

Domestic Workers and the Employer-Employee Relationship in Delhi: Personal Connection and Dissonance

Alexis Pramberger

Abstract. There are currently approximately four to five million domestic workers in India today. Most of these workers are women and migrants of lower castes or socioeconomic status and lack formal education. Domestic workers are not guaranteed social security, welfare, or basic rights in the workplace in India because domestic labor is part of the unorganized and therefore unregulated sector of industry. Workers make little money and are often overworked, abused, malnourished, and suffer psychologically in the workplace. The employer-employee relationship is critical to understanding the workplace environment, and control of the relationship can make it more or less professional, either benefiting or hurting workers. Two interviews with advocates for domestic workers from Nirmana, an NGO in Delhi, and five interviews with female employers of domestic workers in Delhi were conducted over Whatsapp. Employers often referred to their employees as family members, did favors for them, and understood some of their daily struggles while receiving emotional support. Blame for poor conditions was placed externally of the workplace, especially when applied to salary rates; employers claimed feeling helpless to improve conditions. Although the employers do speak about and in some ways care about domestic workers as family, they likely function at a level of dissonance, both being partially aware of and benefiting from the same system that oppresses their workers.

I. Introduction to Domestic Workers in India

A. *The Indian Context*

There are approximately four to five million domestic workers in India today who are part of India's unorganized and unregulated workforce, the sector which includes 94% of all workers. (National Domestic Workers Movement, 2016). Workers in the unorganized sector lack job security, anti-harassment infrastructure, and reassurance of safe working conditions due to lack of legislative regulation. Unlike workers in the organized sector, domestic workers do not have social securities such as medical leave, insurance, pension, or minimum wages (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). Workers are vulnerable to the

breaching of informal contracts, unsafe and unregulated working environments, and power differences in the employee-employer relationship which limit power in facing abuse (Rights for Domestic Workers, n.d.; DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020).

Between the end of the 20th century and 2011-2012, the number of domestic workers in India increased fourfold (John, 2019). Data on domestic workers is sparse because A) domestic work is seen as illegitimate and considered extension of the household, B) many workers are part time, so they do not register domestic work as their primary occupation, and C) because there is little government-mandated data collection for the sector (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019). Currently, most middle to upper class households traditionally employ at least one domestic worker. As traditional

family units become more nuclear and more women shift from the domestic sphere into professional roles outside of the home, a “global care deficit” is created which domestic workers can fill (John, 2019; Kodandarama, 2018). In addition to increased demand, the labor supply has increased because of “distress migration”, a phenomenon which describes the recent movement of workers from the increasingly unprofitable agricultural areas of India to urban centers like Delhi (John, 2019). People who work as domestic workers often lack formal schooling and are unfamiliar with the urban labor market (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019). Despite coverage of domestic worker abuse by media outlets, lack of legislative jurisdiction lowers public awareness (Tewari, 2018). Furthermore, implementation of reforms is very difficult due to bias in law enforcement and the number of workers (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020).

B. What is Domestic Work

For the present study, domestic work will include any cleaning, cooking, caretaking, or emotional labor done by someone on a regular basis for a household that is not their own. Part time domestic workers work between 5-6 homes everyday, working 10-12 hours per day. Workers typically live in poor areas or slums nearby (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). It is worth noting that the experiences of part time domestic workers and full-time domestic workers can differ tremendously, especially since full domestic workers are more isolated from others and hence more vulnerable to employer exploitation and abuse.

II. Who is the Domestic Worker? What are Their Issues?

Workers in this sector tend to be women and migrants of lower caste and income. They often lack a formal education and experience intersectional disadvantages in both public spaces and their workplaces. Employers may generalize domestic workers to certain stereotypes based on their identities, which can further cause them harm (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014). Stereotypes of “naughty

workers” establish a narrative which rationalizes mistreatment between domestic workers’ and their employees.

