

Socio-economic determinants of the engagement of maid servants in domestic work: A case study of Aligarh city

Nazish Naz

Faculty of Science, Department of Geography, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

The engagement of women in domestic works depends on multiple factors. Disastrous domestic circumstances, migration, caste & class discrimination, gender inequality, and lack of education, poverty, unemployment etc. are the major determinants pushing the women in domestic work which is still included in informal factors where the wages, working days and working hours are not fixed and on account of these economic insecurities and other vulnerabilities associated to their social condition the women suffer immensely. Their condition becomes more critical when they are physically assaulted, psychologically harassed and sexually exploited by their employers. In order to bring improvement in working as well as social condition of maid servants, it is imperative to investigate the causes responsible largely for the involvement of the women in this weaker informal occupation lessen their dependence in this sector, making them skilled workers and other multi-dimensional aspects. In this context, the present study is an attempt to analyse the major factors pushing the women in domestic workers. The study is entirely based on primary sources of data collected through the field survey conducted in month of September, 2020 following the direct interview method to the respondents. The overall research findings reveal that the vulnerable socio-economic condition in terms of literacy, household size, marital status, indebtedness, low household income, and, disability and bad habits of male breadwinners is the major determinant of the women participation in domestic work.

Keywords: maid servants, domestic work, determinants, socio-economic condition, Aligarh city

Introduction

The participation of women in economic activities has increased significantly over the last decades but the engagement of women is much higher in unorganised sectors rather than the women working in organised sectors in which neither their working days nor working hours are fixed nor are their wages are stable. Since the domestic service is considered as a tedious job, most of the women workers involved in this work come from economically poor families (Dar, J.A., 2014) ^[2]. On account of economic insecurity in these informal sectors, the women are exploited, assaulted and harassed in various ways and thereby they suffer a lot from various vulnerabilities. The involvement of women in informal sectors depends on a combination of socio-economic causes which are essential to be investigated for multi-dimensional aspects. In this context, the present study attempts to make an in-depth assessment of causes responsible for the engagement of the women in domestic works which is one the most disgusting and insecure jobs of women among all types of informal economic activities.

Generally they are compelled to work as domestic servants in distress condition when their main male breadwinners of households are not capable to support the families either due to their physical disability, or due to the addiction of bad habits, or on account of low wages or unemployment. The male breadwinners of those families generally work as rickshaw pullers, street vendors, constructional workers, running small khokhas of tea or tobacco materials, or working as servants or security guards in complexes, lodges, wedding halls or apartments who themselves earn very low wages and thus unable solely to sustain their family's livelihood. Their sons also do not become the skilled

workers and thereby not a sound earner and remain confined to the traditional occupations of their fathers. In this situation the women majorly from rural areas being unskilled and having no formal education are compelled to be the domestic helper. Besides, the breakup of the families or death of the husband also becomes the causes of their engagement in this work. In brief, increased nuclear family system, labor force participation of women, growing urbanization, lack of education and low economic conditions are the primary reasons for the exponential growth of this sector (Adin and Singhe, 2016) ^[1]. In a study conducted by Manson and Palan (1981) ^[3] it has also been found that the household economic structure was a major determinant of female labour force participation. Women from high economic status were found to be less likely to participate in the work force than women from poor households. The traditions, customs or practices of rural society sometimes become the causes for the engagement of women in domestic work such as the practice of early age marriage, caste system, and religion do not allow the women to get education further. They remain deprived of formal education and thereby they at the time of sudden economic crises have no option but to engage in such a disgusting and undignified work.

Migration may also be responsible for their involvement in the petty work. The domestic workers often migrate from one area to another particularly from rural to urban areas sometimes urban to well-developed urban areas in search of better livelihood, qualitative living standard and often attracted by the city light. After having reached to cities, the migrants do not often find the appropriate work enough to afford the daily expenditure including high cost housing rent, medical expenses, children's education, etc. In order to

support their working male members, the women who are generally unskilled and without formal education, have to engage in domestic work as maid servants. Thus migration becomes an effective push factor enforcing them for domestic works.

