upper class residential areas indicated that domestic work was among the most easily entered areas of employment for migrants. Studies have shown that the proportions of migrants are higher among live-in workers and a majority of them are drawn from tribal areas of Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand, which are socially and economically backward.

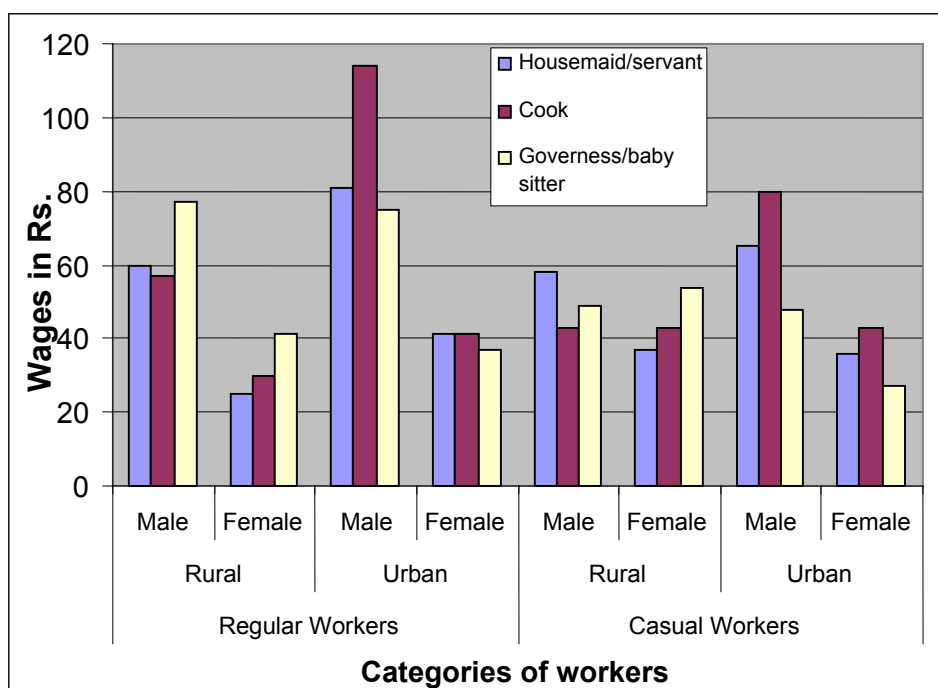
### 2.3 Wages

Macro level employment and unemployment surveys collect wage data from a small sample of workers in each category, classifying them as regular and casual. The data for various categories of rural and urban domestic workers show that very low wage rates were the common feature. The male-female differences in wage rates were also very high and in urban areas extremely striking, though among casual workers the difference was lower. The wages of women domestic workers are less than the National Floor level Minimum Wage of Rs. 80 per day,<sup>10</sup> both in rural and urban areas. The lowest wages reported were that of housemaids/servants, while in urban areas lowest was reported for the category

<sup>10</sup> State governments are supposed to fix minimum wages such that they are not lower than the National Floor Level Minimum Wage.

babysitters/governess. Some of the variations seen by gender and category of work are probably due to sampling errors and the small numbers in particular cells. However, they are broadly in accordance with (i) the view that designates cooking as a more skilled and labour intensive task and childcare as the least labour intensive and skilled; (ii) the generally found female-male differential in wages, even for the same task. It is striking that while qualitative findings indicate that girls/women are preferred as childminders and governesses male wages are higher even in this category (except among rural, casual workers where cell size is likely the factor).

**Figure 8: Average daily wages of domestic workers**



Domestic work occurs in an isolated, largely non-regulated, privatized environment and most domestic workers negotiate job terms and pay without the benefit of official guidelines. Except in a few states in the country, an official minimum wage for the occupation is not specified, which makes workers very vulnerable to exploitation. Wages of domestic workers vary across regions and even by locality in the same town/city. Apart from the variation across larger divisions such as cook, cleaner, and baby sitter, wage rates vary within these divisions as well. A domestic worker under the category cleaner may only perform house cleaning or can take up other cleaning work in addition, such as washing of clothes and/or dishes. For urban, part-time workers, the sub-type showing the most growth, wages even vary with the exact task for which they are engaged, reflecting the socio-cultural hierarchy of work. The number of times such a task is performed during the day and the time required to complete the task is also taken into account in fixing the wage. Total emoluments in urban areas range from Rs 100 to Rs 400 per month for tasks such as washing clothes, utensils, or sweeping and mopping floors. On the other hand, child-care fetches monthly wages in the range of Rs 500-1,000 and cooking is the best paid in the range of Rs 500-1,500 per month. Elderly care commands a wage between childcare and cooking. Wages for some activities are based on the area of the dwelling (sweeping, mopping floors, etc), while others are related to the number of individuals in the family being served (washing clothes and utensils, cooking). Part-time workers themselves try and avoid working for large households. Apart from

monthly wages, a festival 'bonus' is expected, usually given in the form of clothes and sweets.

To some extent, the 'paying capacity' of the employer also has a bearing on wages and the domestic labour market is fragmented by the area of residence and class of the employer. Niche markets develop within a metro city or small town. Thus, the rates paid by 'expatriates' in metropolitan cities are among the highest and workers move from one 'saab' to another. The wages paid in households of similar size and dwelling may further differ as a result of the personal relationship between the employer and employee and the length of service of the worker. In addition, depending on these factors or the need of the employer, the worker might be given help with medical or other expenses. It is difficult to arrive at a uniform daily wage rate for domestic work even for a specified locality (Neetha 2004). One study found differences by state of origin in wages and treatment of domestic workers, linked to common sense valuations of the quality and quantity of work done women of different ethnic background (Mehrotra 2008). In sum, the complexity of the wage structure, with payments made for an intricately worked out 'package' of services that varies from household to household not only makes analysis tricky, it also makes unionisation difficult.

Nor is there any uniformity or regulation of the hours of work, number of working days in a week, and other conditions of work. While employers complain that part-time workers take short cuts to finish their work fast, workers speak of how employers are constantly trying to expand their work load or asking them to take on an extra task 'occasionally' for no extra pay. Most domestic workers have a seven day week and no annual vacations. Even sick leave or negotiated leave affect their income (Neetha 2004; Kaur, 2006). In a situation of extreme hierarchy and informality, the mutually agreed terms are usually biased against the domestic worker. There is no security of employment: they may be dismissed overnight without notice for petty reasons including 'excessive leave', poor quality of work, lack of punctuality, 'answering back', etc. (Kaur 2006). Workers suffer from occupational health problems, especially back aches, joint pains and allergies to detergents and other cleaning agents.

There are no provisions for health insurance or pension. Social exclusion and discrimination is visible. Though they are a part of middle class households, domestic workers are usually viewed as strangers - of a different blood and culture - reflected even in the food they will be given to eat. The lower social and economic status of domestic workers compounded by lack of social confidence and a low level of unionisation makes them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of harassment.

Over the last two decades, there have been attempts by a range of organisations of varied perspective and approach to form unions or groups of domestic workers. Some groups, such as the National Domestic Workers Movement have branches in a large number of states. Others, such as the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), have taken up various specific aspects or have tried to organise workers with small successes within a limited area. Issues taken up include wages and non-payment, recognition as workers, sexual harassment, physical violence or forced attachment of children, compensation for work-related injuries, and legal aid or the formation of Self Help Groups (Jagori 2008). The numbers unionised or even aware of such possibilities remain a small fraction of domestic workers. One feature which emerges from micro studies is that domestic workers from regions/areas where there has been a wider unionisation of workers are more insistent on a

minimum dignity of treatment and get better wages as compared to those who are from regions where there is no such history.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.4 Wages of Domestic Workers Compared to other Informal sector wages

As discussed in the earlier section, domestic workers are by and large not included in labour laws and their wage fixation is not governed by any national, legal norms. Thus, domestic workers' wages have remained low. Domestic workers are largely illiterate or with little education and the alternative job possibilities are unskilled or low skilled work in the informal sector, such as helpers in construction and factories, cleaning tasks in institutional settings (in both the formal and informal sectors) or casual labour in agriculture. Though a minimum wage is fixed for all these different occupations there is little monitoring or concerted implementation by the state. Thus, the actual wages are in many cases much below the minimum wages.

The only all India wage data, collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation, has been widely criticised. As mentioned earlier, the sub-sample of households is small. In the following table a comparison is made between the wages of domestic workers and workers in agriculture and allied services, manufacturing and related sectors and service sector workers.

Table 8: Average daily wages of workers across sectors/occupations (in Rs.)

	Rural				Urban			
	Regular Workers		Casual Workers		Regular Workers		Casual Workers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
All Domestic workers	65	32	58	37	81	41	65	36
Housemaid/servant	60	25	43	43	114	41	80	43
Cook	57	30	49	54	75	37	48	27
Governess/baby sitter	77	41	50	45	90	40	64	35
Agriculture and allied services	45	31	48	33	40	8	59	34
Manufacturing	71	26	70	45	59	29	79	49
Services	82	21	66	42	85	113	69	44
All sectors	51	30	55	35	64	53	74	43

Source: NSSO Employment Unemployment Data, 2004-05

The average daily wages of domestic workers are higher than wages in agricultural and allied services across all rural and urban areas for both casual and regular workers. Rural, female domestic workers have the highest wage, next only to urban, service workers. The wages of female, casual domestic workers, rural and urban, however, are less than manufacturing and service sector wages. Clearly, though female domestic workers' wages were much below the then national floor minimum wage of Rs. 66,<sup>12</sup> given the low wage rates in other informal sector occupations and the lax enforcement of the Minimum Wages Act, domestic work figures as a better wage alternative than many other occupations.

<sup>11</sup> This is noticeable in the comparison between Bengali and Rajasthani domestic workers in Jaipur (Mehrotra 2008: 15), wherein the former report slightly better pay and better valuation of their work, with higher percentages reporting better facilities and benefits in kind and an ability to discuss issues with their employers.

<sup>12</sup> The floor minimum wage during the period of the survey was Rs.66 which was revised in September 2007 to Rs. 80

Hence, domestic workers do not appear to face a wage penalty when compared to other informal sector jobs. Given the possibility of combining childcare and paid work for non-resident workers, domestic work becomes a preferred and possible employment option for many women. However, cultural valuations and the social relations of domestic work (see below) deter women. Their complete exclusion from even a minimum regime of protection and security provided by labour laws and policies has also to be underlined.

The first attempt to regularise domestic work through the draft Domestic Workers' Bill (Conditions of Service) 1959 did not succeed. Collective struggles have led to some changes in a few states in the country. In Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, domestic work has been included in the minimum wages notification. In Tamil Nadu, domestic work has been added to the scheduled list under the Manual Workers Act (Regulation and Employment and Conditions of Work Act), 1982. However, even in Karnataka, which is the first state to fix minimum wages of domestic workers and where there is a strong organisation of domestic workers, the legislative benefits are yet to reach the large chunk of workers. Further, counter political pressures are evident in the removal of domestic work from the scheduled list under the Minimum Wages Act between 1993 (after a year of its inclusion) and 2004.