A. Women, Violence, and Safety

The vast majority of domestic workers are women. In India, violence against women in the form of domestic abuse occurs at an alarmingly high rate and is concealed within families and/or widely accepted as a traditional practice (Sharangpani, 2008). There have also been cases of in-laws being a part of this violence, going as far as murdering the victims or pushing them to suicide (Sharangpani, 2008). The effects of domestic violence on the victim’s mental and physical health are extremely negative, and with no discussion of resources for victims, workers feel especially powerless and worthless (Kodandarama, 2018).

Domestic labor is unrecognized as skilled labor largely since it is deemed to be feminine, “innate” work in a patriarchal society (2018, DW Advocate B, personal communication, May 5-8, 2020). Domestic workers also do “affective labor”, or emotional support for employers, a form of care and caution even less recognized (Joseph, 2020; Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014). Domestic workers must maintain what Gorbán calls “the front”, a non-threatening submissive persona which helps maintain “positive” employer-employee relationship but can be exhausting (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014).

B. Socioeconomic Status

Domestic workers are typically the sole earners for their families, and in part because they make so little money, are often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014; Joseph, 2020). In addition to working for their employers, domestic workers are often charged with caretaking and cleaning work in their own homes (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019; Kodandarama, 2018). Long hours and commutes hinder essential time parents can spend with their children which is known to increase health and education outcomes and can leave children unattended for large portions of the day (Kodandarama, 2018).

Domestic workers frequently live in Delhi’s Juggi Jhopris, also known as slums. Citizens of

slums may stay at their residence for decades, yet are frequently labeled “migrants,” and despite long term residency are vulnerable to displacement by state-mandated demolitions at any given time. A severe lack of safe toilets for women can result in open defecation, polluting residents’ water supply and spreading easily preventable diseases which, given the lack of medical resources in the area, can be deadly (Glegziabher, 2016).

C. Caste

Caste-based discrimination in India largely surrounds the idea of hygiene and ritualistic purity, in which people of lower castes are considered to be less pure and more polluted than those of higher castes (Banerjee, 2020). Because of both residence and caste, workers can be seen as “dirty” and “disease ridden”. Since cleanliness is cited as a priority for employers, workers are often hired/ placed based on their caste (Tewari, 2018; DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). Employers might ask workers to shower and change clothes when they arrive at the home, distribute chores according to caste, and limit access to certain rooms in the house (Banerjee, 2020).

Caste fuels multiple means of social stratification, encompassing residential segregation, systematic deprivation of resources, minority stress, and use of stereotyping (Mosse, 2018). Caste-based violence has also been resurging in the past several years with the rise of nationalism in India (Sadanandan, 2018).

D. Migrant Status and Education

Almost all domestic workers in cities are migrants who come from the failing agrarian sector, returning home perhaps once or twice a year (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020; John, 2019; Kodandarama, 2018). Coming from rural tribal villages with little education/ literacy, workers are unfamiliar with urban areas (new living conditions, technologies in the home, etc.), an ever-changing workplace, and have little knowledge about their rights, rendering the transition emotionally taxing and self-advocacy more difficult (Kodandarama, 2018; DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020; Joseph, 2020). Full time workers are frequently stolen from

vulnerable tribal villages and sold to “placement agencies” for domestic and sexual labor in bigger cities (DW Advocate B, personal communication, May 5-8, 2020; DEHAT, 2020; Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019). All domestic workers are vulnerable to feelings of isolation because of poor treatment, cultural barriers, and time spent isolated in the home. This abuse and isolation sometimes leads to a lost sense of identity (DW Advocate B, personal communication, May 5-8, 2020).

E. Health

Domestic workers are among those with the highest risk of malnutrition in India, and people who experience decreased power in the home experience increased risk (Joseph, 2020). 70% of women in India are anemic, and since women traditionally eat last among family members, they are often the least nourished (Joseph, 2020). When employers occasionally give workers food, it may be stale or lack necessary nutritional value (DW Advocate B, personal communication, May 5-8, 2020; Kodandarama, 2018). Limits to bathroom use at work and poor bathrooms at home result in frequent UTI infections (Glegziabher, 2016; Tewari, 2018). Domestic work itself is taxing and cleaning solutions can be toxic over time, worsening wounds and wearing down workers’ hands (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020; Tewari, 2018).

