

# **SOCIO ECONOMIC STUDY FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS IN AHMEDABAD**

**Shrayana Bhattacharya**

## **Introduction**

Domestic work implies being employed to do household chores on a temporary or permanent basis for hire or reward (Neetha 2004, Pathare 2000). Several studies on domestic work focus on migration and urbanization as the key causes for the increased demand and supply of paid care work. 2004-05 NSS data suggests 3.05 million women in urban India were employed by private households. They provide varied services ranging from cleaning utensils, childcare, care for the elderly to cooking. This makes domestic service the largest sector for female employment in urban India. The number of women engaged by the sector has increased by 222% since 1999-2000 (Ghosh and Chadrashekhar 2007).

Despite such significance, there are very few studies to ascertain the basic wage and working conditions experienced by workers, let alone programmes and organizations working for them. While there has been much discussion on a draft bill for domestic work in states such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka and Delhi, very little has materialized at the state level in Gujarat – in terms of minimum wage legislation or a welfare board. Recent studies analyzing decent work deficits in cities in Gujarat such as Surat highlight the need to sustain and support organizations for domestic workers in order to improve bargaining power, wages and voice (Kantor, Unni and Rani 2006).

## **Research Objectives and Methodology**

The focus of the study was not merely data capture, but also to organize women into the SEWA domestic workers union. With its experience in attempting to organize women across slum clusters in Ahmedabad city, SEWA union members realized the need to look into the possibility of working with domestic workers in 2007. Previously domestic work was part of the ‘small trades and activities’ section of the union. However, once the number of domestic workers who were registered members of SEWA crossed 1000, a separate entity or *dhandha samiti* was created. This study is a follow up from the meetings with several domestic workers who are members of SEWA as there was a need felt to organize more women, at the same time generating information on wages and working conditions across the city. This was also seen as a particularly useful exercise with the increasing number of domestic workers in the country. No previous study has looked into issues regarding domestic work in the city and the findings shall be used by SEWA as an input into the ILO’s 2010 Domestic Work Convention.

SEWA conducted a mapping exercise in 2007. This was done by the Grassroots Research Team in association with union members. The exercise found approximately 50,000 domestic workers in 41 different areas of Ahmedabad city. The survey of 1045 workers

was canvassed in 21 locations based on the mapping exercise. As discussions with domestic workers revealed some degree of homogeneity within the profile of workers in each cluster, the number of persons surveyed in each area was based on the incidence of domestic work found in the cluster; observed by key observers such as SEWA union members and local *agyawans*/ members. The study covers members and non members of SEWA. 69% of the sample includes women who are linked to SEWA. At the end of the study, many more women were considering joining or becoming members.

### Locating the Study

Historically, there has been a weak tradition of paid domestic work in the state, specifically in the city of Ahmedabad due to caste, purity and pollution related issues (Shah 1985). Ahmedabad houses 4.5 million people and was once a major textile centre. The city is still associated with a large informal garments sector. Details regarding the entire sample and clusters are available in the appendix.

The study, though spread out all over the city has focused on 3 clusters for qualitative insights. These were areas where the largest section of the sample was also spread. While discussions with union members suggested that the first section of domestic workers to join the union came from Gomtipur, the members stated that Sabarmati, Chandkhedha and Narangpura were areas from which many current members of the domestic workers union hailed. Thus, these areas hold special significance for the study. 2 FGDs with externals were conducted in Sabarmati and Narangpura each.

### Demographic Details

Majority of women surveyed fall between the age groups of 26-35 years. The percentage share of this section in the sample is close to 41%. Close to 97% of the respondents report Ahmedabad as their domicile. Only 3% state being from Madhya Pradesh.

Characteristics	Narangpura	Chandkhedha	Sabarmati	Vadaj	Total
Average Age (in yrs)	32	34	33	31	33
Uneducated (in percentage share of respondents)	73.5	27	32	41	41
Majority Religion (based on percentage share of respondents)	Hindu (100)	Hindu (100)	Hindu (100)	Hindu (100)	Hindu (93.5)
Currently Married (in percentage share of respondents)	88	77.5	84	66	79
Migrant (percentage share of respondents by domicile)	0	2.5 (MP)	0	0	3

Average Family Size	4.8	4.5	3.8	4.5	4.3
Number of Respondents	102	120	95	110	1045

The average age of women in the sample is 33 years. 8% of the sample is between the ages of 15-20 years. Close to 41% of the sample is uneducated, while 28% have completed between classes 7 to 9. 1% of the domestic workers surveyed have completed graduation. 22% have completed between class 1 to 6 and thus report some degree of primary education. 93.5% of the domestic workers surveyed are Hindu, while 6.5% are Muslim. Muslim groups were surveyed in the Idgah , Gomtipur and Ampura clusters. 79% of those surveyed reported being married, while 12% of the domestic workers were widowed. 2% stated being separated from their husbands. 7% were unmarried. Widowhood and separation were seen as important causes for women to chose domestic work as it provided women income opportunities, in a situation where they could not rely on any other family members for survival and sustenance.

Average family size of the respondent is 4.3 members. 66% of those surveyed report 4 to 6 members in their cohabitating families. 5% report households with more than 7 members.