Study Area

The Aligarh city of Uttar Pradesh, India has been selected for present study. Geographically, Aligarh city is located between 27°52'N to 27°56'N latitudes and 78°3'E to 78°6'E longitudes. It occupies an area of about 36.10 square km in the west of Uttar Pradesh. Total population of Aligarh city as per census 2011 is 8, 74, 408 out of which, 52.80 percent are males while 47.19 percent are females. The sex ratio of city is 894 females per 1000 males, whereas, the child sex ratio is 885. The literacy rate in the city is 68.52 percent. While literacy of male and female is 73.53 percent and 62.93 percent respectively. The area selected for the present study is well connected with its hinterland by both road and rail ways. The famous Grand Trunk passes through

the city and many of Highways are well connected to Aligarh such as- NH91, NH93 and Yamuna Expressway. Aligarh is an important center of Uttar Pradesh and is mostly famous for its lock industry. The famous Aligarh Muslim University is also situated here. Thus, being an industrial, educational and administrative city of Uttar Pradesh, it becomes socio-economically significant for the people which become a motivating factor attracting a large number of migrants within and beyond the Uttar Pradesh such as Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan, etc. These migrants visit to city along with their households. Various classes of people like Upper class, middle class and poor class live in Aligarh city. Socio- economic status of women varies with various classes to which they belong. The participation of women in economic activities has increased appreciably with the increasing urbanisation over the last decades. The increased work participation of women has also increased the demand of maid servants for maintaining the households works which are easily supplied or available from the poor class or migrant families.

