

# Rights and Dignity : Women Domestic Workers in Jaipur



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*Published by Jagori, 2008*



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*Printed by*  
Chauhan Graphics

*For limited circulation only*

*Cover photo : Members of Research team with few domestic workers*

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## Acknowledgements

This research on part time women domestic workers is the first study of its kind in Jaipur. I am grateful to JAGORI for providing me assistance and guidance to undertake the research work. The study would not have been possible without their support. I am grateful to Kalyani Menon-Sen and Kalpana Viswanath, JAGORI, for their guidance during the research and report writing.

I would like to thank Kavita Srivastava, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Jaipur, who has been involved in this research since its inception. I thank Pradeep Bhargava & Manju of Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur for their analysis of statistical data. I also extend my gratitude to Jyotsna Lal & Butiram and the members of the research team - Vimlesh, Ravi, Harvendra & Kanak Parmar for their meticulous data collection. I am grateful to UNNATI, Hyderabad, for the financial support provided to the research team during data collection.

Mewa Bharati

## About JAGORI

Jagori is a women's training, documentation, communication and resource center that was established in 1984. It works extensively on the impact of current economic and social processes on women's lives and issues like communal violence, economic policies, reproductive and child health and violence against women. The main objectives are

- To bring about feminist consciousness and struggle towards women's empowerment in rural and urban areas.
- Production and distribution of creative material on women's rights and educational materials on a wide range of issues relevant to women.
- Running a documentation and resource center that serves the information needs of women's groups, NGOs, researchers, media and other regular users.
- Action-research on the impact of current economic and social processes on women's lives.

At Jagori we collectively support and work with the oppressed and affected women facing violence from a feminist perspectives. The outcome paves the way for action-research and social change, like –

- To organize and create mechanisms on community problems
- To increase and play a significant role in bringing a women-centred perspective on these issues.
- To initiate dialogue with the policy-makers and expand our outreach in a positive way.

In accordance with the fellowship programmes, for the past two years we have associated with women's movement and feminist organizations to work on the issues of different kinds of violence against women. This study is based on the part-time domestic workers in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

# Introduction: Women Workers in the Informal Economy

In the recent years, changes in economic policies, rural poverty and migration to urban areas due to impoverishment and disruption of livelihoods have changed the nature of the informal economy in India. One of the most visible changes has been the increase in participation of women in the informal sector. This change in the composition of the informal sector is not only due to the growing opportunities but is also related to the move being made by unskilled male workers to semi-skilled and skilled jobs. These unskilled jobs are being taken over by poorer men and women.

Women are primarily found in the following sites of work:

- Garment and electronic factories
- Home based work for garment factories
- Domestic work
- Construction work
- Running petty roadside stalls

Working conditions in the informal sector are often unsatisfactory and these jobs offer no security of employment or benefits. There is no formal or recognized method of deciding wages, working conditions and hours, payment for working over time, holidays (weekly or on festivals), leave structure (for example, casual, annual, sick or maternity) and the termination of employment. In most cases, these are decided unilaterally by the employer. It is widely recognized that the work taken up by women is poorly paid. In addition to the vulnerabilities faced as a worker, the situation is compounded for women who also face violence and sexual harassment. The only recourse to any such violation is to leave the job but it is important to recognize that in spite of harassment of a woman worker, she may not be able to leave the work due to economic necessities. Further, most of these workers are migrants and may not have the support system to seek any form of help against the harassment. They may not find support to take up the issue with the employer as that could lead to losing the job.

Living conditions, access to schools for their children and access to medical facilities are equally dismal for these families. Studies have shown that the lack of basic amenities such as clean drinking water and proper drainage not only increase their hardships but also lead to ill health which is economically crippling. In case of a long illness, these workers have to not only bear the cost of their medical

treatment but often lose their jobs because of absenteeism. Most women carry a triple burden of work outside the home, household chores and child rearing as well. These vulnerabilities will be discussed at length in the context of female domestic workers.

## Background to the Study

JAGORI has been working on the issues of migrant women and women workers in the informal economy over the past several years. In 2002 we carried out a study to explore migration and work patterns of women in Rajasthan and Gujarat. A detailed research undertaken in 2003 on the lives of first generation women migrants to Delhi, *Rights and Vulnerabilities* (2004), explored the process of migrating to Delhi from different rural areas and the subsequent life in Delhi with a special focus on different forms of work in the informal economy. This study focused on domestic workers, construction workers, factory workers, junk dealers, self-employed, piece workers and home based workers.

In the study, it was found that the vulnerabilities of domestic workers were located in their lack of negotiating power in all aspects of their work including the wage negotiation process, number of holidays, having a cup of tea and snack, or getting gifts and bonus. With the insights from this study, we wanted to further explore the living and work conditions of female domestic workers in a city. This brief research study in Jaipur arose from these concerns.

Further, workers in the informal sector are often not aware of their rights as workers. In some states domestic workers have begun to organize in order to demand for their rights. Along with collecting data on domestic workers, this study is also a first attempt towards organizing domestic workers to demand rights and fair working conditions. The aim is to form a group (*samooh*) to make workers aware of their rights, start a process of rationally fixing wages, resolve the problems/ cases involving non-payment of wages, other issues with employers, upgrade their skills and competence and help to make the work more professional.

A focus on female domestic workers is also critical as there has been a sharp increase in the number of female domestic workers in India in the last two decades. According to National Sample Survey (NSS) data, in sharp contrast to the number of male domestic workers remaining static at 0.3 million between 1983 and 1999, the numbers of female domestic workers have increased from 1.2 million to 2 million in the same period<sup>1</sup>. Studies have shown that demand for domestic workers have increased as more women are working outside homes, their chores are not shared by men but replaced by the inexpensive female labour which is easily available in the contemporary urban economies<sup>2</sup>. A larger

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1. As cited in Kaur, Ravinder, 2006 *Migrating for Work: Rewriting Gender Relations* in Sadhna Arya and Anupama Roy (eds) *Poverty, Gender and Migration*. New Delhi: Sage

2. For further details see Kaur (2006) and Neetha N. 2004 *Making of Female Breadwinners: Migration and Social Networking of Women Domestic In Delhi*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXIX (17): 24-30 April.



number of women are now working as domestic workers due to the unskilled nature of domestic work, their willingness to work for lesser wages, and work in jobs with low status. The main chores done by these domestic workers are cleaning, washing, cooking, looking after children and in some cases, caring for the aged.

Studies have shown that ethnic and regional differences often shape the kind of work taken up by different migrant groups. In some cases, women cannot work as domestic workers in their own region due to their social status. They are able to work only after migrating to another region. Also, in some cultures as that of Rajasthan, domestic work is culturally considered to be a lower form of work and domestic workers often conceal the nature of their work from their families, especially the part of the family still living in the villages.

This study explores the different dimensions of the lives of part time domestic workers – life in slums, working conditions and their attitude towards work. This study focused on two distinct categories of domestic workers – Rajasthani and Bengalis. Families from rural Rajasthan are migrating to the city of Jaipur but even people from far off states as West Bengal are migrating in search of work. This study also explores the differences and tensions between them. Some of these differences emerged in the survey and have been followed up in the case studies and focus group discussions.

## **General Migration Patterns**

During the course of the fieldwork, we found that the women, along with some or all members of their families had migrated from different parts of Rajasthan, Bengal, and few from Bihar. As has been pointed out, this Report focuses only on the two dominant migrant groups – the Rajasthani and the Bengali women. It is significant to note that a large number of domestic workers are first generation migrants. A few women working as domestic workers were born in Jaipur itself.

The patterns of migration for Rajasthani women are very different from those of the Bengalis. Most of these women migrated to Jaipur between six years to thirty years ago. Rural poverty is the main reason for people to migrate to the city. The process of migration is a gradual one spanning a period of a few years. Men often migrate first to work in the construction industry. Many of the male construction workers come to the city with a contractor who is from the same village. Once they stabilize in their work and find accommodation, they bring their wives and children to the city. In some cases, they leave older children behind in the village if an able bodied family member is available to take care of the children. Some of these children also go to the school in the village.

