INFORMALITY AND THE DOUBLE DAY: THE CASE OF PART-TIME DOMESTIC WORKERS IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all Treaty people.

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ABSTRACT

This MA thesis aims to understand the experiences and perspectives of part-time women care workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It seeks to understand their dual role in social reproduction, a role they take up in other people's homes for pay, and in their own homes under conditions structured by poverty and patriarchy. It particularly focuses on the live-out/part-time domestic workers in Dhaka, who represent an important segment of the informal labor market as they are not included in the country's labor law and face numerous challenges, including discrimination, violence, insecurity, and low wages. Despite these vulnerabilities, many choose domestic work as their primary source of income. Employing feminist political economy, especially social reproduction theory, this thesis aims to understand their paid and unpaid care works in two spheres: in the employers' household, which is their workplace, and in their own household. Through this analysis, this research contributes to the invisible work performed by domestic workers and analyzes the impact of the informal nature of their work on their lives and families, as well as their crucial contribution to the social reproduction of their employers' family members and their own family members. The research attempts to fill the knowledge gap from an anthropological perspective and to challenge prevailing narratives that predominantly focus on violence and overlook the complexity of domestic workers' lives. Additionally, it aims to draw the attention of policymakers, governments, and social scientists to the situation of domestic workers, improving their understanding of the situation of domestic workers' lives and experiences from the workers' perspectives.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED

APA	Any Phone Automation
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BSAF	Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum
DOHS	Defence Officers' Housing Society
DWPWP	Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy
GPA	Grade Point Average
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
ILO	International Labour Organization
IVR	Interactive Voice Recording
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
NGO	Non-Government Organization
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
STC	Save The Children
TK	Taka
$	Canadian Dollar

GLOSSARY

Apa	Elder sister, used to refer to women with less age difference
Basha Bari	Apartment house
Beloon	Rolling pin used to make Roti
Bhabi	Sister-in-law (Brother's wife)
Bhaiya	Brother
Burqa	A kind of outer garment worn by some Muslim women that fully covers the body and sometimes the face
Chuta Bua	Part-time domestic workers
Chuta Kaj	Part-time domestic work
Dhoirjo Dhora	Enduring Patiently
Didi	Elder sister. Usually used to refer to Hindu women
Fokinni	Women Beggers
Grihokormi	Paid Domestic Workers
Grihokormo	Paid Domestic Work
Kachabazar	Produce, fish, and meat market
Kapor Dhowa	Washing clothes
Khala	Maternal Aunt. Also used to call elderly women
Khalamma	Same as Khala, maternal aunt and usually used to call elderly women
Kotabacha	Chopping, sorting, and cleaning vegetables, spices, fish, and meat
Moddhyom	Middle-class
Paratha	Flatbread (made with oil)
Pira	The wood board used to make Roti
Ranna Kora	Cooking
Roti	Flatbread
Shaheb	Respectable middle-class man
Sharee	is a traditional garment worn by women, typically measuring around 10 to 12 feet long, un-stitched fabric.
Thana	Police Station

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This MA thesis aims to understand women domestic workers' daily experience as paid care workers when they work in other people's houses as informal laborers and unpaid care providers in their own households. There are different kinds of paid domestic work in Bangladesh, for example, live-in domestic work, where the worker lives in their employers' houses while working as domestic workers, and live-out domestic work, where workers do not live in their employers' houses. This thesis particularly focuses on the live-out paid domestic workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who represent an important segment in the informal labor market. Informal labor is often defined as work that is not regulated, protected, or taxed by the state and includes self-employment, casual labor, and domestic work (Cross, 2010; ILO, 2015; Millar, 2018; Rajan & Neetha, 2019; Chen & Carre, 2020). That makes workers in the sector vulnerable to precarity and different forms of violence as they are not entitled to any benefits or protection from employers or the government. More than half of the world's employed population works in the informal sector, but that rate is higher in Countries like Bangladesh. According to the Labour Force Survey 2016-2017, 85% of active labor in Bangladesh is engaged in the informal sector (BBS, 2018). Paid domestic work is common in Bangladesh, where low-income workers offer their physical labor to do household chores in middle-income homes. Around 90% of these workers are women and considered workers without an "institutionally certified skill set" (Ashraf, 2016; Mahan & Kamruzzaman, 2016). Opportunities for these women with limited skill sets to find paid work are few and involve low wages, safety concerns, and unequal pay (e.g., brick breaker, street hawkers, construction workers, fisherfolks, etc.); therefore, many

eventually start working as paid domestic workers in other people's homes (Ashraf, 2016). Domestic Workers lack stability, security, regular wages, social protection, and fundamental labor rights or entitlements in South Asian countries (Cross, 2010), like India and Bangladesh. Despite significant contributions to the economies of households, communities, and states, informal labor is repeatedly undervalued, misinterpreted, and stigmatized (Chen & Carre, 2020). In the context of Bangladesh, it is a precarious workforce, even scarce in academic research. This research aims to convey the voice and perspectives of those workers who face structural inequalities on a daily basis yet continue their work, developing pragmatism and resistance. They are an essential contributor to Bangladesh's changing economy and important agents of social change both as informal laborers and care providers.

In the Bangladeshi context, only 36% of women participate in the labor force compared to 80% of men who are actively engaged in the labor force (BBS, 2018), with nearly 92% of them engaged in the informal labor sector (Bidisha et al., 2022). This low participation is influenced by prevailing patriarchal social norms where reproductive and care roles in the family are considered the primary role of women (Islam & Sharma, 2022; Heintz et al., 2018). For example, due to women's reproductive roles, they face obligations (these can be direct or indirect, self-imposed, or imposed by family members, the community, and society) to balance their care work and employment. Several factors influence their decision-making regarding livelihood, including education and wage rates (Khandaker, 1987, as cited in Heintz et al., 2018). In another study, Heintz, Kabeer, and Mahmud (2018) identified patriarchy, including patrilineal inheritance, purdah norms, and the loss of women's economic contributions after marriage, as key reasons for women's exclusion

from the labor market in Bangladesh. Consequently, women were perceived as economic burdens, heavily dependent on male family members. Only women from impoverished households, where men are absent or unable to play the role of breadwinners, were compelled to seek employment outside their homes (Mahan & Kamruzzaman, 2016). Most of these women found work as domestic wage laborers in wealthier households within their communities, undertaking tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and post-harvest crop processing. In many cases, these women migrate to Dhaka or other big cities from various parts of Bangladesh, primarily rural areas, with or without a family member, in search of livelihood opportunities crucial for their household's survival (Ashraf et al., 2019). The scenario could vary in formal and informal employment in Bangladesh since women employed in the formal sector may have access to resources such as paid daycare services and the ability to hire a care provider for their children and family. Whereas, women employed in informal labor, such as paid domestic workers, often lack the financial capacity and resources to seek and buy care services for their children and families.

These women domestic workers must play the care roles in their families and communities in addition to earning a wage. The reproductive care role that they play in their households is historically, politically, and economically unrecognized as work (as feminist scholars have revealed) (Ghorayshi & BéLanger, 1996) but shapes their role as wage workers. For instance, it influences the decisions they make about how they earn a living. This study engages with feminist political economy, especially social reproduction theory, to understand the participation of women in the informal sector and their role as unpaid care workers in their households.

Research Aims

The abuse, exploitation, and violence these workers face in their workplaces as domestic workers have been discussed in the media, by civil society organizations, and, to some extent, in the academic literature (see Ashraf, 2016; Ghosh, 2021; Mahmuda & Rahman, 2023). The government has been urged to take legislative action to regulate the sector and protect domestic workers. Media reports[1] and civil society reports (see BILS, 2015; dnet, 2023; ASK & STC, 2010) have addressed the complexities of the sector – the private household nature of the workplace – that hinder the implementation of regulatory measures (ASK & STC, 2010; Ashraf, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2019; Ghosh, 2021). There is a significant gap in addressing the complexities of the workplace in sociological and anthropological scholarship of work on this type of labor in the context of Bangladesh. Therefore, I have conducted anthropological research on paid domestic work and the workers' unpaid care role in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The key objective is to understand the everyday lives and experiences of paid domestic workers. However, this study also considers the regulatory aspect of domestic work, recognizing its strong impact on their work experiences and lives. The emphasis is on the complexities of their work as it takes place in the private houses of employers. I also explore how their workplace experiences affect other aspects of my

[1] National daily newspaper, The Daily Star, reports on October 3, 2023, "21pc [percent] of housemaids face physical abuse, says BILS study." The report also states that 67 percent of domestic workers face mental torture, and 61 percent are verbally harassed.
Another national daily, Dhaka Tribune, reports on February 26, 2024, "Torture of domestic workers: Why do cases end midway?". Dhaka Tribune also published a series of reports on the case of a child domestic worker's death at her employer's house on February 06, 2024 ("Death of Preeti Urang: Daily Star terminates former Executive Editor Ashfaqul Haque" on April 02, 2024. "Death of domestic help: Case report against journo, wife deferred to May 16" published on April 17, 2024. "Eminent citizens allege cover-up in case filed over Preeti Urang's death" published on April 25, 2024. "Death of Preeti Urang: Civil society demands fair, impartial investigation" published on May 15, 2024).
The Business Standard reported on December 20, 2020, "Protecting domestic workers' rights is uncertain without a law".

participants' lives, considering the broader debates on gender and class-based inequalities in the informal sector as well as the patriarchal social norms of the reproductive role.

To engage with women domestic workers' daily experience as paid care workers in other people's houses and unpaid care providers in their own households, this thesis focuses on the live-out domestic workers of Dhaka city. It aims to examine two broad questions: 1) How do live-out domestic workers experience paid domestic work in private households of their employers? and 2) how does the role of paid domestic work shape their understanding of the care work they do in their own homes? Within these two broad questions, I investigate how and why women start working as domestic workers. What are their jobs, and what do their work and work conditions look like? What are the skills they need and bring to their work? How are their relationships with their employers? How do they manage working under multiple employers, and how does that affect their relationships with their employers? How do they manage their unpaid care work at home? How do they manage their childcare responsibilities? What differences do they experience in their paid and unpaid care roles? How does their paid care work role contribute to their family? Moreover, what are their views on their lives, their aspirations, and their aspirations for their children?

Bangladesh and Domestic Workers

Bangladesh is a riverine country[2] located in South Asia. The country covers a total area of 147,570 square kilometers (BBS, 2022). It shares borders with India to the west,

[2] Bangladesh is often called a riverine country due to its hundreds of rivers (approximately seven hundred including tributaries), including four mighty rivers named Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, and Brahmaputra (see Alam, 2021). William Van Schendel (2010) shows in his book 'A History of Bangladesh' how these rivers play a critical, formative, and destructive role in people's lives in the country.

north, and northeast, and a tiny border with Myanmar to the southeast. To the south, Bangladesh is bounded by the Bay of Bengal. The capital of the country is Dhaka, which is in the center. It has eight administrative divisions (Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet, Rangpur, and Mymensingh) and sixty-four districts (Chowdhury, 2024). The following Google Earth Map shows the geographical location of Bangladesh (bordered in red) within the South Asian region.

Figure 1: Geographical Position of Bangladesh in South Asia in Google Maps. (Source: Google Map Data)

Bangladesh experienced a prolonged period of colonial rule that significantly influenced its culture, politics, economy, and all other aspects as an independent nation. The land now known as Bangladesh was colonized by the Mughals from 1576 to 1757 and was part of the Bengal region in the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Before Mughal rule, the Bengal region was ruled by Buddhists and later Hindus. Subsequently, the Bengal region came under British colonial rule until 1947; in this period, it was referred to as East Bengal. Following World War II, the British colonial period ended, and the subcontinent was partitioned based on religion in 1947, creating two independent

nations: India, with a Hindu majority, and Pakistan, with a Muslim majority. Due to its Muslim population, East Bengal became part of Pakistan and was officially designated as East Pakistan under West Pakistani rule after the partition (see Schendel, 2010). Finally, Bangladesh[3] achieved independence in 1971 after a nine-month-long brutal war with Pakistan, officially becoming an independent nation as the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

When the country finally achieved its independence, having gone through a long period of discrimination based on religion, language, social classification, and economic deprivation, it was devastated and left with a ruined economy which was mockingly referred to as a bottomless basket. Emerging as one of the poorest countries in the world, the nation started its constitutional journey with four pillars: Nationalism, Secularism, Democracy, and Socialism. However, the constitution was later amended. Islam was introduced in 1977 (White, 1992) and was declared the state religion in 1988 (Nazneen, 1995) based on the Muslim majority population (then 85%). Therefore, Islam plays a significant role in Bangladeshi society (Chowdhury, 2009), particularly in shaping gender relationships[4].

Gendered Social Norms in Bangladesh

The gendered social norms in Bangladesh are governed by patriarchy (Bridges et al., 2011) and shaped by religious beliefs and cultural practices (Adams, 2015). While

[3] Bangladesh comprises two words: 'Bangla' (the language of its people) as of Bengal and 'Desh' as of land or country, meaning 'Land of Bengali speakers' or 'Country of Bengali speakers.'
[4] Although Chowdhury (2009) argues that it is a misinterpretation of religion by men. Given the scope of this paper, I am not furthering that argument here.

defining patriarchy[5], Lata et al. (2020b) recognize the difficulty of separating patriarchy from religion in the Bangladeshi context because men often use religious norms to dominate women, and patriarchal authority is frequently expressed through religious values (Nazneen, 1995). Men hold power over women and resources, whereas women depend on men for economic needs and social protection and remain under the guardianship of male member(s) of the family (Kabeer, 2000). Thus, an unequal, dependent relationship between men and women is prevalent in Bangladeshi society despite the constitution of the country giving equal rights to both. Sarah White (1992) argues that in Bangladeshi society and the state, women are seen as mothers and primarily responsible for biological reproduction (p. 13). In this view, women belong inside the home (private sphere) and manage the domestic realm, whereas men are responsible for the outside roles (public sphere), managing the economy and politics. This access to resources, power, and the public sphere makes men the decision-makers in both spheres, outside and inside the household, while women are the insiders and highly dependent on men for economic security as well as for social status and recognition (Bridges et al., 2011; Kabeer, 2000).

This identification and positionality of women, deeply influenced by the 'Purdah' (seclusion of women) institution (Kabeer, 2000; White, 1992), is a significant aspect to consider. As Chen (1986) explains:

> The term purdah (veil) is used figuratively to mean the veiled seclusion of women. Purdah norms refer to accepted and non-accepted female behaviors and can be seen

[5] Lata et al. (2020b) defines patriarchy as, "Although patriarchy has been variously defined, for the purpose of this article, we use the term "patriarchy" to refer to social and religious arrangements that privilege Muslim men as a group to dominate Muslim women as a group, both structurally and ideologically" (p.2)

> as visible and invisible norms. […] In the narrowest sense and visible form, "purdah involves the seclusion of women within the four walls of their homes and the veiling of women when they move outside their homes." In a broader sense, "purdah involves the exclusion of women from the public—'male' sphere of economic, social, and political life" (Chen, cited in Lata et al., 2020: 322)

In Bangladesh, women are expected to dress and behave modestly in public regardless of religious identity. Although many Muslim women wear 'Burqa' to maintain strict purdah, this practice has not been mandatory in the country. Instead, Purdah has been practiced differently by women of different ages and social statuses. Scholars argue that purdah impacts women's participation in the labor market (Bridges et al., 2011). As White (1992) points out, the gender division of labor in Bangladesh is grounded in values of honor and modesty or shame, which the purdah institution imposes by idealizing female seclusion. That restricts and limits women's mobility, thus access to education, markets, productive services, health care, and local government (Heitzman & Worden, 1989; Kabeer, 2000). Considering the poverty situation[6], the exclusion of women from the labor force of the newly formed Bangladesh negatively impacted the country's economy. Initially, foreign aid made economic recovery possible, which was critical to women's invisible position under the Purdah institution as Western donors were concerned about women's socio-economic exclusion (see White, 1992). However, the purdah culture has been negotiated in many ways, especially by women from poor families, where extreme poverty means, they can no longer afford to maintain purdah and stay at home. Instead, women's participation in the labor force has been taken as a

[6] "According to the FY 1986 Household Expenditure Survey conducted by the Ministry of Planning's Bureau of Statistics, 47 percent of the rural population was below the poverty line, with about 62 percent of the poor remaining in extreme poverty" (Heitzman & Worden, 1989, p. 62)

strategy for moving out of extreme poverty (Bridges et al., 2011; Chakrabarty & Chakrabarty, 2015). Women's access to labor force participation has increased significantly with the growth of the Ready-Made Garments industry after the 1980s, significantly employing women workers from all around the country, especially women from poor families.

Socio-economic conditions

Bangladesh is a small country, considering its geographical size, but it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world (Schendel, 2010). The total population is over 165 million people, with a population density of 1,119 per square kilometer (BBS, 2022). The majority of people live in rural areas. Around 80% of Bangladeshis are estimated to have lived in rural areas before 2000 (Heitzman & Worden, 1989), but urbanization has been growing since then. Bengali is the major ethnic group, comprising 98% of the country's population; more than 90% are Muslim (Samad, 2015), and *Bangla* (Bengali) is the official language.

Family and kinship are considered the core of social life in Bangladeshi society; social stratification is mainly based on wealth, education, and occupation; however, the family's cultural and political lineage can play a vital role in determining the class of certain families and individuals (Heitzman & Worden, 1989). Since gaining independence, the Bangladeshi state and society have undergone a significant transformation. This period has been marked by the emergence of capitalism in the agrarian economy, increased rural-to-urban migration, and the growth of the informal sector (Afsar, 2003). Additionally, the current state formation results from colonial rule and the influence of neoliberal economic policies

(Mondal, 2014). Lipon Kumar Mondal (2014) offers a critical analysis of the contemporary class structure of Bangladesh in the article, "Social Formation in Bangladesh: An Essay on The Political Economy of State, Class and Capitalism". Analyzing Marx's asiatic mode of production to understand the social class and economy of the Indian subcontinent, Mondal suggests that the socioeconomic structure, the contemporary state-class relationship, and the nature of capitalism in Bangladesh still reflect elements of the asiatic pode of Production, particularly in terms of state control and the lack of a fully developed capitalist class.[7] Drawing from Marx's asiatic mode of production, Mondal analyzes eleven class categories present in the current Bangladeshi context based on the sources of income and means of income (2014, p. 362 – 363). Considering the scope of this research, I do not elaborate on or analyze the class categories. However, I found all the class categories important to understanding the social hierarchy my study population faces and belongs to. The first Category is the Metropolitan Industrial/Finance Bourgeoisie class: this class derives its income from profits and stocks and owns the means of production. This class includes corporate businessmen, RMG owners, bankers, and real estate businessmen. The second category is the Metropolitan Comprador Bourgeois class: This group's income comes from rent and interest, and their means of income include projects, grants, foreign aid, bribes, and donations. Civil bureaucrats, poverty managers, and NGO owners are examples of this class. The third category is the Metropolitan National Bourgeois class. Like the Industrial/Finance Bourgeoisie class, their income is derived from profit through

[7] Citing Marx (1859), Mondal explains, "It is evident that hydraulic economy, despotic government, rigid caste system and the absence of private property were the main characteristics of Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) which now pose major challenges to the rise of capitalism in Asia, especially in India. […] Marx's notion of societal typologies can be applied to Bangladesh to understand the issue of social formation." (2014, p. 346 – 347)

ownership of production. Owners of garment factories (small factories compared to the large corporate RMGs) and investors in pharmaceuticals fall into this category. The fourth category is the Metropolitan Lumpen Bourgeois class: Their income is derived from rent and interest, and their means of income involve exploitation and plundering. Politicians, land grabbers, and corrupt professionals are examples of this class. The fifth category is the Petit Bourgeois class: This class earns income from salaries through elite jobs. Civil bureaucrats, professionals, and intellectuals are part of this class. The sixth category is the Lumpen Petit Bourgeoisie class: This class is associated with the Metropolitan Lumpen Bourgeois class and earns income from rent and interest through their association. Brokers, lobbyists, and a fraction of civil society belong to this class. The seventh category is the Lumpen Proletariat: Their source of income is contractual pay, and their means of income involve criminal activities such as killing and extortion. Musclemen, touts, and terrorists are examples of this class. The eighth category is the Landlord class: This class derives income from the rent of the land they own. Metropolitan businessmen, politicians, and local landowners are examples of this class. The ninth category is the Farmer/Peasant class. Their income is derived from wages, and their means of income involve labor. Small or medium landowners (most of them are in the rural area) are examples of this class. The tenth category is the Worker/Proletariat Class. Their income comes from wage labor, and their means of income involve employment as non-owners. Day laborers, industrial workers, construction workers, and agricultural laborers belong to this class. The final category is the Landless Wage Labor Class. Their income is from wage labor, and their means of income involve employment as non-owners. Urban poor such as slum dwellers and street dwellers, as well as rural poor like sharecroppers and nomads, belong to this

class. The businessman-politician class belonging to the upper and middle classes dominates and suppresses other classes, which are the key elements of shaping the country's socio-economic class structure. Although the lower classes (especially the lower two categories) are the majority in number, they mostly belong under the poverty line (Mondal, 2014, p. 364). This class category significantly impacts people's lives regarding access to education, healthcare, and other economic and political spheres.

Despite having gone through significant economic challenges since its independence, over the past five decades, Bangladesh has made substantial progress in reducing poverty by strengthening its economy, emerging as South Asia's second-largest economy (The Daily Star, 8 January 2019). Numerous factors have contributed to the country's rapid economic growth. This features a significant demographic dividend, robust ready-made garment (RMG) exports, sustained remittance inflows, and stable macroeconomic circumstances that have supported rapid economic growth over the last two decades (The World Bank, 2023). However, despite experiencing significant economic growth, the country has been grappling with high social inequality and unequal labor force participation.

Labor force participation

According to the Labour Force Survey of 2016-17 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2018), the country's labor force comprises approximately sixty million people. As previously noted, 80.5% of men participate in the labor force, while only 36.3% of women are in the workforce. The lower participation of women is explained as the result of the existing patriarchal social norms shaped by religion (Heintz et al., 2018; Bridges et al., 2011). Most of the workforce is employed in the agriculture

sector (40.6%), followed by the service sector (39.5%), with the smallest proportion in industry (20.4%). However, all three major sectors heavily rely on informal labor arrangements, with 85% of workers engaged in informal employment. The nature of informal work varies significantly across economic sectors, with 95.4 percent of overall employment in the agriculture sector being informal, followed by 89.9 percent in the industry sector and 71.8 percent in the service sector. Among the workforce, 91% of female and 82.1% of male laborers are employed in informal employment.

Paid Domestic Workers

The unequal labour force participation data (based on gender) sheds light on the prevailing labor dynamics in Bangladesh and lays the groundwork for understanding the circumstances of domestic workers in the country. According to an ILO report, around four million people are estimated to be employed as domestic workers in Bangladesh (ILO, 2006, cited in Ashraf et al., 2019). Although men also work as domestic workers, evidently holding more skilled positions like gardening, driving, and guarding, this sector is heavily feminized (Ghosh, 2021). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) report of 2015, globally 80% of domestic workers are women and girls (ILO, 2015, cited in Ghosh, 2021). The scenario is quite similar in Bangladesh. Where, poverty pushes women and girls to migrate from rural areas to cities and start working as paid domestic workers (Ashraf et al., 2019).

Bangladesh government has defined domestic work and workers in the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015, in the following terms:

> **Domestic work ("*Grihokormo*")** refers to cooking and assisting with cooking, shopping, cleaning the house or premises, arranging and organizing the house

and other household tasks typically recognized as domestic work. Additionally, it encompasses washing clothes, looking after, and caring for children, the sick, pregnant women, the elderly, or disabled individuals in the household. However, activities related to the employer's business or profit-making ventures are not considered part of this work (MoLE, 2016; p. 45, My translation).

Domestic worker (*"Grihokormi"*) refers to such an individual(s) who perform the household task(s) in an employer's house based on a verbal or written contract and works part-time or full-time basis. In this regard, Mess or Dormitories will also be considered as household (MoLE, 2016; p. 45, My Translation).

Domestic workers are mainly classified into two groups: live-in and live-out. Workers who live in their employers' homes provide diverse services, including cleaning, cooking, and caring for young children and the elderly, and work full-time. These domestic workers typically lack fixed working hours and assigned tasks. On the other hand, as we will see in the following chapters, live-out domestic workers do not live with their employers, work part-time jobs for single or multiple employers, and are contracted verbally for specific tasks and paid accordingly. Despite working more than 8 hours across multiple employers, they are considered part-time because they work for a few hours under each employer. The traditional recruitment arrangements are through parents, relatives, neighbors, and peer domestic workers (Ashraf et al., 2019) based on a verbal contract. However, civil society organizations and private companies have recently taken some initiatives to facilitate a more formal recruitment process. As of the time of writing, no empirical studies are available that critically analyze the effectiveness of the initiatives.

Domestic worker recruitment through private companies

The recruitment process of domestic workers through recruitment agencies is very recent in Bangladesh (Ashraf et al., 2019), and most workers are recruited traditionally. I had experience working with one such recruitment company named Hellotask while working on a project focused on domestic workers in Bangladesh. Based on that experience, I found it relevant to learn about the recently developed online recruitment agencies. Surprisingly, I found several private companies and civil society organizations' initiatives working as recruitment agents/companies/platforms in Dhaka, Bangladesh. These companies include Sheba Platform Limited, Sulekha, Sohokari Dot Com, and Bangladesh Maid Agency. Several civil society initiatives are implemented by Nari Maitree, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), and BRAC (formally known as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, an international development organization based in Bangladesh). It would have been beneficial to discuss in detail the private and non-profit initiatives that are opening a new form of domestic work service in Bangladesh. However, considering the scope of this paper, I only discuss one company that has been working for the last seven years and with which some of the research participants have experience working.

Hellotask Platform Limited is a mobile app launched by two brothers in 2017 in Dhaka city to offer instant hourly domestic worker service to the city's residents. They developed an Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) technology named “Computer APA” (Any Phone Automation), addressing a common cultural practice of calling adult women ‘Apa,’ which means sister, commonly practiced showing respect to women. The platform currently provides domestic worker services in four areas of Dhaka city:

Dhanmondi, Mirpur DOHS, Basundhara, and Uttara. They have developed a mobile app that offers three services through the app: instant maid, package, and prebook.

The instant maid service is a one-time request that can be ordered for a certain number of hours, from one to eight hours a day. The payment is fixed based on the number of hours the service is requested. If a customer (employer) takes instant maid service daily, an available registered domestic worker in the nearby area is assigned to complete the request. This service does not guarantee that the customer will get service from the same domestic worker or that the domestic worker will be sent to the same customer's house. The package service is monthly and can be one hour to eight hours of service requests for a month. For example, when a customer requests a three-hour package service for a month, the customer will have to pay the service fee for the whole month in advance and then be assigned a registered domestic worker for the entire month. To renew the service, the customer must pay for the next month in advance to confirm the renewal. Usually, if the customer does not request the replacement of the domestic worker and if the domestic worker does want to continue working in the same customer's household, then the arrangement remains the same in case of renewal of the package service. The pre-booking service allows customers to order instant maid service in advance for a specific day.

These emerging private companies, which use digital platforms like mobile apps and social media, play a crucial role in the country's gig economy and are transforming domestic work from highly informal to a, to some extent, formal platform. These transformations can play a positive role in the workers' experiences (as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five), as well as creating different kinds of inequality in the sector.

For example, they may add another layer of power hierarchy when the company capitalizes on customer satisfaction through exploiting workers. Therefore, empirical research is needed to understand the effectiveness of these companies and initiatives, especially from a feminist political economy perspective.

Literature on paid domestic work in Bangladesh

The available literature on paid domestic work is heavily focused on vulnerable working conditions, the legal status of domestic workers, and policy advocacy initiatives (Ashraf, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2019). The literature on vulnerable workers agrees that in developing countries like Bangladesh, paid domestic work is provided by rural migrants who move to the urban centers to find employment (ASK & STC, 2010; Chodhuary et al., 2013; Ashraf, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2019). The studies find that several push and pull factors lie behind such migration: poverty and limited livelihood options for women and children in rural areas are identified as significant.

This literature describes paid domestic work in broad strokes in the Bangladeshi context. The existing literature often refers to domestic workers as ‘domestic help’ and ‘domestic servant’ and their jobs as ‘domestic service’ and ‘household work’ (ASK & STC, 2010; BILS, 2015), but studies after the reformation of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015 (DWPWP) refer to domestic work in terms of the definition provided in the policy as quoted previously (Ashraf, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2019; Ghosh, 2021).

Some studies focus on child domestic workers. Many children are employed in this sector, often as live-in, full-time domestic workers starting at the age of six (ASK &

STC, 2010; Chodhuary et al., 2013). According to the ILO 2006 report of the Dhaka office, an estimated 421,486 child domestic workers worked in Bangladesh in 2005; 78% were girls, and 94% were full-time workers (ILO, 2006, p. 9). The cause of this vast child labor in this sector is identified as extreme poverty in the family, which puts the family in a position where they do not have any other options to feed their children except sending them to work in other people's houses (ASK & STC, 2010).

A considerable literature focuses explicitly on abuse and violence against domestic workers (ASK & STC, 2010; BILS, 2015; Mohajon, 2014). This gender distinction implies gender-based and sexual violence against these workers. Ghosh (2021) addresses verbal, physical, and sexual violence as pervasive in her study, connecting it to the feudal mindset of a rigid patriarchal society, which can be attributed to the violence against the workers in this sector. Violence against domestic workers is the most common concern in academic work and media reports; it is important to note that very few of the cases are reported officially. Apart from the significant DWPWP 2015 policy reform, the government has not taken many steps to improve working conditions for domestic workers.

The second category of literature focuses on the legal status of domestic workers in the country and related policy advocacy. In this part of the literature review, I draw attention to some significant works by Ashraf (2016), Rahim and Islam (2018), Ashraf et al. (2019), and Ghosh (2021). While examining domestic workers' legal status, the studies focused on the Domestic Servants' Registration Ordinance 1969, The Bangladesh Labour (Amended) Act, 2013, and the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy,

2015, as these laws and policies address domestic workers. The 1969 Ordinance appears to grant no rights to domestic workers and fails to outline the legal obligations and conduct expected of their employers (Adam-Badr, 2010, as cited in Ashraf, 2016, p. 13). Rahim and Islam (2018) highlight the limitations of this ordinance by pointing out that while the ordinance mandates that domestic workers self-register at the local police station within 15 days of starting employment, this requirement is, in theory, only enforced at five police stations in metropolitan Dhaka City. There are also critiques of this ordinance. One is that it is designed to protect employers from offenses committed by domestic workers without providing any recourse for workers facing abusive and harsh working conditions. Another criticism is that the ordinance has become largely irrelevant as domestic worker registration is virtually nonexistent in the country, including Dhaka City (Ashraf, 2016; Rahim & Islam, 2018), which remains the same in current days as well.