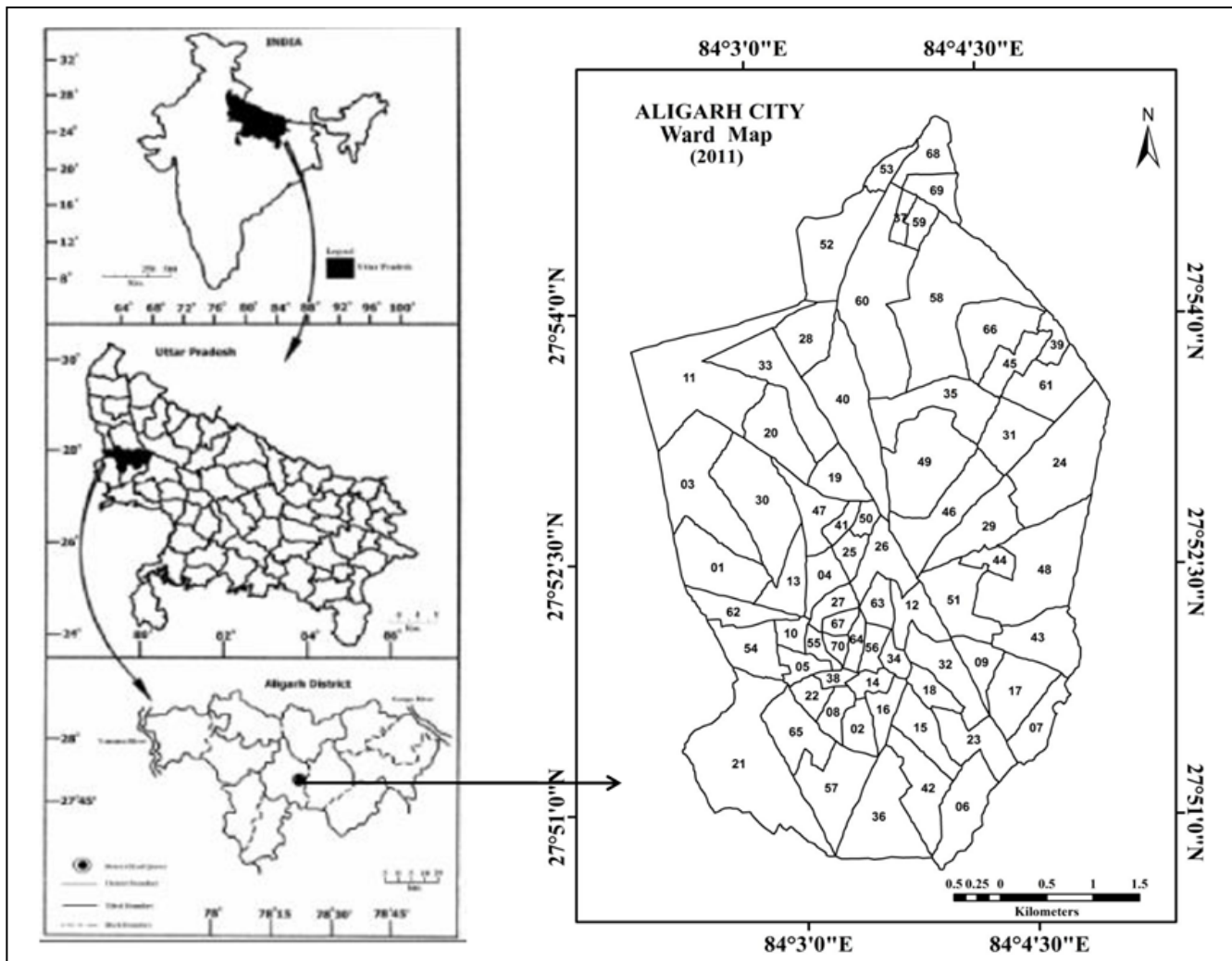


Fig 1: Location Map of Aligarh City

Aims and Objectives

- To analyse the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of maid servants in order to observe their socio-economic background to which they belong.
- To find out the causes which force the maid servants to engage in domestic work.

Data Base and Methodology

The present study is entirely based on primary sources of data that has been generated by conducting a comprehensive field survey. The data has been collected through the direct interview method to the respondents by visiting to their working or residential areas. For the purpose of data collection a well-structured both close-ended and open-

ended scheduled has been used. Only those women have been exclusively included in the survey who were working in households, societies or apartment either as kitchen assistant, or care taker of children, cleaning or sweeping, doing the all types of domestic works in households. The survey has consisted 220 women who were sampled randomly from various major locations of Aligarh City such as Sir Syad Nagar, Ahmad Nagar, Amir Nisha, Firdaus Nagar, Dodhpur, Jamalpur, Jeenwargarh, and Medical colony, etc. when the major concentration of domestic maid servants was observed during the pilot survey which was held prior to field survey. The survey has been conducted in month of September, 2020 maintaining the social distancing and following all essential safety measures while interviewing the respondents. The obtained data has been calculated in simple percentage and average method and presented in tabular form. The data has been described both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Result and Discussion
Profile of Respondents

An in-depth analysis of the data provided in table-1 pertaining the social and demographic characteristics of the maid servants reveals the fact With regard of age-group of maid servants, the largest share of the respondents belonged to 31-45 age-groups in which they accounted for 50.9

percent, followed by the women falling in age-group 45-60 years, 21-30 age-groups and 16-20 age-group, their respective shares were 21.81 percent, 20 percent and 16.36 percent while the lowest proportion (10.9 percent) of the women was recognized in age-group of above 60.

Out of total sampled maid servants 45.45 percent of them were married, nearly 21 percent were unmarried and about 15 were divorced or separated whereas the remaining consisted of widowed.

With respect of literacy level, 71 percent were illiterates whereas 29 percent were literates. Nearly one-third of the maid servants were observed having the large size of family exceedingly more than 8 members while one-fourth percent were recorded belonging to medium sized households (6 members) and very little portion of them were examined falling in small sized household (4 members).

An in-depth analysis of the data pertaining the migration status of the sampled maid servants reveals the fact that more than third-fourth of maid servants were migrants while little less than one-fourth of them were non-migrants the exact corresponding figures of migrant and non-migrant maid servants were 78 percent and 22 percent. Most of the maid servants had migrated from Bihar, followed by West Bengal and Rajasthan and in minor proportion from other states of India.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Maid Servants’ Demographic and Social Characteristics in Aligarh City, 2020

S. No.	Demographic-Social Indicators	Categories	Percentage
1.	Age	16-20	16.36
		21-30	20
		31-45	30.9
		45-60	21.81
		Above 60	10.9
2.	Marital Status	Married	45.45
		Unmarried	20.9
		Divorced/Separated	14.54
		Widowed	12.72
3.	Literacy Status	Illiterate	70.9
		Literate	29.1
4.	Migration Status	Migrant	78.18
		Non-migrant	21.81
5.	Caste-Composition	GN	52.72
		OBC	26.36
		SC/ST	20.9
6.	Ownership of house	Own	20
		Rented	55.45
		Jhuggi	2.45

Source: Based on primary survey by author.

While considering the data regarding the caste categories of maid servants nearly 53 percent were examined belonging to general caste category, 26 to other backward caste and the remaining 21 percent belonged to scheduled caste or scheduled tribe population.

Most of women were observed living in rented houses and a very short amount of them were having the ownership of their houses; the corresponding figures of them were 55.45 percent and 20 percent. 2.45 percent of the women were observed living in *jhuggi* or huts built along the roadsides, open fields, pavements or near to railway lines, etc.