High stress, poverty, poor living conditions, alcoholic husbands, intimate partner violence, financial difficulties, housing insecurities, lack of property, spousal mortality, lack of credit facilities, and marital conflict are all factors which make domestic workers vulnerable to mental health and chronic physical issues (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23). Workers often spend hours alone during the commute or while at houses and may have few meaningful interactions with employers (John, 2019). Workers may experience damaging self-esteem, decreased social connectedness, and limited opportunities. They may experience stereotyping, which is associated with hypertension, cardiovascular reactivity, risky lifestyle behaviors like smoking. Additionally, in visiting so many households women often have backaches, aching limbs, colds, fevers, skin

infections from unsafe cleaning products, and kidney stones because of bad drinking water and acute anemia (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019).

F. Time Off, Hours, and Wages

Since domestic workers do not have formal contracts with welfare provisions, sick leave can be particularly difficult to obtain (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019). Employers often demand more work hours than initially agreed upon and only 2-3 days off per month. In some cases of longer leave, workers are simply replaced, creating instability in the workers' lives (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019; Tewari, 2018).

Workers are very vulnerable to exploitation of wages due to lack of contract. Part time domestic workers make between 750-1500 rupees per job per month and average about 5-6 jobs per day. By that math, domestic workers work 10–12-hour days with only 2-3 days off per month for the equivalent of about 50-120 USD per month. These rates come from a neighborhood consensus about what makes sense to pay. Although there are more jobs than laborers, which leads to higher rates, the power gradient still tips in the employer's direction (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). In some cases, residents' welfare associations determine rates for the whole area without consulting the workers at all, and complexes may selectively open community gates for certain workers at certain times in order to regulate their jobs and movements (John, 2019). Even when rates are "agreed upon" by the parties, there is no guarantee of pay, and confrontation with an employer can result in violence or false accusation of thievery (S interview; Tewari, 2018). Reputation of employees is extremely important in India as word of mouth is the primary way for workers to get hired, therefore a bad reputation could mean losing customers in the whole area. Employers instead may give material goods to the domestic workers as a means of satiating them rather than creating a larger change (Tewari, 2018).

G. Legislation & Community Action

There are some NGOs and cooperative societies in India which aim to help domestic workers, but few with a focus on their ability to emotionally cope with their many stressors.

Moreover, few large social platforms exist for domestic workers. The sparse protections that the Indian government includes for domestic workers are not carried out in a meaningful way, and there are no unions to protect these workers. Thus, migrant domestic workers - especially in states without domestic labor regulations - are among the most vulnerable workers in the world. Nirmana is one organization which advocates for domestic workers (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). As an NGO and a cooperative in Delhi, India, Nirmana advocates work in political organizing, training, unionizing, and trafficking rescue for full time domestic workers (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020).

H. Arguments Against and Challenges in Creating Legislative Change

One obstacle to creating lasting change are legislators who benefit from the subjugation of domestic workers (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). Some officials argue that a set minimum wage for workers will decrease market demand and lead to unemployment (Joseph, 2020). A lack of research on domestic workers means that it is hard to link the finances of domestic workers directly to their well-being, making it harder to tie issues of job security to humanitarian issues in politicians' eyes (Sahni & Junnarkar, 2019). Even if legislation was implemented in the protection of worker's rights, the issues of implementation and compliance remain. Legislation would affect millions of households across India and would require hundreds of thousands of government workers to get involved. The fact that domestic work largely takes place in the private sphere creates even more issues. It is hard to access every household, and many citizens may feel this intervention is an unwarranted intrusion. Additionally, since employers generally can replace domestic workers easily, it is more likely that employers hire someone willing to work under the table or pay off a sympathetic official rather than continue to employ a worker asserting their rights.

III. The Employer-Employee Relationship

No oversight means that the employer almost exclusively determines the worker experience, which is often characterized by little recognition, low pay, harsh criticism, and constant need to prove trustworthiness (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014, Joseph, 2020). However, the rich are virtually dependent on domestic workers; if the domestic sphere is not covered, then employers cannot go about their life in the same way (Dasgupta, 2020).

