

Becoming a Domestic Worker: The Case of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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Abstract: This research unpacked the challenges experienced by domestic workers in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. Domestic workers play a pivotal role in supporting the labour market and economy. However, this work is often gender biased. The research pursued a gendered approach in an attempt to examine the challenges faced by domestic workers in the area. A qualitative research approach was used in the investigation. The findings of the study are that harassment of domestic workers at their workplace affects their lives negatively as they often lose concentration and become unproductive and ineffective at work. The study results showed that domestic workers from rural areas face more challenges than domestic workers from urban areas. This is due to the fact that their conditions in urban areas are more improved than in rural areas. The study also established that domestic workers resort to keeping quiet and do not communicate with their employers for fear that they will be victimized. However, some of them pointed out that they exercise patience when dealing with their employers because of fear of losing their jobs. The research also established that domestic workers are the most oppressed and exploited sector of the economy in South Africa.

Keywords: domestic work, patriarchy, gender, feminism, documented workers, dignified labour.

Introduction and Background

In modern societies, domestic workers play a pivotal role in supporting the labor market and the economy of a country at large through relieving working families of household chores. Given this background Lutz (2007) argues that domestic work is a crucial tool for sustainability and functioning of the economy. Statistics have it that an estimated one third of the world's households rely on domestic workers (Albin, 2011). International Labour Organisation (2010) also echoes the same sentiment noting that, although statistics about domestic workers is scarce, the number of domestic workers worldwide is estimated at over 100 million and is on the rise everywhere. Given the fact that the sector is female dominated, it becomes the main source of employment for women especially in South Africa (ILO, 2010). This is testimony enough to show the significance of domestic workers in many countries. Developed countries have a higher percentage of domestic workers than developing countries (Steedman, 2009). This is mainly due to the labour market structure which absorbs many people regardless of their gender unlike in developing countries where the employment of women was very low until recently when gender equality was advocated. In the wake of the world economic recession, Lutz (2007) suggests that domestic work is an effective alternative employment opportunity for the unskilled labour which cannot be absorbed in other occupations. Despite the importance of domestic work to the modern society, its regulation is still a challenge (International Labor Organization: ILO, 2012). More significantly, the close intimacy between employee and the employer makes the former appear as a family member than a worker.

This reduces their value and the measurement of their economic status. Additionally, the fact that domestic work is invisible as it is performed behind closed doors, makes it difficult to regulate (Anderson, 2007). According to Steedman (2009) the fact of legislation vulnerability of domestic workers is historically entrenched, especially in the United Kingdom. In the UK, domestic workers were not included in the legislation for a long time. This was due to the proximity and intimacy to their employers among other reasons. Albin (2011) reports that, in recent years several changes have occurred regarding the legislation in the UK. However, he contends that within these changes there are still many pitfalls which expose domestic workers to economic vulnerability. For instance, they are still omitted from working time regulation in the Regulation 19 of the working time regulation Act. They can also be paid less than the minimum wage when their employer provides them with accommodation. Similarly, Zungu (2009) claims that in Asia, the contribution of domestic workers to the economy is never factored in the Gross National Product. This illustrates that domestic workers are undermined and less valued. This is exacerbated by the fact that they do not have specific working hours or rest periods, receive poor wages

and poor standards of work termination among other challenges (Zungu, 2011). These challenges are an evidence of how the legislation irregularities position domestic workers at a disadvantage hence exposing them to economic mistreatment.

However, the aforementioned omission does not apply in other countries. For instance in India, the National policy for domestic workers provides domestic workers the right to minimum wage laws, establishment of the number of working hours and rest period as well as social protection and security benefits (Ministry of Labor, 2011). The case of India shows that some countries are taking the plight of domestic workers seriously and are taking necessary steps to protect them from social and economic exploitation.

The demand for domestic workers has been on the increase in the past two decades (Gobind, Plessis and Ukpere, 2012). This increase has occurred even in the developing countries where there is a major incorporation of women into the sector (ILO, 2010). However, Gobind, Plessis and Ukpere, (2012) insist that domestic workers are mostly overworked and unprotected. This undermining of domestic workers is as a result of the lack of skill requirements of the job. This in turn makes it difficult for them to be recognized and to be remunerated fairly (ILO 2010).

