

Decent Work Deficit at its Peak among Female Domestic Workers' Working Condition in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This in-depth analysis squarely focuses on the working conditions experienced by female domestic workers, investigating various facets of their daily work environment, including workload, working hours, rest days, and departure schedules. Grounded in a constructivist research philosophy, the study employs a cross-sectional qualitative research design to collect primary data, utilizing the convenience sampling method within the non-probability sampling framework. A diverse cohort of 32 respondents, comprising domestic workers, employers, parents, and stakeholders, participated in the study. The findings disclose that the working conditions of female domestic workers reveal a stark manifestation of exploitation and a power imbalance. The extended and erratic work hours indicate a notable imbalance in power dynamics, expressed by employer control over leave and rest days, limiting the autonomy of domestic workers and making them more susceptible to exploitation. The labor theory's concept illuminates the decent work deficit caused by the inconsistent and frequently excessive workload, insufficient remuneration, capricious deductions, salary withholding by employers, unpaid terminations, and financial instability faced by subjects. The study advocates for government and stakeholder intervention to champion the rights of domestic workers, accompanied by the implementation of targeted awareness-raising initiatives aimed at society and employers.

Key Words: Decent work Deficit, Female Domestic workers, Work condition, Labor theory

1. Introduction

Domestic work refers to work performed in or for a household or households; this includes home chores in general, such as 3Cs (cleaning, cooking, and caring) ((ILO, 2013, Budrich, 2018). Millions of men and women worldwide work as domestic workers. It constitutes a large part of the workforce, especially in developing countries, and the number is increasing in the industrialized world (ILO, 2013, pp. 67-101). Scholars argue that there is a significant gender gap in terms of the distribution of paid and unpaid employment opportunities, the amount of time spent on paid and unpaid labor by women and men, as well as the sorts of unpaid work they perform. Most domestic tasks are done by women globally and women spend more than twice as much time on unpaid care work as men (Harpreet Kaur & Uppal, 2021). Harpreet and Uppal (2021) argued that in both paid and unpaid work, women's total workload is slightly higher than men's since they put in more time overall each day. Despite domestic workers' contributions to the upkeep and welfare of millions of households, it is still not generally agreed that domestic work is undervalued, underpaid, unprotected, and poorly regulated. For this point, the ILO depicted that one of the fundamental reasons contributing to the undervaluation of domestic workers is gender because domestic work is habitually takes place overwhelmingly by women.

The concepts of domestic work and domestic workers have been a long history in Ethiopia since the time of the slave trade (Mekonnen, 2014 and Kifle, 2002). Many Ethiopian women engage in domestic work within and abroad, contributing to income of their households and thereby to the national economy (Adamnesh, 2006). However, their working conditions often fall short of the standards for decent work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity” (Aper & Smith, 2012), (Zekić, 2020). Work is often seen as decent when it provides a fair wage, secure employment, and secure working conditions. In addition, decent work is employment that "respects the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of

employees in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration; respect for the physical as well as mental integrity of the worker in the exercise of his or her employment (Tomei, 2011).

The phrase "decent work deficit" encapsulates the deficiencies and insufficiency in the quantity and caliber of job opportunities available globally. This concept, often used in discussions on labor and employment, highlights the disparities between the ideals of decent work as outlined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the reality faced by many workers (King-Dejardin, 2019). These challenges encompass issues such as low wages, a lack of job security, and insufficient access to social benefits. The term denotes a state in which a sizable segment of the world's labor force encounters difficulties in securing jobs that are not only productive and reasonably compensated but also provide social protection and uphold fundamental labor rights.

Female domestic workers frequently face challenges such as long working hours, inadequate rest and limited access to social security (Adugna et al., 2019; Busza et al., 2017). Moreover, the lack of legal protections specific to domestic workers exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them without recourse for grievances related to workplace mistreatment or exploitation. The informal nature of many domestic work arrangements in Ethiopia further compounds the challenges associated with decent work. Often, these women work without formal contracts or legal recognition, leaving them without the basic labor rights and protections afforded to workers in more formal sectors. The absence of standardized wages and working conditions in the domestic work sector perpetuates economic disparities and contributes to the cycle of poverty for many female workers (Adamnesh, 2006; Dessiye, 2011 and Kidist, 2012).

Currently, some community members exhibit their diminished sense of attitudinal value by referring to them as "*Gered*", a pejorative term meaning "servant" "*yebet serategn*" in Amharic (Berhe, 2019, and Kidist, 2012). This is a reflection of unfair treatment for this social group which is an indication of a decent work deficit, a condition that plays role in their vulnerability to violence. In Ethiopia, academicians gave particular focus on those domestic workers in the Middle East, returnees, their overall working situations and social integration while they come back to Ethiopia (Wujira, 2010; Dessiye, 2011; Kuschmind, 2014; Mekonnen, 2014; Dusit Abdi, 2018).