A. Ambiguity

In spending almost every day with employers, domestic workers can have conversations and tea breaks which lead to bonding. Bonding is key to job security, networking, and favors. Domestic labor union members and people who discussed the power dynamics of this relationship more had higher wellbeing overall, even if their relationship with their employer was less congenial (Gurtoo, 2016). If the line between personal and professional is ambiguous, it is prone to exploitation, leading to overworking and undercutting of wages (John, 2019). Terms of endearment like “aunty” and “didi” continue to break down the professionalism in these relationships (Gurtoo, 2016).

B. Status and Control

The employer-employee relationship is asymmetric by the nature of a working relationship, the difference in social capital, and the workplace being the employer’s home. Sara Dickey’s work on this topic expands on the concept of *ullai* (inside) and *ve/iyai* (outside) to understand how these boundaries are carefully managed within the relationship to reinforce the status of the family while managing perceived threat for privacy, possessions, and sexual purity. Employers look for humility of hires and carefully control where workers go in the home, as well as their bathroom use and interaction with children. This is extremely isolating and degrading for domestic workers in addition to the other dangers of abuse they experience (Dickey, 2000).

Gorbán’s work (2014) examines how high expectations and extreme control result in “the front”,

a persona which workers put on to fulfill employers’ expectations of them, including stereotypes. A job is also “impossible” when the employer does it but merely “help” when a domestic worker does it, an intentional dissonance which pacifies any perceived threat. The front plays on inferiority, using change in manner and speech to reflect a power difference. This expectation infringes on employees’ ability to stick up for themselves in the workplace (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014).

C. Social Benefits to Employers

In interviews, female employers frequently cite their domestic workers as being the reason they can have a career and get out of the home, contributing to an “upward redistribution of resources” to the elite that in some ways helps with gender-based social change (Dasgupta, 2020; Tewari, 2018; Austin, Capper, and Deutsch, 2020). Workers may act as confidants for employers as well, helping to relieve some of the social expectations and stress employers have as women. This may be particularly salient for young women who lead a non-traditional lifestyle, face particularly great social stress or strain in their marriage, or who are apart from their personal family (Sharangpani, 2008).

IV. Methods

A. Study Target

The focus of this study was to explore the relationship between domestic workers and their employers in Delhi. Interviewing the employers of domestic workers provided insight into how they perceived their workers, and perhaps more interestingly how they depicted this relationship.

Employers were chosen as the participants because of their ability to provide insight into how the relationship is perceived from the top of the power gradient. Additionally, their interviews provided further insight into how employers want other people to perceive this relationship with their employees. In terms of feasibility, employers of domestic workers were easier to recruit for interviews than domestic workers. Both the teachers at the School for International Training and my project advisor had connections with women

who employed domestic workers rather than with domestic workers themselves. Due to the nature of collecting data and writing this paper remotely, all participants had to be recruited through connections made prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

Female employers in particular were interviewed because background literature suggests that women who employ workers may have more anxiety surrounding status in the home than men. This makes them a more interesting target of study since they are familiar with domestic work and stay in the home more often than men, developing more of a relationship with workers (Dickey, 2000). Women were also mainly chosen as the focus of this study because they are more likely to share gender-based struggles with their workers, allowing them to have similar negative experiences with social roles, expectations, and safety. Additionally, domestic workers' presence in the home allows for women employers' roles to change more dramatically than men's roles, allowing for more clear insight into the role of domestic workers in social change. The power discrepancy between the employer and employee is not explicitly gender based, but rather comes from other forms of status and a larger patriarchal system.

B. Method 1: Interviews with Nirmana

For this study, two professional advocates from Nirmana were recruited convenience sampled through staff members at the School for International Training. Both advocates work primarily in political organizing, although one of them also works more directly in training and trafficking rescue of full-time domestic workers. These individuals were interviewed because of their expertise on the topic, current work in the field, and their existing connections to the School for International Training. Nirmana means construction in Hindi and refers to the NGO's founding cause in 1998 which was to create a national campaign for a social security law focused on construction workers (DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020; Nirmana, 2018).

