

The Invisible Workforce: A Situation Analysis of Pakistan's Domestic Workers

FACES Pakistan

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About FACES Pakistan

FACES Pakistan – Formation, Awareness, and Community Empowerment Society – is a non-profit organization which, since its inception, has been striving for the emancipation and empowerment of underprivileged groups in society along with advocating for the rights of marginalized communities. Besides this, FACES aims at facilitating collective action for sustainable development to achieve the broader aims of peace, harmony, social justice and gender equality. Through capacity-building of underrepresented sections of society, we provide them a platform to express their ideas, particularly in multi-religious communities, and help them embrace cultural and religious differences through interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue.

FACES Pakistan is creating an enabling environment for participatory governance and sustainable collective action through advocacy at the grassroots level, community organization and engagement of the marginalized sections of society.

Introduction

The International Labor Organization (ILO) states that there are 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan.¹ Although no reliable figures exist, it has been estimated that the majority of domestic workers comprise of women and girls from low-income backgrounds. There is very little data available on the largely unregulated domestic work falling under the informal sector in Pakistan. Pakistan has not ratified ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers from abuse and exploitation under national laws.²

In this report, FACES has undertaken a situation analysis of domestic workers and highlighted the various challenges and issues that they face. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to study the working conditions as well as the personal lives of these women. Data sources included results from a 2019 survey FACES conducted in a group of 25 domestic workers, detailed case studies, oral histories, interviews with project participants as well as secondary data, including news reports and academic literature. Although this report is not an exhaustive account, it reveals significant problems at both the structural and individual levels, which impede the socioeconomic betterment of women employed as domestic workers in Pakistan. Findings indicate that this invisible labour force suffers exploitation, abuse and gender, class, and in the case of Christian domestic workers, religious discrimination.

The first section of the report provides a brief background of FACES Pakistan's Socio-Economic Empowerment Project (SEEP). This project aimed at training a group of 25 domestic workers and raising awareness among them. The second section of the report provides a situation analysis of domestic workers in Pakistan. Lastly, the conclusion sums up the principal arguments with a few recommendations and calls on provincial

¹ International Labour Organization, "Giving Rights to Millions of Domestic Workers in Pakistan," accessed March 11, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/info/public/fs/WCMS_347029/lang--en/index.htm.

² International Labour Organization, "Up-To-Date Conventions and Protocols Not Ratified by Pakistan," accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11001:.....>.

governments to turn their attention towards the plight of domestic workers, especially those belonging to religious minority groups.

1. The Socio-Economic Empowerment Project (SEEP)

1.1 Project Background

FACES Pakistan seeks to improve the lives of domestic workers through the Socio-Economic Empowerment Project (SEEP). The idea behind SEEP was reaching out to domestic workers and offering viable and appropriate opportunities of decent work to these women. The project supports domestic workers by providing trainings that focus on acquisition of relevant skills and by developing an awareness of labour rights among the participants. Through this project, 25 beneficiaries were placed on contracts with employers. Participation in the project also provided the women an opportunity for forming groups and committees, accessing job placements and learning to negotiate employment contracts, including securing a formal work agreement on remuneration and on the rights and responsibilities of the employees and the employers. The project has helped the beneficiaries to address various issues in domestic work such as poor social protection, insufficient payment with long working hours and poor standards of termination.

1.2 Project Objectives

- To form and organize domestic workers for promoting socioeconomic empowerment opportunities, raising their voices and strengthening their leadership and networking skills for sustainable development.
- To develop an understanding and awareness of work ethics, legal rights, and improve domestic work skills of women from underprivileged communities
- To enable targeted women to earn higher monthly wages and improve their standard of living

1.3 Project Location

SEEP was implemented in the targeted area Mehar Town in district Lahore where it is common for women, especially those from religious minority communities, to work as domestic housekeepers in nearby higher income localities.

2. A Situation Analysis of Domestic Workers in Pakistan

In the following section, an analysis of the situation of domestic workers in Pakistan has been undertaken. The aim is to provide a succinct overview of the various economic, social and legal problems faced by women and girls working as domestic workers in Pakistan. In addition, insights gained from interviews, discussions and case studies of women involved in SEEP were utilized for highlighting the struggles of Christian maids – a demographic that is often overlooked in policy discussions.