Domestic workers are not included in the Bangladesh Labour (Amended) Act, 2013, the only law that addresses all labour-related issues in the country enacted in 2006 (Rahim & Islam, 2018). Article 1 (4) (o) of the 2006 Labour Act (which remains the same in the 2013 amendment) explicitly states that the act does not cover domestic workers. Ashraf highlights that this situation is not unique to Bangladesh. A global study shows that only 10 percent of domestic workers worldwide are protected by general labor laws, while another 30 percent are entirely excluded from national labor laws (ILO, 2013, cited in Ashraf, 2016). The main reason for this exclusionary policy is that most domestic workers work in their employers' private homes, making it complicated and difficult for public inspectors to enter and enforce compliance with labor laws. The consequences of

such exclusion of domestic workers from labour laws are vast. It weakens the position of domestic workers compared to other workers (Ashraf et al., 2019). In Bangladesh's case, such exclusion resulted in the Minimum Wage Board not being authorized to handle issues concerning domestic workers and exclusion from maternity benefits, including 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, which formal sector workers can avail themselves of (Rahim & Islam, 2018; Ghosh, 2021).

I identify several gaps in these studies where the complex nature of employers' private homes (given that workers are isolated while working alone in employers' houses or with few more workers and difficult to monitor the working conditions by inspectors or others), which serve as the workplace for domestic workers, has not been explicitly addressed. The workers' experiences and conditions are primarily presented through quantitative and statistical representations heavily focusing on their vulnerability, abuse, and violence (see Ashraf et al., 2019), which may overlook the workers' understanding of those experiences as well as their strategies to overcome such challenges. Therefore, this study focuses on the workers' voices to better understand their working conditions and experiences. In doing so, along with examining their vulnerable working conditions and addressing legal issues, the study also highlights these workers' strength, resistance, and resilience. That underscores this sector's existence, expansion, and transformation over time, recognizing domestic workers as a significant part of the informal labor sector, economy, and society.

It is worth noting that no anthropological or sociological qualitative research has been done on paid domestic workers in Bangladesh that addresses the workers' perspective.

This research aims to fill this gap in the anthropological work on paid domestic workers in Bangladesh by understanding this sector in detail from the perspective of its workers. By sharing their stories, this research aims to generate new insights and draw the government's and policymakers' attention, potentially leading to policy changes that can improve the lives of these workers.

Global perspectives on domestic workers

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars primarily focused on addressing the issue of unpaid domestic work and its relationship to production, mainly focused on societies in the global North. Marxist feminists argue that domestic labor generates a crucial commodity for capitalism: labor power (Anderson, 2000). This type of labor, being reproductive, mental, emotional, and physical, produces the current and future generations of workers (MacDonald, 2006). However, contemporary feminist discourse has shifted its focus towards paid domestic labor performed in other people's homes, and this body of literature is being produced across both the North and South (Constable, 1997; Ray & Qayum, 2009; Wilks, 2018).

From a historical account, most works on domestic service are studied in North America and Western Europe. Addressing the connection with slavery from the ancient period, these studies highlight the significant contributions of women servants as a 'modern workforce' (Steedman, 2009), the modernization of domestic service, and the intersection of race, class, and immigration in this sector (Glenn, 1986; Palmer, 1989). Judith Rollins's (1985), work *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers*, is quite an old work but it seems still relevant in studying domestic workers, particularly in the

context of this current research. It presents a rich historical account of domestic service in different parts of the world:

> This survey of domestic service throughout history reveals a picture of a chameleon-like occupation, changing its size, role, and composition in relation to changes in the larger political and economic spheres of the society. But, grounded in stratification, it was always low in the class hierarchy, always composed of people considered inferior (by virtue of their unfree status, their gender, their geographic origins, their lower-class backgrounds, and/or their caste, race, or ethnicity), and always held in the lowest esteem by the overall society, including the domestics themselves. The fact that domestic service is one of the two forms of work historically accepted as "women's work" (the other being prostitution), that it has an ancient and modern association with slavery and is manual and dirtying, makes this occupation one universally and those who do it universally dehumanized. (Rollins, 1985, pp. 58 – 59).

Phyllis M. Palmer (1989) outlines how, following World War I, white, middle-class housewives hired poor black women for low-wage domestic service and reduced their own reproductive duties. Thus, the class status becomes particularly significant when the employer does not engage in work outside the home (Ray & Qayum, 2009). Employers usually designate domestic workers as their "doubles" but give them household tasks they would not undertake, or their "double" can not give them any work, thus devaluing the work (Anderson, 2000, p. 16). Employing a domestic worker implies that the employer has more pressing responsibilities while hiring migrant workers or those from different ethnic, religious, social, or caste backgrounds perpetuates stereotypes that suggest these groups are inherently suited for servitude. This perpetuation of stereotypes

serves to justify offering low wages and maintaining poor working conditions (Anderson, 2000; Rollins, 1985).

Unpaid domestic work

Bridget Anderson (2000) highlights the challenges in defining domestic work, particularly concerning the tasks involved which is very much relevant for my current study. Citing Glazer-Malbin (1976), Anderson illustrates how a single domestic task, such as 'shopping,' encompasses a range of associated activities, including making a list, going to the market, and making purchases, all while simultaneously performing other tasks like taking a child to school en route to the market and caring for a child while cooking. Anderson emphasizes the perception of domestic work as a 'series of processes' involving intricately linked tasks while stressing that it represents more than the sum of its parts. She argues that domestic work is not merely physical labor but highly skilled management work requiring adept time management and task completion. Thus, Anderson asserts that a 'housewife' has a dual role as both manager and laborer (Anderson, 2000, p. 11).

Domestic work is understood as 'reproductive work,' necessary for the social reproduction of labor and human beings. As Anderson argues, 'reproductive work – mental, physical, and emotional labor – creates not simply labor units, but people' (Anderson, 2000, p. 13). Laslett and Brenner (1989) define domestic work as reproductive work. They write:

> How food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work – mental, manual,

> and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation. (Laslett & Brenner 1989, p. 382)

Feminist scholars argue that domestic work, viewed as reproductive work, is essential for the survival of society. Social reproduction goes beyond the family; domestic work is deeply embedded in the community, essentially recreating our communities and roles (Anderson, 2000). Activities like caring for children and the elderly help build community ties. The arrangement of our homes indicates our social status. Reproductive work entails the social and cultural reproduction of humans, and the details of who performs this work and when and where it takes place are critical to its significance (Romero, 1992). This work reflects and perpetuates social relations, particularly gender relations.

Paid domestic workers

As mentioned earlier, the discourse on paid domestic workers has piqued the interest of feminist scholars since the 1970s. Bridget Anderson (2000) and Mary Romero (1992) make significant contributions by critically examining the various perspectives of the early feminist debate on paid domestic work. They highlight significant contradictions and gaps within this debate. Romero (1992) points out the gap in feminist advocacy, which heavily emphasizes women's participation in the labor force to achieve gender equality, while domestic duties also primarily remain a woman's role. Romero criticizes this one-sided advocacy, saying it did not push men to share domestic duties equally. Anderson (2000) criticizes the tendency of feminists "to regard domestic work as the great leveler, a common burden imposed on women by patriarchy and lazy husbands" (Anderson, 2000, p. 1). This perspective oversimplifies the notion of women's

oppression by only considering the gender aspect, thereby overlooking the power dynamics of class, race, and nationality. Anderson stresses that these dynamics shape the experiences of paid domestic workers, particularly immigrants, and their relationship with their employers.

The purchasing of cheap reproductive care from racialized immigrant women workers became a solution to balance women's dual role in the household (Moya, 2007), especially with the rise of the 'new global economy' (Wilks, 2018). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the increased availability of inexpensive immigrant labor was tied to the revival of paid domestic work in North America and Western Europe. A key focus in the literature on paid domestic work has been its connection to migration and globalization. This body of scholarship broadens its focus from the gender lens to the experiences of migrant domestic workers to take a more serious account of class and their racialized process. Addressing the racial division of paid reproductive labor with discussions on globalization and the feminization of migrant labor, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2000, 2001) demonstrates how Filipina domestic workers migrate to undertake the reproductive labor of middle-class women in the global North while delegating their own reproductive duties to poorer women who remain in the Philippines. Parreñas argues that this migration and involvement in domestic work create an 'international division of reproductive labor,' which she terms the 'international transfer of caring' (2000: 561). Arlie Russell Hochschild's (2000: 131) 'global care chain' concept expands on Parreñas's work and is widely used in the social sciences to describe the trend of outsourcing reproductive labor in the global North.

Critical issues have been explored in the literature on the international migration domain of paid domestic workers. For example, issues such as structural discrimination and violence based on gender, racial, and national identities (Anderson, 2000; Moya, 2007), power differentials, and hierarchy existing between women (Rollins, 1985; Marchetti et al., 2021). Apart from this domain, there is a growing number of studies addressing the paid domestic work issues at a national level and internal migration of paid domestic workers, especially in developing countries where poor people (primarily women) work in wealthy and upper-class people's houses (see Ray & Qayum, 2009; Goldsmith, 2013; Wilks, 2018).

I want to focus on how paid domestic workers are defined and characterized in the available literature. Paid domestic work, also called 'domestic service,' is generally defined as "the performance of household work by non-family members" (Moya, 2007, p. 1). I found the recent definition given by Sabrina Marchetti (2022) to be more detailed and addressed crucial issues like legal entitlement, types of work, the scope of work, wage, etc. Framing the definition of paid domestic worker in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 (adopted in 2011), 'work performed in and for the household,' Marchetti broadly defines paid domestic workers as:

> domestic workers provide personal and household care in the frame of a formal or informal employment relationship, which means that they work for one or more households (not their own) for a wage. Occupations and tasks considered to be domestic work vary across countries: they may cook; clean; do the laundry; iron; take care of children, adults, the elderly and the disabled; tend to the garden or pets; or drive the family car. They may work part-time, full-time or on an hourly basis, and may or may not live in the home of the employer. (Marchetti, 2022, p. 3)

Anderson (2000) finds the earlier definition of the ILO problematic as it fails to address the critical scope of paid domestic workers in Western Europe. Scholars have critically examined the complexities of such associations by recognizing the problematic aspects of defining paid domestic workers and their work, often understood as ‘reproductive work’ and as a form of ‘care’ or emotional work (Wilks, 2018). Adelle Blackett (2011, cited in Wilks, 2018) stresses that referring to domestic work as 'care' or using these terms interchangeably helps prevent reinforcing the racial and class hierarchies between two women (domestic worker and employer) that distinguish 'menial' tasks typically given to domestic workers from the 'spiritual' work usually associated with mothers or mother-like figures (who are employers of the workers). Sen and Sengupta (2016) remind us that 'care' captures the emotional aspect of certain types of labor, including teaching, nursing, and domestic/household work. In the context of my research, where I pay attention to the paid ‘care’ work of the women domestic workers in Dhaka city, who are primarily hired to perform the ‘menial’ tasks as pointed out by Adelle (2011), may engage with emotional tasks especially when performing care work for children and the elderly in the family. However, there is debate about the skill associated with performing such tasks. For instance, Mignon Duffy (2005) argues that the jobs and roles classified as ‘nurturant’ care are inherently emotional and relational, whereas those under 'reproductive labor' focus on maintaining and reproducing the labor force (or the next generation). Some tasks within reproductive labor are undoubtedly relational and sometimes involve emotional elements; however, many are not. Duffy gives an example from the USA, where both types of labor are highly gendered and undervalued, but reproductive labor is mainly performed by poor women, primarily racial minority

women; the nurturant care jobs, which are more professionalized and better paid, are dominated by white women. That points out the differences and inequalities that shape the various types of care work, which may be overlooked while framing all care work as the same.

Another worldwide characterization of paid domestic work is that "domestic workers tend to universally epitomize the figure of the low-skilled, low-valued, precarious, hidden, and unrecognized labor" (Marchetti et al., 2021, p. 1). While examining the labor process debate, Gabrielle Meagher (1997) criticizes labor theories by saying that while labor process theorists acknowledge that skills are socially constructed within specific historical contexts, they overlook the gender bias inherent in skill designation within the labor market. Feminist critics argue that skill definitions in the labor market have historically centered around male-dominated craft work, allowing employers to exploit the social and domestic skills typically associated with women's gender role socialization. Agreeing with Meagher, this research analyzes the critical aspect of skills paid domestic workers hold but are not formally or informally recognized or valued because of their gender and categorization as informal labor.

Reviewing this literature, which critically addresses both paid and unpaid domestic work, I found that significant work has been done in this area. It is evident that despite structural discrimination, violence, and oppression, paid domestic work has a considerable amount of demand around the world. The wide range of feminist debate led to many movements and, thus, the reformation of law worldwide (see Marchetti et al., 2021), but the oppressive work conditions persist. While the studies are heavily focused on paid domestic work in the North and West, some regions got significantly

less attention but crucially require critical examination; one example is the Gulf region (Anderson, 2000). That region receives a significant amount of paid domestic workers from East and South Asian and African countries but has lately drawn substantial media attention due to violence against workers. Bangladesh also sends domestic workers to this region. A significant number of cases of severe physical and sexual violence against workers have been reported but have yet to get the required academic attention to critically examine the issues (Siddiqui, 2001; Blanchet, 2002). Blanchet (2002) draws from a migration aspect and says that:

> In spite of the millions of men and women who migrated from Bangladesh to the Middle East over the last thirty years, a literature on them has not developed. The migrants are silent and their experience abroad is almost a taboo subject. Most do not feel free to speak out about the ways in which migration has transformed them and changed their understanding of the society they originate from and, in most cases, go back to. This is the case for men, but especially for women who went as unskilled workers and ended up in sex work. (Blanchet, 2002, p.88)

My research does not address the international migration of paid domestic workers. However, it is important to note that citizenship status empowers internal domestic workers to avoid the critical challenges that international migrant workers often can not overcome.

Several rich ethnographic works in West Bengal, the neighboring region of India, address various aspects of paid domestic work (Ray & Qayum, 2009; Sen & Sengupta, 2016; Wilks, 2018). Ray and Qayum (2009) analyze paid domestic work (both live-in and live-out) in modern Kolkata from a historical perspective. Sen & Sengupta (2016)

focus on part-time, live-out domestic workers employing a class and gender lens to analyze the relationships of work and domesticity in the context of domestic workers' lives. Wilks (2018) pays attention to the domestic workers who commute to work every day. Ray and Qayum (2009) refer to domestic work as ‘servitude’ and frame it as an institution by saying, “Domestic servitude confuses and complicates the conceptual divide between family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the home and the world” (Ray & Qayum, 2009, p. 2). By analyzing employers' accounts of their domestic workers, Ray and Qayum show how middle-class employers take refuge from household work through their class and status. Their access to resources enables them to purchase domestic labor for the whole day, every day. However, those comforts have been changing in the light of the capitalist modern form, where the concept of an ever-present servant, the utmost loyal relationship between the master and the servant, has been shifting to a new form where changes have been experienced from both ends (Ray & Qayum, 2009; Sen & Sengupta, 2016; Wilks, 2018). While all three of these studies attend to class and gender aspects of the workers and accounts from the workers' daily experiences (although Ray & Qayum (2009) and Wilks (2018) added employers' accounts as well in their studies, these studies are focused on Kolkata. Although there are several cultural similarities between these two Bengal regions across the borders, there are also socioeconomic and cultural differences between these two regions. As mentioned, Bangladesh was part of the West Bengal region during the British colonial period leading to historical, social, and cultural similarities. In all these studies, high social inequality between workers and employers is evident, which also addresses the oppression of these workers by the employers. However, an increasing number of domestic workers recruiting agencies in

Kolkata that mediates some form of formalities in this sector is a very new concept in Bangladesh. Thus, almost all domestic workers work following the traditional arrangements of domestic work in Bangladesh, which keeps the sector highly informal. This literature (Ray & Qayum, 2009; Sen & Sengupta, 2016; Wilks, 2018) describes the high inequalities domestic workers face in Kolkata. In my research, I attend to the workers' daily working experiences as informal labor that is influenced by gender and class; I also attend to the social reproduction of these workers and their contribution to the social reproduction of their employer's families.

Thesis structure

This paper is divided into six chapters, starting with this introduction, where I locate the research on domestic works in Dhaka with respect to Bangladesh, the anthropology of work, and the feminist political economy. Chapter two explains this study's methodology. This includes how and with whom fieldwork was carried out, data collection methods, my experience as a researcher, ethical considerations taken before, during, and after the fieldwork, and the analysis and writing of the thesis.

Chapter three addresses part of the first broad question: the experience of women-paid domestic workers. It explores their socio-economic backgrounds, migration from rural parts of Bangladesh to Dhaka, why they enter the workforce, their daily work experiences, narratives of their everyday tasks, and working conditions. The aim is to understand the diversity in their work and workplaces, the differences in their individual experiences, the skills they bring, and their expectations for rules and regulations that ensure a safe workplace and improve their overall work experiences.

Chapter Four delves into workers' perspectives regarding their relationship with their employers. It uncovers some of the tensions in this relationship experienced by domestic workers daily and how they interact with and understand these tensions in their workplaces. This examination sheds light on the power imbalances in the relationship, the reproduction of social hierarchies, the social reproduction of the employers and their family members through the work of the domestic workers that are evident through the dynamics of reciprocity and dependency within these relationships, all of which significantly impact domestic workers' resistance and resilience. Through these analyses, it becomes apparent that domestic workers create their own strategies to survive and manage their day-to-day realities that highlight their agency and efforts to improve their circumstances. At the same time, they play a significant role in their employer's improved well-being through contributing to their reproductive work.

Chapter five seeks to uncover two aspects of the care role that are fulfilled mainly by women, called the ‘double day’ by feminist political economists (Glazer, 1980; Cobble, 2003); one is the paid care work done by these women domestic workers in other people’s houses, and another is the unpaid care role these women play in their household. This chapter examines the social reproduction of themselves and their family members and their contributions to the social reproduction of their employers’ family members. To understand these aspects, the chapter attends to questions such as what kinds of differences these women experience in their roles, acknowledgment, and capabilities in their employers’ houses and their household spheres. Additionally, it explores how these women relate to these differences and their impacts on their personal lives.

Chapter Six is the conclusion, where the key analysis of the discussion will be highlighted. Despite various challenges at work and in their lives, live-out domestic workers have contributed to a shift from the live-in pattern to the live-out pattern of domestic work in Bangladesh. This shift, to some extent, positively supports the labor autonomy of the workers and reflects several other characteristics of their resistance. More academic attention seems required to understand distinct aspects of these workers' lives. Therefore, the latter part of the conclusion discusses possible policy recommendations for policymakers and government that can be helpful to have a better understanding of the workplace's complexities and the workers' expectations from the workers' perspective. Finally, the chapter also identifies the study's limitations and suggests possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Pinash: Do you want to ask me anything before we start the interview?

Shayma: If you think this is good, then this is good for me as well. I do not understand much about all these, but I believe if you find this good for me, it is good for me. (Shayma, October 22, 2023)

Tara: I want you to come again. We understand that you can not give us anything for talking to us, but I am happy that you are at least concerned about us. Talking about us, next time when you come, I will tell more people to meet you and talk about their work. (Tara, October 25, 2023)

Shayma and Tara, both in their mid-fifties, work as part-time domestic workers. The quoted responses were expressed just before we started our interview when I discussed the consent form explaining the topic, their voluntary participation, and the freedom to withdraw. They listened to the entire briefing and then expressed their thoughts about participating in this research. Their trust in me and the research might be surprising since I had only met them two or three times before the interview. I think it can be explained by my ethnicity, language, cultural background, and the fact that I used to live in the same Kochukhet area (discussed briefly in the research approach section).

In this chapter, I discuss the methods I have adopted to conduct this research with domestic workers like Shayma and Tara in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I explain the data collection methods, the location, my entry into the research field, the connection with the participants, my experiences, the challenges I faced as a researcher, my analytic strategies, and the ethical considerations I made throughout the process.

Research Approach

I built the discussion on the broader two questions of this research based on two theoretical concepts: informality and feminist political economy, especially the social reproduction concept. As discussed in the first chapter, paid domestic work is informal labor in most parts of the world, including Bangladesh. At the same time, this labor force directly contributes to the social reproduction of other households as informal domestic workers. therefore, employing the informality and social reproduction lens to understand part-time domestic workers in Bangladesh has been crucial for this research.

Informality: The term' informal sector ', introduced by British anthropologist Keith Hart in the 1970s, holds significant relevance in the context of Bangladesh. It was initially used to describe the economic activities of northern Ghanaian migrants in Accra (Chen & Carre, 2020; Hodder, 2016). The International Labour Organization later adopted this term to replace the 'traditional sector.' (ILO, 1972 in Chen and Carre, 2020). Since then, studying the 'informal sector' or 'informal economy' has become a significant research area in various academic fields, including sociology and anthropology. Hodder (2016) describes informality or the informal sector as economic activities that are not regulated by formal institutions, which can include unregistered businesses, street vendors, and other forms of self-employment. It is often associated with low productivity, poor working conditions, and a lack of social protection and legal recognition. This situation is further exacerbated for women informal workers in developing countries like Bangladesh, where informal employment dominates and lack of recognition, devaluation, and stigmatization are more pronounced. As Hodder’s definition matches the definition of informal paid domestic workers in Bangladesh mentioned in the labour force survey report as,

> […] paid domestic workers in a household are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (such as advance notice of dismissal, severance pay or paid annual or sick leave). (BBS, 2018)

However, Smita Yadav (2019) argues that the current approach is too focused on material aspects such as wages, working conditions, and job security, measured in terms of markets and state, and not enough on the human element, which is the primary subjective and ideological focus for agrarian and tribal communities. On a similar note, Kathleen M. Millar (2018) aptly emphasizes, "labour is constituted not only through states and markets but also through the very meanings workers ascribe to their labour. And forms of living are also formative – shaping life rhythms, habits, and orientations to the world" (p.11). This perspective underscores the importance of understanding the informality of paid domestic work from the multifaceted aspects of informal labor, considering the subjective and ideological significance of labor within households and communities.

Social Reproduction Theorists call our attention to the ways productive and reproductive activities work together to create value and make people vulnerable to exploitation. Informalization involves the casualization of factory work, the feminization and racialization of workforces, and the blurring of formal and informal, urban and rural, and waged and unwaged divides (Mezaddri, 2021). In the Bangladeshi settings, for instance, it is obvious that women are more likely to be employed in the informal labor market to make a living (Chakravarty & Chakravarty, 2015; Heintz et al., 2018), which also allows them to fulfill essential family care responsibilities.

Clarke, as cited by Vosko (2014), emphasizes that social reproduction involves both the training and well-being of workers for their labor and the broader societal standards of living, education, and health. Picchio, also cited by Vosko (2014), defines social reproduction as crucial for labor market analysis, influencing individuals' positions within the labor market, standards of living (important for wage negotiations), and the distribution of resources among different classes. Vosko further identifies institutions like the state, school system, public sector, family/household, companies, and trade unions as integral to the processes of social reproduction. To understand the social reproduction of domestic workers, the queries Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) poses are applied in this research: “If workers’ labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker? Put another way: What kinds of processes enable the worker to arrive at the doors of her place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society? What role did breakfast play in her work readiness? What about a good night’s sleep?” (p. 2). She calls SRT an analytical strategy that prioritizes "process" over "visible facts" in its attempt to investigate and address issues and/or questions like these. It is an approach that questions the intricate web of social dynamics and interpersonal relationships that create the conditions necessary for the existence of that entity rather than being content to accept what appears to be a visible, finished entity.

By applying these questions of Bhattacharya and analyzing the elements of social reproductions discussed by Vosko (2014) and other feminist political economy scholars, this research analyzes how paid domestic workers contribute to the reproduction of both workers and wealth by bridging the care role gap within their employers' households. Additionally, how the social reproduction of these workers happens while they play crucial

and dual care roles as paid and unpaid care workers in two spheres: their employer's household as their workplace and their own homes as their own domestic sphere.

This thesis employed qualitative research methods to generate data, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Since paid domestic work is widespread in Dhaka, observation happened naturally during my entire stay for this fieldwork in October and November 2023. I carried out active observations in the communities, talking to community people and the domestic workers, grocery shopping in the Kochukhet and Boubazar areas, having tea in the roadside tea stalls, and during my commute to anywhere in Dhaka. This is not a full ethnography as I did not participate in their daily activities, did not go to their work[8], and did not work as a domestic worker myself.

Designing the research method, developing tools for the data collection and overall research, being informed and aware of the context, considering and addressing the ethical aspects, and producing overall knowledge through this process strongly connect with the researcher's identity, lived experience, and knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to address my ‘positionality’ (Sultana, 2007) or ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988) as a researcher from the same society as my study subject, and how my identity and experience influenced and impacted conducting this research.

First, since this study is about a marginalized group of women in Bangladesh, it raises the feminist critique of who is producing the knowledge, especially considering the racial and

[8] Live-out domestic workers work under more than one employer in most cases, and getting access to the employer's houses seemed challenging considering that not all domestic workers have an understanding relationship with their employer. Moreover, it would take me a longer time to make such arrangements. Another aspect I have considered is employers may not like that their domestic workers have been interviewed about their work conditions, which can portray a negative image of themselves.

gender identity of the researcher (White, 1992). That also raises the need for knowledge to be produced within the community. I recognize my privilege as an educated woman, which can create a distance between me and the study group, potentially hindering my ability to represent their voices fully. Nonetheless, as a Bangladeshi woman from a lower-middle-class family background, my ethnicity, lived experiences, and sociocultural and socioeconomic identity allow me to connect with the workers and interpret their experiences with a nuanced understanding. I have encountered domestic workers as a member of a worker's family, an employer, a member of an employer's family, a relative, and a friend. Therefore, along with the theoretical lens used in this thesis and my lived experience in Bangladesh, it adds to the part where knowledge, in a way, is produced from within the communities we are trying to understand.

Second, my interest in conducting this research lies in my research, work, and life experience. During my undergraduate studies, I worked on social research projects with several national and international organizations, where I conducted studies on gender norms in various parts of the country. These experiences significantly impacted my decision to pursue a career in the development sector. I started working with a non-profit international development organization on their Food for Peace project right after graduation, explicitly targeting Indigenous women’s and children’s health and economic empowerment. This started my intense interest in issues related to women and their work. I joined the gender justice and social inclusion team of Oxfam in Bangladesh in 2018. As a program officer, I actively worked on projects centered around empowering women, including a significant project focused on skill development and rights enforcement for paid domestic workers in Bangladesh. Working alongside Oxfam and six local

implementing partners, we implemented the project in Dhaka city, aiming to benefit 16,000 women domestic workers organized into eight hundred groups (20 in each group). I was responsible for coordinating with implementing partners, designing and planning activities, conducting needs-based research, training project staff, developing training guidelines, and facilitating meetings with relevant stakeholders such as government officials, employers, and local influencers. Over three years, from October 2019 to September 2022, I was deeply involved in the project, which resulted in the registration and initiation of skills training for over 10,000 domestic workers and regular interaction with these workers. Additionally, I conducted various small studies during this period. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted a needs assessment survey among one hundred domestic workers to better understand their livelihood conditions that were heavily affected by the pandemic. Based on the data collected, we provided emergency support tailored to their specific needs.

Through these intensive engagements and studies, I have gained invaluable insights into the lives, well-being, and livelihood conditions of domestic workers, the policy status of these informal workers, and plans of government and international agencies (such as the International Labour Organization) about paid domestic workers. This experience fueled my curiosity to explore aspects beyond my job's scope, such as understanding their vulnerabilities, strengths, personal reflections, and aspirations. I wanted to delve into their perceptions of well-being and their worldview, moving beyond the typical narratives of vulnerabilities, violence, and exploitative conditions portrayed in the media. Consequently, this deep involvement motivated me to select this population as the subject of my academic study, design the research, and approach the field and participants.

Research Fields

For this thesis, I conducted interviews with participants from Dhaka city: the Boubazar area under the Kafrul *Thana* (Police Station) and the Rayer Bazar area under Dhanmondi Thana. This section will briefly discuss Dhaka city, its slums, and the specific research sites: Boubazar and Rayer Bazar. I will also discuss Kochukhet because it is close to Boubazar and significant to most participants.

Dhaka, as capital, is considered the country's economic, cultural, and political center; it is home to more than 20 million people, with approximately 18,000 people living per square kilometer (Ahmed, 2014). The city has become a megacity for its rapid industrial and economic growth, especially the ready-made garment industry, attracting workers from all over the country. The socio-economic diversity in the population living in the city is significant. Dhaka has over 5000 slums, with over 4 million people living in there (Ahmed, 2014). Most live-out domestic workers in Dhaka live in slums (Ashraf et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the slum is important for this research. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in the National Populations Census 2022 report,

> A slum is generally defined as a group of five or more houses that are located in municipal areas on public land, railways, roadsides, embankments, or private land, and are of very poor quality. It includes huts [made of straw and thatch], tongs [made on top of water bodies such as lakes], tin sheds [made of sheet metal and wood], semi-pucca [brick wall and tin-shed roofed], rickety structures as well as dilapidated buildings" (PHC preliminary report, BBS, 2022).

A visual presentation can help understand the living arrangements of the study participants. If you search for photos of slums in Dhaka on Google, you will find many photos portraying the inside and outside conditions of slums with or without their dwellers. My

eyes were caught in this photo (Figure 2), as it tells a story connected to my research with meaningful insight.

Figure 2: A photo of Korail Slum (on the right side of the lake, showcasing tin-shed residential structures) in Gulshan. (Source: SW Photography, October 22, 2021)

Due to Dhaka's population density, high-rise buildings are everywhere for residences, offices, educational institutes, hospitals, and almost everything in Dhaka, as you can see in one part of the photo. This area is Gulshan, one of the wealthiest posh areas of the city, the hub of multi-national and national corporate offices, diplomatic areas, and residential areas for the richest and diplomates. On the other side of the lake is the biggest slum in Dhaka, Korail Slum. People who live in high-rise buildings have probably never gone to the slum on the other side of the lake, but people from the slum commute across the lake regularly for their livelihood and other reasons. The high-rise buildings are the workplace for domestic workers who are slum dwellers. The tiny bridge connecting both parts is the path

they commute daily to work in the rich people's houses. The picture clearly shows the extent of socio-economic inequality among the city dwellers.

I had several options for selecting the study site, as my previous work experience has connected me with domestic workers living in different slums. However, I primarily focused on the Boubazar area as my research site for several reasons. Firstly, its proximity to my residence (at Kochukhet) allowed me to avoid traffic jams during frequent commutes to my research site during the day and evenings when participants were available. Secondly, if any participants chose my place as the interview venue, considering confidentiality and a safe and quiet place for the interview, they could walk to my home, avoiding commuting time and hassle. Thirdly, Boubazar encompasses a large area with numerous slum communities where domestic workers reside. This provided me with a vast pool of potential participants, ensuring I could recruit twenty participants (my targeted number of interviews) willing to participate in the research and provide their availability without facing any negative repercussions from their families. Lastly, my existing connection to a part of this community through Khala[9] (I discuss Khala in detail below) facilitated my easy access to the community and potential participants. Boubazar is located between North and South Kafrul and the Kochukhet area. It is centered around a grocery market ('*Kachabazar*') named 'Boubazar'. There are several slum areas around Bourbazar, and those slum areas have different names. However, the research participants identified their residence at Boubazar.

[9] In Bengali, Khala means maternal aunt. It is a customary practice in Bangladesh to show respect to older women by calling them Khala or other kin terms equivalent to the mother. who are not related by kin but are the same age as one's mother or older. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the domestic worker who worked at our house as Khala, as we (my husband, younger brother, and I) always called her.

Another relevant area for this study is Kochukhet, which is adjacent to my study area, Boubazar. I lived in Kochukhet, and it was frequently mentioned by my study participants, especially the Kochukhet market, where almost everything is available, from gold to groceries. Many of their husbands and children work in different shops or as day laborers in the market. Moreover, many retired army personnel and their family reside around Kochukhet and Kafrul. A considerable number of these retirees employ domestic workers from the Boubazar area. Many of my research participants mentioned working in the officers' houses.