South Africa is one of the Southern African countries with many domestic workers. Zungu (2009) reports that the domestic working sector accounts for around 800 000 workers and falls under the informal sector. This shows the significance of the sector to the country's economy. However, gender bias exists in the sector as female workers tend to dominate male workers in the domestic sector. A patriarchal belief dominates most of the South African communities hence domestic work is viewed as predominantly women's work. The socialist feminist theory proposes that the patriarchal family, motherhood and housework are the basis of women's oppression (Chinn & Wheeler 1985). Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012) note that about 18% of all women in South Africa are employed as domestic workers and 80% of them are poorly educated. Similarly, Lutz (2007) asserts that domestic workers are mainly poor women. Rural poverty which has increased in many African countries due to the devastation of the agricultural sector and limited employment opportunities are all factors leading to women flooding the domestic work sector (Zungu, 2009). In light of the above, it becomes vital to conduct a fact finding study which examines the gender and age related challenges and coping strategies of domestic workers in South Africa.

There are also a number of economic related challenges which exist in the domestic work sector in South Africa. Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012) point out that domestic workers are poorly remunerated. Their mean wages are also lower than in any other sector. However, the irregularities of their wages and privacy of their work make it difficult to know the lowest amount they earn. This poor remuneration situation triggers other social and psychological problems such as stress and insecurity among the workers. In line with the above, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA, 2007) notes that domestic workers are usually more vulnerable to challenges as they work without guiding policies and employment contracts. According to Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2012), before 2002 there was no specified minimum wage in the domestic work sector and the wage negotiation mechanism was not standardized. This situation reduced domestic workers to mere slaves who depended on the mercy of their employers who unilaterally decided their wage structure.

However, in recent years, South Africa has tried to establish some policies and legislation for protecting domestic workers and to increase their resilience to challenges they are facing. Post 2002 saw South Africa passing a regulation which granted domestic workers the right to a minimum wage and up to 8% annual wage increase (Dinkelman and Ranchhod, 2012). Although this was a positive development, it remains challenging to judge if the minimum wage standard helps alleviate domestic workers' challenges. The South African government has also established the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 which covers domestic workers wage and working hours (Gobind et al 2012). This Act aims at improving the challenges of domestic workers in the country. However, the basic conditions included in this piece of legislation do not set the wages to a satisfactory level. A study by the International labour Organization (2010) indicates that many domestic workers do not enjoy the protection level offered by this policy. This is mainly due to the privacy of their workplace and the unbalanced relationship between employee and employer. In other words, the private home deprives the domestic workers free interaction with other workers or trade union representatives (Gobind et al 2012). Moreover, the low level of education deprives domestic workers understanding the various protective legislations which exist for them hence they might continue to suffer behind closed doors. Additionally, the aforementioned legislation frameworks lack the feminist focus which considers domestic work as a predominantly women sector with certain needs and challenges exclusive to them. It is clear that through an exploration of challenges faced by female domestic workers, there can be a conducive platform for them to interact and share their challenges and strategies to address the impediments resulting from the relegation of domestic work to unrecognized labour.

Statement of the Research Problem

Domestic workers are facing various challenges inspite of the fact that labour laws meant to improve their quality of working conditions have been introduced especially in South Africa. In particular, for domestic workers, the Unemployment Insurance Act No. 97 of 1998 is a ground breaking regulation in South African labor history. It grants domestic workers the right to organise into trade unions, publicised minimum wage, stated legislated annual increase and mandatory contracts of employment. Despite the progress made thus far regarding new legislations on domestic work, the ILO (2010) reports that domestic workers are still lowly paid and the work remains undervalued and poorly regulated in South Africa. This shows that there is a gap between legal framework provisions and their effective implementation. There is also evidence of insufficient research on the subject especially in rural areas and semi-rural towns (Acher, 2011).

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by female domestic workers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

Objectives

The following objectives facilitated the research questions guiding the study:

1. To explore the challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe.
2. To determine the coping strategies employed by domestic workers for sustainability.
3. To establish essential ways of making domestic work a recognizable and dignified profession in Thulamahashe.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions which guided the study:

- [1] What are the challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe?
- [2] What are the coping strategies employed by domestic workers for sustainability?
- [3] What are the mechanisms that can be put in place to conscientise communities about the importance of domestic work?

