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## **THE PLIGHT OF THE HOUSE-HELPS (DOMESTIC WORKERS) IN SELECTED ESTATES IN EASTLANDS AREA, NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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### **Abstract**

*In Kenya, households in the middle class suburbs have increasing involvement of house-helps who in most cases take care of household chores. Moreover house helps have borne the brunt of being among the least paid in the country. Therefore, this paper focused on the plight of the house-helps in selected estates in Eastlands in Nairobi County. More specifically, the study sought to: investigate the demographic characteristics of the house-helps; perceived socio-cultural factors influencing female house-help participation in domestic work; the perceived economic factors influencing female house-help involvement in domestic work and finally the causal challenges faced by the female house-helps. A descriptive research design was used in the study. Data was collected using the interview schedule, which was administered to women found in households in selected estates in Eastlands area in Nairobi. The study purposively targeted house-helps with the*

*experience of three years and above. Simple random sampling technique was applied in picking the respondents in each Household. The sample size was 82. The salient findings of the study indicate that the house-helps faced hardship in their working environment. It is thus recommended that their plight should be addressed by all stakeholders more so the government so as to factor in the existing labour laws both nationally and internationally.*

### **Keywords**

House-helps, Female, Plight, Economic, Challenges

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## **1. Introduction**

The International Labour Organization, ILO (2009) points out that domestic workers represent considerable portions of the labour force and are predominantly women. According to UNWOMEN (2013), domestic workers number between 52.6 and 100 million worldwide and 83 percent are women. Moreover, ILO (2012) elucidates that what distinguishes domestic workers from many other workers is that they work in private households, where their remuneration tends to be among the lowest in the labour market, and they tend to be informally engaged. According to various authors the impact of a minimum wage rise on social welfare of low-income households depends on the distribution of minimum wage earners across rich and poor households and the elasticity of hourly wages with respect to the minimum wage for minimum wage earners in rich households (Richardson and Harding, 1999; Neumark *et al.*, 1998; Neumark *et al.*, 2004; ILO, 2012).

Accordingly, ILO (2012) as cited in Agaya and Asunza (2013) point out that large proportions of domestic workers internationally do not receive minimum wages specified under labour laws thus have no control of their normal weekly working hours, and lack maternity leave or maternity cash benefits. Richardson and Harding (1999) analyze the family characteristics of low-wage workers, and rejected the suggestion that they are tightly clustered at either end of the household income distribution. They further elucidate that low wage workers are neither predominantly the sons and daughters of the affluent middle class nor are they predominantly hard pressed household heads struggling to put food on the table to feed their families. They find that the typical low wage worker works full-time, is of prime age, with no formal education qualifications, probably married and disproportionately female. Furthermore, one third have dependent children as Richardson (1998) puts it. He further pointed out that that most low wage workers are in households in the bottom half of the income distribution. In the US, Neumark *et al.*,

(2004) used variation to state minimum wages and concluded that higher minimum wages have a negative impact on the incomes of poor families, which they attributed to the negative effects on employment outweighing the positive impact on hourly wages.

In the Kenya, a majority of the workforce is comprised of the minimum wage employment and that includes the domestic workers. Furthermore, minimum wage employment is seen to comprise of the low class earners with the highest earning 3000/= Kshs and the least earning 500/= Kshs (Kenya shillings). Studies have indicated that the demographic profile of living wage workers is different from that of minimum wage workers, who are typically young (between the ages of 15 and 24) and have low education, few skills, and little work experience (Godin and Veldhuis, 2009). Moreover, women jobs do indeed pay less than men's jobs. First, even after accounting for observable differences in worker and job characteristics, a significant fraction of the gender wage gap remains unexplained (Blau, and Kahn, 2000; Goldin and Katz, 2008). Consequently, wages in female dominated employments are lower than those in male-dominated sectors and occupations. This phenomenon has received much attention, and abundant evidence shows that individual wages vary systematically with the gender composition of occupations (Dolado *et al.*, 2004).