On reaching the city, the immediate support network is that of other family members who might have migrated to the city earlier. In the absence of family, other villagers become the support network. However, it was observed that immediately after reaching the city, most people prefer to stay for a short while with family members and not with known people from the same village. Owing to

financial needs, a large number of women look for work with construction as their first option. As women do not find employment in the construction field easily any more, domestic work is the most viable option. Most of the families go back to the village every one or two years but those women with some family land, or those who work as agricultural labourers, go back to the village two or three times a year. Though they continue to maintain the link with their villages, many of them buy houses and settle down in the city itself.

As mentioned earlier, a large number of the children are left behind in the village to attend school. A survey<sup>3</sup> which was part of this study revealed that 96% boys and 91% girls (between 6-14 years) of Rajasthani domestic workers attend school in the city as well. A large number of these girls get married around the age of 14 though, in keeping with the local cultural practice, they may continue to live with their parents for a few more years. In some cases, these girls are allowed by their families to work. Also, daughters of widows often work or assist their mothers. However, these girls conceal the fact that they do cleaning work (which is considered menial) and tell others that their work entails looking after children. A large number of boys also discontinue their education and join the same occupation as their fathers.

It was also observed that when Bengali women visit Bengal every two or three years, they return with a few other women from their village who migrate with the intention of earning a livelihood by working as domestic workers. Once they reach Jaipur, the newer migrants live for a short period with the older ones who brought them to the city. A large number of the Bengali men find work as rickshaw pullers, while others work as construction workers, painters, or as factory workers. The older migrant women takes the new women with her to work where they observe how domestic work is done and then help them to find jobs. Once they gain some experience, they find other jobs and negotiate wages.

A large number of Bengali couples bring their children with them though some, like the Rajasthani migrants, leave them in the village with older family members. A large number of Bengali children do not attend school<sup>4</sup>. The survey revealed that only 47% of the Bengali boys and 51% girls of school going age (6-14 years) attend school. On pursuing this issue, the Bengali women shared with the researcher that it was difficult for them to send their children to school due to language differences and also as they are not at home to ensure that the children go to school on time and study. It was observed that the young girls start accompanying their mothers to work from the age of ten. In a couple of years, they are capable of working independently. The mothers of these girls find jobs and negotiate on their behalf. In contrast to the Rajasthani girl, these girls do not conceal the nature of their work. Boys also start working by the age of fifteen as construction workers, painters or as factory workers.

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3. Details of the survey are given in the following section.

4. In keeping with the composition of the migrant workers in the informal sector, majority of the women (86%) are illiterate. Except for the secondary level education, where we came across a couple of Bengali women with secondary education, the education profile of women from Bengal and Rajasthan is similar.

It was also observed that Bengali women keep their homes very neat and tidy and their children also appear to be neat. This, along with the fact that they eat variety of foods, gives an appearance of a better standard of living than the Rajasthani families. Almost all the Bengali women said that they save a part of the family incomes which is used for their children's education or marriages. Some of them buy houses in Jaipur and settle down in the city while many others aspire to do so.

## The Sample and Methodology

A total of 369 women were included in the survey. As shown in Table 1, 177 were from Rajasthan while 182 were from Bengal. The remaining ten were from other states.

**Table 1: Distribution of domestic workers by State of origin**

State of origin	Number	Per cent
Rajasthan	177	48.0
West Bengal	182	49.3
Andhra Pradesh	1	0.3
Bihar	6	1.6
Madhya Pradesh	1	0.3
Uttar Pradesh	2	0.5
All	369	100.0

**Table 2: Age profile of domestic workers (per cent)**

Age Group (years)	State of origin		All
	Rajasthan	West Bengal	
11-18	18.6	17.6	18.1
19-25	17.5	24.7	21.2
26-30	16.4	20.9	18.7
31-40	29.9	24.7	27.3
41-50	8.5	8.8	8.6
Above 50	9.0	3.3	6.1
All	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	177	182	359

The distinct feature which emerges is that the majority of women workers are below 40 years of age (about 85% of the sample) though there are variations according to the place of origin. Lesser percentage of young Rajasthani women in the age group of 19 – 25 years (17.5%) work as domestic workers in contrast to the Bengali women (24.7%). This could be located in the cultural differences

of the two groups as Rajasthani women are generally married and become mothers at a younger age. These factors can also explain the difference in the 26 – 30 age group as well.

Further, a larger number of Rajasthani women in the age group of above 50 were found to be still working as domestic workers (9% Rajasthani women in contrast to 3.3% Bengali women). The reasons for these could be located in the migration patterns – a large number of the Bengali migrants are more recent migrants and the age profiles of such migrant groups rarely comprise older persons. However, some of these older Bengali women had migrated to Jaipur when they were young and continue to work after 50 years of age. In contrast to the Bengali women, a larger number of Rajasthani women are older migrants into the city of Jaipur – women who migrated and started working at a younger age and hence a larger number fall in the age profile of above 50. It needs to be stated that some of these older women, of both regional groups, are widows and continue to work to sustain themselves.

This study was carried out over a period of a year, from October 2005 to September 2006. As Jaipur has a large number of slums (ranging between 300 – 400 according to different estimates), those slums with a large number of domestic workers residing in them were selected. These slums are also representative of different areas of Jaipur. The study included both quantitative and qualitative methods of research:

1. Survey – A survey of 369 households of female domestic workers was undertaken. This survey focused on the background of families, the place of origin, profiles of the domestic workers, their living conditions, the basic amenities available to them in their slums, their working conditions and other work related issues.
2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Group discussions were held to gain an understanding into the problems faced by the domestic workers. Ten FGDs were held in different localities with 10 – 15 women participating in each of them.
3. Case Studies – Detailed experiences of a few domestic workers were collected with in-depth interviews. The focus of these interviews was to gain an insight into the lives and the working conditions of these women.

## Jaipur: A Profile

Jaipur has a total population of 2,324, 319 persons with 1,239, 711 males and 1,084, 608 females<sup>5</sup>. Total slum population is 368,570 which is the highest slum among the number of slum dwellers in the State. They constitute 15.09% of total population of city. Of these, 194,762 are males whereas 173,808 are women<sup>6</sup>.

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5. [http://www.censusindia.net/results/million\\_plus.html](http://www.censusindia.net/results/million_plus.html)

6. <http://www.censusindia.net/results/slums/slums-index.html>

The slum settlements, or *bastis*, are not all similar as the infrastructure and facilities available vary widely. Some slums have proper drainage and sewage while others have open *kuchha* drains and are often located adjacent to a large open drain, a *nullah*. There are no bridges over the drains and often the residents have to walk through these large drains. These *nullahs* over flow during the rainy season with water often flowing into the houses at low level.

Other infrastructure issues such as electricity, water supply, schools affect the lives of those living in these slums, especially of the women, who have to often bear the load of the house work, child rearing and work as paid workers outside the home as well.

The following table on page 8 describes the main features of the slums from which the data was collected.

## Life in the *Bastis*

All domestic workers in this study live in *bastis*. Almost all the families had lived in other settlements, some in four or five different settlements, before moving to their present houses. The survey reveals that nearly 80% of the Rajasthani women, in contrast to about 19% Bengali women, live in their own houses. The sample reflects that most Rajasthani families settle permanently in the city. Most Rajasthani migrants have also spent a longer time in the city than the Bengali migrants. Stability of residence is also reflected by having a ration and voter identity card. Nearly 76% of the Rajasthani families, as compared to 65% of the Bengali families, have voter identity cards. Similarly, 89% of the Rajasthani families as opposed to 71% of Bengali families have ration cards.

The amenities available vary in each settlement. Some settlements have water supply to individual houses while others have public water connections or hand pumps. The type of water supply is vital to their everyday lives as filling water from public sources is time consuming. Nearly 79% of the Rajasthani families and nearly all the Bengali families (99.5%) have access to drinking water at home. A larger number of these women have access to toilets and bathing facilities at home. Nearly 71% of Bengali women, in contrast to 9% of Rajasthani women, use LPG for cooking. This familiarity with conveniences and modern mode of cooking also enhances their confidence and makes them more employable. This aspect will be discussed at length later in the Report.