### **Housing and Habitat**

Shelter and the immediate habitat plays a significant role in mediating the experience of working. 70% of the respondent's reports owning their own home, while 30% pay rent. Average rent paid by these respondents is estimated to be Rs 636 per month. 44% of the rent paying respondents pays between Rs 501 to Rs 1000 per month.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Narangpura</b>	<b>Chandkhedha</b>	<b>Sabarmati</b>	<b>Vadaj</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ownership of House	67	63	71	65.5	70
Kucha House	84	41	58	77	61
Rent Paid (in Rs)	985	827	517	602	636
Access to Water	Tap in households, Communal Hand Pump	Tap in households and shared Water Tap	Communal Handpump	Handpump	-
Sewage	Open	-	Closed	-	-

Many women in the FGDs said they had to start working as the payment for water and electricity had increased. In Narangpura, women reported costs of Rs 800 to Rs 1200 annually for water and electricity combined. Ranjan Bai, who claimed to be the oldest domestic worker in Sanjay Nagar, felt the escalating costs associated with living in the Sanjay Nagar cluster played a major role in women taking up domestic work. Her husband worked as a construction worker in the city and earned between Rs 75 to Rs 100

per day, around the time she started thinking about taking up work in households as a domestic.

*‘Earlier the water was free , but now we must pay. There is a monthly tax. Around 10 -12 years ago, we started feeling the change. Our homes could not survive based on his (husband’s) income alone...how were we meant to run a house with the savings of Rs 200?’*

Narangpura was provided drinking water through the municipality connections made in each house. There were a few communal hand pumps in the area too. Women in the FGD said that most people now used water taps at home. Women living in a certain part of Narangpura said they were very worried about evictions and were hoping their husbands salaries could be saved. This would allow them to find shelter in a legal cluster or a legal part of Sanjay Nagar itself. Sharda Ben says,

*‘Since our house is on the boundary with the road, there are fears that we may lose our plot. The house is legal as per corporation rules, but we hear the government wants to remove kuccha houses from the main roads. So we need to try and move elsewhere’.*

### **Entry and Exit**

Women in the interviews focused on income and expenditure related reasons for taking up domestic work. The main form of entry was through social networks at the place of residence. Many women would discuss their economic woes with their neighbours and find work through them and known domestic workers. None of the women in the FGDs stated finding work without the referral of another domestic worker.

Rama Ben, a domestic worker for 9 years in CG Road says,

*‘It is unsafe for the employer. How can they hire someone they don’t know?’*

**Table 17.4: How did you join this trade?**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Neighbour	456	43.636364
Self	322	30.813397
Reference of other	225	21.5311
Other worker	11	1.0526316
Hereditary	24	2.2966507
Relatives	7	0.6698565
Total	1045	100

Such themes are supported by the survey data too. 44% of domestic workers in the sample have found work through neighbours, while 31% have searched for employment in households on their own. 22% found work through reference from another person. While the survey did not probe caste issues, discussions with workers in Narangpura revealed that upper caste and elite neighbourhoods would only hire women from Gujarati textile communities. This was seen as acceptable.

Discussions also revealed certain caste groups seen by women in Narangpura as significant member of the paid domestic workforce. Rama Ben elaborated on this issue further,

*‘ Nowadays everyone does this work. Especially the Rabari and Dalit groups. But Dalits can only work in the apartment areas. Others can work anywhere’*

Women in the Narangpura FGD mentioned how women from Rabari and Dalit groups would work for lower wages and cut wage levels in the neighbourhoods. The Rabari caste group is a pastoral caste considered very powerful in Gujarat. Its is interesting to note how economically well off Rabari and Marwari households were seen as employing women from the poorer sections of this specific caste group by women in the area. During the FGD women mentioned how Rabari women were preferred by households in CG Road and Mithakhali. While some women felt this was due to them working more for lesser wages, others felt it was a caste issue.

92% have taken up such work due to poor economic conditions at home. 5% have moved from other kinds of work to take up domestic work as they find inadequate income. 13% report engaging in other forms of work in addition to domestic work. 61% of those who have another income source engage in garment related work – either stitching or in patch work.

**Table 17.5: Motivation for taking up Domestic Work**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Poor economic condition	960	91.866029
Inadequate income in other work	49	4.6889952
Due to closure of mill	2	0.1913876
Education of children	0	0
Inadequate income of husband	34	3.2535885
Total	1045	100

A major cause for this poor economic condition was the increasing casualisation of men’s occupational profiles, resulting in inconsistent and unstable income streams. 56% of

currently married domestic workers surveyed report their husband's working as casual labour in various trades and services. 13% report their spouses as self employed, while 11% are construction workers. Close to 7% of respondents have spouses engaged in regular salaried jobs. 6% report unemployed husbands.

Neelu Ben had recently taken up domestic work in CG Road. She is 28 years old. Her narrative suggests the role played by general job insecurity in the growth of female domestic workers.