Kochukhet is between the Dhaka Cantonment area, Mirpur 14, and Kafrul. Dhaka Cantonment is the dedicated official and residential area of the armed forces of Bangladesh. Kochukhet is the entrance to Dhaka Cantonment from the side of Mirpur 14. Through this entrance of Cantonment, Kochukhet directly connects several economically and politically significant areas of Dhaka city, including corporate offices, garment industries, diplomatic zones, and educational institutes in Banani, Gulshan, Mohakhali, the airport, and other places. People from Mirpur, Shewrapara, and Kafrul often use this road to commute to their workplaces in the abovementioned areas. The Kochukhet market is significant both for ordinary people and elite defense officers, serving for their daily grocery shopping.

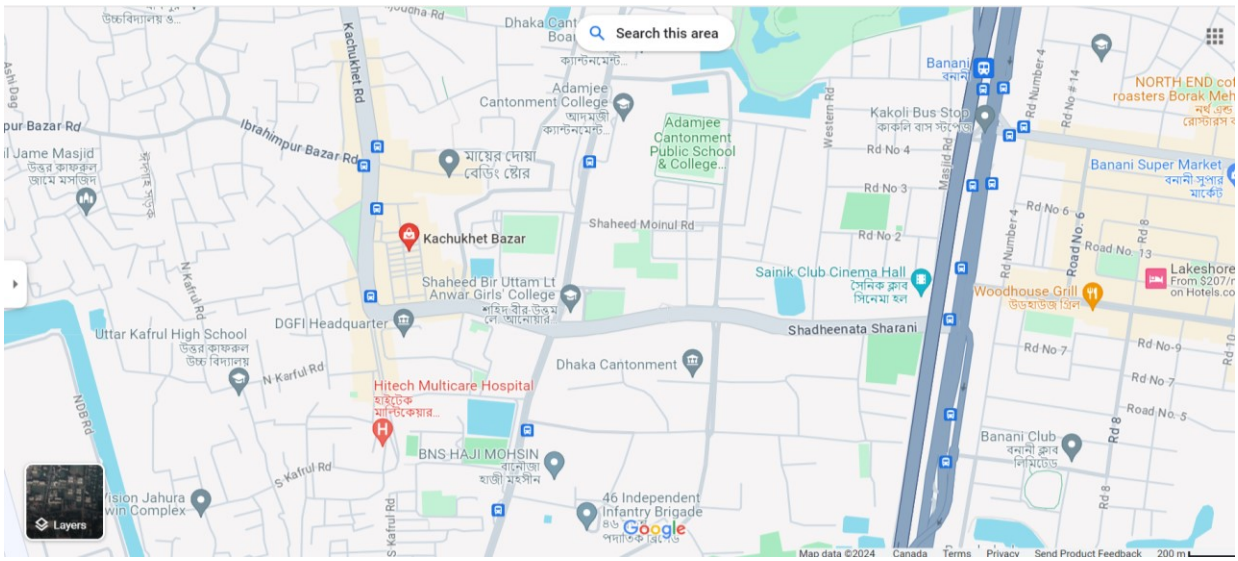

Figure 3: Location of Kochukhet Bazar in the Google Map. (Source: Google Map)

People from all economic backgrounds, including the poor, wealthy, middle-class, and lower-middle class, live in Kochukhet and adjacent areas. According to the participants, this area is crucial because it hosts good schools and colleges within the cantonment area, where civilians' children can study alongside elite defense officers' children. Within a kilometer to the north is a government dental hospital in Mirpur 14 that provides treatment to both dental and general patients. Additionally, there is a Cholera Hospital in Mohakhali (to the South of Kochukhet) where medical treatment is affordable for both the rich and the poor. Private hospitals are also available in proximity to this area. Commuting from here to offices in Gulshan or Banani is easy, and rent is comparatively cheaper. For these reasons, many people prefer to reside here. That creates significant employment scope for domestic workers. This was the case for my husband and me because our offices were in Banani and Mohakhali, allowing us to walk or take a rickshaw through the Dhaka Cantonment area, bypassing Dhaka's traffic jams.

I intended to interview participants with experience working in domestic work service provider private companies. After multiple visits to the domestic worker communities in the Boubazar area, I found no domestic workers with such experience. All of them work following the traditional recruiting networks. Then, I reached out to one of my former colleagues, who I knew accessed such services through a mobile app, Hellotask. I contacted her, and she connected me with her current domestic worker, who works through Hellotask and lives in the Rayer Bazar area. Rayer Bazar is bigger than Boubazar and has a mixed set of living arrangements for workers and employers. I visited three houses in this area; one house was similar to the kind of house I visited in Boubazar (the big tin-shed house where more than ten families live), one was a three-storied building where more than twenty families live, and another one was a multi-storied building and not part of a slum community.

Entering to the field

To conduct the fieldwork for this project, I traveled to Bangladesh in early October 2023 and spent almost two months collecting data. After reaching Dhaka, I mainly remained at home for the first two days due to the heavy rain that caused flooding on many busy roads in the city. Additionally, I was still awaiting Research Ethics Board (REB) approval to begin my research officially. I received approval on October 16, 2024; in the meantime, I visited the domestic worker who used to work at our home before I came to Canada. I have called her Khala since she started working at our home, and I still call her Khala. She is an older woman in her early sixties and resides in Boubazar with her children. Her residence is approximately three hundred meters from my own.

My primary reason for visiting Khala was to check on her well-being, inquire about her health, and see whether everything was going well in her life. In the past, I frequently visited her at her residence for several reasons: to check on her during her illness, inform her if she did not need to come to work, or for any other necessary communication as she did not own a cell phone. Therefore, I already knew the place, as well as some other house residents Khala introduced me to. Previously, Khala resided in a large tin-shed house shared with more than ten other families. She, along with her two sons, lived in a small room in that house. I will now paint a picture of the environment in which Khala, and her children reside and my interconnections with her, as these demonstrate an essential cultural, economic, and social context for my research.

Khala recently moved to a first floor flat in a five-story building on the opposite side of the tin-shed house she used to live in. The flat has three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a tiny living space. In this apartment, Khala lives with her two sons, eldest and youngest daughters, and their spouses and children. Her middle daughter lives close by. Two daughters, with their spouse and children, occupy two bedrooms, while Khala and her two sons, over 18 years old, share another room. Khala's elder daughter, who is already a mother to one son, is currently expecting her second child. Meanwhile, her younger daughter has two sons, aged ten and four. The monthly rent for the flat amounts to 15,000 TK[10], excluding electricity, gas, and water expenses. In total, they incur around 18,000 TK monthly, which is divided among Khala and her two daughters.

[10] It is important to note here that the full form of 'TK' is 'Taka' (which means money), which refers to Bangladeshi Taka (BDT), the official currency of Bangladesh. I use TK throughout this paper to refer to Bangladeshi currency.

According to them, this new living arrangement offers significant improvements compared to their previous situation. In the previous tin-shed house, they had to share bathroom and kitchen facilities with at least ten other families, a challenge they no longer face in their new living arrangement. Additionally, the tin shed house had issues of flooding during the rainy season, leading to mosquito infestations and Dengue[11], other health concerns, mobility restrictions, and risks for younger children. Khala and her family do not face many problems in their new flat. Moreover, the increased sunlight in their living space addresses the previous lack of natural light. Considering these improvements and the similar rent cost[12], they chose this new accommodation to provide their children with a better living environment. Before we moved to Canada, Khala took care of our kitchen, household chores, and overall well-being for two years. During this casual meeting, I learned about some of the significant changes that have taken place in Khala's family since I last saw her, a year earlier. In brief, she retired from work as a domestic worker, her youngest son finished high school and got admitted to one of the top public universities in Bangladesh, her younger daughter moved with her into this apartment, and her elder son is getting married soon. Before discussing the changes in detail, it is useful to know a little about Khala's life and our relationship.

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[11] According to the World Health Organization report about the Dengue situation in Bangladesh (August 11, 2023), "Dengue is a viral infection transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes and is found in tropical and sub-tropical climates worldwide, mostly in urban and semi-urban areas. The primary vectors that transmit the disease are *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes and, to a lesser extent, *Aedes albopictus*." One of the major concerns is the Dengue mosquito infestation that results from the logged-in water situation. The report also says that 69,483 laboratory-confirmed dengue cases and 327 related deaths were reported in 2023. The dengue virus was declared an epidemic and later an endemic in Bangladesh. The increased occurrence of dengue takes place amid an atypical pattern of heavy rainfall, elevated temperatures, and high humidity. These conditions have led to a rise in the mosquito population across Bangladesh.

[12] A daily news article, The Business Post (July 24, 2021), reports that slum dwellers pay more rent per square foot than people living in other better living arrangements in Dhaka city. One of the identified causes is the rapid increase in slum dwellers, which results in high demand for slum living arrangements.

When my husband and I relocated from my mother's residence to a small apartment closer to our workplaces during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020[13], we hired a domestic worker through the domestic worker employed by our landowner. Thus, we met Khala who started working as a domestic worker in our house. She agreed to cook daily, wash clothes every other day, and clean the house on alternate days. We asked Khala and the mediator about their salary expectation. The salary was fixed according to the existing rate per task in the Kochukhet area. They shared that in this area (Kochukhet and Kafrul), people take 1,000 TK (Approximately $15)[14] per month for one task, and the rate is higher for cooking. Since Khala would perform two tasks daily, including cooking, the verbal agreement was a monthly wage of 3,000 TK (2,000 TK for cooking and 1,000 TK for the other task. Approximately $48) starting the following month. The next day (early September 2020), Khala started working at our place which she continued to do until 1st October 2022, when we left the country. Khala spent 3 to 4 hours at our home cooking and cleaning every day, six days a week. At that time, she had only this one job. Before that, she worked in a single household for 18 years and dedicated her time solely to that employer's house.

She started working as a domestic worker when she migrated to Dhaka from her native village with her husband and children due to poverty. Before moving to Dhaka, she was a young village rural housewife with no experience of earning money by working. To support her husband financially and contribute to the family, the young housewife decided to work

[13] The first three cases of COVID-19 were reported on March 8, 2020 (The Daily Star, March 9, 2020), and the government declared strict lockdowns throughout the year.
[14] Throughout this paper, the '$' indicates the Canadian Dollar. According to Bangladesh Bank (Central Bank of Bangladesh), the average exchange rate of the Canadian Dollar was 63 Bangladeshi Taka in 2020 (Source: Bangladesh Bank, Exchange Rate of Taka, 2020), and the average exchange rate of the Canadian Dollar was 80 Bangladeshi Taka during my fieldwork in October 2023.

as a domestic worker. She could not read or write, and finding any other job seemed difficult. With the help of her relatives, who already resided in Dhaka and worked as domestic workers, she got a job at a house very close to Boubazar. Her employer was a retired army officer who owned the one-story house, and the family was an extended family with around ten members. Khala continued working there for almost two decades and witnessed the one-story building become six-story. Despite starting from scratch, she committed to working full-time at this house, from 8 am to 5 pm.

Tragically, she lost her husband in a road accident shortly after starting work when her youngest son was only two years old. As a young widow, she faced the daunting task of raising three daughters and two sons alone. Through sheer determination, hard work, and support from her maternal family (she mentioned her younger brother and mother), she managed to support her family by continuing her work as a full-time domestic worker under a single employer.

Over the years, she married off her daughters, and her elder son entered the workforce early. However, her youngest son emerged as a promising student. Despite facing financial constraints and numerous obstacles, Khala remained committed to prioritizing her youngest son's education, something she regrets not being able to do for her other children. Her youngest son's academic achievements remain constant. He achieved a GPA of 5 (A+ Grade) in the SSC (Secondary School Certificate, equivalent to 10^{th} grade) and HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate, equivalent to 12^{th} grade) examinations. He then diligently prepared for the public university admission exam and successfully gained admission for a bachelor's in accounting at Rajshahi University (located in Rajshahi district), one of Bangladesh's top public universities. He resides in Rajshahi, a district approximately 200

km from Dhaka, where he attends university, marking a significant milestone in his educational journey through the unwavering support of Khala, his elder brother, and his sisters.

In the absence of her youngest son, Khala and her elder son reside in a single room within the three-bedroom house. Due to health concerns, Khala retired as a domestic worker. She had previously discussed this decision with me, saying that her sons insisted that she should stop working due to her health. Her elder son has since become the primary breadwinner, covering household expenses, her medical bills, and the educational costs of her youngest son. Currently, Khala spends most of her time at home, looking after her grandchildren while her daughters are at work. This arrangement has been a significant source of support for her daughters, offering them peace of mind knowing their children are well cared for during the day.

Given my close relationship with Khala and her family and their familiarity with me, I have always felt a strong bond of respect and trust between us. Khala has treated me like her own daughter, which has deepened our connection. The thinking behind this research is connected to Khala as well. My work with domestic workers and my daily interaction with Khala made me feel the urge to dig deeper into their work experience, their lives, and their connection with society and the world. Therefore, I have chosen Khala as my entry point to my research field and sought her trusted support.

From my experience, I have realized that in this community, people tend to feel more at ease with strangers when accompanied by a resident. Otherwise, our presence and movements within the community might raise suspicion or unwanted curiosity. My relationship with Khala was invaluable in facilitating interactions within the community.

Whenever someone asked about my identity, I told them that I was connected to Khala, and then they were comfortable talking to me as they mostly knew and had ties to Khala as her relatives or neighbors.

During my conversation with Khala, she generously offered her home as a venue for conducting interviews with domestic workers. Additionally, she assisted me in connecting with other older domestic workers in her community. Through Khala's introductions, I became acquainted with several individuals, some of whom had worked in the building where I lived and a few of whom had briefly worked in my home. Khala's younger daughter has been working as a domestic worker for the past two years. During the visit, I had the opportunity to meet with her and provide a brief overview of my research.

Data Collection

After the initial connection with Khala, I started approaching my study participants in the Boubazar area. The following two sections discuss the participants, their recruitment process, and the data collection methods of this study, including interviews and focus group discussions.

Participant Recruitment

After I received the REB approval, I visited the large tin-shed house where Khala had lived earlier, where more than ten families currently reside. I learned that nearly all the adult women in this household are employed as domestic workers. Starting from this house, I have visited seven large houses (five in Boubazar and two in Rayer Bazar) with ten to thirty families and, on average, four to six members in each family. Five were tin sheds; one was a three-story building, and another was a concrete-roofed house. I will talk about these houses in detail later in Chapter 4.

I also did grocery shopping at the Boubazar grocery market. Through this activity, I aimed to observe the residents and market conditions. Subsequently, I visited another tin-shed house just beside the grocery market (Boubazar), where I became acquainted with several domestic workers through the caretaker of our apartment building.

Later, I visited the tin-shed house and met Joba and other participants. Joba cordially invited me into her room, which was situated at the front of the large tin shed house. During our discussion, I provided a brief overview of my research and expressed my interest in conducting interviews with the women in the house who work as domestic workers. All the rooms are attached so that people from other parts of the house can hear what has been discussed elsewhere. Hearing us talking, women and children from other rooms gathered outside of Joba's door and later showed interest in participating. From this impromptu gathering, I got a list of six interested participants, including Joba, for interviews. We discussed their availability, and they provided suitable times for interviews. Most of them were available for the interview after 5 pm. One participant was available in the morning around nine, and I scheduled her interview at her place.

Through my frequent visits to the Boubazar community, I was able to gather more than twenty participants from this community and nearby areas. Many women were initially interested, but later, they either did not get the time to sit for the interview or decided not to participate. I ended up interviewing thirteen women of different age groups in the Boubazar area. All work following the traditional ways of recruitment. Among them were mother-daughter and mother-in-law-daughter-in-law pairs with experience in the domestic work profession spanning decades. Additionally, there were two participants over 60 years old, three aged around 50, four between 35 and 45, and four participants under 30. This

diverse age range allowed me to gain insights into the changes that have taken place in this profession over the years. Regarding work arrangements, some are employed by single employers, and most work as task-based part-time workers in multiple employers' houses.

I also conducted two focus group discussions. One with younger women domestic workers who are aged between eighteen and thirty. Another with older women domestic workers who are aged over thirty. When recruiting, I explained that they could participate in both the one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions if they were interested. Most of them agreed to participate in both components, but not all of them managed to come to the dates that were fixed for the focus groups which were scheduled based on the availability of most of the participants. In the older group, there were seven participants, including two newcomers who had not participated in interviews. The younger group discussion included seven participants under 30 years old, with three who had not taken part in interviews.

In addition to the fourteen interview participants and those involved in the focus group discussions, I sought to understand the experiences of domestic workers who found jobs through the new technology. To do this, I contacted a former colleague who utilized a mobile app platform for domestic work services. My colleague connected me with a domestic worker engaged through the platform. I met with her in front of her residence at Rayer Bazar, and later, she took me to her residence. Rayer Bazar is approximately six kilometers from my residence. She expressed interest in participating, and we fixed a convenient time for the interview. She also introduced me to her mother-in-law and another relative who works on the platform, and both agreed to participate. Through these initial contacts, I connected with another participant who has been using the platform for over a year.

The domestic workers I recruited were adult women (above 18) who work as live-out domestic workers. They are married, widowed, or divorced women who have children and elderly members in their household. It is important to note here that I did not reach out to the organizations I worked with before to connect me with domestic workers, nor did I go to the communities where domestic workers are aware or engaged with the skill development project I worked with. As I have mentioned before, the domestic workers who are engaged with the project or aware of it may have developed specific skills through the training programs, and the number of these domestic workers is minimal. I also assume that they might discuss issues from the awareness they have developed through the skills program, which may not reflect the real scenario of the millions of workers who do not have such exposure.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

After the initial visits, I found that participants mostly work from early morning to late afternoon, so conducting interviews in the evening was more feasible for them. After confirming the interview time with participants, I discussed their preferences about the location. Some participants preferred their residence; usually, this was because they did not have many members in their household or because other family members remained at work at that time, so we could interview while no one was around, and they could talk freely and comfortably. Some participants preferred my house for the interview.

The first three interviews were conducted at my place, and I observed that participants did not feel comfortable sitting on a chair or the bed as I had arranged. They wanted to sit on the floor. A few domestic workers came to meet me after hearing about my research project from other domestic workers in the Boubazar community. They also hesitated to sit on the

bed when I invited them to sit. This is an everyday practice that domestic workers go through in their employers' houses. They are often not allowed to sit on a chair, on the bed, or on the sofa at their employer's house, which Ray and Qayum (2009) identified as “the politics of sitting” between different classes. After observing this discomfort, I discussed conducting interviews at Khala’s place near their house. Khala and the participants agreed that it would be easier for them. Khala is their neighbor or a relative, and they often visit her place. Three interviews and focus group discussions were held at Khala’s place. The other interviews were conducted at participants’ residences.

I followed a semi-structured approach to the interviews. Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe the semi-structured interview as exploratory, guided by the main topic(s) that provides a general pattern. Conducting semi-structured interviews allows interviewees' own perspectives to shape the interview. This is particularly important since the main objective of these interviews was to understand that perspective. I had an interview guide outlining the topics I wanted to discuss with the participants (see Appendix D). However, I prioritized the flow of discussion to understand what was important to participants. Therefore, some interviews were more like stories told by the participants about their journey as domestic workers. In these interviews, I emphasized the points raised by the participants. Some interviews took longer than others (50 to 90 minutes), and some interviews were relatively short (around 20 – 30 minutes) based on their available time and what they wanted to say. All communication with the participants was in Bengali, which is our (participants and I) mother tongue.

Two focus group discussions primarily focused on the challenges domestic workers encountered in their work and their strategies for organizing themselves informally to

overcome them. This method aimed to gather collective responses regarding informality and social reproduction of domestic work, and a group discussion guide was followed (see Appendix E). In addition to including some additional individuals, the focus groups added to this research by revealing how participants discuss their work with each other. They can also elicit additional information as one person's comment leads to contributions from others, either agreeing or disagreeing. As mentioned in the first chapter, paid domestic work has undergone transformations; for instance, live-out part-time domestic workers have become more common than live-in, full-time domestic workers (discussed in Chapter 3). Consequently, the experiences and aspirations of older and younger generations of domestic workers may differ (discussed in Chapter 5). These two group discussions explored these differences.

With respect to ethics, a brief about my research was discussed with the participants when I first met them for recruiting (see Appendix A). Then, before starting the interview, I followed the oral consent script describing the research (see Appendix B for interview consent and Appendix C for focus group consent), their voluntary participation, freedom of withdrawal from the interview, benefits of participation in this research, including an amount of 300TK as compensation for their time to participating in each component of this research[15], protection of their confidentiality in the research, the contact details, and finally,

[15] It is important to note that these compensations were provided to acknowledge the participants' valuable time and contribution to the research. Efforts had been made to ensure that the compensation process was fair and respectful. To ensure fairness and prevent any potential negative consequences, it was essential to adhere to the compensation practice that is already established and practiced in the context of domestic workers in Dhaka. The compensation for participating in the study was not arbitrarily set, but rather based on previous experience and the economic situation of domestic workers in Dhaka. As per Ashraf et. al (2019), the average monthly income for domestic workers in Dhaka city is approximately 5000 BDT (72 CAD). In light of this economic context, the project I previously worked with maintained a compensation of 500 BDT along with lunch for a 4-hour session.

the consent for recording the interview in my mobile phone. Participants heard the briefing attentively and consented to the interview and recording. For their future reference, a copy of that form was given to every participant. I recorded the interview data in two ways: audio recording the interviews and focus groups and taking field notes of my observations throughout. I took field notes in my notebook and in my phone's digital notes. I transcribed recordings upon my return to Halifax. All the transcriptions are done in Bengali to better process the original meaning. When I found that the same word was said repetitively in the interviews with a specific tone, I wrote down the interpretation of that word in detail, which later helped me to grasp as much nuance as possible from that transcription. For writing this research, I have taken an inductive approach to explore participants' daily lives and work experiences in depth and develop a better understanding based on their individual and diverse experiences.

Challenges

During my fieldwork in October and November, election fever was in the air in Dhaka city as the national election was just three months away. There were not many open discussions among the people about the elections. In the previous years, before the elections, there had been incidents of petrol bombs thrown at vehicles, violence on the streets, and many accidents where many lost their lives. People seemed to prefer silence as a safety measure based on the previous experience. During my days in the country, there were almost daily strikes and blockades by opposition parties. Except for Friday and Saturday, the two

This amount was deemed reasonable and in line with the prevailing norms in the community. It was a strategic decision to avoid offering higher compensation, as it could potentially lead to an influx of domestic workers participating, which in turn could cause dissatisfaction among those not selected. This scenario could create tension among the final 17 interview participants and 14 focus group participants and their other community members.

weekend days, at least four days a week would see regular strikes or blockades. Even though the long-distance vehicles did not run during these strikes, some local transportation still operated within the city. However, these strikes did not pose much of a problem for my research work because I did not need to go outside the area for my research.

Another significant protest by the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) workers was happening nationwide, especially in Dhaka, spreading to Kochukhet and nearby areas. RMG workers demanded a minimum wage raise from 8000 TK (last raised in 2018) to 23,000 TK (IndustriAll, October 30, 2023). Although the protest in Kochukhet seemed peaceful, several workers were arrested, one was shot dead, and one was injured by the violent act of Police in Dhaka (IndustriAll, October 30, 2023). Many domestic workers' family members are employed in those garment industries. Therefore, they worried about the safety of their family members, neighbors, and relatives who joined the protest and showed concern regarding the closure of the factories. They supported and expressed anger at the factory owners and government for not taking considerate measures to increase the minimum wage. They perceived this protest as a powerful practice of negotiation among garment workers because some protests succeeded before.

Apart from this political situation, I did not face many challenges during my fieldwork. As I was staying near the community, I could walk safely to the community, and participants also could walk safely to my house (for those I interviewed at my place). During some of the interviews, the story of the domestic workers had an emotional effect on me as well, especially when they voluntarily shared their experience of abuse and violence both at the workplace and at home. After such interviews, I talked to the participants, checked if they

needed help, and ensured they felt all right. When I was feeling emotionally affected, I took a break for a couple of days and connected with my friends and family members.

There were a few challenging situations where, as a researcher, it was difficult for me to offer the expected support. One situation was that I had an interview set up with a domestic worker, Rehana, who was in her late fifties and a widow. The interview was in her room at Boubazar. I met some other young women and children in her room when I reached there. The young women were sorting some old clothes from a sack, and Rehana told me that her employer gave her those old clothes, but the clothes were so worn out that they had not been able to find even one for the wearable stack. She introduced me to her daughter, who was removing the clothes from the stack. I noticed that she was pregnant. And the other women were Rehana's neighbors. While her daughter and neighbors were sorting the clothes, Rehana asked me to sit, and I sat and observed the whole situation. They were done sorting the clothes a few minutes later and left. This entire time, Rehana was sitting on her bed, and she looked so dehydrated. I asked if she was all right. She responded with a low voice that she had not been feeling good lately and was almost starving. She asked me if I could help her get a government safety net card or any regular help from any organization. Understanding her situation, I felt bad; as researchers (and, in my case, student researchers), we have limitations and follow some academic norms, which hinder our ability to help any participants directly. Even though I could share resources or redirect her to a resourceful person, my limited timeline for fieldwork did not enable me to support her further.

Some participants thought I was from any Non-profit organization that could offer them direct benefits or enroll them in some NGO programs. I took extra time during the

recruitment process and before starting the interview to explain my research and its purpose. I do not have any direct contact with any non-profit or local organization for this research. Therefore, except for a 300 TK compensation for their time, I could not offer any direct or indirect benefits for their participation.

Ethical Considerations

Women domestic workers are vulnerable (Ashraf, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2019) to domestic violence and workplace abuse. Therefore, it was crucial to consider the ethical aspect carefully. To ensure safe participation in this research, I visited the communities first, sharing my research and its purpose; I also offered to discuss their participation with their family members so they could find out whether their family members, especially their husbands, are okay with their participation in the research. I have also considered that asking adult women to discuss their participation with their family members, despite their interest, can be seen as not recognizing their agency. According to the Violence Against Women Report 2016 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 76% of married women are victims of one or more forms of intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime (BBS, 2016, cited in Islam et al., 2021). This report made me take precautions and prioritize safety while recruiting adult women domestic workers. One participant who showed interest in participating told me the next day that her adult son did not want her to participate. She agreed and did not participate. Another domestic worker I talked to during my initial visits to the Boubazar told me that her husband dislikes getting involved in NGO programs or this kind of discussion. They think staying out of any outside meetings or programs can save them from any future hassle.

None of the participants I interviewed shared any concerns from their family members or husbands about their participation in this research. During the interview, I met almost all participants' family members, including some of their husbands, as they were around, coming back for lunch, or sitting in the outside tea stall. The woman's family members and the children were comfortable talking to me and were interested in our discussion. I got a welcoming gesture from all the participants, especially when I went to their homes. Some offered me tea, which I happily accepted as this could make the participant feel more comfortable and respected.

Only I can access the demographic information of participants I gathered on my laptop, notebook, phone, and OneDrive. All the names have been changed in this paper to ensure the participants' anonymity. Although I do not know how many women in the Boubazar area work as domestic workers, according to the older group discussion, most married women with young children living in the Boubazar area work as domestic workers. That number would not be less than thousands. Therefore, though I did not change the area name, it would be virtually impossible for people to identify the participants with the details in this paper. My friends and relatives may recognize a few participants, especially Khala, as they know her. However, I think that would not cause any safety issues for the participants.

As I mentioned earlier, all the interviews were conducted in Bengali. As I write this thesis in English, I sometimes use Bengali words beside English words to emphasize the significance of those words in my participants' work and life. Regarding the English translation of the Bengali works, I also recognize my limitations as English is not my native language, and I am still learning it. That may have impacted my translations, but I have

tried to translate the participants' responses into simple English, which are added as quotes in this paper.

Conclusion

To summarize, this thesis is based on qualitative research on live-out women domestic workers in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. The primary data was collected through seventeen in-depth interviews with live-out domestic workers. Thirteen of them are from the Boubazar area and work in traditional arrangements. Four are from the Rayer Bazar area and work in both traditional arrangements and through private domestic work service provider companies. Two focus group discussions were facilitated in the Boubazar area; one was with a group of women over thirty-five years old, and another was with a younger group aged eighteen to thirty. Fourteen participants participated in the focus groups, seven in each. Among them, three participants were new in the younger group, and two were new in the older group. The rest of the participants participated in focus groups and interviews. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide outlining the topics, and a guide of topics was also followed during the focus groups. In the following chapters, I hope to effectively convey the many insights gained from the generous participation of these paid domestic workers.

CHAPTER 3: DAILY WORKING EXPERIENCE OF PAID DOMESTIC WORKERS

Paid domestic workers are a significant part of Bangladesh's informal labor force, like many other developing countries. About 90% of livelihoods in India occur in the informal economy, and 85% in the case of Bangladesh. Informality is not seen as a marginal or residual phenomenon but rather a fundamental political-economic process essential to these countries' capitalist development (Cross, 2010). While the casualties, marginality, and non-protective aspects of informal labor are extensively analyzed in anthropological literature, it is also acknowledged that informal labor arises from the abundance of unskilled or low-skilled workers who are mostly poor and are unable to secure employment in the formal sector (Chen & Carre, 2020). These are evident in the accounts of the participants of this research.

This chapter explores the informal nature of work for part-time/live-out domestic workers. It addresses their socio-economic conditions, migration to Dhaka from poor rural backgrounds, entry to the domestic workforce, informal verbal contracts, narratives of their work, ordinary concerns about wages, work conditions, hours of work, and expectations from their employers and the government to improve the overall experience. These workers' past and present socio-economic conditions explain the push and pull factors for their migration to Dhaka and entry to the paid domestic workforce. Their socio-economic conditions are also a primary reason the workers continue working as paid domestic workers. The nuances of their everyday work in every employer's house demonstrate that domestic work is not just a number of tasks; instead, it is a ‘series of processes, of tasks inextricably linked,’ as Anderson (2000, p. 11) stressed, which is often not recognized and

valued due to the overall nature of the gendered informal labor market situation of paid domestic work in Bangladesh. The participants' accounts of their informal verbal contract system, where the employers determine the wage and hour of work, and employees have little to say.

By addressing these issues, this chapter answers the first broad question of this research: How do live-out domestic workers experience paid domestic work in private households of their employers? Although the complexities of a ‘private household’ as a workplace for domestic workers have been addressed in this chapter and the next chapter (chapter four), this chapter focuses on the complexities that exist in the informal nature of their working conditions. For instance, the number of tasks and the wage are fixed during this contract, but the number of tasks participants perform often exceeds the contracted number of tasks. What I mean by complexities is the private nature of the employers' home, which is the workplace for domestic workers. Employers take advantage of the isolated private nature of their households, where they are not held accountable for following the contract. That same household is the workplace for domestic workers, where workers are forced to obey their employer's demands as they do not have anyone to complain to. Workers who have experience working through private companies offer their perception that these private household complexities can be partially addressed through having a system like Hellotask.

The Social and Economic conditions of the workers

In this part, I discuss the participants' age, education, family information, and current living conditions, which will help us understand domestic workers' overall socio-economic conditions. Socio-economic conditions play a crucial role in participants’ choice of domestic work as their profession and help explain why they continue working in this

highly informal sector.[16] The following tables show the age, marital status, and education of a total of twenty-two participants.

