

An Investigation of the Challenges Faced by Female Domestic Workers: The Case of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Domestic workers play a pivotal role in supporting the labor market and economy in any country around the world. The aim of this paper was to scrutinize the challenges experienced by domestic workers in South Africa. The objectives of the paper were to find out the coping strategies employed by domestic workers in this area and to establish some ways that may make domestic work a recognizable profession in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was used in the paper. The findings of the paper are as follows. Due to the workload of domestic workers, many of them fail to finish on time and are forced to work overtime. In most instances, they are not paid for this overtime, as the employers always argue that they did not plan for their increased wages. They are sometimes fired from their jobs for daring to demand their overtime pays. Some are also facing steep deductions in their salaries as a way of punishing them. Some domestic workers face harassment from their male employers by way of demanding sex. Thus far, there are no strict policies and laws that protect domestic workers in their workplace.

INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, domestic workers play a pivotal role in supporting the labor market and the economy of a country at large through relieving working families of household chores. Given this background, Archer (2011) argued that domestic work is a crucial tool for sustainability and functioning of the economy. Domestic workers are undermined and less valued. This is fuelled by the fact that they do not have specific working hours or rest periods. They receive poor wages and poor standards of work termination among other challenges (Mkandawire 2010). However, in India, the national policy for domestic workers provides domestic workers the right to minimum wage laws, establishment of the number of working hours and rest period as well as social protection and security benefits (Ministry of Labor 2011). The case of India shows that some countries are taking the plight

of domestic workers seriously and are taking necessary steps to protect them from social and economic exploitation.

The demand for domestic workers has been on the increase in the past two decades (Gobind et al. 2012). This increase has occurred even in the developing countries where there is a major incorporation of women into the sector (International Labor Organization 2010). However, Gobind et al. (2012) insist that domestic work remains unappreciated and poorly regulated and this exposes domestic workers to abuse. Most of the time, domestic workers are overworked, underpaid and unprotected. This undermining of domestic workers is as a result of the lack of skill requirements of the job. This in turn makes it difficult for them to be recognized and to be remunerated fairly (International Labor Organization 2011).

South Africa is one of the southern African countries with a sizable number of domestic workers. Nazir (2011) reports that the domestic working sector accounts for around 800,000 workers and falls under the informal sector. This shows the significance of the sector to the country's economy. However, gender bias exists in the sector, as female workers tend to dominate

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male workers in the domestic sector. A patriarchal belief dominates most of the South African communities, and hence domestic work is viewed as predominantly women's work. The socialist feminist theory proposes that the patriarchal family, motherhood and housework are the basis of women's oppression (Schwenken and Heimeshof 2011). Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012) further note that about eighteen percent of all women in South Africa are employed as domestic workers and eighty percent of them are poorly educated. Similarly, Albin (2010) asserts that domestic workers are mainly poor women. Rural poverty has increased in many African countries due to the devastation of the agricultural sector and limited employment opportunities and these are all factors leading to women flooding the domestic work sector (Archer 2011). In light of above information, it becomes vital to conduct a fact-finding paper, which examines the gender and age related challenges and coping strategies of domestic workers in South Africa.

There are also a number of economic related challenges, which exist in the domestic work sector in South Africa. Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012) point out those domestic workers are poorly remunerated. Their mean wages are also lower than in any other sector. However, the irregularities of their wages and privacy of their work make it difficult to know the lowest amount they earn. This poor remuneration situation triggers other social and psychological problems such as stress and insecurity among the workers. In line with the above, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA 2010) notes that domestic workers are usually more vulnerable to challenges, as they work without guiding policies and employment contracts. According to Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012), before 2002 there was no specified minimum wage in the domestic work sector and their wage negotiation mechanism was not standardized. This situation reduced domestic workers to mere slaves who depended on the mercy of their employers who unilaterally decided their wage structure.