C. Method 2: Interviews with Employers of Domestic Workers

In addition to the two aforementioned

domestic worker advocates (see Method 1: Interviews with Nirmana), five employers of domestic workers from the Delhi area in India participated in this study. This project used a convenience sample and participants were recruited through existing connections with my project advisor and my teachers at the School for International Training, the institution through which this paper is being written and reviewed. Consent was based off of the School for International Training's consent script and adapted for this study, with staff member revision to ensure cultural barriers were addressed. All participants spoke fluent English and the script was from SIT's standard consent. During each interview, participants received basic demographic questions followed by questions about their experiences with domestic workers. Some examples of questions were *Who are some of the domestic workers that stand out in your mind? Why do they stand out in your mind?, Can you describe your domestic worker for me? Has your domestic worker ever asked for anything from you, such as a pay raise, extra time off, help for a child's school admission, or borrowing money? How did you respond to this?* After each interview, a personal reflection was carried out to assess personal feelings and biases towards the participant's answers. Themes were also discussed with the project advisor who clarified cultural misunderstandings and helped make sense of the complex socio-cultural context within which domestic work in middle class Indian homes was embedded, within which the data was then interpreted.

Secondary literature referenced throughout this paper was accumulated through interviews (see Method 1: Interviews with Nirmana) and a variety of peer reviewed journals and web articles. Journals referenced included the Women's Studies International Forum, and the Economic & Political Weekly.

D. Analysis

Secondary literature referenced throughout this paper was accumulated through interviews (see Method 1: Interviews with Nirmana) and a variety of peer reviewed journals and web articles. Journals referenced included the Women's Studies

International Forum, and the Economic & Political Weekly.

E. Participant Characteristics

Participants were all higher caste women from middle to upper class backgrounds. Women were ages 41 and 61 years old and they all had 2-3 children. All of the participants' homes were about the same size and they had 2-3 bedrooms. Employers typically hired 1-4 domestic workers.

V. Results

A. Descriptions of Domestic Workers

Most of the participants described their domestic workers, and particularly their favorite workers, as family. The question which typically elicited this response asked about positive bonds with past relationships, which is where the word "family" surfaced voluntarily. One participant said that when her child was young, her domestic worker would give "extra effort and pain" and that "he used to always involve himself with the family. He never thought that you know, okay, I'm just to help, I'll finish my work and get aid. No, he was always part of the family" (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). This type of involvement in family matters and rhetorical shift from being called a family member rather than a domestic worker can be found in most of interviews. Employees who helped in difficult times in their lives tended to be viewed fondly by their employers, for instance around the time they had children or were separated from family (Employer C, personal communication, May 4, 2020). A different employer spoke of one worker fondly, saying that "she didn't seem to be like a domestic worker. It was like the family relations," while others said very similar statements, "she was kind of family" (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020; Employer C, personal communication, May 4, 2020). The workers with whom employers bonded with most tended to act as cooks and caretakers rather than cleaners.

B. Good Traits of a Domestic Worker

Trustworthiness/honesty, friendliness/
thoughtfulness, attitude/politeness, cleanliness,

and quality work were all cited as good traits in domestic workers. The second most mentioned trait of a good domestic worker was friendliness and thoughtfulness. Several spoke about how critical it was to have a worker who paid special attention to their children, and one even fired a worker for speaking to her child in a way she found offensive (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020; Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). One employer spoke in detail about the thoughtfulness of her workers, and how the little things they did which supported her and her family were the highlight of their relationships (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Attitude and politeness was the third most common trait mentioned. One participant preferred a simple, professional relationship with their employees, while another recalled one of her favorite workers as having a nice, polite attitude (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020; Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Quality work was cited less than the aforementioned traits, only mentioned explicitly by one participant (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Although the demographics of the domestic worker were not mentioned, one participant who worked with a placement agency did get a demographic description of the worker before the employer.