Age

By design, no participants were under 18. Half of them were more than 31 years old, and three were 60 years old. Two of the sixty-year-old participants are still working, and one has recently retired.

Table 1: Age of domestic workers

Age range	Number of Participants
18 – 25	3
26 – 30	5
31 – 35	3
36 – 40	3
41 – 59	5
60 and above	3
Total	**22**

Marital status

This research focuses on the reproductive role of women domestic workers in their family setting. Therefore, unmarried workers were not recruited. Most participants were married and staying with their husbands, whereas only one was divorced and staying with her mother. One was not divorced but was separated from her husband as he had another family, and she was living with her elder son and his family. All three 60-year-old domestic workers were widows.

[16] The information is based on interviews with seventeen workers, two new participants in the focus group discussion with older groups, and three new participants in the focus group discussion with younger groups. As stated in the methodology chapter, most of the focus group discussion participants have also participated in the interviews. In total, seventeen domestic workers participated in the interviews. From them, nine participants (five in the older group and four in the younger group) participated in both components: Interviews and focus groups.

Table 2: Marital status of the participants

Marital status	**Number of Participants**
Married	16
Divorced	1
Widow	4
Separated	1
Total	**22**

Education

Most participants never attended school, which is common among those over 30. However, one participant (Jannat), who was 50 years old, attended school up to class six (grade six), and another participant, Sonali, who is 26 years old, attended school up to class eight (grade eight). Participants aged under 30 years have attended at least primary school except for one participant.

Table 3: Education of the participants

Education	**Number of Participants**
No education	14
Up to class Five (Grade five)	6
Up to Class Eight (Grade eight)	2
Total	**22**

Family members and number of children

I do not have the specific number of children and family members of the participants who only participated in the focus groups. We focused on discussing the working conditions of domestic workers and their reproductive role in their families from a collective point of view. Therefore, individual family information was not collected. According to the information I have from the interviews, participants aged between 18 and 40 are mostly

found to be living in a nuclear family situation where they live with their spouse and children. Participants' families range from one to seven members; the most common family size is three to six. However, one participant, Poddo, with two daughters (one is six years old, and another is two), reported living in a joint family with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law (husband's sister who is divorced) and her two sons. Tara also lives in a joint family with her husband, youngest son, elder son, his wife, and their newborn child. One participant, Rohima, a widow in her sixties, reported she lives with her divorced daughter (Nazma) and her granddaughter, and her adult son lives with his family in Cumilla. All the interview participants have children. Five participants have one, five participants have two, three participants have three, three participants have four children, and one has five children. Four participants reported having children under five years of age.

Living conditions

Different studies (Ahmed, 2014; Patel et al., 2022) show Dhaka's slums are of poor quality and extremely crowded, with over 95% of one-room dwellings being less than 14 square meters in size and being shared by at least three individuals. That is also evident in my study. Seventeen participants live in different slums in the Boubazar and Rayer Bazar areas. They live in big houses where ten to thirty families live in each of these houses. Most of these housing structures are predominantly temporary and mostly made of low-quality materials like tin sheds; only a few are built with permanent materials like concrete roofed multi-storied buildings (Ahmed, 2014), but the arrangement was mainly like tin-shed houses. In these houses, a shared kitchen with multiple burners and a common washroom are shared among all the residents. Participants said they often must wait in line to cook and use the washrooms. Sometimes, conflict occurs among the residents if someone breaks

the line or takes too much time to cook or in the washroom. During the rainy days, participants face difficulty accessing the kitchen and washroom because the heavy rains cause flooding, as discussed in the methodology chapter. Ahmed (2014) shows that basic public infrastructure is often missing in these slums, lacking essentials like clean water, sanitation, and drainage, and is prone to frequent flooding and water-logging. The flooding issue is not faced by the participants who live in concrete-roofed and three-story buildings. Participants explained that they live together in one room in these houses due to the high rent. For example, Shayma (55) lives in a tin-shed house in the Boubazar area with ten other families where she, her husband, and four children, one of whom is an adult, live in a room less than 20 square feet. Hafiza (53) lives with her elder son and his family, in similar conditions to Shayma. Hafiza, her son, daughter-in-law, and their three children live in a similar room, where she and her grandchildren sleep in the bed, and her son and daughter-in-law sleep on the floor.

Five participants live in a multi-storied building that is not part of the slums but near the slums. Khala (60), her daughter, Tanzila (24), Nuri (40), and Tara (55) from the Boubazar area, used to live in the slums but have now moved into these apartment-style living arrangements in a multi-storied building. I visited their apartments and found that they have three bedrooms, one kitchen, and one washroom, and they occupy only one bedroom and sublet[17] the other bedrooms to their relatives or acquaintances, except Khala and Tanzaila. However, they explained that their living conditions were better than those in the slums

[17] Subletting is a widespread practice in Dhaka city among lower-middle income families. To manage the high house rent, tenants sub-rent part of the apartment with one or more tenants. A one-bedroom apartment costs more than a bigger apartment with three or more rooms. According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), “more than two lakh households in the two city corporations of Dhaka were sublet in 2022” (The Daily Star, February 07, 2024).

because they shared their kitchen and washroom with one or two other families. Therefore, they do not have to wait long to cook and use the washroom. They also have better privacy and a better environment than the slum residents. Nuri shared that her younger son is a college student studying engineering who always asked for a better place so that he could focus more on his studies when they were living in the slums. Nuri and her husband prioritized his education. Therefore, they moved into this apartment arrangement from the slum, and to afford the rent, they sublet the apartment with two other families.

Sonali (26) has a different story about her living conditions. She, her husband, and their ten-year-old daughter live in a separate room on the ground floor of a five-story building in Rayer Bazar. The room has an attached washroom and kitchen. They also used to live in the tin-shed house in the slum where her mother-in-law (Hafiza) still lives. A few years ago, as her daughter was growing up, Sonali and her husband decided to live in a better place to ensure a good environment for their daughter. Sonali explained that the slum environment is neither safe nor good for children because there are many kinds of people, and it is tough to know their intentions. As she and her husband work outside, they cannot always be with their daughter at home. Therefore, they felt it necessary to live in a house with separate washrooms and kitchen facilities. When they are at work, their daughter can stay alone after returning from school, watch TV, and use the washroom without going outside and meeting other people. Sonali told me that when she leaves her daughter at home, she usually locks her door outside so that no one (including her relatives) can come in their absence. Only she and her husband have the keys. To ensure her daughter's safety, they have kept a mobile phone for her daughter; if she needs anything, she can call them. Sonali shared her concern about the child abuse that she thinks is alarming in Dhaka city

and her neighborhood. According to the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) report (2013), 55% of children in Bangladesh experience different forms of abuse and violence, and 90% of them are girl children. Sexual abuse against children and adolescent girls is alarming all over the country, and in most cases, the perpetrator is found to be from the family, close relatives, and neighbors. Sonali does not want to compromise her daughter's safety; therefore, they choose a better living arrangement even with their tight income.

Family income and economic conditions

To explain the economic condition of the participants, several aspects need to be considered: their income, their family income, family expenditure, their debt, and land and house ownership. Participants with no land expressed concern about their future, especially the older participants. One example is Josna (60). She explained that her husband sold their last piece of land in their village before his death, and now she and her sons do not have any piece of land under their ownership. She can hardly work and make ends meet, but she is concerned about her health as she already had an operation and is taking medication; she is uncertain how long she will be able to work and what will happen once she no longer can.

Most participants have at least two earning members in their families: themselves and their husbands. Their husbands work as rickshaw pullers, street vendors, construction site day laborers, caretakers, and pick-up van drivers. Participants explained that some jobs are not regular, so their income is irregular. Some participants' children also work in grocery stores at nearby food markets and garment factories. One participant, Honufa, told me that she and her husband were unemployed for more than a month during the interview and had no income then. To make ends meet, they took some loans, and her mother-in-law (Josna) tried

to help them out from her meager income. Her parents send rice, and some produce from their village. With these supports, they had been trying to survive, and she was actively looking for domestic work that she used to do but lost due to her hand fracture.

Most participants shared that they (and their families) owned no land or house, not even in their village. Some had a small piece of land in their village where they planned to build a house and wished to live in their old age. Poddo's husband and his two brothers got a small piece of their ancestral land in their village, where they built a house jointly. To complete the house, they had to take out a loan from a relative with high interest. Jannat was exceptional, she and her husband own a small house in their village that they completed making during COVID-19.

Why and How: Entering the paid domestic workforce

Almost all the participants migrated to Dhaka from different rural areas to find better employment opportunities with their families (Ashraf et al., 2019). However, they did so at various ages and different life stages. Some migrated with their husband after marriage, some came with their parents as children, some of them came with relatives, and one left her village with one of the villagers at the age of 10 to escape the abuse of her stepmother. The following table and figure show the age range of the participants during migration, the place they migrated from, and the people they migrated with.

Table 4: Migration to Dhaka at different ages (Total Number of participants 17)

The age range of participants during migration to Dhaka		**With whom**	
Born in Dhaka		1	
1 – 10 years old	2	Before marriage with relatives	1
		Before marriage, with a villager	1
11 – 17 years old	4	Before marriage with relatives	1
		Before marriage with parents	2
		Before marriage with a sibling	1
18 – 25 years old	6	After marriage with husband and children	4
		After marriage to husband	1
		After marriage, migrated alone	1
After 36	4	After marriage with husband and children	4

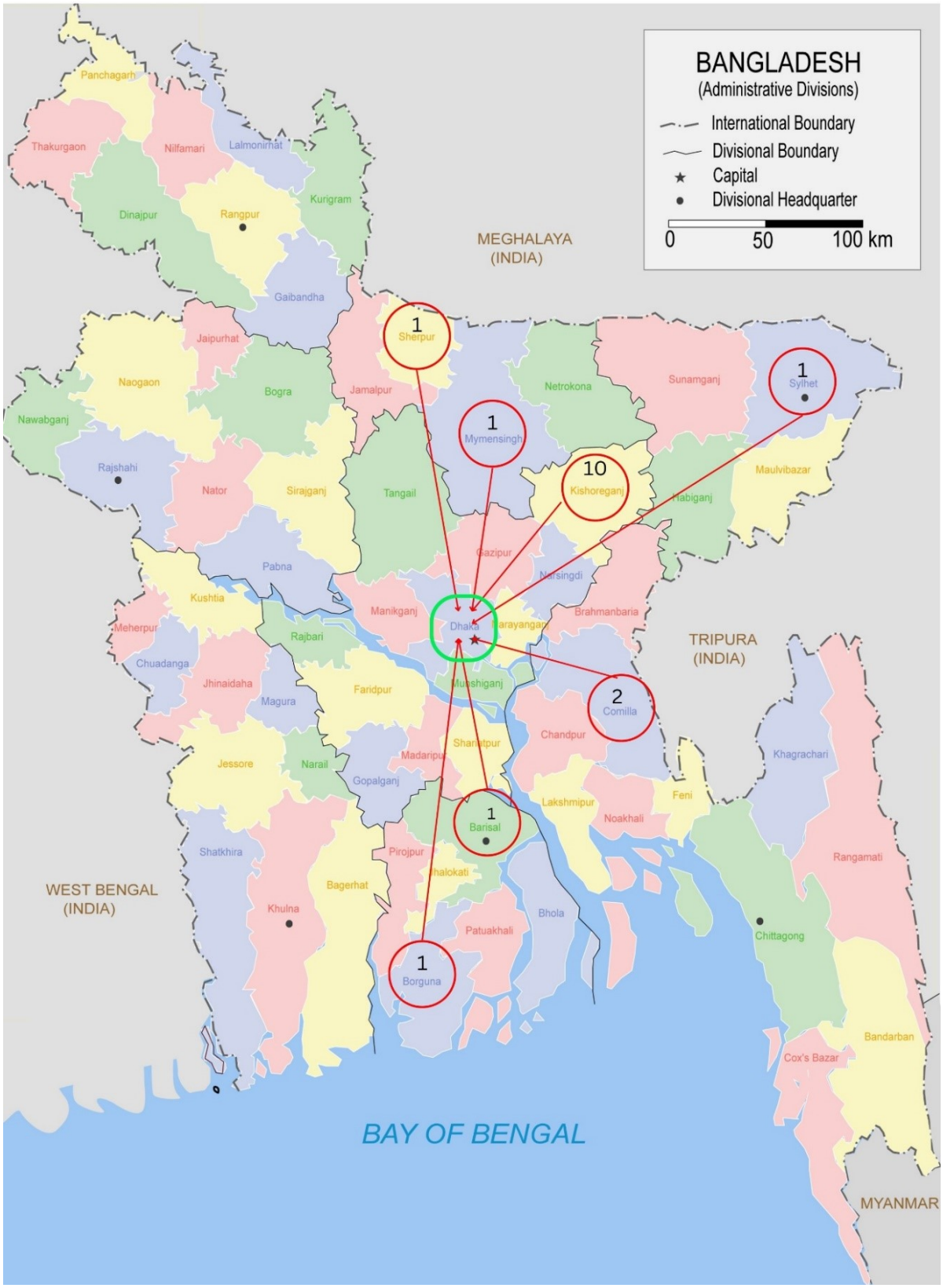

Figure 4: An internal migration Map: Origin of participants (Source: Armanaziz, July 30, 2007) [Modified with field research data].

Five participants started working as live-in child domestic workers when they were between the ages of 7 and 12 due to the extreme poverty in their families. One participant, Joba (35), traveled to Dhaka from Barishal[18] with a villager without telling anybody, including her father, at the age of 10 to escape her stepmother's abuse. She started working as a live-in child domestic worker in a stranger's household. Joba's case aligns with the findings of the ILO Report 2006, which states that 10% of girl child domestic workers left home due to the ill-treatment of their stepmothers and started working as child domestic workers.

When they left their villages, most had no prior experience in paid domestic work. The married participants were housewives in their village, while their husbands were the household's main breadwinners (Mahan & Kamruzzaman, 2016). Their husbands struggled to find livelihoods in the village and to make ends meet. Therefore, they decided to go to Dhaka in search of work for their husbands. While making ends meet in the village was hard, the cost of living in Dhaka was about twice as high, as they had to pay high room rents in the slums. As a result, within a few months, these women decided to utilize their skills as housewives and enter the domestic workforce. This choice was made in a context where many of their family members, relatives, and neighbors were working in this sector. As Tanzila (24), a part-time domestic worker, explained:

> When my younger son turned two years old, I started working. I could see that my husband's irregular and sole income was not enough to manage the household expenses, and it became very difficult to afford food. The prices of goods are high and rapidly increasing; therefore, it is hard to make ends meet. That is when I

[18] Barishal is a southern divisional district of Bangladesh which is 183 km away from Dhaka.

> realized that no matter how difficult it is, I must raise my children and bring food to their plate. That is when I took up work. (Tanzila, Boubazar, October 22, 2023)

Before her marriage, Tanzila lived with her mother and siblings in a tin-shed house at Boubazar. She completed fifth grade (Class Five) and can read and write in Bengali. Her mother (who was also a domestic worker) was the single earner in their family after Tanzila's father's death. Therefore, like her elder sisters, she had to drop out. Later, she got married at a young age to one of her relatives from Kishoreganj. Her husband then took her to Kishoreganj, where they settled. Their first son was born in the village of Kishoreganj.

Tanzila's husband was also from a poor family and did not have any land where they could cultivate crops for sustenance. He worked as a laborer in construction. However, it was difficult to find consistent construction work in Kishoreganj[19], leading him to seek work elsewhere. Eventually, he found employment in Narayangonj[20] and took Tanzila with him to Dhaka, leaving her in the care of her mother while he worked and stayed in Narayangonj. Tanzila returned to Dhaka four years before our conversation. During this time, Tanzila gave birth to their second son at her mother's place, making it increasingly challenging to provide for their children. Tanzila decided to join the workforce as a paid domestic worker, following in her mother's footsteps. She discussed this decision with her husband, who at first expressed concern about caring for their young child while she was at work. Tanzila

[19] Kishorganj is a northern district under the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh. The district is 120 KM far from Dhaka.

[20] Narayanganj district is the smallest district of Bangladesh, located in the central part of the country, and is a part of Dhaka division which is about 16 km southeast of Dhaka city.

assured him that her mother would provide care, emphasizing that her earnings would at least ensure they could afford food every day.

Given her limited education, Tanzila did not explore other employment options, such as cleaning in an office, clinics, or hospitals. She was familiar with domestic work because her mother, many relatives, and neighbors undertook these jobs without formal education, making it seem like an easy choice. Tanzila sought the help of her relatives and neighbors to find work; she got her first part-time task-based work as a paid domestic worker.

The stories of other domestic workers who migrated to Dhaka with their husbands are quite similar. The inconsistent income of their husbands was not enough to support the entire family, prompting wives to seek employment. With limited or no education, finding alternative jobs was difficult for most of them. Ghosh (2021) identifies it as 'the most accessible form of work' considering the "flexibility" of starting this job quickly with little or no education or other 'skills.' However, some participants with no education joined the ready-made garments industry first, but women with young children could not pursue that option due to their childcare responsibilities. The part-time, task-based structure of domestic work appeared to be a feasible option. One example is Lily, who worked in the garment factory for almost eight years. Later, she switched to paid domestic work due to childcare responsibilities after the birth of her third child. This challenges Ghosh's narrow comprehension of workers' choices and decision-making dynamics regarding labor force participation.

There was a different trend for young girls who migrated to Dhaka before marriage. The young girls joined the readymade garment industry as they did not have many care responsibilities at home and could work long hours. Some continued working in the RMG

industry as long as they did not have children or there was someone in their family to take care of their young kids. Eventually, these people also ended up joining the domestic workforce as their childcare responsibilities increased. In addition to childcare responsibilities, there are cases where some participants, like Nazma (35), started working in the RMG industry but could not continue due to their health. Nazma suffered from jaundice due to the heat from the high-voltage lights inside the factory. Another participant, Nuri (40), also left the factory as standing for a long time during her long shifts made her sick. Their health conditions left them with no choice but to work in the domestic work sector.

One illustrative case is Sonali (26), who entered paid domestic work through the connections of her relatives and later engaged via the mobile app Hellotask. Sonali was born in Mymensingh[21] district and grew up in her native village with her three siblings and four half-siblings. At the age of 12, Sonali came to Dhaka with her elder brother to pursue a better education. At that time, her elder brother was working as a caretaker in a residential building. He wanted Sonali to continue her education just as much as she did so that she could pursue a service job. Her brother wanted this because none of their siblings could continue studying due to poverty. They had to start working to support their family.

Sonali moved with her elder brother to a slum in the Rayer Bazar area, where she met her future husband's family. Her future mother-in-law adored her, as she did not have any daughters of her own. In her early teens, Sonali got married. Sonali’s elder brother kept

[21] Mymensingh is a divisional district of Bangladesh and about 120 km north of the capital city Dhaka.

motivating her to continue attending school and bore all the expenses. Her mother-in-law and husband also supported her education.

Within a year of marriage, Sonali became pregnant, but she was unaware of it until the fourth month. She continued attending school throughout the pregnancy but fell behind soon after giving birth. During an exam, her newborn daughter got pneumonia, and she had to stay home with her. Sonali missed the rest of the exams and fell behind by a year. Feeling upset, she did not want to go back to school. She thought, *"*Now I have a daughter and my family that need my care, it's better for me to fully be with them" (Sonali, Rayer Bazar, November 03, 2023).

Sonali's husband worked as a rickshaw puller when they had their firstborn. Sonali realized that her husband's income alone would not be enough to provide all the necessities for raising her daughter. She decided to work. Sonali discussed this with her husband, but he was hesitant about her working, as it would require her to stay away from their child for much of the day. However, Sonali convinced her husband of the financial necessity. She found cleaning jobs, first in a college and then in an office. However, she could not continue either of those jobs because of the long hours that did not allow her to breastfeed her 8-month-old daughter. She decided that working in households as a paid domestic worker was a better solution for her situation. Because her mother-in-law, other relatives, and neighbors in the slum also worked as domestic workers she was familiar with the details of domestic work. She asked her relatives and neighbors to help her find a job where she could take her daughter with her to work. They helped her find two employers willing to allow her to bring her daughter to work. That is how Sonali joined the paid domestic workforce.

Informal work arrangements

This section discusses the informal nature of paid domestic work. It includes verbal contracts during hiring, key responsibilities, tasks performed in each employer's household, salary, and other benefits, including health benefits.

Verbal contract

"Mina Apa, I am looking for *Chuta Kaj* [part-time paid domestic work]; please help me get one." Poddo (27) who left her garment factory job when she was pregnant with her first baby, said to Mina, the woman tailor, who is her relative and with whom she lived in the same house. Women from the Boubazar, Kafrul, and Kochukhet areas come to Mina, the owner and operator of the tailor shop, for tailoring and altering services. Therefore, Mina has good connections with many employers and workers in this area. Often, Mina is a mediator between the worker and employer for part-time paid domestic work.

Poddo wanted to return to garment factory work, but her husband disagreed because she would have to spend much of her day at the factory while her kids would be away the whole day. Her husband assured her that she did not need to work; he would try to manage to make ends meet with whatever he earned. Nevertheless, Poddo wanted financial independence, as she does not like asking her husband for money for her and her kids' every need. She also wanted to help her husband as she saw how hard he worked as a pick-up truck driver to make ends meet. Therefore, she decided to take part-time domestic work. Her husband agreed because it would not bind her to full-day work commitments like garment factory work. One day, Mina took Poddo to a nearby employer's house, who had earlier informed Mina that they needed a *Chuta Bua* (part-time, task-based domestic worker). Mina was present during their verbal contract, during which the employer explained Poddo would be required to do three tasks and would be paid 700 TK per task

for a total of 2100 TK. This was less than the usual amount other domestic workers were paid; the rate was usually 800 to 1000 TK per task. Despite the lower offer, Poddo agreed to take the work because it was getting a little hard to get work at that time.

Other women I spoke with told me how they got their work through other domestic workers in their community. Everyone's story is quite similar regarding getting their first work through other domestic workers in their neighborhood or through the gatekeepers of residential buildings who also live in the neighborhood or pass by during their walk to work. Tara (55), for example, has a good connection with employers in Boubazar and the neighboring communities because she has worked as a domestic worker for a long time. Employers often ask her when they need workers. Tara then connects her acquaintances with the employers, suggesting that the workers behave well, maintain sincerity, avoid arguing with the employers, and refrain from stealing anything.

Employers can also act as mediators or connectors between workers and employers. Lily (35) has been working as a part-time domestic worker for nine years and got one of her jobs directly through the employer. She explained,

> I was working in one household, and one day, when I met the landlord in the lift, he told me that if I wanted to take up another job, I should see him in his apartment after work. When I went there and asked the landlord how many tasks they wanted me to perform, they initially wanted to hire me for three tasks: mopping the stairwell, mopping floors, and washing clothes. They said they would consider giving me more tasks if they liked my work. After working there for two days, they offered me two more tasks: doing dishes and making Roti. For the first three tasks, I was offered 4000 TK per month, and with the addition of the two extra tasks, the wage increased to 5000 TK per month. (Lily, Boubazar, October 29, 2023)

Like Lily, some other domestic workers were hired directly by their employer. Nuri (40) was hired by her elderly employer on the street when she was going to work. Rohima met her current employer in the house of her previous employer, who one day offered her to work at their house. After getting that offer, Rohima left her previous employer and started working in her current employer's house three years ago.

None of the participants in the Boubazar area mentioned coming across any agencies to help them find work. However, in the Rayer Bazar area, I interviewed four domestic workers, who had both kinds of working experiences, working through traditional informal arrangements and also through Hellotask, a private company. All of them work part-time in multiple employers' households, and they told me about their hiring experience through the Hallotask mobile app platform.

Jannat (50), who now works under two employers as a part-time domestic worker, traditionally found both of her jobs through other domestic workers. However, in early 2020, when Hallotask recently launched its app providing domestic worker services, Jannat got connected to the platform through one of Hallotask's field officers. Through Jannat, Sonali (26), Hafiza (53), and Reshmi (25) also got connected to the platform. After hearing from the field officer about how the app works, they were interested in exploring this new opportunity, primarily as the pandemic had already spread, leading to many of them being laid off from their work when residential buildings restricted outsiders' entry to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They were registered on the app by providing a copy of their National Identity Card (NID), a mobile phone number, and a photo (taken by the field officer on their smartphone). Once enlisted, they became part of HalloTask's registered domestic workers list.

When HalloTask receives a request for domestic worker services in the location where these workers prefer to work, they call them to ask if they want to provide the service. If the worker agrees, they are assigned to the service, and the employer can then see the workers' details in the app and contact them for their whereabouts and location details. In the early days, all of them used to work on an hourly basis on the platform, earning 125 TK for each hour of service, paid in cash immediately after completing their tasks. From that 125 TK, HalloTask deducted 20%, which the domestic workers had to return through a mobile financing system.

Later, Hellotask introduced a package service where employers can request monthly packages that can be anywhere from one to eight hours. The participants preferred the package system because they had to go to a new location every time they received a request to work in the hourly service. It was difficult for them as none had a higher literacy level. If the employer's house was not within walking distance, then they had to pay the transport cost, which was not worth it. Sonali (26) and Reshmi (25) had been providing monthly package service through Hellotask at the time of the fieldwork. Both of Sonali's employers and one of Reshmi's employers were through Hellotask. Jannat (50) and Hafiza (53) were not working through Hellotask. They had requested Hellotask to assign them monthly package services, but they were not getting any due to scarcity.

In response to the question of how they get work through Hellotask, participants explained that recently, Hellotask introduced its IVR system, Computer APA, as mentioned in the first chapter. Registered domestic workers now receive a call from the IVR Computer APA every afternoon. During this call, they are asked whether they want to work the next day. If the workers are interested, they are instructed to press a certain button on their phone; if

not, they must press another particular button. Based on this confirmation from the workers, if Hellotask receives any requests near the workers' preferred location, they receive another call from the IVR Computer APA instructing them about the service request. If domestic workers accept the request, they are provided with the address of the service requester (employer). Domestic workers are provided with a phone number to report any problems with the service or the employer for any kind of communication. At the end of the job, the IVR Computer APA calls again to confirm that the workers have successfully completed the service request. With this new system, Hellotask has also introduced a cashless service, meaning that the payment for the service that domestic workers receive upon completion of their work from the employer is now made through online payments via their card or mobile financing service.

Jannat and Hafiza receive a call every evening, and they press the button that confirms they want to work the next day. However, it has been several months since they received any work from Hellotask, which they were unhappy about. They explained that recently, it has become extremely uncertain working in the new system. Jannat and her husband spoke highly about the days when these digital systems (like Computer APA and cashless payment) were not launched; they remembered the earlier days when Jannat received several jobs each day and had work every day. Sonali, Reshmi, and Hafiza agree with the uncertainty of getting to work every day. While this new system offers some sort of flexibility and better work provisions, it also creates high job insecurity. Sonali explained that there is no guarantee that workers will receive regular work through Hellotask. Although a worker may frequently receive hourly instant maid service requests, the monthly package service that the workers expect more of is scarce nowadays.

The next question concerned the contract between Hellotask and the workers. Participants explained that they must provide a copy of their NID card and a digital photo when registering in the Hellotask system. Once registered, the workers receive an identity card with a unique worker number from Hellotask that they need to carry while going to work. Except for the Identity card, workers do not receive any other documentation stating the conditions of their work's provisions. Here, we need to understand how Hellotask offers some organized labor conditions through its platform for domestic workers in Dhaka, though, that does not allow the workers many of the workers' rights. As Ashraf et al. (2019) analyze the decent work deficits in domestic workers in Bangladesh following the decent work agenda developed by ILO, they state that signing a formal contract with the workers is one of the key elements for improving working conditions. Although Hellotask offers a digital version of the contract (which is each service-based) with the customers but they do not sign any formal contract with the workers that assures regular work, clearly explains their pay and other benefits, protection from workplace hazards and violence, and workers' rights violations. This makes this platform another informal arrangement mediated by private companies, which merits further research to understand the issues related to such arrangements.

Domestic Work and Wages

Two of the seventeen in-depth interview participants work as paid full-time live-out domestic workers. Both reside in the Boubazar area, but one works in the nearby Kafrul area, while the other works in the Mohakhali DOHS[22] area, which is about a 25-minute walk from her home. Although both have identified themselves as full-time workers as they

[22] DOHS stands for Defence Officers Housing Scheme, which is a residential project for retired defense officers and civilians overseen by the defense ministry of Bangladesh.

work under one employer and spend more than 7 hours a day at work, there is a significant difference in working hours between them. The participant working in the Mohakhali DOHS area works 7 hours a day, while the other works 13 hours a day without any day off.

Fifteen other participants work as part-time domestic workers, varying their working hours from 3 to 9 daily. Only two domestic workers, Josna and Shayma, work under a single employer for about 3 to 5 hours daily. Josna, aged 60, underwent a major operation a few years ago, and Shayma, aged 50, has diabetes. Therefore, neither can work under multiple employers, as moving immediately from one household to another is required, which they cannot do due to their health conditions. Shayma told me that she is seeking another employer for one or two tasks within one and a half hours, which would earn her an additional 1000 to 2000 TK.

These domestic workers perform task-based jobs under single or multiple employers, with four working under single employers and one with six employers every day (see details in Table 2). The usual practice is that they are paid based on the number of tasks they are hired for. Participants shared details about the daily tasks they performed in employers' households. The intensity of these tasks varies among households. The tasks the participants usually perform as paid domestic workers include, but are not limited to, cooking, cleaning the house, cleaning the washrooms, washing clothes, doing dishes, dusting furniture, dusting and wiping ceiling fans, mopping stairwells of multi-storied buildings, and taking care of elderly people and children. Each task is counted as one task, and their monthly wage is fixed based on the number of tasks they are hired to perform under an employer. The workload, labor, and time required to complete one task varies depending on the size of the house, the number of family members in the household, the

demand for cleanliness of the individual employers, and the socio-economic condition of the employers. Discussing each task in detail from the workers' perspective is necessary to understand the workload.

Cooking (*Ranna Kora*) is performed by almost all participants. For example, Sonali (26) works under two employers and is responsible solely for cooking in both households. Her employers have other domestic workers to handle cleaning and laundry tasks. Josna (60) is another example. She works under one employer and is hired to cook and mop the house. Cooking may sound generic, but for domestic workers, it encompasses a series of tasks and responsibilities that vary in intensity and complexity. It involves washing dishes, chopping vegetables, fish, and meat, preparing spices, and cooking multiple items (e.g., breakfast items like Roti/paratha, vegetables, omelets, or boiled eggs; lunch and dinner items like steamed rice and various main dishes that vary each day, along with everyday items like lentils and vegetables). Additionally, cleaning the kitchen after cooking is part of the cooking process. Completing all these tasks can take anywhere from one and a half hours to six hours. Therefore, the wage for cooking indeed varies depending on these factors.

Hafiza (53) cooks in both of her employers' households, one in the morning and another in the evening. The morning job takes her around six hours to finish cooking daily because she must prepare breakfast items first, followed by lunch and dinner. She starts at 7 in the morning and finishes by 1 pm. The breakfast items vary between weekdays and weekends; her employers prefer Roti/paratha with vegetables and omelets on weekdays, while they prefer Bhuna khichuri on weekends. In the evening, she cooks for another employer, where it takes only one and a half hours to complete all cooking tasks. This difference in work intensity is reflected in her salary: she receives 7000 TK from her morning employer and

3000 TK from her evening employer. Although in both workplaces, she is responsible for cooking, the workload, duration of work, and salary vary significantly based on the socio-economic conditions of her employers.