Literature Review

Tolla (2013) points out that patriarchal beliefs are the root cause of male and female inequalities regarding gender roles in some parts of Africa. On the other hand, the gender distribution of housework is not a simple trade-off between work time and respective financial contributions. Instead, the way housework is allocated defines and expresses gender relations operating within households (Katz, 1997). Individuals are believed to perform gender through their daily behaviour, including domestic work, especially when interacting with individuals of the opposite sex (Gupta, 2007). This explains why women are dominant in the domestic work sector. But even though the patriarchal beliefs are rooted in South African societies, the rise of feminism and gender equality advocacy has ceaselessly targeted the downfall of these beliefs in societies. However, it remains questionable why women's oppression in various spheres of life including their relegation to poor jobs like domestic work without them declining such opportunities does not abate. To obtain a certain standpoint, the study concentrated on domestic workers situated in a semi-rural community with slightly different conditions from major towns. This will assist in drafting practical and situational female domestic worker centred strategies to improve their plight.

Domestic work is a world phenomenon crucial for the efficient functioning of the economy and the home environment. It has existed for a long time, providing work for many women worldwide (Nazir, 2011). ILO (2010) echoed the same sentiment citing that domestic work is characterized by more women than men. The main reason being the stereotypical beliefs embedded in various communities expecting women to take responsibility for the home chores. In line with this view, Du Toit (2011) observes that women form a larger part of the domestic work sector due to the beliefs of shared obligations for domestic activities which is rooted in traditional history.

Domestic work is significant for national economies to function in modern societies. In the past two decades, demand for care work has been on the rise everywhere. The large recruitment of women in the labor force coupled with the intensification of work and the frequent lack of policy actions to enable the balancing of family life and work explains this development (Nazir, 2011). Resultantly, over 100 million people have been recruited in the domestic worker sector in the past decade (ILO, 2010). For instance, in South Africa 9, 4 percent of the workforce is made up of domestic workers. However, the statistics of domestic workers are usually not reliable given the private nature of their employment.

Conditions of Domestic Workers

Domestic workers resemble a unique working group living in isolation outside the regular labor force. Their nature of employment environment accounts for the aforementioned situation. They are employed in private homes by individuals. Dilata (2010) notes that “domestic workers are often described as forming part of the invisible labor force”, due to the fact that they work in private households. This forced Chen (2011) to lament that, the fact that domestic workers are hired in private people’s homes creates an unequally balanced relationship in favour of the employer. This results mostly in them being vulnerable to all sorts of abuse at the hands of their employers. Worth noting is the fact that most of the tasks in domestic work are stereotypically viewed as women’s work hence devalued and disregarded. Du Toit (2013) highlights that domestic workers are highly individualised and non-standard in nature and this make the sector difficult to regulate. This is also a factor which compels employers to resist legal regulations for domestic workers on the basis that domestic work is not employment but rather a private family arrangement.

According to Nadasen (2012), the association of domestic work with women’s unpaid labor and its private nature in homes makes it difficult for many people to view it as real work worth any value. More often than not, paid domestic work is associated with unpaid domestic work performed by women for their families. In this regard, it is not calculated in the gross domestic product and in government statistics. This led Rollins, a renowned sociologist, to call it ‘invisible work’, as early as 1985. The aforementioned facts culminate in employers failing to offer domestic workers the rights and respect equivalent to other workers (Nadasen, 2012). In addition, the fact that the workplace is in the employer’s home gives rise to serious challenges in imposing the standard range of labor protections that arise through collective bargaining. The workers often find it difficult to discuss their challenges with their employers given the intimacy of the working environment and the mutual relationship created with the employers’ family members (Department of Labor, 2010).

Women as Important Agents in the Domestic Work Sector

Domestic workers’ tasks are a vital tool for fostering development in many countries. Serano (2007) has called it as the most basic survival activity. This is mainly due to the fact that caring for children from young age and caring for the working class are fundamental tasks with significant connotations for human survival in every society. However, the association of domestic work is based on cultural notion that they are more interested in soft work whilst men prefer developing their individual competencies. ILO (2012) notes that, domestic work is mainly gendered because most of the workers are women. In this regard, it was delineated as a separate area of work when productive and reproductive work got separated. This indicates how the work has been culturally and traditionally organised for women.

