

Original Research Article

Female Domestic Workers in Urban Informal Employment: The Case of Hossana City, Ethiopia

Abstract: Domestic work is a significant sector within the informal economy, predominantly employing women globally, yet remains largely unrecognized. This study examines the driving factors and sociodemographic characteristics of female domestic workers in Hossana City, focusing on the challenges they face. A random sample of 167 female domestic workers from three kebeles was selected using multi-stage sampling techniques. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA to investigate wage disparities based on sociodemographic variables. A five-point Likert scale ranked the challenges faced by female domestic workers. The analysis revealed that the majority of domestic workers are young, single, illiterate, and migrants from rural areas due to economic hardships and limited job opportunities. Key motivations for entering domestic work included supporting their families financially, rural-urban migration, and saving money for potential migration abroad. Wage analysis indicated significant disparities influenced by age, marital status, education, the employer's family size, and working hours. The study found that low wages, unpaid extra workload, and long working hours are significant challenges. The findings highlight the need for policy interventions to improve working conditions and ensure fair wages, addressing the socioeconomic challenges faced by female domestic workers in urban settings.

Key word: Domestic worker, Female, Informal employment, Wage, Hossana

1. Introduction

Domestic work, one of the fastest-growing informal vocations globally, employs approximately 76 million people, or 2.3% of total employment worldwide. These workers provide essential services that enable others to work outside their homes, significantly contributing to the global economy and societal well-being (Bonnet et al., 2022). Domestic work encompasses a variety of household services, including cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, and elder care (ILO 2013). The demand for domestic workers has seen a sharp

increase due to rising living standards, increased participation of women in formal jobs, and a high degree of urbanization in many regions (Agrawal 2023).

Globally, 83% of all domestic labour are female whose participation are progressively rising in both developed and developing countries (ILO, 2013, 2016).

The domestic labour sector is predominantly female, with women accounting for 83% of all domestic workers globally. Their participation in this sector is progressively rising in both developed and developing countries (ILO, 2013, 2016). For instance, women constitute around 63% of domestic workers in the Middle East and 92% in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Ecuador, an overwhelming 98.7% of domestic workers are women. Similarly, almost 90% of domestic workers in India are women (ILO, 2013). This trend is rooted in traditional gender roles that assign women the responsibility of home and family care, leading to their disproportionate representation in domestic labour. Improving working conditions in this sector has broader implications for gender equality, as it creates employment opportunities for poor, rural women who often have limited access to education and other employment (Atnafu, Oucho, and Zeitlyn 2014; ILO 2018). This labour remains unrecognized and invisible, despite enduring through generations (Ghosh 2021).

Many domestic workers come from marginalized communities and rural areas, migrating to urban centres in search of employment due to a lack of literacy and job opportunities in their hometowns (D'Souza 2010; ILO 2018; Thomson 2009). Domestic work often becomes the primary job opportunity for migrant women, driven by factors such as family poverty and the need to support their families (Blagbrough 2010; Kedir and Rodgers 2018; Pufaa and Apusigah 2021; Hodzi, Annor, and Darkwah 2021). The lack of social safety nets and insurance exacerbates this situation, pushing girls and young women into domestic work to meet basic survival needs (ILO-IPEC 2004; Kedir 2014).

The emergence of nuclear families and the increasing participation of women in the workforce have further heightened the demand for domestic workers in urban settings, where at least one domestic worker is often employed for household assistance, child care, and caregiving (Banerjee and Raju 2009). Despite the critical role of domestic labour in supporting economic and social development, its contributions remain under-recognized, invisible and poorly regulated. According to ILO Convention 189, domestic workers should enjoy fair employment terms, decent living conditions, protection against abuse, and other rights (ILO 2018). However, many domestic workers do not receive full labour law protections, facing issues such as unclear

contractual agreements, long working hours, low pay, and various forms of abuse (Augustine and Singh 2016; D'Souza 2010; Erulkar and Ab Mekbib 2007; Mulugeta, Mandefro, and Alemie 2021; Shafeeq, Naz, and Awan 2022; Srinivasu and Aggarwal 2018). The informal nature of the sector compounded these challenges, leaving many workers without social security benefits or labour rights protection (ILO, 2007). This job is typically undervalued and underpaid, with workers frequently living in the households where they work. Additionally, these workers often lack access to healthcare and other basic services, further exacerbating their precarious situation. Some regions treat domestic workers as second-class citizens, subjecting them to severe mistreatment and dehumanising conditions.