Part of the cooking includes *Kotabacha*, which is also mentioned as an individual task. "*Kotabacha*" is a Bengali term composed of two words: "*Kota*," meaning chopping or cutting, and "*Bacha*," meaning sorting. For example, when domestic workers need to prepare leafy vegetables, they must first sort through the vegetables to remove dirt and then chop and wash them. "*Kotabacha*" also involves cutting fish, chicken, and meat and sorting small fish. Sorting small fish can be time-consuming, often taking more than an hour. This is because these fish are often mixed with debris, such as weeds, stones, and other types of dirt. Workers must meticulously sort through the fish to remove the dirt before cleaning them thoroughly for cooking. Jannat (50), Nuri (40), Poddo (27), and Parul (40) shared that '*Kotabacha'* is one of the tasks they perform every day in one of their employers' households as an individual task. For other participants who perform cooking, *Kotabacha* is the integrated part of their task of cooking every day.

Making Roti for the employer is sometimes considered distinct from general cooking, as it involves several steps. Tanzila (24), who works under four employers and performs two tasks in each employer's household, begins her day by making Roti for her first employer every morning. The intensity of this task depends on the number of Rotis she must prepare each day. Making Roti includes mixing flour with water (which can be boiled or at room temperature, depending on the employer's preference) and salt. The dough is then freshly kneaded by hand until it reaches a smooth and soft consistency. Next, the dough is divided into similarly sized pieces (the number also depends on the employer's instructions) and

flattened using a '*pira-beloon'* (a wooden board and a rolling pin). Finally, the Roti must be cooked in a pan. Tanzila (24) must follow all these steps to make 10 to 15 Rotis every day. The time required to make Roti can vary, taking an hour or more, depending on the quantity needed. Parul (40) used to work in a household where she had to make 30 – 35 Rotis every day.

Washing Clothes (*Kapor Dhowa*) is counted as one task, though the time it takes can vary based on the number of household members and the types of clothes they ask the domestic workers to wash. The clothes types can include clothes they wear day to day, bed sheets, pillow covers, curtains, quilts, floor mats, kitchen towels, bath towels, and any other pieces of clothes they use in the households. Washing clothes includes multiple steps, all of which are included in this single task. For instance, sorting the clothes by color, soaking them in soapy water for a few minutes (sometimes with warm water for certain clothes), washing the clothes, hanging the wet clothes, folding them, and sometimes ironing them. All these tasks are counted as one task – washing clothes. The second aspect depends on the number of household members and the employers. Nuri, who works under four employers as a part-time domestic worker, shares her washing experience in one of her employers' houses.

> In the other household I work in, they own 3 or 4 multi-storied residential buildings. How many clothes can a person wear and make dirty in one day? They would put clean clothes in the dirty clothes bin. Every day, I must wash 3 to 4 buckets of clothes. They buy detergent powder in tons. I get wounds on my hands and feet from washing these many clothes daily. Look, my feet are wounded. When I put the clothes in the detergent water, they check if it is slippery or foamy enough. Then, they add more detergent powder to the water. Washing the clothes takes more than an hour – just a single task. I only get 2000 TK for working there for two tasks, so how can I manage to work in other places and earn enough to make ends meet? I washed clothes there today and will see another basket full of dirty clothes

> tomorrow. They use mats in every corner of their rooms, so they have many mats, and I must wash all of them every week. (Nuri, 40, Boubazar, October 24, 2023)

In another household, Nuri mops the floor daily, for which she gets 1000 TK. Additionally, four times a month, she is required to wash bed sheets and pillow covers, which her employer considers a half-task and pays her 500 TK for. Nuri appreciates washing clothes in this household because her employer is considerate of her workload. She has expressed satisfaction with this arrangement, as her employer is mindful of her workload, trusts her work, and treats her well.

Mopping floors is another common task performed by many domestic workers in their employers' households. For instance, Reshmi (25), who performs nine tasks under three employers, mopping floors is common in every household she works in. The same applies to Nazma (35), who works in five households, and mopping the floors is a common task in all her workplaces. All participants accounted that mopping is an individual task in most households where they work. The only exceptions are Hafiza (53) and Sonali (26) (mother and daughter-in-law), who handle cooking in all the households they work in.

The process of mopping floors involves several steps. Firstly, sweeping the floors of every room, living room, balcony, and front area of the apartment is done. Then, the floors are mopped using warm water or normal room temperature water (sometimes mixed with detergent powder or Savlon) and damp cloths, typically old t-shirts. None of the participants mentioned using mop sticks or any other modern mopping tools.

While mopping floor is considered one task, the size of the house or apartment is not considered when fixing the wage for this task. For example, Joba (35) performs four tasks in her single employer's household, where mopping the floors is counted as one task. That house has ten bedrooms, two kitchens, six balconies, and two living rooms. When mopping

the floors, Joba must sweep and mop all these areas. Since the wage is fixed based on the number of tasks performed, the worker who mops in a two-bedroom apartment receives the same wage as another worker who mops in a three/four/five-bedroom apartment like the one Joba works in. This applies to other tasks as well.

In addition to mopping floors, other common tasks performed by domestic workers include cleaning bathrooms, dusting and wiping furniture, window grills, and ceiling fans, making beds, sweeping, mopping stairwells of multi-storied buildings, and taking care of elderly individuals and children. The following table shows the employment type, the number of employers each participant works under, the number of tasks they perform every day, the number of working hours it takes to complete their tasks, and the monthly wage they receive for their work.

Table 5: Type of employment, number of employers, working hours, and monthly wages (total number of Participants 17)

Type of Employment		**Total number of employers they work under**		**Working hours everyday**		**Number of tasks performed**	**Monthly wage (TK)**
Full-time	2	1 household	2	7 hours	1	4	8,000
				13 hours	1	At least 8	6,000
Part-Time	15	1 household	2	3 hours	1	3	3,000
				5 hours	1	2	5,000
		2 households	6	4 hours	2	3	3,500
						4	6,200
				7.5 hours	1	2	10,000
				7 hours	1	7	8,000
				8 hours	2	2	9,600
						6	8,500
		3 households	2	6 hours	1	6	5,600
				9.5 hours	1	9	14,400
			3	9 hours	1	7	11,500

		4 households		8 hours	1	8	8,000
				7 hours	1	8.5	8,500
		5 households	1	9 hours	1	14	13,000
		6 households	1	5 hours	1	6	9,500

All participants identified themselves as *'Chuta Bua*'; even Joba (35) and Rohima (60), who work full-time under a single employer, refer to themselves as *'Chuta Bua'* as they do not live in their employers' houses. However, except for these two participants, every other participant also identified themselves as part-time domestic workers but most of them work more than 7 hours every day, which is approximately the same hours a full-time worker in the formal sector works. This also has been evident in other research, both for international migrant domestic workers (Anderson, 2000) and internal migrant or non-migrant domestic workers (Sen & Sengupta, 2016; Wilks, 2018; Ashraf et al., 2019). While these workers manage their time to rush from one employer to another, they often do not get any break time for eating or sitting to take a break and end up working long hours like Rohima (Anderson, 2000; Wilks, 2018; Ashraf et al., 2019).

As we can see from the table, their wage does not depend on the number of hours they work every day and sometimes also not on the number of tasks they perform every day. This is a critical aspect that requires attention from everyone (Ashraf et al., 2019). If we adhere to the point of a task-based wage system, then the worker who performs fourteen tasks every day should receive a higher salary than the worker who performs nine tasks. However, we observe that the worker who performs fourteen tasks receives 13,000 TK, which is less than the worker who receives 14,400 TK for performing nine tasks. Both take almost the same amount of time to complete their tasks. This highlights the disparity in the

informal system, which is heavily dominated by the employer, leaving the worker with little to no bargaining power. Ashraf et al. (2019) address in their study that domestic workers lack the power and agency to negotiate their wages and other rights due to the absence of legal coverage.

If we pay attention to the number of hours spent daily in the employer's household, we can observe that Rohima (60), a full-time worker under a single employer, spent around thirteen hours daily in her workplace. During this time, she had to handle various tasks from cooking to cleaning, yet her monthly wage was only 6000 TK. In contrast, Parul (40) worked four hours daily under two employers and earned 6200 TK as a monthly wage. When Rohima was asked why she receives only 6000 TK for working 13 hours a day and doing everything in the house, she replied,

> The salary was low. Gradually, it has increased to 6000 TK now. I have been telling them, 'Look, I work in your house from dawn to dusk and do everything. I doubt if you will find anyone as trustworthy as me. The other workers are not reliable; they leave gaps in their work.' They appreciate my work and praise me to their guests. This is the only house where I am getting 6000 TK. Earlier, for the same amount of work, I got far less. Now, I only work in a single household as I have become older, and my body cannot work as fast. I work slowly. Additionally, I must perform prayers; I must pray because only working will not benefit me in the afterlife. My employer allows me to perform prayers there. They also provide me with three meals. (Rohima, Boubazar, November 01, 2023)

Her daughter Nazma (35), who is 35 years old and has been working as a domestic worker since she was ten, performs fourteen tasks under five employers, which take her about nine hours every day, earning 13,000 BDT. Nazma starts at seven in the morning and continues

until four pm in the afternoon, mostly without taking any breaks. She shared her daily work routine as follows,

> Currently, I am working in five households. I start my day by going to the first household at 7 am, where I perform five tasks: making breakfast, doing Kotabacha for lunch and dinner, doing dishes, washing clothes, and mopping floors. Madame (my employer) remains in bed while I complete all these tasks nicely before leaving. Working in this house takes about 4 hours, from 7 am to 11 am. After completing my tasks in the first household, I move to the second house, where I perform three tasks: washing clothes, doing dishes, and mopping floors. It takes around 2 hours in that house. Then, I proceed to my third household, where I only mop the floors. Next, I go to the fourth house, where I complete two tasks: washing clothes and mopping floors. Finally, I go to the last house, where I must wash clothes, mop floors, and do dishes. By the time I finish my tasks in the last house, it is already 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and then I return home. Throughout these 9 hours of work, I usually do not get any break time between the households. These households are all in the same neighborhood, requiring me to run from one house to another without taking any breaks. If I get delayed in one house, it affects my schedule for the rest of the day, and I risk missing doing the task at least at one house. If I miss a house, I must deal with the employer's anger the next day when I return to work." (Nazma, 35, Boubazar, part-time domestic worker)

The detailed description of the major tasks that domestic workers perform in their employers' households proves that every single task is combined with a series of unrecognized tasks that are thus undervalued (Anderson, 2000). Ghosh (2021) argues that these works are undervalued, unprotected, and often invisible. Neetha (2019) notes that "One of the reasons for the existence of poor wages for domestic work has been this devaluation of care work and the social understanding of the specificity and skill associated with such work as something inherent in all women" (p. 25). Wilks (2018) discusses that washing floors and clothes is strenuous, labor-intensive work; domestic workers often do this using traditional methods, such as hand-washing clothes and scrubbing floors on their hands and knees with cloths and buckets of water. Additionally, while cooking is seen as a

relatively skilled activity, other tasks (such as cleaning) are considered unskilled, menial labor. Therefore, employers who can afford only one domestic worker usually hire someone for washing dishes, which, along with bathroom cleaning, is viewed as the lowest household task (Ray & Qayum, 2009). The perception of cooking as a more skilled task also leads to higher wages for cooks compared to cleaning jobs, making cooking jobs more attractive for live-out domestic workers as in the case of Sonali and Hafiza. Despite heavy physical labor and certain skill set required in domestic work, Grimshaw and Rubery (2007) emphasize that women are often confined to low-paying jobs due to perceptions of their skills as inferior, gendered occupational and industrial segregation, assumptions about women being secondary earners, and their unpaid care responsibilities. Consequently, occupations and sectors dominated by women are viewed as less important, requiring lower skills, and therefore deserving of lower wages compared to those dominated by men (Antonopoulos, 2009). The lack of recognition of the home as a workplace contributes significantly to the invisibility and devaluation of care and unpaid domestic work (Ghosh, 2021), which is exacerbated by gender, race, caste, and other social characteristics of these workers and results in low wages and lack of legal protection (Antonopoulos, 2009; Ghosh, 2021).

Weekly days off and annual leaves

Four participants who have experience working on the Hellotask platform explained that while they worked in the monthly package service, they received one day off every week which is not applicable for the instant hourly service. Sonali (26) works in two employers' houses through Hellotask, she gets one day off in both of her jobs. She asked her employers for Friday off as her daughter’s school is also off on Friday. She wants to spend her off day with her daughter. Both of her employers agreed. Sonali mentioned that this is a unique benefit of working through Hellotask, as employers do not allow such weekly days off in traditional work arrangements. Reshmi (25), on the other hand, gets a day off from the work that she does through the platform but does not get any days off in her two other traditional jobs. Therefore, she does not get any full day off from her work. Jannat (50) and

Hafiza (53), who had worked through the platform before and enjoyed this weekly day off benefit, now miss that. During their interview, they highlighted how helpful that system was for them as they could rest on their days off, visit their relatives, and cook good food for their family members.

A weekly day off seemed surprising to some workers as they said their employers would never give them a monthly day off. If they raise the topic in front of their employers, they either do not respond or say it is impossible. Lily (35) said,

> Yes, I must work seven days a week. They never talk about a weekly day off, not even any day off. I have been working for a long time now, and I am usually never absent from my work. Maybe that is why they think I don't need a day off and never bother to ask! If I cannot go to work one day, the next day, I face them very angry." (Lily, Boubazar, October 29, 2023)

Joba (35), who works under a single employer as a full-time worker, shared that in that house there are four more domestic workers like her doing different tasks. For example, one person is dedicated to cooking, and another worker is dedicated to taking care of the elderly person. Altogether, five domestic workers work there every day. They had raised the topic of a weekly day off to their employer and suggested they would take days off on alternate days. For example, if Joba is off on Saturday, the other four people will be there to do all the work, and they can also cover for Joba on that day. Similarly, someone else can take off on Sunday when Joba and the other three workers will cover for that person. The employers dismiss all these suggestions, saying that as long as their elderly mother is alive, they must work seven days.

Here, the question arises: Why do the employers of Hellotask allow their workers a weekly day off while other employers in traditional arrangements are strict about not allowing any

day off? There is the presence of a private company that plays the role of mediator between the employers and the workers. Their mediation takes place through their policy, which is developed by analyzing the country's context, labor rights, demands and supply, etcetera. This policy also addresses some of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015 provisions. When this company offers its service with certain rules and regulations, and people agree to buy that service, they accept the rules and regulations applied by the company. Participants shared that it is integrated into their service that workers will work six days a week. The weekly off days will be fixed upon discussion between the workers and employers. This practice also highlights the existing hierarchies in a society where employers accept rules and regulations implied by an entity (e.g., Hellotask) but deny that same provision while the workers themselves demand or ask for it without having been involved with an organization. Ashraf et al. found in their study that the reason for not getting a weekly day off is the gendered cultural practice of domestic work where women (even the employer women) do not get any off days from their household chores (2019, p. 86). This finding takes it as normally well accepted by the workers, which I found my participants do not accept as normal cultural practice. Rather, they take their job as work like other sector workers and demand a weekly day off quite strongly. They cannot negotiate alone with their employers because of their social position.

Participants noted that they only get three to five days off during one Eid, especially Eid-al-Fitr. They must inform their employers in advance about their need for time off. For example, Poddo's (27) employers do not allow her any days off during Eid-al-Azha, and she must work that day. She only gets time off during Eid-al-Fitr.

Some participants mentioned the days off they receive when their employers go on vacation, though this is not the same for all employers and workers. Participants in the older focus group discussion shared that employers who are tenants in the city usually go on vacation during Eid, summer school vacations, or at the end of their children's yearly final exams. Landlords usually do not go on vacation for extended periods; they stay in the city year-round. If they do go somewhere, it is usually only for a few days. Rohima (60) told me,

> I don't have any days off. The only chance I had to take a week off was when my employer was planning to visit her brother for a week. She told me to take time off as there would be no one at the house. However, her mother-in-law refused to go anywhere else. She said, "I will not go anywhere. I will stay at this home. This Bua will take care of me. I cannot stay well anywhere else. I get sick if I go to any of my other son's places." Since the mother-in-law would not leave at that time, I had to go to work to take care of her. I had to cook for her and stay with her for the week." (Rohima, Boubazar, November 01, 2023)

When employers prioritize their own physical and mental health without considering their workers' well-being, they deprive workers of the opportunity to take much-needed days off after extended work periods. This lack of consideration for the effects on their workers' health stems from the sole dominance of the employer, creating a vulnerable situation for the workers where their basic needs are often neglected. There is a pressing need for a regulatory structure overseen by an impartial authority that can establish provisions for days off and other essential benefits for workers, enabling them to prioritize their mental and physical well-being.

When they are deprived of weekly days off, then, a question arises about how they handle the emergencies that all human beings face in their lives. That can be their own sickness,

their children’s sickness, any of their family members' sickness, a death in the family, any family event, or any issues that require their physical presence. What do they do then? How do their employers respond to their human needs in emergencies or life issues? The participants explained that it takes them many bargains that usually do not go in their favor and makes them face their employer’s bad behavior if they ask for any emergency leave. Gothoskar (2013) also found that when domestic workers become sick or encounter a crisis and are unable to work for a few days, they are often told they no longer have their jobs. But ironically, this is exactly when they desperately need their employment and income the most, which is not considered by their employers either from a labor rights point of view or from a human rights point of view. Hafiza (53) needed leave for the days when her daughter-in-law would undergo an operation. She said,

> In my current job, I don't receive any days off. If I can't go to work due to emergencies, they become upset. When I return to work the next day, they say, "You are letting us down. You can't just miss a day. We depend on you. If you don't come, who will cook for us?" They keep repeating this and don't allow me any time off. My daughter-in-law (the wife of my elder son, with whom I live) is scheduled to undergo major surgery next week. I've been telling them for the past two weeks that I'll need time off during her operation. They respond, "Who will cook if you take time off? We keep you here for our benefit, and now you're asking for time off." Then I told them, "Everyone faces challenges. You have your own problems, and we have ours, that needs our attention." They responded, "No, you can't take full days off for several days. You have to come in for at least two hours every morning to make breakfast for us and complete some other tasks. (Hafiza, Rayer Bazar, November 20, 2023)

Fatema (38) faced a similar experience when one of her sons contracted dengue fever and had to be admitted to the hospital. He remained hospitalized for several days, during which

Fatema was unable to go to work. When she informed her employers about her son's hospitalization, they still insisted that she come to work. In response, she said, "My son is in critical condition. How can I leave him in such a condition and continue working for you?" Understanding the gravity of the situation, her employers paid her a full month's wage despite her absence from work. Touched by their sympathy, Fatema tried to attend work whenever she could, while someone else attended to her son at the hospital.

Nazma (35) also resides in the same tin-shed house as Fatema and her family. They revealed that many residents of the house had contracted dengue fever, as certain parts of the house, particularly some abandoned and broken rooms, had been flooded and water-logged after rains due to a poor draining system (Ahmed, 2014), creating breeding grounds for dengue mosquitoes. While some individuals recovered within a few days, others, including Fatema's son, became critically ill and required hospitalization due to rapidly dropping platelet levels. Nazma herself also contracted dengue fever, although she was fortunate enough to avoid hospitalization. Despite experiencing high fever and weakness, she had to continue working.

> I had dengue fever a few days ago. I was extremely ill; it's hard to describe the pain unless you've experienced it yourself. I could barely move my body. Despite my condition, none of my employers suggested that I take some time off. They didn't offer any breaks or time off. I continued to work, washing clothes, mopping floors, and doing everything else. As a result, my body became extremely skinny because I couldn't rest. I wasn't this skinny before. (Nazma, Boubazar, October 21, 2023)

Since their employers are often unwilling to grant them days off, participants revealed that if they feel unwell or have a family emergency, they sometimes miss work without informing their employers. They do so because they anticipate their employers reacting

negatively. Tanzila (24) mentioned that when she tries to explain her situation, her employer dismisses it, saying, "You always have these kinds of problems. We don't get sick every few days. These are just excuses for not coming to work." Aware that their employers may react angrily if they miss work for a day or two, participants usually avoid arguing and remain silent when yelled at.

Some even face harsh consequences for taking days off, such as having money deducted from their monthly wage or being replaced by other workers without prior notice. Joba (35) recounted a time when her employer deducted money from her salary for taking time off during her father's stroke.

> My current employer is generally good. However, when my father had a stroke, I went to visit him in Barishal and stayed by his side for 13 days. Upon my return, my employer deducted 3772 TK from my 8000 TK salary for those 13 days, which happened to be just before Eid. I was hoping for a bonus during Eid month, but instead, they deducted it from my salary. This deduction affected me greatly as I had ongoing loan payments and couldn't afford new clothes for my children for Eid. I shared my concerns with my employer's daughter-in-law, suggesting that spreading out the deduction over a few months or in smaller amounts would have been more manageable for me. However, she explained that the decision wasn't hers but her brother-in-law's, who oversees the family finances. I didn't press the issue further. Feeling upset about the deduction, I decided to quit my job. Later, my employer asked me to return, and I did. Sadly, my father passed away a month after I rejoined. When I went back to Barishal for his funeral, I stayed for only five days this time, fearing another salary deduction. Upon my return, my employer asked why I came back so soon. I explained that the last time my father was alive, I wanted to take care of him and spend more time with him. This time, since my father had passed away, there was no need for me to stay longer. They understood my fear of

> salary deduction and didn't deduct any money from my salary this time. (Joba, Boubazar, October 24, 2023)

These workers also miss out on important social events, such as the marriage ceremonies of their relatives, friends, or neighbors. Nazma (35) shared that she was invited to attend a neighbor's wedding ceremony last Friday (during fieldwork in October 2023). She genuinely asked her employers for a day off. However, her employer at the morning household told her to come for at least two hours to do the dishes and make breakfast before leaving. Feeling obligated to fulfill her duties, she went to work. Since her other employers were in close proximity and saw her working in the first house, she could not skip working in the other households as it would be unfair to them, and they would not accept it. Consequently, she had to work in all five households and could not manage to attend the marriage ceremony. This illustrates how these workers lack basic human needs and social life.

Neither the traditional domestic workers nor those who work through private companies are entitled to maternity leave. This is also evident in other studies (Ghosh, 2021). Ashraf et al. (2019) show that most of the live-out domestic workers did not receive maternity leave, but this study does not further discuss what the workers do when they become pregnant and deliver the child. Considering their socio-economic conditions, a regular source of income is much needed during this critical period. Not addressing that can leave a crucial aspect of these workers' well-being unaddressed. Lines (2018) discusses in the context of Mexico that domestic workers are forced to leave their jobs during their pregnancy and after their child’s birth. In my study, participants elaborated on what do they do during their pregnancy. They continue working until they feel it is unsafe to do so during

their pregnancy. They must leave their job if they feel it is unsafe to go to work. There is minimal chance that they will be able to return to the same work when they are ready to go back. Lily worked until she was seven months pregnant in a household where she had a good work experience. The apartment of that employer was on the fourth floor, and she had to use the stairwell. When she was in her seventh month, she found it difficult to climb the stairs and left her job. She did not receive any benefits from her employer after leaving the job. She went back to the same employer after her delivery, but they had already hired another worker and could not rehire Lily. Tara had a similar experience and continued working until nine months into her pregnancy. She had to leave all her jobs when her delivery time approached. She had to find new employment with different employers when she wanted to restart working.

Health care and other benefits

Most participants mentioned that their employers did not offer them any other benefits aside from their monthly wages. Four participants with experience working in the mobile app platform reported the same: besides their salary and one weekly day off, they are not entitled to other benefits such as statutory holidays, health care benefits, or retirement plans. While some participants mentioned receiving some non-monetary compensation, such as meals and bonuses during Eid al-Fitr, as well as traditional clothing like Sharee[23] or a three-piece[24] set for Eid[25], and sometimes old clothes. However, this is by no means

[23] A saree is a traditional garment worn by women, typically measuring around 10 to 12 feet in length un-stitched fabric.
[24] A three-piece set typically refers to the traditional garment worn by women, which consists of a pair of pants called "salwar," a long tunic extending to the knees called "kameez," and a scarf, approximately 2.5 feet long, called "orna."
[25] Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are the two official holidays celebrated in Islam. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, while Eid al-Adha commemorates the end of Hajj. With almost 90% of the population in Bangladesh being Muslim, these two Eid days are celebrated as significant religious festivals in the country.

universal. For example, Poddo (27) receives a three-piece set from one of her employers during one Eid and nothing from her two other employers. On the other hand, Joba (35) receives half of a month's salary as an Eid bonus during Eid al-Adha and five sets of three-piece from her employer.

Rohima (60) and Joba (35) mentioned receiving meals during work, with Joba noting that her employer provides fresh food daily, like what their employers eat. However, Rohima's meals vary in quality. She mentioned that for breakfast, she used to receive Roti, an egg (boiled or poached), and a cup of tea, but due to the increased price of eggs, she no longer receives them. For lunch and dinner, if her employer provides a main dish with rice, she gets to eat something with her rice; otherwise, she only eats rice. For dinner, she brings the rice home and takes curry from her daughter. Her daughter encourages her to ask for curry from her employer, as she works there all day and should receive a full meal. However, Rohima (60) feels she has enough self-respect not to ask for food if it is not offered to her. She is not greedy for food and refuses to compromise her dignity for it. Other than the meals, she receives 4000 TK as an Eid bonus during Eid al-Fitr.

Hafiza (53) had to negotiate with her employer to provide her breakfast because she starts working at 7 in the morning, making it difficult for her to have breakfast at home at such an early hour. Even if she manages to eat before starting work, she spends at least 6 hours on the job, which is challenging without having anything to eat. Her employers agreed to provide her breakfast, but they do not offer her lunch, even though she prepares all the dishes they have for lunch and dinner.

Another worker, Jannat (50) from the Rayer Bazar area, receives snacks and tea, which she is quite satisfied with. Sonali (26) shared her good experiences with her employers in this regard.

> It has happened that I have taken my daughter to Didi's house (she calls her evening employer Didi) some days. Didi's house is the best workplace I have ever worked at. My other employer is also good, but Didi and her family members are the best. One day, I took my daughter to Didi's house, and after coming back, she told me that she wanted to eat Nutella with bread, which she had seen at Didi's house. The next day, when I went to work, I told Bhaiya (Didi's husband) that my daughter wanted to have Nutella with bread. Bhaiya then said, "You don't have to ask us if your daughter wants to eat something. She is a child, and she is like our children. Whenever she asks for anything to eat, just give it to her. We have no problem with that." I replied that I preferred to ask first, and Bhaiya responded, "That is a good quality of yours. But we believe that you also should not work on an empty stomach. If we have only one egg at home and you are hungry, you don't have to ask us. Eat that egg first, and then tell us that we need to buy more eggs. But if you hesitate and keep working while starving, you can become sick or even faint. That is not good for your health, and it will cause problems in our kitchen the next day, as you won't be able to come to work while you are sick. Therefore, you don't have to ask us for permission to eat anything. We are at home and see what you eat, and we do not have any problem with it." (Sonali, Rayer Bazar, November 03, 2023)

It is worth noting that this kind of benefit or none of the other benefits they have mentioned were discussed, not even verbally, during their hiring conversations. Anything beyond salary is entirely at the discretion of the employers. The workers appreciate small gifts and provisions for food and drinks and consider them to be the generosity of their employers (Wilks, 2022). Providing these in-kind benefits does not hinge on the economic condition of the employers. During the older focus group discussion, participants shared the story of

a fellow worker (also a participant in the group) who had served under a single employer for 18 years. When the worker was let go after 18 years of service, she was not given anything in recognition for her long tenure. All the participants in that group felt that this worker deserved some form of one-time benefit for her dedicated service. That participant added,

> I worked for 18 years in that house, from 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, and sometimes even later, past 7 in the evening, to finish all the work. I put all my energy into my work, never caring about my body. Now, I have back pain and heart disease because of the heavy workload over the years. They didn't even consider paying for my medicine. […] It depends on people's hearts, not on their financial condition." (Older focus group participant, Boubazar, November 01, 2023)

Conclusion

After discussing in detail, the informal work arrangements of domestic workers and their working conditions, it is evident that this sector presents a crucial opportunity for a large number of women with low literacy from poor families. An important aspect is that this is even more crucial for women with young children at home to look after. Due to the childcare responsibilities, many of them left jobs in the ready-made garment sector, where they were at least entitled to a government-fixed minimum wage, a weekly day off, statutory holidays, and fixed and certain work hours. For these provisions, the participants who previously worked in the RMG expressed their preference for a garment industry job and their future plan to rejoin the RMG workforce once their children are older. Though childcare is not the sole reason many women left jobs in the garment industry, these women often seek to earn from sources that would allow them some sort of flexibility, such as deciding the number of employers they work under, the number of hours they work every day, and maintain their comfort of working with women in a private household setting

instead of working with men outside. This sector is also crucial for women who had no work experience before migrating to Dhaka. This informal work opportunity opens a door for them to survive while their husbands, who used to be the family's breadwinners, face livelihood challenges due to sickness and other reasons. Therefore, it can be said that despite the low pay, very minimum benefits, almost no recognition, and poor working conditions, these workers stick to domestic work jobs because of their extreme poverty, lack of opportunities for work with their limited education and institutionally certified skill sets, childcare responsibilities, and health conditions.

Their informal verbal contract system leaves them with almost no space to claim their rights as workers, negotiate their wages, refuse demands for extra work, protect themselves from any form of abuse and exploitation, and nowhere to seek justice if their human rights are violated (Gothoskar, 2013). This informal and traditional contracting system gives the employer almost all the power over the workers. Despite their skills, dedication, and hard work, many domestic workers are undervalued and exploited by their employers. They often have limited options and feel compelled to continue working in difficult conditions due to economic necessity. Some workers also face discrimination or suspicion from their employers, which further exacerbates their challenges.

After discussing all this, several questions arise. Despite facing numerous challenges, why do these workers continue to work as domestic workers? What do they like and dislike about this work and their employers? How is their relationship with their employers? What do they value in this relationship, and what do they expect from this relationship? These questions are crucial for studying domestic workers. Therefore, the next chapter will delve into these concerns from the workers' perspective.

CHAPTER 4: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMESTIC WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

This chapter discusses the complex relationship dynamics between live-out domestic workers and their employers, addressing the 'reproductive' 'care' work debate. As discussed in the literature review section in the Introduction chapter, feminist scholars argue that reproductive/care work encompasses the practical and relational efforts essential for sustaining and replenishing the workforce over time (Marchetti et al., 2021). Reproductive/care activities aimed at fostering the well-being and continuity of societies (Anderson, 2000), such as caring for children and the sick, as well as undertaking household chores like cleaning, cooking, and laundry, all contribute to the welfare of every member of the household (Marchetti et al., 2021). When this work is provided in the family, it has often been defined as a woman's role and thus historically undervalued and invisible. Feminist analysis also suggests that women's labor is often unpaid because it is associated with familial roles and prescribed gender norms (Gothoskar, 2013; Sen & Sengupta, 2016). As a result, when care work transitions into paid work, typically from the family context to the job market, the wages and working conditions tend to be poor. In the case of transitioning the care work into paid domestic work in a family context, the wage and working conditions are poorer because of the double devaluation of the domestic work and the worker.