In developing countries, however, two questions frequently arise. First, to what extent can minimum wages be enforced in a context characterized by a large number of casual and informal wage earners who operate beyond the reach of understaffed labour inspection services? Second, where minimum wages are implemented, do they benefit the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society or do they merely reinforce the segmentation and inequality between a few fortunate salaried workers and all the others? (Rani and Belser, 2012). The minimum wage constitutes an instrument to combat poverty and protects the income and the living conditions of the domestic workers and their families. However, the minimum wage is not enough and therefore cannot protect under employed and employed workers from poverty. To guarantee the minimum standards for a decent life, workers who are not covered by the minimum wage and their families need other instruments and measures, whether welfare policies, market supervision or policies for the labour market (such as unemployment insurance, work incentives or qualification grants). (Barbosa De Melo *et al.*, 2012). Domestic work constitutes minimum wage employment and thus there are compounding challenges that are attributed to domestic work. Consequently, this study is geared toward finding out the plight of the house-helpers in selected estates in Eastlands area in Nairobi County with a view of addressing the demographic characteristics of the house-helpers in the study area, the socio-cultural factors, the economic factors and finally the compounding challenges that

they face when working in households. These objectives will be of key importance in understanding the plight of domestic workers in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Domestic work is one of the world's oldest occupations (ILO, 2012). Domestic workers may cook or clean, or care for children, the elderly or the disabled, tasks that have been traditionally assigned to women in the vast majority of societies and that have been largely uncompensated. In developing and developed countries alike, the domestic work sector work absorbs significant numbers of workers, many of whom belong to the poorest segments of society with little access to other work or employment, generally as a result of limited educational opportunities (ILO, 2010; ILO 2011). In spite of this, their valuable role in serving and caring for households and contribution to the global economy, domestic workers remain one of the least socially recognized and protected groups of workers. Furthermore, in Kenya, the vulnerability of domestic workers is evident in the numerous documented accounts that show for instance that their remuneration tends to be among the lowest in the labour market, and they tend to be informally engaged (Agaya and Asunza, 2013). Moreover, majority of the domestic workers continue to suffer under extreme condition in their work place. This situation is more disturbing and worrying when compared with other developing and developed countries that have been able safeguard their rights and interests. Nonetheless, if the government wants to reduce the increasing abuses and violations against the domestic workers then existing labour laws need to be put into practice. There are legislation that have been put in place for example the Labour Act of 2007 and the international agreements by the International labour organization that focus on the treatment, rights and privileges for the domestic workers. Despite this minority of the house-helpers or the domestic workers in households continues to suffer and their voices continue to be unheard. Furthermore, for those that know their rights, there are no established mechanisms to address their plight and thus the study aims to address challenges and possible policy address.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was to investigate the plight of the house-helpers in selected estates in Eastlands area in Nairobi County. The study was informed by the following objectives;

- a) To investigate the demographic characteristics of the female house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County.

- b) To find out the perceived socio-cultural factors influencing female house-helpers participation in domestic work.
- c) To find out the perceived economic factors influencing female house-helpers involvement in domestic work.
- d) To identify the causal challenges faced by the female house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County.

#### **4. Research Questions**

The study answered the following questions;

- a) What are the demographic characteristics of the house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County?
- b) What are the perceived socio-cultural factors influencing house-helpers participation in domestic work.
- c) What are the perceived economic factors influencing female house-helpers involvement in domestic work?
- d) Are there causal challenges faced by the house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County?

#### **5. Significance of the Study**

In the today's 21<sup>st</sup> century wage employment has come under scrutiny to due to the fact that much of emphasis is not place on minimum wage with regard to domestic work as stipulated by the labour law. Domestic workers issues need to be addressed especially in urban areas where a majority of them work in households. Domestic workers have a critical role to play as they suppose and perform household chores. It said that a '*they are the home-makers when the rest of the household go to work*'. However, there have been increasing cases of them being discriminated and looked down upon. This critically hampers their productivity especially when they are paid little income or wages thereby pulling their morale down.

This study will play a vital role in highlighting the challenges that these domestic workers face in relation to their work performance. Therefore, there is need to address their plight of the domestic workers to the concerned labour stakeholders and more so the national government towards formulating policies that will safeguard the rights and interests of the domestic workers/house-helpers Furthermore, the study findings will stimulate new researches that will

identify gaps in the labour laws with regard to challenges facing the domestic workers in their day to day activities. Therefore, this study will stimulate other studies to establish new findings regarding domestic workers.