In Ethiopia, domestic work is a significant employment source, especially for women, who represent 91% of the sector (ILO, 2013). These women, predominantly from rural areas with limited education, migrate to urban centres seeking better opportunities, only to face exploitative working conditions (Kedir and Rodgers 2018; Woldemichael 2013). The cycle of poverty and exploitation often leads these women to seek employment abroad, despite the risks of abuse and exploitation in foreign countries (Kefale and Mohammed 2016). Low domestic wages compel many to migrate abroad in search of better opportunities to improve their own and their families' lives.

Despite this, research and policy efforts have largely focused on migrant domestic workers abroad (Atnafu et al. 2014; Kefale and Mohammed 2016; Schewel 2022; Woldemichael 2013), neglecting those who remain in the country. Most existing studies concentrate on vulnerabilities such as discrimination, violence, legal gaps, and human rights abuses (Demarso and Abba 2020; Erulkar and Ab Mekbib 2007; Gebremedhin 2016; Mulugeta et al. 2021; Woldemichael 2013). For instance, Ejigu et al.(2020) examined depression and anxiety among housemaids in Addis Ababa, while Biadegilegn (2011); Yohannes (2014) studied the work conditions and educational challenges faced by domestic workers.

However, these studies were limited in scope and lacked quantitative analysis. They did not adequately address the driving factors and wage disparities based on sociodemographic characteristics. A more comprehensive study is necessary given Hossana's status as the capital of the Central Ethiopian Regional State, the high levels of migration from rural areas, and the increased demand for domestic workers due to urban household affluence and rising female labour force participation. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by investigating the sociodemographic characteristics of domestic workers in Hossana City, examining how these characteristics influence their wages, identifying the factors that drive women towards domestic workers, and exploring the challenges they face in their workplace.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.Domestic workers

Female domestic workers constitute a significant portion of the urban informal workforce. A domestic worker is an individual who works within a residence, performing various household services for an individual or family. These services often include household chores, childcare, and elderly care—roles that are essential yet undervalued and underpaid. Domestic workers play a crucial role in maintaining the daily operations of households, enabling other members to engage in formal employment and other activities.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), domestic workers are defined as individuals engaged in household tasks for one or multiple households under an employment relationship. This work is categorized into three main types: housework, care work, and medical assistance or nursing. The ILO identifies domestic workers through national labor force surveys, highlighting two primary employment modalities: live-in and live-out. These workers can be employed directly by households or indirectly through service providers, reflecting the diverse nature of domestic employment arrangements (ILO 2013, 2016, 2018).

2.2.Theoretical debates about domestic work

Theoretical debates about domestic work have evolved significantly, encompassing perspectives from feminist theory, labor economics, and sociology.

Feminist scholars argued that domestic work is undervalued because it is traditionally seen as “women’s work” and often unpaid (Marchetti et al. 2021). This perspective highlights the gendered division of labor within households and the broader economy. The concept of “reproductive labor” is central to feminist debates, emphasizing that domestic work is essential for the reproduction of the labor force but is often invisible and unrecognized (Bubeck 1995). Intersectional analyses consider how race, class, and gender intersect to shape the experiences of domestic workers (Marchetti et al. 2021). Migrant women of color often face compounded discrimination and exploitation in domestic work (Agarwala 2018).

Economic theories explore how domestic work fits into the broader labor market. Some argue that domestic work is a form of informal employment that lacks the protections and benefits of formal employment (Garcia and Tomlinson 2021). The dual labor market theory posits that domestic work is part of the secondary labor market, characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and poor working conditions. The commodification of care refers to the process by

which care work, traditionally done within the family, is outsourced to paid domestic workers, raising questions about the value of care work and the conditions under which it is performed (Marchetti et al. 2021).

Sociological studies examine the power dynamics between domestic workers and their employers, often marked by significant power imbalances, with domestic workers having limited bargaining power (Agarwala 2018). The concept of “emotional labor” is relevant, as domestic workers often provide emotional support and care, which is not always recognized or compensated (Bubeck 1995). Social reproduction theory focuses on how domestic work contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of society, argues that domestic work is essential for the functioning of the economy and society but is often devalued and marginalized (Marchetti et al. 2021).