2.1 The Gendered Nature of Domestic Work and Feminization of Labor

Patriarchal structures and conservative social norms in Pakistan confine women's bodies and labour to the domestic sphere. Therefore, domestic work is seen as one of the few socially acceptable means of employability for poor women. It limits their presence to private spaces within the houses they work in, thereby preserving their honour while allowing them to contribute towards the family income. Sania, a project participant, highlighted how her mobility and education took a setback when she migrated to Lahore:

In our family, girls are not allowed to study outside [the house]. This is why we do not find jobs. My siblings and I used to study back when we lived in the countryside, but we did not understand [the system] when we moved to Lahore. Our grandmother also did not allow us to go outside. The people in our community are not aware [of their rights].

The gendered nature of domestic work has several social and economic implications. Because domestic work is feminized and takes place within the domestic sphere, it is not seen as a legitimate 'job'.³ Instead, it is perceived as "women's work" that was just

³ International Labour Organization, "Giving Rights."

delegated by the female employer to her hired help.⁴ The labor and productivity of domestic workers is undermined and overlooked because of social attitudes that consider household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, insignificant tasks undeserving of praise, dignity or recognition that come with a ‘proper’ job. This contributes towards the lack of documentation of domestic workers’ output that remains invisible and unaccounted for in the formal economy.

2.2 Absence of Legal Protections

In most provinces, domestic workers are not covered by labor regulations that guarantee legal protections, such as the right to a minimum wage, social security benefits, and health insurance. Domestic workers have no formal mechanisms or platforms at their disposal for filing complaints, airing grievances, organizing and negotiating for their rights. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation by largely unaccountable employers. For instance, Rani’s case study details how her employers made her work overtime with little to compensation for the extra hours she worked (see Case Study 1).

Case Study 1: Rani

Rani, 34, was born in Lahore. Her parents migrated from Baggrian. Her father passed away when she was studying in the fifth grade. Consequently, her mother, a maid in a garment factory, had to shoulder all living expenses for her three children by herself. Rani had to help her mother earn money by trimming thread remnants off garments every day after school until 9 p.m. She earned a 100 rupees per day—only enough to cover her carfare to school. Rani eventually left school and started a job. She was taken to the factory owner’s house to clean the house and do laundry. She had no private room of her own and had to sleep on the ground in front of the owner’s bed with only a pillow and a blanket as her bedding. She endured this job for one year. She had wanted to quit earlier but the shop owner did not let her go. Eventually, she decided to quit without her final monthly salary.

Rani married when she was 17. After five years of living together, her husband got involved in an affair with a girl, leaving Rani alone with their three-year-old child. She received no money from her husband and did not work. After living with her parents for almost a year, she got back together with her husband. After eight years, her husband married the girl he was seeing and shifted to her house, leaving Rani all alone with their four children.

⁴ Ayesha Shahid, “The Socio-Legal Implications of Women’s Work in the Informal Sector: A Case Study of Women Domestic Workers in Pakistan,” *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal (LGD)*, no. 1 (2009): n.p., https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2009_1/shahid/shahid.pdf.

Rani got a job in Lahore when she was 30. She had to clean the employer's house and later became a fulltime domestic worker to make ends meet. Her contract stated that she had to open and close all the gates, clean five rooms, including a guest room, serve guests, water the plants, and do any "other job assigned by employer," including preparing lunch, cleaning dishes, etc.

Although Rani worked diligently, she never received her pay on time and what she did receive was less than the agreed amount. She used to get little payments of around 300 rupees or 500 rupees but never more than 5,000 rupees a month. Sometimes her employers went away for a month and Rani waited until they returned home to receive her wage. She often wondered why she received such a low pay, because, although she did fewer household jobs, she still had to be present all the time at her employer's house. When she worked overtime, she did not receive compensation. She had to work seven days a week, had no right to paid leaves, and every absence led to a wage deduction. Rani conveyed her grievances to her employer, but that did not change how she was paid. She wanted to change jobs but concern for her four children prevented her from doing so.

Rani left her job as a domestic worker. She wants to join an organization to help domestic workers introduce fair practices in their profession like job security, respect and a decent income. Her pride is found in helping others.