*' My husband used to work in a mill 15 years ago and it was a good job. He would earn close to Rs 5000 per month. Then, the mills shut down and he had to start working in a shop. The shopkeeper treats him very poorly and he cannot ask for a raise. He earns Rs 3000 now. We needed another form of income if we planned to save and build a proper life'*

**Table 9: Husband's Occupation**

Occupation	Total	Percentage Share
Casual Worker	459	55.8394161
Construction worker	89	10.8272506
Factory based worker	56	6.81265207
Regular salaried worker	60	7.29927007
Piece rated worker	2	0.243309
Domestic worker	1	0.1216545
Self employed	102	12.4087591
Vendors	6	0.72992701
Unemployed	47	5.71776156
Total	822	100

Each woman interviewed or present for the FGDs in Sabarmati and Narangpura mentioned how their income was more stable than their husbands. There were several stories recounted about days when their husband's worked in factories or at a fixed site, opposed to current times where work and wages had become more difficult to come by. Narangpura appeared to be an area where many men and women were engaged in construction work. On an average, husbands contribute Rs 1039 per month to the household through their income. 41% of respondents state their husbands income between Rs 1001 to Rs 1500. Close to 1% report their husband's income to be above Rs 3000.

**Table 10: Husband's Monthly Income**

Husband's Monthly Income	Total	Percentage Share
501 to 1000	103	12.53041
1001 to 1500	336	40.87591
1501 to 2000	209	25.42579
2001 to 2500	66	8.029197
2501 to 3000	53	6.447689
3001 and more	8	0.973236
Unemployed	47	5.717762
Total Currently Married Women	822	100

Many in the FGDs felt they wanted to leave domestic work if they got a more secure job. This exit was already being seen in Sabarmati where two women interviewed said they also worked in cleaning 2 office spaces. They felt this was more secure work and holidays and wages were better than working for households.

While only 3% report having problems with their work, 47% state the desire to gain training in other livelihoods. Of this group who want training, 71% desire training in stitching while 6% want training in beauty parlour work.

**Table 17.3: Do you want alternative livelihood training?**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	484	46.315789
NO	561	53.684211
Total	1045	100

### **Wages and Benefits**

Survey data and discussions with domestic workers in selected clusters reveal ad-hoc and complex wage payment patterns. Domestic work was seen as a form of casual labour which allowed a small yet steady stream of income into the family. For a few women interviewed, the particular wage rates were unimportant as long as the payment was

regular, secure and undisputed. Pushpa ben worked in 3 houses in Mithakhali. Prior to taking up domestic work, she used to work as a home based embroidery worker. Her husband continues to work as a construction worker. She had assisted him on the site for nearly 10 years, prior to staying at home with her two children. She says,

*'It is tough with these other jobs. When the season is good, you get good money. There were days during the festival season that I would earn close to Rs 200 per week, if I worked fast and well. But once the season ended, business would slow down and there would be no work. My husband gets between Rs 200 to Rs 50 dependent on the way he works on the site. We needed some income to be certain (pukka). That way, this work is good. We may not make as much money as others, but we always get the money without much hassle.'*

For the remaining 20 women met through FGDs in 3 sites, the wage rates were considered low. However, most felt their work was more stable and secure compared with their husbands or their previous work. This was particularly the case amongst women in Narangpura who came from a long working history in the construction sector.

Unlike general assumptions, wages were not solely based on the employers. Wage rates were dependent upon varied factors. On initial investigation, payment patterns appeared directly related to the number of houses and tasks taken up by women. However, social networks and household financial circumstances affected wage rates. Each locality shared a common understanding of wages expected for specific tasks taken up by domestic workers. However, such an understanding was restricted and varied between different groups within each cluster based on networks, migrancy status and the economic situation of the workers household. While the SEWA grassroots research team discovered great co-ordination amongst women in certain clusters such as Chandkhedha and Sabarmati, other clusters such as Narangpura, Gomtipur and Bapunagar reported no standard information sharing mechanisms on wages between workers. It is important to note that certain areas reporting greater coordination also reported a longer history of domestic work. Interviews in Sabarmati revealed that women had been taking up employment as domestic workers for the past 15 years in the area. This was due to nearby apartment complex buildings which had come up during such time.

The other cause for coordination between workers in fixing and negotiating wage rates was the concentration of their places of work in the same colony or apartment building. Women working in the Chandkheda cluster had been involved in domestic work for an average of 5 years. Most were employed in a common ONGC staff colony. Women working in Narangpura stated there was vast differences in wages between migrants and local Gujarati women working as domestics. Kapila Ben mentioned how women and men from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh would work for lower wages, even in palatial houses on CG Road and Mithakhali, both considered extremely posh and well off areas in the city. It is tough to decipher if this is a perception issue as the survey data does not point to any significant difference in wages between the domestic workers from Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. However, the surveyed respondents contain very few migrants. The FGDs in Sabarmati suggested no major presence of migrant domestic workers in the



cluster. The group involved in the discussion at Narangpura explained that women would fix wages based on information provided by those who would help them get hired. Kapila ben explained,

*‘ How will a sister find out about wages the first time ? Ofcourse, it shall be the person who gets you the work. They know the person who is looking for someone to clean and knows what the rates are.’*

FGDs and interviews with workers in Narangpura highlighted the wage competition and secrecy present between different workers based on kin and social networks. Kapila Ben received Rs 150 per household for washing clothes and she maintained that this was the rate amongst the workers she knew. Her narrative suggests the complex negotiation, informal organisation and information channels present amongst domestic workers in Narangpura. When asked about how wages in the area are determined she says,

*‘It started with Rs 75 for cleaning floors, but then we used to tell our employers to increase our wages. It took nearly 2 years for them to increase our wages...we had to wait and hope that they would see our hard work. Finally they increased to Rs 100 and then last year some employers increased our wages by Rs 20 or Rs 50. However, if the employer sees that we are not coming regularly or are not happy with our work, they will cut the money.....We have to work together and once one or two women talk to their employers and are able to get an increase, some others sisters get the courage and ask. This way everyone who knows each other will start getting their wages increased....Some women do not understand and will work for any amount of money. They are making life difficult for other sisters’*