The South African government has also established the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997, which covers domestic workers wage and working hours (Gobind et al. 2012). This Act aims at improving the challenges of domestic workers in the country. However, the basic conditions included in this piece of legislation do not set the wages to a satisfactory level. A study

by the International Labor Organization (2011) indicates that many domestic workers do not enjoy the protection level offered by this policy. This is mainly due to the privacy of their workplace and the unbalanced relationship between employee and employer. In other words, the private home deprives the domestic workers' free interaction with other workers or trade union representatives (Gobind et al. 2012). Moreover, the low level of education deprives domestic workers understanding the various protective legislations, which exist for them, and hence they might continue to suffer behind closed doors.

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the progress made thus far regarding new legislations on domestic work, domestic workers are still lowly paid and the work remains undervalued and poorly regulated in South Africa. This shows that there is a gap between legal framework provisions and their effective implementation. Most policies relating to domestic workers is inadequately informed by situational analysis of the real challenges facing domestic workers especially in Mpumalanga, where this paper was conducted.

Objectives

The following were the objectives of the paper:

1. To explore the challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe.
2. To find the coping strategies employed by domestic workers in this area,
3. To establish some ways that may make domestic work a recognizable profession in Thulamahashe.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that guided the paper:

1. What are the challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe?
2. What are the coping strategies employed by domestic workers in Thulamahashe?
3. What are the ways that can make domestic work a recognizable profession in Thulamahashe?

Literature Review

Domestic workers' tasks are a vital tool for fostering development in many countries. Albin

(2012) has called it the most basic survival activity. The association of domestic work is based on cultural notions that women are more interested in soft work whilst men prefer developing their individual competencies. ILO (2012) notes that domestic work is mainly gendered because most of the workers are women. In this regard, it was delineated as a separate area of work when productive and reproductive work got separated. Despite the significance of domestic workers, Nazir (2011) claims that the conditions faced by domestic workers have varied considerably throughout history the world over. In actual fact, the work remains undervalued. This is because domestic work is viewed as unskilled given that women have traditionally been socialized in the work, and hence the skills they obtain from young age are regarded as insignificant. Women enter domestic work due to various factors either in the sector or in their background. Challenges, crises and unemployment and higher women illiteracy are some of the factors, which have increased poverty in many countries thus forcing people to take any job available to them (Social Law Project 2010). The situation has escalated women problems, and thus many of them find cover in the domestic work sector where they are most welcome.

Significances of Domestic Work

Domestic work is one of the valuable job activities in modern societies. Changes in the labor market, which include the growth of service market, globalization and the increasing involvement of women in the market, have put pressure on home care in many households. This has increased reliance on domestic workers to look after families. In the light of the foregoing discussion, domestic work becomes a vital tool for the functioning of the economy outside the household (Albin and Mantouvalou 2012). In addition, it can be a desirable and readily available job for semi-skilled and unskilled personnel. However, it is vital to note that some of the domestic workers are very skilled and educated personnel from other countries suffering from dysfunctional economies in their home countries. Hingson-Smith and Kagee (2013) echoed the same sentiment citing that migrant domestic workers in Western countries are skilled professionals who disguise their qualifications due to lack of proper documentation

after being forced out of their home countries by various hardships.

The Social Law Project (2010) reports that domestic work absorbs up to ten percent of the total employment in some countries. In this regard domestic work absorbs a large number of people into the labor market, and hence reducing unemployment rates. In the same line, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Challenges of Social Council revealed that in many industrialized countries, migrant domestic workers are being empowered to advance in employment and in society. This implies that through the help of domestic workers, many women have ample time to do productive work while their children and the elderly are looked after at a cheap price.

Various categories of domestic workers face different working conditions that worsen the common challenges faced by all domestic workers. For instance, those who stay in the homes of their employers tend to suffer greater isolation and limited mobility, which results in longer working hours. Worth noting also is the fact that they are at a greater risk of receiving payments in kind as well as physical and sexual abuse (Chen 2011). Moreover, women may suffer more sexual abuse as compared to men. The fact that many women work far away from home compel them to admit to residing in their employers' homesteads, and hence risking the prospects of abuse and lack of adequate support in difficult times (Tolla 2013).