Table 3

S. no	Name of <i>basti</i>	Legal/ Illegal	Approx. year of being established	Access to water	Electricity connection	Access to toilets	Sewage	Dominant groups and house ownership	Tenants	Men's occupations	Women's occupations	Ways of commuting to work for DW
1	Sushilpura	Legal	1970	Hand pump	Connection in all houses	Toilets in very few houses. Most use open area	None. A <i>nallah</i> runs through the area	Bengali - majority owners	Bengali	Construction workers, export houses workers, <i>kabadivala</i> , run petty roadside stalls, sell ware in push carts, and guards	DW, stitch at home	Walk
2	Jyoti Nagar	Legal	1990	Connection in most houses	Connection in all houses	Toilets in very few houses. Most use open area	Work in progress	Rajsthani - own houses	Bengali	Daily wage workers, rag pickers, rickshaw and cart pullers.	DW, work in export houses	Walk
3	Baba Ramdev Nagar	Survey number allotted	1986	Hand pump and tanker	Connection in most houses	Toilets in very few houses. Others use open area	None	Mostly Bengali and few Rajsthani	Rajsthani and Bengalis	Daily wage workers, fruit sellers, vegetable sellers, salesmen	DW	Walk
4	Vidhyadhar Nagar	Legal	1982	Connection in all houses	Connection in all houses	Toilets in very few houses. Others use open area	None	Rajsthani - own houses	Mostly Rajsthani, very few Bengalis	Daily wage workers, construction workers, factory workers, and <i>kabadivala</i>	DW, factory workers, run petty roadside stalls	Walk
5	Raigar Basti	Illegal	1945	Connection in all houses	Connection in all houses	Toilets in very few houses. Others use open area	Sewer along with open drains	Rajsthani - own houses. Few Bengalis own houses.	Bengali	Daily wage labourers, glass factory workers, lentil mill workers	DW	Walk
6	Hathroi	Survey number allotted	1970	Connection in few houses and hand pumps	Connection in all houses	Toilets in most houses. Others use open area	None. Overflowing open drains.	Rajsthani - own houses	Rajsthanis	Daily wage labourers, auto rickshaw drivers	DW, work in export houses, run petty roadside stalls	Walk
7	Kathputli Nagar	Survey number allotted	1965	Connection in most houses	Connection in most houses	Toilets in few houses. Others use open area	None. Open drains.	Rajsthani - own houses	Few Bengali	Puppeteers, daily wage labourers, sweepers	DW	Walk
8	Fauji Nagar	Survey number allotted	1980	Only one hand pump in the area	Connection in most houses	Toilets in few houses. Others use open area	None. Open drains. Large and deep <i>nallah</i> in one side of the basti	Rajsthani - own houses	Few Bengali	Construction workers, taxi drivers, trash pickers, rag pickers, cooks, make statues	DW, work in export houses	Walk/ bus
9	Sitarampura	Survey number allotted	1930	Connection in all houses	Connection in all houses	Toilets in few houses. Others use open area	None. Open drains.	Rajsthani - own houses	Mostly Rajsthani, very few Bengalis	Construction workers, sell ware in push carts, <i>kabadivala</i>	DW, stitch at home, work in export houses	Walk
10	Sanjay Nagar	Legal	1970	Connection in half the houses and a hand pump	Connection in all houses	Toilets in most houses. Others use open area	Work in progress. Both open and covered drains	Rajsthani - own houses	Mostly Rajsthani, very few Bengalis	Construction workers, work in export houses, <i>kabadivala</i> , run petty roadside stalls, sell ware in push carts, and guards	DW, home based piece workers	Walk
11	Prem Nagar	Legal	1970	Connection in all houses and a hand pump	Connection in all houses	Toilets in most houses. Others use open area	Sewer along with well maintained drains	Rajsthani - own houses	Mostly Rajsthani, very few Bengalis	Construction workers, painters, factory workers, <i>kabadivala</i> , presswala, sell goods in push carts	DW, coolies, work in export houses	Walk

**Table 4: Percent workers with access to basic facilities**

House	State of origin		All
	Rajasthan	West Bengal	
Own	79.7	19.2	49
<b>Toilet facility</b>			
At home	76.3	98.4	87.5
In locality	1.1		0.6
Not available	22.6	1.6	12.0
<b>Drinking water</b>			
Available at home	78.5	99.5	89.1
Public tap in locality	20.3	0.5	10.3
Not available	1.1	-	0.6
<b>Bathing facility</b>			
At home	88.7	99.5	94.2
In locality	10.2	0.5	5.3
Not available	1.1	-	0.6
<b>Mode of cooking</b>			
LPG	8.5	70.9	40.1
Stove	9.6	20.3	15.0
<i>Chulha</i>	81.9	8.8	44.8

The survey indicates that Bengali women have a better standard of living than the Rajasthani women. The sample further reflects that Bengali families use their resources for a more convenient and hygienic living standard. It is critical to highlight that a large number of the Rajasthanis are older migrants than the Bengalis and have been living in older slums where the facilities available have not been upgraded. Many Bengali migrants live in newer houses with basic amenities of water and toilets. However, many of the Bengalis, especially the relatively newer migrants to the city, do not invest in houses as they remit the money back to the village as some intend to return to their villages once they have saved a substantial amount of money. The process of settling down in the city involves not only finding a job and house but also obtaining documents such as ration cards and voter cards. It was observed that most of the families who have moved in the last couple of years or so do not have these documents.

Besides the space of the home, the larger settlement is also important in the lives of these women. Almost all the women we interviewed spoke of their homes in their villages which were in a cleaner and more scenic environment and compared it to overflowing drainage or the *nullahs* in *bastis* in the city. As a Rajasthani woman in Fauji Nagar basti while talking about her daily schedule said,

*It's all about living in this filth with the nullah flowing right in front of me. Not all poor people live in such filth but I have no choice as moving away involves more money. Water is the biggest part of my daily struggle...*



# Life as a Domestic Worker

## Background

This Report, as mentioned earlier, focuses on two of the largest regional groups working as domestic workers in the city of Jaipur – Rajasthanis and Bengalis. Most of the Rajasthani women have migrated from rural parts of the State and have earlier worked as construction labourers. Working in the construction industry with husbands is culturally acceptable. Generally, they move to domestic work when they are unable to do the back breaking work of a labourer or when they are unable to find work. A large number of them conceal the nature of their work (as domestic workers) from their extended families, especially those in the village. However, their pattern of working has been threatened in the recent years with the large influx of domestic workers from West Bengal.

The women from West Bengal, mostly with their husbands, have migrated with the sole purpose of earning a living and thus work hard to earn as much money as possible. Many of them make a special effort to adjust to a new language and culture. Unlike the Rajasthani women, the workers from Bengal leave home early for work and are hence able to work in a larger number of houses. They are willing learners and have adapted to the ways of the employers faster than their Rajasthani counterparts. Their daughters often accompany them to work and begin working as domestic workers at a young age.

Very few Rajasthani families allow their young girls to work as domestic workers – even if they do, the girls accompany the mothers and do not work alone in any house. Further, it emerged during the FGDs that Rajasthani girls do not want to work as domestic workers as they prefer working in a beauty parlour, or as helpers to teachers, or earn their money by stitching. According to the Rajasthani women these professions may not be very remunerative but have dignity.

It also came up in the course of the FGDs and interviews that many Rajasthani workers do not discuss the accepted rates in an area with other workers and are often underpaid or demand higher wages which no employer will be willing to pay. This could be related to their hesitation in revealing the nature of their profession to people they know which makes them unaware of the market rates. Unlike the Rajasthani workers, the Bengali domestic workers are open about the nature of their work and demand salaries after discussing it with other workers.