## **2.5 Changing relations of work and factors in the growth of paid domestic work**

The tasks allocated to paid domestic workers include housecleaning, laundry, cooking, dish-washing, care of children and the elderly, shopping, fetching and dropping children from/to school, and various other activities associated with the regular and smooth functioning of a household. Many of the tasks listed here are often separated in payment and the employee who undertakes them.

Non-familial, domestic workers as an identifiable category have a long history in the Indian context and were embedded in feudal work relations. There have been significant changes in the organisation and relations of employment, concomitant, however, with remarkable continuities. (a) A much wider range of households hire domestic workers than the earlier elite and upper classes of the landed, business, and bureaucratic communities. The expansion of the urban middle class and the rise of a nouveau-rich, rural elite in the form of contractors, agents of MNCs, traders, and transporters has led to a growing demand for hired domestic workers, cutting across caste, religion, and region; (b) The market and the language of contract explicitly frame the terms of employment, such that wage rates are fixed by task. Except for live-in workers, unquantified 'kind' perks are a supplement (albeit important) rather than central to the payment as they were in the past. Yet, the quality of the personal relation remains significant, not only because of the intimate nature of the work, but because of the very nature of the market and the dependence of the worker on the employer for loans, assistance in times of emergency, or other help; (c) Employers are increasingly ready to turn a blind eye to the caste or religion of the worker, especially in metropolitan cities and for specific tasks and particularly if the worker is a migrant; (d) While employer-worker relations in the past were based on shared cultural norms and values, these are manifestly absent in the contemporary institution of hired domestic work even in the case of live-in workers, who may largely be migrant women.

This has meant a tremendous change in the organisation of work and the workers' living situation. Till a few decades ago, both rural and urban domestic workers tended to be attached to a single household, in which they would be responsible for a single or many different tasks,

depending on the economic and social status of the employer, the size of the household and the caste of the worker. Whether they lived as part of the employer's household or not, their hours of work were long - 10 to 14 or more hours per day.

Much of the growth in the last two decades has been of those workers named as 'live-outs' or 'part-time' in the discussions. This system is typically associated with the urban, nuclear households of the Indian middle class, who live in dwellings with insufficient space to accommodate a live-in domestic worker. These workers, predominantly female, undertake heterogeneous tasks in different households. She may be the cook in one house, the cleaner in another house, and in the third do only the laundry. The characterisation of such domestic workers as 'part time' is from the point of view of the employer rather than the employee. For the latter, though she may work only for a few hours in each household, her total hours of work may be greater than that of a 'full time' worker. The flexibility in and instability of employment is more marked, however. Workers shift in and out of the sector and change employers, due both to demand and supply factors (relocation of families employing them, marriage, availability of other types of work, etc.) and the frictions in the daily relationships with employers. The fragmented nature of their work, the multitude of tasks, a multiplicity of employers, and the instability of employment pose challenges in documenting them and in attempts to organise them.

The ethnic and demographic characteristics and recruitment patterns vary considerably across various forms of domestic servants, especially in urban centres, though with visible and discernable commonalities. Some find work through neighbours, relatives, or employers, the most common pattern in the past. Interstate migrant women account for the majority of domestic workers. A recent development in metropolitan cities has been the emergence and upsurge of 'placement' agencies managed by private entrepreneurs and NGOs (Neetha 2004). According to some estimates, there are between 800-1000 placement agencies, with various layers of recruitment agents, in the capital city of Delhi itself. They function with varied terms and conditions placed on the employer and in services offered to the worker and differ considerably in their objectives. The commissions they charge, advance payments, and the absence of regulation are the major attractions to 'entrepreneurs'. Large numbers of women (especially unmarried girls) are mobilized from tribal pockets of the states of Jharkand, Chattisgarh and Orissa. These women migrants depend on middlemen as they are strangers to the city, often illiterate, and have scanty knowledge of the local language. Non-payment of wages, elements of forced/bonded labour, and the possibility of sexual exploitation (by the middlemen, agents and employers) are among the concerns raised in the literature. Thus, the formalisation of paid domestic work with the growth of placement agencies does not seem to have improved the conditions of workers (Neetha 2004).

A combination of cultural and economic factors explains both the feminisation of domestic service in India and the low wages of domestic work. In the literature on modern domestic service, growth trends have largely been explained in terms of economic processes. The changing patterns of industrialization and urbanisation in India have correlated with an expanding '*servant-employing*' middle class and a surplus of unskilled workers, in which the increasing inequality between and within rural and urban areas has been described as a factor. The agrarian crisis (as discussed in RR1 and RR3) has resulted in shrinking employment opportunities in rural areas and much more widespread migration of women to urban areas (AIDWA 2004). A study in Pune, Maharastra (Western India) found that domestic workers continue to have rural roots, a plot of land or a house back in the village, but these resources are not economically sufficient. Ultimately, it is the lack of cash incomes that drive



women/families to live in overpopulated city slums with no amenities, where domestic work is the one type of activity in which they find employment (Moghe 2006). Kaur (2006) found a similar pattern in Delhi.

A different reason cited for the growth in paid domestic workers is the loss of jobs in the organized industrial sector. With the closure of the textile mills in Mumbai and Ahmedabad and the relocation of 'polluting' factories in Delhi, the predominantly male workforce became unemployed and women family members had to find paid work in the informal sector. Many studies have also documented a shift of women workers from construction to domestic work (Neetha 2003; Moghe 2006). Domestic work is the most readily entered and available and, though not unskilled, it is perceived as an extension in a different socio-cultural situation of work women do in their own homes. The sheer lack of alternative opportunities for work in urban areas, especially for young girls and women with limited education is also a factor. Many women are seen to 'take over' the jobs done by their mothers or their mothers-in-law, resulting in a quasi-hereditary occupation. That many of them are deserted at a young age or have become widowed adds to the push.

As indicated earlier, the growth of the sector is much higher in urban areas, which is largely attributed to the new styles and patterns of living associated with transformations in the urban economy and demography. Some aspects may be noted here. The sudden increase in the demand for domestic workers has been related to the emergence of the *dual earner* family. The absolute number of women, who are working outside the household and in jobs which require them to be away from the home through the day, has been growing. The number and proportion of adolescent girls, who are in school or college in a situation of declining family size and fewer girls being born has also been growing. Hence, the proportion of households in which the non-household demands on women's time (and who can afford to hire cheap domestic workers) has also been growing. This has been exacerbated by temporary or long-term nuclearisation of urban households.<sup>13</sup> There may also be resistance to carrying the burden of domestic work by middle-aged women (mothers-in-law) at a point in their life cycle when they assumed that daughters-in-law would relieve them. Nor may they wish to have sole responsibility for young grandchildren through the day. Lastly, despite patterns of nuclearisation, an aging senior generation requiring care is present in a significant proportion of households in which adult women are absent through the day.

Among most sections of the middle and upper classes in India domestic tasks are shaped by a number of paradoxes that affect the hiring of domestic workers. One is the pattern noted for Europe and North America that despite labour saving domestic technologies the time spent on housework did not decline initially as standards of 'cleanliness' and household maintenance rose. In India, these domestic technologies are increasingly available, affordable, have become status symbols, and are important components of domestic consumer markets. However, rather than replacing comparatively cheap domestic workers, these technologies tend to be viewed as additions or fall-backs in situations where workers are not available. A second paradox has been that among the upper middle and upper classes, the demands of 'childcare' have expanded even as children are increasingly absent from home in school. Children are seen to require more personal and individualised attention by adults/mothers. A third feature is the continuing demand for 'traditional', home-cooked food and other services. A last aspect is that even among 'modernising' households there has been a growth of everyday and periodic religious rituals, preparations for which add to the burden of domestic

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<sup>13</sup> The range of social, cultural, and economic factors leading to this cannot be elaborated here.

work. In all these situations, the availability of cheap domestic labour enables households to maintain the life-style they aspire or are accustomed to. Growing sections of the middle class can aspire to the status symbol of 'having' domestic servants, such that even if there is a women member who is not in paid employment, domestic workers will be hired, relieving her of many domestic tasks considered strenuous or of lower value.

With paid domestic workers, the loss and replacement of or supplement to the labour of wives, mothers, and adolescent daughters can occur without disturbing the gender division of labour or the patriarchal construction of work. In fact, the latter may be reinforced. Men do not have to take on work they did not do or share care work more than they did. The low value of domestic work and the low wages of the maid reinforce each other. Further, as indicated earlier, the supply of domestic workers is maintained through a regular and systematic flow of 'distress', migrant workers to urban locations from particular, though changing, rural areas, regions, and socio-economic backgrounds. They are ready to work in low status and low paying jobs due to their absolute need.

Though there have been studies of the conditions of work and employment of domestic workers, there is a dearth of research that looks at them over their life course.<sup>14</sup> Little is known of the intra-household relations of domestic worker households, especially the care dimension. Though this is true for other categories of workers too, due to their dual status as paid carers in employer households and unpaid carers in their own households, domestic workers bring this into sharp relief. A small survey of domestic workers focussing on these issues was conducted in five localities of Rohtak, a town in Haryana.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. Child Care Practices of Paid Domestic Workers**

#### **3.1 Socio-economic and work profile of surveyed workers**

Rohtak is a fast developing town in Haryana in North India, a hub of industrial and agricultural trading activities. After a rough mapping of residential areas in which pockets of domestic workers were concentrated, five areas were selected. Criteria included the nature of employer households that domestic workers catered to, the origins of the workers, and access to the areas and the domestic workers in the immediacy and the long run.<sup>16</sup> From each of these five clusters, 10 workers were selected for detailed study, ensuring that there was at least one child of less than 14 years in the worker's household. Apart from collecting broad socio-economic information and details of employment, care practices were probed in depth. In the following section a profile of the surveyed workers and their work and employment conditions are outlined. The childcare practices adopted in the households of paid carers are discussed in the following sections.

All the respondents were migrants, though a large proportion of them belonged to Haryana. The remaining had migrated from the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Most women who had migrated from other states had moved with their husbands and children, leaving their in-laws in their place of origin. Most of the Haryanvi respondents had migrated with their husbands, children, and in-laws, if alive, or with parents and siblings,

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<sup>14</sup> A few studies that do so are Kasturi (1990) and Kaur (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Based on our open-ended list of questions, activists of the Haryana unit of AIDWA, which is taking initial steps to organise domestic workers, undertook the survey.

<sup>16</sup> Since possible future organization was one of the reasons that the investigators undertook the survey.

though not all lived in joint households. Only a few were very recent migrants. While some of them took to domestic work immediately on migration, many reported a time gap between arrival and domestic service. Uncertainty and irregularity of male employment and the latter's low wages were factors inducing them to enter the labour market. The absence of any skill or education combined with their familiarity with 'housework' to make domestic work almost the only option for them.