## **6. Literature Review**

The paper provides for literature review that focuses on the emanating challenges relating to domestic workers in the global context and relating it to the current context. This will clearly reveal the genesis of the challenges the domestic workers faces in other parts of the world.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2010) statistics indicate that 52.6 million women and men above the age of 15 were domestic workers. This figure represents a significant share of global wage employment at 3.6 percent. Furthermore, statistical evidence show that women comprised 43.6 million or 83 percent of the total global domestic workforce and further that domestic work is an important source of wage employment for women, accounting for 7.5 per cent of women employees worldwide. ILO (2009) statistics indicate that large proportions of domestic workers globally do not receive minimum wages specified under national law, have no limitation of their normal weekly working hours, and lack maternity leave or maternity cash benefits. As Boateng (2002) has argued that unemployment is partly the consequence of mismatch between inadequate educational outcomes and skills demanded. Although the numbers of young people who have had some amount of formal education is large it also remains true that such young women and men still lack the right set of skills and knowledge demanded by the labour market. As a consequence, the transition from school to work is more often than not unsuccessful such that young Africans end up either unemployed (typically university graduates) or underemployed in the rural and urban informal sectors (UNECA, 2005). Accordingly, the domestic workers seem to fall into the bracket of the underemployed as their skills and abilities are utilized for the benefit of the employer.

Domestic workers are vulnerable to abusive treatment, discrimination and unfair working conditions. Such abusive practices tend to be aggravated by their general isolation from other workers, socio-cultural barriers that tend to focus on language, class and religion. This moreover prevent them from engaging and negotiating with their employers and serious difficulties in finding alternative jobs due to their lower-than-average levels of formal education (Agaya and Asunza, 2013).

Domestic work is an occupation without boundaries. Domestic workers typically have no work contract, their work hours are often unpredictable as they depend on the daily needs of their private employer, and many report that they are frequently summoned for longer hours than expected, asked to do additional days of work, and assigned additional tasks unpredictably. Such a situation fosters workplace abuse. Moreover, long term consequences of domestic worker include that fact that few employers report domestic worker's wages to the relevant authorities and therefore are not paid their employee's social security. This failure means that workers do not compile the documented work history needed for such things as signing leases, buying a home, or obtaining credit, nor do they earn the necessary credits to qualify for social security in retirement (Agaya and Asunza, 2013).

Furthermore, report by the BCHR (2008) has shown that in Bahrain there are a lot of cases of violence against women migrant domestic workers and some are subjected to verbal and physical abuse, including beating, sexual molestation and rape by employers and recruiting agents. Statistical evidence shows that between 30 to 40 percent of the attempted suicide cases handled by the government's psychiatric hospitals were foreign domestic workers. Although sexual harassment is prohibited in Bahrain it remains a widespread problem for women, especially women migrant domestic workers and those working in other low-level service jobs. Many of these cases were reported to local embassies, the press, and the police, however, most victims were too intimidated to sue their employers, although they had the right to do so. Moreover, there are incidences of Gender discrimination in public life and employment is generally visible. Furthermore, migrant workers working behind closed doors, especially female domestic workers, are often "*invisible*" and are therefore particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They are not protected by labour laws and are effectively subjected to conditions of involuntary servitude (BCHR, 2008). Therefore, this paper has identified challenges that pre-exist in other countries and therefore there is need to address other challenges as identified by the house-helpers (domestic workers) on the ground especially in selected estates in Eastlands in Nairobi - Kenya.

## **7. Methods and Materials (Methodology)**

**Site of study:** The study was carried out at selected Eastlands estate in Nairobi County, Kenya. The decision to carry out the research at Nairobi County was due to the fact that it is a large number of house-helpers and especially the female house-helpers who work within the households.

**Participants:** Respondents for this study were 82 female house-helps based in Eastlands Estates. To participate, the house-helps were to have worked in a household for a minimum of six (6) months and a maximum of three (3) years. This would enhance the reliability of information given in the study as stipulated by their duration of work.

**Population and Sample:** The population comprised all the female house-helps in Nairobi County residing in the Eastland estates of the town which include Umoja 1, Umoja 2 Estates and Soteen-Tena Estate. The identification of the research subjects in each estate was purposively done using simple random sampling. Moreover, the study also used snowball sampling in other areas where one house-help identified the rest. In most cases a majority of these house-helps knew each other as some were tribes' mates. In total 82 house-helps participated in the study. The reason for using 82 respondents was due to the fact there was probability of saturation effect.

**Research Design:** Research design that was appropriate for the study was descriptive design. The rationale of using descriptive design was to enable in-depth understanding of the pull factors and challenges faced by the house-helps in their day to day responsibilities.

**Instruments:** The study used interview schedules for data collection. The instrument was guided by the study objective. Data for this study was collected using an interview schedule. The interview schedule contained both open-ended and close-ended questions which allowed appropriate flexibility of the respondent as well as restrict them to relevant issues. Questions related to the house-helps were mostly open ended and the consistence of the responses of the interviewees was ensured through cross checking questions. Supplementary questions were asked where further probing was needed and recorded in a field notebook.

