Original Article: An Evaluation of the Vulnerability Situation of Female Domestic Worker in Gopalganj District of Bangladesh

Sayda Mahmuda[1],*, Zubaidur Rahman[2]

[1]*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj, Bangladesh*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj, Bangladesh*

A B S T R A C T

Background: This research study aims to assess the vulnerability of female domestic workers in Bangladesh.

Methods: The present study applied a multistage random sampling technique where district and upazila were selected purposively, whereas unions, villages, and respondents were selected using simple random sampling techniques. 200 female domestic workers were selected as a sample using a simple random sampling technique. A five-point Likert scale was applied to rank the challenges faced by female domestic workers in the study area.

Findings: Analyzing the marital status of domestic worker, it is seen that 49% of the domestic workers were married while 25% of respondents were separated, and 11% of the respondents were divorced. Findings suggest that 34% of the employer provides breakfast to female domestic worker, whereas 29% of respondents did not get any food support from the employer's side. Findings obtained from this study demonstrated that the average working day per month was 27.09 days. About 57% of domestic workers work on an average 5 to 8 h, while the average working length ranges from 1 to 4 hours for 23% of female domestic workers in the study area. The average monthly salary drawn by the female domestic worker was Tk. 2135.07. The female domestic workers in the study area have recognized mental harassment as the first challenge in the workplace, with a mean index value of 4.02 followed by the insecure status of the job and the wage rate is not fixed.

Introduction

As the division of labor increased in the era of globalization, women's employment also increased. Along with this, the demand for domestic workers is also increasing. All social systems of the world are stratified and classified. There are four basic foundations of this stratified society: the slave system, caste system, estate system, and social class system. Among these, the slave system was very ancient and prominent in the ancient Greek andRoman Empires. Although the inhuman form of slavery

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*Corresponding Author: Sayda Mahmuda (mahmuda.bsmrstu@gmail.com)

is not present in Oriental societies, the tradition of domestic servants in Asian societies has been present since ancient times. With the change of era, slavery disappeared; however, the need for domestic workers did not end. It is evident from the objectives set for the study that though domestic workers have the freedom to choose their work, their salaries, working hours, vacations, and types of work are not specified. In addition, domestic workers are subjected to exploitation by householders in many cases. Domestic workers are constantly being deprived of the facilities they should get as human beings. In Marxian stratification theory, these domestic workers are known as working class.

Domestic workers work for private households in return for wages. They provide direct and indirect care services. Their task may include activities like cleaning the house, cooking, laundry and ironing clothes, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, shopping for food, and any errands related to the upkeep of a household and even taking care of household pets. The length of a domestic worker may be full-time or part-time. Some domestic workers may reside in the employer's house while others may live in their own residence. Domestic worker usually works within the country, but sometimes they are found to work abroad. According to an estimate by ILO, it is found that there is75.6 million domestic workers worldwide, 76.2 % are women, meaning that a quarter of domestic workers are men. Domestic work is a more important source of employment among female employees than male employees. The issue of domestic workers has been explicitly mentioned in target 5.4 under goals 5, which states that the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the familyis nationally appropriate. The contribution of women to national well-being through unpaid household work remains obscured and unrecognized since caregiving and other activities do not accrue direct rewards. The labor force participation rate for women was 36.3 % and the rate was 80.5 for men in Bangladesh (Labour Force Survey,

2016-17). An estimate by Kabir (2022) found that women spend 4.6 hours in unpaid domestic work and 1.2 hours in unpaid care work at their homes daily.

On the other hand, men use only 0.6 h a day in unpaid domestic work and 0.2 h in unpaid care work. According to the labor force survey 2017, There were 1.3 million domestic workers in Bangladesh, and 80% were female (BER, 2019). A research study conducted by Fahmida *et al.* (2015) concluded that the contribution of women in the informal labor sector was about 33% worldwide. The study also shows that only 3.25 percent of employed women work in the public sector, and 8.25 % work in the private sector in Bangladesh. The remaining 89.5 % are employed in the informal sector with varying often unpredictable earning patterns.

Objectives of Study

The study aims to examine the overall scenario of a domestic worker in Gopalganj District of Bangladesh. To achieve this aim, the study sets the following specific objectives which are:

i.   To describe the demographic profile of the female domestic worker in the study area

ii. To identify the working environment of the female domestic worker in the study area

iii. To identify the occupational status of respondents in the study area;

iv. To describe the challenges faced by domestic workers in their workplace.