C. Support in Daily Life

Domestic workers were cited as influencing employers' emotions and being critical in completing daily tasks. One of the women interviewed spoke extensively of the companionship which several domestic workers offered her in the past; she spoke of massages, company, and pieces of advice which had helped her over the years (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). On the other end of the spectrum, another participant did not recall much connection with her employees beyond the professional relationship, saying that she preferred workers come in and out rather than share extensively about their personal lives, as one of her workers does (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020). Other participants fell somewhere in-between, citing their family-like connections with domestic workers as helpful and

supportive but not necessarily as a foundational column in their support network. Several employers said that they maintained contact with previous domestic workers and that this was a positive relationship. One participant spoke about working full time as a woman, saying “in a situation where I’m expected to continue my work the way I used to, not having a maid is just not possible... it’s not possible that a woman will also go out and have a career, earn a living and then come back home and do all the work... and men to do the work... you would rather do it yourself or you would end up fighting” (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020).

D. Non-Contracted Favors and Support

Throughout the interviewing process, all of the employers spoke of different casual courtesies and friendly favors which they regularly extend to their domestic workers. Several employers said that they made chai for their employees, with some sitting down for regular conversation with their workers and another making chai particularly on cold days (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020; Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020; Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020). Employers said they spoke to domestic workers mostly about matters including family health, domestic violence, husbands who drink, financial issues, and missing family members who live far away (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020; Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020; Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020; Employer C, personal communication, May 4, 2020; Employer D, personal communication, May 5 2020).

The most frequently cited form of support was money lending of sums up to tens of thousands of rupees. Often this money was loaned to be paid in small sections from the employee’s future paychecks, paid in small sections later on.

E. Determination of Rates and Power in the Workplace

All participants stated that rates in their areas were fair. Going rates for chores ranged from 750-4000 rupees per month for part time workers,

and typically caretakers and cooks are paid more than cleaners. All employers of part time workers said that these rates were determined by the area. Another participant explained

“... there is no question of paying lower than that, because they will not accept.. the maids themselves do not ask for very high salaries, because they know nobody will pay them. I mean, it is fixed in a way...”
(Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020)

The onus of control with who determined these rates was reported either being on both parties or primarily on the employee, not the employer. One participant speaks of what happens when an employee asks for a pay raise, saying that

“I would ask the other ladies that you know, are they asking for a pay raise, is everyone paying a pay raise? And then when they say yes and confirm it, then we increase the pay, so it’s...so it’s not as if maids can arbitrarily ask us for a pay raise... so that kind of understanding is there” (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020).

F. Conditions: Days Off, Sick Leave, Toilets, Access to Rooms

Employers mainly fed their workers only at points when they had full time workers. Employers seemed to take a lot of pride in using the same utensils as their workers and serving the same food, likely comparing their treatment to that of others who do not permit this (Employer C, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Most employers ate separately from their workers and at different times; one part time worker who had breakfasts each morning did eat with the employer, but from a separate stool in the kitchen (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). One such employer took special care to explain how she tried to make a worker feel more comfortable eating what they would like, saying that she would leave food with them and walk away so that they would not feel judged about how much they ate (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Workers generally received 2-4 days leave from their employers, plus a month for a longer break to visit family outside of Delhi. Three of the employers mentioned allowing or even encouraging their workers to take sick leave. Still, several employers acknowledged why workers may not do this, saying “they have to work to feed their families” or “they keep saying ‘we have to feed [our] family, we have to send money to them’” (Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020; Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Workers tended to be given access to all of the house except the family’s bathroom in all cases but one. The reason for this tended to either be that the employee never asked for anything different or that all parties involved were more comfortable with this arrangement. The employer who had a full-time worker said that all spaces were open to the worker for sleeping, including the children’s area, although there was not a designated private area for the domestic worker (Employer C, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

G. Perception of Domestic Workers’ Issues and Government Support

All employers had at least some basic knowledge of their worker’s family lives, such as how many kids they had and their marital status. When prompted about the types of problems domestic workers most commonly shared, they cited problems with the workers’ violent and/or alcoholic husbands at home. (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020; Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020; Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Illness of family members was also cited (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020). When prompted about domestic workers’ issues in the workplace, employers mainly spoke about maltreatment and overworking by employers. Employers varied vastly in their knowledge about issues domestic workers faced, with one participant saying that she found almost no issue with the way domestic workers were treated (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). On the opposite end of the spectrum, a participant spoke extensively about sexual and physical abuse