**Techniques of Data Analysis:** This study utilized the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) in the organization and analysis of quantitative data from closed-ended questions. This data was presented in form of frequency, percentage tables and means. The qualitative data from open-ended questions and further probing was classified into various themes on the basis of their central focus for the purpose of presentation and analysis. In this study the data gathered from the field was integrated with available secondary data for the purpose of interpretation, which involved the search for broad meaning to answers given and making inferences.

## **8. Demographic Characteristics**

### **8.1 Marital Status and Age of the House-Helps**



This study collected data from eighty (82) respondents of whom were female; more than fifty percent (53.7%) were married, less than a quarter (24.4%) and less than fifteen percent (12.2%) were separated. The study found that those who were single were slightly less than ten percent (9.7%) as shown in Table 1 below.

Furthermore, the study wanted to determine the age of the respondents. Accordingly, age of the respondent was considered an important factor in determining the age bracket of the house-helpers, thus the study found that most of the respondents were aged 20 years and below. This accounted for less than sixty percent (58.5%). For those who were aged 25-28 accounted for 20.7%. Those aged 21-24 were 13.4%, while above the age of 29 years accounted for 7.4% as shown in Table 1 below. Accordingly, from the Table 1 above, the respondents were selected from Umoja 1 (34.2%) estate, Umoja 2 (32.9%) estate and Tena/Soteen Estate (32.9%) estate.

In a nut shell, the research findings show that most of the house-helpers were married which can be postulated as a factor for most of them to engage in domestic work in order to sustain their livelihood and that of the family as indicated in the below sentiments. The rest of the respondents were widowed, separated or singled. Moreover, research findings further point out that more respondents were aged 20 years and below. Further probing revealed that house-helpers engaging in domestic work pointed out that they did so as a result of supporting their dependents. The following below sentiments are echoed:

*“....I chose this job because I have to support my family... I have no other choice but to do domestic work... this is the only way...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 22 year with three children- Umoja 2).*

*“.... My husband died and this since there was no any other breadwinner I had to start working as a domestic worker.... This was the only way to earn a living....” (Echoed by female house-help aged 27 years- Soteen).*

*“.... The thing that made me join this work was when my husband left me..... I had no any other choice....” (Echoed by female house-help aged 30 years-Umoja 1).*

This clearly shows that the female house-helpers that compounding problems relating to marital problems and death of the spouse may have led to them performing domestic work. In this scenario it is postulated to have an effect in them supporting their families and sustaining livelihoods. Moreover, it is perceived that as they perform domestic work, their main aim is to sustain their families and ensure their safety both socially and economically.

**Table 1:** Marital Status and Age of the House-Helps in Eastlands Area in Nairobi

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>		
<b>Marital Statues</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Married	44	53.7
Widowed	20	24.4
Separated	10	12.2
Single	8	9.7
<b>Age of the Respondents</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<20	48	58.5
21-24	11	13.4
25-28	17	20.7
29>	6	7.4
<b>Estate (Where they are employed from)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Umoja 1	28	34.2
Umoja 2	27	32.9
Tena/Soteen Estate	27	32.9

n= Frequency, n=82, %=Percentage

## 8.2 Level of Education of the house-helps in Eastlands

The research finding indicate that that out of that the female house-helps who had attained education, a majority (67.1%) of the respondents had attained primary school level, nearly a quarter (24.4%) had no formal education while less than ten percent (8.5%) had attained high school level of education as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** House-helps Level of Education

<b>Level of education</b>		
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary level	55	67.1
No formal education	20	24.4
High School level	7	8.5

n= Frequency, n=82 %=Percentage

The study finding point out that education level among the domestic workers is below par as majority of them still have basic primary education. This may be attributed to the fact that since the introduction of the free primary education in the year 2002 by the Kibaki Administration, a majority of Kenyans took up the opportunity to enroll their children. The transition from primary to secondary schooling may be attributed due to the fact that school fees was high as echoed by the female domestic workers in the study. The following sentiments were echoed in support of the above:

*“... I have not completed my primary school education, it is because my family told me that it is a waste of time.... I decided to join this form of employment” (Echoed by female house-help aged 20 years- Umoja 2 area).*

*“... I had no school fees to join high school... I opted to this form of employment to earn a living.... Poverty is bad my friend....” (Echoed by female house-help aged 26 years- Soteen/Tena area).*

*“.... when I finished high school I did not have good grades so I decided to be a domestic worker...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 23 years- Umoja 1 area).*

Recent findings by Belete (2014) that the challenges facing the domestic workers towards advancing their education is due to the fact that they are in domestic work employment currently, they have time constraints, unintended pregnancies, and finally lack of education fee to advance their studies from one stage to the other.