In examining the division between home and work during the rise of industrial capitalism, feminist political economy scholars have shown that the commodification of reproductive labor during early capitalism played a crucial role in the development of wage labor and the formation of social classes. This understanding of class dynamics has dramatically

influenced how we perceive paid and unpaid domestic workers. Feminist scholars and activists have particularly noted the class divide between the mistress (employers) and maid (paid domestic workers) as a plain example of direct exploitation of women by women, challenging the notion of sisterhood across different class backgrounds (Marchetti et al., 2021). Scholars note that the greater the economic inequality, the wider the social gap between the mistress and maid (Sen & Sengupta, 2016). In this research, paid domestic workers have highlighted this inequality while describing their employers' economic status. They also identified this inequality as a clear indicator of class differences and the gap between them.

The relationship between domestic workers and their employers needs to be analyzed in terms of class and gender. To understand this relationship, it is important to analyze the high levels of exploitation due to poor wages and working conditions (Sen & Sengupta, 2016). This has led some scholars to compare these relationships to slavery (Anderson, 2000) or feudalism (Ray & Qayum, 2010), especially in the case of live-in domestic workers who are mostly young migrants and lack awareness of their rights. In the context of Bangladesh, patriarchal social norms further reinforce this control, regulating women's bodies and mobility (Kabeer, 2000; Gothoskar, 2013). This relationship is also shaped by the notion of domestic workers as substitutes for their employers' (Anderson, 2000), maintaining rigid gender roles and ideologies in middle-class households (Sen & Sengupta, 2016).

Marchetti (2022) emphasizes that employing a paid domestic worker can be seen from the employer context in two ways. For middle-class women who are not actively in the labor

market, hiring a domestic worker can provide them with more leisure time and more time for childcare and emotional support to their families, reproducing their higher and sustained social and economic status. When middle-class women are actively engaged in paid employment, a domestic worker allows them to perform their economic activity without disrupting their care role. Another woman from the poor social class fulfills their care roles. The live-out domestic workers who participated in this research identified the differences between these two groups of employers and discussed some of the differences they experienced in their relationship with their working and non-working employers.

As we learn in Chapters 1 and 2, in Bangladesh, domestic workers have often been subjected to sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence and are thus considered a highly vulnerable group. It is worth noting that during the interviews and focus groups, while workers have extensively discussed physical violence and verbal abuse, most of them remained silent when it came to sexual harassment and violence cases. In this section, we will see how the narrative of violence and abuse has been shifting from one of extreme violence to a more impersonal form of dominance. However, issues of exploitation and abuse persist (Ashraf et al., 2019). The violence against live-in child domestic workers includes instances of starvation, incarceration, and sexual and physical abuse reported in the media and in civil society reports (ASK & STC, 2010; BILS, 2015). In contrast, violence against adult live-out domestic workers is less extreme as they can leave abusive situations earlier.

The relationship between domestic workers and their employers is complex, given the private nature of the workplace. Judith Rollins (1985) stresses that this kind of work

environment creates a sense of isolation among the workers as they are detached from other workers as they labour. In Bangladesh, two kinds of employers' households are accounted for by the workers; one kind has multiple workers who perform different tasks and often work together; their contracts can differ, and these workers share a kind of bonding that does not yield any collective bargaining power but allows them sharing space. This type of employer is usually from the upper class. The other kinds of employers are from the lower-middle class and employ one part-time worker for specific tasks. Isolation is more prevalent in this kind of employer's household. However, the experience of live-in domestic workers can be very different, considering that if a single worker is employed in the household, the sense of isolation can be very intense.

Feminist scholars also debate the private home as a workplace, not only as a personal space but as a political space. In this space, different people (workers and employers) interact for different purposes, and this private space shapes the workers' identities (Marchetti, 2022). The debate draws attention to the need to deeply examine the private but politicized space of the 'home,' where employers exercise considerable power. This results in significant social, economic, and cultural inequalities and reproduces hierarchies that are perpetuated across generations, particularly affecting domestic workers (MacDonald, 2006). The home also impacts workers' long-term physical and mental well-being (Marchetti, 2022), as they experience both positive and negative behavioral patterns and emotional treatment from employers and their family members on a daily basis. This private sphere – home - requires academic investigation to better understand this as a workplace and policy intervention to treat this as a workplace with regulations that can improve the working conditions and establish a sort of accountability for employers and domestic workers.

This private household as a workplace also creates the paradox of ‘pragmatic intimacy,’ as Sen and Sengupta (2016) put it. In which interaction between employers and workers happens in the private household space of employers. Janet M. Arnado (2003) explains it as simultaneously dominating and mutual, distant and intimate, exploitative and caring, and despite recognizing class exploitation, the relationship's familial and affective aspects help mitigate conflict. These workers spend a certain amount of time at their ‘rich’ employers' houses and perform tasks that engage both their emotional and physical labor while performing intimate tasks such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children, the sick, and the elderly. These interactions develop intimacy and dependency in the relationship between workers and employers. Workers often value such intimacy when it results in a positive experience. Workers also commented that despite having some intimacy, a significant social divide remains, marked by differences in material conditions, language, experience, and culture.

Workers categorize their employers as good and evil based on how their employers treat them. Assessments of employers help us understand what values domestic workers look for and appreciate in their employers. As Sen and Sengupta (2016) explain, in personalized work environments, familiarity fosters intimacy, and care facilitates smoother interactions. Intimacy serves a pragmatic purpose, often substituting for good behavior. For example, workers feel valued when they are called ‘Apa’ by the younger family members and when they are involved in intimate discussions about family wealth or purchases. However, workers also recognize the social and economic inequality inherent in the employer-employee relationship.

To better understand the relationship between employers and paid domestic workers, this chapter examines a number of topics: 1) employers' socioeconomic conditions are one. 2) Workers' evaluation of employers as good or bad; what workers value in employers is often based on social hierarchy, trust, and dependency. 3) The violence and abuse they face in their employers' private homes. 4) Their sense of job insecurity is a crucial concern for workers, considering the overcrowding of workers, especially after the closure or shift of several garment factories in this area. Finally, this chapter will also explore why workers frequently choose to remain and adapt, even though they experience significant dissatisfaction with their employers and work, including what they think can improve their relationship with their employers.

Employers' socio-economic conditions

Participants refer to the adult woman (usually married to the household's breadwinner) as their employer. Multiple adult women can be also present in some of their employers' households. For example, in a joint family, where an adult married son lives with his parents, his mother or wife plays the employer role. When the mother is elderly and sick, she does not move much and stays inside her room, so the wife plays the employer's role. In cases where the mother is not sick and is active in the kitchen, she acts as the employer. This does not mean domestic workers are accountable to only one women employer. They must comply if other members ask them to do anything.

Regarding family size, most households participants work in are nuclear families, where the spouse and their children live together. In nuclear families, live-out domestic workers usually work under the adult female of the household. Some of the participants work in joint family households. The concept of a joint family household needs to be elaborated a

bit. There are families where the elderly mother-in-law, father-in-law, unmarried brother-in-law, and unmarried sister-in-law can be family members, along with the employer's spouse and children. The number of household members varies. For example, at Joba's employer's house, for her regular work supervision, she refers to 'Bhabi' (the wife of a brother or sister-in-law) as her employer. The total household includes four people: Bhabi, her son (who goes to primary school), her elderly mother-in-law, who is almost handicapped, and her unmarried brother-in-law, who is the younger brother of her husband. Bhabi's husband died a few years ago from cancer. Bhabi's brother-in-law (whom Joba calls 'Bhaiya'/brother), who works in a corporate position related to the airport (which Joba could not explain), manages the family's finances. For day-to-day work, Joba takes instructions from Bhabi, but Bhaiya pays her and makes decisions related to leave and wages. Some participants work in single-person households. For example, Nuri's elderly female employer lives alone in an apartment at Kochukhet and owns that multi-story building. She has her children, but they do not live with her. Lily works in a household where four adult males who are not related live in a bachelor's arrangement.

The socio-economic conditions of employers vary in both Boubazar and Rayer Bazar. Participants had experience working in upper-class households as well as in lower-middle-class households. They mentioned some common indicators of wealth that confirm that the employers belong to the upper and middle classes discussed in Chapter 1. Employers who own multiple multi-storied buildings in Dhaka, own ready-made garment factories, and have family members (especially husbands, sons, and brothers) living in the USA or Europe are considered very wealthy by the participants. Employers who are doctors, engineers, and current or retired army officers, or whose husbands hold these positions, are

considered upper-class. Employers who work as schoolteachers, office workers (though participants are unsure of the specific nature of the office jobs, they know their employers are involved in nine-to-five work), small business owners (For example, one of Poddo's employer who sells army uniform parts in the Kochukhet market), or migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are considered middle or lower-middle-class. When I asked Parul about the economic condition of her employers, she smiled and said, "They are not very rich people; they are kind of like us – a middle-class ('*Moddhom*') family" (Parul, Boubazar, October 23, 2023). Some participants work in households where both the husband and wife work outside. Employers (women) have a range of jobs, including schoolteachers, doctors, and office workers. In other cases, employers are housewives, and most employers' husbands are the household's breadwinners.

Employers' household type, household members, professions, and socioeconomic conditions impact live-out domestic workers' daily experiences and relationships with their employers. However, attaching these employers' socio-economic class to domestic workers' specific experiences is difficult. Specific socio-economic class of the employers do not determine the relationship alone; the broader social perception of paid domestic work also plays a crucial role in the relationship between paid domestic workers and their employers.

High power imbalance and discrimination

The highly unequal relationship between domestic workers and their employers is evident in almost every piece of literature focusing on domestic workers (Rollins, 1985; Ray & Qayum, 2009). The participants of this research repeatedly highlighted this inequality during their interviews. To understand the unequal but interdependent relationship between

workers and their employers, paying attention to several aspects of this complex dynamic is important. And those are how workers explain their relationship with their current employers. How much does that relationship affect their work and life? What do domestic workers seek from this relationship? What do they value about their employers? How do domestic workers define good employers, and why is a good employer important to them? These questions have been addressed in the workers' account by discussing employers' behavior, dependency on workers, trust, suspicion, and surveillance. The level of labor autonomy that workers exercise and the aspects they consider crucial in this regard have also been discussed. Where extreme job insecurity in the domestic work sector, very limited alternatives available in the labor market, and their own preferences for the work also shape this relationship experience. On the one hand, this keeps the employers in a dominant position and reproduces the social hierarchy by retaining the status of the employees. On the other hand, it keeps the domestic workers stuck in a subordinate position with little bargaining power over labor rights, thus socially reproducing the workers' vulnerabilities in society.

Employers' behavior and attitude

Poor behavior from the employers and their family members is a common phenomenon paid domestic workers face in their workplaces. Which workers do not like such behavior at all but cannot protest or leave due to their economic need, scarcity of work, and not knowing if their situation will be better in a new workplace. Nevertheless, they keep searching for new work if the behavior of a particular employer is beyond their tolerance. Participants discussed the poor behavior they get from their employers and to what extent they tolerate it and continue working. One of the participants in the older focus group shared,

> We are poorly treated in the employers' apartment house (*Basha Bari*).[26] We are treated very badly. For instance, when I was mopping the floor in one of my employers' houses, the woman (the employer) started quarreling with me for no reason. She called me names, scolded me, saying I was a traitor and low-class, and kept insulting me in various ways. (Older focus group Participant, November 01, 2023)

Another participant joined her, saying, "They call us '*Fokinni*' (beggars)." Another participant added, "We cannot protest because we are poor, and they are rich people." The first participant shared her experience, saying, "I told them, if you don't like my work, then don't keep me employed, but don't mistreat me and call me names." Participants in the interviews shared similar experiences of being treated very poorly. It is very common. Suppose their employers are dissatisfied with their work or any of their behavior. In that case, the employers, who hold power over the workers, do not hesitate to express their irritation, anger, or frustration negatively. Thirty-five-year-old Nazma, who has been working as a domestic worker since she started at 10 as a child live-in domestic worker, shared that an employer who is an elderly woman always finds fault in her work, constantly monitors every single task and keeps criticizing and scolding her. Nazma thought that her employer may do such behavior because of her old age, because she does not face this kind of behavior or criticism in her four other workplaces every day. However, if she is late at work or misses a day, her other employers do not hesitate to scold her, which Nazma does

[26] The participants refer to 'Basha Bari' as apartment houses in multi-storied buildings. The literal meaning of Basha is the modern apartment system living arrangement in multi-storied buildings in urban areas, whereas Bari means house. This means the modern apartment system house differs from the earlier concept of 'Bari,' which is built on land for a family's living, comparatively bigger, and not separated by different units; this kind of house is usually built in rural and semi-urban areas. By referring to Basha Bari as their employer's house, participants make a difference between their employer's home and their own homes, indicating the employers' home as an improved living arrangement compared to their own in the slum or in the shared apartment.

not protest much. Fatema (38) shared the same experience: "Usually they are good, do not yell at me. But they angrily show their real face if I am late or cannot go to work one day." Fatema explained how one of her employers constantly keeps giving instructions for work, and in replies to Fatema's questions or conversations, her employer nods or makes sounds like '*haa*' and '*hmm'* (yes or all right) and does not talk to her much. Hafiza's employer, where she cooks and works from seven in the morning to one o'clock in the afternoon, does not like it if Hafiza talks a little bit during work. Suppose she asks her employer for instructions or tries to have a conversation. In that case, her employer expresses weariness and tells her not to talk unnecessarily because Hafiza's talking causes her headaches.

Employers' behavior and attitude toward domestic workers show the clear class difference between the workers and the employers. It is typically perceived and practiced that higher-class people can scold lower-class people, pity them, and call them names because lower-class people are considered to have less status and do not practice their agency. The employer class feels entitled to insult the working class, believing that they are subordinate to them. The term '*Fokinni*' is a derogatory term that implies a person has failed in life and belongs to the lowest strata of society, who is completely dependent on others and from whom society cannot benefit in any way. By calling the workers '*Fokinni,*' their hard work goes unacknowledged, their identity as workers is denied, and their source of income is voided as if the employer is giving them wages out of pity for their economic condition, not for their work.

Participants shared that, to some extent, all of them experience unequal, discriminatory, and abusive behavior from their employers. In some cases, these behaviors end up in physical violence that domestic workers take as a serious threat to their safety as well as

their work. They do not usually protest verbal abuses, weary behavior, demeaning remarks, and criticism from their employers, considering the high risk of losing their jobs. However, they explained that these behaviors cause stress, low self-esteem, and demotivation in their work. Nazma's elderly employer got so angry with her that Nazma feared she could lose control and hit Nazma. Therefore, to ensure her safety, Nazma decided to quit this employer. Nazaneen and Huq found that such cases of verbal and physical abuse were reported by all the participants of their study, which indicates the "asymmetrical power relations between them and their employers and that the domestic workers are in an environment where their agency to protect themselves from violence is limited apart from leaving the job" (2022, p. 07).

A 24-year-old part-time domestic worker, Tanzila, faced the same kind of verbally abusive behavior from her employer but could not leave the job as a mother of two and a husband who often does not go to work. She is under financial pressure to pay the rent and other expenses. Therefore, she works in four houses for a total monthly wage of 8000 TK, which she uses to pay for her rent and her elder son's education. One of her employers, an elderly woman whom she calls *'Khalamma*' (aunt), often scolds her, and she feels unable to respond. When asked why she tolerates such behavior, she said:

> They have money, so they make other people work for them with their money. They think, "We are rich; even if we beat them (the workers), they will not say anything. Even if we use bad language or slap them, they will not say anything." We are afraid to argue with them because we fear they will beat and dismiss us if we argue. Then we will not easily find another job. If we lose our job, then how will we survive? What will we eat? We do not even know any other work; we cannot find any other jobs. Therefore, we are forced to continue working, enduring all this abuse patiently. (Tanzila, Boubazar, October 22, 2023)

Tanzila mentioned ‘enduring patiently’ (‘*Dhoirjo dhore thaki’*) several times in her interview, especially when she was talking about the abusive relationships she has with her employers (except one) and her husband. Patience is usually a positive word/term that holds hope for something better while waiting patiently for the time being. In the case of Tanzila, she did not indicate what hopes that patience holds for her. All this pain endured patiently has become an integrated part of her acceptance of reality. She is aware of her poor socio-economic condition, where her husband does not show any motivation and care to improve their situation. Her employers do not care about her well-being and condition. Therefore, she must be patient to only survive through her reality.

Workers particularly dislike when their employers throw food away in front of them or tell them to do so. These workers face extreme hardship in managing to have food three times a day for all of their family members. They see for such behavior as extremely inhumane by their employers, who literally do not care about them. They said that they are fine with the food, which is one or two days old and was kept in the fridge; if the food does not smell bad, they would happily eat it or pack it for taking home. That would be helpful for their families as the inflation is so high nowadays that these workers cannot buy any protein for extended periods, like months and months. Older focus group participants reminisced about when domestic workers' families did not have to cook at home at all, as their employers always provided them with more than enough food for their entire family. Nazma pointed out that she had been offered food that was older than a week and smelled bad. She threw that out.

Employers' Dependency

Regarding the relationship between domestic workers and their employers, dependency is evident in two broad ways: employers' dependency on the whole domestic work sector for the menial and 'dirty' tasks in middle-class households (Anderson, 2000; Lines, 2018) and the domestic worker's dependency on the employers for their economic needs. Ray and Qayum (2009) note how this interdependency is characterized by evolving techniques of managing servants and households. Employers position themselves as the leaders who will guide India into modernity while simultaneously casting servants as a separate, premodern class reliant on the middle and upper classes for their livelihood. This analysis applies to Bangladesh as well. Domestic workers explain and understand this dependency as one participant said, "rich need the poor and poor need the rich" (Older focus group discussion, Boubazar, November 1, 2023).

Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2014) argues that when a woman hires another woman to handle domestic tasks, the negative emotions linked to such work are transferred from the female employer to the domestic worker. This shift allows the female employer to avoid the cultural devaluation associated with domestic labor and the notion of femininity as inferior. By delegating household chores, these women regain a sense of well-being in a context where femininity has traditionally been associated with subordination and exploitation. Nonetheless, the female employer is still responsible for overseeing and managing the household work, often because male members and children typically do not contribute to these duties. The participants in this research confirm this argument as the case in their work as well. In many employers' households, the female members fully depend on the workers for cooking, cleaning, and all the other household chores. The participants explained that if they cannot go to work one day, their employers, in most cases, get furious

because either they must do the tasks or these tasks remain undone. They cannot manage all these manual tasks by themselves that they have delegated to their domestic workers. Tanzila explained the situation with one of her employers where she does the task of making Roti along with washing dishes:

> (If we cannot go to work one day) Women do the work, and because they struggle to do the tasks, they misbehave with us when we go the next day. They struggle with the work for just one day and then take their frustration out on us. They say, "Why didn't you come? Aren't we paying you for this work? Yesterday, I had to do the work, and it caused me so much pain! My hands and feet hurt." They tell me such things. Their hands hurt from making ‘Roti’ and from washing dishes. They can't stand for long periods. But when we do the same work, they neither understand nor do we tell them how much pain we endure. Even if we did, they would say, "Aren't we paying you to do it?" (Tanzila, Boubazar, October 22, 2023)

Many participants had similar experiences, indicating a strong dependency of middle-class households on domestic workers for all sorts of household tasks. As employers depend on the reproductive services provided by domestic workers, so even a single day's disruption can create significant chaos in the household, which is often not equipped to handle daily tasks like eating, drinking, and cleaning without assistance (Sen & Sengupta, 2016; Wilks, 2018). Some employers have multiple live-in and live-out domestic workers to handle different tasks. Hafiza said:

> **Hafiza:** She [One domestic worker, live-in] takes care of the house, organizing and managing everything. There is one child, and she looks after the child's meals and needs. I only do the cooking. There is also another woman (live-out) who washes clothes, cleans the house, wipes the furniture, and cleans the bathroom. She also works part-time.
>
> **Pinash:** If you three were not working there, how would they manage the work?

Hafiza: Then they would struggle and could not run without domestic workers' help.

Pinash: What kind of struggle would they face?

Hafiza: For instance, they've never done these household chores themselves. They're not accustomed to these tasks. They've always had someone else [domestic workers] do does these things for them. They are working professionals. I don't think they can do it. Listen, I used to work full-time in a house before. The Madam was a schoolteacher, and the '*Shaheb'* (middle-class man of respect) was a college professor. Shaheb sometimes joked with us, saying, "Your 'Bhabi' [Shaheb's wife] doesn't even know how to cook rice. She doesn't even understand how to fry an egg." They went on a honeymoon abroad. There, she tried to fry an egg and just cracked it directly onto the pan. And can you cook rice without water? I said 'No,' and he replied, "Your *Bhabi* just put the rice on the stove without water." The rice got burnt to ashes. Many don't understand. The husband, however, knows everything. Later, he taught his wife. The husband is very good. The Bhabi is also good. She is a cherished daughter of her parents, who educated her with great care. She never had to do anything in her life. The rule is that every girl should learn everything [household tasks]. Boys need to learn, too. For instance, because the man [Shaheb] knew how to cook, he could help his wife when they went abroad. He cooked, and they ate together. But he told us the story for making fun, saying, "Your sister-in-law used to be like this." (Hafiza, Rayer Bazar, November 20, 2023)

To analyze these accounts of participants in light of the definition of social reproduction given by Brenner and Laslett (1991) as the daily and intergenerational activities, attitudes, behaviors, emotions, responsibilities, and relationships involved in maintaining and reproducing life, we find significant insights. Social reproduction includes the processes by which food, clothing, and shelter are provided for immediate use, how children are raised and educated, the care given to the elderly and those who are ill, and the social construction of sexuality (Brenner & Laslett, 1991). From that perspective, as we have also

seen in the previous chapter, employers are often completely dependent on domestic workers for preparing the food that their families eat every day, cleaning their houses to create a comfortable environment for rest and other necessary activities, washing their clothes to ensure they have clean garments to wear, and caring for their children and elderly. For instance, in the case of Rohima, she could not take time off because the elderly person in her employer's house would be alone. The variety of food prepared, the cleanly decorated house, and the clean clothes are also symbolic of social status for the employers.

Therefore, it is clearly evident how significantly domestic workers are directly involved in the social reproduction of their employers and their employers' family members on a daily and intergenerational basis (Vosko, 2014). While we have also seen that the women employers supervise the domestic workers and are primarily responsible for the reproductive work in their families, it is evident that domestic workers serve as ‘doubles’ of the women employers in performing their primary reproductive roles in their households (Anderson, 2000).

Domestic workers are aware of this strong dependency on their employers' side. They are confident about their ‘skills’ in domestic work, which they often do not recognize as significant. However, they understand these are invaluable skills, especially for women who cannot afford to buy labor from other women. At the same time, they are also aware that these middle-class women can always buy labor like domestic workers anytime for their social reproduction because of the city's overcrowded supply of domestic workers. This makes them more powerful on a two-way dependency scale.

Domestic Workers’ Dependency

Domestic workers typically come from low-income backgrounds, earn low wages, and lack access to social security benefits; consequently, they often cannot afford to leave an

undesirable job unless they have secured a new one (Haynes & Hempel, 2023). In this part of the discussion, I look at the individual level of dependency of domestic workers. Participants explained that when they ask for a wage increase based on extra work, their employers reply that they will not increase their salary; if they (workers) do not want to work for this salary, they can leave. This harsh condition narrows the choice for some workers who cannot just leave work considering their economic need and the overcrowded market, where employers will find another person just the next day, but it will take them a while to find another job. The older workers are more concerned about the high turnover as finding a new job at this age requires much effort. At sixty, Rohima (Boubazar) has been working as a domestic worker for more than half of her life; she can not risk her job by protesting to her employer or pushing hard to increase her wage as she does not want to get fired from this work as this employer is comparatively better than her previous employers. Rohima recalled:

> I have endured much hardship in my life. I have never missed a single day of work. Even when I feel unwell sometimes, I still don't skip work. If people still treat us badly despite all my hard work and dedication, we can do nothing. Quitting my job and staying at home is not an option for me either. My daughter [Nazma] is alone; she doesn't have a husband [divorced], so how can she pay the rent and cover other household expenses alone? (Rohima, Boubazar, November 01, 2023)

Along with making ends meet, workers work to support their children's education. Nuri's younger son is a 1st year undergraduate student in engineering. She has back pain, and the doctor advised her not to do heavy work, but she washes clothes, anyway. She cannot leave the job because if she does, her husband must bear all expenses, including her son's education. Nuri is determined to continue working until her son completes his education. A twenty-six-year-old Sonali has a similar story as she started working as a domestic

worker to be able to afford all her daughter's expenses so that it does not become hard on his husband, who works as a 'mover' – assists with the physical labor of moving goods, such as loading and unloading items from a house.

What domestic workers value in their employers

The distressing work environment impacts workers' self-confidence and motivation. They do not feel motivated in the morning to go to work, knowing they will face the same distressing environment. They appreciate employers who make their workplace less distressing by not being rude, showing affection, asking about their children, offering food and drink, and responding positively and with care when they share that they are feeling sick, unwell, or experiencing family issues. Such simple and kind behaviors foster loyalty and closeness between workers and employers. Workers try to put forth their best effort when employers treat them well.

For example, when Sonali was having issues with her husband, she felt stressed, which affected her cooking. Her employer, whom she identifies as her best employer, did not blame or scold her for the bad taste. Instead, they discussed possible reasons for the decline in food quality—whether it was due to serving the same items for several days or using spoiled fish. Her female employer then asked if everything was okay at home and her other workplace. They addressed her circumstances instead of holding her accountable for her poor cooking. This gesture allowed Sonali to trust her employer with her intimate family issues, and she shared her problems. Her employer then proposed a favorable solution for both Sonali and the employer: they told Sonali to get some rest by reducing her workload and letting them know if she needed any other help. Sonali feels immense gratitude to this employer for ensuring a caring work environment where her personal distress is addressed

with respect, she was offered support to manage her personal condition and improve her mental health. Sonali shared that she has had less bitter experiences with her employers so far; therefore, in most of her workplaces, she worked for several years and has familial relationships with their former employers as well. Stressing mutual understanding, Sonali shared how the relationship between workers and employers can be improved:

> If I am not feeling well one day and ask for a day off from my employer and they do not allow me the off and give me more work, I would comply with their request for that day but would be unhappy with their decision. I might become even sicker the next day because I couldn't take proper rest to recover. Consequently, I may be unable to work the next day. I might feel angry with them and might leave the job. These factors will affect my work at their house, and they will not receive the same quality of work they are accustomed to from me. However, if they allow me time to rest, my body will heal, and I will be grateful to them. The next day I go to work, I will be well mentally and physically. And I will give my best service to them. Employers need to understand this. (Sonali, Rayer Bazar, November 03, 2023)

Along with mutual respect, domestic workers also value their employers' affectionate behavior. In their employers' houses, where they are treated like family members, they feel loved and have a close connection to their employer, which helps them recover from the distressing work experiences they usually have in their everyday work. Nazma shared that she had a sister-like relationship with the mistress in one of her earlier employers' houses.

> One of my employers, whom I used to call Apa, was a kind and good human being to me. When my daughter was only one and a half years old, I used to work at her house. Now, my daughter is a teenager. Everyone in that household was kind to me and considered me one of their family members. We were very close, especially since they were also from Cumilla, my home district. Apa used to show me whatever she bought; for instance, if she purchased a piece of gold jewelry, she

would wear it and show me, asking how she looked and if I liked the jewelry. When I told her that I liked it, she would be happy.

When I worked at her house, she allocated one side of her daughter's wardrobe for me and told me to use that side to keep my clothes. I used to work there in the evenings. After finishing all the work, I would bathe in their washroom, so I kept my clean clothes there. They were fond of me and treated me well, and after her daughter got married, even her son-in-law (her daughter's husband) was good to me.

They built their house in Uttara and moved there into their own house. When they left, Apa cried a lot, holding me. They trusted me a lot. Whenever they went out, and there was no one in the house, they used to leave the key with me. I would go to their house, do all my work, and lock the door. Earlier, when I had my mobile phone, she used to call regularly to check on me. Now I do not have my phone, she cannot call me often. A few months ago, they bought their car; Apa came to visit me here, showing me the car and bringing sweets from Vaggokul (a renowned sweet shop in Dhaka).

I liked her a lot. When they moved to Uttara, they told me, 'Nargis, you should come with us. You will live with us. We will make a room for you in our house and admit your daughter to school there. You will stay with us.' But I could not go because my elderly mother is alone here. How could I leave her alone at this age? (Nazma, Boubazar, October 21, 2023)

One of Tanzila's employers, where she works last in the afternoon, treats her well, offers her food, checks on her health, asks about her children and mother, helps her with money in emergencies, and gives her fruits and snacks for her children. If Tanzila is sick, only this employer tells her to take rest. Tanzila spoke very positively about this employer and highly appreciated this employer's humanity. Joba appreciates that her employer gives them (Joba and her other co-domestic workers) free access to food as Joba and the other four domestic workers have two meals and a snack there, use the washroom, and get to rest after finishing

work and having lunch. The fast-paced and demanding nature of domestic workers' work and lives explains why they often speak favorably about employers who allow them to work at a manageable pace and provide support for their needs. These employers typically have good, reciprocal relationships with their workers. Workers frequently emphasize that they perform their duties in these homes as if working in their own homes. This can be seen as an effort by workers to distance themselves from viewing domestic work as dirty and menial wage labor (Ozyegin, 2001, in Wilks, 2018), which conflicts with prevailing notions of femininity and domesticity. Additionally, it underscores the importance of autonomy for workers.

Lily is a thirty-five-year-old domestic worker and a mother of four children. She has been working as a domestic worker for the last 9 years in the Boubazar area. Lily shared a unique support from one of her earlier employers, which she wishes she could get from other employers, too.

> Once, my husband was almost unemployed. Therefore, it was difficult for me to manage all the expenses alone. Most of the time, I had nothing to feed my children. At that time, one of my employers was kind to me. They saw my hurdles and helped with money and food. If I asked them for an advance on my salary, they would understand my needs and give it to me. Sometimes, they deducted that from my monthly wage; sometimes, they didn't. If they didn't, I used to remind them that they had given me advance that they had forgotten to deduct from her salary, and I returned the amount I had already taken in advance. They kept it then but later told me that they didn't deduct that amount from my salary but saved it for me. At first, my monthly wage was 2000 TK, but later, they increased my salary slightly. I worked there for around five years.
>
> The next month, when they paid my wage, they told me to give them 500 Tk from my salary that they would save for me. And I could use that money during any

emergency or for treatment. Therefore, they used to keep 500 or 200 from my salary every month.

When I was at the last stage of my pregnancy, I told them that I needed some money for my delivery. They gave me 5000 from that savings. They saved a small amount from my salary every month and helped me when I needed money. I liked that because I couldn't save myself because of the dearth in my household. I couldn't save a penny at home because if my children asked for something and started crying, I couldn't bear that, knowing I had some money to buy them what they were crying for. If I needed anything in the house, I would buy that if I had money in my pocket. Another issue was if I kept money somewhere at home, my husband used to take that even without telling me. These were the reasons I liked that my employer kept my money to her as savings that neither I nor my husband could take for any avoidable reason.