Conceptual Clarifications

Domestic Worker

The International Labour Organization (ILO) broadly defines a domestic worker as "someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages. The alternative names of domestic workers include domestic helper, domestic servant, manservant, or menial. Their tasks may include taking care of children, elderly or sick family members,

cleaning, cooking, laundry and ironing, gardening, shopping for food, and any errands related to household upkeep.

Literature Review

Islam *et al.* (2014) studied the situation of child domestic workers in five selected areas of Dhaka city. They also investigated the attitude of 15 child specialists about child domestic work in light of ILO new standards of decent work for domestic. They used both qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing their study. Results from the study indicate that the education level of child domestic workers is very poor, and about 79.2 percent % have no access to non-formal education. The study also revealed that 75.83 percent of child domestic workers wish to go to school and continue their studies. A research study by Islam (2010) aimed to investigate the actual landscape of the domestic child workers in Dhaka city, their socio-economic consequences, livelihoods, and gender segregation. Three thanas from Dhaka city, namely Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, and Mirpur, were considered as the sample. The author used the triangulation approach to improve the validity and reliability of the research. Findings from the study showed that almost 73 % of child domestic workers experienced physical abuse, and a significant number of children, 17 % are being sexually abused. The study also shows that almost 95 % are abused by their owners. Black (1999) found that domestic work is one of the world's largest categories of 'child labour' and is often considered equivalent to servitude. Black (1999) concluded that it is a 24-hour type of job as there are no specific hours or tasks allocated to child domestic workers. Beri (2020) operated a study on the socioeconomic condition of female domestic workers in India. Data for this study was collected from secondary sources, including journals, books, research papers, and reports published by ILO and the government of India. Results showed that gender discrimination, poverty, lack of basic knowledge, ignorance of government, and inadequate laws are responsible for the pathetic conditions of domestic workers. Dar (2014) conducted a study on domestic workers

of investigating the socio-economic condition of domestic women workers in Punjab. 160 domestic women workers from different areas of Sangrur district were considered as a sample. Result of the study revealed that the wage rate they get is very low compared to their marginal productivity. The study also found that the reasons for their vulnerable condition are caste difference, unequal gender relations, poor economic background, irregular work, very little or no bargaining power, lack of credit facilities, drug addiction of their male partners, death of husband, and lack of assets. Sen and Majumder (2015) studied the socio-economic status of part-time female domestic workers in Siliguri. The study shows part-time maidservants faced various constraints at the workplace in terms of poor wage bargaining power, time bounding, low paid wages, job threats and fear of taking leave. Shaikh and Bhutto (2014) aimed to analyze the demand for domestic workers, specifically in urban India. The study used data from the National Sample Survey and household consumption expenditure survey for 2004–2005 (61st round) and 2011–2012 (68th round). Results obtained from the study indicate that affordability has a strong influence on the employment of domestic workers. However, the role of dependency characteristics cannot be ignored. Mohapatra (2012) conducted a study in India intending of investigating the degree of vulnerability of women workers in the informal sector in India. Results suggest that a highly visible percentage of occupational groups, irrespective of their monthly average income, continue to face multiple constraints which otherwise compel them to live a life full of compromises. The reasons for their vulnerability are-(a) irregular work, (b) low economic status, (c) little or no bargaining power, (d) lack of control over earnings, (e) need to balance paid work with care for children and homework, (f) little or no access to institutional credit, training and information, and (g) lack of assets. Sumalatha *et al.* (2021) conducted a study on the impact of covid-19 on an informal sector with special inclusion for women domestic workers. They collected data via telephonic interviews with 260 domestic workers from three cities, namely Delhi,

Mumbai, and Kochi, focusing on working conditions, livelihood, and household dynamics, health scenarios, and state support during the pandemic. Results revealed that about 57% of domestic workers reported stigma and discrimination at the workplace, and 40% worked without any safety measures.

Methodology of the Study

Study Area and Sampling Technique

The present study was conducted in the Gopalganj Sadar upazila of the Gopalganj district. It was selected purposively as aconsiderable number of domestic workers are found to perform their household activities.

This study applies a multistage random sampling technique where district and upazila were selected purposively, but unions, villages, and respondents were selected using simple random sampling techniques. Each domestic worker was instructed about the aims and objectives of the study before starting an interview. For the study, data were collected from April to July 2022. Although this study is mainly primary data-based, some secondary data were also collected and used for analysis. These secondary data were collected from various sources such as Bangladesh Economic Review (BER), the Gopalganj municipality office, various journals, and daily newspapers.