### **8.3 Characteristics of Employment among House-Helps in Eastlands Area**

The research findings indicate that the wage scale varied and thus more than half (57.3%) of the house-helps earned between Kshs 3,000 and 5,000. In addition, nearly forty percent (37.8%) earned less than Kshs 2,000 while nearly a five percent (4.9%) earned above Kshs 6,000 as shown in **Table 3** below. Consequently from the research findings, those perceived as earning Kshs 1,000 and below indicated that they were also part-time house-helps while those. The study findings indicate that the wage scale is below minimal for the majority of the house-helps in Nairobi County. Although there have been attempts to increase the minimum wage scale in Kenya, there seem to be no implementation on the ground. Therefore, this means that the female domestic workers are paid below par as majority of them still earn meager earnings.

Furthermore, data collected to identify the terms of employment whether on part-time or full-time basis. The findings show that more than sixty percent (62.2%) were on full-time basis while less than forty percent (37.8%) were on part-time basis. These findings show that the house-

helps in full-time duties are not keen in multi-tasking in other ventures as they have no other alternative other than to work full-time for their employers. Further, those engaging in part-time employment indicated that they perform specific duties such as washing dishes and clothes and overall cleaning of the house then leaving when the duty is done. In some cases others worked as baby-seaters as established in the various interviews shared. One of the house-helps echoed the following sentiments:

*“....I wash clothes and dishes and after that I get paid I leave... I am not a full time employee like rose here....” (Echoed by female house-help on part-time basis aged 25 years- Umoja 2 area).*

Therefore, full-time house-helps cannot engage in other duties other than to perform those stipulated by their employer as compared to the part-time house-helps whom after their daily chores they can end up performing others to sustain their families as echoed in the below interview:

*“....For me I work part-time.... I wash the clothes and I get Kshs 250-300.... I can sometimes get a job sometimes I cannot.... It depends with availability of the customers... I also sell food when I get time and money to do so..... My children come first....” (Echoed by female house-help on part-time basis aged 28 years- Tena/Soteen Area).*

For those on full-time basis:

*“....I have to work for my boss all the time.... I cannot ask for off all the time even if it is an emergency...I I do so then this means that my job is over” (Echoed by female house-help on full-time basis aged 26 years- Umoja 2).*

**Table 3: Characteristics of Employment of the Female House-Helps in Eastlands**

<b>Income measure (Monthly)</b>		
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<2,000	31	37.8
3,000-5,000	47	57.3
6,000>	4	4.9
<b>Whether full-time or part-time house-helps</b>		
Full-time	51	62.2
Part-time	31	37.8
<b>Whether there is Job Security</b>		
Yes	3	9.7

No	79	96.3
<b>Reasons for Not having Job Security</b>		
We feel that our work can end at any time	55	67.1
When we make a mistake at any time we can be chased out	20	24.4
There is no one to guarantee our stay at work	7	8.5

n= Frequency, n=82, %=Percentage

The study sought to determine whether there is job security among the house-helpers in Eastlands area. The study findings indicated that overwhelming majorities (96.3%) of the respondents have no job security or they believe that their fate is at the hands of the employer as shown in Table 3 above. Moreover, this study identifies job security to be the most influencing factor for guaranteed employment among the house-helpers (domestic workers). Most employees are aware of scarcity in informal employment opportunities. Thus most of them wanted to retain their job so that they can attain basic needs for their families. However, according to the respondents interviewed, they felt that the work can come to an end at any time. For instance, if they make mistakes they can be ‘chased out’ and therefore are not guaranteed to retain their work for long. This shows lack of job security.