Punjab was the first province in Pakistan to pass legislation on the regulation of domestic work. The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, passed by the provincial assembly in January, 2019, extends rights and privileges to domestic workers, provides for their social protection and establishes the terms and conditions of their employment. Under this law, domestic workers shall receive a minimum wage, work no more than 8 hours a day with compensation provided for extra working hours and will be entitled to paid sick leaves as well as holidays.⁵ The act also formalizes the domestic work sector. Employers now have to issue a letter of employment that lays out the terms and conditions of the employment and a copy of the letter is to be submitted to the Labor Inspector. A registration process has also been initiated under Section 22 which establishes a "Domestic Workers Welfare Fund". Domestic workers can now avail benefits from the fund by submitting an application after which they will be provided a security number and an identity card.⁶

⁵ The Punjab Assembly, *The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019*, (The Punjab Assembly: Lahore, 2019), <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2724.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

However, comprehensive implementation of the law is lacking. Domestic workers still have to work overtime with no compensation, and many are not even aware that the provincial government has stipulated a minimum wage and social security benefits for them. The registration drive is still in its early stages and acts as a deterrent for employers who are hesitant to enter into a formal contract with domestic workers. Some women do not even approach their employers for signing the contract as they are afraid that they will be either not be hired or replaced with non-contractual workers if they are already working.

2.3 Economic Exploitation

Many domestic workers face economic exploitation at the workplace. Owing to illiteracy, poverty, absence of formal rules and limited awareness, domestic workers often do not understand the terms of their employment and have to endure long working hours with little to no compensation. FACES' 2019 survey found that not a single domestic worker out of a total of 25 knew about labor laws in Pakistan, while only 2 women had vague knowledge of the minimum wage law. The case study of Parveen is instructive in this regard (see Case Study 2). Parveen was neither aware of provincial labor laws nor could she comprehend the terms of her contract. Several other women narrate a similar lack of awareness and education on national and international labor rights.

Case Study 2: Parveen

Parveen is 23 years old. She has been working at Shehbaz Sharif Hospital near Mehar Town for the last 6 months. She got married to her first cousin at the age of 13 because of her parents' death and went to live in her aunt's house in Mehar Town near the Catholic Church. When she got married, she did not know how to do household chores such as cooking, sewing, cleaning, etc. Her aunt helped her to them. She has four children: three sons and one daughter. She is illiterate and does not have an educational background. Her husband is a labourer and gets daily wages which are insufficient for meeting monthly expenses.

Parveen has worked as a maid for three years. She used to work for a Muslim family that treated her badly due to which she left the job. She experienced disrespect and verbal abuse, and her female employer often forced her to convert her religion. She now works in a hospital from 7 am to 3 pm and earns a salary of Rs. 15,000 per month. She is not satisfied with the working hours and conditions because she has to work overtime whenever there is an inspection visit. Her colleagues often behave rudely with her. Since she is illiterate, she is unaware of the terms and conditions of her employment

contract, which allows her employers to exploit her. She also does not know about the Punjab Domestic Workers Act and lacks awareness on labor rights.

Parveen is a also victim of domestic violence. On days when her husband does not get a job, he gets depressed and beats her. She also has to manage the household after coming back home from the hospital. She contributes her income for meeting the family's monthly expenses like the children's school fees, grocery and transport. Her children are studying in government schools, and it is her wish to see them educated.

Most women receive less than the set minimum wage of Rs. 17,500. Only 2 women in the FACES survey disclosed incomes above the minimum wage. With no strict enforcement of minimum wage laws, especially in the private sector and the domestic sphere, the women struggle with financial difficulties since their incomes are insufficient for meeting their monthly expenditures. In interviews conducted with the women in Mehar Town, one respondent said that she receives a salary of only Rs. 15,000 from her job as a cleaner at a government hospital. When asked to give her opinion on government interventions, she remarked, "The government is doing nothing for us and our kids. There is so much inflation. I am only paid 15,000 rupees. From this amount, around 7,000 rupees goes to my rent. Then I have to pay the bills and the children's fees. How can poor people educate their kids?"

2.4 Exploitation by Agencies

There are certain employment agencies that facilitate domestic workers in finding placements. These agencies sign an employment document with the domestic worker, which specifies the terms of employment, including details such as the amount of the fixed salary to be provided by the agency, the number of leaves, the kind of tasks to be performed, etc. The domestic workers recruited by employment agencies are often made up of migrant labor from the rural areas and smaller cities in Pakistan.