Table 1. Selection of the Study Area

District	Upazila	Municipality	Villages	No. of domestic worker
Gopalganj	Gopalganj Sadar	Ward No. 06	Bot tala	20
			Aram Bag Nichu Para	20
		Ward No. 09	Nobinbag	20
			Pachuria	20
		Ward No. 07	Bank Para	20
			Candmari road area	20
		Ward No. 15	Varsity area	20
			Gobra	20
		Ward No 05	Bangabandhu College road Area	20
			Binapani Govt. school area	20
Source: Field Survey, 2022				

Analytical Tools

The data used for this study was collected by using a well-structured questionnaire. The results of the study were summarized and presented both in tabular forms and graphical forms with their meaningful interpretations. Descriptive statistics (i.e., average, percentages, maximum, and minimum) were employed to examine the objectives set for the study.

Discussion of Results

Demographic Profiles of the Domestic Worker in Gopalganj District

Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of the domestic workers in the Gopalganj district. The demographic characteristics of domestic workers are analyzed in terms of their age

structure, marital status, religious status, educational background, dependent member in the family, earning members in the family. Age is considered the crucial determinantsthe crucial determinant of women for participating in household activities as it determines the physical and mental strength of the respondents. Result found in Table 2 shows that the age of domestic workers ranges between 10 to 50 years. It is evident from Table 2 that 51% of domestic workers fall within the age category of 21-30 years, whereas 23% of respondents fall within the age category of 31 to 40 years. This implies that most domestic workers wermiddle-aged with high working efficiency. In regards to the marital status of a domestic workers, it is seen from Table 2 that majority of the domestic workers were married while a significant portion of respondents was separated. In addition, this study also showed

that 11% of the respondents were divorced. About 32% of the female domestic workers had no formal education, while 58% had only primary education. Only 10% of respondents had their secondary level education. The analysis showed that the majority (56%) of the respondents had family members between 6 and 8 persons, and 37% of domestic workers had a family size of over 9 persons. This indicates that family members are recognized as a major source of income for these domestic workers. Regarding dependents' family members, the results indicate that 61% of domestic workers reported that they had 1 to 3 dependent family members, whereas 25% of respondents claimed that they had 4 to 6 dependent family members. In the case of earning members in the family, it is observed from Table 2 that 54% of respondents had 2 earning members, while 22% of respondents had 1 family member.

Table 2. Demographic profiles of the Domestic Workers

Variable	Description of variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age Structure (in years)	10-20	42	11
	21-30	101	51
	31-40	46	23
	41-50	10	15
Marital Status	Married	98	49
	Unmarried	30	15
	Separated	50	25
	Divorce	22	11
Religion	Muslim	122	61
	Hindu	78	39
Educational background	No formal education	64	32
	Primary education	116	58
	Secondary education	20	10
Number of family member (in number)	3-5	14	7
	6-8	112	56
	9 and above	74	37
Dependent Member in the Family (in number)	01-03	122	61
	04-06	50	25
	07-09	28	14
Earning members in the family (in number)	1	44	22
	2	108	54
	3	34	17
	4	14	7
Source: Field Survey, 2022			

Working Environment of Domestic Worker

Working shift of domestic worker

Table 3 reveals the working shift of domestic workers in the Gopalganj district of Bangladesh. It is seen from Table 3 that 37% and 32% of domestic workers work the morning shift and

day shift, respectively. In addition, there was only 21% respondents' worked in night shift. It is also seen from Table 3 that 10% of

respondents were found to work both morning and day shifts in the study area.

Table 3. working shift of domestic worker

Working shift	Number of domestic workers	Percent
Morning shift only	74	37
Afternoon shift only	64	32
Night shift only	42	21
Both morning and afternoon shift	20	10
Source: Field Survey, 2022		

Figure 1 illustrates the working shift of domestic workers in the Gopalganj district. As seen in Figure 1, 37% of female domestic