which happens in many other employers’ houses (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020). No employer was able to talk about a wide variety of issues which domestic workers faced in the workplace, instead each employer mentioned a few things. Several employers explained maltreatment as potentially resulting from trust issues or stress. One employer spoke about how some houses make their workers sit on the ground to eat and give them separate silverware, saying that employers must not trust them (Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Another employer spoke about how domestic workers in her office faced harsh words at their workplace, following which she tried to console them by explaining that “maybe their bosses are overburdened with money or with the world... so they just need to ignore it... and gradually when they understand the nature they know how to tune in themselves” (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Employers were split halfway about whether their workers typically had health issues worth noting, and one participant mentioned not giving food as a concern (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). No participant mentioned access to bathrooms as a health concern.

Overworking was also cited as a concern by several participants but was touched on most extensively by one participant. She said

“That’s what I personally feel they’re over-worked. And I keep telling them not to work so much... because of the extreme weather conditions in Delhi... they tend to fall sick, they’re prone to fall sick more frequently... I keep telling them so you work only that much know when your own body can accept it, otherwise, we’ll keep falling sick... As long as they’re young, they can do it and do it, they do it but once they age up, you know” (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020)

This participant also took special care to check on workers, saying that she could “make out from their body language” if they were feeling ill, then would give medicine and tell them to rest accordingly (Employer E, personal communication,

May 5, 2020). She speaks of one worker particularly fondly, saying that

“I keep telling one of my maid who worked with me for 20 years... she’s aged but not very old. She’s very active... she works in part because and she’s got a lot of... problem[s]... Back at her place, hometown. She’s working more than her capacity. So I keep telling her, she should not work from house to, house... she should stay in somebody’s house and work there so that she doesn’t have to roam around.” (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020)

This particular employee had a very strong connection with several of her workers and spoke of them as family most frequently out of all the participants.

In general, employers only partially understood common issues facing domestic workers in the workplace and at home, and even when these issues were recognized, sometimes employers explained this behavior as making sense rather than labeling it as abusive. The employers primarily pointed to other homes or media when speaking of issues domestic workers faced in the workplace. Overall, all employers recognized that domestic workers face some challenges in the workplace, although the extent and type of issue differed within each interview.

When asked about government support of domestic workers, both of the advocates interviewed did not mention any social security benefits, minimum time off requirements, or other government resources (DW Advocate B, personal communication, May 5-8, 2020; DW Advocate A, personal communication, April 23, 2020). In contrast, several of the participants mentioned government resources. One participant spoke about how the government subsidizes food and some services and additionally requires that workers get two day’s leave (Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020). In another account, the participant discusses how local gurdwaras give out food to the domestic workers, how the government sponsors special affordable medical facilities for them, and how they have access

to ration cards for food (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). The main source of this information was media outlets.

H. Enjoyability of the Work

Although most of the employers interviewed recognized that doing domestic labor is not desirable work, they also said that workers loved and enjoyed the work. One employer said that she could not “think of reason that they wouldn’t” (Employer D, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Of the employers who did think workers love their jobs, one who spoke about abuse in the workplace also said

“They don’t have access to better education... training that would help them get a better job that they are doing this... no one loves to do it. I mean, it’s drudgery.... Who’s going to be excited about doing this work? Nobody, but they have no other option... it’s just that their circumstances have put them in such a situation that they have no other option, and then to treat them like this. I mean it’s really, really unforgivable” (Employer A, personal communication, April 29, 2020).

Another says “They’re not well educated, so what else can they do?... they are helpless, they can’t do anything else... they get used to it actually, they get used to it” (Employer B, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Another speaks about how despite how difficult their employers can be, that they gradually “understand the nature (and) they know how to tune in themselves” (Employer E, personal communication, May 5, 2020). These views echo that of one of the advocates. Employers generally understand that a career in domestic work is not necessarily done out of desire, but rather circumstance.

