



Research Article

Working Conditions of Domestic Workers and Human Rights Protection: A Socio-Legal Study

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Abstract

Domestic work constitutes one of the largest categories of employment in India, with an estimated 4.75 million domestic workers, predominantly women, Dalits, and migrants, engaged in households across the country. Despite their indispensable economic contribution, domestic workers remain among the most legally invisible and institutionally unprotected categories of workers in the Indian labour market. They operate in private households, beyond the reach of most labour inspection regimes, without written contracts, without guaranteed minimum wages in most States, and without access to social security. This article presents the findings of a socio-legal empirical study conducted among 600 domestic workers in five cities of Odisha, examining the working conditions, the nature and incidence of human rights violations, the awareness of legal protections, and the barriers to accessing grievance redressal mechanisms. The study situates its findings within the framework of the Indian Constitution, relevant labour legislation, the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013, and ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. It documents a pervasive and systematic denial of the most basic labour and human rights and advances a set of rights-based policy recommendations directed at legislators, courts, labour administrators, and civil society organisations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The domestic worker, the woman who sweeps floors before dawn, cooks' meals she will not eat, and cares for children who are not her own, is an invisible pillar of the Indian economy. In millions of middle class and affluent households, domestic workers make possible the professional careers and comfortable lives of their employers. Yet the law has historically treated the private household as a zone exempt from its protective reach, leaving domestic workers exposed to exploitation, abuse, and deprivation that would be plainly unlawful in any other employment setting.

India is home to one of the largest domestic worker populations in the world. The National Sample Survey estimates suggest that domestic work employs between 4 and 50 million persons, depending on the definition adopted. The wide variance in estimates reflects the fundamental problem of invisibility: domestic work is not uniformly defined, is frequently part time or casual, and takes place in private spaces that are structurally resistant to official enumeration. The ILO estimates that women constitute approximately 83 per cent of domestic workers globally, and this feminisation is even more pronounced in India, where social norms confine domestic service almost exclusively to women from the lower castes and economically marginalised communities.

The human rights dimensions of domestic work are acute and multifaceted. Domestic workers are subject to wage theft, physical and emotional abuse, sexual harassment, forced labour conditions, arbitrary dismissal, denial of rest and leave, and the denial of basic dignity in the spaces where they work. They are excluded from most labour protections, including the Employees State Insurance scheme, the Provident Fund, and the organised sector's grievance redressal infrastructure. They lack unions, collective bargaining capacity, or effective institutional advocates in most States.

This study was conducted in five cities of Odisha, namely Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Rourkela, Berhampur, and Sambalpur, with the objective of providing an empirically grounded account of the working conditions of domestic workers and the nature of human rights violations they experience. It also examines the legal and institutional framework for their protection, identifies the gaps in that framework, and proposes a set of concrete policy recommendations grounded in both the empirical findings and comparative international experience.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the legal and normative framework governing domestic work in India and at the international level. Section 3 presents the methodology of the study. Section 4 analyses the socio demographic profile of respondents. Section 5 details the empirical findings on working conditions, violations, and awareness. Section 6 examines institutional mechanisms for redressal. Section 7 provides a comparative perspective. Section 8 discusses the findings and their implications. Section 9 presents policy recommendations, and Section 10 concludes.

2. Legal and Normative Framework

2.1 Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India, in its Preamble, commits to securing to all citizens justice, social, economic and political, and liberty and equality of status. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which the Supreme Court has consistently interpreted to encompass the right to live with dignity. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below 14 years in factories and hazardous employment. The Directive Principles in Articles 39, 41, 42, and 43 impose obligations on the State to ensure equal pay for equal work, just and humane conditions of work, maternity relief, and a living wage.

These constitutional provisions apply to domestic workers in their full force. However, the translation of constitutional guarantees into enforceable statutory rights specific to domestic workers has remained incomplete. The constitutional mandate has not yet been followed by a dedicated Central legislation protecting domestic workers, despite repeated recommendations by parliamentary committees, the National Commission for Women, the National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations over several decades.

2.2 Statutory Protections: An Incomplete Architecture

Several central and State level statutes offer partial, fragmented, and largely unenforced protection to domestic workers. The Minimum Wages Act 1948 permits State governments to schedule domestic work as a scheduled employment attracting minimum wage protection. Several States, including Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, have exercised this power. Odisha has also notified minimum wages for domestic workers. However, compliance is minimal, monitoring is non-existent, and enforcement mechanisms are functionally absent.