Domestic workers surveyed are engaged with varied tasks within each household. These include the following:

1. Washing Clothes
2. Dusting and Cleaning
3. Dish Washing
4. Cooking

Majority 58% of those surveyed report working in not more than 2 houses. 34% state working in 2 to 4 houses, while only 8% work in more than 5 houses. Only 10 workers in the sample of 1045 report working in more than 8 houses. The maximum number of houses worked reported in the sample was 10. The average number of houses worked for the sample is estimated to be 2.5 households. Most women in the discussions placed focus on increasing the number of tasks in each household than the number of households themselves. Majority 35% of the domestic workers surveyed have been engaged in this work for a period of 1 to 3 years.

Only 3% state being engaged in such work for more than 22 years. 41% have been engaged as domestic workers between 4 to 9 years. The average number of years the entire sample is 6.9 years. Monthly income details from the sample suggest that 40% of

the sample earns between Rs 500 to Rs 1000 per month from domestic work. Average income earned by domestic workers in the Ahmedabad sample is close to Rs 1021 per month. Considering the surveyed domestic workers are engaged with 2 to 3 households on an average, this implies domestic workers in the survey earn between Rs 500 to Rs 300 in each household.

**Table 13: Monthly Income of Domestic Workers**

DETAILS	Total	Percentage Share
100 to 500	194	18.564593
501 to 1000	418	40
1001 to 1500	233	22.296651
1501 to 2000	120	11.483254
2001 to 2500	52	4.9760766
2501 to 3000	28	2.6794258
Total	1045	100

This can be further divided based on the number of tasks performed. On an average, the surveyed domestic workers are engaged with 5 tasks. This implies that workers are earning between Rs 100 to Rs 60 per month for each task. The rates mentioned in the surveyed areas are given in the following table. One must also adjust wage rates with holidays taken.

**Table : Wage Payments and Cluster Characteristics**

Characteristics	Narangpura	Chandkhedha	Sabarmati	Vadaj	Total
Number of Respondents	102	120	95	110	1045
Average Number of Years as Domestic worker	6.7	6	5.6	2.7	6.9
Average Hours working	6.3	6.7	5.3	4.7	6
Average Number of Tasks per worker	6.7	6.3	5.1	4.8	5.1
Average Number of Households in which working	3.35	3	2.56	1	2.5
Average wage cuts in per month wages for holidays	15	15	15	15	15
Average number of holidays with wage cuts per month	2	3	1	3	2.7
Average per month income (in Rs)	779	1609	1033	987	1021
Majority wage rates for Washing Clothes	155	155	155	155	155
Cleaning and Sweeping	155	155	125	155	155

Washing Utensils	155	155	155	155	155
Cooking	355	355	355	355	355

While it may be assumed that the income received has been under-reported in clusters such as Narangpura, the rates stated by the majority of respondents for tasks in the city are rather similar. Women often calculated their income in terms of the number of tasks performed in total as opposed to the number of houses worked in. It was felt that the number of households where women could work was restricted due to their personal care roles and workload.

Only 5 women report problems in receiving wages regularly. However, the entire sample reports having been through some dispute regarding the amount of wages due to holidays and illness or during retirement. 87% state they received the wages after dispute, while 13% state they never received the remaining amount due to them. 49% of the sample reports getting advance payments.

**Table 13.1: Advance Payments**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	515	49
NO	530	51
Total	1045	100

97% of those who receive advance payments say they receive these once or twice in a month. 82.5% of those receiving advance cash state the amount received in a month is between Rs 100 to Rs 500.

Many women in the Sabarmati cluster reported fears and worries regarding asking for advance cash as it would often lead to skirmishes with employers. Kapila Ben was a 35 year old domestic worker living in the cluster of Parvati Nagar and earned Rs 1500 from cleaning floors in 4 houses in Gandhi Nagar. These houses were adjacent bungalows and she says her employers treated her very well. However, on one occasion she needed an amount of Rs 150 for her son's school notebooks. Upon hearing this request, her employer screamed at her.

*'She (employer) told me that she did not have money growing on trees and that I should not ask her for such cash. She told me I should be happy with my wage and if I needed more, I should find another job. I have never asked her for an advance ever again'*

Kesar Ben living in the same cluster narrated a different story, where she mentioned how her employers would ask her if she needed any advance cash assistance. She says,

*‘It is about luck (kismet). If you have good houses, then life is easy, otherwise the work becomes very difficult. One has to hear a lot. I talk to my sisters who work in the same neighborhood as me and realize that I am very fortunate’.*

During the focus group discussion with 15 workers in Sabarmati, 2 workers mentioned how they could ask their employers for some material or in kind assistance if required. Others said they would not risk losing their job. Kapila Ben continued to tell the research team stories of how dangerous asking assistance was for a domestic worker.

*‘Most employers just want us to keep quiet, finish our work and go home. They do not like to talk to us and you can forget about any help from them. I have heard so many stories of how women loose their jobs for asking for any help. They are screamed at and people hurl abuses at them. We are getting our wages and we should be happy with that only’*

**Table 13.2: Any Other Assistance**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	41	3.923445
NO	1004	96.076555
Total	1045	100

96 % of the sample states they do not receive any other form of assistance from their employers. Among the 41 workers in the sample who receive assistance, 39 get help from medical expenses while 2 are helped with education expenditures for their children.