Saving a small amount from my salary caused a few hurdles, but no one could help me that way. People won't save for me if I do not give them the amount. Even not many people do that. I am glad that my employer did it for me. I kept saving for the next two years. Sometimes, I could give them 100 in one month, 500 in the next month, and maybe 200 in the later month; that way, I saved the money. I haven't kept the account. They told me that there was around 20,000Tk. I took 5,000Tk during my delivery and took 5,000Tk when one of my kids was sick. My children liked watching TV, but we didn't have one at that time, so the kids had to go to neighbors' rooms to watch TV, which was not a pleasant experience. Then I decided to buy a TV for them with the remaining 10,000Tk from that savings. I felt good that I was able to save 20000 in two years. That helped me in so many ways. Therefore, I liked the savings system this way. As I didn't have to save a large amount every month, that was not difficult for me. When I got a little extra money for doing some extra work, I used to give that amount to my employer for savings. If I didn't have this system going on, then I would not have saved that extra income. I was able to manage my household expenses by my salary. So, the savings was great for my emergency needs.

> I had to leave that employer when I was pregnant. I worked there until my seventh month of pregnancy but couldn't continue after that as I couldn't use the stairwell to the fourth floor. Then, they hired someone else. I went back after my delivery, but how could they take me as they already had another person working there?
>
> I didn't get that kind of support from my other employers. I wish my employers would suggest that way to me for saving and making better decisions in my life. If I had that kind of support, I believe I would have been able to save money to buy a piece of land in my village and build a little house for us where we could live in the future. (Lily, Boubazar, October 29, 2024)

Labour Autonomy

A few domestic workers have recounted that they have protested their employers' abusive behavior to protect their self-respect. They would rather be unemployed for a few months than tolerate such tantrums from their employers daily. Their point is that they are not begging; they are hardworking people who will find new jobs, but they cannot be humiliated every day regardless of how hard and perfectly they work. Here, they practice their labor autonomy to some extent. Tara is in her mid-fifties, currently working for six different employers, where she mops staircases in multi-storied buildings and shares her experiences of exercising labor autonomy despite the risk of dismissal for arguing with her employer. In one of her earlier work experiences, when she was younger, she worked for an employer in a building where another resident asked her to work in their apartment. Tara agreed and began working in both apartments, discussing the time arrangements with her existing employer beforehand. The new employer treated her well, provided daily meals, and offered health tips to help her gain weight, as she was thin then. However, her previous employer was displeased with the attention and care Tara received from the new employer,

which she had never provided herself. This led to frequent expressions of irritation. After enduring this behavior for some time, Tara finally decided to protest:

> My old employer was envious because my new employer, who was her neighbor, was taking good care of me. She threw a lot of tantrums and constant irritation (‘*khali chatang chatang korto’*). She had been doing this for several days, and one day, I could not take it anymore; I was angry, too. I told her I did not want to work there anymore and asked for my wage for the days I had already worked. But she refused to give me my wage. I was determined not to leave without it. We had a lot of arguments, but in the end, I made her pay me. (Tara, October 25, 2023)

Tara responded that finding another job was not so challenging for her, given that she has established a strong network with other domestic workers and employers. She only had to wait for a few days. While Tara seemed very confident about this, most other participants did not take such steps until they found another job. Participants also leave jobs where they are regularly made to do extra tasks that are time-consuming and heavy. When that happens repeatedly, some try to negotiate with their employers to increase their wages but mostly fail. Nuri gave me an example:

> I used to work in a household where I was hired to do three tasks, and for three tasks, I was supposed to get 3000 TK according to the current standard. But they paid me 2500 TK. I told them, “Apa, increase my wage,” she replied, ‘Why should I.’ I asked her on what basis you pay me 2500TK. She replied I pay you 1000 for mopping the floor, 1000 for washing clothes, and 500 for making Roti. I reminded her that I also wash dishes, chop onions, clean the washroom every week, and dust and wipe the ceiling fans and windows every month; where are my wages for these tasks? Then she replied that she pays 2500 TK for all these works. I worked there for three years and kept asking for an increase in my wage, but she did not. then I left the job on the 20th day of the running month. Then they tried to find another domestic worker to do the same job with the same pay but did not find anyone.

> Later, they got someone for two tasks only for 2000, and that person did not do any other tasks except for the two. I won't work in that employer's house again if they call me because she is an angry person; if she tells me to do anything and if I refuse to do it, then she will make her face and will not talk to me. If she needs anything, she will send her son to tell me. I was afraid that she could hit me out of her anger. (Nuri, Boubazar, October 24, 2023)

The most practiced form of labor autonomy is leaving the job when they find it very inconvenient, threatening their safety, paying less than they agreed to, or make them work extra daily. Participants also shared that to ensure their safety and convenience, they also assess their employers (in their own way) when they start working. A young domestic worker from Rayer Bazar, Reshmi, explained that she does not like it when employers constantly monitor her work and keep pointing out her flaws. That makes her slow and disturbs her spontaneity. Since she works in three households, she needs to manage her time well to be on time at her employer's house and finish working in nine hours, as she also must take care of her own family. When she observes such obstruction by her new employer(s), she discontinues after two or three days and finds a new job. Joba added to that experience during her interview that if she notices any threat of sexual harassment from a male member in the house, she discontinues. For instance, Joba mentioned that there are several cases where domestic workers face sexual harassment by male employers. She explained that the older workers, who are comparatively brave and outspoken, understand if the male members have such intentions by observing their expressions. Joba follows a strategy to prevent any sexual harassment at her workplace. She calls the male employers usually 'mama' (mother's brother, also used to address elderly men to show respect). If the employers resist, she explains that she prefers calling them 'Mama.' If she finds that her employers do not have such intentions by observing their facial expressions, she calls them

Bhaiya. Protecting ‘honor’ is very important to domestic workers. Nuri explained that she works in this sector because she does not have to deal directly with men, which could damage her ‘Purdah’—a practice she wants to maintain.

Suspicion and accusation of theft

Lauren Wilks (2018) argues that questions of autonomy are closely linked to security and mistrust, as the employer often remains at home during the day to supervise workers. There is a widespread belief that workers might be potential thieves or criminals. This suspicion, although not new, has intensified with the shift to apartment living and the increase in part-time or live-out work (Ray & Qayum, 2009). Many employers, now more often dealing with workers who are complete strangers, fear that these domestic workers might steal from them or cause harm. Domestic workers are often accused of theft by their employers (Gothoskar, 2013). If anything goes missing in an employer's house, the first suspicion usually falls on the domestic workers (Wilks, 2018). This can significantly impact their lives in several ways. First, they may lose their job based solely on suspicion. As no regulation and monitoring system can hold both parties accountable, workers are highly vulnerable to proving themselves innocent to employers. Due to the unequal power relationship between workers and employers, employers often refuse to hear the workers' voices, stand on their point of view, and keep accusing the workers without any proof. Second, such accusations humiliate the workers and affect their dignity. Joba told the following story: one of her relatives was falsely accused of theft, showing how workers try to protect their dignity when falsely accused of stealing.

Joba (35) now works full-time for a single employer. Before her current employment, she worked for an employer in the Kafrul area. When she left that job, she recommended her

sister-in-law (Bhabi) to that employer. One day, the employer's child dropped an earring (made of gold) under the bed. However, the employer accused the new domestic worker, whom Joba had recommended, of stealing the earring. The employer said, "Where did you keep my earrings? Give it back now, or I will call the police." Joba asked, in a sad tone, during her interview, "Is it fair to accuse a good person of such a crime?" They involved Joba because she had recommended the worker. Joba pressured the worker, saying, "If you took it, please give it back." Joba's relative insisted that she did not take anything from the employer's house and was upset that Joba did not trust her. Joba assured her relative that she trusted her. The employer then asked Joba for the new worker's address, which Joba provided. Joba pointed out that she would not have shared the address if she were afraid of her relative's intentions. Joba was confident that her relative was innocent. The employer then came to Joba's house (where Joba's relative also lived) and made a fuss that other people got to know about the accusation.

Joba suggested that her employer look under the bed and furniture, as the earring might have fallen there. Despite this, the employer continued to accuse the worker. An argument ensued, and Joba's relative urged them to search the corners and under the furniture. Eventually, the employer found the earring under the bed in front of Joba's relative. Joba's relative said, "You harassed me for something I didn't do and spread rumors in my slum that I am a thief. Now that you have found your earrings, can you restore my reputation that you destroyed by calling me a thief?" The employer apologized. Joba's relative advised them not to make such accusations in the future and to search their house thoroughly before blaming others. Subsequently, Joba's relative left that job. Joba threw another question to

me during her interview, “How could she continue working there after such a serious accusation?”

The first question posed by Joba ("Is it fair to accuse a good person of such a crime?") can be discussed in several ways. Joba perceives stealing as a severe offense (criminal behavior) that she does not support and goes against her principles. By "good person," she meant an innocent person, especially when there is no evidence that the person has stolen the item. Since Joba knows her relative and is confident that her relative does not have such characteristics, she is sure that her relative is innocent. Her confidence grew stronger after the employer found the item under the bed. Therefore, accusing an innocent person of such a severe crime, which has legal implications and can damage personal status in society, is inconsiderate, and workers cannot usually accept it. Later, in the older focus group, participants shared that nowadays, employers keep copies of their National Identity Cards (NIDs) as cases of such crimes have increased. They support this from a safety perspective and comply with the requirements of their employers. This discourse of suspicion fosters a stigma that domestic workers steal items from their employers' homes, whether these are small grocery items (e.g., onions, oil, spices), money, or valuable items like gold. The anxiety of theft may also reflect employers’ sense of the gulf between their living conditions and those of their domestic workers. As stealing is often associated with poverty, implying that poor people have lower morality and values. Therefore, it is assumed that they cannot resist the temptation when surrounded by valuable items in their employer's house. The second question that Joba posed to me ("How could she continue working there after such a serious accusation?") highlighted the sense of self-respect that workers hold,

even though their socio-economic conditions allow them limited space to uphold and practice their self-respect.

Safety

Domestic workers work within the private households of others. Workers hired for tasks such as mopping floors, dusting furniture, and cooking undertake various household chores and have access to bedrooms, washrooms, and all areas of the house. Participants highlighted their approach to assessing workplace safety in their own terms, which involves several measures. Most often, they communicate with the female members of the household, who serve as their primary employers. If there is no female member in the household, most prefer not to work there. However, there is an exception to that, too. For example, Lily cooks for a household where four bachelor adult males of different ages live. She shared that she did not have to face any safety issues there. Therefore, she continues working there. On the other hand, Nuri prefers not to work in a household with only men. She believes domestic work is respectable because they work with women and do not have to talk to men. Another way of measuring the work environment is by observing the reaction of the employers during their work. Reshmi commented that,

> Many 'Khalamma' [aunts, sometimes they call their elderly employers Khalamma] can be quite critical. In many cases, I do not continue working after two or three days because if I do not get along with the madams (employers) or if we do not like each other, then I quit. However, there are other madams' houses where I have been working for the last two or three years, and they value me a lot. If they buy a dress for themselves, they will also buy one for me. On the other hand, some other madams tend to follow me every second while I am working. This slows me down. We have many tasks to complete in each house as we do *Chuta kaj* [Part-time domestic work], so we need to finish them as soon as possible because we must go

> to other houses afterward. That is why I do not like it when someone follows me during every task. They also keep telling me, ‘Do not touch this, do not eat that, do not do this, do not do that.' My point is, if I want to eat something, I will ask them first. Nothing to steal from them, and I cannot steal their crockeries in front of their eyes. They always suspect us of stealing from them. That is why I do not like working in their houses. When we work through the platform, those employers do not doubt us because they know the office has all our information. (Reshmi, Rayer Bazar, November 22, 2023)

Unlike Reshmi, many workers cannot quit their jobs even if they do not like working with their employer. These workers feel trapped even when employers blame them for stealing, not working correctly, or making them do a task twice because they did not find it clean enough. Fatema, for example, shared that her employer makes her wipe the furniture twice a day - once with a damp cloth and then with a dry one - to avoid scratching it. This increases her workload, but she does not have the option to leave and find a new job. Similarly, Shayma shared that her employer often verbally abuses her. They tell her to stop if she tries to discuss anything, claiming her talking gives them a headache. She is actively looking for another job and plans to leave this employer as soon as she finds one.

Employers do not provide workplace safety training or equipment to protect workers from potential hazards. For example, they are not instructed on what to do in case of a fire, a common occurrence in Dhaka city. Nor are they provided with protective measures to prevent injuries while working in the kitchen, cleaning ceiling fans, or performing other tasks.

For example, one day, Josna was sweeping the floors of a room in her employer's house when she unknowingly stepped on a piece of broken glass. No one in the house had warned her about it or advised her to wear sandals or shoes. Her foot was cut, and it was bleeding

heavily. Despite this, her employers did nothing to assist her. Fortunately, Josna's daughter worked in another apartment in the same building and could provide immediate help. Her daughter's employer provided a bandage and pain relief medicine. After receiving first aid, Josna returned to work, but her employer did not even inquire about her well-being after this incident. Josna explained that she had no choice but to continue this work as it was her only source of income, and she needed to buy necessities like food and medicine.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. This relationship plays a significant role in the experience of domestic workers and is shaped by the socio-economic class and gender of the employer and workers. In this chapter, we have seen how domestic workers explain the socio-economic status of the workers. It is not essential that if the socio-economic condition of an employer is good, they will get a good salary, or the socio-economic condition of the employers does not help workers to have a good experience. Rather, domestic workers share a negative experience with their landlord employers who treat them poorly. In contrast, working women employers treat them well as they may try to understand them from a working women's perspective. Employers typically hold negative views and attitudes toward domestic workers, exacerbated by the broader cultural perspective that manual labor is demeaning (Sen & Sengupta, 2016). Domestic work is particularly stigmatized because it is reproductive labor, often seen as a substitute for the domestic responsibilities of middle-class women (Anderson, 2000). Consequently, the employment of domestic workers as wage laborers elevates the employer's status while devaluing that of the domestic worker (Ray & Qayum, 2009). How these tasks are perceived influences our perception of the

individuals performing them. It is commonly believed, especially in the context of Bangladesh and in South Asian Countries, that menial chores that are significant in terms of social reproduction are delegated to individuals considered less socially important, allowing others to focus on establishing a meaningful, public identity for themselves (Lines, 2018).

Based on these perceptions, the relationship between domestic workers and their employers is highly unequal and reproduces the social hierarchy between the workers and their employers. There are several long-term effects of such a hierarchical relationship, including workers' ability to negotiate wages, working terms, and leave, that make domestic work a highly inflexible sector. The negative perceptions among employers also increase job insecurity, as domestic workers' options to find a better job are very limited. However, there are a few positive stories about what domestic workers appreciate and value in their employers, such as offering food, treating them with affection, behaving well, providing financial support in case of emergency, trusting them, and understanding their situation. As repeatedly highlighted, domestic workers are also social human beings like their employers, who have families and children who need them. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will focus on the home life of domestic workers and their social reproduction.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

> If workers' labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker? Put another way: What kinds of processes enable the worker to arrive at the doors of her place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society? What role did breakfast play in her work-readiness? What about a good night's sleep? (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 1)

Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) posed these questions in the introduction to her edited book, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, a book that has an important place in field of Marxism and our current discussion. I ask the same questions while analyzing the paid domestic workers' lives and unpaid care responsibilities within their households. The central focus is on how the social reproduction of domestic workers and their family members takes place in their own households and how domestic workers manage their dual care roles, paid and unpaid. As we have discussed, almost domestic workers are employed seven days a week. Asking the questions posed by Bhattacharya is crucial to understanding the social reproduction of these workers (Bhattacharya, 2017). I start this discussion by describing the human conditions of domestic workers, such as their housing, food, clothes, education, treatment, and leisure. Then, I focus on the daily routine of domestic workers, which gives us a picture of their daily paid and unpaid care work routines and nurturing of themselves. While analyzing the daily routine, we will see these workers do not get enough time to rest, have a good night's sleep, have any leisure time or activity, and do not even get rest when sick. When these women take care of the entire household, barely anyone takes care of them, even when they are sick. Which is normal to them as well because of the prevailing gender social norms that have taught women to

prioritize them the least. These women are more concerned about their male household members (who do one job outside and do not engage in any household duties) health and well-being. At the same time, they and some of their female family members work hard outside the home and engage in reproductive work at home as well, but they do not even mention their physical health and well-being. While these women workers are refused their workers' rights and well-being at their workplaces, they are also neglected in their own household sphere by their family members and, most importantly, by themselves because of existing social norms where women's health and well-being are the last priority. To understand the social reproduction of these workers and their family members, I analyze their daily lives, reproductive work at home, childcare responsibilities, the current and future biggest concern they care about the most, and their aspirations.

Domestic workers in their own home space

It has been the norm that domestic workers lived in their employers' houses, apart from their own families, in all parts of the world. However, there have been rapid shifts from live-in to live-out domestic workers (also discussed in Chapter 1) (Rollins, 1985; Anderson, 2000; Sharpless, 2010; Ray & Qayum, 2009). Examining the conditions of domestic workers' home lives is crucial to understanding their social reproduction process. In this discussion, I pay close attention to the conditions of food, clothing, and shelter available to live-out domestic workers and their families, where class formation also occurs within the process of social reproduction.

When the living conditions of the participants were discussed in detail at the beginning of Chapter 3, we saw that domestic workers live in very poor conditions in the slum areas of Dhaka city. Although their living conditions vary (a few domestic workers live in multi-

storied buildings and have separate apartment arrangements), all the participants shared a single rented room with the rest of their household members. On the one hand, these living conditions are evidently poor, as stated by the participants themselves, because they provide very congested space for multiple members, damp floors that get worse during rainy days, shared kitchen with at least ten more households, shared washroom facilities, flooding during heavy rain that increases the Dengue mosquito infection and other water-borne diseases. The minimum is three in the case of Nazma, who shares her room with her mother and teenage daughter; Sonali, Parul, Nuri, Jannat, and Reshmi share the room with their husbands and one child. The maximum is eight in the case of Poddo, who has made a partition in their room to create a separate space for her mother-in-law, divorced sister-in-law, and her two adult children in one part of the room while she, her husband, and her two daughters live in another part of the room. Other participants shared their rooms with their husbands and multiple children, resulting in four to six members in a room. On the other hand, these rented living arrangements with their families "represented an autonomy that living in their employers' households simply did not afford" (Sharpless, 2010, p.90). This dense home but personal space gives the workers a space where they can create a community of resistance where, along with the kin-related family members, relatives, and neighbors (many of whom are also domestic workers), they can create a support space and networks where discuss and heal from the wounds inflicted by class domination at their workplaces and also other issues in their lives. This informal support space also works as a network for themselves and their family members to find work and opportunities. For example, when Fatema moved into the Boubazar area, her relatives helped them find work for her, her children, and her husband. Shayma shared that her elder sister's husband taught

her husband how to sell fish on the street when they moved into Boubazar from their village. In the Older focus group discussion, participants shared that they often can not protest their employers' abusive behavior. However, they do discuss that with other domestic workers who live in the same house or nearby. In this community space, they also discuss the benefits they receive from their employers, whose employers treat them well and whose do not; from there, they also build a shared sense of what makes an employer good. In the Rayer Bazar area, the women I interviewed in the community are related (through marriage or blood). Jannat introduced them to the Hellotask. As Jannat had a good experience, they trusted that system and started working, though they were less familiar with the digital technology through which the Hellotask system operates. This freedom of choice also indicates the autonomy these workers have, which has been built into their homes and community spaces.

Before discussing the food conditions of the domestic workers, I would like to discuss their clothing conditions. The food conditions and their reproductive labor in their home space will be discussed together in the next section. The clothing of domestic workers is somewhat shaped by the ‘Purdah’ norms that these women have negotiated along with their participation in the work. Women who are below fifty had been observed wearing three-piece sets as regular wear that they also wear to work. Three women in the younger group discussion wore Burkha during the focus group discussion at Khala’s place as they had come from other houses in the Boubazar area. However, their residences were within a kilometer of the focus group discussion venue. When I met Sonali in front of her residence, she wore a Burkha as she returned from work. Therefore, I assume she wears a Burkha when leaving her house. The older participants, Josna and Rohima, wore cotton Sharee

when I met them during interviews. All these women, regardless of whether they wore sarees or salwar kameez, were covering their heads following the cultural norms. Heintz et al. (2018) argue that domestic wage labor, along with women from very poor households, is especially affected by patriarchal risks and are the exceptions to Purdah norms. That means their poor economic conditions do not allow them to follow total seclusion from the market. Rather, I would say they still practice some 'Purdah' by wearing traditional dresses covering their bodies and heads to uphold the social norms related to women's dress and behavior, as violating them can cause harassment in the public space. Domestic workers also use modest dress-ups according to cultural norms to protect them from workplace sexual harassment by the male members of their employer's households (Nazneen & Huq, 2022). The expectation of maintaining a dress code in public implies the affordability of clothes for themselves and their family members. Fatema (38), a mother of four children who works in four households, explained how hard it is to buy decent clothing for themselves and their children with their current income, as most of the income goes for room rent, utility bills, and food for six. She said:

> If I do a couple of extra tasks [extra] in a month [in the employers' houses], spend an entire month cleaning your house [employers], and you [employer] only give me 1000 taka for it [for one task] at the end of the month. If you could also give me a three-piece (set) along with that, I would appreciate it. You people wear expensive three-piece sets. (Fatema, Boubazar, October 25, 2023)

Like Fatema, some other participants also shared that their employers wear expensive clothes even as regular wear at home. In contrast, they often wear used clothes provided by their employers or cheap clothes of poor quality. Such clothes get ripped very easily as they do physical labor, such as mopping the floor by moving on their hands and knees,

cleaning washrooms, etc. This work makes their clothes dirty and causes them to wear out quickly, rendering them unusable. Since clothing is also important for their modesty, it is crucial that the clothes they wear are not ripped and do not expose any body parts except for their face, hands (below the elbow), and feet. Class differences are highly visible in how women are dressed. As these women cannot afford even moderate-quality clothes, the social class difference between them and their employers is clearly visible, which also makes these women have low self-esteem. Therefore, during their interviews and group discussions, participants expressed their expectations from their employers that employers at least give them new clothes during Eid as they often struggle to afford to buy new clothes for all their family members. If their employers give them clothes, that helps them save money from buying for themselves and using that amount for their children. However, only a few participants mentioned that their employers gave them new clothes during Eid. For example, Joba (35, Boubazar) is a mother of four daughters who works full-time in one employer's house, whom Joba recognizes as very wealthy, giving her an Eid Bonus (half salary) and five sets of three pieces. At the same time, most were highly critical of their employer's uncustomary behavior that they did not gift them new clothes during Eid. For example, Rohima (60, Boubazar) criticized her current employer by saying that the clothes they give her are too old, worn out, and not wearable.

While domestic workers who work through the traditional system strongly expect such gifts from their employers and believe this is their employer's moral responsibility, the participants who work through the Hellotask platform did not share such expectations from the employers they work for. That could be because of the guidance provided by the platform before joining the work and a more third-party (e.g. Hellotask) mediated

relationship which allows them moderately better pay, a better work environment, and weekly one-off days, and creates, to some extent, a formal relationship between the employers and the workers in digital presence of the private company. However, it is difficult to conclude with those remarks as only four participants had experience working through the platform and did not have long-term working relationships with their employers (the highest is three years of Sonali working in one of their current employers).

Reproductive and care work at home

Before delving into the unpaid reproductive work of domestic workers in their households, it is essential to discuss the household dynamics, which are also strongly shaped by patriarchal social norms (see Cain et al., 1979). The gendered division of labor and the power inequality between men and women have been widely discussed (Cain et al., 1979; White, 1992; Kabeer, 2000). Men are mostly engaged in economic activities outside the home and, thus, are providers and decision-makers. In contrast, women are responsible for the reproductive work inside the home and thus depend on men economically and for social protection (discussed in Chapter 1). However, it is important to understand the power dynamics among women of different ages and statuses in the household to better understand the domestic workers' daily reproductive work in their households. Mead Cain, Syeda Rokeya Khanam, and Shamsun Nahar analyze these dynamics in their work *Class, Patriarchy, and Women's Work in Bangladesh* (1979). They argue that in Bangladeshi society (studied in rural society, which I found similar to urban society), two phases in women's life cycles are especially important for the societal control of women and the continuation of patriarchy.

> One is the process of sex-role socialization during childhood. The second is the hierarchy that exists between women of different status in the same household. In general, older women dominate younger women – mothers-in-law dominate daughters-in-law, elder brothers' wives dominate younger brothers' wives, and so on. This age stratification among women allies older women with patriarchal interests (because both share domination and exploitation of younger women) and also gives the younger women something to look forward to with advancing age (Cain et al., 1979, p. 422).

A similar hierarchy among women in the participants' households has also been evident in this study, although to the extent of reproductive and care work distribution among the household members. We can see that the amount of reproductive work varies among the participants based on their age, marital status, children's age, household types, living conditions, the number of female members, the number of employers they work under, and any other responsibilities they carry out. Older participants, who are widows (Rohima and Josna) or separated from their husbands (Hafiza) and live with their adult children, are less responsible for the reproductive work. For instance, Rohima (60, Boubazar) lives with her daughter, Nazma (35), who is divorced and has a teenage daughter who is a school dropout. Rohima spends around thirteen hours in her paid domestic work, where she goes at 8 am in the morning every day, gets three meals at her employer's house, and returns home at around 9 pm. After returning, she prays and has dinner with her daughter and granddaughter. After that, she goes to bed. She does not have to do many household chores at her own house as her daughter and granddaughter take care of those. She washes her clothes mostly and cooks when her daughter is sick. Josna (60, Boubazar) lives with her younger son's family (younger son's wife and a two-year-old child), works for around four hours at her employer's house, where she goes at 8 am and comes back around 1 pm, spends

her day praying five times, looking after her grandson when her daughter in law is at work (she also works as a domestic worker), goes to the grocery market when she needs anything, washes her own clothes, cooks when her daughter-in-law is sick or visiting her maternal home. Hafiza (53, Rayer Bazar) lives with her elder son and his family (elder son's wife and three children) and works in two households. Hafiza shared her daily routine, where her daughter-in-law plays a significant role in daily household work.

> Now that I am a bit older and my daughter-in-law [elder son's wife takes care of many things in the household] is there, I wake up at 6:30 in the morning. After waking up, I wash my face and hands, comb my hair, and prepare my betel leaf. After that, I go to work. My son's wife does all the morning chores. She makes breakfast, prepares food for the children, and prepares them for school. After sending them off to school, she also goes to work. She leaves at 7:30 in the morning. She works at a house where she works for 2 hours, then around 9, she goes to the university to work [where she does a cleaning job]. I return from work at 1 p.m., and my son's wife returns at 4 p.m. […] Then I take care of my grandchildren. I make the beds, clean the house, and prepare food for the children when they return from school. I wash the dishes from the breakfast they had in the morning. We eat lunch. After that, I pray (the second prayer – Dhuhr); by this time, their (grandchildren's) mother returns from work. When she comes back, she rests for a while. Then, she washes the children's clothes that they left during bathing and takes a bath herself. After that, she cooks.
>
> In the evening, I work in another employer's house. There, I also cook. There is only one husband and wife living there. I work there for one and a half hours and get 3000 TK. I leave for that work after praying the Maghrib prayer. When I return, I sit for a while, then watch a little TV. Then I pray (Isha) and have dinner. After dinner, I go to bed.

> […] My son rides a bike (Uber/Pathao[27]). He leaves as soon as he wakes up. On days when he feels well, he goes out early in the morning; when he doesn't feel well, he goes out later. The children go to school. Today, the school is closed due to the strike. They leave for school at 8 AM. No one is home then. They come back at 1 PM. Minu (elder daughter of her son) returns at 1 PM, bathes, eats, and then goes to private tutoring. They can go to school and the private tutor's place independently.
>
> My son's wife does the cooking at home. I cook if there are guests or something special needs to be cooked. She helps by preparing the ingredients. Sometimes, she asks me to cook and prepares everything for me. (Hafiza, Rayer Bazar, November 20, 2023)

Hafiza's account tells the typical gender division of care work at home in a typical Bengali lower-class family. In the presence of their mother-in-law, the daughters-in-law, takes care of most of the reproductive work in the house. The elderly women (the mother-in-law like Hafiza or, in some cases, the mother like Rohima and Khala) mostly look after the children when their mother is at work and occasionally cooks. The man (like Hafiza's son) does one job – earning by working outside. It is important to note here that Hafiza, who wakes up early in the morning, prays five times a day, does around eight hours of paid domestic work at two employers' houses. Both are cooking, which requires both physical and emotional engagements, doing household chores, and going to bed at around midnight; this is her everyday routine, seven days a week. At the same time, her daughter-in-law takes care of most of the household chores, including cooking, does a paid domestic work in one employer's house, does a full-time cleaning job in a university nearby, cooks at least two

[27] Pathao is a Bangladeshi ride sharing app that has both ride sharing options – by car and by motorbike. In Bangladesh, Uber also has motorbike ride sharing options. Hafiza is not sure about the specific platform her son uses (whether Uber or Pathao), but mentioned about both.

times a day (in the morning and afternoon), does the childcare. She follows this routine for at least six days a week. Hafiza never mentions their (her and her daughter-in-law's) tiredness or not feeling well. Instead, she emphasizes that her son is not feeling well. He does ride-sharing work but can do it on his own terms and skip going to work anytime. That shows how men's work is valued by themselves, where they do not recognize their hard work compared to their male members' work, though the men work half the amount of what they do.

None of the participant's male household members share care work duties; the women (most possibly the younger married women) take care of the household chores and care work for the household members, including the men. It is more work for women with children under five years old, and if there is no other adult woman in the household to look after the children when she goes to work. For instance, Lily has four children: three daughters and a son. The elder two are daughters, sixteen and ten years old; the third one is a son, five years old; and the youngest one is a one and half year daughter. Her elder daughter has left school; Lily regrets that she could not afford to send her to school after class five. Her second daughter attends the government primary school and is in class three, and her five-year-old son started attending pre-primary school. Lily's story shares how care work in her family is taken care of.

Lily wakes up between 5 and 6 in the morning. Then, she makes breakfast for her son. Sometimes, she makes Roti for breakfast; if there is leftover rice from the night, then she fries that rice with onion, green chili, and other spices. Sometimes, she buys bread from the grocery store for breakfast. She feeds her son and takes him to school around 7:30. When he is at school, she comes back home and stores water. In their house, they do not

have a constant water supply. Water is only available from 5/6 am to 11 am, so Lily has to store enough water for the entire day for the entire household, including cooking, drinking, bathing, and other uses. Then, she cooks before going to work. She has to pick up her son from school at 9:30. After bringing him home and feeding him, she does paid domestic work around 10 in the morning. To finish work in two households, it is 3.30 pm, and sometimes 5 pm when she returns home. After returning home, she takes a bath, eats, and feeds her son. Then she has to think about cooking again, so she goes to the market to buy groceries. After preparing the ingredients, she gives them to her daughter and returns to work for the second time in the same two households. She cooks most of the time, but sometimes, her elder daughter also takes care of cooking. When she finishes work and returns home, it's around 8 to 9 pm. At that time, she does not feel like working anymore. Even if there is work left, she lies down and sleeps. The next morning, she starts the same routine.