The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008 was a landmark recognition of the vulnerability of workers in the informal sector. It mandated the Central and State governments to formulate and implement social security schemes covering life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection, and education for workers outside the organised sector. A decade and a half after its enactment, however, the Act remains largely unimplemented in respect of domestic workers, with registration under the e Shram portal being the primary tangible output, and the benefits linked to registration being minimal and poorly communicated.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 (POSH Act) represented a significant advance in women's labour rights. However, its application to domestic workers is deeply ambiguous. The Act defines the workplace to include any place visited by the employee in connection with her work. Whether a private household constitutes a workplace within this definition has been debated, and the enforcement mechanism of Internal Complaints Committees, which applies to establishments with ten or more employees, is structurally inapplicable to the private household setting.

Table 1: Legal Framework Governing Domestic Workers in India: Provisions and Gaps

Legal Instrument	Key Provision Relevant to Domestic Workers	Limitation / Gap
Minimum Wages Act 1948	Fixes the minimum wage for scheduled employments	Domestic work not uniformly scheduled across all States
Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008	Social security schemes for unorganised workers	Implementation remains poor; registration low
Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013 (POSH)	Protection from sexual harassment at workplace	Home as workplace is ambiguous; enforcement is weak
Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act 1979	Protections for migrant workers, including domestic workers	Rarely enforced; employers are unaware or non-compliant
Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986	Prohibits the employment of children below 14 years	Child domestic workers remain widespread in practice
Code on Wages 2019	Consolidates the minimum wage and payment of wages legislation	Rules yet to be uniformly notified for domestic work
ILO Convention No. 189 (2011)	Decent work for domestic workers; equal rights	India has not ratified; serves as normative standard
NHRC Guidelines on Domestic Workers (2019)	Minimum standards; registration; grievance mechanism	Non-binding; implementation largely absent

Source: Author's compilation from statutory instruments, NHRC guidelines, and ILO documentation.

2.3 International Standards: ILO Convention No. 189

The most comprehensive international standard for domestic worker rights is the ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2011. Convention 189 establishes that domestic workers are entitled to the same basic labour rights as other workers, including minimum wage coverage, limits on hours of work, weekly rest of at least 24 consecutive hours, protection from abuse and harassment, maternity protection, social security, and the right to keep their identity documents. India voted in favour of the Convention at the ILC but has not ratified it. Nonratification does not, however, deprive Convention 189 of normative force as a benchmark for evaluating Indian law and practice.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining a structured household survey with qualitative data collection through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The survey was conducted between January and May 2024 in five cities of Odisha: Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Rourkela, Berhampur, and Sambalpur. These cities were selected as representatives of large metropolitan, medium, and smaller urban centres in the State, thereby capturing the diversity of domestic work contexts across the urban hierarchy. A total of 600 domestic workers were surveyed, with 120 respondents drawn from each city. Respondents were identified through snowball sampling, beginning with contacts provided by domestic workers trade unions, NGOs working with unorganised labour, and community contacts in lower-income residential areas. While snowball sampling limits the statistical generalisability of findings, it is the most feasible approach for reaching a population that is dispersed, mobile, and largely

invisible to official enumeration. A structured questionnaire was administered in Odia and, where necessary, in Hindi, covering socio demographic background, nature of employment, working conditions, wages, leave and rest entitlements, experience of violations, awareness of legal rights, and interaction with any grievance redressal mechanism. The questionnaire was pre tested with 30 respondents in Bhubaneswar and revised before the main survey. Ten trained field investigators with prior experience in labour research were engaged for data collection.

Qualitative data were collected through ten focus group discussions (two per city), each with eight to twelve domestic workers, and twenty key informant interviews with labour inspectors, trade union representatives, NGO workers, DLSA officials, and two employer respondents. All qualitative sessions were audio recorded with participant consent and transcribed before thematic analysis.

4. Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of the 600 respondents reveals the concentrated vulnerability that characterises the domestic worker population in Odisha. Women constitute 85.3 per cent of the survey sample, consistent with the feminisation of domestic work nationally. The modal age group is 26 to 35 years, accounting for 35.2 per cent of respondents, followed by 36 to 45 years at 28 per cent. Scheduled Caste workers constitute the largest caste group at 41.2 per cent, reflecting the intersection of caste and class that structures entry into domestic service. Migrants constitute 54 per cent of respondents, predominantly from districts of western Odisha, including Bolangir, Bargarh, and Nuapada, reflecting the well-documented pattern of distress migration from these areas.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of Domestic Worker Respondents (n = 600)

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	512	85.3
	Male	88	14.7
Age Group	18 25 years	138	23.0
	26 35 years	211	35.2

	36 45 years	168	28.0
	Above 45	83	13.8
Caste	SC	247	41.2
	ST	98	16.3
	OBC	187	31.2
	General	68	11.3
Migrant Status	Migrant	324	54.0
	Non-Migrant	276	46.0
Literacy	Illiterate	162	27.0
	Primary level	243	40.5
	Secondary level	138	23.0
	Above secondary	57	9.5

Source: Primary Survey, 2024.

Literacy levels are low, with 27 per cent of respondents reporting no formal education and 40.5 per cent reporting only primary level schooling. These low literacy levels are directly relevant to rights awareness and advocacy capacity. A worker who cannot read cannot access written information about their legal rights, cannot comprehend a written contract if one is offered, and cannot navigate the written complaint procedures of labour offices or courts.

5. Empirical Findings

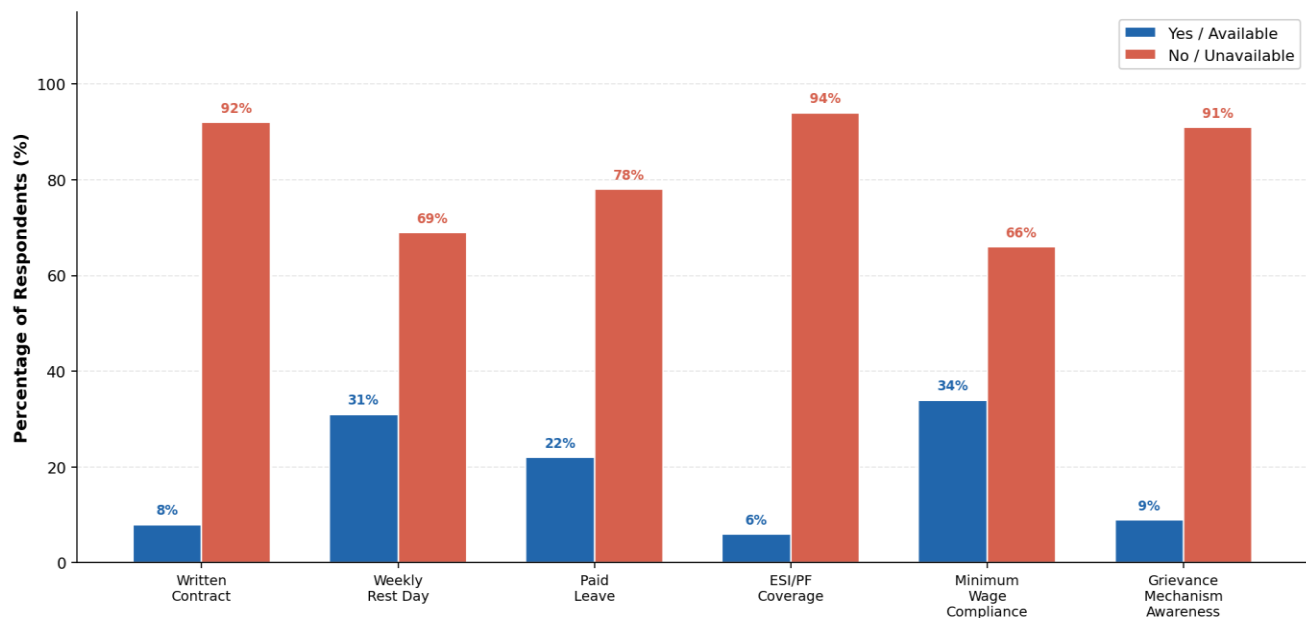
5.1 Working Conditions: A Landscape of Precarity

The survey findings paint a stark picture of the working conditions of domestic workers in Odisha's urban centres. Across virtually every indicator of decent work, the majority of respondents reported conditions falling far below legal and

normative standards. Only 8 per cent of respondents had a written employment contract, confirming that the overwhelming majority of domestic work relationships are governed by entirely verbal arrangements that leave workers with no documentary evidence of their terms of employment, a fundamental vulnerability in any dispute with an employer.