2.3. Migration and urbanization

Urbanization and migration have led to an increase in the number of female domestic workers in cities. Many women migrate from rural areas to urban centers in search of better employment opportunities, often ending up in informal domestic work. The migration of female domestic workers to urban areas is a complex phenomenon influenced by various socio-economic factors. They often driven by a combination of push factors, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and socio-political instability in rural areas, and pull factors such as higher demand for domestic workers , better wages, and improved living conditions in urban areas (Boyd 2021; Yilmaz and Ledwith 2017). Women constitute a significant portion of the global migrant work workforce , with may migrating to urban centers in search of employment in domestic sector (Boyd 2021). For instance, in regions like Southeast Asia and the Middle East, a large number of female migrants are employed as domestic workers (ILO 2016).

In urban, the demand for domestic workers has increased as a result of rapid urbanisation. Research by Yeoh et al. (1999) indicates that urban households, particularly those in the middle and upper classes, frequently depend on domestic workers to assist with household duties, childcare, and elderly care. Employment of domestic labourers is perceived as an economic necessity in numerous urban areas, which allows local women to engage in the formal workforce. Female domestic workers contribute significantly to the urban economy by taking over household responsibilities, thereby enabling them to engage in formal employment (Aronsson et al. 2023; Yadav and Jacob 2023). Despite being undervalued and facing

discrimination, are essential for the functioning of urban households by enabling other family members to participate in the formal economy.

2.4.Challenges of domestic workers

Despite their contributions, female domestic workers often face vulnerabilities impacting their wellbeing and job security. Domestic workers frequently earn below-average wages and lack formal employment arrangements, which makes their job security precarious (Mitchell 2024). Many domestic workers are excluded from labor protections that other workers enjoy. This includes the right to unionize, access to social security benefits, and protection against unfair (Demarso and Abba 2020; Mulugeta et al. 2021; Woldemichael 2013). They often work long hours with little rest and may face unsafe working conditions, including exposure to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Altman and Pannell 2012). The nature of domestic work, often performed in private homes, can lead to isolation. This isolation increases the risk of exploitation and abuse, as workers have limited access to support networks (Atnafu et al. 2014; Ejigu et al. 2020; Martha et al. 2013; Mulugeta et al. 2021). Yohannes (2014) conducted a qualitative study on the educational barriers and opportunities faced by female domestic workers in Bahir Dar. The study found that the main obstacles to continuing education for female domestic workers include low wages, heavy workloads, long working hours, time constraints to balance work and household responsibilities, and unintended pregnancy. Migrant domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse due to their precarious legal status and lack of access to support networks(Yeoh et al. 1999; Yilmaz and Ledwith 2017). The migration of female domestic workers to urban areas is a complex phenomenon influenced by various socio-economic factors. While they play a crucial role in the urban economy, their work is often undervalued and unprotected. Addressing their challenges requires comprehensive policies that provide social protection, fair wages, and legal recognition.

Hosanna, currently the capital of the Central Ethiopia regional state, has a rapidly growing population and economy. Women migrate to the city from surrounding rural areas in search of job opportunities and a better quality of life. For these migrant women, a primary occupation is working as domestic workers in the homes of urban residents. As the city experiences an increase in women's participation in the workforce, the demand for domestic workers continues to grow.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study was held in Hossana City, the capital of the Central Ethiopian regional state, located about 232 kilometres from Addis Ababa. The target population for this study comprised all female domestic workers in the city who had more than six months of work experience at the time of data collection. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select participants. First, we purposely selected three kebeles out of the six city kebeles. We then specifically selected three villages (Naramo, Wuhalemat or Aberash loj, and lucid) from sample kebeles due to the high number of female domestic workers, the growing demand for domestic workers, and the existence of government employees and wealthy individuals living in shared apartments and villas with higher living standards. The sample size was proportionally distributed to each selected village based on the size of its household. Finally, we select households from each village using simple random sampling technique. If a chosen household lacked a domestic worker, we proceeded to the next one. When a household had multiple domestic workers, we randomly selected one worker. To determine the sample size, Cochran's (1977) statistical formula was used, which is advisable when the exact target population is unknown:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2} \text{-----(1)}$$

where n is the sample size, z is the desired confidence level (93% or 1.81), p is the estimated proportion of the population (assumed the p value is 50% or 0.5), q is $1 - p$ (which equals 0.5), and e is a maximum allowable error (7% or 0.07).