The labor practices of certain agencies are exploitative. Employment agencies tend to be profit-oriented enterprises where monetary return takes precedence over the maids' economic welfare, health and well-being. Maids are required to fulfill a minimum number of working hours per day, and they are only allowed a few leaves every month with no rest for the weekends. Some agencies follow a model in which a household is charged for a job

according to an hourly rate set by the company, and the maids themselves receive a monthly salary fixed. However, the salary, though constituting a steady source of income, is less than the amount some maids could have earned by working independently. For instance, a maid who works additional hours than the minimum requirement does not receive compensation for those hours in her monthly income.

There are also issues with mobility and travel. Some agencies do not cover transportation fares and expect their employees to pay for transport with money from their salaries. This becomes expensive for maids who end up using a large portion of their salaries only for travelling to their workplaces. Affordable options, like bike sharing, are not available to them as they are not allowed to sit in such close proximity to strangers, especially men. In certain cases, a small allowance for petrol is given which is insufficient for meeting the monthly transportation expenditures of domestic workers living farther away.

2.5 Lack of Education and Formal Training

Domestic work becomes the only line of work and source of income available to poor women lacking basic literacy skills, education and vocational training. Poor education infrastructure and low enrollment of girls in schools also increases the entry of women into the informal domestic work sector. According to the FACES 2019 survey, out of 25 domestic workers, 40% were illiterate and another 40% had only received primary education. Only 1 woman had studied up till matric. Most women, however, understood the significance of education. Overall, 20 out of 25 women agreed that education was important with 11 strongly agreeing and 9 agreeing.

Due to economic woes, poor families in Pakistan send their daughters to work in homes as maids so that they can contribute towards the family income and help to make ends meet. This adversely impacts their education, as many women start domestic work at school-going ages, sometimes working as full-time maids. Conservative social norms on women's mobility further impede women's access to education and limit their professional development. One of the project participants, Iram, told FACES, "Our parents don't educate us. They say that girls should not go outside. This is why we get left behind. We will only we get good jobs if we study."

Domestic work in Pakistan requires no certification and educational qualifications. There are no formal training programs for domestic workers at the national and provincial levels, which has created an absence of standardization of domestic work, further contributing towards its image as a sector that does not need regulation and proper documentation. Employers use the women's lack of training as justification for not raising their wages with some arguing that even the low wage that they are offered, along with food and residence, are sufficient measures for improving their economic conditions.⁷

2.6 The Impact of Migrant Labor

Migration of skilled labor from other countries limits Pakistani domestic workers' access to care work opportunities in high-income households. Due to a lack of formal training and education, these women face stiff competition from foreign household service workers, notably, those from the Philippines. Unlike their Pakistani counterparts, Filipina domestic workers are protected by a number of policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms that ensure their legal protection, economic welfare and cultural integration.

A core feature of the Philippines' labor migration policy– one that makes Filipina household service workers a desirable pool of labor – is its emphasis on skills development.⁸ The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) offers courses at accredited centers for training women in household work. After clearing an assessment, the women are issued the National Certificate for Household Workers by TESDA which allows them to apply for jobs abroad.⁹ The Household Service Workers Reforms package,

⁷ Shahid, "The Socio-Legal Implications."

⁸ The Republic of the Philippines, *Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (RA 8042)* (Manila: The Official Gazette, 1996), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1996/02/29/irr-republic-act-no-8042/>.

⁹ Graziano Battistella, Jung Soo Park, and Maruja M.B. Asis, "Protecting Filipino Transnational Domestic Workers: Government Regulations and their Outcomes" (Makati City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2011), 10, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/126839/1/pidsdps1112.pdf>; Philippine Institute for Development Studies, "Protecting Vulnerable OFWs: The Case of Filipino Household Service Workers (HSWs)" (Makati City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2012), 2, <https://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/ris/pn/pidspn1205.pdf>.

introduced in 2006, established a minimum monthly wage of \$400, introduced language training and made it compulsory for domestic workers to obtain the National Certificate.¹⁰

Formal trainings and acquisition of technical skills facilitate the entry of Filipina domestic workers into Pakistan's labor market, especially in elite households that desire 'educated' maids for taking care of children. Filipina workers are seen as a skilled labor force - educated, hygienic and competent - as opposed to Pakistani workers who receive little to no support from the government in terms of formal trainings, skills development and awareness.

2.7 Spatial politics and Task Segregation

In the case of minority women, class, gender and religion intersect and create a distinct form of oppression rooted in their as second-class citizens from a religious minority community in a Muslim majority state. Not only do Christian domestic workers face discrimination based on class and sex, they are also subject to pervasive bias stemming from societal beliefs on hygiene, cleanliness and respectability. The unequal power dynamics between the employer and the domestic worker are punctuated by a social stigma that reproduces, and reinforces, the negative stereotype of the Christian community as 'impure'.