The provision of a weekly rest day, a basic requirement under any standard of decent work, was reported by only 31 per cent of respondents. Paid annual leave, entitlement to which is recognised under the Minimum Wages Act for scheduled employments and under the general principles of labour law, was available to only 22 per cent. Coverage under the Employees' State Insurance scheme or the Provident Fund was reported by a mere 6 per cent of respondents, exposing the remaining 94 per cent to the full financial risk of illness, injury, and old age without any institutional safety net.

Figure 1: Working Condition Indicators among Domestic Workers (Survey, 2024)



5.2 Wages: Systemic Underpayment

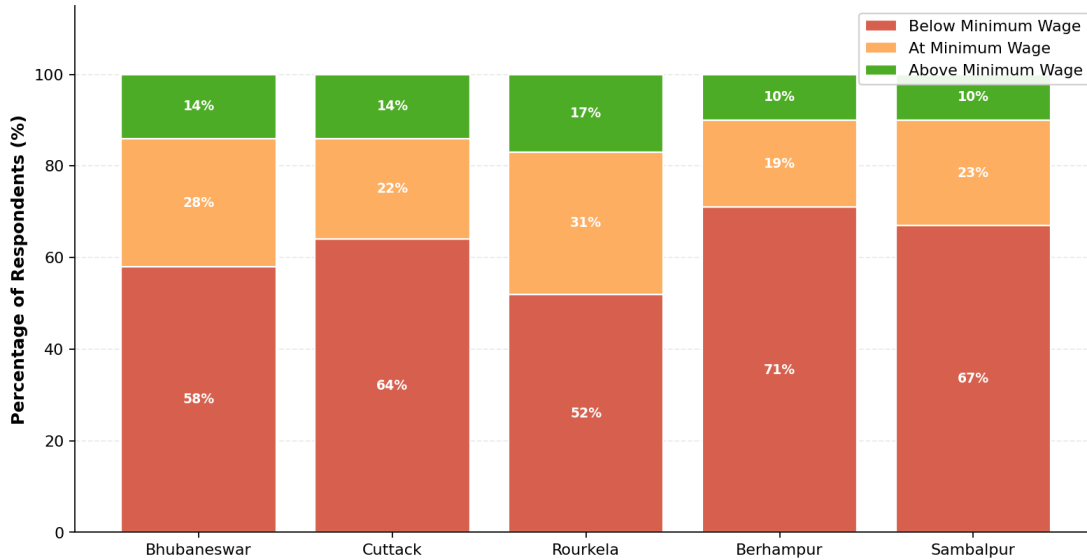
Wage underpayment is the single most pervasive form of economic exploitation experienced by domestic workers in the study. The Government of Odisha has notified minimum wages for domestic workers. However, only 34 per cent of respondents reported receiving wages at or above the applicable

minimum. The remaining 66 per cent were paid below the minimum wage, a straightforward violation of the Minimum Wages Act 1948. In Berhampur, the proportion paid below minimum wage was 71 per cent, and in Nabarangpur it was 67 per cent.

Figure 4 below presents the distribution of wage levels relative to the minimum wage across the five surveyed cities. The data reveal that above minimum wage payment is marginal in all cities and that the majority of workers are systematically underpaid regardless of city size. The wage theft documented in

this study is not incidental: it is a structural feature of an unregulated market in which workers have no documentation to support a wage claim, no union to negotiate on their behalf, and no realistic prospect of enforcement from labour authorities.

Figure 4: Wage Levels of Domestic Workers Relative to Minimum Wage by City



5.3 Human Rights Violations: Nature and Incidence

The study documented a high and alarming incidence of human rights violations across all five cities. Wage theft or underpayment was experienced by 74 per cent of respondents, as noted above. Wrongful or abrupt termination without notice was reported by 49 per cent. Denial of leave entitlements was

experienced by 61 per cent. Verbal or emotional abuse by employers or their family members was reported by 58 per cent of respondents. Physical abuse was reported by 31 per cent and sexual harassment by 22 per cent. Figure 2, the pie chart below, presents the proportional distribution of violation types as identified by the survey.