Using this formula:

$$n = \frac{(1.81)^2 0.5 * 0.5}{0.07^2} = 167$$

Thus, the sample size was calculated to be 167.

3.2. Data type, sources, and method of data collection

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, relying on primary data sources. The primary data was collected through an interviewer-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to include socio-demographic questions, questions about employers' family size, factors motivating women to become domestic workers, and challenges faced by domestic workers. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess the level of agreement on the challenges faced by domestic workers. A pre-test was conducted with ten randomly

selected participants to check the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. After refining the questionnaire based on pre-test feedback, the final version was administered to the study participants. The data collection was supplemented by direct observation of working conditions and informal discussions with brokers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by domestic workers.

3.3.Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed quantitatively using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The descriptive statistics frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to summarize the data. A one-way ANOVA was used to identify if there were statistically significant differences in mean wages among different independent groups. The dependent variable was the respondents' wages, and the independent variables included age, marital status, educational level, employer family size, work experience, and working hours. Specifically, one-way ANOVA was chosen for its suitability in comparing means across more than two groups and examining the effects of one categorical independent variable on a continuous dependent variable (Moore 1996).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1.Socio-demographic characteristics of women domestic workers

Table 1 presents the survey results on the distribution of female domestic workers by sociodemographic characteristics. A significant portion of these workers, 51.5%, are below the age of 18, followed by 35.9% aged between 18 and 25, and 12.6% aged between 26 and 35. The majority of female domestic workers surveyed are young, with over half of them under the age of 18. This underscores the vulnerability of young girls, who frequently engage in domestic work. This is in line with an ILO report from 2004: domestic work is the most prevalent career for teenage girls in developing countries (ILO-IPEC 2004). In terms of marital status, most domestic workers are single (83.2%), followed by divorced (13.8%) and widowed (3%). Our study focused on full-time domestic workers who live with their employers; hence, married women are not interested in this situation. Educationally, more than half of these women are illiterate (55.7%), 35.9% have completed primary school, and only 8.4% have secondary education. This lack of education further exacerbates their vulnerability and limits their future opportunities for better employment. The duration of employment in domestic work shows that 45.5% have worked in this job for 1-3 years, 41.9% for 4-6 years, and 12.6% for over 6 years. In terms of daily working hours, 36.5% work 11- 13 hours, 29.5% work over 13 hours, 16.8%

work 8- 10 hours, and 17.4% work fewer than 8 hours. This implies that about 82.6% of female domestic workers spend over 8 hours working daily. This violates Ethiopian labour laws, which mandate employees work eight hours a day. The findings suggest that women domestic workers in the study area are mainly young, single, have low educational levels, and work long hours.

Table 1 Distribution of women domestic workers by sociodemographic characteristics

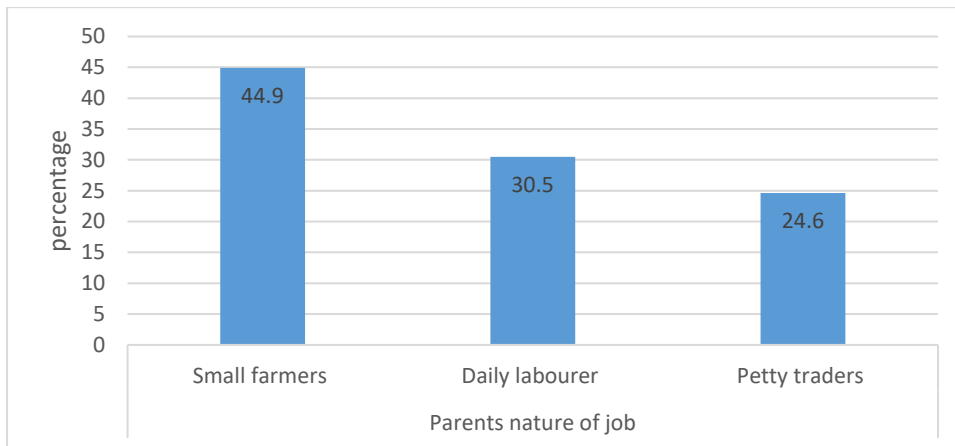
Variables	Measure	Frequency	Percent
Age	Below 18	86	51.5
	18-25	60	35.9
	26-35	21	12.6
Marital status	Single	139	83.2
	Divorced	23	13.8
	Widowed	5	3
Education level	Illiterate	93	55.7
	Primary school	60	35.9
	Secondary school	14	8.4
Duration of years in this work	1-3	76	45.5
	4-6	70	41.9
	Above 6	21	12.6
Working hour	Below 8	29	17.4
	8-10	28	16.8
	11-13	61	36.5
	Above 13	49	29.5
Place of birth	Rural	153	91.6
	Urban	14	8.4