In South Africa, domestic work is mainly characterized by the interconnections of race, gender and class. In this regard, domestic work in the country is inherently dominated by black women or colored women who are poorly paid (Dilata and Ngoepe 2010). As a result, Du Toit (2012) argues that domestic work is a sector deeply rooted in a neo-colonial set up especially in South Africa. This is because the perceptions, which were inculcated in people's minds that black and colored females are ideal for domestic labor, were entrenched in societies from the colonial period to the present democratic South Africa. However, it is vital to note that domestic labor existed even before colonialism but at a smaller and less organized manner.

In Ecuador, the Constitution of 1998 established that the State would encourage the incorporation of women into paid employment with equal rights and opportunities (ILO 2012). This

was an attempt to improve the challenging plight of women domestic workers. In Bolivia, after a long period of oppression where domestic workers would work for up to 16 hours a day, Law No. 2.450 of April 2003 was enacted to ensure that domestic workers work only up to 10 hours a day. South Africa introduced a minimum wage of between R111 and R135 per month for domestic workers in 2009 (Department of Labor 2010). However, due to the privacy and informality of the work, domestic workers continue to earn less than what is desirable.

The international network of domestic workers' trade unions and support organizations have also been established to ensure empowerment of women and an end to their exploitation in the domestic work sector (International Domestic Workers Network 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The researchers chose to employ feminist epistemologies of research. As described by Babbie (2010), qualitative feminist research approach is appropriate because it is more suited to the exploration, description, understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by females all over the world. This is also in line with the standpoint theory for feminist research proposed by feminist researchers. It entails looking at social reality from the researched position or situation thus allowing for objective data applicable to a particular group of people in a specific area. In this regard, the qualitative feminist approach (or standpoint feminist research) became an ideal methodology given that the researchers intended to examine the social reality of domestic workers from their standpoint of women (that is, the researched) in order to valorize their voices.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, a qualitative research approach was used. This significantly allowed for the collection of in-depth data from participants with different variables, level of education as well as working conditions. The explanatory approach was also ideal for identifying and explaining the challenges faced by domestic workers due to the fact that it allowed for face to face interaction with the participants in order to obtain feelings and opinions.

Description of the Study Area

Bushbuckridge Thulamahashe Municipality is located in the northeast of Mpumalanga, and it borders the southeastern part of Limpopo province. It is under Ehlanzeni district situated in Mpumalanga province of South Africa. The area is semi-rural with a population density of 235 persons/km. Thulamahashe Municipality has four major townships namely Mkhuhlu, Thulamahashe, Acornhoek and Bushbuckridge. The municipality is divided into two borders with the Blyde River Canyon on the west and Kruger National Park, and the second is Sabie Sand reserves in the east, Manyeleti and Andover game reserves fall into its area along the northern border. Approximately forty percent of the residents do not have basic education and the remaining populations have at least basic education. Domestic work is one of the major employment opportunities that exist in the area, as many working families seek local people to look after their homes and families while they are at work.

Sampling Procedure

Sampling is the process of selecting units, for example people and organizations from a population of interest so that by studying the sample one can fairly generalize the results back to the population from which the sample was chosen (De Vos 2011). The snowball sampling procedure was used in this paper. This was due to the fact that the researcher did not know the exact residences to find domestic workers, and hence a few who were initially identified helped in identifying other participants in the area. Both youth and adult domestic workers were selected.

Data Collection Methods

For the purpose of data collection, meetings were called through the local leadership structures. In the meetings domestic workers were divided into adults and youth, and then females and males. These groups were then given a set of semi-structured questions to answer in their reflective circles. While in their groups, participants were also given individual questionnaires with the same set of questions in order to get all their responses as individuals. This triangulation assisted to obtain in depth quality results. Semi-structured interviews were preferred in this

paper due to their flexibility in allowing for probing and clarification of questions.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of data for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie 2010). The thematic analysis technique was employed in drawing meaning out of the data.