Figure 2: Types of Human Rights Violations Reported by Domestic Workers

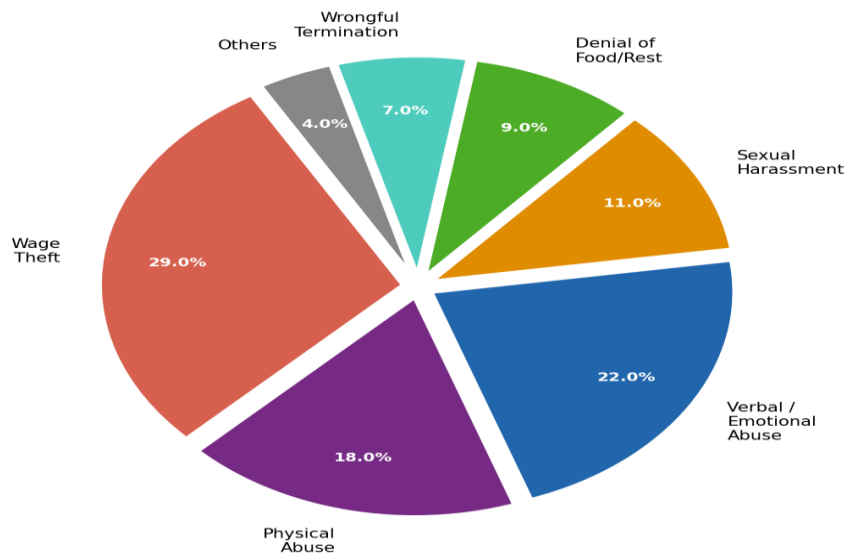


Figure 2: Types of Human Rights Violations Reported by Domestic Workers — Source: Primary Survey, 2024

The qualitative data richly illustrate the quantitative findings. In the FGDs, participants described verbal abuse as normalised and constant: being shouted at, called by caste names, and accused of theft as a matter of routine. Several participants described being denied access to the toilet used by the employer's family and being required to use a separate facility or the street. The practice of employers locking domestic workers in the house while they go out, effectively a form of confinement, was reported by eight respondents across three cities.

The incidence of sexual harassment at 22 per cent is particularly concerning, given the established barriers to its reporting. Only 3 per cent of those who experienced sexual harassment had reported it to any authority. The reasons cited in the qualitative data were consistent: shame, fear of disbelief, fear of losing employment, the absence of any credible and accessible complaint mechanism, and the fundamental power asymmetry between a live in domestic worker and her employer household.

Table 3: Working Conditions Indicators among Domestic Workers (n = 600)

Working Condition Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Remarks
Written employment contract	8	92	Overwhelmingly verbal or none
Weekly rest day provided	31	69	Well below legal norm
Paid annual leave	22	78	Rarely provided
ESI or PF coverage	6	94	Near total exclusion
Access to toilet at workplace	74	26	Basic facilities mostly available
Provision of meals by employer	61	39	Common in live in arrangements
Overtime compensation paid	12	88	Widespread non compliance
Notice before termination given	19	81	Arbitrary dismissal prevalent
Minimum wage compliance	34	66	Majority paid below minimum wage
Awareness of any legal protection	21	79	Critical knowledge deficit

Source: Primary Survey, 2024.

5.4 Experience of Violations and Reporting Behaviour

Table 4: Human Rights Violations Experienced and Reporting Rates among Domestic Workers

Type of Violation	Experienced (%)	Reported (%)	Primary Reason for Non-Reporting
Wage theft or underpayment	74	9	Fear of job loss; no contract proof
Physical abuse by employer	31	7	Fear; social pressure; distrust of police
Verbal or emotional abuse	58	4	Considered normal; no legal remedy known
Sexual harassment	22	3	Shame; fear of disbelief; no support
Denial of food or rest breaks	41	6	Power imbalance; live in dependency
Wrongful or abrupt termination	49	11	No written contract; no recourse known
Denial of leave	61	5	No formal entitlement in their knowledge
Child domestic work (self)	18	2	Normalised; family economic necessity

Source: Primary Survey, 2024. Multiple responses permitted.

striking feature of Table 4 is the catastrophic gap between the incidence of violations and their reporting. Violations experienced by 22 to 74 per cent of respondents are reported at rates of 2 to 11 per cent. This reporting gap is not anomalous; it is a predictable consequence of the structural conditions of domestic work: the absence of written contracts denying workers documentary proof of their terms, the live in character of many arrangements creating existential dependence on the employer, the absence of a union or collective organisation, the inaccessibility of official complaint mechanisms, the social stigma attached to making accusations against employers who are often of higher caste and social status, and the well-founded fear of retaliation in the form of termination and, for migrant workers, the loss of accommodation.