All the respondents were Hindu and most were Scheduled Castes. Around 80 per cent belonged to one caste, namely Valmiki, who are the traditional sweeper community in the region. In the past, most of them would not have been allowed into the homes of their employers. Migrants tend to join neighbours and relatives from their place of origin. Thus, the high proportion of Valmikis is as much a reflection of the localised nature of the survey as of the fact that members of the higher castes of the district and state are unlikely to enter paid domestic service so close to home. Most of the women were married and of the age group of 21-30. The youngest respondent was 12 years of age and the eldest 40 years old.

Most respondents lived in nuclear households with husbands and children. At the most, the husband's mother and/or father were also present. Most of the adult men took up whatever work was available - construction, factory work, shop assistant, or other informal work - and found employment on a day to day basis. Other household members were also in paid work, especially in extended households. In a few households 2-3 women/girls were engaged as domestic workers in different homes. Thus, in most households there were at least two earners, while in one the woman domestic worker was the only earner.

Most of the women were engaged in cleaning activities and a large number of them performed all such tasks in a particular home, such as sweeping, mopping, toilet cleaning, and washing clothes and dishes. Though most respondents worked in houses with children below 10 years of age, only one reported any involvement in direct child care work. The almost complete absence of domestic workers' involvement in direct childcare work or cooking in their employers' households is an outcome of the social understanding of care work as well as the caste of the domestic workers. While other household tasks such as cleaning are seen as transferable, care work is largely understood as the most important duty of the women in the household. Women in the employer households mostly did not go out to work. In a few households women were in paid, non-household employment, but other female kin, mostly the mother-in-law, filled the gap. In only one case wherein the employer was a teacher and had no other care supports were the domestic worker's services used in child care. Here too, as the child was attending school and the school timings of the child and the work timings of the mother matched, on normal days no child care requirement arose. In the one case of elderly care (a bedridden widower), the other three household members - 1 son and 2 daughters - are employed. In some other households, though there were old people who were ill, none of the workers reported person care as part of their duties, as household women (wife, daughter, or daughter in law) performed the necessary tasks.

Many respondents worked in more than one employer-house. Though the largest number of workers reported working in 2-3 houses, a considerable number worked in more than 4 houses. Where the hours of work in a particular house were long, workers did not work in more than one or two houses. In fact, women who worked in a single house reported the longest working hours - 7 to 14 hours. These workers remained in the employers' home through the day, on call even after the completion of their assigned work. They were often asked to perform work beyond the contracted tasks. Workers who were employed in a

number of households on the other hand would finish their assigned work and move to the next household. There was considerable variation in the total working hours, which on the average were 5-6 hours in a day. Two women reported working in only one house during the winter and in two houses in the summer, since the day was longer.

Cleaning activities are traditionally carried out in the morning and the services of domestic workers are most in demand at that time. Hence, workers are found moving from one house to another in the morning hours. Some respondents returned from work after their morning duties and again went in the evening for a second round of cleaning, largely of utensils. The patterns of urbanization in the urban centres have ensured the existence of pockets of urban slums that service the surrounding middle and upper class areas. One major reason why poor women prefer paid domestic employment is the location of the work, usually in the vicinity of their own tenements or huts. A number of studies have noted that 'part-time' domestic workers try to find employment close to their place of residence. They are able to undertake their own care responsibilities if their place of employment(s) is nearby, allowing them to return home for a few hours through the afternoon. It also saves them transport costs and the time taken to commute to other work sites, especially when public urban transport is becoming more expensive and deteriorating in quality.

For workers who worked as part-timers, monthly wages varied between Rs. 200 to Rs. 2500,<sup>17</sup> depending on the type of activity and number of houses worked in. Generally, the wage rate for any one type of cleaning was Rs. 150. If a worker performed all the cleaning activities, such as sweeping and mopping floors, washing toilets, washing utensils, and cleaning clothes, over approximately two hours, the rate was Rs. 500 for a month. For those engaged in a single house, there was wide variation in the wage rates, but it could go as high as Rs. 3000. As discussed earlier, the variation was linked to differences in the amount of work and time demanded, the personal relationship with the employer, and the experience of the worker. The average monthly wage was Rs. 1130, far below the official minimum wages of an unskilled wage labourer in any other informal sector job in the state.<sup>18</sup> Most workers could not take any days off without a pay cut, rarely received any medical or other costs, and were occasionally given some food, old clothes, or a festival bonus.

With the concentration of domestic workers in the age group 20-30 years, most of them have childcare responsibilities with at least one child who is 5 years or less in age. Besides them, the childless respondents (in the age group 'below 20') are involved in sibling care and those in the higher age group are involved in care of their grandchildren. Different arrangements are relied on by the respondents. Women undertook the tasks of cooking, feeding, and cleaning of children before they left for work, in the afternoons when they would return briefly, and in the evening. Some were assisted by a young daughter and a few by a mother-in-law or another resident female kin, but most lived (78 per cent) in nuclear households. The biggest problem they faced was child-minding during the day, including feeding and cleaning

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<sup>17</sup> Legal minimum wages in India vary widely across states, but the range for unskilled work is from a low of around Rs 45 per day in rural areas in some states to a high of Rs 120 in urban areas of other states. In Haryana, the lowest minimum wage for unskilled workers is Rs. 138. Therefore, assuming 24 days work in a month, the legal monthly minimum wage is Rs. 3312.

<sup>18</sup> As indicated earlier, the poor implementation of the Minimum Wages Act means that in many informal sector jobs the actual wages are much lower. Hence, if one compares the actual wages of domestic workers with that of other unskilled informal sector wages, the average wages of the former are better though there is no minimum wage fixed for this occupation in many states. The growing demand for domestic workers in recent years is a factor in pushing up wages. This is also reflected in the macro data on wages as given in Table 6, where wages of domestic workers show a comparatively better picture than that of unskilled informal sector workers.

of infants. The practices resorted to ranged from leaving the children unsupervised to taking the children to their workplaces. These arrangements were not water tight or exclusive compartments. For example, women, who managed most care tasks on their own and then left their children to fend for themselves through the day, took their children to their workplaces, drew on the help of neighbours or did not report to work, in the event of a contingency. Though schooling meant that for some hours children were removed from parental and familial care, school hours and the working time of mothers did not always match. Additional and regular child minding practices were necessary for the time of the mother's absence from home. Thus, though households could be sorted according to their main care practice, most households combined it with other care arrangements occasionally or on a regular basis.

The situation was similar to and different from that described by Kaur for domestic workers living in slums in Delhi. "They fit their own housework, domestic lives (family duties), socializing, leisure and their children's care and schooling into their work routines. For child care, women enter into several reciprocal arrangements with friends and neighbours...people connected with each other through kinship/friendship/village/regional links inhabit adjoining spaces. Thus, doors are often left unlocked and children tend to themselves; neighbours baby sit children while mothers are at work; local grocers give goods without demanding immediate payment" (Kaur 2005: 2007). Much of life in these settlements take place in the by-lanes except in the hottest months and while the close proximity and supervision in which people live may have its disadvantages, easy child-minding is one of the advantages. In such neighbourhoods, however, most adults may be at work and absent during the day as our respondents seemed to suggest. Nor did we find the practice of group child-minding for a small fee, which Kaur observed in Delhi. Nor were migrants bringing young female kin from their place of origin to help them. In Rothak, those with the longest working hours were unmarried and childless, or had at least one child over the age of 10 who cared for her/his younger siblings, or were living in extended families, or relied on neighbours.

In the following section the various arrangements made for child-minding and infant care are reported, along with occasional glimpses of relationships with employers. Unless otherwise stated, all the cases narrated are of married women of the Valmiki caste. Material from a rural survey conducted in Tamil Nadu and some material on *anganwadi* workers is also drawn on.

### **3.2. Self Care or Children left unsupervised**

Lack of alternative care arrangements meant many domestic workers left their children at home without any adult supervision. This was a prevailing practice particularly in nuclear households where all the adult members were in paid employment outside the household. While the services of neighbours or *anganwadis* were used occasionally or partly, self care - by children themselves - was the major form of child minding. The surroundings in which these children were left were not very hygienic or safe for young infants. These poor households lived in thatched, temporary huts in congested localities. In many cases, homes were near roads with motorised traffic and the fear of the child going out to the open road was a major concern of many mothers. For parents with slightly older children, who were seen to be more 'mature' and able to handle day-to-day situations, self care was viewed as a practical option. The following case studies provide insights into the determinants and dynamics involved in the selection of child self care as an option by women domestic workers.

*Case 1. Kiran:* She is 22 years old and has two children- a son (4 years) and a daughter (one and a half years old). Her caste is Kurmil, a 'low' caste. She migrated to Rohtak from Bihar. Her parents-in-laws are dead. They live in a rented house and do not own any land. Her husband is a casual labourer and she works in four houses in various cleaning activities. She chooses to work in houses that are close to her home because she has two small children. She comes back in between houses to check on them. She cooks before she leaves in the morning. She leaves before her husband, who ensures that the children eat before he leaves. At times, he also bathes them. She said, "We tie the key of our house around our son's neck so that they can enter and eat when they feel hungry. Our neighbours also go out to work and all the children around play amongst themselves." When she returns from work, she bathes her children. Earlier she had sent her children to the anganwadi, but stopped doing so, because they were given stale food on one occasion and fell ill. "Children are not taken care of or taught anything there." Sometimes she takes her children to her employers' houses, but they have asked her not to do so. She said that their son is not going to school, because if he does, there will be no one at home to take care of their infant daughter. She cannot take a day off from work even when her children are ill, without her pay being cut. Quite often, due to this lack of care and attention, their condition worsens – adding to the care demands. "Sometimes the children throw shoes and other things out of the house... At times, they leave the door of the house open and the cat comes in and drinks the milk we bought for them. They do not eat or rest when they are ill, which makes them weaker."

*Case 2. Rita:* She is 23 years old and has 3 children (5 years - daughter, one and a half years-son and the third child of a few months- daughter). This is an extended household of 8 members and her father-in-law is the head. All the five adults are earning. Her father-in-law and brother-in-law are casual labourers and her husband drives a tractor, while both she and her mother-in-law are domestic workers. Rita works in three houses and has been working for the last 5 years. She leaves for work at 7.00 a.m. and returns after 7 hours. It takes her 15 minutes to reach her place of work. Her employers don't give her a day off and deduct her pay if she does not turn up for work. Rita cooks food in the morning before leaving for work. Her mother-in law works nearby and normally comes to feed the children. However, on days when this is not possible, since all the adults are absent during the day, her 5-year old daughter takes care of her younger siblings. Rita was not very clear as to what was done when the children were younger, but it appeared that she worked in fewer households and for fewer hours, with her mother-in-law and her managing the care between them.