Discussions with the SEWA domestic worker union representatives and *agyavans* (members) focused on the role women’s networks play in providing material and in kind support to other domestic workers. Tara Ben was 29 years old and had 3 sons. Her husband was working on a construction site, but they could increasingly not afford their youngest sons school fees. She received word from his school headmaster that if his fees were not received within a week, he would be removed from the school rolls and lose an academic year. Tara mentioned how she sought help from other domestic workers and her neighbours to solve this crisis.

*‘I was too scared to ask my employer (malik). So I discussed it with other women I knew in the area and asked for some help. A few of them had decent employers and they borrowed some money which I paid back within the next month.’*

78% state they receive a bonus payment in the year. Half of the section that receives a bonus, gets this in cash form, while 23% receive an entire month’s wages as bonus. 21% receive in kind goods such as clothing and sweets.

**Table 13.3: Bonus Payments**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	815	77.990431
NO	230	22.009569
Total	1045	100

A high majority in the areas included in the survey reported receiving bonus payments. However a few clusters such as Idgah, Kaligram and Bapunagar reported only half the domestic workers receiving bonus payments. Tara Ben who worked in the Bapunagar area says,

*'They are all small minded selfish people. Too busy saving their own money. We never got a bonus'*

Urmi Ben adds,

*'Aaj kal bonus ka zamana gaya.' Or 'The time of bonus payments is long gone'*

Tara Ben adds,

*'In any case, people don't think such work is proper work. Only jobs in factories and shops get bonus payments'.*

However, festival time is the period where wage increases are discussed and implemented. Rekha Ben, a 32 year old domestic worker with a son works in Darshan Apartments and lives in Sanjay Nagar, Narangpura. During focus group discussions in this area, Rekha mentioned how her salary had been increased last Diwali by Rs 50 per month. She washes clothes and utensils in these households.

**Table 13.4: Changes in Wage payments**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Increase	618	59.138756
Decrease	59	5.645933
Don't know	200	19.138756
As it is	168	16.076555
Total	1045	100

Discussions in Sabarmati, Narangpura and Saibag revealed that women negotiate for wage increases on their own and it is a time a lot of jobs are changed. Ramila Ben from Saibag says,

*'It is a time wages should be increased. If the wages are not increased for one sister like others, she may start looking for another house which will pay her more.'*

60% of the surveyed workers state their wages saw an increase in the past year. 6% have experienced a decrease. Domestic work, though a nascent work opportunity for those surveyed, has witnessed some increase in wage rates. Romila Ben in Chankhedha mentioned how her mother used to get Rs 55 for cleaning floors in houses 15 years ago while she receives Rs 120. She elaborates,

*'That time seth long would get only the large drawing or guest rooms cleaned by local women and give whatever money they felt was worth the work. Nowadays, the entire houses are cleaned and the size of houses has increased too'.*

## Savings

FGDs conducted in 4 sites along with insights gained through the grassroots research team suggest the inability to generate savings through domestic work. Most women mentioned ho earnings were used directly to pay rent or school fees for children.

**Table 13.5: Respondent Savings**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	322	30.813397
NO	723	69.186603
Total	1045	100

Only 31 % of the domestic workers report saving money earned through their employment. A majority 69% do not save. Average savings for the group are close to Rs 103. 75% of the sample reports savings between Rs 50 and Rs 100.

Champa Ben lives in Narangpura and works in 5 houses. She washes utensils and earns between Rs 1500 and 1600 per month. She says she pays the rent which is close to Rs 1000 per month. Her remaining income is used by her daughter in law for household expenses. She says,

*'I have not saved anything for the past 5 years I have been in this job.'*

Priti Ben, a member of the grassroots research team explains the link between the lack of savings and the very cause to join domestic work.

*‘Women take up this job as they are unable to pay certain bills or meet costs. They use the income to assist such expenditures. How can they save?’*

Pramila uses some of her income to pay her travel expenses to work.

### **Travel to Workplace**

Nearly all domestic workers walk to work. 93% in the sample report walking to work, while 3% take the bus. 4% report using auto rickshaws. Those walking report travel hours between 15 minutes to an hour. Conserving on travel related expenditure was also seen as important. Kapila Ben walked for an hour to reach the apartment complex in Chandkheda where she works.

While the women who travel by foot or cycle report no travel related expenditures, the remaining 73 women report spending between Rs 1 to Rs 20 for travel. The average expenditure is Rs 8 per day. 54% of this group spends between Rs 6 to Rs 10 daily. Assuming a 26 day working month, this implies an expenditure of Rs 208, which is 21% of the average income reported by domestic workers.