Socio-Economic Causes of Engagement of Maid Servants

The data regarding the percentage distribution of the socio-

economic causes pushing the women in domestic work has been provided in table-2 which clearly shows that as a whole the highest proportion of maid servants (18.64 percent) has been forced to work in houses on account of joblessness or unemployment of their adult male family members such as father, sons or husbands on which they depend for their survival. The second largest amount of women (16.36 percent) maid servants has been noticed working as maid servants due to their inadequate household income. The women forced by the causes like burden of large family or daughters’ marriage, low wages of their male earners and disability or illness of their husband or father have amounted significantly in which they constituted 15.45 percent, 14.55 percent, and 9.09 percent respectively whereas the women having compelled by indebtedness, death

of husband or divorce or separation from their spouses, and bad habits of husband/father have shared 9.09 percent, 8.64 percent and 8.18 percent respectively.

A further analysis of causes of the engagement of women in domestic work on the basis of age structure reveals the fact that majority of women aged 16-20 has been noticed to work as maid servants on account of unemployment in which they shared 27.79 followed by those who were compelled to do domestic work by low household income, low wages of male working household members, burden of large families and their respective percentages are 27.77 percent, 11.11 percent and 11.11 percent. The women falling in this age-group pushed by the remaining factors to engage in domestic work such as bad habits of husband or father, indebtedness, disability/illness of husband/father, death of husband or divorce/separation or left by their spouses shared collectively 22.23 percent.

The women aged between 21-30 have been mostly forced to involve in domestic work by the unemployment of their male household earners followed by low household income, burden of large family in which they respectively accounted for 18.18 percent, 15.92 percent and 15.90 percent. The corresponding figures of females inspired to work under consideration of the socio-economic causes such as low wages, death of husband or divorce or separation from their spouses, disability or illness of husband/father and indebtedness are 11.37 percent, 11.35 percent, 9.09 percent

and 9.09 percent respectively.

Similarly the highest number of women falling in age-group of 31-45 has been reported to get involved in domestic work because of unemployment. The females of these age-groups forced to be maid servants on account of low wages and burden of large families/marriage of daughter also share the significant proportion. The percentage share of the women in these causes is 17.65 percent and 14.65 percent respectively. The pattern is little different among those aged 46-60 who mostly were compelled to be maid servants due to low household income (18.75 percent), followed by large family size or responsibility of adult daughters' marriage (16.67 percent), low wages (14.58 percent) and unemployment (14.58 percent). The further observation of the data experiences a little condition in case of the women aged above 60 who were noticed to do the job of maid servants influenced by burden of large families or responsibilities of daughters' marriages in which they accounted for 20.83 percent. The second largest percentage of the women in the same age-group has been found to engage in domestic work on account of low wages (16.67 percent) and indebtedness (16.67 percent). The causes in which the old maid servants shared significantly are unemployment of household male working members (12.50 percent) and disability/illness of husband or sons (12.50 percent).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Socio-Economic Causes responsible for the Engagement of Maid Servants in Domestic Work Categorized by Age-Structure in Aligarh City, 2020

Socio-Economic Causes	Age-Groups					All
	16-20	21-30	31-45	46-60	Above 60	
Disability/illness of husband	2.78	9.09	10.29	10.42	12.50	9.09
Death of husband or divorce/separation	5.56	11.35	8.82	8.33	8.33	8.64
Bad habits of husband/father	8.33	9.09	8.82	8.33	4.17	8.18
Burden of large family/Marriage of daughters	11.11	15.90	14.71	16.67	20.83	15.45
Unemployment	27.79	18.18	19.12	14.58	12.50	18.64
Indebtedness	5.56	9.09	8.82	8.33	16.67	9.09
Low household income	27.77	15.92	11.76	18.75	8.33	16.36
Low wages	11.11	11.37	17.65	14.58	16.67	14.55
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Based on primary survey by author.

An assessment of the data regarding the percentage distribution of socio-economic causes of engagement of maid servants contained in this table-3 reveals that the share of the married women have been the largest to do the work as maid servants under the economic consideration such as unemployment, indebtedness, low household income, and low wages followed by unmarried and divorced/separated women whereas the widowed women have been the lowest to engage in the work of maid servants forced by economic reasons while the reverse the condition has been observed among the social causes such as disability/illness of husband/father, death of husband or divorced/separated, bad habits of husband/father, and burden of large family in which the widowed dominate over the married, unmarried and divorced/separated.