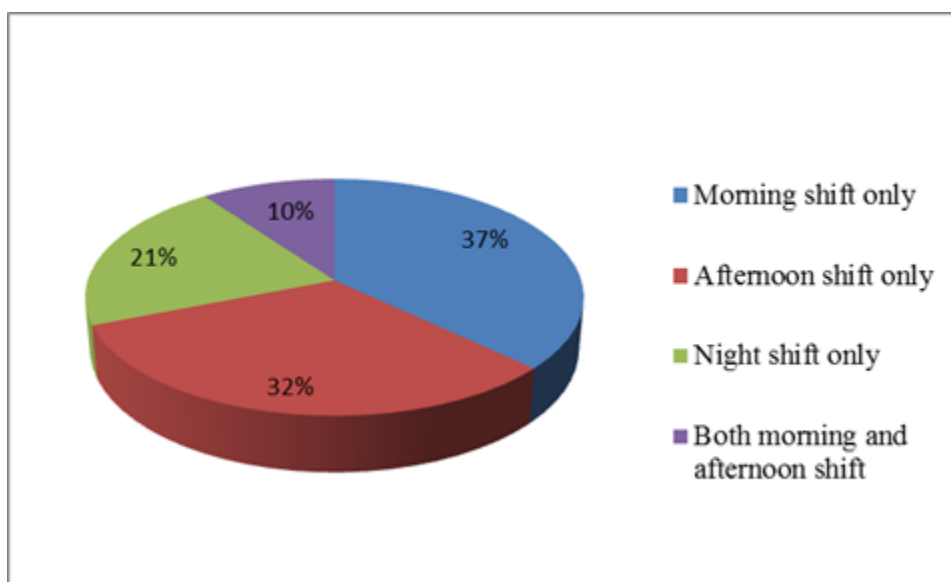workers are found to work in day shift, whereas 21% are found to work in night shift only.

Figure 1: Working shift of domestic worker

Sleeping Place of Domestic Worker

Table 4 illustrates the sleeping place of a domestic worker in the Gopalganj district. As seen in Table, 35% of respondents use the floor

of bedrooms as their place of sleeping, while 25% utilize the floor of the drawing room as their sleeping place. It is also found from Table 4 that there are only 11% of respondents used a separate room as their sleeping place.

Table 4. Sleeping Place of Domestic Worker

Place of Sleeping	Number of Respondents	Percent
Separate room	22	11
Kitchen	30	15
Staying with a sick person	28	14
Floor of bedrooms	70	35
Floor of drawing	50	25
Source: Field Survey, 2022		

Figure 2 narrates the sleeping place of a domestic worker in the Gopalganj district. It is found from Figure 2 that about one-third of the respondents use the floor of the bedroom as their sleeping place, while 15% of respondents are found to use the kitchen as their sleeping destination for taking rest.
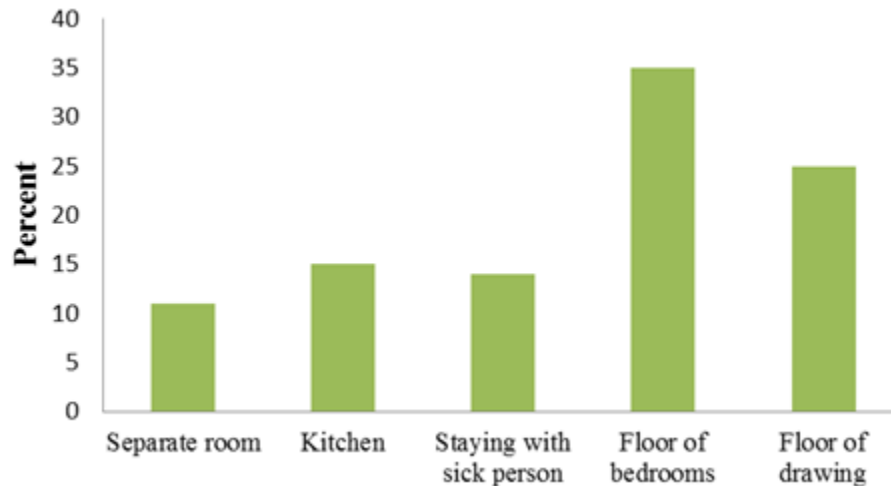

Figure 2: Sleping place of domestic worker

Food Support from the side of the employer

Figure 3 shows the food support from the side of the employer. It is evident from Figure 3 that most employers provide breakfast for female domestic worker while 11% supply dinner to their domestic worker. Furthermore, 19% provides breakfast and lunch to their employee.