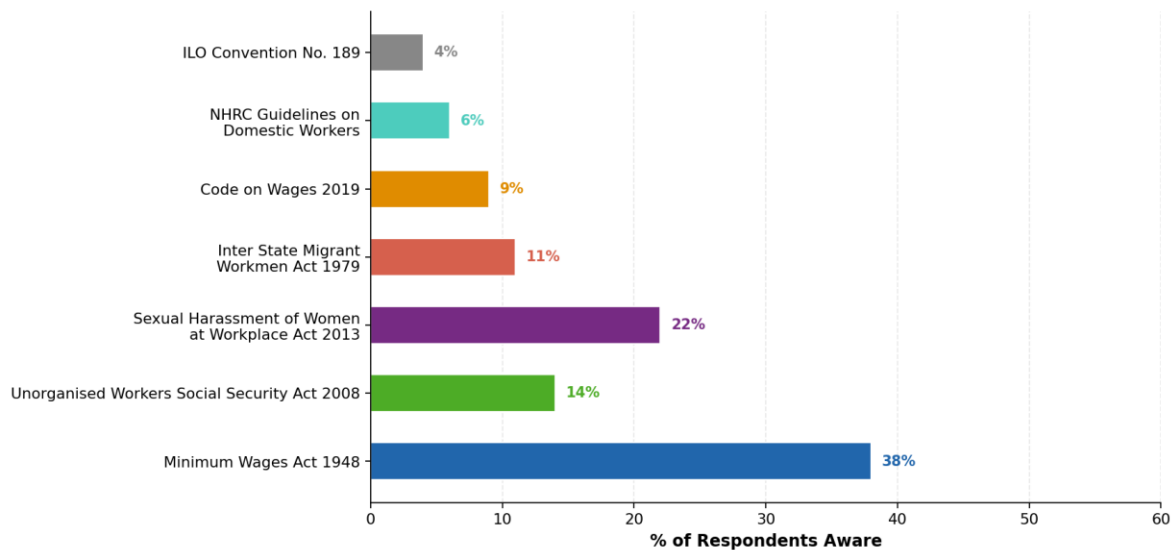
The FGDs consistently confirmed these structural explanations. In Bhubaneswar, one respondent described the dynamic eloquently: 'Where will I go if she throws me out? My children eat because of this job. If I complain, I lose everything. So, I keep quiet and come back tomorrow.' This statement

encapsulates the coercive dependency that characterises the labour relations of domestic work and explains why legal protections that exist on paper are meaningless in the lived experience of the worker.

5.5 Legal Awareness: An Alarming Deficit

The study assessed respondents' awareness of specific legal instruments relevant to their rights. The findings, presented in Figure 3, reveal a legal awareness landscape that is deeply inadequate. The Minimum Wages Act 1948 was the most widely known instrument, cited by 38 per cent of respondents, reflecting the greater public prominence of the minimum wage concept. However, awareness of the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, which is directly relevant to their social security entitlements, was limited to 14 per cent. Awareness of the POSH Act 2013 was found in 22 per cent of respondents, though most of those aware did not know how to file a complaint. Knowledge of the Code on Wages 2019 and ILO Convention No. 189 was minimal.

Figure 3: Awareness of Legal Instruments among Domestic Workers



6. Institutional Mechanisms: Efficacy and Gaps

6.1 Labour Department Enforcement

The Odisha Labour Department is mandated to enforce the Minimum Wages Act and other applicable labour statutes. In principle, a domestic worker who is being paid below minimum wage can file a complaint with the Labour Commissioner's office. In practice, the survey found that fewer than 2 per cent of respondents had ever approached the Labour Department with a complaint, and none had received a satisfactory resolution. Labour inspectors, interviewed in the key informant interviews, acknowledged that they had never inspected a private household and did not perceive inspection of domestic employers as within their practical remit.

This institutional gap is not merely a question of administrative capacity. It reflects a deeper conceptual failure: the legal and administrative apparatus for labour enforcement was designed for the factory and the formal workplace. Its extension to the private household requires not merely resources but a fundamental rethinking of inspection methodology, complaint reception, and enforcement strategy.

6.2 Local Committees under the POSH Act

The POSH Act mandates the constitution of Local Committees at the district level to receive and adjudicate complaints of sexual harassment from women workers in the unorganised sector. In theory, a domestic worker who experiences sexual harassment could file a complaint with the Local Committee of her district. In practice, awareness of Local Committees was virtually absent among survey respondents: only 4 per cent had heard of the Local Committee, and none had ever filed a complaint with one. The key informant interviews with district officers revealed that Local Committees in several of the surveyed cities were either nonfunctional or met only rarely.