A further examination of table-3 exposes the fact that among the married women respondents, unemployment has been the found to be the most dominant cause of their engagement in domestic work followed by more income, low wages and burden of large family/marriage of daughters and these contribute 23 percent, 18 percent and 14 percent.

In case of unmarried women, low household income has been the most important causes of their involvement in domestic work which shared about 20 percent which is notable higher than those of married women. The other significant reasons of unmarried maid servants are unemployment (17.39 percent), disability/illness of father/brothers (17.39 percent) and burden of large family (15.22 percent).

The main causes responsible for the participation of women in domestic work who were divorced, separated or left behind by their spouses are divorces or separation from their husband which alone constituted 28.13 percent. The causes like the low wages, low household income and unemployment of their working aged male household members have pushed the significant proportion of maid servants in this menial job. The corresponding percentages of the respondents sharing in these reasons are 18.75 percent, 15.66 percent and 15.60 percent respectively. The most of widowed maid servants were forced to work after the death of their husbands and the duties of their large families or

marriages of their daughters have compelled 21.43 widowed females to join the service of maid service. Besides, low wages and unemployment of their adult sons or

brothers/fathers have prompted 14.29 percent and 11.90 percent widowed maid servants respectively to engage in this job.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Causes of the Engagement of Maid Servants in Domestic Work Classified on the basis of Marital Status in Aligarh City, 2020

Socio-Economic Causes	Marital Status				All
	Married	Unmarried	Divorced/Separated	Widowed	
Disability/illness of husband/father	9.00	17.39	3.13	4.76	9.09
Death of husband or divorced/separated	0.00	0.00	28.13	23.81	8.64
Bad habits of husband/father	10.00	10.87	0.00	7.14	8.18
Burden of large family/Marriage of daughters	14.00	15.22	12.50	21.43	15.45
Unemployment	23.00	17.39	15.60	11.90	18.64
Indebtness	12.00	6.52	6.25	7.14	9.09
Low household income	18.00	19.57	15.66	9.52	16.36
Low wages	14.00	13.04	18.75	14.29	14.55
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Based on sample survey by author

The data about the socio-economic causes of the engagement of maid servants categorized on the basis of literacy status have been presented in table-4. An analysis of the data unfolds the fact that illiterate women serving as maid servants under the economic considerations are significantly higher than those of literate women. The maid servants working under the economic compulsion such as unemployment, indebtedness, low household income and low wages collectively constituted about 61 percent whereas their literate counterparts forced to serve as maid servants by the similar economic reasons altogether accounted for 57.70 percent. The trends gets opposite for the social reasons in which the literate respondents outnumber the illiterate ones. An examination of the data considering the socio-economic causes of maid illiterate servants reveals that reasons of unemployment has contributed the largest share among all causes responsible for the engagement of women in domestic which alone constituted 17.31 percent whereas the causes like low household income, burden of family and low wages forced to 16.03 percent, 16.03 percent and 14.10 percent maid servants to serve in households respectively. Similarly, the unemployment has been recorded to be an important cause of literate maid servants which forced 21 percent women to share in work of maid servant. Other main reasons of literate maid servants are low household income, low wages and burden of large family in which they comprised of 17.19 percent, 15.63 percent and 14.06 percent respectively.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Causes of the Engagement of Maid Servants in Domestic Work based on Literacy Status in Aligarh City, 2020

Socio-Economic Causes	Literacy Status		All
	Illiterates	Literate	
Disability/illness of husband/father	8.97	9.38	9.09
Death of husband or divorced/separated	7.69	10.94	8.64
Bad habits of husband/father	9.62	4.69	8.18
Burden of large family/Marriage of daughters	16.03	14.06	15.45
Unemployment	17.31	21.88	18.64
Indebtness	10.26	6.25	9.09
Low household income	16.03	17.19	16.36
Low wages	14.10	15.63	14.55
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Based on sample survey by author

An account of socio-economic causes of involvement of maid servants based on Migration status has been detailed in table-5. The close examination of table-4 envisages that the ratio of

migrant maid servants forced by the economic circumstances such as unemployment, indebtedness, low household income and low wages is much larger than their non-migrant counterpart and they respectively comprised of 59.88 percent and 54.16 percent while the condition gets reversed in social causes such as Disability/illness of husband/father, death of husband or divorce/separation, bad habits of husband, and burden of large in which the non-migrant maid servants exceeded the migrant maid servants.