## 9. Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing House-help Participation in their Job

Socio-cultural factors were measured by looking at the following variables: level of dependency by households, society’s ridicule of domestic workers, control by men on female participation in domestic work, domestic work regarded as a poor man’s work, and inherent belief that domestic work belongs to females as shown in Table 4 below. This question was analyzed by using the mean to identify the rank of each reason. Likert Scale was used for answering (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

**Table 4:** Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Participation in Domestic Work in Households in Eastlands Area

Socio-cultural challenges faced	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
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Level of dependency by households	4.79	1.16	<b>1</b>
The society ridicules and hurls abuses at domestic workers	4.65	1.20	<b>2</b>
Men control whether we can participate in domestic work	4.52	0.76	<b>3</b>
Domestic work is regarded as a ' <i>poor man's</i> ' work	4.44	0.64	<b>4</b>
Inherent belief that domestic work responsibility belongs to females	3.65	1.11	<b>5</b>

n=82

From Table 4 above, of the eighty two female house-help who were involved in the domestic work in Eastlands area, level of dependency by households was ranked *first* (4.79), society ridicule and hurls of abuses at the domestic workers was ranked *second* (4.65), male control of female involvement in domestic work was ranked *third* (4.52), domestic work being regarded as a *poor man's* work was ranked fourth (4.44) and lastly, inherent belief that domestic work responsibility belongs to females was ranked *fifth* (3.65).

The increasing dependency level by households may attribute to more female involvement in domestic work so as to support their families. However, as they continue to participate in domestic work activities, they are faced with the challenge of being regarded as inferior due to their nature of work. Thus the household chores performed are preferred to be performed by those who are lesser in the society as compared to the rest of the members of the society. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that social problems mainly arise at the household level where men occasionally seek to control their wives and partners with respect to whether or not they should serve as domestic workers and how their income from domestic work should be spent. Moreover, with the increasing shift of responsibilities in provision of basic needs, women are now becoming bread winners in today's society due to a range of factors, for instance, alcoholism and misuse of resources by men in urban area and more so in slum areas.

## 10. Economic Factors Promoting Female Involvement towards House-Help Employment

The study aimed to identify factors that lead women to experience domestic violence. Likert Scale was used for answering (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Uncertain 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree). Thus, this question was analyzed by using the mean to identify the rank of

each factor. The factors that were measured by looking at the following variables: increasing poverty and cash levels, increased dependency levels, forced rural urban migration, limited access to employment and lack of fees as shown in Table 5 below:

**Table 5:** Economic Factors Promoting Female Involvement in House-help form of Employment

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
In my opinion in increasing poverty and limited cash levels led me to house-help activities	4.46	0.67	1
Increasing need to supplement household income led to house-help employment	4.43	0.53	2
I was forced to migrate to an urban center by relatives to look for a job	4.35	0.36	3
Limited access to employment into the informal sector	4.26	1.30	4
Inadequate fees to facilitate my education led me into house-help employment	4.11	1.14	5

n=82

According to the Table 5 above, of the eighty two female house-helpers who were involved in domestic work, increasing poverty and limited cash levels was ranked *first* (4.46), increasing need to supplement household income was ranked *second* (4.43), forced migration to urban center in search of employment was ranked *third* (4.35), limited access to employment was ranked *fourth* (4.26) and finally, inadequate fees was ranked *fifth* (4.11). Thus, factor that lead to female participation in house-help form of employment entailed the need to reduce poverty levels and increase cash levels. Thus, increased poverty level was considered as the major factor that influences female involvement in house-help activities.

## 11. Overall Challenges faced by House-Helpers in their Work

The study was interested in finding out what were the specific challenges faced by the house-helpers in Eastlands area in the County. This section focused on the work related challenges. The respondents were asked in an interview to name the possible challenges as perceived by them. Out of the 82 respondents, those who mentioned that they were physically abused and sexually assaulted were 75 (91.5%), low wages were 72 (87.8%), and working hours were 70 (85.4%).

Moreover, those that indicated that the work environment was not good were 65 (79.3%) while those who indicated that they lacked access to health care services from their employers were 62 (75.6%). On the other hand, respondents indicated that they could not seek legal redress with regard to the working conditions, pay and working environment 60 (73.2%) This is summarized in Table 6 below.

**Table 6:** *Compounding Work Related Challenges as Perceived by House-Helps*

Work Related Challenges Faced	n	%
Increasing level of physical abuse and sexual violence	75	91.5
Low Wages and/or lack of increased wages	72	87.8
Long Working hours	70	85.4
Poor working environment	65	79.3
Lack of access to health care services from our employers	62	75.6
Ability to seek legal redress with regard to working conditions	60	73.2

n= Frequency, n=82, %=Percentage

The study found out that there were increasing cases of violence and sexual violence thus some of the respondents indicated that they contracted Sexually Transmitted Disease (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. During the interview sessions, the following sentiments were echoed:

*“... My employer kicks me violently and says that I am worthless... she says that I am a nobody...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 18 years- Umoja 2).*