4.1.1. Migrant Status and parents background of Women Domestic Workers

From Table 1 the majority of domestic workers (91.6%) are rural-urban migrants, with the remaining 8.4% from Hossana city. According to the study by Srinivasu & Aggarwal, (2018), the majority of domestic workers are rural migrant women. Additionally, the survey found that a large proportion of women domestic workers come from low-income households, with 44.9% being small farmers, 30.5% being daily labourers and 24.6 being petty traders (*Figure 1*). This suggests that the majority of domestic workers come from informal sector families. The interviewed women reported that their family income is below the poverty line. This economic hardship likely contributes to their decision to enter into domestic work at a young age. These findings align with the study by Pufaa & Apusigah (2021), which identified a high rate of

female migration within and outside the African continent. Overall, the data shows that women domestic workers are predominantly young, uneducated, work long hours, and come from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation and abuse in the workplace.

Figure 1 Distribution of domestic workers by their parents' jobs.

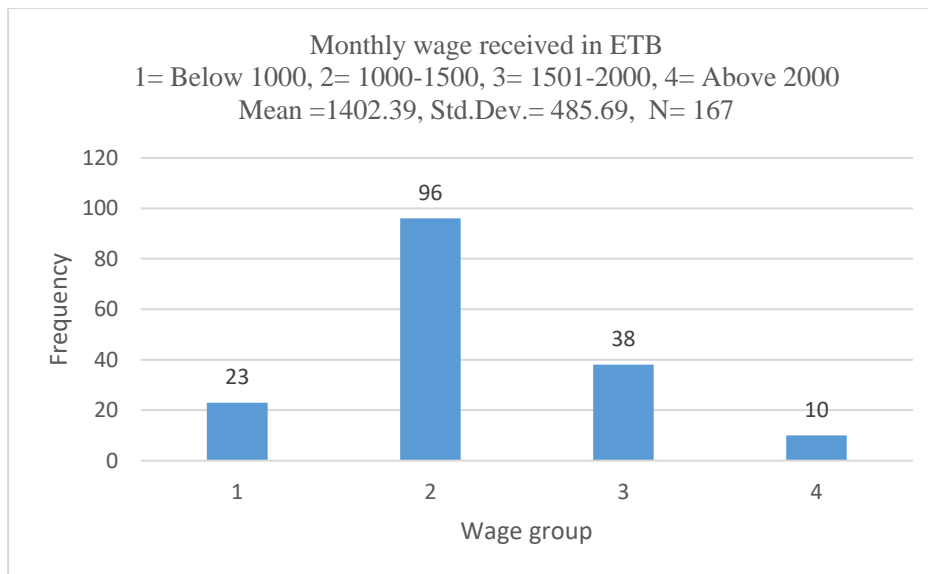


Source: field survey

4.1.2. Wage Condition of Domestic Worker

The mean and standard deviation of the monthly wages earned by women domestic workers are 1402.39 and 485.69, respectively. The survey results also show that the majority (57.5%) of respondents earned between 1001 and 1500 ETB, followed by 22.8% earning between 1501 and 2000, 13.8% earning below 1000, and 6% earning above 2000 (Figure 2). This implies that women domestic workers in the study area earned wages that were below the average income level in Ethiopia, further highlighting their vulnerability to economic exploitation.

Figure 2 Monthly wage of respondents



Source: field survey

4.2. Comparison of Respondent's Wage Based on Sociodemographic Variables

Domestic helpers in Ethiopia earn a very low monthly wage. Mulugeta et al.(2021), report that their monthly wage of 28–36 USD is considered adequate nationally, even though their employers typically cover their food and housing expenses. Nevertheless, public employees stick to a 40- 46-hour workweek as per labour regulations, making domestic helper earnings seem disproportionately low given their lengthy work hours. Therefore, various factors, not just hours worked, influence the wages of female domestic workers.