On the other hand, even though many feminist suggest women oppression in the domestic work field some scholars think otherwise. For instance, Lutz (2007) report that in cases where they fail to establish fair sharing of responsibilities on home chores with their husbands, women usually resort to hiring a domestic worker to assist them. This is an indication that the employment of domestic workers is perpetuated by other women. Furthermore, the management of domestic work in households is done mainly by women. The aforementioned fact is testimony enough that women domestic workers usually suffer or face challenges at the hands of fellow women who are in a different class. This indicates structural oppression among women hence derailing holistic women emancipation efforts. However, as suggested by Albin and Mantouvalou (2012), not all employer and employee relationships are oppressive and abusive. In the light of this information, it becomes vital to explore the challenges faced by female domestic workers in relation to their employers who are either men or women in order to establish the relationships between the women domestic employers and their female employees.

Domestic Work in South Africa

The acquisition of freedom in South Africa in 1994 enhanced the establishment of various policies directed towards disentangling the disadvantaged citizens from the jaws of oppression. In a democratic South Africa, one of the priority areas was the commitment to gender equity and equality at the public level. The reservation of 26% of national parliamentary seats for females alongside the establishment of a constitution devoted to non-sexism and the efforts to bring more women into the labor market were all crucial measures to ensure women’s critical position in national healing and building at the public level (Fall, 2003). However, the success of the implementation of the aforementioned policies in the domestic work sector mostly dominated by women remains questionable. More often than not, women remain isolated in the private domestic work sector where their suffering remains under closed doors. In support of the aforementioned, Albin and Mantouvalou (2012), suggested that domestic labour represents a small-scale version of prevailing patterns of racial inequality that reflect clearly unequal relations between women established upon their race and class positions. This implies

that the efforts to establish gender equality have mainly been established at the public level but fails to resolve outstanding feministic issues in various private sectors.

Throughout the apartheid period, domestic work has been an institution advancing and reflecting apartheid ideologies. This was mirrored by the relegating of black women to domestic work services in the homes of working white employers (Jennifer and Fish, 2006). Though men were also part of the sector, women dominated the sector as men would be working in sectors such as gardening. A scrutiny of this scenario reveals gender inequality wherein a black female suffered triple oppression through their class, gender and race. In recent years, the domestic work sector absorbs a large number of African women in the country (Statistics South Africa 2000). This is an indication that the sector has been highly alienated from the gender equality and democracy advocacy apparent in other sectors around the country. In light of this information, Jennifer and Fish (2006) concluded that the relationship between the structural inequalities contained within domestic labor and women's collective intervention provides enlightening information into gender aspects of social change in the country.

In South Africa, since the inception of democracy, various labor policies that held the potential to protect women employed in private households and the formalisation of domestic work have been established. The domestic work sectorial determination of 2001 specifically set the minimum wage and conditions in the domestic work sector. In addition, the employment equity act of 1998 was meant to eliminate segregation in employment and bring a gender balance in all sectors including domestic work. However, Jennifer and Fish (2006) reveal significant women marginalisation and limited union representation in the domestic work sector, this symbolises limited success for the established policies to achieve the desirable change. The domestic work sector is plagued by various gender related challenges worth exploring in order to administer the transitional injustices into the democratic national building process.

Mpumalanga is a South African semi-rural province. Due to limited job opportunities in the local town, many people migrate to big cities like Johannesburg and leave their homes with domestic workers and children. Other employees working in the local cities employ domestic workers especially women to look after their families while at work. Tolla (2013) reports that, employers are not following the minimum standards set by the Department of Labor. On a local level, the rural nature of the Thulamahashe district in South Africa worsens the situation. This is mainly due to the fact that female domestic workers are seemingly taken advantage of and are not exposed to unions and other domestic worker organisations. Despite various laws in the country, Tolla (2013) findings indicate a continuous abuse and exploitation of domestic workers in Mpumalanga. This prompted De Waal (2012) to assert that pressure needs to be exerted on the government to ensure that employers abide by the set laws and regulations of domestic workers. This is an indication that a lot needs to be done to improve the conditions of domestic workers in Thulamahashe and Mpumalanga at large.