In Pakistan, politics of purity governing the employer-employee relationship should be seen through the lens of both class and caste. Jobs that are poorly paid and involve menial labor are reserved for workers from low castes.¹¹ Christian maids, by virtue of being poor members of a lower caste, "come to represent dirt, disease, and danger" for their household employers.¹² One domestic worker mentioned that employers sometimes use derogatory terms, like "chura", to refer to Christian workers in casual conversation. Suggaran said, "Pakistan is an Islamic state. This is why people put us down. They think that we are only capable of doing the most low-status jobs."

¹⁰ Shannon Doyle, "HSW Policy Reform Assessment" (Quezon City: Center for Migrant Advocacy, 2015), 6-7, <https://centerformigrantadvocacy.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/hsw-policy-reform-assess-final-version-aug-9.pdf>.

¹¹ Ghazal Mir Zulfiqar, "Dirt, Foreignness, and Surveillance: The Shifting Relations of Domestic Work in Pakistan," *Organization* 26, no. 3 (2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418812579>.

¹² Ibid.

These beliefs also determine the type of tasks assigned to the women. For some Muslim households, cleaning unsanitary spaces would mean defying norms of respectability by undertaking manual labor and coming into contact with impurities. For this reason, Christian domestic workers are inordinately hired for cleaning ‘dirty’ spaces such as toilets, and, in certain households, they are not allowed to work in the kitchen or touch eating utensils. An interview with a babysitter revealed that she is required to say “Bismillah [In the name of God]” every time she picks up the family’s child, and that she is allowed to change his diapers but not feed him. She says that she always feels uneasy whenever she has to recite the Arabic prayer: “We [Christians] also say ‘The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’. We have the same God, but I want to save my job.” Iram, another respondent, said, “They put restrictions on us. They say, ‘You are Christians. Don’t touch out clothes. Don’t touch our dishes.’ They don’t eat food made by us. They mostly don’t allow us to touch their clothes, because they say that we have to perform *wudu* [Islamic ritual cleansing] and pray.” Farzana recalled how her daughter’s Muslim colleague at a beauty salon used to “torture” her because of her religion. She often told her to clean the washrooms and their female employer used to favor the Muslim colleague.

Christian maids are, therefore, not just confined to the domestic sphere. They are further restricted to specific spaces within it –spaces that are often construed as unsanitary and unhygienic. Social and physical barriers, and the notions of hygiene that support them, severely limit the social and economic mobility of Christian domestic workers. Some of the Christian maids that FACES interviewed said that they often do not even disclose their religion unless they are asked or when it is absolutely necessary for them to do so.

2.8 Religious Discrimination, Social Pressures and Forced Conversions

Religious discrimination is a daily occurrence for domestic workers from minority communities. For some, religious identity often obstructs access to jobs and opportunities. Iram, said, “When we go to work, we are asked whether we are Christians or Muslim. If we say we are Christian, they tell us immediately that we don’t want to hire you. This has happened to me three or four times.” Another worker told us, “There are few jobs for us [Christians]. There are no government jobs for educated Christians. My cousin had done BA

and applied at many places, but she could not find a job. Now, she works as a maid in some house in Askari 11.”

The maids expressed disappointment at the general lack of respect for their religious practices. One respondent said, “Muslims have more rights than us. We do not even get holidays for our fasting period and people do not respect our religious practices. For example, the hotels are closed during Ramadan [the Muslim fasting period]. We should also have the same laws.” Many of the women interviewed said that they are frequently told to leave their religion and accept the teachings of Islam. Farzana told us that some of the *begamat* [female employers] ask the women to convert: “They say, ‘Our religion [Islam] is very good. Accept Islam.’ We tell them, ‘No. Your religion is good; our religion is good as well. We are better off being what God made us, and you are better off being what God made you.”