*Case 3. Anjali:* She is 26 years old and has three children, two sons and a daughter (10, 5 and 3 years old). Their rented, kuccha house consists of one room and does not have a toilet or bathroom. Her husband works at a brick kiln and she leaves for work at 8.00 a.m. and returns after 3 hours. At times she works for 2 extra hours. Though she has been working at this house for the last 8 years, she cannot take a day off and on days that she does not turn up for work, her employer summons her. She has to go to work even when she or her children are ill. Her elder son has the responsibility of minding his younger siblings. She said, "There is nobody to take care of my children at home. They are not able to go to school. They play in dirt and keep on crying. They do not bathe for weeks in winter." Earlier she used to tie her children to her back while working. But since they have grown, her employer does not allow her to bring them with her. She has good relations with her neighbours and they tend to children if they are ill or during emergencies.

Of the reasons given as to why child self care was the chosen mode, the absence of alternative care provisions that were suitable and affordable, whether institutional or informal, was the

most important. Most of the neighbourhood women were also in the labour market (in many cases as domestic workers), such that active neighbourhood care was difficult. The passive presence of neighbours who pitch in during emergencies was important, however, in accepting this care arrangement. It is a practice which women spoke of with a mixture of pathos, suffering, and resignation. One woman described how in the past she had to leave her child alone, on their one cot with lots of padding around her. She had no choice but to go out to earn and did not know anybody in the vicinity she could ask for help. She would return to find the child in a mess and one day on the floor. In Kiran's case, the elder child was only four years of old, hardly of any age to do more than run or call for help if he or his sister were in trouble. In most of these cases, mothers work nearby and can come and attend to the child at various times during the day and quickly if the need arises. Usually at least one child is above 4 years. The line between self care and sibling care in these households is thin, for one may well suppose that such a young 'older' sibling cannot care for her/himself let alone a younger sibling. Yet, informants would name it as 'sibling' care.

### **3.2. Sibling Care**

Sibling care is the other most widely resorted child care practice. Parents find it safe to leave children at home in the care of elder children, especially daughters. However, as indicated, the transition from self care to sibling care is at times questionable. The carer child in some cases replaced the mother in performing duties such as cooking, feeding younger ones, bathing them and managing them in the absence of the mother.

*Case 4. Lakshmi: She is 27 years old and has 3 children (daughter is 12 years old and sons are 9 and 5 years old). This household is nuclear. She is employed in 2-3 houses. She is absent for about 4-5 hours and does not go to work on Sundays, unlike most of the women. She was a paid, domestic worker in her natal village even before her marriage. Her husband earns a very good wage at a sugar mill, Rs. 8000 a month, but he is an alcoholic and does not contribute to the household expenses. Earlier her mother-in-law took care of her children, but she has died. Her eldest child now takes care of the younger ones, when she goes to work. Because of her child care responsibility, the girl was not sent to school while the elder son goes to a nearby school.*

*Case 5. Shakuntala: She is 26 years old and has 5 children - four daughters and a son. The daughters are 15, 7, 5 and 4 years old, while the son is 10 years old. The household is nuclear. She works in 6 houses and is absent for about 7 hours. She has been working as a domestic worker for 8 years, starting after her elder daughter was seven years old and able to care for herself and for her siblings. Her husband (35 years) is a casual labourer, but works only occasionally due to illness. She is the main earner. Four of her children are going to school and one of her daughters has dropped out of school. The last takes care of her siblings before school hours and once they are back from school. She cooks food and cleans the house and at times also helps her mother at her employers' households.*

Parents name the mode of care as sibling care when the elder child is nearing or in her teens, and in such cases childcare may be left to children even in extended households. The charge of caring for siblings is a deterrent to school enrolment or leads to drop outs, especially if the elder sibling is a girl.

### **3.3. Neighbourhood Care**

People did not easily request a neighbour to child mind on a regular basis and nor did most neighbours want the responsibility. More than active childcare, however, casual 'keeping an eye out' and emergency care of children of working mothers is the most important service rendered by neighbours. There may be no explicit understanding, but the presumption of such assistance does enter a household's decisions on child care practices. There are neighbours, however, who take on more than passive responsibilities of child care as in the case narrated below. Being of similar economic background, the neighbours understood the mother's compulsion to take up paid employment and though the care demand was high they accepted it. Regional and caste affinities also played a role.

*Case 6. Sitai:* She is 25 years of age and has two children, a son (6 years) and a daughter (2 and a half years old). Her caste is Ahir and she migrated from U.P. with her husband, leaving her in-laws at their place of origin. They live in a rented house, which has no provision for electricity or drinking water. She works in 4 houses and is absent from her home for 5 hours. She is allowed to take 2-3 days off in a month. She said, "Sometimes I have to take a day off because my children are small." Her husband is a construction worker and he leaves for work before her. Her neighbour, who is also from her village and is from the same caste group, takes care of her children when she goes to work. She said, "They know my situation. There is a railway line behind our house, so I am constantly scared that the children may wander off there." There is no anganwadi near their house. At times, she takes her children to her place of work. One employer gives biscuits to her children.

*Case 7. Reena:* She is 28 years old and has three children- a daughter (9 years) and two sons (6 and 3 years old). They own their house but do not own any land and do not have a ration card. They migrated from a nearby village leaving her in-laws behind. Her husband is unemployed. She works in 5 houses, but is absent for only 5 hours. It takes her half an hour by cycle to reach her place of work. Her employers give her medicines and she is allowed two holidays a month. She does not take her children to her employers' houses. Her daughter and older son have started going to school. She wakes up in the morning and prepares food for her children and packs their lunch. Her neighbour drops her children to school and also takes care of the youngest child till she comes back from work. At times, her husband takes care of the children. However, "Sometimes my children roam around the railway line, in the fields with dirty children. I am always worried about this."

From the above and other cases, it appears that where women rely on neighbours for active child care, all the children are below 10 years of age, the households are nuclear, and some or all the children go to school.

### **3.4. Relatives**

In many cases, mother-in-laws and unmarried sisters-in-laws provided the needed care in the absence of a working mother. Interestingly, women living in extended households with male kin such as fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, but no female kin, relied on either self care or sibling care. This was both because the men were in paid work and due to the notions of the gendered responsibility for domestic work and child care. The last was reflected in the low level of participation of most fathers in childcare, even when unemployed. Only in one of the households covered were children left with their grandfather. Child minding was all that the old man had to do, but the mother complained of his uncooperative and irresponsible behaviour, where he would forget the children, visiting friends to play cards.



*Case 8. Jamuna: She is 26 years old and has two small children, a son who is 5 years old and a daughter who is 1 year old. She works in three houses and though they are located in three different 'colonies' all are five minutes from her home. She returns home after 7-8 hours. Her employers do not deduct money from her pay if she takes a day off due to an emergency and she gets four holidays a month. Jamuna has replaced her sister-in-law and thus has a long relationship with her employers. Her husband works in a cable T.V. shop and also runs a small general goods store. Her mother-in-law lives with them and looks after the children, ensuring that the children eat and bathe on time. If her mother-in-law is away, she leaves her children with her sister-in-law who lives next door. If both are absent, she carries her children to her employers' houses or takes the day off. She said that they were too young to be left alone. On normal days she completed other tasks of childcare after returning from work.*

*Case 9. Dhanno: She is 21 years old and has two children (3 years and 1 and a half years old). She migrated to Rohtak from M.P with her husband, in-laws and children. They don't own any land and are very poor. There is no tap, toilet or bathroom in their house. She works in two houses, located in two different colonies. She leaves the house for work at 7.00 a.m. and returns after 4-5 hours. Her employers do not let her take a day off. Her mother-in-law is also a domestic worker. Her husband works as a labourer. Her father-in-law sometimes drives a rickshaw, but stays at home most of time. At times, she takes her children to her employers' houses, but has been asked by the latter not to do so. Her father-in-law takes care of the children after everybody leaves for work. She cooks food before she leaves for work and bathes the children after she gets back home. She said, "My father-in-law does not pay much attention to our children. Because of that I have to come back fast." She narrated the following incident. "Once my children had gone far away to a shop while playing. There a stranger lured them with candy and would have carried them away. The shopkeeper was known to us. She stopped the man and got my children home. She told my father-in-law to take care of the children otherwise someone will take them away....There is no place nearby where my children can go for some hours in a day. Nobody is able to take care of them properly. I work in only two houses because of my children."*

*Case 10: Lata: She is 40 years old and the household consists of her husband, three unmarried children, her mother-in-law and a six-year old granddaughter. They had migrated from a nearby village and are Jats, the dominant caste of the region. The house they live in is their own. Both her mother-in-law and she are domestic workers. She works in 2 houses, for a total of 4 hours. Two sons are casual labourers, but her husband is unemployed and an alcoholic. Her youngest daughter and her granddaughter go to school. She prepares their breakfast and packs their lunch and sends them to school before she leaves for work. She returns home by the time they are back from school. If not, her sons take care of their niece. Lata said, "If she (granddaughter) was not going to school, I would have to stop working. She is small and requires full time attention - that is why my daughter has sent her here."*

In the above case, we see two common North Indian practices. One is the help provided by mothers to married daughters in caring for a child sent to live with them as the child's own mother finds it difficult to manage.<sup>19</sup> Second, married daughters may send a child to live with her parents or brother if better schooling is available there than near her marital home. The former is made easier if the latter is the case, as the care burden is shared between the school and the grandmother.

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<sup>19</sup> Married couples live with the man's parents. For Hindus, village exogamy is also the norm.

### 3.5. Schooling as an Alternative

For children enrolled in school, mothers are relieved of child care during school hours. Many mothers see the enrolment of children in school as enabling their labour market entry. The relatively long hours (6-8) were perceived as a good arrangement for children. Many women reported taking up domestic work once their children started school, even though school timings did not completely match the work timings of domestic service. Workers were required during the early hours of the day, such that there could be an interval between their departure and that of the children. People were of the view that children of school going age were capable of taking care of their daily routines as long as food and other necessities were provided. Thus, schooling was combined with early morning self care and care by the mother when the child returned from school. Most workers returned home by the time children were back from school and prepared food for them. Dropping and picking up young children to/from schools was a problem. If husbands could/did not take on this responsibility, mothers took breaks or sought the help of relatives or neighbours.