Addressing the decent work deficit necessitates comprehensive legal reforms, increased awareness, and the establishment of mechanisms to monitor and enforce adherence to decent work standards within the female domestic employment sector. It is imperative to recognize the

vital contribution of female domestic workers to the Ethiopian economy and ensure that their labor is valued and protected by providing decent working conditions (Adamnesh, 2006; Dessiye, 2011 and Kidist, 2012).

However, domestic workers in Ethiopia have received less attention from government, researchers and scholars. Top of this, the relationship between employers and domestic servants in Hossana town has yet to be the subject of comprehensive research by scholars. As long as they live together in the same household and under the umbrella of the employers, the relationship is essential to be studied. Therefore, this study intended to explore the factors and process of domestic workers' employment along with their experiences in the employment relationship from the perspective of decent work.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Method

A constructivist research philosophy was utilized with a cross sectional qualitative research design. Interviews were employed to collect the data from key informants and selected female domestic workers using interview guides. The instrument was prepared in English, translated into the Hadiyyissa language and then back-translated to English by an independent translator to ensure that the accuracy of thought was maintained. Convenience and availability sampling techniques were used to recruit the study participants because domestic workers have no permanent residence and they are less accessible given they are under strong control of their employers. Further, their official registration records could not be organized and available from government organizations. All domestic workers who met the requirements and consented to take part in the study were therefore included. A total of 32 respondents took part in the study from different sites and locations. Precisely, communicating with female domestics in their employers' households was challenging because employers were uncomfortable to allow their employees participate in interviews. Therefore, ten of them were recruited from Private Employment Agencies (PEAs, licensed brokers), schools holding evening classes, and water points.

The role of stakeholders enriches the study by giving practical support for the study to be scientific. Moreover, data collected from the stakeholders helps to regulate the data bias collected from the study population. Cognizant of this, in this study, three government institutions participated based on the domestic workers directly and/or indirectly, and experts

based on their work experience in the area. Specifically, two police officers; one expert from Labor and Social Affairs; and one expert from Women Affairs Departments each engaged in key informant interviews (KIIs).

Regrading the brokers, they play a crucial part in job facilitation, regardless of their license status. It might be easier for female domestic workers to get jobs with their assistance; and it is also functional to employers to contact employees via brokers. Therefore, four brokers (two licensed and two unlicensed) from the Hossana town were interviewed for this investigation. The selection process considered their professional experiences, the number of domestic workers they hired every week, and the status of their connections with institutions and government representatives (in the case of those with licenses). However, two unregistered brokers who were extremely difficult to get in touch with took part in the data collecting. Following extensive diplomatic efforts, ten employers and four domestic workers' parents participated in in-depth interviews. The data were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, categorized and re-categorized into themes and sub-themes, and finally thematically analyzed.

2.2. Labor Theory Frame Work

The area of labor theory is dynamic and multifaceted, with different academics putting forth distinct conceptual frameworks. According to Crenshaw (2015) the labor market plays a crucial role in supplying skilled personnel and setting working conditions. In his critique of the conventional analytical framework, Kerr (1955) offers a more expansive theoretical framework for comprehending the labor force. In his exploration of the dialectical link between tangible and abstract labor, Rutherford (2023) argues that open Marxist theories should place more emphasis on this relationship. Herod (2003) argues that workers are spatial actors who want to influence the economic environment, giving labor theory a geographical component. Together, these viewpoints advance a more thorough comprehension of labor theory. To successfully handle the unique issues in this environment, a strong conceptual framework for the labor theory of female domestic workers should comprehensively cover a variety of characteristics (Nayak, 2020). Examining how socio-cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and economic inequality shape the job prospects and circumstances for female domestic workers entails examining structural inequalities. Furthermore, assessing the suitability and efficacy of the legal and regulatory frameworks governing domestic work—which include national laws, international standards, and local regulations—is essential to determining how successfully these frameworks

safeguard the rights and welfare of these workers. The framework also helps to examine the power dynamics between employers and female domestic workers, examining how socioeconomic, gender, and class issues affect the distribution of power and authority and, in turn, how domestic workers' bargaining power is affected. A thorough assessment is necessary for important factors such as pay and working circumstances, which include hours worked, wages, accessibility to benefits, and the presence of abusive behaviors. In addition, it is important to recognize the role that social support networks—which include community connections, advocacy organizations, and unionization initiatives—play in empowering people, increasing consciousness, and advancing labor rights. A review of the effects domestic labor has on one's physical and mental health, taking into account things like stress, occupational risks, and access to healthcare services, highlights how important it is to provide a safe and healthy work environment.

2.3. Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted with close regard to the relevant standards of research ethics. Participants in the study were first informed of the study's aims prior to getting their informed permission to take part. Participants in the study were also offered promises of confidentiality which were later put into action. The respondents were also given the choice to stop taking part in the study at any time. Lastly, those who consented to take part in the study signed a consent form before participating in interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Background of the Respondents

This study encompassed female domestic workers and stakeholders who interact with them directly or indirectly including government experts in labor and social affairs, law enforcement, and women's affairs, employers, parents of employees, and licensed and unlicensed brokers.

