

# **Invisible Labor, Visible Struggles: Socioeconomic and Psychological Tribulations of Unorganized Female Domestic Workers: A Study**

**Dr. Babita Das**

## **Abstract**

Unorganized female household workers form a major yet often disregarded section of the urban informal labor force in India employed in private household without any proper contracts, social security, legal defense these women face numerous challenges that affect their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Present study aims to explore the lived experiences, working conditions, and psychological hampered countered by these workers, with a specific focus on the stressors causative to mental tribulations such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness.

**Keywords:** Psychological Tribulations, Unorganized, Female Domestic Workers

## **1. Introduction:**

The impact of globalization is perceptible everywhere on the globe as well as Guwahati, a city in Assam (India), is not an exception. As a consequence of globalization slow but sure changes have been taking place in different spheres and have considerably changed the formation and functioning of the family, ensuing in the growth of nuclear families from large and rural joint families and an accompanied shift to urban centers. In the side of economic scenario also many changes have taken place. As can be seen, educated women from middle and lower middle class families originate opportunities to enter the paid workforce in a significant numbers. At the present time domestic work is in advance importance as a source of livelihood among the unskilled and under-skilled poor women in different places. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines domestic worker as “someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages”. According to the 1989 Shramshakti Report, there were at that time 16.8 lakh female unorganized domestic workers in the country where the presence of male domestic workers were of no consequence The domestic work sector in India is predominantly female-dominated and mostly informal. These workers play a vital role in urban households but stay behind indistinguishable in labour laws, social security frameworks, and public conversation. It is measured as an on-institutionalized unorganized sector where approximate 20 Million people have occupied themselves for their livelihood. Among them, 92% are women and 20% are children below 14 years of age (Kalita, 2014). In the year 2000, the UN Human Rights Commission confirmed household work as a form of up to date slavery. Among the unorganized sector workers the most mistreated group are female domestic worker. They have different types of problems in their personal and occupational life. In spite of work for long hours they are poorly paid. Some of them work in more than 3 or 12 houses and they fall sick. Many

health related illness such as—headache, body ache, skin disease and respiratory troubles and also mental problem like anxiety, depression economic insecurity etc. because of their occupational life. They have little rest after working the whole day. They have family conflicts, scarcity and sum unpaid also. While there were no exact figures, reports from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) in the early 2000s highlighted that: over 90% of domestic workers wide-reaching were women, the majority worked informally, without contracts or legal protections, high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety were common due to long working hours, annoyance, low pay, and social isolation (ibid)

## 2. Operational Definition

**Mental Tribunal:** It refers to the mental and emotional struggle that a person experiences due to the challenges faced in various situations in life, Conflict, stress and emotional illness affect people's behavior, thinking and on. It is a concept related to a person's mind, emotions and behavior

**Unorganized:** The term unorganized refers to a system that is not properly arranged, formed, ordered, or planned, or to a state of deficiency or lacking.

**Female Domestic Workers:** Women who informally engage in domestic work in private households for wages to care for others or perform household activities are considered female domestic workers. This is the concept of labour.

## 3. Review of related literature:

**National Commission for Women (NCW, 2012),**This report titled "Socio-Economic Status of Domestic Workers" emphasized that the majority of female domestic workers in India are migrants from rural areas, lacking education, and working without contracts. It found that poor wages, long working hours, and disrespectful behavior by employers are common. However, **mental health challenges were not adequately addressed**, leaving a critical gap.

**Neetha N. (2009)** – Centre for Women's Development Studies in her work on "*Paid Domestic Work in India*", Neetha highlights that female domestic workers operate in a highly informal and unregulated environment. Her study outlines the exploitation, insecurity, and class- based discrimination they face, with particular emphasis on **the invisibility of their labor**. Emotional distress and lack of agency are noted, though not deeply analyzed from a psychological standpoint.

**Kalpana Kannabiran (2013)** in her sociological analysis of gendered labor, Kannabiran discussed about how **patriarchy and class intersect** to reinforce the marginalization of female domestic workers. She argues that domestic work is devalued due to its feminized nature, which leads to structural neglect—both in policy and public discourse. This contributes to mental

Stress, identity suppression, and emotional exhaustion.

**ILO (International Labour Organization, 2010 & 2021 Reports)** ILO documents on domestic workers worldwide, including India, indicate the absence of workplace rights, social security, and occupational health standards. The **ILO Convention 189** emphasizes “decent work for domestic workers” but India has not ratified it. Studies show that mental health is deeply affected by long-term job insecurity, overwork, and abuse, especially for women in live-in positions.

**Shramshakti Report (1988)** although dated, this government report on women in the unorganized sector was one of the first to recognize domestic work as a labor category. It acknowledged the lack of recognition, support, and safety faced by these workers, laying groundwork for future inquiry, though mental health concerns were not explicitly covered.

#### 4. **Statement of the Problem:**

Unorganized female domestic workers face multiple types of problems. Despite this, many of them continue to work more than four or five houses in everyday even they suffer from many physical illness. They are also poorly paid. The problem is thus stated as “**Invisible Labor, Visible Struggles: Socioeconomic and Psychological Tribulations of Unorganized Female Domestic Workers: A Study**”

**5. Need and significance of the Study:** The reasons behind the need of the present study are as follows-

- Similar studies have been conducted in various places. Unorganized women workers are seen in most parts of Guwahati city and there is a need for study on these special areas of Guwahati city as well as unorganized female domestic workers.

- This study has got social and humanistic value.