Transcription of Verbal Data

Transcription of verbal data informs the early stages of analysis. The researchers therefore developed a far better understanding of the data by having transcribed it.

Defining and Naming the Themes

The researchers defined and refined the themes that were analyzed. To define and to refine means identifying the essence of what each theme was all about, and determining what aspect of the data each theme captured.

Producing the Report

The write-up was then done in a logical and coherent manner following the identified themes.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were adhered to. These are voluntary participation, confidentiality and usage of pseudonyms to protect the identity of the research participants.

RESULTS

The results of the research are discussed below.

Mistreatment and Harassment by the Employers

The majority of participants indicated that harassment at work was the major challenge they were facing. Employers reportedly gave them difficult tasks without real concern for their wellbeing. Despite being given difficult tasks, participants were reportedly compelled to work for many days without off days, working extra or after hours but still being paid less. It was also

indicated that employers usually ignore their employees' pleas and grievances, a fact, which made them feel oppressed, manipulated and harassed by their employers.

Secondly, a significant number of responses showed that domestic workers from Thulamahashe were working without contracts. Their employment was based on mutual and verbal agreement with the employer. In this regard, they reported that their job description was not that clear and hence they had no strong ground for negotiations when faced with challenges. Participants also reported that they were commonly suspected of theft if there were missing items in their employers' houses. Contrary to the abovementioned challenges, a minority of the participants noted that they were well treated by their employers. Even though they indicated the absence of contracts, they noted that their employees were usually ready to listen to their complaints especially with regard to the provision of off days and pay increase.

Depression and Stress

The mainstream of the responses also indicated that domestic workers from Thulamahashe were affected by the challenges raised above. As a result of these hardships, they developed hatred, stress, depression and anger, which later manifested themselves in traumatic signs while they are with their families. Domestic workers also echoed that working without contracts, long working hours and lower salaries limited their capacity to afford buying enough food that can sustain their families for the whole month. The stress and depression, which domestic workers face while at work reportedly resulted in poor productivity and performance when executing their duties. This implies that all these challenges raised above affect the relationship between their family members as well as their wellbeing. Thirdly, some respondents pointed out that these challenges affect them because they lose self-confidence in everything they do, and feel discriminated because of being uneducated and not having what it takes to obtain higher paying jobs.

Gender Disparities in Domestic Work

The results revealed that female domestic workers were more involved in domestic work in the whole district of Thulamahashe. However, this does not mean that male domestic workers

do not significantly participate in domestic work as well. The nature of domestic work in the district, which is predominantly household chores, looking after children, cooking and washing clothes was reportedly favorable for female than male domestic workers, and hence their dominance. Another reason accounting for this trend was the fact that community patriarchal beliefs endorse male non-participation in domestic work by narrowing them to productive work. Male domestic workers reported that in most cases they were not involved in domestic work because they were being hindered by restriction from patriarchal beliefs and the shame from the community. However, the need for survival sometimes pushes them into domestic work.

A Comparison of Challenges Faced by Male and Female Domestic Workers

The paper results revealed that there are various challenges faced by female domestic workers than male domestic workers. Both female domestic workers reported that the challenges they face were different nevertheless sometimes they could be similar. The majority of female respondents revealed that they face domestic violence whereby they were being forced to have sex with their male employers in order for them to get a salary increase and keep their jobs. The reason behind this situation was presumably that women were socialized to believe that they cannot defend themselves, and hence males can stand for themselves whenever this difficult situation transpires. Female domestic workers also echoed that sometimes they endure the sufferings because they are afraid of losing their jobs, because they do not have any other source of income. This implies that female domestic workers are more affected by social and economic challenges than male domestic workers. However, another female domestic worker indicated that the difference of the challenges they face is due to the fact that women are more experienced in undertaking household chores than males. This arises from the patriarchal belief where males are socialized differently from females.