Dilata (2010) contends that employers sometimes take advantage of the desperate situations of domestic workers to manipulate them. This is apparent in Mpumalanga as a study by Tolla (2013) revealed situations which mirrored manipulation of domestic workers. For instance, employers use food and clothes as instruments to foster loyalty and in turn underpay and overwork their female employees. Dilata (2010) also mentions that domestic workers find it difficult to have time off to see their families. This occurs mainly to those who stay with their employers. The fact that domestic workers are required to be working even on public holidays when everyone is resting deprives them of the opportunity to visit their families. Dinat and Peberdy (2007) echoed the same sentiment noting that the social lives of domestic workers are not free like other workers in industries. This is due to the fact that they have limited time out of work and are forced to socialise with the employers' family even when they do not like it.

Research Methodology

The researchers used a qualitative research methodology which is viewed by feminist researchers as relevant in valorizing the voices of the exploited and denigrated women. Feminist epistemologies of doing research build on this emphasis to include issues of partiality and positionality on research (Manias & Street, 2001). Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information from the participants who are believed to hold what feminist research refers to as researcher privilege. Participants' knowledge was of paramount importance in this study. This chapter also includes the population of the study, research design, sampling procedures, description of the study area, data collection methods, ethical considerations, research questions and data analysis.

The study area

Bushbuckridge Thulamahashe Municipality is located in the North-east of Mpumalanga, and it borders the south-eastern part of Limpopo province. It is under Ehlanzeni district situated in Mpumalanga province of South Africa. Bushbuckridge Thulamahashe Municipality is made up of Tsonga and Pedi speaking people. According to statistics South Africa (STATSA, Census, 2006) there are about 500 000 people residing in 133 dispersed villages in an area which covers 2,23km. The area is semi-rural with a population density of 235 persons/km.

Bushbuckridge Thulamahashe Municipality has four major townships namely Mkhuhlu, Thulamahashe, Acornhoek and Bushbuckridge. The municipality is divided into two borders firstly the Blyde River Canyon the west and Kruger National Park and the second is Sabie Sand reserves in the east, Manyeleti and Andover game reserves fall into its area along the Northern border. Approximately 40% of the residents do not have basic education and the remaining populations have at least basic education. The population is made up of 53 percent of females and comprises 56% heads of households (STATSA, Census, 2006). Due to the fact that the area is semi-rural, there are few industries. Most of the employment opportunities are found in government offices, non-governmental organisations and shops. Domestic work is also one of the major employment opportunities which exist in the area as many working families seek local people to look after their homes and families while they are at work.

Population of the Study

Population refers to the total number of possible cases, units or elements that are included in a study (Gray, 2009). Samples are drawn from the population and have particular or specific characteristic meant to make up an appropriate sampling frame. For the purpose of this study, domestic workers were selected as participants. Twenty participants were selected for the study from most villages which has domestic workers. Due to the limited time frame, a small manageable percentage was selected so as to properly manage the data collection process. Furthermore, since the study was qualitative in nature, the purpose was to gain as much detailed information as possible from a few representative participants.

Sampling Procedure

Sampling is the process of selecting units, for example people and organizations from a population of interest so that by studying the sample we can fairly generalize the results back to the population from which the sample was chosen (De Vos, 2002). The snowball sampling procedure was used in this study. This was due to the fact that the researcher did not know the exact residences to find domestic workers hence a few who were initially identified helped in identifying other participants in the area. Both youth and adult domestic workers were selected. Female and male domestic workers also formed part of this study. To ensure a proper representation of gender and age, all subgroups were identified in the first group of participants. Thereafter, various participants went on to identify other domestic workers in their subgroups. For instance, youth would identify youth and females would identify other female domestic workers in their surrounding areas.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of data for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2010). The thematic analysis technique was employed in drawing meaning out of the data. The researcher firstly familiarized herself with the depth and the breadth of the content. She read over the entire data set at least once before beginning to code the ideas and the identification of possible patterns was shaped in the process of reading through. Transcription of verbal data informed the early stages of analysis. The researcher therefor developed a far more understanding of the data through having transcribed it. A list of the different codes was established. Lastly, the write-up was done in a logic and coherent manner following the identified themes. Ethical considerations

Ethics are guidelines and rules which state what is wrong and what is right in the process of conducting research. Social science research consists of the right and the wrong norms and values (Bless *et al*, 2006). One of the main reasons why social scientists are so worried about research ethics is that they have been many cases of abuse of people's rights through social studies. For the purpose of this research, ethics which were considered included confidentiality, informed consent, avoidance of harm and voluntary participation.