In contrast to the domestic worker's food supply, almost 29% of respondents did not get any food support from the employer's side.
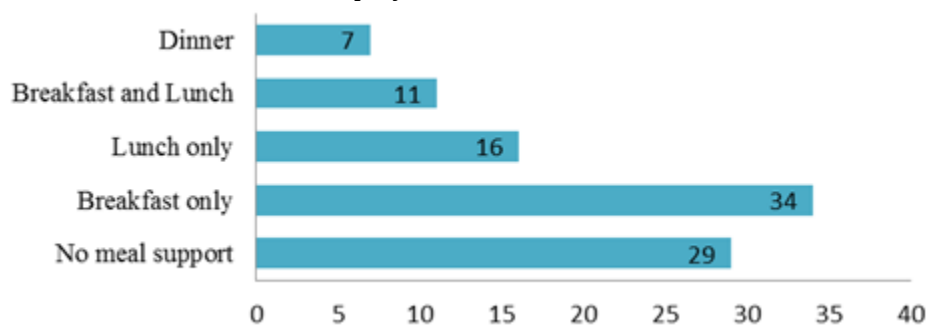

Figure 3: status of food support from the side of the employer

Leisure Time during Day of the Domestic Worker

Figure 4 describes the leisure time the domestic worker enjoys during the day. It is evident from Figure 4 that 83% of respondents do not enjoy any leisure time, whereas there are 4% of domestic workers who enjoy leisure time as equivalent to 3 to 4 h. Also, the study found that 12% of respondents enjoy leisure time for less than 2 h.
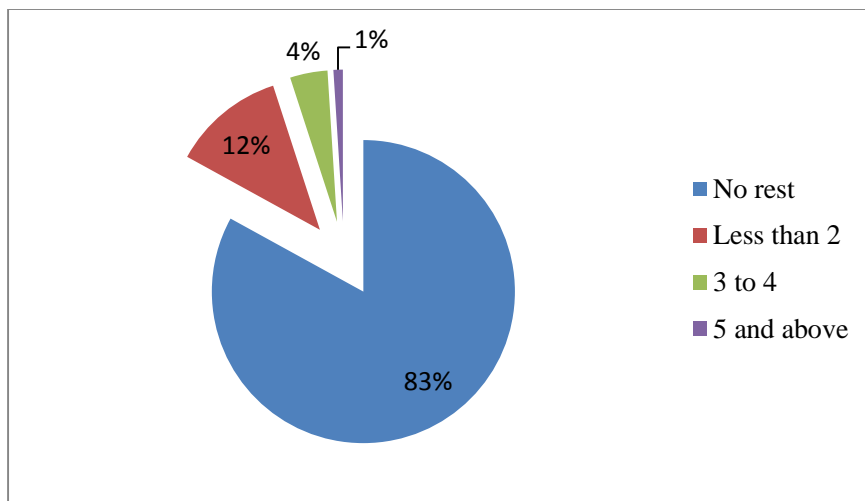
Figure 4: leisure time during day of the domestic worker

Monthly Working Days of Female Domestic Workers

Findings obtained from Table 5 show that 72 percent of domestic workers are found to work 27 days in a month, whereas 19 percent of respondents work 26 days in a month. The average working day per month was 27.09 days.

Table 5. Monthly Working Days of Female Domestic Worker

Working days/month	No. of domestic worker	Percentage (%)	Average
Less than 25	6	3	
26	38	19	
27	144	72	27.09
28	14	7	
29	2	1	
Source: Field Survey, 2022			

Average working hours of Domestic Workers per Day

It is found from Table 6 that 57% of domestic workers work on average of 5 to 8 h while the working length ranges from 1 to 4 h for 23% of female domestic workers in the study area. On the other hand, only 9% of domestic workers have an average working hour of 13 hours and above.

Table 6. Average working hours of Domestic Worker Per Day

Average working hours per day	No. of domestic worker	Percentage
01-04	46	23
05-08	114	57
09-12	22	11
13 and above	18	9
Source: Field Survey, 2022		