The wages of women domestic workers are influenced by their education, experience, skills, location, and the type of household a woman serves. Without clear regulations, many employers pay unfairly low wages, perpetuating poverty and exploitation. Implementing and enforcing fair wage standards can help empower these women, leading to a more equitable society.

This study used a one-way ANOVA to examine potential wage variations among female domestic workers based on their socio-demographic attributes. The impact of age on the monthly wage (MW) revealed a statistically significant difference among various age groups ($F(2,164) = 56.31, p = 0.000$). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicated significant variation in the mean monthly wage (MMW) across different age groups. The MMW for group 1 (below 18) was 990 birr ($SD = 161.24$), group 2 (18-25) was 1641.55 birr ($SD = 498.24$), and

group 3 (26-35) was 1613.33 birr (SD = 311.54). Thus, younger workers generally earn less due to their lack of experience and skills. As workers gain more experience and skills with age, they are able to negotiate higher wages and seek better job opportunities, resulting in higher monthly wages. The study also explored wages across different marital statuses ($F(2, 164) = 3.76, p = 0.025$). Single women earned 1359.71 birr (SD = 490.00), divorced women earned 1573.91 birr (SD = 426.63), and widowed women earned 1800 birr (SD = 273.86), suggesting that marital status influences wages. Widows and divorced women may be more professional and skilled, so employers value them more. This may be due to widows and divorced women being more experienced and skilled in their roles, leading employers to value them more. Moreover, widows and divorced women might have more financial responsibilities, prompting them to negotiate higher wages than single women with fewer financial obligations.

Education significantly influences wages, with a one-way ANOVA showing differences among education groups ($F(2, 164) = 14.85, p = 0.000$). Illiterate workers earned 1347 birr (SD = 364.19), primary level workers earned 1306.67 birr (SD = 521.68), and secondary school workers earned 1900 birr (SD = 539.44), indicating that higher education levels correspond to higher wages. Employer's family size and duration of employment also impact wages, with a significant difference based on ($F = (2, 164) = 44.42, p = 0.000$) and duration of work ($F = (2, 164) = 36.52, p = 0.000$). Larger family sizes and more years of experience result in higher wages due to increased workload and valued expertise.

Working hours significantly affect wages, with different groups earning varying amounts ($F(3, 163) = 8.47, p = 0.000$). Group 1 (below 8 hours) earned 1172.41 birr (SD = 453.47), group 2 (8–10 hours) earned 1296.42 birr (SD = 448.43), group 3 (11–13 hours) earned 1352.45 birr (SD = 476), and group 4 (above 13 hours) earned 1661.22 birr (SD = 434.84). Higher wages are associated with longer working hours. The study found that working longer hours is associated with higher wages for female domestic workers, despite the fact that their wages may not be fair given the hours they work. This suggests that there is a significant wage difference based on the number of hours worked by women in domestic work.

Table 2 ANOVA for comparing MW among women domestic workers, and cross age, marital status, education level, employer family size, work experience, and working hour.

DV*IV		Sum of squares	Df	Mean sq.	F	Sig
Monthly wage *age	Between groups	12125173.699	2	6062586.850	36.77	0.000*
	Within groups	27033868.217	164	164840.660		
	Total	39159041.916	166			
Monthly wage *marital status	Between groups	1720305.601	2	860152.800	3.768	
	Within groups	37438736.315	164	228284.978	0.025**	
	Total	39159041.916	166			
Monthly wage *education	Between groups	6007173.699	2	3003586.850	14.859	0.000*
	Within groups	33151868.217	164	202145.538		
	Total	39159041.916	166	6879953.065		
Monthly wage *family size (employer)	Between groups	13759906.129	2	154872.779	44.423	0.000*
	Within groups	25399135.787	164			
	Total	39159041.916	166			
Monthly wage *work experience	Between groups	12066969.234	2	6033484.617	36.523	0.000*
	Within groups	27092072.682	164	165195.565		
	Total	39159041.916	166			
Monthly wage *working hour	Between groups	5283010.346	3	1761003.449	8.473	0.000*
	Within groups	33876031.570	163	207828.415		
	Total	39159041.916	166			

DV: dependent variable, IV: Independent variables $p < 0.01^*$, $p < 0.05^{**}$

4.3. Factors Deriving Women to be Domestic Worker

Numerous factors influence women to enter domestic work, particularly those from poor households or disadvantaged communities. These women often face limited employment opportunities and discrimination based on gender, caste, class, race, or ethnicity.