Presentation Of Study Results

The data was presented and analysed systematically using the thematic data analysis system. In this respect, the data was presented in the form of major themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews. The main aim of the study was to investigate the challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe area. Since the study was qualitative in nature, the result generally applies to Thulamahashe area rather than the whole of Mpumalanga Province. The main themes in this chapter include, challenges faced by domestic workers in Thulamahashe, gender and age disparities in challenges experienced by domestic workers as well as variations in challenges in relation to geographical location, that is, urban versus rural areas. Another theme relates to the coping strategies being employed by domestic workers in the area to deal with their challenges. Ways which can be employed to address the identified challenges are also covered in this chapter. Last but not least, ways of disseminating information to domestic workers in order to foster awareness about their rights, regulatory policies and legislative frameworks were also discussed in this chapter. The chapter ends with conclusion of the results.

Presentation of results

Results showed a unanimous need to provide training for domestic workers at institutions so as to foster organization and upgrading of the field. In this regard, all domestic workers in future would be in possession of certificates which they can use to secure jobs. The results expressed that domestic work was perceived as a profession which is done by unskilled individuals. In this respect it is regarded as a useless profession which is done by people who come mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds and without any or proper qualifications. Furthermore, the study findings also showed that the community regards domestic work as reproductive work which only requires compensation or stipends rather than real salaries hence employers usually pay domestic workers less than what is required. This is due to the fact that the sector mainly consists of women who come from patriarchal societies that believe they are naturally meant for reproductive work and should not be paid a living wage. Professionalizing the field will therefore trigger the need to standardize the profession, raise the status of domestic workers and generally foster their recognition by their employers and the society at large. The study findings established that domestic work is generally done by women from the lower economic stratum of the society in Thulamahashe area. Due to their disadvantaged background, most of these workers do not have any say when they are abused and mistreated by their employers. This belief possibly makes it possible for employers to manipulate them as they perceive them as people who can rarely find other jobs. In the light of the above, professionalizing the field will boost the pride and bargaining power of domestic workers while putting pressure on employers to comply with the requirements of their employees.

Challenges facing domestic workers in Thulamahashe

In the present study, domestic workers revealed a number of challenges they are facing in their daily lives. However, being harassed, working many days without being given off days and being forced to have sex with their employers, receiving low wages, working after hours and extra hours as well as exploitation were reported as the main challenges they encounter. ILO (2010 and 2009) also supports this by stating that domestic workers are usually paid low wages and the work remains undervalued and poorly regulated. The survey by the ILO conducted in 2009 reports that 40 per cent of selected countries world-wide did not guarantee domestic workers a weekly day of rest, and did not specify the working hours for domestic hours. Tolla (2013) also reports that domestic workers from Mpumalanga earn between R800-700 per month, the salary which is inadequate and not in the range set by the department of labour which is R1491.86 per month (Department of labor, 2002). Albin and Mantouvalou (2012) state that more often than not; female domestic workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment by the male members as well as their visitors. Furthermore, they add that a survey done in the United Kingdom in 2010 reveals that 54% of domestic workers in the country suffered psychological abuse while 3% were sexually abused by their employers. Tolla, (2011) adds that domestic workers find it difficult to resist exploitation and abuse due to fear of losing the only jobs that helps them to survive.

On the other hand, the study revealed that factors such as the heavy workloads they are given, being shouted at when they make small mistakes, being disrespected, and not caring about the age difference of domestic workers are as some of the challenges facing domestic workers in this part of the world called Thulamahashe.

