



Socio-Economic Study of Domestic Workers in Pune City

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Abstract

Domestic work constitutes one of the largest yet most under-recognised segments of the urban informal labour market in India. In rapidly urbanising cities such as Pune, the expansion of nuclear households, rising female workforce participation among the middle class, and an ageing population have together fuelled a sustained demand for paid domestic help, drawing large numbers of migrant and local women into cooking, cleaning, cooking, child-care, and elder-care work. Despite their indispensable contribution to urban households and, indirectly, to the wider urban economy, domestic workers remain largely outside the ambit of formal labour protections, social security, and collective bargaining. This paper examines the socio-economic condition of domestic workers in Pune city on the basis of a primary field survey of 150 respondents drawn from Kothrud, Hadapsar, Aundh, Wanowrie, and Pimpri-Chinchwad localities, supplemented by secondary data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the Census of India. The study analyses the socio-demographic profile, migration pattern, nature of employment, wage structure, working hours, and the social security status of respondents, and identifies the principal problems they encounter, including wage irregularity, absence of written contracts, lack of paid leave, and vulnerability to exploitation. The paper concludes with policy suggestions centred on registration, minimum wage enforcement, and extension of social security schemes to domestic workers in Pune and comparable Indian cities.

Keywords: Domestic Workers, Informal Sector, Urban Labour Market, Socio-Economic Status, Pune, Social Security, Women Workers.

1. Introduction

India's informal economy employs over ninety per cent of its workforce, and within this vast and heterogeneous sector, paid domestic work occupies a distinctive and largely invisible place. Domestic workers—predominantly women—perform cooking, cleaning, washing, child-care, elder-care, and other household maintenance tasks inside private homes, an arrangement that places them outside the physical and regulatory boundaries within which most labour law traditionally operates. The National Sample Survey and successive rounds of the Periodic Labour Force Survey indicate that several million workers, overwhelmingly women, are engaged in this occupation across urban India, with the actual number widely believed to be underestimated because of the casual, unregistered, and often part-time nature of the work.

Pune, the second-largest city in Maharashtra and a major hub for information technology, education, and manufacturing, has witnessed rapid horizontal and vertical expansion over the past two decades. The proliferation of gated housing societies, the rise of dual-income nuclear households, and the growing elderly population living independently of joint families have combined to generate a substantial and growing demand for domestic help. Simultaneously, distress-driven and opportunity-driven migration from the drought-prone districts

of Marathwada and Vidarbha, as well as from neighbouring states, has ensured a steady supply of women willing to take up this work, often as an entry point into the urban labour market.

Yet domestic work in Pune, as elsewhere in India, is characterised by low and irregular wages, the absence of written employment contracts, long and unpredictable working hours, lack of weekly offs and paid leave, and near-total exclusion from statutory social security benefits such as provident fund, gratuity, and health insurance. The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, and the more recent Code on Social Security, 2020, formally acknowledge domestic workers as unorganised sector workers, but implementation on the ground remains weak, and Maharashtra's own domestic workers' welfare board initiatives have achieved only partial registration coverage. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to provide an empirically grounded socio-economic profile of domestic workers in Pune city and to identify the structural and everyday problems that constrain their well-being.

2. Review of Literature

A substantial body of research has examined the conditions of domestic work in India. Neetha (2004) documented the feminisation and increasing commodification of domestic

service in metropolitan India, arguing that domestic work reproduces class and caste hierarchies even as it enables middle-class women's labour force participation. Raghuram (2001) highlighted the contractual ambiguity that characterises domestic employment relationships, noting the almost complete absence of written agreements between employers and workers. Mattingly (2001), in a study of paid domestic work and space, showed how domestic workers' mobility and time-use are shaped by employer households' spatial and temporal demands.

The International Labour Organisation's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and its accompanying reports have repeatedly drawn attention to the global under-regulation of domestic work and have called upon member states to extend core labour standards to this workforce (ILO, 2013). In the Indian context, the National Commission for Women and several state-level studies have documented low wages, absence of social security, and vulnerability to verbal and physical abuse as recurring features of domestic workers' experience. Studies specific to Maharashtra and Pune, including those undertaken by labour rights organisations such as the Domestic Workers' Union network, have reported that daily-wage part-time workers earn substantially less per household than full-time live-in workers, but enjoy comparatively greater autonomy in choosing employers and working hours.