Working Under Pressure

Results demonstrated that working under pressure was one of the main challenges, which

was depressing female domestic workers more than male domestic workers. They indicated that they were being given many tasks per day, which they fail to complete before sunset. For instance, they were expected to cook, clean, do laundry and child minding just to mention a few. As a result, they had to work under pressure in order to accomplish the tasks before the evening. The results also indicated that due to workload, they fail to finish in time and as a result they receive bad treatment such as being kicked out of the house, deductions of the salaries and sometimes they get sex demands from their male bosses as a way of resolving the conflict. This demonstrates the fact that female domestic workers presumably cannot fight back for their rights, and hence they were prepared to suffer in order to preserve their jobs.

Comparison of Challenges Faced by Domestic Workers in Urban and Rural Areas

The aim of this subsection was to determine if domestic workers in urban and rural areas face the same challenges. An assessment by the researcher was done about the challenges faced by domestic workers in villages and those working in towns, in different parts of the Thulamahashe area. Results indicated that the majority of participants believe that domestic workers from urban areas face different challenges to those faced by domestic workers in rural areas. This is due to the fact that the environments they work in as well as the resources available to workers vary significantly between urban and rural areas. Those working in towns were seemingly facing fewer challenges as compared to those working in the villages. Various reasons account for the aforesaid view. The main justification to this verdict as indicated by the majority of responses was that domestic workers from rural areas did not have enough materials or resources to use in order to complete their tasks in time. For instance, domestic workers reportedly had to do a lot of manual work such as fetching firewood, water, washing clothes without washing machines were some of the laborious tasks, which were mentioned in support of the above fact. Variably, domestic workers from urban areas presumably had enough equipment to use around them to complete their tasks faster. Moreover, those in rural areas were more subjected to lack of information about their rights and labor

regulations protecting them and limited employment opportunities while the ones in the urban areas had a better level of access to information and a better chance of obtaining another domestic work job in the event that they were fired.

Conclusively, domestic workers from rural areas seemingly faced more and different challenges than domestic workers from the urban areas. This was likely due to the fact that urban areas were more endowed in terms of resources than rural areas among other reasons.

Communicating with the Employers

Despite the fact that the majority of responses indicate that domestic workers in the area usually employ a passive coping strategy, others reportedly resort to regular communication with their employers. It was revealed that some domestic workers were courageous enough to talk about their grievances with their employers despite the fear of losing their jobs. As a result, sometimes domestic workers are frightened that if they happen to complain they will lose their jobs. This really brings fear and drives them to keep quiet where they were supposed to talk. A certain female participant noted that she relies on a counselors' help whenever she feels depressed, stressed and confused about her work situation. However, it was observed that most of the domestic workers could not afford to consult a counselor either because of lack of consultation fees or due to unavailability of such services in their area.

Results revealed that domestic workers in Thulamahashe seemingly preferred to share their experiences and challenges with their close families and close friends rather than outsiders. In this regard, they noted that friends and family had become their constant source of comfort, strength and encouragement to cope at work.

Urgently Required Legislation and Policy Frameworks for Domestic Workers

Results revealed that domestic workers in the Thulamahashe area require protection from the legislation and policies. Even though there are legislative frameworks, which indirectly or directly cater for domestic workers, the paper observed that participants had very limited information about their rights, protection measures and who to approach for help when they

faced challenges. In this regard, participants suggested the need for strict legislation protecting the rights of domestic workers. Direct policy framework stipulating compulsory provision of work contracts was also noted in the area. Interestingly, responses mostly from the urban areas stipulated the need for the Department of Labor's relations' officers to do some door-to-door audits to ensure that all domestic workers are working under contracts. This would reportedly be a tool against which mistreated domestic workers can use to take action against their employers without fear of unfair dismissal. Participants also indicated the need for government to include, in their policy framework, minimum salaries for domestic workers and thenceforth strict adherence procedures. There was no age or major gender distinctions regarding the aforesaid sentiment thereby showing its significance as a suggestion.