#### 5. **Limitation of study:**

- Only 25 parttime job holder Unorganized Female Domestic Workers are chosen for the study.
- **UFDW** will be used in the present study to mean the Unorganized Female Domestic Worker.
- Present study has been limited to only three localities/areas of Guwahati City of Assam, namely— Chandmari, Sarumotoria and Bamunimaidam

#### 6. **Main objectives of the present study:**

- To know the reasons of preferring the job by **UFDW**
- To explore the conditions and common characteristics of the **UFDW**
- To understand and focus their psychological challenges and psychological tribulations of **UFDW** of the study area.

#### 7. **Method of Study:**

- **StudyArea:**GuwahatiCity, Assam (Chandmari, Sarumotoria and Bamunimaidam area)
- **Population:** All the UFDW of Guwahati city are the population of the study
- **Sample Size:** 25femaledomesticworkersselectedusingpurposivesamplingtechnique.
- **Tools Used:** Semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and field observations.
- **Data Collection Period:** Over a span of 2months
- **Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis of qualitative responses.

## 8. Analysis of Data:

Data have been collected primarily from three as selected for the study and analysis is made as well.

### **Objective1: To know the reasons of preferring the job by UFDW**

Majority of the UFDW have been choosing this profession to earn their livelihood. They are bound to come out to support their family. But some of them choose this type of job for earning additionally or for own benefit. Here it is found that out of 25, 12 females are widow, 4 of them are divorcee, 3 married and 3 are separated who choose this job only for the purpose of supporting and feeding their own family. They have no alternative to earn their livelihood. On the other hand 3 unmarried (45years of age) are engaged with this job to earn additionally to help themselves and their family. Three separated and three married woman chooses this profession with a view to supporting themselves. It reveals that 48 % of UFDW are involved in this job to feed their family and only 12 % are in this sector to earn additional income. The UFDW of study area confess that they have no any other option to choose for their livelihood, due to lack of education and other skill.

### **Objective2: To explore the conditions and common characteristics of the UFDW**

The Unorganized female domestic workers in Guwahati represent a helpless and marginalized fragment of the urban informal labor force. These women play a critical role to maintain and in the carrying out of middle- and upper-class urban households. However their own living and working conditions remain insecure. The majority of the study area in Guwahati, the unorganized female domestic workers comes from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They are often migrants from rural districts of Assam and neighboring states like Meghalaya, West Bengal, and Bihar. Their entry into domestic work is usually determined by poverty, lack of education, lack of considerable skill and limited access to other employ opportunities. Women from married, single mothers, widow, separated, divorcees are found as UFDW. Husbands of married women's are found as unemployed, alcoholic, or work as daily wage laborers.

They reside in unauthorized colonies, or rented rooms with poor or minimum facilities like limited access to clean drinking water, toilets, electricity, or drainage. They Work in multiple households as part-

time domestic helper. Employment is informal, with no written contracts, job descriptions, or terms of service. Their types of works are – Cleaning, sweeping, mopping, washing clothes and dishes, childcare and elderly care, cooking etc.

Working hours and conditions are – daily work hour strange from 2 to 12 hours, including travel time, no paid leave, sick leave, or weekly off, often not allowed to eat or sit in the employer's home. Paid monthly, but often face late payments or unjust deductions and no formal minimum wage enforcement for domestic workers in Guwahati. Wages are ranged between ₹4000 to ₹8,000 per household per month and often lower than the minimum wage having no any standardization. They have no job protection at all. So, there is always a risk of instant discharge without any explanation. It is observed that, they live with lack of savings or financial security, health insurance, pension, or access to social security settlement. They are heavily dependent on informal loans from money lenders or self-help groups. Lack of legal protection increases helplessness to exploitation.

**Objective3: To understand their psychological challenges and Psychological health tribulations of UFDW of the study area.**

Due to low attentiveness of mental health circumstances most women are unaware. They are suffering from apprehension or hopelessness. Many domestic workers face verbal insults, derogatory remarks, and social unfairness and they are also treated as inferior which affects their self-esteem and dignity. They remain under pressure to balance domestic responsibilities of own home with paid work adds to emotional burden. It is observed that, UFDW of the study area do not openly express their psychological distress unless specifically asked in a trusted setting. Single women and widows showed higher levels of emotional injure compared to those with accommodating partners. Some of them indicated that, emotional stress had physical effects, such as headaches, body pain, or sleeplessness unswerving fear of job loss, wage deductions or maltreatment by employers creates constant stress also. Some of them report about the feeling of hopeless, worthless, or emotionally frozen. Many of them face emotional or physical violence at home, mostly from alcoholic or unemployed spouses. Long time working hours prevent their meaningful social interaction. No leisure, no relaxation, no recreation leads to mental fatigue and feelings of loneliness. They have also no idea and time to access counseling or therapy of mental health services. Cultural beliefs and stigma discourage them from seeking help. So methods of coping are religion, superstition, or sharing personal problems with other peers and their advice. Majority of them practicing silence and endurance—a common matter they have feels no way but to tolerate pain. Moreover sexual harassment and safety issues at workplaces are also confessed by two or three UFDW of study area.

## 9. Suggestions:

- As like other job they should also get recognition of domestic work under formal labor laws.
- There should be minimum wage, job security, and regulated work hours for UFDWs.
- There should be written agreements between employers and domestic workers outlining duties, wages, and work conditions. UFDWs are to be linked with government welfare schemes like E-Shram, health insurance (Ayushman Bharat), and pension plans.
- Provision of free or subsidized mental health counseling through community health centers is very necessary for the support of their mental health.
- Govt. may offer training in domestic skills, financial literacy, and alternate livelihoods. Establishing support centers in urban areas where domestic workers can rest, seek help, or connect with others.
- Open up help line and complaint redressed mechanisms specifically for domestic workers by competent authority.
- Govt. may promote coordinated efforts between local authorities and NGOs to conduct surveys, deliver services, and monitor welfare.

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