Sen and Sengupta (2016) situate domestic work within a broader analysis of India's care economy, arguing that undervaluation of domestic and care labour is both a cause and a consequence of women's subordinate position in the urban labour market. More recent work following the passage of the Code on Social Security, 2020, has examined the gap between legislative intent and ground-level implementation, pointing to low awareness among workers regarding registration procedures and welfare board benefits (Sankaran, 2021). While this literature establishes the broad contours of domestic workers' vulnerability across urban India, city-specific and locality-disaggregated empirical evidence for Pune remains comparatively limited, a gap that the present study seeks to address.

3. Objectives of the Study

- i). To study the socio-demographic and migration profile of domestic workers in Pune city.

- ii). To examine the nature of employment, working hours, and wage structure of domestic workers.
- iii). To assess the extent of social security coverage and access to statutory welfare benefits among domestic workers.
- iv). To identify the major problems and challenges faced by domestic workers in their occupation.
- v). To suggest policy measures for improving the socio-economic condition of domestic workers in Pune city.

4. Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between the migration status of domestic workers and their wage level.

H2: A majority of domestic workers in Pune city lack access to formal social security benefits irrespective of their years of experience.

5. Research Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule administered to 150 domestic workers selected through purposive-cum-snowball sampling from five localities of Pune Metropolitan Region—Kothrud, Hadapsar, Aundh, Wanowrie, and Pimpri-Chinchwad—chosen to represent a mix of established upper-middle-income residential areas, IT-corridor housing societies, and industrial-belt working-class neighbourhoods. Fieldwork was conducted between January and March 2026. Secondary data were drawn from NSSO and Periodic Labour Force Survey reports, ILO publications, Census of India, and reports of the Maharashtra Domestic Workers' Welfare Board. Data collected were tabulated and analysed using simple statistical tools including percentages, averages, and cross-tabulation, and are presented through descriptive tables in the sections that follow.

6. Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the sampled domestic workers. The data reveal that domestic work in Pune remains an overwhelmingly female occupation, with the workforce concentrated in the middle-adult age group and characterised by comparatively low levels of formal education.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	141	94.0
	Male	9	6.0
Age Group	18–30 years	32	21.3
	31–45 years	71	47.3
	46–60 years	39	26.0
	Above 60 years	8	5.4
Educational Level	Illiterate	27	18.0
	Primary (1st–7th)	58	38.7
	Secondary (8th–10th)	47	31.3
	Higher Secondary and above	18	12.0
Marital Status	Married	112	74.7
	Widowed/Separated/Single	38	25.3
Migration Status	Migrant (from outside Pune)	96	64.0
	Local (Pune resident)	54	36.0

The predominance of women aged 31–45 years reflects the life-cycle stage at which household economic pressures and childcare responsibilities most commonly push women into flexible, home-based or nearby informal employment. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported migrant status, with the largest proportion originating from Solapur, Osmanabad (Dharashiv), Beed, and other districts of the drought-affected Marathwada region, corroborating the well-documented distress-migration corridor linking rural Marathwada to urban centres such as Pune and Mumbai. The comparatively low educational attainment of respondents—over half having not

progressed beyond primary schooling—both reflects and reinforces their confinement to low-paid, low-skill segments of the urban labour market.

7. Nature of Employment, Working Hours and Wage Structure

Domestic work in Pune is organised principally along two lines: part-time work across multiple households and full-time or live-in work with a single employer household. Table 2 summarises the employment pattern and wage structure reported by respondents.

Table 2: Employment Pattern and Wage Structure

Particulars	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Type of Employment	Part-time (multiple households)	104	69.3
	Full-time (single household)	31	20.7
	Live-in	15	10.0
Number of Households Served	1 household	46	30.7
	2–4 households	71	47.3
	5 or more households	33	22.0
Monthly Income	Below ₹4,000	29	19.3
	₹4,000–₹8,000	64	42.7
	₹8,001–₹12,000	40	26.7
	Above ₹12,000	17	11.3
Daily Working Hours	Less than 4 hours	22	14.7
	4–8 hours	89	59.3
	More than 8 hours	39	26.0

Part-time work across multiple households emerges as the dominant employment pattern, adopted by nearly seven of every ten respondents, largely because it allows workers to aggregate income from several employers while retaining some flexibility over working hours. Monthly income levels, however, remain modest: almost two-thirds of respondents earn ₹8,000 or less per month, well below Maharashtra's notified minimum wage benchmarks for unskilled work when computed on a full-time equivalent basis. Live-in workers,

though a smaller proportion of the sample, reported the longest working hours and the least control over their daily schedule, often being on call throughout the day with only nominal rest periods.