It was observed that Rajasthani and Bengali domestic workers have different work schedules. Rajasthani women first clean their homes, bathe, cook for the family and then set out to work around eight (or later) in the morning. The Bengali women, in sharp contrast, wake up early, cook a small meal and leave for work by six thirty or seven in the morning. They clean their houses, cook and bathe in the afternoon. In some cases, the husbands of the Bengali women help their wives with kitchen work. All these factors enable Bengali women to work in larger number of houses than the Rajasthani women. They point out that the main reason for them to migrate was to earn money and they have



to work hard to earn enough to justify the move. As Anjali, about 30 years, who moved about six years ago said,

*We moved here with my family for a better life as it was difficult to earn in the village and even nearby. If we have come so far away, I will work as much as I can and not sit at home to relax. I work in so many houses not because it's enjoyable but because I need to. And then I have to cook for my family and clean the house as well. My husband helps but I have to do most of it. My day is very tiring.*

Interviews and FGDs indicate that some employers now prefer Bengali workers as the Rajasthani women are perceived to be unpunctual and are also slow workers. Further, some Rajasthani workers recognize that they spend a lot of time chatting with the employers. Bengali women, on the other hand, are punctual and silently do their work without wasting time with the employers. They also have a culturally distinct manner of speaking which comes across as polite in contrast to the rather blunt manner of the Rajasthani workers.

It was also observed that many Rajasthani domestic workers are critical of some aspects of the lives of Bengali women, especially their leaving home without a bath in the mornings and their acceptance to clean bathrooms. However, a small number of them acknowledge that by and large, Bengali workers take lesser time than them and that their work is neater. Some Rajasthani women, especially the younger ones, do not like to discuss this tension as they are friends with some Bengali girls including domestic workers. For instance, Geeta a 20 year old Rajasthani domestic worker said that she is aware of many differences among the two groups but she refuses to get involved in any such discussions as she has many Bengali friends.

## **Learning the Work**

There are different patterns of learning domestic work – some young girls accompany and assist their mothers, others are trained by the employer and some accompany other part time workers for a few days and then pick up an independent job. The speed at which the worker picks up work depends on her aptitude and the employer's style of teaching. In most cases, a new worker works for a lesser salary than the accepted rates till she learns her work. The initial negotiation of her working conditions and wages depends on the negotiating capabilities of the person mediating between the worker and the employer. This mediator, in most cases, is also a domestic worker. In some cases, it could be a relative of the worker who knows the employer.

Kanta Bai, a domestic worker of Rajasthani origin, around 40 years old, accompanied her domestic worker mother as a child in Jaipur. She stopped working when she got married. However, years later, owing to financial difficulties, she started working again as a domestic worker. She did not find it difficult as she was familiar with the work and found work through her mother's contacts.

On the other hand, a person who has not worked earlier as a domestic worker depends on the employer to learn the work. Anjali, (introduced earlier) first worked as a live-in domestic worker while her husband and children lived in a neighbourhood basti. She took this option, as it was the only one available to her. Though it was inconvenient to live away from her family, she worked in this house for nearly two years as the employers paid her well and even gave old clothes and some food items for her children. She left this household when she was confident of finding work on her own. Some women, such as Mangla Devi, a 35-year-old Rajasthani domestic worker, found work through her neighbour. She learnt the work in the first household that she worked in, and as in most other cases, was paid less than the standard wages. After gaining confidence, she found work in a couple of other households.

## **Finding and Selecting Work**

As discussed above, these women find work for the first time through known people but they develop a larger network over a period of time. The survey revealed that most domestic workers find work through other domestic workers – 66% of the Rajasthani workers and 98% of the Bengali workers find work through other workers. The interviews with these workers further revealed they seek help only from other women of their own State and not from women of other regions. Unlike Bengali women who do not have a large family network in Jaipur, some Rajasthani women seek help from their relatives and neighbours as well. This clearly shows that the Rajasthani women have a wider network as most of them have been in the city over a long period of time and have developed relationships in their neighbourhood.

Related to this are the factors influencing the selection of work sites. The survey shows that almost all domestic workers apply the same parameters before selecting the households to work in. Most of the women we interviewed said that they did not like to work in large households unless they were very well paid. Some of them work in large families when they do not find other jobs or when the size of the family increases during the course of their employment (for example, with the marriage of young men in the family). In some cases, especially among some Rajasthani domestic workers who have worked over a long period of time in large households, cherish the respect that they receive from the employers' families. Some also work in large houses for a high salary.

They generally prefer to select work sites within walking distance to their homes though a few commute by bus to work. In some cases, domestic workers continue to work for the employers when they move houses if the cost of commuting is reimbursed by the employers. The domestic workers were quick to clarify that they would go through this trouble only if they shared a good rapport with the employer. Further, many domestic workers prefer employers from certain regions. These preferences are subjective. Some workers shared that their first job was with a Marwari household and they prefer such families as they are familiar with their way of living. Others do not like to work with Punjabis as they are uncomfortable with their manner of talking. Some do not like to work with Sindhis as they are unable to understand the employers' language.

The large influx of Bengali domestic workers has led to a change in the market for domestic work and many households now prefer to employ Bengali workers. Some Rajasthani domestic workers are very vocal about the shortage of jobs since a large number of Bengali women have moved to Jaipur. For instance, Savitri, a 45 year old domestic worker working since 18 years said that

*...earlier it was easy to find work. We could negotiate the salaries but now with Bengali women here, things have changed. Hardly any work is available for us.*

As interviewing employers was beyond the scope of the study, many interviews with workers revealed that nuclear families are opting for Bengali domestic workers as the employers perceive them to be more thorough, understand instructions, especially about electronic kitchen appliances and are faster in their work than the Rajasthani women.

## **Duration and Quantity of Work**

It emerged from the interviews that domestic workers look for stability in their work and generally stay in the same job unless they find that the workload is incompatible with the wages or if they face any form of harassment. Some of them are asked to leave the job when absent or sick, especially if the employer finds someone to work for a lesser salary. It was observed that few workers work over a long period of time for the same employers. No regional variation among Bengali and Rajasthani domestic workers working for long period in the same households was found in the survey. 21% of all domestic workers have been in the same household over 4-6 years, 22% between 7-20 years.

If the working conditions are acceptable to the domestic workers, they prefer to work with the same households over a long period of time. As noted earlier, in some cases, domestic workers continue working for the same employers even if the latter moves to a different locality. Some workers join households along with their mothers and continue working for them. For instance, Geeta, a 20 year old Rajasthani worker (introduced earlier) has been working in the same three houses since the age of ten. She feels very comfortable with these families and adds that she would like to work for them as she has known no other families.

On an average, Rajasthani women work in 2.4 households spending 5.5 hours at work whereas Bengali work in 4.1 households over 7.2 hours. These figures show that on an average, Bengali women not only spend more time working but also work in a higher number of houses.

All workers pointed out that they had to put in extra work with no compensation. They are expected to put in extra work when the households have guests or during festivals. If the workers ask for compensation, this is frowned upon and sometimes they are asked to leave the job. Savitri (introduced earlier) pointed out that every year the employers ask them to do extra work on Holi and Diwali. In her words

*The employer tells me, “Baiji, I have not worn this saree often even though its beautiful and expensive”. Its as though she is doing an absaan on me. Then Diwali is also cleaning time like Holi. All windows are cleaned thoroughly, floors washed, curtains are washed, and kitchen cleaned thoroughly. Then they give a saree which costs around 150/- after we have worked for about Rs.500/-*

Another domestic worker’s, Mamta, a 30 year old Bengali worker, wages are deducted in lieu of the saree that she is given at Diwali. She shared that after a few such instances, “I have no expectations from my employers”. Sonali, a 30 year old Bengali worker had a similar story. Her employer asks her to clean the house thoroughly at festival time. When she asks for money, the employer says that the new saree is for all this work.

*Look at the amount of work she gets done for a new piece of cloth. She is very clever...wonder what the bade log will get by saving money and denying the rights of the poor. We all have to burn in the same wood after death.*

Similarly, Savitri said that there is no concept of gratitude among the employers.

*Even when I will do any amount of extra work, she will never be grateful. On the contrary, she will say, “I have given you clothes, what else do you want? Not that you have done huge amounts of extra work...only some extra work”*

Many employers ask the workers to do some extra work even on a regular basis. Anjali, said that employers ask for extra work on a regular basis.