*“....The first time I worked as a house-help is the first time my employer had sex with me... it was by force and this I later found out that I had contracted HIV...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 20 years- Soteen).*

It is evident that from the above sentiments there is perceived existence of physical and sexual abuse when female house-helps perform their tasks. In view of that, this is in support by Niriella, (2014) who provided empirical evidence revealing that female domestic workers who fall into the category of either unskilled or low skilled are subject to a high level of violation of human rights including labour rights and sexual harassment, abuse and torture at their work places. Moreover, the house-helps were fired without warning due to employer’s dissatisfaction with work performance and more so there were suspicions of sexual relations developing between their husbands and female domestic workers as perceived by the female employers. This created strenuous relations that forced the house-helps to sometimes leave without any notification.



Furthermore, low wages or lack of increased wages and long working hours were perceived as a challenge that constitute the majority of domestic workers in the study area. Moreover, the house-helps remain vulnerable and are often subjected to poor working conditions and excluded from entitlements commonly enjoyed by other wage workers under the labour laws in Kenya. They work they perform does not commensurate to the pay offered. It is therefore worrying that they cannot sustain their families and their house-hold responsibilities. In most cases some of them are depended on by their children as some of the respondents are widowed, separated and single. For those who are married, their husbands are not working or if they are working their income cannot support the household. The following sentiments echoed reflect the above statement:

*“... The income that I earn cannot make me sustain my family... My employer cannot also increase my income...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 19 years- Umoja 2).*

*“... What I get here is too little... I work for long hours and this makes me poor because I cannot get enough for my family.... Yet my husband works on part-time basis thus his income cannot sustain the income...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 23 years- Umoja area).*

Moreover, the study also established that poor working environment and discrimination in the work place were challenges facing the house-helps in the study area. The following sentiments were echoed by the respondents:

*“... Where I work I sleep at a store where when it rains it leaks and when there is sun it becomes hot.....This makes me feel bad.... I have no other choice but to work.... This is what I face” (Echoed by female house-help aged 20 years- Umoja 2).*

*“... When I cook the meal afterwards I am not suppose to eat at the dining table... I am supposed to eat at my room or at the kitchen...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 24 years- Umoja 1).*

*“... When my employer’s visitors come I am supposed to cook and walk out... and when my family comes I am supposed to meet them outside...” (Echoed by female house-help aged 24 years- Tena/Soteen area).*

This clearly shows that domestic workers are vulnerable to abusive treatment, discrimination and unfair working conditions. In most cases, the female domestic workers are seen as second class thus they are not supposed to interact with the rest of the members of the employer’s family. In the group interviews the respondents who worked on part-time basis reported that they often walked for long distances in search of domestic work and travelled as far as from Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Makadara, Dandora and Huruma and were often tired to be productive at work.

Moreover, it was perceived that the female domestic workers had no access to health services and thus when they felt sick they were either relieved of their duties or sent home parking as they were replaced immediately. This meant that the longer they were healthy the more they were likely to sustain their job. Healthcare is paramount to the each and every human being thus as stipulated under Kenya's labour laws a house-help is entitled to NHIF (National Hospital Insurance Fund-Government Scheme) scheme. Studies by Beck *et al.*, (2013) posit that the work intensity for the domestic workers is immense such that some of them lack sleep, is stressed and lack recreation.

In addition, such cases relating to domestic workers abuses fail to be reported to the relevant authorities that include the police or relevant authority. Furthermore, a majority of female domestic workers are unable or unwilling to seek legal redress because they are unaware of their rights, and they have no resources to seek legal help that they need. Moreover, they do not have access to the judicial institutions/services where they could seek the much need help and advice. In a nut shell, the female domestic workers fear reprisal from their employers who in turn have the much resources to counter their objections.

## **12. Discussion on Implications for Practice in Social Sciences Practice**

The study has focused on domestic work and the challenges faced by domestic workers in their day to day work. The increasing involvement of women as domestic workers has attributed to the many negative issues they face. They continue to be vulnerable to exploitation, sexual harassment and abuses which leads to in some cases loss of their lives. The house-helps have to face unexpected hardships as they continually work for minimum or meager wages and/or earnings. Many female domestic workers have families which equally depend on them and thus there is the struggle for them to work for survival. According to Omolo and Omitti (2004) the minimum wage policy in Kenya has failed to contribute to sustained poverty reduction. The aim of any form of employment is to sustain livelihoods and moreover, promote choice in obtaining goods and services. However, with the harsh low pay the domestic workers/house-helps face then the choice is limited. The implication that the paper has put forth is that there still persists discrimination in this form of employment, more so exploitation and abuses among domestic workers is on the rise. The minimum wage does not commensurate to that at the national level as proposed in various Labour laws in Kenya.