**Table 14: Mode of Travel to Workplace**

MODE OF TRAVEL	Total	Percentage Share
By walking	969	92.727273
By Cycle	3	0.2870813
By Bus	31	2.9665072
By Auto	42	4.0191388
Total	1045	100

Women living in Ampura report using a shared auto service to reach their places of work which are dispersed around the city. 9 women in Sabarmati report using autos. Our discussions with workers in the area suggest fares are divided between a group of 4 to 5 women. Daily payment amounts to Rs 4- Rs 6 per day. Vimla Ben from Narangpura adds,

*‘We have to save money for travel to Mithakhali. It would take us 45 minutes to walk and my children will be home without me, if I do not use autos. This is a necessary cost’*

The workers mentioned how their employers very rarely give them any money to reimburse conveyance. Vimla adds,

*‘If there is a party or guests come to their house, I have to stay till late night. Then they may give us money for returning home. But traveling so late alone feels unsafe, so we take the bus or ask someone from home to pick us up.’*

## Hours of Work

Nearly all workers undertake domestic work during the morning shift and do not work in the evening. 86% report not working a second evening shift. The average hours of work extend between 5 to 6 hours per day. 69% of the workers leave between 7 and 9 am in the morning, while 80% return between 1 and 3 pm.

**Table 15.1: Time of departure to work**

DETAIL	Total	Percentage Share
7 a.m. to 9 a.m.	721	68.995215
10 a.m. to 12 a.m.	284	27.177033
1 p.m. to 2 p.m.	39	3.7320574
Permanent	1	0.0956938
Total	1045	100

**Table 15.2: Time of Return from Work**

Detail	Total	Percentage Share
1 p.m. to 3 p.m.	836	80
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.	176	16.842105
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.	32	3.062201
Permanent	1	0.0956938
Total	1045	100

The evening shift was prevalent in Narangpura and Chandkheda and the workers interviewed explained this as a result of the nature of families which employed workers from this cluster.

Women living in Narangpura would go to two apartment complex areas nearby (Darshan Apartments and Anmol Towers) in the evening around 8 pm to help with the evening cleaning and cooking in families where women were working. This would take a 10 minute walk. Women in Chandkheda would be required to help migrant families



working in the ONGC quarters in the evening. Women who worked only in the morning shift stated that those working evening shifts were in desperate economic circumstances and belonged to Rabari (pastoral caste) , Machis (lower social group) and Dalit caste groups. Amongst the 141 workers surveyed in the sample who report working for an evening shift, 63% return home between 9 and 10 pm at night. Further, it was felt that women going to work for second shifts had help at home in dealing with childcare or household work.

Rekha Ben , who worked in the morning shift only in the two apartment complex areas mentioned suggests,

*‘These are mostly destitute and elder women, who can work at night. It is unsafe for younger women and we cannot leave our families alone at home. The area here is still safer than most other parts of the city.’*

Many women in the Narangpura and Sabarmati areas complained that they were too tired with their on household work and paid domestic work in the morning to even attempt a second shift. Most had to work for extra time during the month. 53% workers report partaking in extra time work.

**Table 15.3: Extra Time and Work**

DETAILS	TOTAL	
YES	556	53.205742
NO	489	46.794258
Total	1045	100

Only 2% of those who undertake extra time or not paid for their efforts. While a majority gets paid, 42% earn between Rs 5 to Rs 10 per day for any extra work.

**Table 15.4: Payment for Extra Time**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
5 to 10	231	41.546763
11 to 15	109	19.604317
16 to 20	103	18.52518
21 and more	104	18.705036
Does not get money for extra work	9	1.618705

Due to the arbitrary nature of the working pattern and non existence of a written contract etching out time and duration of work and duties to be performed, many women work extra time and take on extra tasks without knowing it or being paid in cash or kind. Bansi Ben, a 36 year old domestic worker living in Chandkhedha was employed by 3 households to clean dishes. She says,

*‘I arrive between 8 or 9 in the morning and have to wait till 10 for all the dishes to pile up. In the meantime, I help in cooking and serving breakfast. She pays me Rs 50 at the end of the month for this help, but the rate for cooking is close to Rs 250. I know I don’t cook the complete meal, but I do half her work, she should atleast pay me Rs 150. I need to reach my other employers house by 10 and I am always late. I help her so much; she does not even give me food for the morning’*

Passi Ben lives in Narangpura and works for a Marwari household in Mithakhali and further illustrates the problem.

*‘These women give us all the work and we can say nothing. Not only do I hand wash clothes, I also take the other clothes from the washing machine and place both sets to dry. I should get a little more for this work.’*

## Holidays

The entire sample receives holidays. However 29% experience wage deductions for all their holidays. 71% do not get their wages deducted for taking a certain number of holidays. Employers deduct between Rs 10 to Rs 20 for each holiday.

**Table 15.5: Deductions and Holidays**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
With deduction in wages	304	29.090909
Without deduction in wages	741	70.909091
Total	1045	100

Discussions with workers in Narangpura revealed a standard rate of wage deductions for holidays. Anjana Ben from Narangpura works in 5 houses in a nearby apartment complex. She experiences a deduction of Rs 7 per holiday. She says that this is the common rate in her neighborhood and that wage cuts for holidays are not more 13 Rs. Upon mentioning wage deductions in the Narangpura FGDs, women agreed on the common rate being around Rs 10 for each holiday. They said, employers would allow two days without deduction.

In the Private Nagar, Sabarmati, FGDs and interviews with workers revealed a different picture, whereby a majority of workers stated they could take upto 3 holidays without

wage cuts. Survey data in the cluster suggests that 51% experience no age cuts for taking holidays.

Only one woman, Anu Ben in Narangpura mentioned being fired due to taking holidays. Others mentioned that while taking holidays would cause tensions between employers and workers, it was not a cause for losing work, unless the employer was not kept properly informed.