*“Baiji, what difference does it make if I ask you to do some extra work. You only have to move your hands a bit more”. Some employers have no decency. One lady said to me,” Put oil in my hair and then massage my head. Take the last night leftover vegetable as no one will eat it here and your children can eat it”.*

For all domestic workers, whether Rajasthani or Bengali, (except for those in dire need of money) the working conditions are important. Workers are not aware about these issues when they start working but learn about them over time by their experience as well as by discussing with other domestic workers.

## **Working Conditions**

Though most workers are critical of their employers, some workers narrated instances of being treated well by their employers. Some employers give medicines when the workers are sick, or ask them to rest for a while in their house. Some employers give leave for weddings in the family while some give gifts as well. Older women employers often like chatting with the domestic workers. Some Bengali workers who have migrated recently find it difficult to talk with them owing to the limitations of language. On the other hand, some employers expect the workers to work in spite of ill health and do not approve of long leave for weddings etc.

The survey shows that though most domestic workers have similar characteristics at the work place, there are some aspects which vary between the Rajasthani and Bengali women.

**Table 5: Characteristics of work environment (percent workers)**

Characteristics	State of origin		All
	Rajasthan	West Bengal	
Leftovers in utensils	92.0	91.2	91.6
Utensils rinsed by owners	68.8	79.1	74.0
Addressed respectably by adults	100	100	100
Addressed respectably by children	97.1	100	98.6
Drinking water provided at work site	97.2	100	98.6
Toilet facility available at work site	77.4	98.9	88.3
Provided some food daily	74.0	82.4	78.3
Same food shared as consumed by the owner	74.9	84.9	79.9
Leftovers given to workers	6.3	1.3	3.7
Separate utensils maintained for the worker	82.7	74.3	78.4
Reported beating of the worker	1.7	-	0.8
Reported harassment of the worker	0.6	-	0.3
Wages deducted in case of damage	9.1	0.5	4.6
Wages deducted if owner not in town	80.2	97.3	88.9

Bengali women often discuss issues with their employers while few Rajasthani women do so. For instance, some of them have asked the employers to rinse the dishes before putting them away to be cleaned by explaining that it would consume less water while washing.

Similarly, some of the Bengali women were of the view that since their work is better than the Rajasthani women, they are treated better which can be seen in the quality of food given to them, or that many of them have tea in the same cups as the employers. In response to the questions about deduction in wages for breaking any glass crockery, Bengali women said that they work carefully and had heard from their employers that the Rajasthani women are not as careful and their breakage is high. Bengali women also do certain chores like cleaning bathrooms which most Rajasthani women would refuse as they believe it is a task to be done by lower castes. On the other hand, some interviews showed that few workers are allowed to use bathrooms as long as they clean them.

A domestic worker, Sonali (introduced earlier) said that she once used the employer's bathroom and was scolded for the same. She had to wash it thoroughly. Another worker, Savitri, once asked the employer whether she could use the bathroom. She was told by her employer that she could not use it and it was none of her employer's concern whether she used a public toilet or went out in the open

fields. Mamta laughingly recollected that once her employer said that she should relieve herself from home and come out to work. Anjali is one of the few domestic workers who is allowed to use the bathroom by her employer but has to clean the bathroom after use.

In most houses there is no regular pattern of giving tea and snacks. While few employers give tea regularly, others give only during the winter months or when the worker is unwell or when there is extra work. In the experience of some workers, employers ask the workers if they would like some tea. If the worker accepts, the employer says that she should make it for herself as well as for the employer. In fact, a few domestic workers added that the employers ask them for tea when they do not feel like making it for themselves!

Gift giving during festivals is another contentious area. All domestic workers receive some sweets at Holi and a saree at Diwali. However, most workers feel that they are often given stale or left over sweets. At Diwali some get new sarees while others get used ones. All those workers who were interviewed or participated in the FGDs pointed out that the new sarees are in the range of Rs.100 – 150. Some workers said that the cost of the saree is deducted from their wages. Almost all domestic workers also point out that the gift has not much significance as they have to put in extra work, for which they are not paid, at the time of festivals.

## **Wages and Increments**

As with other aspects of their work, there is no norm for deciding wages. Wages are negotiated by the domestic workers and are fixed depending on the worker's negotiating capabilities and need, or in some cases, desperation for money. Wages also vary according to localities – they are higher in upper middle class, middle class colonies, and in the new high-rise apartments while they are lower in lower middle class colonies. Some workers are in a position to demand higher salaries when they feel that they are indispensable to the households. This was found mostly in the case of working women or employers who move home and want to keep the same domestic help. Further, they also vary according to the benevolence of the employers.

The survey reveals that the average wages of Bengali women are higher than those of Rajasthani women – this is linked with the quantity of work done by the Bengalis. On an average, a Rajasthani woman earns Rs.1002 per month in contrast to Rs.1672 earned by a Bengali woman. As has already been discussed, an average Bengali worker does a higher quantity of work than a Rajasthani worker. The wages vary from Rs.150 per month to Rs.2000 per month depending on the quantity of their work. Some Bengali workers who are recent migrants accept underpaid jobs as even that small earning is significant to the running of their households.

Increments are also arbitrary – on an average, only about 4% of the workers included in the survey had ever received an increment. Almost all the domestic workers interviewed raised this issue. As Savitri, shared that whenever she has asked for an increment, the employers have a standard answer, “I will

pay only this salary. If you don't want to work for this amount, I will get other workers". Savitri added that since her household is dependent on her earnings, she cannot think of leaving these households. Sonali said that she is working on the same rate for the past five years. She asked for an increment once, which she says the employers laughed off, and has since not had the courage to ask again. In Anjali's experience, the employer threatened to replace her with another domestic worker when she raised the issue of wage increment. She too has not received any increment after working in the same houses for five years.

Domestic workers receive increments only after working in the same household for 3 -5 years. Among the workers interviewed during the course of this study, they had received an increment of Rs.100 after working in the same houses over a period of time. For instance, 20 year old Geeta has been working since the age of ten in the same three households. In the span of ten years of working in the same houses, she has received an increment twice of Rs 100 each time. Similarly, Mangla Devi also got an increment only after five years. On the other hand, Sonali's wages have increased only by Rs.50 in five years.

Along with the wages, taking leave is the most contentious issues in the lives of domestic workers.

## Holidays and Leave

All the domestic workers included in this study pointed out that holidays and leave structure was one of the biggest problems faced by them. Some workers negotiate for two holidays in a month when taking a new job while others negotiate for four days. Some employers deduct salary even if the worker takes one day holiday. On the other hand, there are employers who do not deduct wages even if the worker takes more leave than the initial agreement. As in all matters, this too is decided unilaterally by the employers without much consultation with the worker.

**Table 6: Leave taken and associated conditions**

	State of origin		All
	Rajasthan	West Bengal	
Number of average days	1.4	2.9	2.2
Maximum	4	5	5
Minimum	0	0	0
Workers granted leave when sick in percent	91	100	95.3
Workers with wages deducted for absence in percent	24.9	14.3	96.4



On an average, Bengali workers take a higher number of holidays and the wages of a lesser number are deducted in case of absenteeism. These figures, along with the figures reflecting higher wages, indicate an emerging preference for Bengali workers over Rajasthani workers.

Kanta Bai, takes four holidays every month and her wages are deducted only if she takes more than these four days holidays. Savitri said that she is never given leave. She has no option but to take leave without telling the employer. Similarly, Sonali said that whenever she asks one of her employer's for a single holiday, she is told that domestic work is not like office work – “when work never stops in a household, how can work stop for you. If you need leave, I will deduct your wages”.

Most employers expect the workers to do some work even when they are sick. As Anjali, a 30-year-old Bengali domestic worker said that her employers expect her to come for a while to do the dishes at least. This demand of employers was voiced by many workers.

In the experience of most workers, they are replaced if they are absent for a longer period. Even in the case of the death of a family member, some employers refuse to give holidays. For instance, Lakhi Devi, a 55 year old Rajasthani domestic worker had a bitter experience at the time of her daughter's death. She had sent a word to her employers that she will not work for fifteen days. When she returned to work, her employer refused to keep her saying that she had kept another worker and that she should not have taken more than five days leave.