Sometimes forceful conversions, often accompanied by abuse, occur. One case of a 14-year-old Christian girl documented in the media showed that her employers coerced her to convert to Islam and kept her in illegal custody.¹³ Incidents such as these, as well as those that involve seemingly banal pressures of conversion, are a violation of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” including the right “to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”¹⁴

2.9 Abuse of Child Domestic Workers

It is a common practice in Pakistani households to hire underage children, mostly young girls, as domestic workers. There are an estimated 264,000 children employed as domestic workers in Pakistan.¹⁵ Child domestic workers lead a difficult life, as they are robbed of a childhood, prevented from attending school and forced to work for a living. They are sent to work in homes by their families, often with the help of middlemen who pocket a portion of their salaries. The women interviewed by FACES mostly report that they want their

¹³“LHC hands over forcibly converted girl to Christian parents,” accessed March 12, 2020, Pakistan Today, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/08/02/juveniles-religion-to-be-same-as-parents-observes-lhc-judge/>.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Paris: United Nations General Assembly, 1948), <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

¹⁵ Saba Karim Khan, “Outrage in Pakistan over abuse of child domestic workers,” accessed March 11, 2020, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/aug/13/trauma-child-domestic-workers-pakistan>.

daughters to study and gain an education, but extreme poverty and economic necessity stop them from sending the girls to school. One respondent said, “If we educate them, then how will we eat?”

Some child domestic workers are subjected to abuse, torture, beatings and rape at the hands of their employers. According to a 2020 report compiled by the Institution of Social Justice (ISJ), 140 child domestic workers have been abused, raped or tortured in the last 10 years,¹⁶ and this number only reflects cases that were reported in the media. In one case that caught international attention, a 12-year-old Christian girl, Shazia Masih, passed away after being beaten and raped by her employers.¹⁷ Last year, 15-year-old Saima was sexually assaulted by a politician and his sons in Faisalabad.¹⁸ Unequal power hierarchies and faulty legal and investigative proceedings lead to suppression of victims and inadequate dispensation of justice. The politician who assaulted Saima escaped punishment by reaching a “reconciliation deal” with her father.¹⁹ This incident illustrates a wider trend of the victim’s family reaching a resolution with the employers to avoid the costs of judicial proceedings.²⁰ A number of abuse cases therefore either go unreported or are never pursued in court.

Section 3 of the Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019 prohibits hiring of domestic workers under the age of 15.²¹ However, due to lax enforcement and weak oversight, the practice of employing underage girls continues unabated. Moreover, legal experts have pointed out that this provision is not in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child ratified by Pakistan in 1990.²² The convention states that all persons under the age of 18 are children,

¹⁶ Zia ur Rehman, “140 Child Domestic Workers Tortured, Raped or Murdered in a Decade,” accessed March 11, 2020, *The News*, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/601492-140-child-domestic-workers-tortured-raped-or-murdered-in-a-decade>.

¹⁷ Sabrina Tavernise, “Bruised Maid Dies at 12, and Pakistan Seethes,” accessed March 12, 2020, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/06/world/asia/06maid.html>.

¹⁸ Khan, “Outrage in Pakistan”; Shafique Khokhar, “Underage Christian girl raped by politician in Faisalabad,” accessed March 13, 2020, *Asia News*, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Underage-Christian-girl-raped-by-politician-in-Faisalabad-47468.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kamran Chaudhry, “Harsh realities faced by child maids in Pakistan,” accessed March 11, 2020, *UCA News*, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/harsh-realities-faced-by-child-maids-in-pakistan-/78100>.

²¹ The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019.

²² Xari Jalil, “Call for addressing lacunae in Punjab Domestic Workers Act,” accessed March 12, 2020, *DAWN*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1461105>.

recognizes that every child has the right to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, obligates signatories to protect children from economic exploitation, hazardous work, torture, degrading treatment and sexual abuse, and calls on members to ensure the “survival and development” of children.²³ The prevalence of child labor also violates international standards on labour practices. The ILO’s Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, ratified by Pakistan in 2001, clearly defines a child as someone under the age of 18 and includes any work that “is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” under the worst forms of child labor.²⁴

2.10 Domestic Violence and Familial Issues

Many domestic workers are victims of violence and abuse. As mentioned earlier in case Study 2, Parveen’s husband used to beat her whenever he could not find a job. Suggaran also faced domestic violence from her husband (see Case Study 3). Some of the husbands of the maids also marry a second time and cause their first wife emotional distress and financial troubles. Rani’s husband married a second time and left her, prompting her to pick up domestic work for earning an income and running her household (see Case Study 1).

Case Study 3: Suggaran

Suggaran is 48 years old. She belonged to a rural background before her marriage at the age of 18. She has four daughters and one son, and all her daughters are married.