Professionalization of Domestic Work

Results also showed a unanimous need to provide training for domestic workers at institutions so as to foster professionalization of the field. In this regard, all domestic workers in future would be in possession of certificates, which they can use to secure jobs. The results expressed that domestic work was perceived as a profession, which is done by unskilled individuals. In this respect it is regarded as a useless profession, which is done by people who come mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds and without any or proper qualifications. Furthermore, the paper findings also showed that the community regards domestic work as reproductive work, which only requires compensation or stipends rather than real salaries, and hence employers usually pay less or even in kind. This is due to the fact that the sector mainly consists of women who come from patriarchal societies that believe women are naturally meant for reproductive work. Professionalizing the field will therefore trigger the need to standardize the profession, raise the status of domestic workers and generally foster their recognition by their employers and the society at large.

The paper findings established that domestic work is generally done by the lower class in Thulamahashe area. Due to their disadvantaged backgrounds, most of these workers do not have any say when they are abused and mistreated by their employers.

Registration of Domestic Work by Labor Department

The results indicated that domestic work should be registered at the labor offices so that when the workers are mistreated the law will take its course. This is due to the fact that domestic workers are working without contracts, and this creates a big problem because when they are abused there is no place to report their matters due to the fact that domestic work happens behind closed doors. This means that the government needs to intervene especially in monitoring and evaluating the conditions of domestic workers as well as coming up with rules that can guide the domestic sector so that whenever they face problems the government can help them resolve them. Domestic workers also mentioned that they know about some of the policies, which include not working for more than 45 hours a week. The paper findings also revealed that the labor department has set the standard that domestic workers should not be paid less than R1,800 per month. Surprisingly domestic workers revealed that they are still paid less than the set amount. This implies that even if there are some policies set by the department of labor for domestic workers they are not effectively implemented in the Thulamahashe area. Significantly, there were different perceptions concerning this factor between males and female domestic workers.

DISCUSSION

Challenges Facing Domestic Workers in Thulamahashe

In the present paper, domestic workers revealed a number of challenges they are facing in their daily lives. However, being harassed, working many days without being given off days being forced to have sex with their employers, receiving low wages, working after hours and extra hours as well as exploitation were reported as the main challenges they encounter. ILO (2012) also supports the above aforementioned facts that domestic workers are usually paid low wages and the work remains undervalued and poorly regulated, and that the survey conducted in 2012 by ILO reports that forty percent of selected countries worldwide did not guarantee

domestic workers a weekly day of rest, and did not specify the working hours for domestic hours. Tolla (2013) also reports that domestic workers from Mpumalanga earn between R800 to R700 per month, the salary is inadequate and not in the range set by the department of labor which is R1,491.86 per month (Department of Labor 2012). Albin and Mantouvalou (2012) indicate that more often than not, female domestic workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment by the male members as well as their visitors.

Depression and Stress

Most of the domestic workers indicated that as a result of the above hardships, when they knock off from work, they carry the hatred and anger home and their family members suffer because of their work frustrations. The results also demonstrated that working without contracts; long working hours and low wages are some of the problems they face. The International Labor Organization (2011) notes that domestic workers are usually paid low wages and that most countries worldwide do not guarantee domestic workers a weekly day of rest, and do not specify the working hours for domestic workers. Results also indicate that challenges raised above cause stress and depression, which result in poor productive work. Furthermore, the results confirm that domestic workers lose self-confidence on what they do and they feel discriminated for not being educated and not having what it takes to survive. This shows that the aforementioned challenges have a negative impact in domestic worker's lives.