## Conclusion

The data from the survey and interviews clearly demonstrates that domestic work is highly informal in its organization. It highlights the vulnerabilities of the domestic workers who belong to the poorer and uneducated section of the society. There is no norm for wage setting, working conditions, holidays (weekly or on festivals) and leave structure (for example, casual, annual, sick or maternity). In fact, even the term domestic worker is rarely used – they are referred to as maids or servants thereby not giving them any status as workers. There are several cases where the workers are treated very well but it is entirely at the discretion of the employers. In its current form, it is not a contract between two parties but an informal relationship with the ability to negotiate being dependent upon the good will of the employer.

Secondly, the work place being within the home adds to the vulnerability of the worker and contributes to the informal nature of the work. The home is not a formal work place and since the women work in different homes, it is difficult to demand any rights or entitlements as formal workers.

Further, the undervaluation of domestic work in the larger society places these women very low in the social structure. All these contribute to the low status of their work and its location in the informal



sector. As with many other forms of informal work, the number of workers available is constantly on the rise with the constant flow of rural to urban migration, and in this case, even from far off states as West Bengal, leading to tensions among workers. There is no mechanism of support in case of loss of job, ill health, maternity benefits, or old age pension.

This study to gain an insight into the working and living conditions of part time domestic workers has been undertaken as a first step towards organizing them in Jaipur and enabling them to negotiate terms and conditions of their work. It is only when domestic work is brought into the realm of work and seen as a contract that domestic workers will be able to negotiate for their rights. The process of mobilizing domestic workers is a complex and a long term one. To begin with, this would involve upgrading the skills of domestic workers and thereby facilitating a more professional attitude to their work. The low self-esteem will change only when they value their work and believe that they have to give importance not only to their time but also that of their employer's. This would involve addressing issues such as wage structure, working terms and conditions, leave structure and absenteeism. Also, there has to be a sense of solidarity among them to challenge ill treatment or unfair wages. However, this is a complex process as solidarity might be of little significance to those women who might be forced to take up jobs in households identified by other workers as ones which ill treats the worker, or even pays less, for the sake of survival of their impoverished families.

The other crucial step would involve deliberating with the employers about the rights of workers and the involvement of the State to give domestic workers the status of "workers" with laws covering their rights. The State has to deliberate over ways to decide wages, working hours and conditions, social security and pension. The process of legislations covering domestic workers has started in States such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Steps have to be taken by all States to ensure job security and safe working conditions of all domestic workers, including stringent laws against sexual abuse. Only then would the relationship of a domestic worker and an employer move from a personal one to that of an employer and employee, an employee working with dignity and security.

# Experiences of domestic workers: some case studies

The in-depth interviews focused on the following issues:

1. When did the domestic worker migrate to the city and what were her living conditions before the move?
2. Briefly discussing the living conditions in the city.
3. The decision to work and her work life.
4. The network which enables them to find work.
5. The work environment, the working day, negotiating wages, facilities and benefits provided to these workers, treatment by employers, leave, and wage deduction.
6. Issues of concern for domestic workers such as security of employment, their rights as domestic workers, need to form a group which would make them aware of their rights and also take up issues of different forms of harassment with their employers, and the need, if at all, of a legal framework for protecting their rights.

In order to explore these issues, we interviewed both Rajasthani and Bengali domestic workers. Seven such case studies are given below.

## Case Study 1

Name: Mangla Devi

Age: 35 years

Residential locality: Sanjay Nagar *Kuchhi Basti*

Mangla Devi was born in the village in Ajmer district and lived there till ten years back when she migrated to Jaipur with her husband. They migrated as the livelihood earned from farming was not enough for sustenance. In the village, she worked along with her husband, in the fields. Her husband came first and she followed once he had found employment and a place to live. Her in-laws continue to live in the village.

She has lived in her current self owned house since the last five years. Before moving to this house, the family had lived in four or five other houses in different localities. After some time in the city, financial constraints forced her to find a job and she started working with her construction worker husband. She was paid Rs.80 per day. However, poor health forced her to look at the option of domestic work. Some of her relatives worked as domestic workers as did her neighbours. One of her neighbour helped her to find her first job. She started with a sweeping and swabbing job – work that she was not familiar with as the manner of cleaning in the city is very different from that of the village. The employer explained the work and gradually she picked up the style of cleaning and got more houses. She got these jobs through her relatives. She was paid less than the prevailing trends and her wages were increased only after two years.

She has now been working for five years – sweeping, swabbing, cleaning utensils and dusting. She earns Rs.1500 per month. She chooses her houses by seeing the size of the house and the number of family members. In her experience, the employers promise a higher salary but pay less at the time of payment. She has got an increment only once in the last five years. Two of her houses are the ones she started with and two houses are new.

None of the households that she works for provide her with a daily cup of tea or a snack. She is given tea only if she is feeling unwell. Most households have separate dishes for her while one has no such distinctions. She is not allowed to use the toilet in any house. At festival time, especially Diwali, she is given sarees, old in most houses and new in a couple, along with some left over sweets and savouries.

In a month, she gets two days holiday. If she takes more leave then money is deducted from her salary. She added that she never leaves a job but the employers keep a new domestic worker when she goes to the village. On her return from the village, her relatives or neighbours help her in finding a new job.

She prefers to work in a Marwari household and not a Punjabi or Sindhi one. She feels uncomfortable in the latter two households as their way of keeping house is very different from Marwari households. She does not interact with the men of the household. She prefers working in a nuclear family as the work load is less. She has never been accused of theft though she has heard stories of others facing harassment from employers. Of all the chores, she dislikes cleaning utensils the most.

She interacts with other domestic workers on the streets – while walking to or back from the houses where she works. They talk about work, their families and children. She is of view that Bengali women work faster than Rajasthani women and are also more polite than the local women.

She has three children – a 15 year old girl and two younger boys. The girl dropped out-of-school after class five as she was required to look after the house while the mother went to work. The two boys are in school. She is of the view that life is better for her family in the city as she and her husband can earn and her children go to school.

She wakes up at 5 am to assist her daughter with some of the housework and leaves for work at 7 am after having a bath and light meal. She comes home for an hour in the afternoon but is unable to return if there is extra work in any of the houses.

In response to our team members' questions about laws for domestic workers, she was of the view that there should be a law about minimum wages whereby the wages should be decided on an hourly basis and the number of holidays in a month should be fixed.

## Case Study 2

Name: Kanta Devi

Age: 40 years

Residential Locality: Sanjay Nagar *Kuchhi Basti*

She was born in Ajmer district of Rajasthan. She came to the city more than 20-25 years back with her parents as there was not enough work for them to earn a livelihood in the village. The family worked as farm help in the village and she also assisted them. Life became tougher after a famine and the family moved to the city. She got married in Jaipur and has continued to live with her mother even after her marriage as she has no brothers. She has no children. Before moving into this house fifteen years ago, they had lived in two other houses in other localities.

Her mother first worked as a construction worker and gradually started doing domestic work. Kanta Devi used to accompany her mother to work but stopped working after her marriage. Though her husband is a construction worker, he does not earn a regular income as he is an alcoholic. His alcoholism and mother's advancing age forced her to resume work. She has now been working since ten years and works in five houses. Her work includes sweeping, swapping, doing the dishes and sometimes even washes clothes. Over the years, among her chores, she prefers sweeping and swabbing and dislikes washing dishes and dusting. In each household she asks for a salary depending on the size of the house and the number of members. Her salary is increased every four to five years.

She is given sweets at Holi and at Diwali time. Only one house gives her a new saree while the other houses give no gifts. Instead, as she points out, she is made to work harder and for a longer time than as people want their houses cleaned for the festival and is not paid for the extra work. This leaves no time for her to clean her own house and is forced to clean it at night.

No household gives her tea on a daily basis. One house gives her tea once in a while in a cup which is kept separately for her. No household provides her with anything to eat. She assumes that she will not be allowed to use the toilet in any house.