6.3 NHRC and SHRC

The NHRC has issued guidelines on the rights of domestic workers, recommending registration, written contracts, minimum wages, and social security coverage. These guidelines are not legally binding and compliance is voluntary. The SHRC has received only a handful of complaints relating to domestic worker rights in recent years, a figure entirely disproportionate to the scale of violations documented by this study. The inaccessibility of the NHRC and SHRC complaint mechanisms to low literacy, low-income domestic workers without legal assistance is the primary explanation for this underutilisation.

6.4 National Legal Services Authority

The NALSA and the State Legal Services Authorities are mandated to provide free legal services to workers in the unorganised sector, who are among the priority categories under the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987. In practice, domestic workers rarely access DLSA services. The key informant interviews revealed that DLSA representatives had not specifically targeted domestic worker communities in their legal literacy camps in any of the five surveyed cities in the year preceding the survey.

7. Comparative Perspective

India's approach to domestic worker rights can be usefully compared with that of other major economies with large domestic worker populations. South Africa enacted the Domestic Workers Amendment Act 2002, which extended the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act to domestic workers, and followed this with specific provisions on written contracts, wage determination, and leave entitlements. South Africa's experience demonstrates that legislative inclusion of domestic workers in standard labour law, while incomplete in its enforcement, significantly improves baseline conditions and creates formal accountability mechanisms.

The Philippines, which is home to a large diaspora of overseas domestic workers as well as a significant internal domestic workforce, enacted the Batas Kasambahay or Republic Act 10361 in 2013, directly inspired by ILO Convention No. 189. The Batas Kasambahay requires written employment contracts, sets minimum wages, mandates social security registration, provides for maternity and rest day entitlements, and prohibits the confiscation of identity documents. Implementation remains uneven but the legal architecture represents a significant advance over the Indian position.

Brazil's constitutional reform of 2013 (Emenda Constitucional 72) extended the full range of constitutional labour rights to domestic workers, who had previously been excluded from several key protections. Brazil's experience of mobilisation by domestic worker organisations, including the historically significant role of the Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenatrad), points to the importance of collective organising as a complement to legislative reform.

Within India, several States have taken steps beyond the Central framework. Maharashtra's Domestic Workers Welfare Board, Karnataka's progressive minimum wage notification and identification card system, and Kerala's Domestic Workers Welfare Fund offer models that the Government of Odisha could adapt and adopt. The Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Construction and Others (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1994 also provides a model of welfare board governance that has demonstrated some efficacy in formalising the conditions of unorganised workers.

8. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study confirm and extend the existing literature on domestic worker vulnerability in India. The combination of low wages, absence of written contracts, social security exclusion, and high incidence of abuse represents a systemic violation of the constitutional promise of dignity, equality, and justice for domestic workers. The constitutional framework, while theoretically sufficient to ground justiciable claims, has failed to translate into the statutory, administrative, and cultural changes necessary for its realisation in the domestic work sector.

The gender dimension is central to this analysis. Domestic work is feminised precisely because it replicates the unpaid care work

that patriarchal social structures assign to women. The devaluation of domestic work as an economic activity is inseparable from the devaluation of women's labour more broadly. A legal and policy framework that treats domestic work as a peripheral or informal concern implicitly endorses this devaluation. A rights-based approach to domestic work must therefore be explicitly feminist, centring the specific vulnerabilities of women workers, including their exposure to sexual harassment, their reproductive health needs, their childcare responsibilities, and the additional power asymmetries created by the live in arrangement.

The caste dimension of domestic work is equally significant. The overwhelming concentration of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe workers in domestic service is not coincidental. It is the product of historical patterns of caste-based labour assignment that have persisted into the post constitutional era. The physical intimacy of domestic work, entering the employer's home and handling their food and clothing, has historically been associated in the caste hierarchy with the impurity attributed to lower castes, creating a social context in which abuse and degradation of domestic workers are naturalised and normalised. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 should in principle apply to caste-based abuse of domestic workers; the survey found that not a single respondent had ever invoked this statute.

The migrant dimension adds a further layer of complexity. Migrant domestic workers, particularly those from western Odisha's distress migration districts, are doubly vulnerable: they have no local social networks to draw upon in a dispute with an employer, they may be entirely dependent on the employer for accommodation, and their precarious position as new arrivals in an unfamiliar city further reinforces their unwillingness to report violations. The Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979, which is directly applicable to many of the migrant domestic workers in this study, is effectively a dead letter.