Recreational Status of the Respondent

Figure 5 depicts the recreational status of a female domestic worker in the Gopalganj district. It is found from Figure 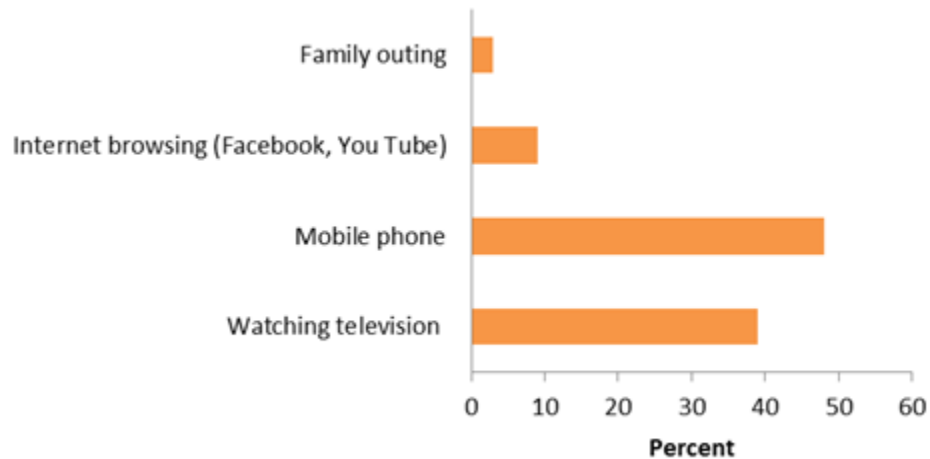5 that 63% of workers use a mobile phone as a means of recreation while 39% use watching television as a source of recreation. About 9% of domestic workers browse the internet for recreation, and 3% reported that they usually go outside as their source of recreation.

Figure 5: Recreational status of the respondent

Occupational status of domestic workers in the study area

Occupational Pattern of the Domestic worker

Table 7 illustrates the Occupational Pattern of the Domestic worker in the study area. It is found from Table 7 that 89% of female domestic workers were part-timer employees whereas only 7 were full-time. In addition, the study also found that 3% of respondents were contractual in the study area.

Table 7. Occupational Pattern of the Domestic worker

Pattern of Occupation	Number of Domestic workers	Percent
Full-time job	14	7
Part-time job	178	89
Contractual job	6	3
Source: Field Survey, 2022		

A graphical representation of the occupational distribution of the domestic worker is presented in Figure 6. It is found from Figure 6 that the majority of the female domestic worker are part-timers, while there 7% full-time workers are found in the study area.
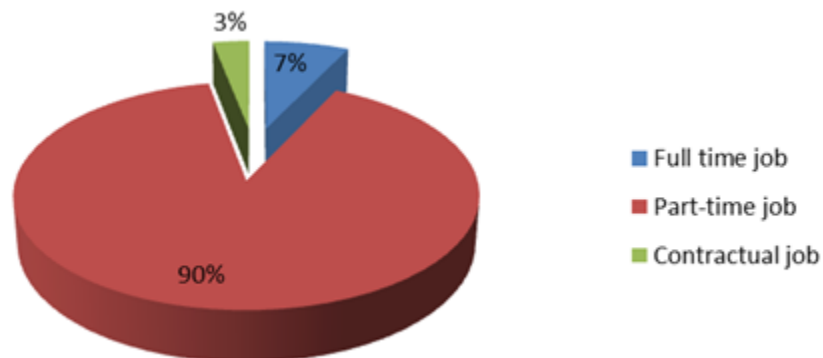

Figure 6: occupational pattern of domestic worker

Types of Activities performed by Domestic Workers

Table 8 shows the household activities performed by a domestic worker in the study area. It is found from Table 8 that 37% of female domestic workers have involvement with cleaning the house and cooking-related activities, while 24% only do cooking-related jobs. Furthermore, 13% of workers are found to perform activities like laundry and ironing clothes and cleaning the house. There are also 2% of respondents who have involvement with taking children to school. In addition, 6% of respondentsare doing activities like shopping for food.

Table 8. Types of Household Activities performed by Domestic Workers

Types of activities	Number of Respondents	Percent
Cleaning the house and cooking	74	37
Cooking	48	24
laundry and ironing clothes and cleaning the house	26	13
Taking care of children or elderly or sick members of a family and cleaning the house	14	7
Gardening	6	3
Guarding the house	16	8
shopping for food	12	6
Taking children to school	4	2
Source: Field Survey, 2022		

Working Place of Domestic Worker

It is found from figure 7 that about 63% of respondents work in the household, and 29% of workers are found to work in a mess. There are also 8% of respondents who are found to work at the hotel for their livelihood.
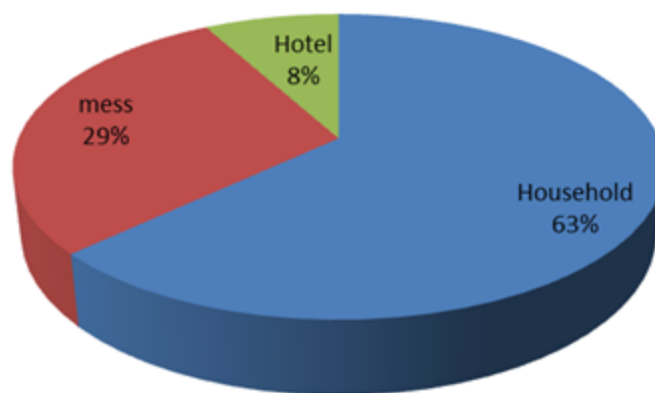