She takes four days holidays every month and her salary is deducted if she exceeds this number. She works even when she is unwell as the employers expect her to do part of the chores. If she does not go at all, not only are her wages deducted but she is pulled up by the employers as well. She stops working for the household if she finds that her salary is not in accordance to her work and also if she is not treated well by the employer. She finds new jobs with the help of her relatives working as domestic workers and other domestic workers. She does not hide the fact that she works as a domestic worker from her extended family as she needs to earn for her family's sustenance. She keeps in touch with other workers on her way to work.

She prefers working in Rajput households especially those which are joint families with older women as there is no interaction with men. Also, she encounters no language problems with them. The employers often share their worries and events in their families with her and she, too, shares her major concerns with her employers. However, she is quick to point out that if anything is misplaced in the house, the domestic workers are often suspected of stealing and often the employers even ask them. The children and men of these houses speak to her with respect. The children mostly address her as aunty. In response to a question about sexual harassment at any one of the houses she replied briefly that in one household, the employer's husband asked her to make tea for him while his wife was out of the house and said something 'wrong' to her. She did not elaborate but said that she left that job.

She wakes up at 6 am and first does her household chores. She leaves for work after a bath around 8 am and returns home around noon when she cooks and clean. Her mother also helps her. She leaves for work again around 4 pm after completing her household chores and resting for a while.

She is of the view that finding work is becoming tougher with the large number of Bengali women now looking for work. If any Rajasthani women stops working for a particular house, the Bengali women immediately take up work in the same houses for a lesser salary. She added that the employment chances of the Rajasthanis are getting bleak as each Bengali and Bihari woman brings back a few more workers on her visit to her village.

In response to our question about a law concerning domestic workers, she was of the view that along with minimum wages, holidays and leave in accordance to government rules and a bonus at Diwali should be applicable to them.

### **Case Study 3**

Name: Lakhi Devi

Age: 55 years

Locality: Sanjay Nagar I *Kuchhi Basti*

Lakhi Devi's grandparents and parents had migrated to Jaipur from Bans village. She was born in Jaipur itself. They migrated due to shortage of work and economic difficulties. The family has lived in the same house ever since they migrated from the village. Lakhi Devi was born in this house itself.

When she was 10 years old, she began working in a working woman's house for the entire day where she had to look after a small child. She learnt the manner in which people clean and keep their houses by observing. A few years later she began working as a part time domestic worker. She has been doing this work since the age of ten.

She is a widow with five children who are all married. She has given her family house to her son as she now lives with her brother – she was once visiting them and found that her sister-in-law was sick and

unable to manage. She decided to stay on to help her and has since then lived with them as her brother does not earn well to run the house. She is the regular earner in this household. Her sister-in-law does all the household chores. Her day starts at around 6 am and she sleeps by 10 pm.

She now earns Rs.1500 per month. She negotiates her salary according to the amount of work. She pointed out that at the time of joining, she tells her employers that “you see the quality of my work and then decide whether you want me to continue or not”. She is given sweets at Holi and some employers give a new saree on Diwali. She added that incase an employer gives her an old saree at Diwali, she returns it, telling the employer to exchange it for utensils! (Old clothes can be exchanged for steel utensils in the city).

She is given tea in one house where she uses the cups used by the family. She does not like to eat in any house. The employers do not allow her to use their toilet. She takes four days holiday in a month though all employers deduct her salary for two days. She gets no leave incase of illness – instead her wages are deducted for being absent and if she is absent for long, she loses her job as the employers keep a new domestic worker. One of her bitter experiences was at the time of her daughter’s death (she died of an ailment which she could not describe). She had sent a word to her employers that she will not work for fifteen days. When she returned to work, one of the employer’s refused to keep her saying that she had kept another worker and that she should have taken five days off and not fifteen. She was paid till the date that she worked.

Incise of harassment over work by the employer, or low wages, she stops working for the household. She finds work through other workers whom she meets on the streets but does not like to talk for long. They ask each other whether they have enough work at that point of time or not.

The children of these households address her as aunty and she does not speak with the men. She has had no reason to complain about her employers manner of speaking with her – and the employers often share news about the family with her. She prefers working for Marwari families and feels safe in joint families. Incase any valuable in the house is misplaced, the employers do ask her and often keep gold and cash out in visible spaces to check on the domestic workers’ honesty. On such occasions, she tells her employers that she may be poor but would not stoop to theft as her reputation is of utmost importance to her.

She is of the view that Bengali domestic workers are more capable than Rajasthani women as they work faster and are of a calmer temperament than them.

According to her, a law covering domestic workers should regulate the number of working hours, holidays, leave and minimum wages. She added that they should also get a bonus at Diwali, similar to the government employees.

## Case Study 4

Name: Anjali

Age: 30 years

Locality: Sitarampura *Basti*, Panipench, Jaipur

Anjali, along with her husband and children, migrated six years back from her village in Cooch Bihar, West Bengal, to Jaipur due to economic difficulties. She is educated till class 10. Her husband works as a rickshaw puller. She has two children – a girl of 13 and a 10 year old boy. Both attend school and look after themselves though she cooks for them.

According to Anjali, she had decided to work in the city before moving here. On seeing other women relatives work as domestic workers, she was able to implement her decision. She got her first job through a relative where she worked as a 24 hours worker doing all the chores. Her husband and children lived in a rented house close by and met her regularly. Her employer explained the manner in which the work had to be done. She now works in five houses. Her work includes sweeping, swabbing, vegetable chopping and cleaning wheat. Among the different chores, she dislikes cleaning dishes the most, and is quick to point out that she does not like anyone of the chores but has to work as the family needs the money. She earns Rs.1800 per month. She negotiates her salary on the basis of the size of the house and the family.

Her salary has been increased once after working in the houses for three years. The employers give her sweets at Holi and a new saree along with sweets at Diwali. There is no fixed pattern of getting tea in any household and she is never given snacks or a meal. She has been given a separate cup in all houses. None of the houses allow her to use the toilet. She is entitled to two holidays in a month. In case of exceeding this entitlement, her salary is deducted. She has to work even during illness and the employers ask her to come for a short while and then expect them to complete their work. She stops working for those households where the wages are not commensurate to the work.

Though she works in houses of people from regions, she prefers working in Marwari households as her first employer was a Marwari and she is familiar with their way of working. In her experience, the behaviour of those employers who work is better than the women who stay at home. The latter are constantly commenting on their work, often finding faults and even speak in abusive language. Employers' children address her as aunty and the men of the household speak with them, if at all, decently and with respect. If any valuable is misplaced in the house, she is always asked about it and in some cases, even suspected. She narrated one instance where her employer suspected her of stealing some valuables which were later found with some relatives. Once the suspicion over her was removed, she stopped working for the family.

She wakes up at 5 am and goes to work after doing some of her own house work. She cooks a meal for the family. She returns around one in the afternoon when she bathes, eats and cleans the dishes. He



goes for the second round of work around 3 pm and returns by four. She sleeps by 10 pm. She seldom goes out for leisure for lack of time, though she visits the temple occasionally. She meets other domestic workers in the park where they talk about their work, families and children.

In response to questions about Bengali women taking over domestic work from Rajasthani women, she responded that her employers tell her that Bengali women work better than Rajasthani women and can work in more houses. Even their way of talking is very polite.

According to her, there should be some laws about their work – especially four holidays, working hours but was not sure about minimum wages as many women are paid more than minimum wages.

## Case Study 5

Name: Sonali

Age: 30 years

Locality: Bangali Basti, Sushilpura, Sodala

Sonali's parents had migrated from West Bengal and she was born in Jaipur itself. Her mother passed away when she was young and she has been working since the age of ten. She began working in the same house where her mother used to work. She says she cannot recollect now what she did there initially though she gradually learnt all household chores there. Her employer got her married at the age of eighteen to a Rajasthani man. She did not receive any wages while she worked for the employer – according to her all the money she would have earned was spent on her marriage. He provided her a place to live and clothes. Even while living there she worked in other houses as a part time worker and had saved the money earned as wages from these houses.