A further close scrutiny of table-5 regarding the reason of engagement of women in domestic work brings into the light that fact that unemployment playing an important role has encouraged forced 18.60 percent of migrant maid servants and 18.75 percent of non-migrant maid servants to adapt the profession of maid servant. Low household income as major economic cause of migrant maid servant accounts for 16.86 percent, while among the non-migrant maid servants it comprises 14.58 percent. Burden of large family has prompted 15.70 percent migrant maid servants to involve in domestic whereas little less than migrants i.e. 14.58 percent non-migrant respondents pressurized by the responsibilities of large size of families have participated in domestic work. While the migrant respondents working on account of disability or illness of their husband or father and death of husband or due to divorce or separation from their husbands have indulged in domestic work in which they have been registered 8.72 percent and 7.56 percent, the respective percentage share of non-migrants shares in these causes have been recorded 10.42 percent and 12.50 percent.

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Causes of the Engagement of Maid Servants in Domestic Work Categorized by Migration Status in Aligarh City, 2020

Socio-Economic Causes	Migration Status		All
	Migrants	Non-migrants	
Disability/illness of husband/father	08.72	10.42	09.09
Death of husband or divorced/separated	07.56	12.50	08.64
Bad habits of husband/father	08.14	08.33	08.18
Burden of large family/Marriage of daughters	15.70	14.58	15.45
Unemployment	18.60	18.75	18.64
Indebtness	09.30	08.33	09.09
Low household income	16.86	14.58	16.36
Low wages	15.12	12.50	14.55
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Based on sample survey by author.

Conclusions

The overall discussion reveals that the women coming from very vulnerable background in terms of their household income, working status of their spouses or fathers, large family size, and the poor health condition have largely been compelled to work as maid servants in one or more households. On account of the unemployment or jobless of their main male earners of households, the requirements of their basic necessities were not possible to be fulfilled, and thereby, they themselves had to jump into this disgusting and devastated job. Moreover, household income which was not adequate to fulfill the basic needs has also pushed them to serve as maid servants. Their male earning family members, though working regularly yet on low wages were also not capable to earn the sufficient means of subsistence and thereby to raise their families' living standards, therefore, in order to support their families financially, the women had to involve in domestic work. The deep rooted evil such as dowry system has also been noticed as a major cause pushing the women into this work. The most of adult women, who had two or three young daughters to get married, required collecting the money for the dowry for their daughters' marriage because without the dowry, none was ready to marry with their daughters. Besides, the addiction of bad habits of their spouses had dragged them into the domestic services to take the responsibilities of their dear ones alone. Thus, it finally be concluded that the disastrous socio-economic circumstances of women have compelled them to engage in the domestic work.

Recommendations

Since, the women are forced to engage in domestic work compelled by a number of causes arising from their vulnerable socio-economic condition; hence it is imperative to mitigate the causes of their involvement in order to enhance their participation in skilled jobs, to mitigate their major problems, to end their exploitation and to increase their bargaining power by following the suggestions or recommendations described below:

- It would be a good step to raise the socio-economic standard of women through the implementation of wages enhancement, increasing their bargaining power, by fixing their working days, working hours, but equally, the emphasis needs to be given on improving the working and wages condition of their working male household members who are mostly daily wage earners or jobless or laboring on a very low wages which ultimately become the main causes of pushing the women in domestic work.
- The daughters of maid servants should be provided better education and they should be motivated to enroll in various skill programs launched by government through the awareness about the implementation of these running programmes. In this way, they will not be burden on their families; rather will be capable to make an addition in their household income.
- The long rooted evil of society such as dowry system needs to be alleviated by campaigning more rigorous constitutional and legislative provisions. On account of this social practice, the daughters are considered as the burden of family, they remain deprived of education, and they are married at very early age. Consequently they have to engage in domestic work being unskilled and having no formal education.

- There should be provision of compensation for the daily wage labourers for any accident at worksite. Maid servants' male breadwinners should be prioritized at the time of launching these schemes.
- The early age marriage should be strictly prohibited through the rigorous implementation of legislative and constitutional amendment.
- The anti-social activities of their husband and the bad habits their father/brother/husbands also force them to enroll in domestic work. So, there should be initiated some Drug Counseling Centres in the area at free monetary cost by the government and other voluntary organization so as to overcome their problems

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