*Case 11. Priti: She has five children - 4 sons and a daughter. She and her husband migrated from nearby and her father-in-law lives with them. They own their house. She has been in domestic service for 10 years and is presently employed in 6 houses. She returns home after 6 hours. Her employers deduct pay if takes a day off even when she is ill and scold her if she brings her children to work. All her children study at a government school in standards 12, 10, 9, 5, and 3. Her father-in-law stays at home. She did not work when the children were small as there was no one to look after the children in her absence. "Once the children started going to school and were able to take care of themselves I took up (paid) work. I come back before they return from school or otherwise my father-in-law is there."*

Some children who were first in the birth order were irregular in school attendance, not through their own volition, but as they had to look after younger siblings or help in the home and were not able to keep up with school work. This could lead to them dropping out of school altogether. For instance, in one of the households, all the children were going to school with the exception of the daughter (9 years) who had dropped out. She took care of her younger siblings. At times, she even helped her mother at her employers' houses. Working parents worried that were unable to ensure that their children were actually in school and that children would roam all over the place on school holidays and during vacations. Short term holidays were managed by making some adjustments in the work timing or by taking the help of relatives or neighbours, but this was not possible over long periods. Children were left to their own devices and care at these times.

### 3.6. Child Care at the Workplace

As the above cases have indicated, the possibility of carrying children to the workplace was not an option for most domestic workers as employers did not allow them to do so. Despite these restrictions, mothers sometimes took their children with them when they were ill, refused to let the parent leave them behind, or as a treat or outing. The following case is truly an exception.

*Case 12. Dimple: She had her three children (10, 5 and 3 years old) very young . She entered paid work after marriage and though they own their house, it consists of only one room. Dimple works in one house, where she has worked for over a decade and is absent from home*

*for 3 hours. At times, she does work other than the cleaning she has contracted for. Her employer's household consist of 6 persons, including his two sons, both of whom are teachers and separated from their wives. Their children are young and she is occasionally involved in childcare related tasks. Her employers give her clothes, medicines when she falls ill, and don't deduct her pay when she takes the day off (if her children are ill), though they threaten that they will. At times, they give her tea and food. Her mother-in-law is also working and her husband is a government sanitation worker. He does not help her with housework, but has reduced his consumption of alcohol. Two of her children go to school. She often takes one of her children to her employer's house, which is an option only because her employer "is a nice person." She does not work in more houses as she does not want to leave the children on their own for longer hours.*

### **3.7. Child Care at Anganwadis**

The use of *anganwadis* for childcare is almost completely absent, though *anganwadis* existed in all the studied areas. *Anganwadis* are seen as a place to obtain free food and perhaps pre-schooling, but not as a place to leave an infant. The inconvenient timings and the short duration of the *anganwadis* is unsuitable to the requirements of many domestic workers. Most of the workers had to report for work by 7.00 or 8.00 a.m. in the morning and were free after 3-5 hours. Some had evening duties of 2-4 hours till about 7.00 p.m. *Anganwadis* are supposed to be open for 4 hours between 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. - usually between 10.00 a.m. to 1 p.m., hours falling in the middle of the working day.

The lack of adequate staff and the demand on the parents to drop and pick up the child also affects their usage of the centres, even for the free meal. Only one respondent reported the use of *anganwadi* facilities. This was an extended household, where a young, unmarried aunt is present to drop and pick up the children between houses and her housework responsibilities at home.

### **3.8. Domestic workers in Tamil Nadu**

From the few cases of past or present domestic workers surveyed in rural Vellore District of Tamil Nadu, the scenario contrasts with the above on a number of counts. The most striking is the much greater use of *anganwadis*, including for children of extended households. Here too, however, the hours were not always compatible and women gave up their paid domestic work after having children or if they found the hours difficult to handle. Further, though employers seemed easier about their domestic worker bringing a child along than in Rohtak town, if children fell ill the mother had to stay at home. If the last continued for a number of days, it could result in their being fired. Again, the school was more significant for women than the *anganwadis* in enabling their absence from the house and direct childcare, not least because the children were older. In Vellore too, domestic workers could be of 'lower' castes or Muslims, who are considered to be 'low' by upper caste Hindus. Poverty levels were high, but many of these women had been through primary school, unlike the illiterate domestic workers of Rohtak. Rural, Tamil women moved in and out of domestic work more easily, perhaps because the demand was lower in rural areas, but also because other employment possibilities were available.

### **3.9 Determinants of Child Care Practices**

Drawing on the above case studies, this section discusses some of the general features and determinants of household choices in childcare practices and the balance made between paid work and childcare.

Mothers are seen as the principal child carer in every household and their entry into domestic work leads to care deficits which are addressed in a variety of ways as narrated above. The choice is influenced by a number of factors. First, the type of household (nuclear, extended) and the presence of adult women in the home during the day are very important. Most of the respondents lived in nuclear households and there were no adult family members to tap as child-minders. The predominance of nuclear households among domestic workers was a consequence of their migrant status, which also meant that there could be few if any kin in the neighbourhood. Children were on their own with a possible 'older' sibling, or sent to school, with or without neighbourhood care. In three or more generation extended households, in the absence of mothers, children are looked after by other household members - old, unemployed, ill, unmarried. In the absence of adult female kin in such households, however, apprehensions are clearly articulated as to whether men will take childcare responsibilities seriously, and tensions and conflict are more than likely. Unemployed fathers are also not seen as reliable carers. Significantly, in many of our cases of extended households, all the adult members are in 'outside', paid employment and hence cannot be carers.

Second, the age of the children and presence of elder siblings are important considerations. 'Self care' usually occurs only when the child is more than 4 years old and/or has older siblings. In households where there is at least one child who is more than 5 years old, the eldest child - particularly if a girl - looks after her/his younger siblings. Increasingly children are going to school by the age of 5 or 6, especially in urban contexts, but provided that they do not have any responsibility of sibling care.

Third, the location and type of work of mothers has a bearing on childcare practice. In most cases of child 'self care', the mother worked in a nearby locality, and could check on the child during her work day or quickly return home in an emergency. None of the workers working in far away localities left their children in self care. Fourth, in housecleaning and laundry work, the hours could be clearly set and limited to the early morning hours and it was possible to add or subtract houses according to a woman's childcare responsibilities at home. These two aspects suggest that these women find domestic work as more compatible with childcare responsibilities than other employment options which would entail longer hours and where the work site could be further away. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of the work, which otherwise undermined the possibility of unionisation and pay enhancement, gave a flexibility to the women in terms of moving between home and work, adding or subtracting working hours and adding or subtracting sympathetic or difficult employers.

Fifth, the presence of neighbours, especially those who share similar a social and economic background is important. This is true in the case of active childcare and in casual supervision and occasional or emergency help.

Sixth, the attitude of employers and restrictions on bringing children with them to work meant that mother could do so only when the children were very young or in emergencies. Employers thought that the presence of children, who would require checking, would distract the mother, whereas the mothers wanted to rush through their work because their children were not with them.

Last, but the most important factor, is the lack of any institutional child care facility which is affordable, functioning, in the vicinity, and seen to provide quality care. This absence was pointed out by many domestic workers. *Anganwadis*, due to their timings, the limited focus on the midday meal, and the sense that their children would not be treated well, is not seen as an institutional option by many workers. Schools to some extent did meet the requirements of older children. The needs of small children, whose care demands are greater and specialised, are largely left unaddressed. This is found to affect even the schooling of older children as they are entrusted with sibling care.

#### 4. Anganwadi Workers

The ICDS scheme, also called the ‘Anganwadi Programme’, has been described at some length in Report 3. The post-1992 decision to expand the ICDS saw an increase in the number of ICDS centres across the country.

Table 5: Number of Anganwadi Centres

Year	1992	1997	2002	2006	2008
No. of <i>anganwadi</i> centres ( all-India)	249,310	347,408	545,714	748,229	1,010,912

The number of centres remains much below the estimate made by the Supreme Court Commissioners of 1.4 million for rural and tribal areas and 0.3 million for urban areas required if the programme is to cover every hamlet, all children under six and all eligible women. the situation in both Tamil Nadu and Haryana was much better than the all-India picture and improved further in the last 5 years. In early 2008, Tamil Nadu had 71% and Haryana 79% of the *anganwadi* centres each state required.<sup>20</sup>

Many people are involved in the implementation of ICDS. In this chapter, we focus on the ground-level staff, the *anganwadi* worker (AWW) and *anganwadi* helper (AWH), who are the direct care givers in the centres. These centres are supposed to function also as crèches and pre-schools, but began as and remain primarily centres running supplementary nutritional programmes for children aged 0-6 and pregnant and lactating mothers. The AWW surveys the locality for possible beneficiaries, enrolls children, runs the centre, ensures that meals are served on time, and beneficiaries receive their supplementary nutrition and immunisation shots (in co-ordination with the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife), conducts pre-school activities, makes home visits, etc. The AWH cleans the centre, cooks the food given to beneficiaries, and (in TN) brings children to the centre.

The sanctioned posts, the number of workers and the vacancies as on February 2008 are given below. In recent years, vacancies have been filled - all the posts of AWW in Haryana, 95.4 % in Tamil Nadu, and 91.4 % at the all-India level. At first sight, Haryana and Tamil Nadu appear better than many other states, where AWWs are overloaded or centres do not open except in name. However, given that Tamil Nadu’s model of 2 helpers is implemented in about 2000 centres, these figures suggest that over 6000 centres in the state do not have a helper and hence are operational only in name.

Table 6: Status of AWW and AWH Positions (as on February 2008)

<sup>20</sup> Calculated from figures on <http://wcd.nic.in/>, accessed 31.3.2009

State	Anganwadi Worker			Anganwadi Helper		
	Sanctioned	In Position	Vacant	Sanctioned	In Position	Vacant
Haryana	17,192	17,192	0	17,192	17,104	88
Tamil Nadu	47,265	45,086	2,179	47,265	43,104	4,161
All India	1,052,638	961,975	90,663	1,052,638	953,483	99,155

#### 4.1 Social background and recruitment

As mentioned earlier, the *anganwadi* workers (AWW) and helpers (AWH) are not classified as workers, but as social workers/volunteers/honorary workers receiving a stipend.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the systematic data that is available on paid workers is not available for them.<sup>22</sup> The discussion below is based on interviews with individual AWW&Hs, reports of trade unions of AWW&H and surveys made by the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (henceforth AIFAWH) before its triennial conferences, other unofficial commentaries on the ICDS programme, the website of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and a study it commissioned in 2006.

The variation in the age range at the point of recruitment of AWW&H is quite large in any one state and between states and over time.<sup>23</sup> The NIPCCD survey (2006)<sup>24</sup> recorded 33% as over 45 years of age, 33% between 35-45 years old and 30% in the age group 25-35 years. As recruitment increased and became formalised, there was a downward swing in age, but as the numbers seeking the post increased, educational qualifications increased and so also the age of recruitment. In the NIPCCD study, 43.2% AWW were matriculates (school leaving certificates) and 23% had higher secondary (pre-university level) education. Only around 1% was illiterate. About 10% were graduates and the trend is towards recruitment of graduates and even post-graduates, reflecting the dearth of work opportunities for women, particularly ‘respectable’ jobs in rural areas.