The survey results (*Table 3*) provide a study of domestic workers motivations. Rural-urban migration motivates the largest share of women, at 14.4%, to enter domestic work. The second-largest group, comprising 12.2% of women, engaged in domestic work to financially support

their families. A significant number of women (11.8%) entered domestic work with the intention of saving money to migrate abroad for better opportunities. Parents' willingness to work with relatives in urban areas and pursue education motivated some women (8.9 The survey results also identified avoiding rural life or early marriage as a key factor for many women, as well as preventing unemployment as the fifth and sixth-ranked factors that pushed 8.5% and 8.2% of women into domestic work, respectively. Other notable factors included the loss of a parent or divorce (8.1%), family disputes (6.5%), easy accessibility to domestic work (6.1%), failure to complete schooling (5.5%), persuasion by brokers (3.3%), being divorced and/or widowed (2.5%), and other miscellaneous reasons (4%).

Table 3 Reasons women become domestic workers.

Deriving forces of women to be domestic worker	Response	
	Frequency	Percent
Migration/Lack of other alternatives for living	138	14.4
To earn an income and support households income	117	12.2
To save money and migrate to foreign as domestic worker	113	11.8
Parents willing to do domestic work with relatives at urban areas and pursue education	85	8.9
To escape from the rural way of life and early marriage	82	8.5
To avoid unemployment	79	8.2
Parental loss or divorce	78	8.1
Had a dispute with family	62	6.5
Could be met easily available	59	6.1
Failed to complete schooling.	53	5.5
Convinced by a broker	32	3.3
Divorced and/or widowed	24	2.5
Other factors	38	4.0
Total	960**	100

** *Multiple response table Source: field survey*

The survey result indicates that the majority of domestic workers in Hossana City are rural migrants lacking formal education. These women moved to the city, seeking job opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions. However, their high illiteracy rates and other socioeconomic barriers prevented them from securing stable urban jobs. Consequently, domestic work remains their primary option for employment. Interviewed women highlighted that the easy availability and high demand for maidservants and care workers in urban areas attracted them to this sector. They emphasized that domestic work allowed them to support their families back in their home villages.

We can conclude from this that women in domestic work face limited options due to their lack of education and challenging economic circumstances. This drives them to take up domestic work as a means of survival and familial support. This finding aligns with existing literature, which posits that domestic work is often the last resort for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with low education levels (Agrawal 2023; Bonnet et al. 2022). Munger, (2017) research reinforces the perception of domestic work as unskilled labor. Additionally, Hodzi et al., (2021) found that the motivation for employing a housemaid is largely associated with existential needs, such as earning income and escaping familial hardships. Kedir & Rodgers (2018) also noted that young women in Ethiopia engage in domestic work to alleviate pressures from early marriage and difficult rural life, as evidenced by a household survey. This broader context underscores the economic pressures and limited opportunities that push many women into domestic work, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these underlying issues.

4.4.Challenges Faced by Women Domestic Workers at Their Working Place

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics on the challenges faced by women domestic workers, emphasizing significant hardships across various aspects of their employment, assessed on a five-point Likert scale. The scale is considered an interval scale where the mean values have specific interpretations: from 1 to 1.8 means strongly disagree, from 1.81 to 2.60 means disagree, from 2.61 to 3.40 means neutral, from 3.41 to 4.20 means agree, and from 4.21 to 5 means strongly agree. The mean and standard deviation (SD) values provide insights into the average level of agreement and the variability of responses across different statements. Higher mean scores indicate general agreement that women domestic workers face significant challenges, while a higher standard deviation suggests a wide range of opinions among respondents.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics on the challenges faced by women domestic workers.