Moreover, this paper has put forth the socio-cultural perceptions whereby gender isolation in access to economic opportunities and employment among female domestic workers exists.

Furthermore, gender differences are still persistent when focusing on responsibilities. Men are still seen to have control on female involvement in domestic work and that there is still the perception that domestic work belongs to women culturally. Thus Culture still plays a role in the choice of employment and profession.

In addition, the pull factors toward rural-urban migration entail increasing dependency on female domestic workers by the family members. In a nut shell, limited access to employment into the informal sector may also be attributed to the lack of unemployment in the rural area. Thus lack of unemployment opportunities leads to rural urban migration.

### **13. Conclusions**

The first objective of the study was to investigate the demographic characteristics of the female house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County. It was observed that majority of the female house-helpers of the sample majority were married and in the age bracket of twenty years and below and had primary level of education. Moreover, characteristics of employment, a most of the respondents had an income of Kshs 3,000-5,000, were working on full time basis, had no job security and thus felt that their work could end at any time. This means that most of the female domestic workers in the study were had not attained minimum wage as stipulated by the labour laws in Kenya and more so there were no guarantees in the job retention conditions.

The second objective of this paper was to find out the perceived socio-cultural factors influencing female house-help participation in domestic work. These factors ranged from level of dependency by households, society's ridicule of domestic workers, control by men on female participation in domestic work, domestic work regarded as a poor man's work, and inherent belief that domestic work belongs to females. Accordingly, the study established that factor that was more dominant was level of dependency by households thus this propelled women to participate in the domestic work.

The third objective of the study was to find out the perceived economic factors influencing female house-help involvement in domestic work. The compounding economic factors entailed; increasing poverty and limited cash levels, increasing need to supplement household income, forced migration to urban center in search of employment, limited access to employment and finally inadequate fees. Accordingly, the study established that the factor that leads to female participation in house-help form of employment was the need to reduce poverty levels.

The fourth objective of the study was to identify the causal challenges facing the female house-helpers in Eastlands area in Nairobi County. The challenges entailed physically abused and sexually assaulted, low wages, long working hours, work environment and lack of access to health care services from their employers and finally the ability to seek legal redress. What the findings confirm is that in one way or another, these challenges inhibit performance of the domestic workers towards working properly in their day to day responsibilities. Moreover, the study established that the physical abuse and sexual assault was perceived as the main challenge that faced the female house-helpers in the selected area of study.

#### **14. Policy Recommendations**

- a) It is recommended that domestic workers should be free to reach an agreement with their employer or potential employer on remuneration package and the terms and conditions of service. If and when the domestic workers reside in the household from which they provide services then adequate standards regarding living conditions need be of important emphasize. This should follow set standards by the ILO (2012) that advocates for efforts to ensure decent living conditions for the workers concerned may involve setting out the employer's obligations on these matters in the law.
- b) It is thus recommended that the plight of the domestic workers should be addressed by all stakeholders more so the government so as to factor in more laws that regulate abuses and at the same time ensure that the domestic workers are paid well. It is further recommended that there should be implementation of the international domestic workers' labour rights in the constitutional framework. This will safeguard their rights and privileges in their work place.
- c) It is recommended that there should be the implementation of the domestic workers' social security rights. House-helpers should be encouraged to apply for the NHIF (National Hospital Insurance Fund) and NSSF (National Social Security Fund).
- d) Consequently, the Kenyan government should be devoted in the execution of the International Labour Organization Convention 189 that sets global standards for domestic workers, relating to the Article 2 (5) and (6) of the Constitution (2010). The article provides that the general rules of international law and any treaty or convention ratified by Kenya shall form part of the law of Kenya under the Constitution. Moreover, the Labour Relations Act (2007) also spells out the workers' rights with regard to freedom of association. The Act protects the workers' right to form and participate in activities of relevant associations and labour unions. Laws exist

and thus implementation of these laws should be at the focal point towards the protection of the domestic workers.

## **15. Further Research**

Whilst this research has provided valuable insights on the plight of house-helpers (domestic workers) in Nairobi County Kenya, it majorly focused on the challenges. Therefore, it is recommended that a study can be conducted in other urban areas in Kenya and the rest of the world to obtain and establish more conclusive findings on the area of the plight of domestic workers.

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