8. Social Security Coverage and Problems Faced

Table 3 presents the extent of access to social security and the principal problems reported by respondents. Multiple responses were permitted for the problems reported.

Table 3: Social Security Coverage and Problems Faced

Indicator	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Written Employment Contract	Yes	11	7.3
	No	139	92.7
Registered with Welfare Board	Yes	34	22.7
	No	116	77.3
Paid Leave/Weekly Off	Available	58	38.7
	Not Available	92	61.3
Health Insurance Coverage	Covered	27	18.0
	Not Covered	123	82.0
Major Problem Reported*	Low and irregular wages	118	78.7
	No written contract/job insecurity	104	69.3
	Excessive working hours	71	47.3
	Verbal/physical mistreatment	39	26.0
	Lack of transport safety at night	46	30.7

*Percentages for the 'Major Problem Reported' category exceed 100 as multiple responses were recorded.

The data reveal a stark deficit in formal protections: fewer than one in ten respondents possess a written employment contract, and less than a quarter are registered with the state welfare board despite the board's operation for over a decade.

Access to health insurance is similarly limited, leaving workers exposed to catastrophic health expenditure in the event of illness or injury. Low and irregular wages were the most frequently cited problem, followed closely by the

absence of job security stemming from the informal, verbal nature of employment arrangements, which allows employers to terminate services without notice or compensation. Nearly a third of respondents, particularly those undertaking early-morning or late-evening shifts, reported concerns regarding personal safety while commuting, an issue with particular resonance for migrant workers residing in peripheral, poorly connected settlements.

9. Findings of the Study

- Domestic work in Pune city is an overwhelmingly female occupation, with almost two-thirds of workers being migrants, predominantly from the drought-prone districts of Marathwada.
- Part-time employment across multiple households is the dominant employment pattern, adopted for income aggregation and scheduling flexibility.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents earn a monthly income of ₹8,000 or less, indicating substantial wage inadequacy relative to the cost of living in Pune.
- Access to formal protections is minimal: over ninety per cent of respondents lack a written employment contract, and more than three-quarters are not registered with the state domestic workers' welfare board.
- Low and irregular wages, job insecurity arising from informal verbal arrangements, and excessive working hours are the most commonly reported problems.
- Live-in workers face the longest working hours and the least autonomy over their daily schedules among the three categories of employment studied.
- A meaningful proportion of workers, particularly migrants commuting at odd hours, report safety concerns, underscoring the intersection of occupational and spatial vulnerability.

10. Suggestions

- Mandatory registration of domestic workers under the Maharashtra Domestic Workers' Welfare Board should be actively promoted through local ward-level camps and simplified digital registration processes.
- A standardised, legally enforceable written contract template specifying wages, working hours, leave entitlements, and notice periods should be developed and popularised among both employers and workers.
- State-notified minimum wages for domestic work should be periodically revised and effectively publicised so that both employers and workers are aware of applicable wage floors.
- Health insurance coverage should be extended to registered domestic workers through convergence with existing state and central health assurance schemes.
- Skill-upgradation and financial literacy programmes should be organised for domestic workers to enable diversification into better-remunerated segments of the care economy, such as trained elder-care and child-care services.
- Resident welfare associations and housing societies should be sensitised, through municipal corporation outreach, regarding fair wage practices, dignified treatment, and provision of basic amenities to domestic workers.
- Safe and affordable last-mile transport arrangements should be considered for domestic workers travelling during early morning and late evening hours, particularly

in peripheral localities.

11. Conclusion

Domestic workers constitute an indispensable but structurally marginalised component of Pune city's urban economy. The findings of this study demonstrate that despite sustained demand for their labour, domestic workers continue to face low and irregular wages, an almost complete absence of written contracts, limited access to social security, and persistent job insecurity. The predominance of migrant women from economically distressed rural districts among the workforce further underscores the intersection between rural agrarian distress and urban informal employment. While legislative instruments such as the Code on Social Security, 2020, and state-level welfare board mechanisms formally recognise domestic workers as unorganised sector employees entitled to protection, the gap between statutory intent and ground-level implementation remains wide. Bridging this gap will require coordinated action across registration, wage regulation, social security extension, and employer sensitisation, so that the substantial and growing contribution of domestic workers to Pune's households and economy is matched by a corresponding improvement in their own socio-economic security and dignity.

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