Table 1. Profile of the Female Domestic Workers participated in the study

No	Pseudo name	Age	Educational attainment	Year of experience	Number of employment relations so far
1	Duto	20	7	4	6
2	Madame	14	4	5	2

3	Genet	16	7	3	4
4	Hirut	24	8	7	10
5	Bertukan	16	6	5	4
6	Huso	15	4	3	6
7	Shita	14	6	3	2
8	Turo	18	5	5	6
9	Chako	19	7	6	6
10	Handame	15	4	3	4

Table 1 gives some important demographic details about the respondents, emphasizing their age, education level, family size, and employment history. Some female domestic workers are younger than the nation's legal age of employment. This raises the possibility of a labor law infraction and paves ways for discussing domestic workers' susceptibility to child labor exploitation. The pattern that all female domestic workers had completed their elementary schooling highlights a shared educational background among them. In addition, the table reveals larger-than-average family size for the respondents with the minimum of six and the maximum of 11.

The table represents the respondents' four-year average work experience in domestic employment and it is noted that this amount of time is adequate to produce insightful data on the working circumstances of domestic workers. This data demonstrates the respondents' subject-matter competence and lays the groundwork for the upcoming examination of the working environment. The study's participation of private employers is essential to comprehending the dynamics of live-in domestic labor. It highlights how vulnerable domestic workers are under these kinds of working condition. The varied employer profiles, which include differences in age, occupation, and educational attainment, offer a nuanced viewpoint on the link between employees and their working condition. The study is made more difficult by including employers who recruit many domestic workers simultaneously and by the fact that some employment relationships extend up to 13 years continuously. The pay range of 800 ETB to 1500 ETB puts these engagements' economic aspects into even more context (Annex 1). Including stakeholders,

especially private employers, in the research process was very important to gain a thorough grasp of the topic and increase the validity and relevance of the findings. The diverse viewpoints of employers provide essential insights into the lives of domestic workers, particularly about recruiting procedures, cohabitation, contact with brokers, employee termination, and employee replacement.

Table 2: Profile of the Parents (all are farmers)

Pseudo Name	Age	Educational attainment	Residence /Woreda/	Parent or guardian	No. of daughters involved in DW (locally or abroad)	Family size
Larebo	57	6	Duna (Sanmera)	Father	1=Arab (ME) 2=Local	11
Tomas	49	8	Lemo (Jawe)	Guardian	1=Local	7
Zenebech	51	No School	Soro/ (Shera)	Mother	1=Arab(ME) 1=Local	8
Tesfanesh	47	5	Duna (Ansho)	Mother	2=Arab(ME) 2=Local	8

SOURCE: Sample survey, Nov 2021, N=130

As stated in table 2, except for one, everyone had a story about attending school. From the total respondent in the table, majority of the respondents said they had sent their girls to the Middle East, and most had at least one daughter living in their towns or cities. This shows that families increasingly commonly send their daughters to work as domestic workers in cities and abroad.

3.2. Reasons for Hiring Female Domestic Workers

The justifications for hiring domestic workers differ based on the context of the employer and their living circumstances. Employment of women out of their home compound is considered one of the reasons to employ domestic workers because home responsibilities are enormous to manage side by side. Basic responsibilities are taking care of their children, doing household chores such as the house, preparing food, cleaning the house, maintaining the house, taking care of the elderly and children in the home, doing laundry for the children and family, and fetching

water from the town water points. In specific terms, the participation of women in outside jobs and their employees was cited as a primary reason for hiring them. On the other hand, global work dynamics, particularly the involvement of women outside the home, have also played a role in the demand for domestic employees. Even women without an office and/or other job have a heavy burden of housework on their shoulders and social responsibility to perform, prompting employers to hire another woman at home. The interviewed employer (woman) narrated that her reason for hiring a domestic worker is the lack of time to manage homework because she is a government employee in one of the offices in Hossana town. Her work is time-demanding, which does not allow her to manage her home, and her children are enrolled in school. Preparing food for the family in general and school children in particular is very time intensive. Therefore, to her, employment in a government office is the major reason to hire domestic workers.

Related to this scenario, one of the 39 years old interviewed employers stated as follows:

"In my case, I believe that having a domestic worker is essential because both my husband and I work in government offices, leaving my children alone in the house until I return. I have nobody to look after my kids. In order to take care of my home and my children, I must thus engage a female domestic worker. Because of this, my family's sort of home needs domestic workers." (A 39-year-old Employer in Hossana town, Dec 2021)

As narrated above, the absence or presence of the madam in the home determines the hiring of domestic workers to look after their family members (children) left behind. This means the wife's employment status is a determining factor in looking for domestic work to employ. Therefore, hiring domestic workers in their homes results from employers, particularly women, engaging in out of home works including government work. However, other interviewed employers disproved that unless the wife is employed in government and/or private employment, there is no need to employ domestic workers because employing domestic workers has lot of miseries on the family like excessive wage, their character and even sometimes theft.