Depression and stress

A spectrum of domestic workers indicated that as a result of the above hardships, when they knock off from work, they carry the hatred and anger home and their family members suffer because of their work frustrations. The results also demonstrated that working without contracts, long working hours and low wages are some of the problems they face. The ILO (2009) and (2010) notes that domestic workers are usually paid low wages and that most countries world-wide do not guarantee domestic workers a weekly day of rest, and did not specify the working hours for domestic workers. Results also indicate that challenges raised above cause stress and depression, which result in poor productive work. Furthermore, the results confirm that domestic workers lose self-confidence on what they do and they feel discriminated for not being educated and not having what it takes to survive. This shows that the aforementioned challenges have a negative impact in domestic worker's lives.

Gender disparities in domestic work

The study establishes that female domestic workers are in the majority. This is mainly due to patriarchal beliefs. In line with this view, Smith (2000) pointed out that patriarchal beliefs are the root cause of male and female inequalities regarding gender roles. These beliefs socialise female domestic workers to take responsibility for domestic work. On the other hand, female domestic workers are socialised mainly to be responsible for house chores, looking after children, cooking, washing clothes, was reportedly favourable for females than males. This fact concurs with ILO (2010) who indicates that women form a major part of the domestic work sector due to the beliefs of shared obligations for domestic activities which are rooted in traditional history. Results showed that the reason encouraging this condition is the fact that community patriarchal beliefs endorse male non-participation in domestic work by narrowing them to productive work. The results indicated that male domestic

workers reported that in most cases, they are not involved in domestic work because they are being hindered by patriarchal beliefs. This is due to the fact that men were socialised into believing that women should participate in home chores while men participate in productive work outside the home.

A comparison of challenges faced by male and female domestic workers

The study established that female domestic workers face more challenges than male domestic workers. The majority of female domestic workers indicated that they face domestic violence and sometimes they are forced to have sex with their male bosses unwillingly, as well as for them to get some wage increase and for them to be permanent domestic workers. In line with this fact Albin and Mantouvalou, (2012) also discovered that more often than not, female domestic workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment by the male employers as well as their visiting relatives. The above scholars also add that a survey done in United Kingdom in 2010 reveals that 54% of female domestic workers in the country suffered psychological abuse while 3% were sexually abused by their employers. (Mkandawire-Valhmu (2010) adds that women experience more verbal abuse and physical abuse. This is probably because of the community beliefs that women are powerless and defenceless. The other reason is that women are afraid of losing their jobs. In line with this statement, Tolla, 2013) adds that female domestic workers find it difficult to resist exploitation and abuse due to the fear of losing their only job helping them to survive. This implies that female domestic workers are affected by more challenges than male domestic workers.

Coping strategies used by domestic workers

In this study, results indicate that domestic workers keep quiet and calm as a way of coping with their challenges. A study by Tolla, (2013) in Mpumalanga reveals that domestic workers resort to keeping quiet to avoid their employers verbal abuse. They consistently read the mood of their employers to avoid upsetting them through talking. They employ this strategy to maintain a peaceful but yet unhealthy relationship with their employers. The findings revealed that they act like this because of the fear of losing their jobs, as well as avoiding arguments between them and their employers. The results further pointed out that domestic workers accept their situations, and sometimes they work according to the rules of their employers and keep quiet no matter how they are abused. This is very common amongst domestic workers because most of them are uneducated so they resort to accepting their situation and continuing with their jobs. The results indicated that they avoid talking to others from outside because they think that the outsiders can take their matters and tell their bosses, and as a result they may lose their jobs.

Additionally, the study shows that domestic workers use communication as another strategy to cope with their challenges. They talk to their employers about the issues that are affecting them, but still they have the fear of losing their jobs. The outcomes show that some domestic workers talk to their counsellors as a way of coping with their hardships, but not every domestic worker can afford to pay a counsellor. However, despite communication as a strategy, domestic workers pointed out that they forgive and accept their situations as another way of coping with their challenges. The results also confirm that domestic workers practice patience as another coping strategy. However, communicating with their employers is not a simple task because they fear losing their jobs, and their employers do not want to be confronted.