After her marriage the employer asked them to live in his house but her husband insisted that they should have a place of their own and moved out. However she was forced to work again due to financial difficulties as her husband is an alcoholic. Initially he worked as a driver with her employer but the employer terminated his services once he showed signs of being an alcoholic. He has changed many jobs from construction labour to factory worker and now works as a rickshaw puller.

She selects households on the basis of the size of the house and the number of family members. She has been working in her current households since the last two years. She washes the utensils, washes clothes, and sweeps and swabs. In response to a question about her preference in work she said that she does not like doing any of these chores but “if I were to see it as work then I like sweeping, swabbing, and washing clothes. Not doing dishes”. She now earns Rs.1800 per month. She does not get a yearly raise in wages and in the last five years her wages have increased only by Rs.50.

She gets sweets at Holi and some households give a new saree at Diwali. Some employers give her tea regularly though no one gives her anything to eat. She drinks in the same cups as those of the



family. None of the employers allow her to use their toilets. She is given two holidays per month and her wages are deducted in case of extra leave. She has never left any part time work on her own but some employers have replaced her with other domestic workers who were willing to work for lesser money. According to her, it is easy to get new work/ households as she is well known in the locality for her quality of work. She gets to know about work available also from other workers whom she meets in the afternoons in the park where some of them eat their lunch. They talk about their families, children and their employers.

She prefers working in joint family households as she feels more secure there though the work is more than in nuclear families. In her experience, the behaviour of women in joint families towards domestic workers is better than those in nuclear families. Some of her employers share a lot of issues of their lives with her – “just like a family member”. The children of the household address her as aunty. However, as with almost all domestic workers, she has experienced that when the employer’s misplace some valuable, they question the worker and often put undue pressure on them even though they forget where they have kept the valuables.

She wakes up at 5 am – she cooks for the children and then leaves for work. She has an eleven year old boy and a nine year old girl. She does some chores in the morning and does the rest when she gets home for lunch. Her children assist her with the household chores. She sleeps by 10 pm. She says that she never goes out for recreation and as there is no time.

In her view, Bengali women are not only more hard working than Rajasthani workers but their work is cleaner as well. It is for this reason that many employers prefer Bengali workers instead of Rajasthani workers. Further, Rajasthani workers consider themselves to be superior to be Bengalis though the latter only think of themselves as good workers. The Bengalis have come to Jaipur only to work – for this reason their attitude and work are both different.

She has no idea whether there are any laws covering domestic workers but would want a law about their working hours and wages.

## **Case Study 6**

Name: Uma

Age: 60 years

Locality: Bangali Basti, Sushilpura, Sodala

She migrated to Jaipur about 20 years back from West Bengal. Her husband died five years after her marriage. Her parents were interested in her marrying again but she decided against it keeping the welfare of her two children as her primary focus. Thereafter she worked as agricultural labourer but after a few years found it tough to make ends meet and migrated to Jaipur with her son. She pointed out that she had decided in the village itself that she will do whatever work she finds. While living with

her cousin and his family, she observed that many women worked as domestic workers and she started working as one. Then she moved into her own house and lived in three houses before moving into her current house ten years back. Her son lives separately close by.

She began as a live-in worker where her employer taught her all housework. Her cousin had found this job for her. Though the salary was low, her children lived with her. After a few years, she started working as a part time worker. She decides on taking a job on the basis of the number of members in the household. She has been working in her current three houses since the last three years. She washes the utensils, sweeps and swabs, and waters the lawn in these houses. Her salary has been increased by Rs.100 every five years.

She is given tea daily by one of the employers and a snack on an irregular basis. There are no separate dishes for her. No employer allows her to use the toilet and this, according to her, is the biggest problem in her work. She gets sweets at Holi and a new saree along with a box of sweets at Diwali.

She has never left any household, nor has she been asked to leave but was forced to find new houses as her previous employers changed their residence. In her experience, it is not so easy to find new jobs. Though she has worked in households from different regions, she prefers working in joint families, especially those with older women as she enjoys speaking with them.

There have been instances when she did not like the attitude of her employer but did not take it seriously as it was “only work”. “I treat my work like a *naukri*. It is for this reason I enjoy any work that I do”. She meets other domestic workers on the streets and they generally talk about their families and not about work.

She wakes up at 5 am and does some of her housework. She leaves for work by 6 am. She attends to some more of her household chores in the afternoon before going on the afternoon round of work. She sleeps by 9 pm. In response to a question about her leisure time she said, “In my 60 years of life I have never thought of going out for recreation...watching a movie is a thought which never enters my mind. I do visit the temple occasionally”.

She is of the view that Bengali women are more competent and faster in domestic work. They keep very neat houses so doing external work with cleanliness comes naturally to them. They are also a polite lot. Rajasthani women, on the other hand, do this work under compulsion and have to hide it from their relatives. They consider this work to be derogatory and have no desire to learn and improve. They work slower and in lesser number of houses than Bengali women.

She has no knowledge whether there is any law covering them but would want one as their work then would be considered as “work”. In her view, it will also help to decide the hours of work and wages which would stop or at least reduce their exploitation.

## Case Study 7

Name: Pooja

Age: 40 years

Locality: Prem Colony, Shastri Nagar

Her parents migrated from West Bengal to Jaipur about 50 years back and she was born in the city itself. She used to accompany her mother to various houses and gradually learnt all housework. Due to financial difficulties, her parents got her a job to look after a small child. According to her, that was her toughest work as “looking after someone else’s child is like the toughest exam of your life”. She now does all domestic chores but does not ponder over which chores she prefers – “I have entered this field to work...its all work and it does not matter which one I like or dislike”.

She was married to a Bengali man in Jaipur itself and has two children. Her 15 year old daughter is married while her 18 year old son, along with her husband, works as a construction labour. Her son left school a few years back as he was not interested in studies.

She now works in four houses – she washes the utensils and clothes, sweeps and swabs. She selects her houses on the basis of its size number of members. She earns Rs.1700 per month. She stopped working in two houses on her own accord as she did not like the behaviour of the employers. She leaves a household also when she finds that her wages are not in accordance to the quantum of work. According to her, it is easy to find new work. They get to know about available work from other workers whom she meets on the streets. Besides work and employers, they also discuss their personal lives with each other.

She is given tea and snacks on an irregular basis. Her tea cup is kept separately. None of the employers allow her to use the toilet. She takes three holidays in a month and her salary is deducted if she exceeds this number. At Diwali, she is given sweets by some employers, while others give her a new saree.

Though she works for all kinds of families, she prefers to work for nuclear families as the workload is low. All her employers treat her well, and some of them spend time chatting with her as well about their families. According to her there is no need for her to interact with the men of the households and hence does not feel threatened by them. The children address her as aunty. She feels that employers do suspect them when valuables are misplaced though she has never been accused.

She wakes up at 5 am, prepares tea and breakfast for her children, and then leaves for work. She goes for the second round of work around four in the evening. She sleeps by 10 pm. She visits a temple and her relatives occasionally.

In her view, there is a great deal of difference between the attitude of Rajasthani and Bengali workers as the former are very irritable and are not interested in this work. They are doing this work under compulsion and this, according to her, is responsible for their irritable behaviour. Bengali women, on the other hand, are polite, competent, their work is clean and are interested in their work as “work”.

In response to a question about laws for domestic workers, she said that there should be a law to protect them – decide hours of work and wages and the number of holidays as maximum arguments take place over leave. Employers do not like to give even one holiday.

## Glossary

<i>Absaan</i>	Obligation
<i>Bade log</i>	Rich people
<i>Basti</i>	Informal working-class settlement
<i>Chulah</i>	Stove lit by firewood and/or coal
<i>Kabadiwala</i>	Junk dealer
<i>Kuchha</i>	Impermanent structure
<i>Naukri</i>	Job
<i>Nullah</i>	A large open drain
<i>Presswala</i>	A person who irons clothes



Focus Group Discussion with domestic workers



Informal meeting with domestic workers



Focus Group Discussion with domestic workers and their family members.



View of Sushilpura



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