Her husband has two wives and is often not at home. She works in four houses from 8 am to 6 pm and earns 25,000 rupees per month. She is not educated. She has been working as a domestic worker since the last 30 years, and joined this profession when she was just 12 years old. She worked with her mother as an unpaid helper. Her household circumstances prevented her from attaining education. She said it was very difficult for her to work initially because she was a child at that time. However, as the years passed, she got used to her job. She said that even though she belongs to a lower class, her employers have never disrespected her. She has never experienced verbal abuse. The children of the employers talk to her with respect most of the time. However, her husband is violent and she regularly faced domestic abuse. As her children got older, her husband reduced his beatings.

²³ United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1989), <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>.

²⁴ International Labour Organization, “C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182),” accessed March 12, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327:NO.

She worked to financially support her husband. Domestic work was the only means she had for earning money, and she also had prior experience in this area. She has no house of her own and pays rent. She purchases the groceries and pays the bills for electricity and gas. Her daughter stays at home and manages the household. Her son-in-law works as a janitor in a branch of Silk Bank and contributes towards meeting monthly expenditures.

She is well-connected in her community and her home is a center for a microfinance institution (MFIs). The women in the community gather at her house for paying off their loans. She herself is a beneficiary of two MFIs.

Although she gets tired when she returns home, she is satisfied with her job, because her employers treat her respectfully. She often receives her wage late, but her employers give her food for her children. She wants to do a night job to save up enough money for buying a house and giving her son a better future. He is currently working in an auto-workshop that gives him a monthly salary of 10,000 rupees. He will be getting married next year, but Suggran does not have the budget to meet the wedding expenses. They receive no support from her husband, because her daughter married a Muslim boy. Suggran runs her home independently.

Drug addiction among male members in some of the women's families is another problem. Alice, one of our respondents, said that both of her sons are drug addicts. One of her sons, a labourer who earns daily wages, brings home 600 rupees. He spends 200 rupees on transport and another 200 rupees on drugs. The husband of another worker, Aroosa, is recovering at a treatment facility. Aroosa had him admitted to the rehabilitation center when he wanted to recover, and she takes care of all the groceries and bills through the money she earns as a domestic worker (see Case Study 4).

Case Study 4: Aroosa

Aroosa is 29 years old. She got married at the age of 19. She has two sons who study in a government school near Mehar Town and also go to an academy for tuition. Her husband has two wives and often does not come home. Aroosa received primary education and knows how to read and write.

She works in a house from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and earns 6,000 rupees per month. She has been working as a domestic worker for one year. She has also completed a beautician course from a community beauty salon. Although she belongs to a low-income background, she said that her household employers have never disrespected her. She started the job to support her husband when he got addicted to opium and alcohol, as she had no other means of earning. She told us that her husband is very kind to her. However, he started to use drugs. Aroosa admitted him to a treatment facility when he wanted to recover.

Nowadays, she lives alone with her children in her own house and does not need to pay rent. She purchases the groceries and also pays the bills.

She is thinking of taking a loan from a microfinance institute like many women in her community. Although she is satisfied with her working conditions and her employers treat her with respect, but she wants to take up home-based work due to her husband's treatment.

3. Conclusion

This report provided a brief overview of the various challenges faced by domestic workers in Pakistan. It showed how female domestic workers are economically and socially marginalized due to gender norms, economic necessity, lack of education and training as well as the nature and social perceptions of their job. This analysis also showed how Christian domestic workers are subject to a distinct regime of oppression resulting from the intersection of their gender, class and religious identities. Though the Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019 is a landmark legislation that grants crucial rights and privileges to domestic workers, its implementation needs to be tremendously strengthened. Moreover, the law does not comprehensively and adequately address the prevalence of child labor in the domestic sphere.

The provincial government should spearhead the implementation of the Punjab Domestic Workers Act and amend it to reflect international child rights standards. The other provinces in Pakistan should also introduce appropriate legislation for the regulation of the domestic work sector. Moreover, each province should take the initiative of introducing government-approved courses for domestic workers at registered training institutes so that Pakistani maids also get access to better opportunities and higher incomes. The provincial government also needs to pay attention towards the particular issues faced by Christian maids. Religious discrimination in access to jobs, task segregation and violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief are commonplace and need to be addressed by specific interventions. Ensuring accountability for the violations of the rights of minorities will go a long way in improving the soft image of Pakistan.