Gender Disparities in Domestic Work

The paper establishes that female domestic workers are in the majority. This is mainly due to patriarchal beliefs. In line with this view, Smith (2012) pointed out that patriarchal beliefs are the root cause of male and female inequalities regarding gender roles. These beliefs socialize female domestic workers to take responsibility for domestic work. On the other hand, female domestic workers are socialized mainly to be responsible for house chores, looking after children, cooking, washing clothes, were reportedly favorable for females than males. This fact concurs with Cespedes (2011) who indicates that

women form a major part of the domestic work sector due to the beliefs of shared obligations for domestic activities, which are rooted in traditional history. Results showed that the reason encouraging this condition is the fact that community patriarchal beliefs endorse male non-participation in domestic work by narrowing them to productive work. The results indicated that male domestic workers reported that in most cases, they are not involved in domestic work because they are being hindered by patriarchal beliefs. This is due to the fact that men were socialized into believing that women should participate in home chores while men participate in productive work outside the home.

A Comparison of Challenges Faced by Male and Female Domestic Workers

The paper established that female domestic workers face more challenges than male domestic workers. The majority of female domestic workers indicated that they face domestic violence and sometimes they are forced to have sex with their male bosses unwillingly, as well as for them to get some wage increase and for them to be permanent domestic workers. In line with this fact, Albin and Mantouvalou (2012) also discovered that more often than not, female domestic workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment by the male employers as well as their visiting relatives. The above scholars also add that a survey done in United Kingdom in 2010 reveals that give percent of female domestic workers in the country suffered psychological abuse while three percent were sexually abused by their employers. Mkandawire-Valhmu (2010) adds that women experience more verbal abuse and physical abuse. This is probably because of the community beliefs that women are powerless and defenseless. The other reason is that women are afraid of losing their jobs. In line with this statement, Tolla (2013) adds that female domestic workers find it difficult to resist exploitation and abuse due to the fear of losing their only job helping them to survive. This implies that female domestic workers are affected by more challenges than male domestic workers.

Comparison of Challenges Faced by Domestic Workers in Urban and Rural Areas

The paper findings revealed that domestic workers from rural areas face more challenges than domestic workers from urban areas. Results

indicated that domestic workers from urban areas have more equipment for use, which makes it easy to accomplish their tasks in time. Results indicated that they have washing machines, they usually find water around the yard and they use electric stoves to cook. On the other hand, domestic workers from rural areas have to fetch water far away from the home, collect firewood, and wash clothes without auto-washing machines, which make it difficult to complete their tasks in time. Furthermore, results indicated that domestic workers from rural areas receive low wages, knock off late, and have heavier workloads. In short, domestic workers from rural areas face more challenges than domestic workers from urban areas. The reason being urban areas are more improved than rural settings.

Coping Strategies used by Domestic Workers

In this paper, results indicate that domestic workers keep quiet and calm as a way of coping with their challenges. A study by Tolla (2013) in Mpumalanga reveals that domestic workers resort to keeping quiet to avoid their employers from abusing them verbally. They consistently read the mood of their employers to avoid upsetting them through talking. They employ this strategy to maintain a peaceful yet unhealthy relationship with their employers. The findings revealed that they act like this because of the fear of losing their jobs, as well as avoiding arguments between them and their employers. The results further pointed out that domestic workers accept their situations, and sometimes they work according to the rules of their employers and keep quiet no matter how they are abused. This is very common amongst domestic workers because most of them are uneducated so they resort to accepting their situation and continuing with their jobs. The results indicated that they avoid talking to others from outside because they think that the outsiders can take their matters and tell their bosses, and as a result they may lose their jobs.

Strategies for Improving Conditions of Domestic Workers

The paper results revealed that domestic workers should come together to fight for their rights in order to improve their situation. Domestic workers should write their problems to-

gether and submit them to the Department of Labor so that the department can help them address their challenges. The outcomes of the study also confirmed that the conditions of domestic workers could also change if their employers give them freedom to express themselves freely. The Department of Labor (2010) also points out that the workers often find it difficult to discuss their challenges with their employers given the intimacy of the working environment and the mutual relationship created with the employers' family members. This is due to the reason that in most cases domestic workers are not given platforms by their employers to air their views. Furthermore, this gives a clear testimony that domestic workers are suffering behind closed doors without the department of labor knowing the challenges they are going through.