Women apply for the position of AWW though it is considered to be of lower status than that of the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) (Ramachandran et al. 2003), partly because the place of work is non-transferable and relatively close to their place of residence. AWWs tend to be local, even from the same village or ward (80% in the NIPCCD survey). In Haryana and in much of north India, the marriage pattern of village exogamy means that those recruited locally when unmarried would no longer be local residents. Many unmarried recruits stopped work on marriage, while a few commuted. In Tamil Nadu, one third of AWW&H commute a distance of 10-20 km. from their place of residence. In contexts where mobility restrictions are imposed on women, as AWW&Hs they are able to go out of the home with dignity and status. Sundaraman (2006) found that the identity AWWs aspired to was that of health workers and teachers - people of standing and respect who did ‘good’ for the community.

<sup>21</sup> These three terms are taken as synonyms in public discourse in India, as also at times in official circles. ‘Social worker’ then refers not to a person trained in social work and earning their livelihood from social work as a profession, but to a voluntary or charity worker, which NGO workers are also assumed to be. It can be a self-given description taken on by political activists and those who wish to suggest that they are working for the social good rather than personal benefit.

<sup>22</sup> Despite inquiries we have not been able to clarify in which occupational category AWW and AWH are counted in NSS surveys.

<sup>23</sup> There are variations in the patterns and recruitment in projects supported by World Bank (restructured in 8 states), NGO operated and the regular ICDS. While the NIPCCD study was biased towards NGO run projects, the regular ICDS are the dominant structure.

<sup>24</sup> [http://nipccd.nic.in/publications\\_frame.htm](http://nipccd.nic.in/publications_frame.htm), accessed 1.4.2009.

Public and media acknowledgement and a sense of being close to the knowledgeable and the powerful (through regular contact with officials) help in making the position of AWW attractive in rural areas.<sup>25</sup> Many join in the hope that their services may be regularised and they will become government employees, as has happened in Puducherry.<sup>26</sup>

A large proportion of the AWW&H are deserted, single, divorced, or widowed women, often with the stipend as their only source of income (AIFAWH documents). In the early years of the programme, recruitment was influenced by two contradictory features. On the one hand, women from the local community were to be inducted, such that if SCs dominated in numbers, the AWW was to be of that caste. Within this, women heads of household (assumed to be widows, deserted, separated, and divorced women) were to be preferred. On the other hand, women did not know of these possibilities, did not apply for the posts, and caste equations being such, rather than seek them out, recruiters appointed women from other villages and castes. Even as educational qualifications have been introduced, knowledge of these posts has spread and educational levels among women in all communities have improved. The desire for a non-transferable but apparently 'government job' has grown, especially in rural areas. The preference given to widows/divorcees has declined. Thus, there are more widows among AWW who have been working for 10-15 years and the educational levels of newer recruits are higher.

In terms of the caste, local equations are significant, seen in the striking difference between Haryana and Tamil Nadu. In Haryana, the AWW tends to be of the middle and higher castes and AWH of the lower and Scheduled Castes. In Tamil Nadu, there is an explicit preference to recruit women of Scheduled Castes and Tribes followed by those of minority religious groups - Christians and Muslims. This reflects the local political strength and organisation of the non-upper castes in Tamil Nadu, as well as Tamil Nadu's closer compliance with the Supreme Court guidelines. The last is probably related to the effects of state politics on the bureaucracy as well as NGO and trade union pressure. According to the AIFAWH, a significant proportion of AWW and AWH are from families of labourers and small peasants. The stronger emphasis on the AWW&H being of the local community and the establishment of one *anganwadi* for every 1000 population has enabled poor and SC women with primary education to join.

In Tamil Nadu, AWW used to be selected from among the matriculates (school graduates) who had registered with the Employment Exchange. Since 2005, posts are advertised and a committee consisting of senior members (directors and programme officers) of the State Social Welfare Board interview and select the candidates. The recruitment process has become a point of conflict in recent years as evident from the documents of struggles initiated by the AIFAWH. In Haryana, the earlier system was that interviews and selection of the AWW&H took place at the district level. Since 2007, in the name of devolution of powers to the *panchayat*,<sup>27</sup> a 12 member village level committee has been formed. It includes 2 *panchayat* members, widows, village *chowkidars*<sup>28</sup>, adolescent girls and the Anganwadi

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Hemlata, General Secretary, All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH), 3.4.2009.

<sup>26</sup> Though rising, the level of educational qualifications for AWW (though not for AWH) is broadly what is found among crèche workers, where pre-school activities are not likely to be emphasised and where 'helpers' are available for much of the physical work. Thus, the educational levels of women who began family day care centres in Mumbai were also rarely more than matriculation and that was one reason why they took to running crèches - their inability to get other work (Datta 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Village Council.

<sup>28</sup> Village 'watchmen', an officially designated position said to have a long tradition.

Worker, but the main power is wielded by the village headman. The village council chiefs want somebody close to them, not only to favour their kith and kin and distribute favours to their supporters, but as ‘commissions’ on money received for rent (of space for a centre) and for food and other materials as well as the influence that the AWW can have within the village. Members of the AIFAWH complained of rampant nepotism and corruption in selection, of fights over ration allocation and factionalism, and an overall decline in the centres. While many of the woman members of the village council were interested in the centres running well, they often had little say as their husbands were the real powers. One of the main union organisers in Haryana said that the services of earlier well-run urban centres had declined. In some states, the attempt to privatise the recruitment process to the supervisor post was protested by the AWW&Hs. They saw this as an attempt by the state to withdraw from the ICDS programme.

#### 4.2. Pay and Benefits

AWW&H are treated as volunteers who are paid an ‘honorarium’ and this has been reiterated by the Review Committee whose recommendations were accepted by the government in July 2008. When the *anganwadi* scheme began in 1975, the AWW was paid an honorarium of Rs.100/- per month (Non-Matriculate) and Rs.150/- per month (Matriculate/school graduate) and the AWH was paid Rs.35/- per month. While stipends have increased over the years, in Tamil Nadu, when AWW&H are recruited they are told that the “work would be social work in nature, which would include helping people below the poverty line and the payment they would receive would therefore be very meagre” (Interview). Currently, the ‘honorarium’ consists of two parts, one paid by the Government of India and the other by the various state governments.

Table 7 : Monthly Honorarium of AWW and AWH

State	AWW/AWH	1998			2008		
		GOI	State govt.	Total	GOI	State govt.	Total
Haryana	AWW	500	200	700	1500	400	1900
	AWH	260	100	360	750	300	1050
Tamil Nadu	AWW	500	428	928	1500	1853	3353
	AWH	260	230	490	750	860	1610

Source: AIFAWH (derived from the website of the Ministry of Women and Child Development)

In Tamil Nadu, the second helper - for the noon meal - gets about Rs. 300 less than the main helper, but was there in only 2000 centres in 2005. The totals for pay in 2008 will depend on whether the state governments implement the recent enhancements announced by the Government of India. When earlier raises were announced by the central government (2002), state governments, including Haryana and Tamil Nadu, had withheld the additional remuneration that they had been giving till then (AIFAWH 2005b). Notwithstanding workers’ agitations, Tamil Nadu continued to do so.

Despite the pay hikes over the last decade following collective struggles, emoluments remain much below that of primary school teachers, who have roughly similar educational



qualifications and a similar work profile and working hours.<sup>29</sup> Even compared to private primary school teachers, whose salaries are below that of government teachers, AWWs' stipends are much lower, including in better paid states like Tamil Nadu.

The low pay, the ambiguous employment status, the excessive work load (and unusually long hours for 'part-time' work) as well as the management of the programme have been among the issues on which the workers have conducted the most agitations (discussed below). Pay and reimbursement of travel and daily allowances (when the AWWs visit the district or state offices for training or other purposes) are often delayed or cut, leading to further resentment. Timely receipt of the honorarium was among the most important results of unionised struggle in Haryana (Interview). In Tamil Nadu, the main success was in enhancing the honorarium, while the lack of protection against unfair disciplinary action and inspection, job insecurity, and inadequate communication and information structures continue to be central issues raised by the AWW unions.

Though they receive their remuneration from the government, AWW are not entitled to the formal employment conditions and social security benefits of permanent, full-time, government employees. Some state governments have instituted benefits in addition to the stipend, either on directions from the central government or on their own account and following agitations by the workers. In 2004, the central government issued instructions to provide a Group Insurance Scheme to *anganwadi* employees, with the government, the public sector Life Insurance Cooperation, and the *anganwadi* employee paying Rs. 100, Rs. 100 and Rs. 80 respectively of the annual premium. In this scheme, the *anganwadis* become eligible for an amount between Rs. 20-100,000 on death or disability. The GOI also instituted a monthly scholarship of Rs. 100 each for up to 2 children of the employees studying in classes IX-XII. There were complaints that most states were deducting the amount from the honorarium paid to the workers and that without agitation it appeared that the GIS scheme would also not be implemented.

In 2001, the GoI issued a directive for paid maternity leave for AWW&Hs. It was applicable to those who had completed one year of service, the guidelines being the same as the general government rules for maternity leave. The directive specifically stated that other arrangements were to be made during paid absence so that the work of centre did not suffer. However, only more intensive fieldwork will be able to tell the extent to which these benefits are ensured.

The issue of retirement benefits was also taken up by the trade unions, but have been won in only in a few states such as Tamil Nadu. In this state, AWW get Rs. 50,000 and AWH get Rs. 20,000 on retirement at the ages of 60 and 58 respectively. The special provident fund scheme has also been implemented in Tamil Nadu since 1988. Employees pay Rs. 20 p.m. for 144 months to receive Rs. 10,000 plus the accumulated amount with interest on retirement. Some states give special festival grants and advances on compassionate grounds and reserve a percentage of posts at the Supervisor level for AWWs.

The demand to regularize AWW&Hs is an issue which is frequently raised, but denied by the government. In 2006, after a ten day relay hunger strike called by the AIFAWH, the Prime Minister appointed a Review Committee whose recommendations were accepted in July 2008. The Committee reiterated that the 'existing structure of honorarium and length of

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, the job profile and responsibilities of Anganwadi Workers are more demanding compared to many primary school teachers.

service' as well as guidelines on leave be continued. It removed the difference in remuneration to matriculate and non-matriculate workers and sanctioned 2 sarees per annum to each worker, which with a name badge was 'to give them a distinct identity and to further enhance their status within the village community.' In this manner, the government gave apparent recognition to their work without giving it economic value or incurring the expenses of social security benefits applicable to government employees.