### Occupational Health Hazards

96% of domestic workers surveyed felt they suffered certain health problems and diseases specifically due to the work process. Women in the Sabarmati and Narangpura interviews were particularly vociferous about rashes and body pain experienced due to long hours of work and exposure to washing chemicals.

**Table 16: Occupational Health**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	998	95.502392
NO	47	4.4976077
Total	1045	100

Kapila Ben says she faces consistent body pain due to long hours cleaning floors. She has been working for the past 8 years and says she has very little form of relief. Women in Narangpura, who moved from construction work to domestic work also state that the physical exertion is tremendous, less compared to their previous jobs though. Champa Ben explains,

*‘At the site, we would be carrying heavy loads. This is only a little better. Now, we are hunched on our backs all the time and it is very painful’.*

**Table 16.1: Types of Ailments**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Back Pain	934	43.482309
Hands and Legs pain	903	42.039106
Spinal cord problem	85	3.9571695
Skin Allergy problem	176	8.1936685
Other	42	1.9553073

Blood Pressure	8	0.3724395
Total	2148	100

87% of the ailments reported by the respondents were pain in the back, leg or hands due to work. 9% reported skin allergies.

**Table 16.2: Treatment Sources**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Government	331	31.674641
Private	554	53.014354
Medical store	13	1.2440191
Other	41	3.923445
do not incur any medical expenses	59	5.645933
No health Problem	47	4.4976077
Total	1045	100

53% of the sample seeks treatment from private doctors or clinics. 32% report using government facilities. Average health related expenditure is reported between Rs 10 to Rs 50 per month.

**Table 16.3: Injury at Workplace**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	181	17.320574
NO	864	82.679426
Total	1045	100

**Table 16.4: Types of Injuries at the Workplace**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Rashes in finger	38	20.994475
Fracture	14	7.7348066
Fell down	73	40.331492
Hurt by piece of glass	24	13.259669
Other	28	15.469613

Dog bite	2	1.1049724
Unconsciousness	2	1.1049724

A major problem mentioned by workers during the FGDs and interviews was related to injuries at the workplace. Each woman present at FGDs said she had experienced some form of injury at work. Interestingly, the survey data estimates this share to be lesser. 18% report facing injury at work. A majority 41% of this group states they have fallen down or met an accident while working. Amongst the larger clusters sampled Sabarmati reports 38% who received injury at the workplace. None of the women surveyed in Narangpura suffered such injuries, despite admissions and narratives emerging from the qualitative field visits. Paasi ben says the following to elaborate,

*'I have heard so many problems from women who work in the apartment complex areas I work in. We fall down or slip during pochha. People have had fractures and serious sprains. It can become dangerous when you are trying to finish work soon'*

Only 25% employers compensate for injury. This was a common source of anger amongst domestic workers. Many present at the meetings said they felt this was inhuman behavior and wanted to take some action locally to solve the problem.

**Table 16.5: Compensation for Workplace Injury**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	47	25.966851
NO	134	74.033149

### **Intergenerational Shifts and Care**

There are serious issues pertaining to intergenerational shifts of poverty which emerge from the survey data and qualitative data. Majority women present for the FGDs in Narangpura and Sabarmati mentioned that girls as young as 12 years would start assisting their mothers with domestic work. Anu Ben had a 17 year old daughter who was engaged in domestic work too. She explains,

*'If the two of us work, we can finish faster and do more work. I do not want her to continue. She is studying part time also'*

Women in Narangpura stated that daughters of domestic workers taking to similar work was not rare, but had not become the given either. In response to questions about the role of daughters in domestic work, Kapila Ben said,

*‘Again, it is about luck. If you can work hard and have good employers, then you can get your daughter educated and she can be free of this load. But, many women do not have such luck. Nobody wants their daughters to take up this work, but if people are desperate—what can we do ?’*

**Table 17: Do your family members help you in paid domestic work?**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
YES	152	14.545455
NO	893	85.454545
Total	1045	100

15 % of the domestic workers surveyed report receiving assistance from family members to manage their paid domestic work commitments. Of this group, 71% state receiving help from their daughters.

**Table 17.1: Who gives you such assistance?**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Daughter	109	71.710526
Daughter in law	6	3.9473684
Son	10	6.5789474
Mother	15	9.8684211
Sister	6	3.9473684
Husband	1	0.6578947
Grand daughter	5	3.2894737
Total	152	100

One of the most shocking findings of the study is in relation to childcare. Women often have to leave their children alone at home or in the care of a neighbour while they go to work. Many women interviewed stated that they could not take up further tasks or households simply because they had to come home and take care of their children.

This was an important theme discussed in Sabarmati and Narangpura. Women often felt that they had no alternative or support for childcare. Of the 10 women involved in the Narangpura FGD, only two women could rely on other domestic workers to take care of their young children. Beena Ben, a 30 year old domestic worker said she had stopped working around the time her children were born, but soon realized that she could not sustain her household without her income. She had to take her 6 month old baby to work.