As stated by the interviewed respondents, there needs to be a consistent response in the study area about the importance and necessity of hiring domestic workers. In particular, as the interviews showed, the likelihood of hiring live-in domestic servants for single men and women is lower because of the low stress on their houses and the small size of their families. However, the respondents frequently refuted these statements by stating that after marriage or having

children, they would likewise look to hire a domestic worker because the possibility of increment of size of the family would be increased which is additional burden to the couples. Therefore, the necessity of hiring domestic workers is based on the respondents' situation and family circumstances.

In line with this, another employer underlined the importance of domestic workers:

"The reason to hire domestic worker is because of the nature of my family i.e., I have no one in my home during office time (morning and afternoon) to look after my grandfather, who was found in my home, and to prepare a dish for the family as well." (35-year-old Employer in Hossana town, Dec 2021)

Employers' main motivations for hiring domestic employees were the size of the home, the need to care for the elderly and young people, the desire to help the wife with household duties, and the existence of two working parents.

3.3. Working Condition of Domestics and Decent Work Deficit

3.3.1. Working Hours

Depending on the circumstances of the family and employers, different households may recruit domestic workers. Intermediaries, employees, and employers all bring up various issues during the hiring process, including the nature of the employment, the hourly wage, and the day off. However, there are still some rights and obligations that the parties have not agreed upon, such as rest time, holidays off, working hours per day, overtime compensation, and workload.

The female domestic employees who were interviewed during the data collection period complained that they are completely overburdened by the family's labor throughout the day, the week, and the month, with no end in sight to taking a break. The following narration has been stated by one of the female domestic workers we interviewed.

"In many respects, having a day of rest is inconceivable. First, the assignment is so enormous and I'm so busy that I need to work constantly to finish it. Normally, I make breakfast for everyone in the family around 5:30 p.m., and then, after making sure everyone has dinner, I am the one always ready to wake up when they need anything, whether associated with me or not. Finally, I go to my sleeping quarter at a minimum of 11:30, i.e., after everyone goes to bed. In many respects, having a day of rest is

inconceivable. Even if I do it, the madam will assign me new work to finish. She appears opposed to my taking a break.”

The working circumstances indicated for domestic workers highlight their increased susceptibility to exploitation and maltreatment from the standpoint of vulnerability theory. The long workdays—more than 14 hours, and occasionally even more than 16 hours—signify a substantial power imbalance. Due to their limited autonomy and exposure to potentially exploitative circumstances, such extended and unpredictable work schedules make domestic workers more vulnerable.

The power dynamics at work are further highlighted by the reported surprise and dissatisfaction from certain employers, especially madams, when domestic servants partake in leisure activities like watching TV even when they finish their jobs on time. This response perpetuates the disparity in the relationship between employers and domestic workers and suggests an expectation imbalance.

In the employer-domestic worker relationship, the assumption that domestic workers should not engage in leisure activities even during their allotted free time is a type of control and domination that strengthens the authority-servitude dynamic.

According to labor theory, extended working hours without set hours lead to something similar to wage exploitation. Domestic workers are vulnerable to overwork without enough pay in an atmosphere where there are excessive working hours and a lack of boundaries and expectations. This relationship is further complicated by the surprise and dissatisfaction that some employers have voiced, which may indicate contempt for the time and labor that domestic workers provide. This emphasizes a labor-employer relationship marked by an uneven power distribution, where the employer's authority is given precedence over the domestic workers' welfare and fair treatment.

However, all of the employers who were contacted concurred that their employees' workloads are within their capabilities and that they would be idle during the day. Simply watching TV because no one would be at home and there would be nothing to do in the afternoon. Instead, because everyone is prepared to leave for work and school in the morning, the workload only happens in the morning and at night. So it is necessary to prepare breakfast and lunch for both the kids' school and the employers. They are tasked with cleaning the equipment and making food during the night. As a result, working from home is not as taxing because it only takes up to

eight hours every day.

3.3.2. Days off

Another practice that strengthens employer power and control over their employees is the perception that it is up to the employer to decide whether to grant leave/day off, or not rather it is not the right of domestic workers to claim the rest days. In addition, if leave is allowed, it's up to employers' decision whether domestic workers can spend their time outside or at home. Some domestic employees admitted that they are aware of the need to take a day off from work and relax once a month. In actuality, though, it falls short. The employee is expected to continue with their regular responsibilities if someone else is present in the home to visit. In line with this narration, one of the interviewed female domestic workers replied as follows

“In many respects, having a day of rest/day off is unsound. First, the assignment is so enormous and I'm so busy that I need to work constantly to finish. Even if I do it, the madam will assign me a new duty. She doesn't seem to want me to take a break, and I can't recall the last time I did. This condition continues the entire month, and I am unable to get a day off. ” (Interviewed in Dec 2021).