#### **4.3. Hours and nature of work**

The hours and the work of the AWW and AWH have been changing and expanding over the years, with much variation between states. In most states, including Haryana, the work is designated as part-time and the official hours were 4.5 hours daily, over 5 days for AWW and 6 days for AWH. The actual hours of work can go up to 7 hours. In Tamil Nadu, where the pre-school programme is most developed, the official day is 6 hours. In the latter state, there is a second helper specially designated for the midday meal. Starting from supplementary nutrition-related activities - their first and according to many bureaucrats and advisors still their main task - AWWs are responsible for growth-promotion, health and nutrition education, home visits, referral services, meetings with the community, and now pre-school education (Gragnolati et al. 2006). The shift from 'dry rations' to a cooked meal has also meant additional work, most of which falls on the AWH and only in a few states has an additional hand been provided. In states such as Tamil Nadu, the AWH is expected to escort children to the centre and drop them back, unless mothers want to leave them late or bring them back early. AWWs maintain around 12 different types of records and spend time on "mindless weighing of children" (Ghosh 2004). Since their workplace is within the community in contrast to government workers, they are often asked to implement a range of government programmes (Gragnolati et al. 2006). The latest of their tasks is the formation of Self-Help Groups. AWWs may spend up to 40% of their time on supplemental nutrition-related activities and 39% on preschool education (NCAER 2001). Time and again they are pushed away from their care-giving tasks into community information and monitoring work.

Neither their training nor their pay is in consonance with the ever-increasing range of duties placed on the AWW. The arbitrary and fluctuating expansion of their hours do not leave them time to supplement their income through any other employment. Much of their training takes place through "learning by doing" or the work does not take place as the employees do not know how to. Many AWWs view record-keeping as their key function (Ramachandran et al. 2003). Record keeping has increased in the states in which ICDS has been restructured under World Bank sponsorship. There are also continuing differences in the visualisation of ICDS by those responsible at various levels. Thus, there are those who suggest that the ICDS programme requires that children below the age of two years should stay at home and be given "take-home rations" only, that the running of crèche facilities is not part of the programme (Sundaraman 2006). Despite being a central programme, there is variation between states on almost every count.

#### **4.4. Relations with employers and the community**

Blame for any shortfall or deficit in the quality of the ICDS services is placed on the front-line workers - the AWW&Hs. The AWW&Hs are vulnerable to the whims and pressures of their seniors - the bureaucrats at the district and state levels - on a number of counts but most particularly in receiving the funds and rations required for the functioning of the centres. These are often received late. In addition to this, the bureaucrats and panchayat leaders may take cuts - their “commission” - forcing the AWW to work with less than is required. Among their important tasks is renting the accommodation used for the centre, for which funds provided are often insufficient. As a number of researchers and TU representatives point out, in such a situation the AWW&H may also not remain immune to the temptation to take cuts.

One effect of the above is that it can create conflict between the AWW&H and the local community who assume that the pilferage has been by the employee. AWW&Hs are blamed for the lack of facilities, the absence of the employees from the centre (which is due to other work given by government authorities), their inability to fulfil tasks for which they have not been trained, their insistence on inconvenient measures and records, and perceived corruption. Local residents do not realise that the AWW&H do not receive government pay and perks and are not in control of their work schedule or the wherewithal for the centre’s functioning. The AWW&H experience the hostility of the locals and may come to resent them.

One of the latest developments, the responsibility of setting up Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and the commissioning of SHGs to provide the meal supplements at centres and schools has furthered the conflict in Haryana. In trying to comply with the multiple demands on their time or to corner the grants given the SHGs, some employees set them up with their kin. Not only were they instructed that they could not do this subsequent to the event, it also created resentment within the community regarding distribution of benefits.

The employees may face physical and sexual harassment and humiliation in discharging their duties. Incidents of physical attacks on AWWs, whether instigated by the village or “anti-social elements”, are increasing in Haryana and elsewhere (Interview). In many cases the signatures of the village council head is required to enable them to get their remuneration, and various ‘demands’ may be made of the employees in return for these signatures. Local power politics and factors like caste and gender affect their working conditions. In Haryana, the TU lead an agitation against sexual harassment of an AWW by a clerk in the CDPO’s office, which she had to visit for her pay and reimbursements (AIFAWH 2002: 23). The vulnerability of the AWW&H is enhanced by the fact that they are largely women of poor and lower status groups.

The responsibility of implementing various governmental social programmes also takes its toll. One incident from Madhya Pradesh has to be mentioned. An official circular making ICDS employees responsible for stopping child marriages was issued, indicating that action would be taken against them if any such marriage took place in their areas. Shakuntala Verma, a supervisor, was brutally attacked when she tried to stop a marriage in a village in Dhar District. Initially, the state government refused to take any responsibility saying that the attack was due to personal enmity or ‘black magic’ and it was only after public and organised pressure that it agreed to bear the costs of her medical treatment (AIFAWH 2005: 15).

Since 1991, there have been efforts to privatise the ICDS and hand over the responsibility for centres to NGOs, village councils, mothers’ councils, etc. The government’s rationale is that

the expenses and the management of AW centres and the responsibility of child development should devolve to the 'community'. This has been met with stiff resistance by AW employees, both because of the fear that state is withdrawing from its social obligations, but also as they fear they will be more vulnerable to the founded and unfounded local resentments and more importantly to the local equations of power and the pressures of the rich, upper caste village elite. They point to many incidents of arbitrary dismissal from services and the increased corruption in appointments, pressures for "commission", and cases of sexual harassment by village council heads (AIFAWH 2005: 14). Further, where local residents refuse to pay the contributions expected of them as part of these 'devolution' moves, the AWW is expected to make good the shortfall from their pay.

Notwithstanding all of the above, AWWs do receive respect from the general public. Various studies have shown a significant improvement in nutritional levels of children who have attended *anganwadis* and a decline in drop-out rates in elementary schools among children who attended pre-school in *anganwadis*. Along with the personal benefits of official status and the stipend, however small, AWWs feel they are achieving something. The solidarity built through working with other women and the formation of their union has also had implications beyond the work sphere. The trade union took up cases of harassment of members by the police, domestic violence, and rape, situations which they otherwise would have had to face on their own. Many of them have found a new respect in their community and the courage to speak out as representatives of women or their oppressed social group. Some were even elected as village council and district council members.

#### **4.5 Organising and contesting working conditions**

Of the approximately 1.8 million AWW and AWH, approximately 0.5 million are in unions affiliated to central trade unions. The membership of the AIFAWH, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (linked to the CPI (M)) is around 0.3 million, and about double this number have been mobilised by it recently on various issues. Other central trade unions, especially the BMS (linked to the BJP), also claim a large membership, but this is not visible on the ground or in agitations. These other central trade unions have not been able to sustain an organisation and their membership has declined over the last 5-10 years ago. This may be attributed to factors such as the restructuring of the ICDS, the dispersed nature of the *anganwadi* workers, and lack of interest on the part of the trade union leadership.

Hemlata, General Secretary, AIFAWH, described organisational and experiential features significant in enabling unionisation. A monthly block/project meeting used to be held at the block headquarters when 100 plus workers would gather to receive their salaries and a little training would be imparted. AWWs and AWHs have been coming together at the project level in 'informal' unions to demand timely payment of salaries, per diem and travel allowances, and to negotiate reductions in the 'cuts' and gifts demanded by the CDPO. In these many instances, the women may not know of any central trade union, but the immediacy of their common concerns brings them together. Despite being scattered in their daily work situation (2-4 in any one village often at great distances from each other as in tribal areas), these monthly meetings, their 8-10 years of schooling, and their poor peasant/agricultural labourer background seemed to combine and enable a sense of a collective that could negotiate. It was this monthly meeting and these attributes of the AWW that enabled women linked to the CITU to try and hold adjunct meetings and build a more sustained union with a wider base. Many of the women had to travel by bus and walk long

distances to come for these meetings and it would have been nigh impossible to bring them together otherwise, because of the time taken and the fare.

These features also mark them as distinct from domestic workers. They were more educated, had a sense of respect in the community, met regularly and institutionally once a month, and could pinpoint an institutional centre which was responsible for their work and pay. The time and money costs of holding meetings remain a factor in making attempts at unionisation very difficult. This has been exacerbated as the monthly project meetings have been discontinued. The stipends are now disbursed by cheque and while the one area of corruption and hardship which the workers experienced has thereby been eliminated, organising collective action has become more difficult.

The main gains of unionisation can be divided into the personal-individual and those pertaining to the running of the ICDS. Among the former, the most important is the greater dignity and respect with which AWWs are treated by CDPOs and the respect from the general public. The last has been very important, particularly where relationships tended towards hostility. This respect is not accorded to them as care workers, but as 'social' workers (in the Indian sense) and as people who are knowledgeable, who can deal with the powerful and stand up to them. In many areas, AWWs have taken the lead in raising issues of gender rights and in questioning local hierarchies, occasionally to the point of questioning their own family members. Where the ICDS workers are not organised, these gains are not perceptible. The enhancement in the stipend and leaves has also been significant and though the increase may not mean an increase in real income, without their agitations it is likely that it would have remained at lower levels.

At the level of the ICDS structure, AIFAWH points to its success in preventing the attempts of the central government to withdraw from the ICDS and to hand it over to NGOs, mothers' committees and *panchayats* in the name of community participation. They argue that the NGOs were the thin end of the wedge towards privatisation, while the *panchayat* and mothers' committees gave the local power elite control of the ICDS. The Federation hopes that local involvement can be ensured through direct contact of the AWW with local women in issues in and beyond the ICDS. It has not suggested a concrete organisational structure whereby this can be ensured within the ICDS, however.

Partly as a result of the Federation's pressure, the Review Committee recommended that AWW and AWH should not be assigned any work which is not linked to their core functions and to 'development/ welfare of women/children'. The Committee also recommended the extension of the hours of a centre from 4 to 5 hours with one hour more for home visits for the AWW. Not only has there not been a commensurate increase in remuneration, however, the Federation points out that (i) the hours are still too short for the centres to run as pre-school centres and crèches; (ii) if children are to stay at the centre for longer hours they must be fed twice; and (iii) the pre-school education component remains very weak. Steps to ensure proper functioning, such as providing sufficient space and 2 helpers, are absent even in the best run ICDS projects of Puducherry. The people and government functionaries continue to view the ICDS as 'gruel centres' rather than crèches and pre-schools.

#### **4.6 Childcare practises of Anganwadi workers**

As discussed above, the *anganwadi* worker and helper is given countless responsibilities, such that they frequently have to work longer hours than the official 4.5-6 per day. The AWH has

a 6 day week even if her hours of work and job brief do not expand as much. All this reduces the time available to them to meet their household care responsibilities/ demands. Since honorariums are low, they cannot access market options. They do, however, have one big advantage - they work in an environment where infants and young children are to be taken care of.

AWW&Hs have a range of options through which to meet their care responsibilities. Many lived with or near their mothers or mothers-in-law, who would look after their grandchildren. Since a large proportion of them worked at centres in their own villages or wards, they could make quick trips home to check that all was fine. For such women, the time spent in commuting was minimal and that cut their hours away. Many brought their infant and young children to the centre with them. Most were motivated to place their children in schools and most children above the age of 6 were encouraged to remain in school. Once children were in school, childcare was not an issue as the AWW&H mother was usually at home till the start of and after the school day. However, some left the job as they found that the hours repeatedly stretched beyond the official and they were unable to manage their care responsibilities. Others left the post when they moved residence and found that the commute meant similar difficulties.