Figure 7: working place of domestic worker

Monthly average Salary of Domestic worker

Table 9 illustrates the monthly average salary of a domestic worker in the Gopalganj district. It is found from Table 9 that 49 % of domestic workers are getting a salary between Tk.1501 and Tk.3000 per month, while 26% of domestic workers earn salary ranges between Tk. 3001 to Tk. 4500 per month. Also, 16% of respondents receive a monthly salary of 4501 and above per month.

Table 9. Average Monthly Salary of Domestic worker

Salary Range (in Tk.)	Number of Respondents	Percent
500-1500	18	9
1501-3000	98	49
3001-4500	52	26
4501 and above	32	16
Source: Field Survey, 2022.		

Reasons for losing jobs of Domestic Workers

Table 10 shows the reasons for losing the jobs of domestic workers in the study area. Most of the domestic workers in the study area are found to lose their job for irregularities present in the workplace, which is 41%. Pregnancy is another cause for domestic workers' jobs, accounting for 11%. In 31% of cases, having small babies and family problems are the causes of losing jobs.

Table 10. Reasons for Losing jobs of Domestic Workers

Causes of Losing jobs	Number of Respondents	Percent
Pregnancy	22	11
Having small babies with family problems	62	31
Seasonal illness of more than 7 days	34	17
Absentee status in the workplace	82	41
Source: Field Survey, 2022.		

Financial support received by Domestic Workers at the time of their crisis

Figure 8 describes the Financial support received by domestic workers during their crisis. About 49% of respondents are found to take help from NGO, whereas 23% reported that they usually take financial support from their employees. Almost 11% of the respondents take financial support from a moneylender. And 7% of respondents report that they get help from the government.
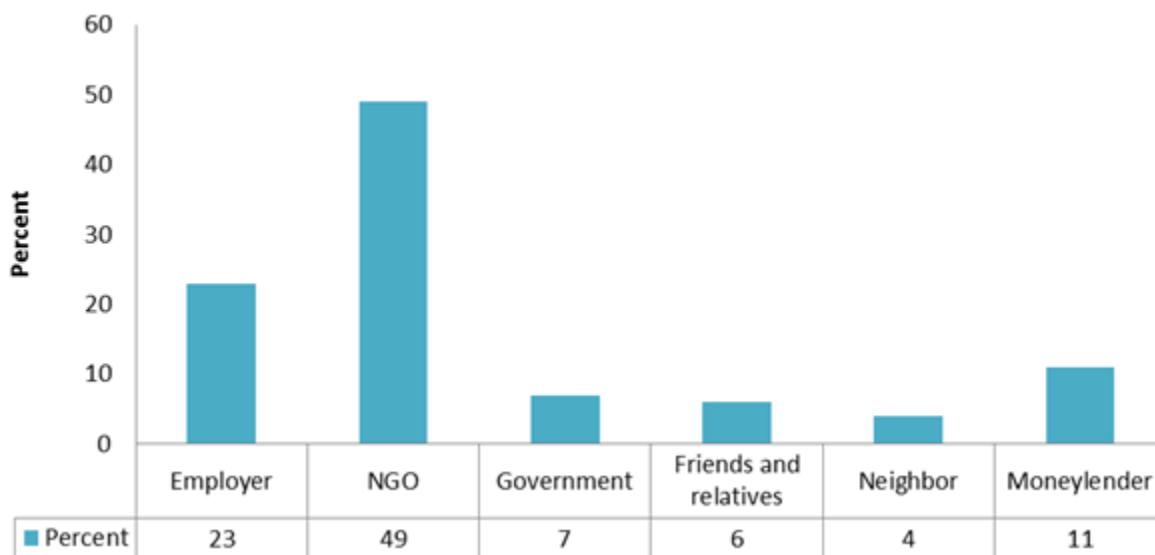

	Employer	NGO	Government	Friends and relatives	Neighbor	Moneylender
■ Percent	23	49	7	6	4	11

Figure 8: financial support received by domestic worker at the time of their crisis

Challenges faced by Domestic Workers in their Workplace

In this study, the Likert scale was applied to rank the challemges challenges faced by female

domestic workers in the study area, shown inTable 11. The female domestic workers in the study area have recognized mental harassment as the first challenge in the workplace, with a

mean index value of 4.02, followed by the insecure status of a job, and the wage rate is not fixed.