The above narration depicted that some employers are not usually happy to let employees walk outside, even on their rest day. Furthermore, employers look for pretexts to avoid giving employees the day off and not letting them leave their homes. Some interviewed employers perceive that domestic workers do not have the right to request them; rather, they have the authority and control to give a day off, contrary to the domestic worker's right to one. The technique of defending the home against criminal activity is stated as the reason for this connotation. According to ILO, the concept of a day off can occasionally rely on the awareness of domestic workers because sometimes employees are unaware of it. In line with this, domestic workers have yet to request time off from their employers due to a lack of awareness of their right to do so and/or shy to request it. The employers argued that not allowing them to leave their homes is not only for the security of the house of the employers but also for the security of the employees because when they left their homes without someone accompanying them, they might face different forms of violence, including sexual violence which leads to other types of trouble in their life. Therefore, keeping them in the workplace for both parties is not problematic.

However, the view of the employees is different from their employers regarding allowing days

off, and even if it is allowed, the reason to keep them in the house is not what the employers mention. In fact, the day off depends on the goodwill of the employers, not on the employee's interest. Some employers allow their employees a monthly day off from work. Some domestic workers mentioned that they agree to a day off during their employment and have a day in a month to rest. However, they have no freedom to go out alone or are allowed with limited areas to go. Most of the time if they are ever allowed to go out of the house compound, they are accompanied by someone from the family. The employees considered it as a way of controlling themselves and the mechanism to control their freedom.

There are scenes where employees argue with their employers, particularly female employers, about their workload and lack of rest time. But, most of the requests were rejected by employers, and even they became nervous. Due to this, requests for days off have become a source of conflict between employers and employees. This perception damaged domestic workers' relations with employers and opened up the possibility of dissatisfaction, disappointment, upset, and even criminalizing them.

The CEDAW's Article 11 Subsection 1(e) stipulates that states grant paid leave to women workers. Findings revealed that the vast majority of domestic employees, in violation of this right, are required to work excessive hours and are denied the right to leisure time. The ILO Domestic Employees Convention No. 189, which mandates paid leave and daily, weekly, and annual breaks for domestic employees, violates this law section. Even though Article 10 of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 mandates at least 24 continuous hours of rest each week, many domestic workers view this as unrealistic. In addition, employers have required employees to put in lengthy hours, notwithstanding their complaints. In the case of this study, this controversy might be one of the manifestations of the absence of a national law for this social group.

3.3.3. Burden of Work

The type of work varies from one household to another depending on the family size, economic situation, location of the house in the town, and other conditions. The employers argued that the type of work is uniform and familiar to domestic workers. From the beginning, the type of work is described in the contract agreement if it has been signed, and they are told verbally during the employment process. Furthermore, they argued that not all work is performed by the employees

because sometimes they do not know how to operate machines and stoves; they are not familiar with washing machines, or they do not know the names of and about different kinds of food and its preparation. Therefore, there are other responsible bodies to complete the homework alone. From the perspective of employees, they are not in the same chapter as employers, i.e., the work is mentioned and/or told as general homework without specification, giving room for domestic workers' exploitation. They stated that the types of work are different, which made them exhausted, such as preparing food at least three times a day, doing chores, cleaning the home, washing clothes (very exhaustive), and looking after children and elders.

Moreover, in the study area, water is one of the primary problems observed in the town, and it is their duty to fetch water from a source far away from the home and carry it to the home. This is one of the burdens that are not manageable by the age and capacity of the employees because some are less than 16 years old. On the other hand, employees go to the market with my employers and carry the shopping materials home. Not only this but also going to the mill house is another big burden left on the shoulders of the employees.

Furthermore, in the study area, as argued by the employees, the number of households/family sizes is very "large" (at least 7) and has its burden because the food prepared is based on the number of households. In addition, in many households, washing machines are not found, and even if there is a washing machine, there is no electric power and/or is not stable. Therefore, washing all the clothes of the entire family and fetching water for washing the clothes and other home purposes is the burden laid on the hands of the employees. This indicates the extent of the workload and variety of the types of work that employees are required to perform for an employer.

According to one of the brokers, the nature of the work varies between restaurants and hotels because it is simpler to describe the job title in a hotel. Along with the contract agreement, it also plainly states their duties and the kinds of work they are expected to perform, such as waiter, kitchen "*injera* preparation," making "*wot*" (Ethiopian traditional food like *sup*), washing dishes, etc. As a result, before beginning employment, both employers and employees are aware of it. However, it would be challenging to regulate the types of work in the case of private household work, particularly for full-time domestic workers. This kind of household job is described throughout their agreement as "general" work. Therefore, failing to mention the type of work opened the door for employers and other parties to abuse and exploit domestic workers. Each of

these circumstances allowed for the growth of mistrust on both sides as their relationship declined.