VI. Conclusions

A. Overall Findings and Questioning Truth

The employers in this study generally knew something about the issues facing domestic workers, gave time off and sick leave to workers,

and made special arrangements for workers outside of obligation. Four out of the five workers reported having a close, family-like relationship to their employees. Although the employers overall reported treating their domestic workers well, at the time there seemed to be missing pieces to the puzzle which called into question their answers. For instance, no participant gave a definitive answer as to how rates were determined for everyone, and several implied that domestic workers themselves decided it. However, this seems unlikely given the bargaining power of the two groups. Additionally, employers mentioned several issues that domestic workers face, but many of them rationalized poor treatment and overworking. Additionally, many of the employers took on a stance of being helpless to change the situations of their domestic worker despite themselves benefiting from and having direct power over the employer-employee relationship. Employers called their workers family, but also paid them little money and hardly gave them time off. The favors that employers do for their employees could be either an overt or subconscious form of mutual reciprocity. Do employers actually believe that workers do not need the toilet when they come over? Or that there are no health risks associated with this work? These contradictions may hint at a subverted form of dissonance between understanding the difficulties of domestic work and some of their workers' struggles and benefiting from sub-par treatment of domestic workers. There is also the possibility that the employers interviewed are, in fact, treating their domestic workers better than everyone else, but there is no way to know if they are telling the truth. Instead, these omissions may play a role in seeing a larger picture. Without observation, these contradictions do not necessarily answer, but rather reveal questions about the truth of these employers' experiences with and views of the domestic workers they hire.

B. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this entire research paper was conceived and executed remotely in the United States. Participants were convenience sampled through the contacts our group had in Delhi and reached out to via Whatsapp text. The sample is less demographically diverse

than is ideal; all participants are general caste, middle to upper class, and live in wealthier areas in Delhi. Additionally, the sample is most likely to be biased, representing views more similar to that of my academic institution and advisor - who are both progressive-leaning - because of these existing connections. Working remotely also meant that there was virtually no opportunity to record observations for this study. All interviews took place over Whatsapp without video, meaning that there was no opportunity to see the household or employer-employee relationship myself. Because of this constraint, the only data collected was from what participants shared, and the only framework to understand their answers was through reflection, background research, and interviews with domestic worker advocates.

The sample of this study was also on the smaller end, leading to lower power. Additionally, convenience sampling both limited the diversity of perspectives represented and potentially led to bias in answers, where some participants may have felt their friends would find out about their answers despite our assurance of confidentiality. During this process, it was of the utmost importance that I continuously address my privilege. As a white, middle to upper class researcher from the United States, I have a lot of privilege when approaching this topic. I have inherent privilege as a researcher and additionally in some ways as a foreigner.

C. Questions for the Future

There are many expansions of this study that can be done which may enhance data quality and provide further insights. The restraints of the coronavirus pandemic on data collection impaired the process, and given different circumstances more interviews and observational data could be collected. More time spent interacting with and spending time in the homes of employers may create positive relationships that provide even deeper insight into this topic. Additionally, future studies should make it a priority to include domestic workers' voices as it is imperative to give domestic workers a platform to tell their truth. Looking at data for domestic workers and their employers within the same household may provide insights into the distance between each party's views and additionally may

act as an incentive for both parties to address difficult topics. A potential avenue to understand the emotionally supportive role of domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship could be to focus on single women in single person households, a population which lacks the familial network of immediate emotional support. Emotional support was primarily addressed in terms of workers being like “family”, but it would be interesting to delve into emotional supportiveness more deeply and explore all of its intersectional, dynamic dimensions. This study helps to expand on prior literature about domestic work specifically in the Indian context, taking an intersectional approach to understanding how the employer-employee relationship develops within an international context. Work like this helps to highlight the voices of those a politically and socially limited voice despite having a presence in most middle to upper class homes.

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Appendix

Participant ID	Marital Status	Income (rupees)/Earning Members of Household	Members in Household	Self or Family Hired Full Time	Self or Family Hired Part Time
A	married	200,000k/2	4	N	Y
B	married	70-80k/1	2	Y	Y
C	married	Participant unsure/1	4	Y	Y
D	married	No data/1.5	4	Y	Y
E	separated	70-80k/1	4	Y	Y

Figure 1: Table of participant characteristics for employer sample.