Professionalization of Domestic Work

Domestic workers need to be trained like other professions in order to receive certificates or qualifications. Results indicated that domestic work is seen as a profession for uneducated people in the communities. It is also a field dominated by women and is characterized by low wages. Nadasen (2012) laments that the association of domestic work women's unpaid labor and its private nature in homes makes it difficult for many people to view it as real work, worth any value. The results also demonstrated that most people who are involved in domestic work are underprivileged and do nothing when they are abused. They accept their situation because of the fear of losing their jobs. Domestic work is regarded as nothing but a division, which is dominated by women as well as a field, which is not well paying.

Measures to Ensure that Local Communities Recognize the Significances of Domestic Work

The paper findings revealed that domestic workers must come up with campaigns to make communities aware about the importance of domestic work. Results showed that domestic workers should lodge complaints and submit them to the local government so that the government can come up with some policies that can explain the importance of domestic work. Domestic workers pointed out that campaigns should be held

in the communities whereby the importance of domestic work should be briefly explained and that the domestic field should be treated as other professions. The reason why people do not take domestic work as a serious profession is the fact that it absorbs a lot of uneducated people who come from poor backgrounds. The responses also established that domestic workers must gather together and invite different stakeholders including the government to come in the communities in order to help domestic workers to highlight the significance of domestic work.

Registration of Domestic Work by Labor Department

The paper results suggested that domestic workers should be registered with the department of labor so that when they face some problems the law can take its course. This was the fact that domestic workers work without contracts. It becomes difficult when they face problems because they have nowhere to lodge their complaints. The results demonstrated that domestic workers knew about some of the policies, which include them not working more than 45 hours a week. The paper findings also revealed that the labor department has set the standard that domestic workers should not be paid less than R1, 800 per month. Surprisingly, domestic workers were still paid less than this amount. This implies that even if there are some policies set by the department of labor for domestic workers, these are not fully implemented. However, the results also pointed that the minority of domestic workers had not read any document about policies governing their profession and that not much information have been compiled about the domestic work profession, and hence perpetuating the problems.

CONCLUSION

Domestic workers face a plethora of challenges at workplace. Salient amongst these are sexual harassment, working without contracts, low wages, and a heavy workload and mistreatment by their employers. The paper also revealed that female domestic workers are more vulnerable than their male counterparts. The paper find-

ings revealed that the above challenges affect the lives of domestic workers because they lose concentration and become unproductive and ineffective at work. The paper results show that domestic workers from rural areas face more challenges than those in the urban areas. This is due to the fact that urban areas are more progressive in terms of following on the rules set out by the labor law in as far as domestic work is concerned. Domestic workers from rural areas have to fetch water from far, collect firewood and sometimes go to the fields for farming. On the other hand, domestic workers from metropolitan areas have all the equipment and resources around them to enable them to execute their tasks easily and faster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations that emerged from the paper. The paper appeals to the community members to develop a positive attitude towards domestic workers and domestic work on its own. The paper recommends that community members should take a leading role in educating community members about the importance of domestic work, regardless of the gender and how people perceive domestic work. Developing a positive attitude towards domestic work may help community members to understand the importance of domestic work and to know how important domestic work is. More effective recruitment ways also need to be employed by community leaders in order to remove a negative attitude about domestic work profession among people in the district. The paper recommends that the government should intervene in monitoring and evaluating the conditions of domestic workers. The introduction of a wide range of effective policies to guide domestic work profession should be available for domestic workers. A trend of increasing domestic workers' salaries should be developed in order to match the prominence of domestic work in communities. In addition, the government must establish awareness campaigns about the importance of domestic work in various communities in order to emphasize its significance around the world.

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