Statements	Mean	Std.Dv.
I received a low wage for the amount of work I do	4.59	0.49
I am given extra workload without receiving extra pay.	4.47	0.64
I Frequently work long hours without sufficient breaks	4.29	0.62
I experience verbal or physical abuse from my employer or their family members	4.11	0.70
My work environment is generally unsafe.	4.10	0.72
I lack adequate rest and freedom in my daily routine.	3.98	0.75
Required to work while sick and handle heavy tasks	3.79	0.92

My sleeping arrangements are insufficient and uncomfortable.	3.63	0.99
I am not respected by the families I work for.	3.39	1.02
My employer provides me with food that is of poor quality.	3.34	0.99
I have encountered sexual assault in my workplace.	2.71	0.76
I experience salary cuts or denial of payment by my employer.	2.58	1.29
Refused to pursue education through night class	2.55	1.12

Source: Own field survey, 2024

According to the survey results, female domestic workers strongly agree that they receive a low wage for their work, rating it at a mean of 4.59 with a standard deviation of 0.49. They also strongly agree that they frequently work long hours without sufficient breaks ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.62$) and receive extra workload without additional pay ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.64$). These findings indicate a high level of agreement among respondents that low wages, extra workload without payment, and working long hours are a major challenge for women domestic workers. The low standard deviation values suggest that the majority of respondents feel similarly about these issues, highlighting the prevalence of these difficulties within the profession. There is agreement on experiencing verbal or physical abuse (mean = 4.11) and working in generally unsafe environments (mean = 4.10). The lack of adequate rest and freedom (mean = 3.98), being required to work while sick (mean = 3.79), and having insufficient sleeping arrangements (mean = 3.63) are also notable challenges. Workers express neutrality regarding the lack of respect they receive from the families they work for (mean = 3.39) and the quality of the food they receive (mean = 3.34). Sexual assault in the workplace (mean = 2.71) and salary cuts or denial of payment (mean = 2.58) are areas where there is slight disagreement, and the refusal to pursue education through night classes (mean = 2.55) also falls into this category.

Overall, the results indicate that domestic workers face numerous challenges, from lack of rest to potential salary cuts. Despite these difficulties, some issues, such as the quality of food and lack of respect, are less problematic for workers. However, the relatively high ranking of sexual assault highlights the need for better protection and support for domestic workers. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the well-being and rights of domestic workers.

The previous research by Augustine & Singh, (2016), which noted that domestic workers in India frequently face undefined working hours, mutually agreed wages, and are subject to shouting, scolding, physical abuse, and harassment, is consistent with these findings. In Nigeria, Ogbegie & Oyetunde, (2019) found that long hours, workload, lack of voice, abuses, and ill-treatment were common, with health and safety issues and inadequate maternity protection also being significant concerns. In this vein, Odeku, (2014) reported that employer-

determined working hours lead to stress, exploitation, and excessive hours for full-time domestic workers. Shafeeq et al.,(2022) emphasized the neglect and exploitation of paid domestic work in the informal sector, while Mulugeta et al., (2021) highlighted gross human rights violations, lack of clear contracts, long working hours, privacy violations, verbal, physical, and sexual harassment, inadequate food and accommodation, and poor payment.

5. Conclusion

The study on women domestic workers in Hossana City, Ethiopia, highlights several critical factors and challenges these women face in their employment. The majority of these workers are young, with over half under the age of 18, and predominantly single and illiterate. These characteristics point to a highly vulnerable population, consistent with findings that domestic work is a prevalent career for teenage girls in developing countries. Many of these workers are rural-urban migrants from low-income households, often compelled by economic hardship to enter domestic work at a young age.

Key findings indicate that these workers typically endure long hours, with a significant majority working more than eight hours a day, in violation of Ethiopian labor laws. Despite this, their wages are disproportionately low, influenced by factors such as age, marital status, education, experience, and the household size they serve. Higher education and more experience generally result in better wages, but overall, the wages remain insufficient compared to the hours worked and the labor regulations for other sectors. The primary motivations for entering domestic work include economic necessity, supporting families, avoiding early marriage, and escaping rural life hardships. However, these motivations also underscore the socio-economic barriers that limit these women's employment opportunities to largely unregulated and exploitative domestic work. Challenges faced by these workers are multifaceted, ranging from low wages and long working hours without sufficient breaks to verbal and physical abuse, unsafe working environments, and lack of adequate rest and freedom. These findings highlight the urgent need for better regulation, protection, and support for domestic workers to ensure their well-being and rights. The research aligns with existing literature, underscoring the precarious nature of domestic work for women from marginalized backgrounds. Addressing these challenges through policy interventions and enforcement of fair labor standards is crucial for empowering these women and improving their socio-economic conditions.

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