**Table 17.2: Who takes care of your children while you are at work?**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Relatives	94	8.9952153
in laws	138	13.205742
children are Left Alone	491	46.985646
Grown up	172	16.45933
No Children	97	9.2822967
Not applicable	28	2.6794258
Other	25	2.3923445
Total	1045	100

17% of the sample has grown up children, while for 12% the question is inapplicable as they have no children or children who are attending school during their working hours. 66% of the remaining 748 women leave their children alone without anyone to care for them. 31% can rely on family members or relatives, while 3% rely on other friends, neighbours or domestic workers to help them.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- **Monthly Income of Rs 1021. Wage rates are ad-hoc and there needs to be some effort made to standardize calculations based on cluster and tasks performed.**
- **Some form of savings mechanism needs to be discussed with workers and employers as close to none report being able to save.**
- **Any mechanism set up or advocated for needs to look into occupational health in relation to pains and skin problems, along with compensation for injury at workplace, which only 25% of victims receive.**
- **Childcare is a serious concern as 66% women leave their children alone when they go to work. The poor support for childcare also hinders women's ability to work in more households and earn more.**

## REFERENCES

Neetha N, 2004. 'Making of Female Bread Winners: Migration and Social Networking of Women Domestic in Delhi', Economic and Political Weekly, April 24, 2004, pg: 1681 - 1688

Pathare Suresh 2000. 'Domestic Workers in Delhi: An Overview', *Contemporary Social Work*, 17.

Kantor Paula , Unni Jeemol, Rani Uma, 2006. 'Decent Work Deficits' , *Economic and Political Weekly* 2006 , 27<sup>th</sup> May Issue.

Chandrashekar CP, Ghosh Jayati 2007. 'Women Workers in Urban India' , *Macroscan*, February 6th 2007 accessed on 1st May 2008  
[http://www.macroscan.com/fet/feb07/fet060207Women\\_Workers.htm](http://www.macroscan.com/fet/feb07/fet060207Women_Workers.htm)



**APPENDIX: TABLES BASED ON SURVEY DATA**

**Table A: Distribution of Respondents in Ahmedabad**

AREA	Number of Respondents	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Khanpur	16	1.53110048
Kuber nagar	43	4.11483254
<b>Narangpura</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>9.76076555</b>
Idgah	13	1.24401914
<b>Chandkhedha</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>11.4832536</b>
<b>Sabarmati</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>9.09090909</b>
<b>Vadaj</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>10.5263158</b>
Paldi	31	2.96650718
Bhaipura	42	4.01913876
Dudheswar	10	0.9569378
Ranip	87	8.32535885
Civil	87	8.32535885
Kaligam	7	0.66985646
Gomatipur	17	1.62679426
Sarangpur	28	2.67942584
Maninagar	12	1.14832536
Kalapinagar	42	4.01913876
Bapunagar	79	7.55980861
Vajalpur	59	5.64593301
Ampura	15	1.4354067
Juharpur	30	2.8708134
TOTAL	1045	100

**Table 1: Age Groups of Sample**

AGE GROUPS	TOTAL FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE SHARE
15 to 20	84	8.0382775
21 to 25	116	11.100478
<b>26 to 30</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>19.138756</b>
<b>31 to 35</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>22.77512</b>
36 to 40	169	16.172249
41 to 45	108	10.334928
46 to 50	79	7.5598086
51 to 55	49	4.6889952
56 to 60	1	0.0956938
60 to 65	1	0.0956938
TOTAL	1045	100

**Table 2: Education Categories of Sample**

EDUCATION CATEGORIES	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Uneducated	421	40.287081
1 to 3	79	7.5598086
4 to 6	152	14.545455
7to 9	296	28.325359
10 to 12	87	8.3253589
Graduate	10	0.9569378
Post graduate	0	0
Total	1045	100

**Table 3: Religion Details of Sample**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Hindu	978	93.588517
Muslim	67	6.4114833
Other	0	0
Total	1045	100

**Table 4: Marital Status of Sample Respondents**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Married	822	78.660287
Un married	75	7.1770335
Widow	123	11.770335
Separated	25	2.3923445
Total	1045	100

**Table 5: Domicile of Respondents**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Local (i.e., Ahmedabad)	1012	96.842105
State (i.e., Gujarat)	5	0.4784689
Other (i.e., Madhya Pradesh)	28	2.6794258
Total	1045	100

**Table 6: Housing Ownership of Respondents**

DETAILS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Own House	727	69.569378
Rented	318	30.430622
Total	1045	100

**Housing**

TYPE OF HOUSING	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE SHARE
Kaccha	637	60.956938
Pakka	408	39.043062
Total	1045	100

**Table 7: Type of****Table 8: Number of Family Members**

NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS	Total	PERCENTAGE SHARE
1 to 3	307	29.37799
4 to 6	684	65.454545
7 and more	54	5.1674641
Total	1045	100

**Table 9: Number of Houses**

DETAILS	Total	Percentage Share
<b>1 to 2</b>	<b>607</b>	58.086124
<b>3 to 4</b>	<b>358</b>	34.258373
<b>5 to 7</b>	<b>70</b>	6.6985646
<b>8 and more</b>	<b>10</b>	0.9569378
<b>Total</b>	<b>1045</b>	100

**Table 10: Number of Years Engaged in Domestic Work**

DETAILS	Total	Percentage Share
1 to 3	364	34.832536
4 to 6	299	28.61244
7 to 9	135	12.91866
10 to 12	129	12.344498
13 to 15	61	5.8373206
16 to 18	7	0.6698565
19 to 21	20	1.9138756
22 and more	30	2.8708134
Total	1045	100