3.3.4. Amount of Remuneration

The monthly salary of the respondents varies based on their age, work experience, negotiation power, educational level, and employers' kindness. During the data collection period, the average monthly salary was 850 Birr (16USD). At its face value, as long as the employers cover the food and other accommodations of the workers, this wage might not be considered lower income. However, they spend 14 hours per day at work hence the salary is extremely low in this regard. Specifically, when their income breaks down per hour, even a worker who worked for 14 hours on average, the maximum payment per hour will be 1.2 Birr per hour (0.02 USD per hour). This payment is the lowest of any worker in the country compared to civil servants who must work 8 hours per day for five days. Also, some employers prefer to pay the employee's salary as per their agreement, whether verbal or written. During the data collection, many of the interviewed domestic workers showed they had experienced dismissal without any salary after working for months. One of the interviewed respondents disclosed as follows:

"I worked in one of the employers' homes for around 14 months, earning 2000 birr a month. They advised me to put money in the bank and made a guarantee to deliver it to me in case of emergency, and I agreed with them. However, I did not understand how to open a bank account before depositing in the bank. Finally, I requested the deposited wage to spend the holiday with my family in the rural area. They did not accept my request to let me visit; rather, they were disappointed. But I insisted on them because it is customary to visit family during the "Meskel" holiday and to give gifts to family, friends, and neighbors in honor of the celebration. Finally, they began to deduct for damaged materials while I was working. They searched for an additional pretext to do so, including the fact that flour, oil, and money had been stolen from the house, considering me as theft, and even that they had claimed that gold jewelry that had been stolen from the madam somewhere else also counted on me. Finally, I was told to be paid 10,000 Birr out of 28,000 Birr. The worst thing was that they instructed me to pay after the holiday but only gave me 1,000 out of 10,000 Birr for transportation, which made me miserable for the rest of my life. I wept in front of my employer's spiritual counselor in their religious practising place. He rebuked them, but their false accusations of theft against

me caused him to change his mind. However, if I returned to them after the "meskel" holiday, they agreed to pay me the remaining sum. My employer told me this tale a long time ago. After that, I never again let my money to an employer to deposit on my behalf; instead, I saved up every month with the threat of leaving simultaneously. And I am not okay to stay in a given household for more than five months. This is my personal decision."

This story illustrates how vulnerable domestic workers are to abuse and exploitation in the context of the employer-domestic worker relationship, according to vulnerability theory. The employer's possible abuse of the domestic worker's lack of financial literacy is demonstrated by the first recommendation to deposit money in a bank and the lack of knowledge about opening a bank account. The employer's subsequent refusal to permit the domestic worker to see her family on a cultural holiday highlights even more the power and control the employer has over the domestic worker's private life and choices. The vulnerability of the domestic worker is exacerbated by the employer's attempt to withhold income for purported damages and unfounded allegations of theft.

This scenario emphasizes how unstable domestic labor may be and how employers might take advantage of their position of authority to create baseless charges and arbitrary deductions. The emotional toll and vulnerability suffered by domestic workers are highlighted by the emotional discomfort shown by the worker, who also sought support from the employer's spiritual counselor. From the standpoint of labor theory, it is evident that exploitation occurs when wages are withheld and deducted for theft, other pretexts, or alleged damages. A second indication of the employer's disdain for the worth of the domestic worker's effort is the choice just to pay a portion of the outstanding salary and postpone the remaining balance until after the holiday. The lack of transparency and fairness in the wage negotiation and payment process places the domestic worker in a vulnerable position where the employer's actions jeopardize her economic well-being. Due to the failure of their intentions, employees get infuriated with all employers and begin to harbor animosity toward employers and even to the community at large.

3.3.5. Provision of Food

In fact, some employers allow their employees to have their meals on time while their family

members are having them. However, there are discriminatory and degrading practices committed by employers against employees were frequently reported by the respondents. Providing separate cuisine to domestic employees is not a problem by itself, but the type of food given to domestic workers is not the same as other family members, the frequency of having food, content, and amount of food given were the most mentioned challenges in terms of meal. An interviewed female domestic worker narrated the food accommodation she faced while employed by one of the employers.

"Madam locked food while she left home to work and I left hungry until she came back because the work given for the day is too much, but the food given to me is minimal."

Another common challenge for the employees was reserving leftovers from other households for domestic workers to eat. It is not allowed to have fresh food as other family members do rather than wait until other family members finish having food and they will have the leftovers, whatever the amount of food is. This is confirmed by some employers who were interviewed during the data collection.