9. Policy Recommendations

The empirical findings and legal analysis of this study support the following recommendations, directed at the Central Government, the Government of Odisha, judicial authorities, and civil society organisations.

Table 5: Policy Recommendations for Domestic Worker Rights Protection

Area	Recommendation	Responsible Authority
Legislation	Enact a standalone Central Domestic Workers Protection Act guaranteeing minimum wage, leave, rest, and social security	Ministry of Labour and Employment
ILO Ratification	Ratify ILO Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers	Ministry of External Affairs / Labour
Registration	Mandatory registration of all domestic workers and employers through a digital portal linked to e Shram	Labour Department (State / Central)
Social Security	Extend ESIC and EPFO coverage to domestic workers through a simplified registration and contribution mechanism	ESIC / EPFO / NHM
Legal Aid	NALSA to launch a dedicated Domestic Workers Legal Literacy Scheme with paralegal volunteers in all metropolitan and Tier 2 cities	NALSA / DLSA
POSH Extension	Amend the POSH Act 2013 to explicitly include private households as workplaces and create a Local Committee mechanism for domestic workers	Ministry of Women and Child Development

Grievance Redressal	Establish Domestic Workers Welfare Boards in all States with complaint reception, mediation and compensation functions	State Labour Departments
Awareness	Mandatory IEC campaigns in vernacular languages targeting domestic workers and their employers through RWA networks and CSOs	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Source: Author's recommendations based on primary survey findings and comparative analysis.

9.1 Central Legislation: A Domestic Workers Protection Act

The most fundamental requirement is the enactment of a comprehensive Central legislation specifically protecting domestic workers. Despite numerous recommendations, including by the National Commission for Labour in 2002, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in 2009, and the NHRC in 2019, India has yet to enact such legislation. The Act should guarantee: a written employment contract for all domestic workers employed for more than one month; minimum wage protection with an enforcement mechanism adapted to the household setting; mandatory weekly rest and paid leave; social security coverage through a simplified employer contribution mechanism; clear provisions on termination notice and severance; and a protection framework for live in domestic workers including the right to leave the premises and to retain personal documents.

9.2 ILO Convention No. 189 Ratification

India should ratify ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Ratification would not merely create an international legal obligation; it would send a powerful signal of political commitment to domestic worker rights and would engage the ILO's reporting and supervisory mechanisms as additional accountability tools. India's ratification of Convention 189 was recommended by the ILO Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in 2014. A decade later, ratification remains overdue.

9.3 Welfare Boards and Grievance Redressal

In the absence of a Central Act, the Government of Odisha should immediately constitute a Domestic Workers Welfare Board on the model of the Kerala and Karnataka boards. The Board should be tripartite in composition, with representation from domestic worker organisations, employer associations, and the government. Its functions should include the registration of domestic workers and employers, the issuance of identity cards to domestic workers, the maintenance of a welfare fund financed by employer contributions and government grants, the provision of social security benefits including medical care, maternity benefit, and accident compensation, and the reception and mediation of complaints from domestic workers. A dedicated complaint helpline in Odia and other local languages should be established as part of the Board's infrastructure.

10. CONCLUSION

The domestic workers of Odisha's cities are the invisible workforce that sustains the daily lives of lakhs of urban households. They cook and clean and care, often for wages below the legal minimum, without contracts, without leave, without social security, and without protection from the

violence and abuse that the private household too often inflicts upon them. The law, as it exists, has fundamentally failed them. The law, as it should be, would recognise their work as an economic contribution worthy of the full dignity and protection that the Constitution of India promises to every person.

This article has sought to provide an empirically grounded account of that failure and a legally informed map of the path toward its correction. The findings are sobering: systematic wage theft, pervasive abuse, near total exclusion from social security, and a reporting rate that reflects not the rarity of violations but the structural impossibility of seeking redress. These findings are not unique to Odisha; they reflect a national pattern rooted in the legal invisibility of domestic work and the social invisibility of the women, Dalits, and migrants who perform it.

The recommendations advanced in this article are neither utopian nor novel. They have been made before, by parliamentary committees, by the NHRC, by ILO bodies, by civil society, and by domestic workers themselves. What has been absent is the political will to translate recommendations into legislation and legislation into enforcement. The Constitution demands better. The workers demand better. The time for action is not merely urgent; given the decades of documented violation, it is long overdue.

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