We conclude this section by narrating the case of an Anganwadi Helper in rural Rohtak, Haryana. This case is typical in terms of the conditions of living and of work for AWH, who are seen in the same light as labourers and domestic workers. They tend not to have the educational levels of AWWs and the status the latter have.

*Gangadevi was 55 years old when we met her. She had been working as an anganwadi helper for the last 25 years. Her monthly income was Rs. 800 and she was allowed 20 days leave in the year. Her husband had been a blacksmith (considered of middling low status), but is now ill and receives an old age pension of Rs. 300 p.m. Their son and daughter-in-law, two grandsons and their elder daughter live with them.<sup>30</sup> Their son is an auto-rickshaw driver and earns about Rs. 2,500 monthly. They have no land, but own a buffalo which has calved twice. Their house is made of bricks and the roof is thatch. It consists of two rooms and has no separate kitchen and nor a bathroom. They have an electricity connection, but fetch drinking water from a hand pump. The daughter-in-law undertakes the housework, while Gangadevi tends to the buffaloes in addition to her work at the anganwadi centre. Their daughter looks after her ailing father, collects fodder for the cattle, and helps her sister-in-law with the housework.*

*Soon after Gangadevi was married, her mother-in-law died and she had nobody to help her with the house or the children. Her husband would not help. If she had to be absent for a short time from the house in tasks that could not be combined with child minding, such as fetching water from the village well, she would leave the children with neighbour women. She would do the housework herself, work as a wage labourer in the fields, and later started work in the anganwadi. When she went to the fields she took her infant children with her, leaving them in the shade while she worked. She also took them with her to the anganwadi. As soon as her elder daughter was old enough to take care of the younger ones, they were left with her. At that time, Gangadevi also started keeping buffaloes.*

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<sup>30</sup> Contrary stories were related to explain the contravention of patrivirilocal norms of residence by their married daughter.

*She leaves for the anganwadi at eight in the morning and returns by 1-1.30 p.m. She said that over the years the number of children at the centre has increased. Her tasks include cleaning the floor and spreading the carpet for the children to sit on. She then goes to each house to call the children. She distributes the ration to the children, giving that for children less than 2 years to their mothers. Since parents have started sending their children to school at earlier ages, most of the children at the anganwadi are 4 years old and less. She said that she gave special attention to the smaller children. She informed parents when vaccinations were due to take place. She takes her elder grandson with her to the anganwadi rather than leave him to play in the streets while his mother is busy with the housework. Her daughter-in-law said that she found the anganwadi to be far and if her mother-in-law, had not been working there and hence able to take the boy with her, her son would not be sent to the anganwadi. As it is, her sister-in-law (husband's brother's wife) lives nearby and they can help each other with minding the children, but their husbands are of no help.*

## **5. Concluding remarks**

The case studies of domestic workers and *anganwadi* workers enable us to examine the significance and value that state and sections of society give to care and the parameters within which it is recognised. We find a muted and partial recognition of the imperatives of care needs as well as an imputation of its 'moral' value. There is little or no recognition, however, of various dimensions of care giving and of its quantitative or qualitative time/labour demands.

As discussed in RR3, the ICDS was designed as a nutritional programme to reduce poverty and malnutrition among children and women. Initially, it was limited in its geographical and demographic reach. Under the pressure of civil society organizations using instruments of the state (the Supreme Court) to push the right to food and the demand of women's and other organisations for crèches and early childhood education, the government agreed to expand and redesign the scope and spread of the ICDS. Unfortunately, as with many other social programmes, even three years subsequent to the Supreme Court instructions the requirements have not been met and the new design has not been implemented. What is discernible is that this is not just another case of the lumbering moves of a vast government in the administration of a vast country or of that innocuous term in social discourse – 'lack of political will'.

These rather vague and not untrue reasonings may partly explain the lack of effort to ensure the infrastructure required to enhance the crèche and pre-school functions of the ICDS *anganwadis*. The mismatch between rhetoric and plan, between plan and action in the ICDS point, however, to the neo-liberal denial of the need and efficacy of universal social policy measures permeating the government and the administration. It also points to the lack of stake of the middle classes in government facilities linked to care – whether of infants, in education, or in health. There is a further specificity which pertains to a conscious refusal in policy – a refusal to give care an economic value and to recognise social responsibility in care, especially a social responsibility that would require the state, if viewed as an expression of the public will, to accept that responsibility. This is buttressed by the assertion of care as being in the realm of moral good and natural human feeling and not to be degraded by being brought into the realm of economics.

The work demanded of and the working conditions of AWWs and AWHs make this explicit. The continuous addition of ad hoc work placed on the AWWs ranging from undertaking

surveys in the village/ward, keeping records, and implementing various 'awareness/educational' programmes rests on three inter-related and occasionally conflicting assumptions. The first is the construct of the time and skill demands of care work: the distribution of nutritional supplements and the care of children, infants or pre-school are neither labour intensive nor highly skilled; any woman can do them easily and naturally and should be able to multi-task while doing so; that child minding requires constant presence even if intermittent attention is not factored in. Hence, it is assumed that AWWs have time on their hands. The second is that as women are relatively poor and desirous of the post/work, new demands can be placed on them and they will accept these. Third is a reiteration that the tasks they undertake are part of 'social' work, charity work, where 'higher' concerns of social and moral good and satisfaction are better measures than economic valuation. This is in the same vein as arguments which suggested that teaching children is so significant that it can never receive its full-economic value and hence it is pointless to attempt to do so. Thus, care deserves respect, but is not to be muddled with the profanity of power or the economics of mundane 'growth-producing' tasks.

As indicated earlier, the agitational pressure of AIFAWH as well as the mobilisation and lobbying of women's organisations and groups working in early childhood education and crèches induced the government to set up a Review Committee in 2006. The review reiterated the view that AWW&Hs are not professionals or workers, but volunteers to be given a stipend. The refusal to recognise AWWs as workers may be related to a number of motives. One is that the ICDS is to be a temporary programme – till malnutrition is overcome! Hence, the staff cannot be given the recognition of being public employees and the status of permanent and protected employment that this entails. Linked to this is the neo-liberal urge to prune governmental expenses, reflected in the vacancies in public employment across the board. These considerations, however, are not a sufficient explanation. Not only are the upper levels of those running the ICDS regular staff, malnutrition is not likely to disappear any time soon. What seems critical in explaining the Review Committee's recommendations is the gendered familialism in which care is understood within state institutions and in vast sections of society.

Care, particularly of children, is something which women do naturally, as a moral duty, and as part of their social location in the family. They give care and are fulfilled in giving care. Care is best undertaken as familial responsibility and by and large families are the locus of care. There may be 'family failures' due to accidents of biography or poverty. These cannot result in practices that encourage widespread breaking of the social norm or which are more than temporary. The state and social groups should encourage familial care workers rather than non-familial institutions. These ideas dovetail to suggest that women who are engaged in government 'care' programmes around malnutrition, childcare, and health can only be volunteers.<sup>31</sup> The stipend is not to recognise them as workers. Their commitment should not rest on their pay, but on social and moral recognition.

Thus, despite the collective agitation of AWWs and of other women's groups there has been little shift in state policy or thinking on care. Limited recognition also means that the need and economic value of non-familial care continues to be devalued. It is striking that this is the case in a context in which important socio-economic and cultural shifts have expanded the need and employment of non-familial domestic workers. Not only are there more families who wish to, need to, and can hire domestic workers, there are large numbers, mainly women,

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<sup>31</sup> The stipend and situation of the ASHAs, women engaged under the relatively new Rural Health Mission, is another example.



who take up this work. Women are trained from an early age in domestic work and domestic care responsibilities, such that this training is appreciated only in terms of normal feminine socialisation. Most components of domestic work naturalised and it is cast as an 'unskilled' occupation open to all who are ready to enter it. Thus, wages remain low, enabling not just the elite but also the middle classes to hire domestic workers. Middle class households are able to expand the family time spent on their own children by passing on indirect care work to cheap hired workers.

For domestic workers, providing for care by earning a livelihood has priority – it is a precondition they say for living. The nature and structure of paid work they opt for and their childcare responsibilities influence each other, but they are compelled in the immediacy to deny fulfilment of care needs in their families. This is in tune with the lack of economic value given to care by the state and the market, the elite and middle classes. It is ironic that the care deficit in the families of women who 'care' in others homes is cast as a result of 'carelessness' and ignorance rather than of poverty, lack of institutional facilities and open flouting of government regulations on wages and working conditions.

The non-recognition of the full social and economic value of the work of domestic workers – of the care provided by hired workers – is in part enabled by the fragmented organization of their work, including the multitude of tasks, the multiplicity of employers, and the 'intimacy' that develops between carer and employer. Women's organizations have off and on raised issues pertaining to domestic workers and sought to bring them into collective groups, but it is only in recent years that more concerted and focussed efforts have been made. It has been suggested that the middle class background of activists and their own dependence on hired domestic workers has made them hesitant in advocacy in this area. The experiences of efforts which have been made, however, suggest that the characteristics of hired domestic work as outlined above, the lack of employment security, as well as the personalised ties between employer and employee make sustained unionisation particularly difficult.

The lack of collective bargaining institutions has facilitated the limited recognition of care and the systematic denial to domestic workers of the key labour protections extended to other workers. Domestic workers have been excluded even from the basic labour law of the Minimum Wages Act. Despite recent lobbying for the specific inclusion of domestic workers in the Unorganized Sector Workers' Bill (2005), they were not named when it was finally enacted in 2008. Further, by confining the workers covered to those who fall into the BPL (below poverty line) category, vast numbers of unorganised sector workers, particularly migrants (as are many of the domestic workers) have been excluded, not least because of the problems in definition and issuing of BPL cards.

The National Commission for Women held discussions with various stake holders and came out with a draft Domestic Workers (Registration of Social Security and Welfare) Bill 2008 to address their specific employment conditions.<sup>32</sup> Apart from regulating placement agencies, the bill stipulates conditions of work and social security concerns of domestic workers. The future of the Bill – whether this would be another of the numerous bills that various commissions have drafted and that have not seen the light of day - is a real concern. Women's groups have frequently argued that the recognition that law gives can act as a step towards a wider social endorsement and as an instrument to be used in struggles for change in values, social practice, and state policy. At the same time, a general legal recognition without

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<sup>32</sup> [http://ncw.nic.in/Comments/Domestic\\_worker\\_bill.pdf](http://ncw.nic.in/Comments/Domestic_worker_bill.pdf)

specific laws and entailments can obscure continuities in practices and social values. The situation of care workers does not suggest we have reached this point.

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