An interviewed employer in Hossana town underscored that

"I have had more than five employees so far. I learned that employees, by nature, never be satisfied with whatever the employers do for their good. Rather, they are always complaints from employers. I always treat them as my "family members" because as long as they are in my home, I am her mother. As a Christian, the Bible (Ephesians 6:9) is not teaching me to mistreat employees working in my house; rather, it teaches me to treat them by fear of the heavenly Father, God. Therefore, I gave them food in the home that was not different from my family, and the food was also "sufficient" for her. However, some employers may violate their rights and even abuse them. But there are still employees interested in shifting from one employer to another within a short period, not because of the mistreatment or shortage of food but rather because of deceit from their friends, families, and relatives. That is their weakness."

However, this particular case has yet to be witnessed by the many female domestic workers who do not work in many employers' homes. A 23-year-old female domestic worker brought evidence from her experience while she was working as an employee in the town. She witnessed

as follows how their employers (madam) forced her not to eat:

"She regularly counts the amount of food (injera) and drinks that are in the house (refrigerator). She did this solely to control me and warn me against eating without her consent, even when it was time. She makes me do household duties like washing dishes at lunch or dinner time; she did this intentionally to stop me from eating at the same time as them. She handed me any leftovers once they finished eating. I had no right to claim add food to the amount she has provided. Not only this but also, while having my meal she has to sit by me until I finish eating to observe me and insulting me say things like, "You are eating like a beast; your way of eating looks like a Hyena," which has a terrible negative impact on my mentality. She continued doing this till I departed from her home. Regarding eating accommodations, this was one of the most heartbreaking and devastating moments in my employment history." (In the middle of the interview, while responding, she was crying and regretting.)

Additionally, many respondents agreed that reserving food left from other households for domestic workers to eat was the most prevalent challenge encountered in many of the employers' homes. They have to wait till the rest of the family has eaten since they are supposed to consume the leftovers because sharing different or similar foods with others was unthinkable. In terms of food provision within the social environment, it is unacceptable. It shows a lack of respect for the person who has leftover food from other people. According to the ILO convention 189, employers were supposed to ensure that their employees—the domestic workers—received appropriate food in both quality and quantity. However, the terrible situation observed in providing food to domestic workers seems to reflect human rights violations against the subjects. One of the prevalent dehumanizing character against domestic workers in the research area is trouble related to food. In line with this, Kidist (2012, p.21-22) stated that hunger is the most challenging problem for many domestic workers since they must work long hours without proper food. However, for most of the respondents in this study relative to other troubles, hunger is not the most critical problem. As stated by Getachew (2006), one of the major problems of domestic workers concerning food provision was the time they had their meals. In line with this finding, in the current study area, delayed food from the regular eating time was one of the challenges that affected the employees' appetite.

3.3.6. Sleeping Situation

One of the basics for female domestic workers is sleeping in the employer's home. From the respondents, the majority disclosed that they sleep in one corner of the salon, and others sleep in the kitchen or corridor of the home. This narrative implies a poignant depiction of female domestic workers' difficult living circumstances, especially the dearth of private and secure sleeping spaces in their employers' houses. Most respondents claim to sleep in communal areas such as the kitchen, salon, or hallways, frequently on the ground using improvised bedding. It is said that being unable to claim a personal bedroom stems from how employers and the general public see domestic work, which is neglected and devalued. This clarifies the social and economic processes that lead to domestic workers' unstable living circumstances.

The employers' budgetary restrictions and perception that providing private rooms is a luxury are why they are unwilling to give such services. This highlights a structural problem in which society's conception of domestic workers' roles undermines their well-being and dignity. Although some employers do provide their domestic workers with individual rooms and amenities, this is the exception rather than the rule. In addition to reflecting the financial gaps that exist between employers and domestic workers, the absence of separate sleeping quarters puts female employees at greater risk of being sexually harassed by their male counterparts. The shared living arrangements put the personal safety and security of domestic workers in danger, as do cultural norms and attitudes.

According to the UN Women Report (2018), a lack of privacy and security and poor sleep quality are some of the hazards and obstacles that domestic workers may experience when it comes to their sleeping arrangements. Female domestic employees who live in their employers' homes may not have a separate room or a lockable door, which is a severe problem for some of them. They were exposed to sexual abuse by offenders due to the situation of the employees. Also, poor sleep quality is a lack of access to proper bedding, lighting, or temperature control in their sleeping spaces. This circumstance could result from health issues, noise, insects, and other environmental concerns interrupting sleep.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines *decent work* as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity." The analysis of the working conditions of female domestic workers reveals a concerning pattern of exploitation and power imbalances within the employer-domestic worker relationship. The issue of working hours demonstrates a significant power differential, with domestic workers reporting excessively long workdays, often exceeding 14 to 16 hours, leading to vulnerability and potential exploitation. The power dynamics become apparent in employers' surprise and dissatisfaction when domestic workers engage in leisure activities, perpetuating an expectation imbalance that further reinforces the authority-servitude dynamic. From a labor theory perspective, this exemplifies a clear case of exploitation, where the value of the domestic worker's time and effort is undermined, emphasizing the need for equitable treatment and respect for their labor.