Suggested collective efforts for domestic workers in order to win their employers' attention

Results indicated that domestic workers should have some meetings to discuss their challenges and after discussions they can take their complaints to the government's Department of Labour. This will ensure that rules are made in addressing their employers on how to treat them. Results also indicated that domestic workers must report their matters to the CCMA and request them to call their employers in order to solve their issues. This shows that domestic workers believe that an intervention from the government can help their employers to consider their problems. The study indicated that domestic workers can also invite their employers and have meetings with them in order to get their employers' attention. However this is not an easy task to perform. Furthermore, results show that domestic workers need to talk with their employers addressing all the issues they face. However, results show that female domestic workers are afraid of communicating with their employers. The Department of Labor (2010) adds that domestic workers often find it hard to discuss challenges with their employers given the intimacy of the working environment and the mutual relationship created with the employers' family members. Only male domestic workers have the confidence of talking to their employers because they do not have the fear of losing their jobs. They believe that they can also look for some other jobs else, unlike women who are afraid to stand for themselves.

Strategies for improving conditions of domestic workers

The study results revealed that domestic workers should come together to fight for their rights in order to improve their situation. Domestic workers should write their problems together and submit them to the Department of Labor so that the department can help them address their challenges. The outcomes of the study also confirmed that the conditions of domestic workers can also change if their employers give them freedom to express themselves freely. The Department of Labor (2010) also points out that the workers often find it difficult to discuss their challenges with their employers given the intimacy of the working environment and the mutual relationship created with the employers' family members. This is due to the reason that in most cases domestic workers are not given platforms by their employers to air their views out. Furthermore, this gives a clear testimony that domestic workers are suffering behind closed doors without the department of labor knowing the challenges they are going through.

In addition, results of the study also indicated that the government must introduce rules that can protect the rights of domestic workers, and that the government should create more jobs because there is a high rate of unemployment and this results in the domestic field absorbing more people. Domestic workers also echoed that at the community they should be programs where by all domestic workers can meet and discuss their issues and these programs need to be done by the state. The study findings also indicate that the government should make sure that people who need help from their homes should make sure that they have enough salary to pay their workers on a monthly basis. However, this is not easy to achieve because most domestic workers are employed behind closed doors and the agreement is between the employer and the employee. Results also indicate that domestic workers must register with the labor offices so that when they are mistreated the law will take its course. The need for the labor act to make sure that the rights of domestic workers are taken very seriously was also pointed out as another factor which can improve the conditions of domestic workers. The results also showed that domestic workers should not get less than R1500. This amount discloses that domestic workers are not remunerated well.

Professionalization of domestic work

Domestic workers need to be trained like other professions in order to receive certificates or qualifications. Results indicated that domestic work is seen as a profession for uneducated people in the communities. It is also a field dominated by women and is characterized by low wages. Nadasen (2012) laments that the association of domestic work women's unpaid labor and its private nature in homes makes it difficult for many people to view it as real work, worth any value. The results also demonstrated that most people who are involved in domestic work are underprivileged and do nothing when they are abused. They accept their situation because of the fear of losing their jobs. Domestic work is regarded as nothing but a division which is dominated by women as well as a field which is not well paying.

Conclusion

The study revealed that domestic workers face many challenges which affect them such as sexual harassment, working without contracts, low wages, a heavy workload and mistreatment. The study also revealed that female domestic workers face more challenges compared to male domestic workers. This was due to the reason that the sector is mainly dominated by women, and that most of the time men are interested in productive work more than reproductive work. The other reason for this is deep-rooted patriarchy where by men are trained to do manual or productive work and women are socialised to do domestic chores. The study findings revealed that the above challenges affect the lives of domestic workers because they lose concentration and become unproductive and ineffective at work. The study results showed that domestic workers from rural areas they face more challenges than domestic workers from urban areas. This was due to the fact that urban areas are more improved than rural areas. The study also established that domestic workers resort on keeping quiet and sometimes communicating with their employers in order to cope with their challenges. However, some of them pointed out that they accept their situations and sometimes forgive and exercise patience because of fear of losing their jobs. The study confirmed that domestic workers need to communicate with their employers so that they can consider their problems. Furthermore, the results indicated that domestic workers should involve the government in order for their problems to be resolved as well as their conditions to be improved. The study findings also revealed that campaigns should be held in the communities to educate people about the importance of domestic work. Communities perceived domestic work profession as a sector dominated by uneducated women and whereby people are not remunerated well. Domestic work need to be professionalised like any other profession in order to remove the negative perception people have about this field. Regarding the issue of the

policies domestic workers mentioned that they knew about some of the policies and just few domestic workers indicated that they have not read any documents concerning the domestic work legislation

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