Table 11. Challenges faced by Domestic Workers in their Workplace

Name of the Challenges	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Physical harassment	1.80	1.68	6
2. Wage rate is not fixed	3.04	1.08	3
3. Mental harassment	4.02	1.08	1
4. No weekly leave/holiday	2.85	1.05	4
5. Mode of repayment	0.92	0.51	9
6. sexual harassment	1.59	1.09	7
7. Insecure status of job	3.87	1.07	2
8. Long distance to the nearest bank	1.26	1.25	8
9. No agreement between the worker and the employer	1.95	0.99	5
Source: Authors' Own Calculation.			

In addition, no weekly leave/holiday, no agreement between the worker and the employer, and physical harassment hold 4th, 5th, and 6th ranks with index 2.85, 1.95, and 1.80, respectively. Sexual harassment is also considered one of the challenges faced by domestic workers,holding 7th rank with an index value of 1.59.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The core objective of this article was to identify the vulnerability situation of a female domestic worker in Bangladesh. This study applied a multistage random sampling technique where district and upazila were selected purposively, but unions, villages, and respondents were selected using simple random sampling techniques. All female domestic workers were considered as the population for the study. Data were collected from 10 villages, and 200 female domestic workers were selected as samples using a simple random sampling technique. Descriptive statistics like mean, maximum, minimum, standard deviation were used to analyze the data. Both tabular and graphical approaches were applied to interpret the collected sample. A five-point Likert scale was applied to rank the challenges faced by female domestic workers in the study area. Results of the study show that 51% of domestic workers fall within the age category of 21-30 years, whereas 23% of

respondents fall within the age category of 31 to 40 years. Regarding the marital status of a domestic worker, it is seen that most of the domestic workers were married, while a significant portion of respondents were separated. In addition, this study also showed that 11% of the respondents were divorced. In the case of educational attainment, it is seen that about 32% of the female domestic workers had no formal education, while 58% of them had only primary education. Only 10% of respondents had completed their secondary-level education. Regarding dependents family members, the results indicate that 61% of domestic workers reported that they had 1 to 3 dependent family members, whereas 25% of respondents claimed that they had 4 to 6 dependent family members. Findings indicate that 34% of the employer provides breakfast to female domestic worker while 29% of respondents did not get any food support from the employer's side. Findings obtained from the study show that 72 % of domestic workers are found to work 27 days a month, whereas 19 % of respondents work 26 days a month. The average working day per month was 27.09 days. The study also indicates that 57% of domestic workers work on an average of 5 to 8 h while the average working length ranges from 1 to 4 h for 23% of female domestic workers in the study area.

The present study shows that 89% of female domestic workers were part-time, whereas only 7 were full-time. The study also reveals that about 63% of respondents work in the household, and 29% of workers are found to work in a mess. There are also 8% of respondents who are found to work at the hotel for their livelihood. It is found from the analysis that 49 % of the domestic workers are getting a salary between Tk.1501 and Tk.3000 per month while 26% of domestic workers earn salary ranges between Tk. 3001 to Tk. 4500 per month. Most of the domestic workers in the study area are found to lose their job for irregularities present in the workplace, which is 41%. Pregnancy is another cause for domestic workers' jobs, accounting for 11%. The female domestic workers in the study area have recognized mental harassment as the first challenge in the workplace, with a mean index value of 4.02, followed by the insecure status of a job, and the wage rate is not fixed.

Based on the findings of this research, it is necessary to put forward some recommendations regarding how to improve the vulnerability situation of a female domestic workers in the Gopalganj district of Bangladesh. Some of the suggestions emerge from the field survey experiences by the researchers. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation can be made:

i. It is found from the study that female domestic workers have recognized insecure status of a job and flexible wage rates are the significant challenges. Thus, the government should take deliberate steps to ensure minimum wage and job security.

ii. Working days per month is 27.09, which is higher in comparison to the law provided by ILO. In addition, the mean salary of the female domestic worker is Tk. 2135.07. Therefore, the salary of domestic workers should be increased, which can be implemented with the government's intervention.

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