Days off, a crucial aspect of decent work, also reflects a power struggle, as employers retain the authority to decide whether to grant leave and control domestic workers' activities even during their free time. This lack of autonomy contributes to a sense of control and dominance within the relationship. The burden of work varies widely, encompassing household chores, child and elder care, fetching water, and market trips, creating an exhaustive workload for domestic workers. This diversity in tasks, coupled with the absence of clear work specifications, opens the door for exploitation and mistrust. From the perspective of labor theory, the lack of autonomy, coupled with an undefined scope of work, perpetuates an environment where domestic workers are vulnerable to exploitation, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines and the recognition of their labor rights.

Remuneration emerges as a critical issue, with monthly salaries often disproportionately low given the demanding and extensive working hours. Specifically, the monthly salary of domestics varies based on age, work experience, negotiation power, educational level, and employers' kindness. The average monthly salary is 850 Birr (16 USD), which is considered lower income. Instances of employers withholding salaries and making arbitrary deductions highlight the vulnerability of domestic workers to economic exploitation. The provision of food adds another

layer of challenge, as some domestic workers face discriminatory practices, receiving different types or insufficient amounts of food compared to other family members. This not only contributes to the economic vulnerability but also reflects dehumanizing treatment.

The sleeping situation further underscores the precarious living conditions of female domestic workers, who are often relegated to communal areas without private sleeping spaces. The structural devaluation of domestic work, budgetary constraints, and societal perceptions contribute to the lack of privacy, posing risks such as sexual harassment and compromising personal safety. From a labor theory perspective, this scenario exemplifies how the devaluation of domestic labor within societal structures directly impacts the living conditions and safety of domestic workers. Addressing these structural issues is crucial to rectifying the systemic exploitation and power imbalances inherent in the employer-domestic worker relationship, ensuring the protection of their rights and well-being. Generally, female domestic workers' hiring and working conditions reveal a profound deficit in decent work, as defined by the International Labour Organization. The absence of regulations addressing these issues further exacerbates the challenges faced by this social group.

4.2. Recommendation

Based on the identified deficits in decent work and the vulnerabilities experienced by female domestic workers, the following recommendations are proposed:

Implement and Strengthen Labor Regulations: To guarantee equitable and respectable working conditions for female domestic workers, enforce and reinforce laws about working hours, pay, and termination processes. Provide unambiguous rules for the working relationship to stop discriminatory hiring practices and arbitrary terminations.

Advocate for Social and Cultural Shifts: Start public awareness initiatives to refute the way society views domestic employment and to lessen the stigma attached to the industry. Encourage a cultural transformation that ensures that domestic workers' worth and dignity are acknowledged and their contributions are valued.

Establish Support Systems and Empowering Domestic Workers: Create support systems, such as counseling services and helplines, to assist domestic workers facing mistreatment, exploitation, or abuse. Provide a safe and confidential space for them to seek guidance and report

violations without fear of retaliation. These platforms can advocate for their rights, negotiate fair employment terms, and provide a unified voice against exploitation.

Engage Employers in Sensitization Programs:

Organize employer sensitization campaigns to increase knowledge of the needs and rights of domestic workers. Encourage reasonable living circumstances in the employer's home, fair employment procedures, and respect for personal space.

International Cooperation and Standardization: Collaborate with international organizations to establish standardized practices and regulations for the employment of domestic workers.

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Annex 1. Profile of the Employers

No	Pseudo name	Age	Sex	School	Occupation	Number of employees	Number of years	Current salary paying for your	No of Househo
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						working currently	employ DW	employee	lds
1	Dero	35	F	10	Housewife	1	13	1000 ETB	6
2	Bezawit	37	F	BA	Gov.Empl Teacher	1	10	900 ETB	5
3	Mekdes	41	F	12	Gov.empl	1	7	1,100 ETB	6
4	Tadewos	43	M	BA	Merchant	2	11	600 ETB	8
5	Wondimu	39	M	Diplom	Merchant	1	9	1,500ETB	7
6	Berhanu	37	M	BA	Gov.empl	1	8	1,200ETB	6

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of the Stakeholders from the Government Organizations

No	Pseudo name	Age	Educ.	Name of Gov. org.	Work experience	Position
1	Gulmesa	39	MA	Hadiya Zone Labor and Social Affairs Department (LSAD)	11	Expert
2	Temsgen	37	BA	Hosana Police	9	Officer
3	Adinewu	36	BA	Hossana Police	10	Officer
4	Lidya	29	BA	Hadiya Zone WAD	8	Gender Expert

Annex 3. Profile of the Broker

No	Pseudo Name	Age	Educational attainment	Work experience	License status	Number of employees per week
1	Shitaye	45	8	14	Licensed	7
2	Kufa	41	8	15	Licensed	7
3	Landore	37	10	6	Unlicensed	4

4	Hankamo	35	7	8	Unlicensed	3
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