When Lily goes to work, her eldest daughter looks after the youngest child, which Lily considers a great help. Her husband does not take any care of work responsibilities at home. Lily has to do everything from the school run to everything else. Lily's husband is illiterate. Therefore, he does not understand many things Lily says, especially at her children's school; if the teacher gives any information at school, her husband does not understand it. However, Lily's husband took care of the household a bit during the last stage of her pregnancy and delivery. He did some small household chores, and as he could not cook, he brought someone else to do any tasks that needed to be done around the house. He would bring someone from the neighboring house or Lily's mother-in-law if available. Her mother-in-law would help with the tasks Lily could not do during her pregnancy. She

expressed her frustration about the household chores and care work she must do daily, along with her paid domestic work duties.

> Every member of the family has responsibilities. But in my family, that is not the case. Neither my daughter nor my husband takes on their responsibilities. My husband only looks after himself. He needs to be fed on time. I have to take care of his needs. If his clothes are dirty, I have to wash them. I have to keep an eye on everything he does. His only and the biggest job is to come home from work. If the children need something, he will provide it. If someone falls ill, he will take them to the doctor. He takes care of some major issues. If my child is very sick and must go to the medical center, my husband will accompany me. He will see the doctor and bring us home. I do not know the places, but he does. If I am sick, he will take me to the doctor." (Lily, Boubazar, October 29, 2023)

There are several points to discuss in Lily's daily care work case. In case of sickness, the care work responsibilities usually go to another woman. The participants with daughters can rely on their daughters to look after their younger kids at work. The water supply issue is widespread around Dhaka and is a regular phenomenon (Dhaka Tribune, April 02, 2024). Every participant mentioned this issue while discussing their daily routine. Storing water at specific times requires special attention from the participants, especially those who live in large, shared houses; both in Boubazar and Rayer Bazar (Ahmed, 2014). Parul, Fatema, Shayma, Nazma, and Joba live in the same tin-shed house in the Boubazar area. They shared that sometimes water is available only after midnight, and since more than ten households live there, they have to wait in line to collect their share of water. Even after completing their household chores and long hours of paid domestic work, they cannot go to bed as soon as they finish their other tasks. They must wait until the water supply starts and their turn comes up. They shared that sometimes it is 3 am before they finish storing

water and can go to bed. However, they can rarely portray this situation as an excuse for their low-paid and unpaid care work routine the next day. The participants who live in apartment buildings and share the kitchen and washroom with a couple more households also face this issue, but their wait time in line to store the water is less than the other participants. Some men share the role of collecting water, especially when collecting it at midnight with other house residents. This creates conflict if someone breaks the line or takes too much time. They face similar issues with the natural gas supply in their kitchen stoves. Gas is also not available at all times of the day. These issues make the care work burden severe for domestic workers as they have to balance their day between paid and unpaid care work. Facing these issues on a daily basis gives them less time to have enough sleep and rest in their seven days a week work calendar. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully analyze their care role, which is not only shaped by patriarchal social norms but also exacerbated by the power supply of the state and urban infrastructure where these domestic workers pay high in all forms, high rents for their tiny rooms, and high utility bills.[28]

Another point from Lily's story is that childcare responsibilities are almost the sole responsibility of women in Bangladeshi society, like in many other parts of the world (Lines, 2018). Women and girls take care of the younger children in the family, including looking after them, feeding them, bathing them, cleaning them, their clothes and everything, taking care of them when they are sick, taking them to the health care centers, taking them to schools, overall, all sorts of physical and emotional care are provided by mostly the women.

[28] According to Bangladesh Shangbad Shangstha (BSS, January 18, 2023), TK 990 is for single-burner users without a meter, and TK 1080 is for double-burner users without a meter. This is the same regardless of high-rise residential buildings or slum areas.

In this part of the discussion, I focus on how domestic workers manage their childcare role when they are at work and home, what they think and feel about the way they manage this role, how their household and family members share these responsibilities, and how their paid care work experience in their employers' houses affect in their childcare role. Poddo's story of her care work involves a great deal of childcare as she is a young mother of a six-year-old daughter with a disability and a two-year-old daughter. Poddo's two daughters wake up early in the morning, around 5 or 6 am, during the morning prayer call. Poddo shares that her body does not want to wake up in the early morning, but she has to because her kids poop and urinate after waking up, and she needs to clean. Before going to work, she cooks and feeds the children. From 9 am in the morning to around 3.30 pm, she does domestic work in three households. After returning from work, Poddo feeds her children, takes a bath, and eats lunch. When she does this, it is already time to cook dinner. Poddo expresses that she cannot even sit for a while to breathe; she shared: "I mean, I go through a lot of hardships, but I do not let anyone know about my suffering. I keep my pain to myself." When Poddo is at work, her mother-in-law looks after her daughters. Her daughters can eat by hand, so her mother-in-law does not need to feed them. If they defecate or urinate, that needs to be cleaned, and her mother-in-law does that. mentioning that her mother-in-law is an aged woman who suffers from several illnesses and cannot do much work, Poddo highlights their plight of being poor by saying, "I understand that it is difficult for her because she is an elderly person. But there is no other choice. When you are poor, there is no option; you must do it. My mother-in-law understands this, too." By saying this, Poddo indicates that in this similar situation, people with money would seek paid care support, like hiring domestic workers, so that the elderly sick members of the family (like

her mother-in-law) would not have to do that. However, poor people, especially domestic workers who offer physical labor for such care, cannot seek this paid support. Therefore, even an aged, sick person like her mother-in-law cannot avoid doing the care work that is physically painful for her. In response to my question about what her husband does for childcare, Poddo replied, “When my husband is at home, he looks after the children for a while, but otherwise, he is always at the market. At night, he asks, 'Have you fed the girls?' I say, 'Yes, I have fed them.' If the child is sick, he will give money, and I will take care of the treatment. But he will not take the child to the doctor. I have to take them myself.” Poddo, along with her sister-in-law, takes care of it when her elder daughter gets sick.

The other participants shared the same experience and said that their husbands, unlike Lily’s husband, do not go to the hospital or health care centers when they, family members, or their children get sick. The only thing that they do is sometimes provide money for the doctor or medicine bills for their children. When the sickness involves staying at the hospital admitted for an extended period of time or for a major operation, the men of the families go to the hospital and talk to the doctors. However, staying in the hospital at night with the patient again falls as the responsibility of women. The participants care for the sick by taking them to hospitals or doctors' offices and caring for them at home. It becomes difficult for them to manage their paid care work during this time, especially because, as we have seen, most employers do not allow them a day off. When Poddo’s elder sister-in-law (her husband's other sister, not the one who lives with them) was sick, Poddo took care of her after finishing her work in the three households, took her to the doctors, and did her household chores. She said,

> **Poddo:** No one else will go. Her husband will not go, her son will not go. I have to go. I have to go everywhere; they do not want to go anywhere. […] Sometimes I

do [feel tired]. But there is nothing to be done. I tell myself that if I fall sick, they [her sister-in-law and mother-in-law] will take care of me too.

Pinash: Have you shared this with anyone to lighten your mind?

Poddo: Who would I talk to? If I talk to my husband, he won't understand. If I tell my husband sometimes, he says, "We are men; can we handle women's things? You have to take care of it." So, what is the use of telling him? I also do not tell my sister-in-law. Actually, I don't want to admit to anyone that I am suffering or feeling tired. I keep my pain to myself. Even if it feels bad, I don't let anyone know. (Poddo, Boubazar, October 25, 2023)

The excuse Poddo's husband came up with may not be pronounced by the other men of the participants' households; however, it is a widely practiced norm that caring for children and the sick, regardless of gender, is the women's responsibility. It has always been backed up that this is a feminine matter that needs women's attention, and men are automatically exempted from such care duties. The accepted account of Poddo in response to her husband's excuse has been voiced by many women, not only poor but from all classes, meaning that women (not only domestic workers but also from almost all classes and professions) have accepted that they can do nothing to change this situation. This response also accounts for the frustration and lack of trust in the whole system/patriarchy that have grown among these women. It highlights their helplessness as a woman at work and in their home space. This can be read in two ways: either they are now on the verge of losing hope in the whole social system that always denied hearing them out, to care about them in a way they would like to be cared for, and to value them. In response to these extremely rigid circumstances, they somehow adjusted to this social and structural system of counting women as the second gender. This response also can be read as a sign of having grown strong resistance in this adverse situation.

The same notion has been evident in response to Tanzila's and Honufa's accounts of their husbands' carelessness. Tanzila lives in an apartment with her mother (Khala), which gives her some support to raise two kids while working as a paid domestic worker. For Tanzila, not only does her husband not share any household chores, but he also does not bother to share the financial pressure to make ends meet. He often skips going to work, which creates financial uncertainty for the family. But Tanzila must ensure that the rent is paid, the rented room is made home, there is food on the plate of her sons, the education cost for her elder son is arranged, and emergency support (from her mother or siblings or employer) is available if needed. All these pressures fall on Tanzila, who explains that she cannot escape. Honufa, a mother of a two-year-old son, felt the same. Honufa's husband has been unemployed for the last few months. However, he seemed uninterested in finding work and earning money, while Honufa and her young kid had a difficult financial situation with no monthly income. They depended entirely on loans from their relatives and neighbors, which was also difficult, and help from Honufa's parents and mother-in-law to pay the rent and have the bare minimum food for their daily sustenance. Honufa and her mother-in-law try to push him to look for work and earn money, but he gets angry if they push hard. To overcome this extreme situation and avoid starvation, Honufa is now thinking of sending her two-year-old kid to her parents in Kishorganj. She could then return to her garment factory job that she had done before her son's birth. The everyday struggles of these women to secure adequate shelter for the family and maintain the home put them at the center of the social reproduction process of the entire family (Elias & Rai, 2019). Iris Marion Young highlights the gendered nature of homemaking, noting that women typically do not build homes but rather 'make' them: 'those who build dwell in the world in a different way from

those who occupy the structures already built, and from those who preserve what is constructed' (Young, cited in Elias & Rai, 2019, p. 209).

Due to the poor economic conditions, it is difficult for domestic workers to afford 'good' food for their children and their families. What they meant by good food is fish, meat, eggs in their daily meals, fruits, and different kinds of snacks. Participants shared that it is getting harder for them to afford basic rice, lentils, one item of vegetables, and eggs as basic protein sources because of the high inflation in the market. While I was doing groceries in the Boubazar market one day during my fieldwork in Dhaka, a woman from the Boubazar community also did groceries at the same vegetable store. While bargaining with the shopkeeper, she shared her frustration with me, saying that only a few items (a bunch of leafy vegetables, a long squash, a cauliflower, and a kilo of potato) cost her 200TK. If I translate that for a domestic worker who earns 6000TK by working in two households, she will have to perform at least six tasks to earn that money. Buying those four items for 200 TK means her one-day income is gone for only buying these few items; she still needs to buy rice, food oil, and spices to prepare a meal. That means 200TK is not enough for a bare minimum daily meal for the average family size of our participants, which is a family of three, two, or four. Almost all the participants shared that they could rarely eat chicken and other meat. Fifty-year-old Shayma lives in Boubazar with her husband and four children in the tin-shed house. She works under one employer because of her health condition (she has diabetes and cannot work much), and her husband is a street vendor (sells fish), the elder son is unemployed, the second son works in a store at Kochukhet Bazar, her daughter works in a garments factory, and the youngest son goes to school. Shayma shared that she uses her income for her youngest son's school fees and her own expenses (clothing, medicine,

and betel leaf); her daughter's and son's income goes for the house rent and buys food from her husband's income. She said:

> We manage the food expenses from my husband's income. We try to get by with this combined income. The income from the four of us barely meets our basic needs. If it does not suffice, where can we go? If his father [her husband] manages to bring in a little extra money some days, only then we can afford to buy a chicken. Otherwise, we make do with simple meals like lentils and mashed potatoes or fish and vegetables, depending on what we have. We live hand to mouth. (Shayma, Boubazar, October 20, 2023)

Other participants, except Sonali, echoed Shayma's food conditions. Sonali explained that she tries to provide her daughter with good food: fish, meat, various kinds of vegetables, fruits, and sometimes food from restaurants. On the day I interviewed Sonali, her daughter had a light cold and fever and wanted to have biryani from a nearby restaurant, which Sonali bought on her way home from work. This highlights the reason Sonali gave for doing paid domestic work: to afford the necessities her daughter needs to grow up in a relatively stable environment, which Sonali and her siblings did not have and which many of her relatives and neighbors cannot afford for their children.

This is one reason domestic workers appreciate food provisions in their employers' households (Wilks, 2018). But they face inequality again between their own kitchen and their employers' kitchen spheres. In their employer's kitchen, they cook different kinds of dishes with fish, meat, and other ingredients that they cannot afford in their own kitchen. Hafiza shared her feelings about cooking in her employer's kitchen:

> [When I cook in their kitchen] I keep thinking, these are foods for rich people. Would we ever be able to make so many dishes at home? For example, they buy expensive, large fish. They even buy fish like Koral and sea fish for ten thousand taka. Ten thousand taka is our entire monthly budget, whereas they spend that much

on fish only, which they eat within fifteen days. (Hafiza, Rayer Bazar, November 20, 2023)

While these domestic workers are aware of this inequality in these two kitchen spheres, they have accepted the reality that, with their low income, they cannot afford the same food for their children, though they want to. If a small amount of the food they cook for their employers daily is shared with them, they will appreciate it from a humanistic point of view. Participants shared that this trait of employers was much more common in earlier days, but nowadays, it is becoming rare. Some participants blamed the high inflation for that, and some blamed the poor morality of the employers. However, they want to provide their children with good food sometimes within their affordability. Whenever Joba gets some free time after work, she tries to cook noodles, make a hodgepodge, and invite all the children of the house to her room along with her children to have fun. Hafiza sometimes makes Bar-B-Q chicken for her grandchildren when they desperately ask for it. It is important for domestic workers that even if they cannot eat a full meal, they can ensure their children have food on their plates. That remains the primary reason for housewives to start working as domestic workers when their husbands' income is uncertain and may lead to the starvation of their children.

Aspiration of Domestic Workers

When the participants were asked about their dreams, they did not understand at first, as they may have never thought about their dreams, at least not since becoming mothers. Everyone talked about their aspiration for their children’s good future, which is almost the only thing they aspire to now. However, after discussing it in detail, they agreed that they want their children to be educated and work in financially stable professions, so they do not have to face the hurdles they have been going through. Nuri and Khala are ambitious

that their sons, who are doing well in their education, will secure better-paying jobs and change their socio-economic conditions. The participants with daughters do not want their daughters to work as domestic workers. They prefer garment factory jobs over domestic work because the garment factories pay better, have a weekly day off, fixed working hours, Eid bonuses, and other benefits. Joba's second daughter works in a small garment factory, and her eldest daughter, a school dropout, is learning tailoring from a neighbor so she can earn a living through tailoring. This is the same case for Nazma's daughter. They also want to marry their daughters off to better households so that their daughters do not have to work. Shayma's biggest concern is that her daughter is getting older (not yet eighteen), but they cannot arrange her marriage due to financial difficulties.

Sonali sends her daughter to a Madrasah (an Arabic medium school), and although she is 10 years old, Sonali is already saving money for her daughter's wedding. Sonali does not want her daughter to be highly educated and work; rather, she wants her daughter to learn Arabic so she can be a good Muslim housewife in a better-off household. Sonali's mother-in-law shared her concern that their profession in domestic work will be an issue in finding a better prospect for her granddaughter, as better-off families may not like that the mother and grandmother of the bride working as domestic workers.

Having their own house is very important for all participants and their children's future. Jannat and Hafiza (from Rayer Bazar) have started building their own houses in their home districts, while Poddo's husband and two other brothers have built a semi-pucca house in their home district. Parul and her husband have a piece of land in their native village where they want to build a house once their son is settled in Dhaka. Other participants do not have their own land, which is one of their biggest concerns, as they do not have any place to go

apart from their current rented living arrangements. The older domestic workers, especially Josna, a widow with health conditions, are the most concerned about their landlessness. Josna worries about how she will manage her daily life when she can no longer work. Her last hope lies with her sons, though she is not dependent on them now as they are struggling with their own lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the care work responsibilities of domestic workers along with their paid care work responsibilities. Domestic workers balance their paid and unpaid care work by waking up early in the morning and performing household chores such as cleaning the house and washing the dishes. They prepare and feed school-going children, and after working in their employers' households, they again take care of groceries, cooking for their families, and other household duties. Their poor living conditions increase their care work burden due to water and gas supply disruptions, which are crucial for cooking and cleaning. This is particularly challenging for domestic workers who live in large, shared houses in slum areas.

Doing all these household chores and care work, women receive help from other women in the family, with young married women taking on most of the work. Men almost do not share any of the household chores or care work. The women take care of children, the elderly, and the sick, along with the men. While middle-class women who are active in the labor market can buy the labor power for this care work, domestic workers do not have that option, impacting them physically and mentally. They are often sleep-deprived, malnourished, and rarely recover from the sickness they suffer from overwork every day.

In this context, the presence of another woman or even a girl in the household helps share at least some care work.

Despite these adverse socio-economic conditions, these women seem to have developed resistance and resilience to navigate through the extreme patriarchy that does not provide any space for them to avoid care work. Their poor economic conditions, caused by their husbands' uncertain income due to the informal sector's livelihood instability, laziness, or carelessness, perpetuate a cycle of social reproduction for these domestic workers that may continue into the next generation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I aim to understand the daily work and life experiences of paid domestic workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Paid domestic work is a common phenomenon both worldwide and in Bangladesh. Historically, domestic work has been considered women's work; thus, most workers in the paid domestic sector are predominantly women. Another significant aspect of domestic work is that it is part of the informal labor sector in most countries. Because of its association with women and the informal sector, female domestic workers are often considered low-skilled and come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, which makes them vulnerable to gender, racial, and class-based exploitation.

I have discussed the social, political, economic, and cultural context of Bangladesh, where my study subjects are situated. Analyzing this country's context reveals that, due to a long colonial history, a devastating war, frequent natural disasters, and a high population, Bangladesh's economy has recently grown from one of the poorest countries to a lower-income country. Therefore, like other developing countries, most of the population is engaged in the informal economy. Labor force participation is shaped and influenced by patriarchal social norms, where women’s primary role is domestic and reproductive, while men’s primary role is economic and public. Consequently, women’s participation in the labor market is notably less than men's. However, women from poor families often engage in economic activities to make ends meet, particularly in the informal sector, such as agriculture. Many of these women work as paid domestic workers in urban areas.

Paid domestic workers are not recognized in the country’s labor law, which makes them vulnerable in many ways. By conducting this anthropological research on paid domestic

work in Bangladesh, complex issues such as employers' private households as the workplace of domestic workers have been addressed, where the workers are primarily isolated, and their working conditions are not monitored by anyone other than their employers. In the introduction, reviewing several literatures on paid domestic work from a Bangladeshi perspective has revealed that vulnerabilities and physical, sexual, and mental violence have persisted in this sector where children and women face extreme abuse that demands regulatory action. Because of this persisting violence against domestic workers, scholarly and media attention has been focused on those aspects, mostly where a significant lack of anthropological or sociological qualitative study is identified. Where this study offers a nuanced understanding of domestic work from their worker's perspective. Feminist scholars have paid rigorous attention to paid domestic workers, especially after the 1970s and 1980s, after the significant emergence of migrant domestic workers from the global south to the global north. The feminist political economy scholarship, especially social reproduction work, provided me with the theoretical and analytical concepts to understand the different aspects of paid domestic work that involve paid and unpaid care work in two different spheres: employers' homes and their own homes. Thus, this study is also an attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of feminist political economy and the anthropology of work, particularly within the Bangladeshi context.

In the second chapter, I have discussed in detail the qualitative approach of this research. I have conducted the fieldwork of this research in two areas of Dhaka city: Boubazar under Kafrul Thana and Rayer Bazar under Dhanmondi Thana in October and November 2023. To collect data, one-to-one in-depth interviews with a total of seventeen women domestic workers aged between eighteen and sixty years old and two focus group discussions with

young and older domestic workers were conducted. Married, widowed, and divorced women who have children and elderly members in their household were recruited as this study focused on understanding the unpaid care work responsibilities of women domestic workers.

In the third chapter, a detailed narrative of the everyday work of domestic workers in their employers' houses has been discussed and analyzed. The details of their work, which are counted as tasks and paid based on the tasks performed, have shown that every task is a process of a series of interlinked tasks (Anderson, 2000) that are often overlooked and unrecognized by employers. Domestic workers' work is based on a verbal contract framed and dominated by employers. As a result, domestic workers often end up doing extra work imposed by their employers, which many of them cannot protest or refuse to do for fear of losing their jobs. Apart from the verbally agreed monthly wages, most domestic workers do not get any weekly off days, struggle to get off when sick or during emergencies, and have no other benefits such as yearly or festival bonuses. Within these adverse working conditions, domestic workers choose this profession and stick to it for limited available options for earning a living with their low education and lack of certified skillset, balancing their childcare responsibilities and health conditions. While addressing the exploitative working experiences, participants find this option as a way to escape starvation and extreme poverty. As long as they feel a serious threat to their safety and honor (physical violence and sexual abuse), domestic workers adjust to their working conditions and resist the hierarchical behavior of their employers by accepting their reality of poor socio-economic conditions. As their work is widely stereotyped as low-skilled, the decades of working experience of some of these workers have gained trust, reliability, and dependence from

their employers through their cooking skills, cleaning skills, loyalty, and patience. While they are extremely undervalued and unrecognized, they themselves recognize those skills that were accounted for in their experience sharing.

The relationship between the employers and the workers is highly unequal. Domestic workers are treated poorly and face discrimination that affects their self-esteem and mental health; some of them share familial relationships with their employers. In this relationship, domestic workers expect good behavior from their employers. they appreciate those employers who try to understand their situation and hardships, trust what they are saying, check on them and their children, help them with loans and financial support in emergencies, and advise them for their betterment.

Domestic workers balance their unpaid and paid care work in their employer's homes and in their own homes. Although these workers earn a living that contributes significantly to their families, in some cases, they actually play the breadwinner role, but they are also not valued in their own families. The men in the houses do not share the care work even when men are not going to work, but the women work around eight hours in their employers' houses. Most of the household chores and care work are taken care of by the young married women of the household, while other women share some of the chores and care work.

As many feminist scholars have argued, paid domestic labor involves physical and societal reproduction. If the family works to reproduce itself physically and to perpetuate “basic ideological forms, class, race, age, and gender ideologies, societal expectations, folkways, mores, norms, and the like” (Anderson, 2000, p. 30), then paid domestic labor also plays a significant role in this process. In terms of the social reproduction of themselves and their family members, they are at the center of this process, where they intimately face

domination and subordination because of the existing patriarchal power systems (Marchetti, 2005).

I recognize several limitations of this research. When discussing domestic workers as a whole, there are many aspects to cover, and leaving one issue unaddressed may obscure significant aspects of these people's lives. This group of workers, largely women, faces numerous vulnerabilities in terms of human rights and labor rights. A closer look reveals that gender is a crucial factor shaping these workers' identities, positionalities, and vulnerabilities to gender-based violence, exploitation, abuse, and discrimination. Moreover, many workers in this group are children as young as six. As I write this, I find it difficult to remain analytical; emotion takes over sometimes. When a six-year-old has to work in someone else’s house, far from their family, in a closed-door situation, that signals our failure—as human beings, as a society, as a state. It is overwhelming but evident that more than 400,000 children aged between six and sixteen were employed as child domestic workers in Bangladesh in 2005. Ninety percent of them are girls who are particularly vulnerable to child sexual abuse. We cannot avoid discussing the vulnerabilities of this group of workers. It is understandable why much academic work has focused on these vulnerabilities and urged regulatory enforcement. However, to enforce regulations that prevent exploitation and protect these workers from violence and discrimination, it is essential to understand the sector from a holistic perspective. From the worker's perspective, this includes addressing the complexities of the workplace, given its private home nature, and understanding the work in detail—the emotional and physical labor, the attachment to the work, the work intensity, necessary skills, social norms, and so on. From the employer's perspective, it also involves understanding the demand for work and

workers, the employers' socio-economic profiles, their demands, perspectives, and expectations, and taking into account the workers' individual experiences, understanding of the work and employers, socio-economic conditions, expectations, challenges, strategies to overcome these challenges, proposals for improvement, and life aspirations. Additionally, we must consider society's perception and suggestions, the government's existing resources, gaps, future plans, and the role of national and international bodies that can support with knowledge, resources, and partnerships. Any work remains incomplete without addressing all these factors and many more that may arise upon more investigations.

The question arises: how can one research project accomplish all of this? I understand that we already have enough research on regulation and vulnerability aspects (though often with a narrow focus, leaving many areas unexplored or not critically studied). Many studies repeat one another. If we focus on the aspects that have not yet been addressed, a more nuanced and critical debate will be possible. Otherwise, this sector may continue remaining as undervalued, unrecognized, and highly vulnerable.

My research attempts to shift the spotlight from vulnerability and regulation to the complexities of this work and workplace from the workers' perspectives. Nevertheless, I recognize that this single study cannot cover all significant aspects, so I invite other researchers to join the discussion, illuminate unexplored aspects in this field, and broaden the debate. This will help make these vulnerable groups more familiar to academia, policymakers, and society. Thus, it may create the space to recognize their skills, strength, labor power, and human power alongside their vulnerabilities and develop strategies to improve their work and life conditions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Documents (Oral Script)

Oral script intended for use in the community.

“Hello, how are you? My name is Pinash Akter, I am a researcher at Dalhousie. I’m here to meet domestic workers who might be interested in speaking with me about their working lives. Do you work as a domestic worker?”

[No]

“Nice speaking with you, have a good day!”

[Yes]

“May I ask: how long have you been working as a domestic worker? Are you above 18 years old? Are you married? If yes, do you have children or elderly members in your family?”

[If “yes” to all these questions, proceed.]

“Would you be willing to participate in my study? It would entail sitting for a one-on-one interview and participating in a group discussion, each approximately 60-90 minutes long. We can do the interview at your convenient time and place. And the group discussion time and place will be discussed during the interview. For your time and participation in both sessions, an amount of 600 BDT will be given as a token of appreciation!”

[No]

“Thanks anyway and have a good day!”

[Yes]

“Great! Are you available to meet in the next week or so?...”

Appendix B: One-On-One Interview Consent Script

Researcher: Mst Pinash Akter

MA Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University

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Ms540200@dal.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Lindsay DuBois

Sociology and Social Anthropology Dept., Chair

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ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW CONSENT SCRIPT

"Informality and The Double Day: The Case of Domestic Workers in Dhaka City, Bangladesh"

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study about the experience and perception of paid domestic workers as informal workers and care workers. This study is being completed by me, Pinash Akter, a graduate student at Dalhousie University as part of the master's program in Social Anthropology. Your participation in this study is entirely optional and voluntary, and you will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to participate.

This letter outlines the goals of the project, what you will be asked to do at this initial interview, and the risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. Please feel free to raise any questions or concerns with me, Pinash Akter, or my supervisor, Dr. Lindsay DuBois, using the contact details listed at the top of this page.

Description of the Project

This project seeks to understand how domestic workers of Dhaka city experience and understand the informal nature of their work as paid and unpaid care workers.

Participation

You may participate in this study if you work as a paid domestic worker, are married/widowed/divorced, and have children and elderly family members in the household, you live in Dhaka city, and if you are 18 years of age or older.

The interview will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes and will be carried out at a time and place of your choosing. With your permission, I will audio record the conversation, to enable me to produce an accurate transcription, which will be helpful in the data analysis stage of the project. I will also take written notes during the interview.

Audio recordings will be transcribed by myself and will be stored in a encrypted archive, on a local computer, locked with a strong, randomly generated password. Any notes including identifying information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a private residence. The researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants when writing the final thesis or presenting the research and will take utmost care to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. Only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the data.

Withdrawing from the Study

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until the end of the data collection period, in December 2023, at which point the data from your interview will be amalgamated with others for analysis and will become difficult to separate. You may stop the interview at any time, refuse to answer any question and decline to participate in any aspect of the study. Participants can opt to receive a copy of their interview transcript and will be able to revise or withdraw any information shared with the researcher until December 31, 2023. The data collection phase of this project will run until November 2023. Participants can opt to receive a summary of the final thesis for their perusal and reference.

Risks and Benefits

Participants in this study are not expected to receive any direct personal benefits. However, you will be compensated with 300 BDT (3.7 CAD) for participating in one component of the study (Interview, FGD, or Observation), excluding snacks, and will receive the gratitude of the researcher. It is important to note that there are potential risks associated with participation. These risks include being asked questions that may evoke negative emotional reactions, feeling bored, experiencing fatigue, or feeling overwhelmed by the researcher's demands. To mitigate these risks, participants will have the option to pause or stop the interview at any time; can decline to answer any question they are uncomfortable with; local support services (government and non-government) contact information will be shared with them in case of experiences related to violence, legal and health-related issues; will be given the opportunity to review or edit their interview transcripts if desired; will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point during the data collection period, which extends until the end of December 2023.

Furthermore, participation in this study may carry employment risks, which is particularly critical considering the participants' roles as caregivers and breadwinners for their families. There is also a potential risk of retaliation if an employer discovers their involvement. Moreover, there may be interpersonal risks, such as the possibility of family members, especially in cases where the husband is violent or the parents are controlling, becoming aware of a woman's participation. To address these concerns, participants will have the

option to withdraw themselves from the interview. They will also be given sufficient time to discuss their participation with their families if they wish to do so. Furthermore, if requested by the participants, the researcher can share the research brief with the family members. Again, participants will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point until the end of December 2023.

Questions and Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you can contact the researcher, Pinash Akter at +8801713286953 or +17828823385 or by email at ms540200@dal.ca, at any time. You can also contact the project supervisor, Dr. Lindsay DuBois at 902-494-1254 or by email at lindsay.dubois@dal.ca. If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this project you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at 902-494-1462 or by email at ethics@dal.ca.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my study.

Best regards,

Mst Pinash Akter

CONSENT CONFIRMATION PAGE

Project Title: Informality and The Double Day: The Case of Domestic Workers in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

Researcher: Mst Pinash Akter, MA Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University, +8801713286953, +17828823385, ms540200@dal.ca

Have I been Clear? Do you have any other questions? I want to remind you that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time during the data collection period, which ends on December 31, 2023. I also want to remind you that that you can decline to answer any question and pause or stop the interview at any time. Your name name and any identifying information gleaned from this interview will not be used in the final thesis or any presentation of this research.

Have I answered all of your questions?

Do you agree that this interview can be audio recorded. ___ Yes ___ No

If Yes: Would like to receive a copy of the interview transcript, which will be produced within two weeks of the interview, or by December 20th, 2023, so that you can revise or withdraw any information. ___ Yes ___ No

Would like to receive a summary of the final thesis: ___ Yes ___ No

If Yes, please provide either your email or mailing address:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Consent Script

Researcher: Mst Pinash Akter

MA Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University

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Ms540200@dal.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Lindsay DuBois

Sociology and Social Anthropology Dept., Chair

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902-494-1254

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONSENT SCRIPT

"Informality and The Double Day: The Case of Domestic Workers in Dhaka City, Bangladesh"

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study about the experience and perception of paid domestic workers as informal workers and care workers. This study is being completed by me, Pinash Akter, a graduate student at Dalhousie University as part of the master's program in Social Anthropology. Your participation in this study is entirely optional and voluntary, and you will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to participate.

This letter outlines the goals of the project, what you will be asked to do at this initial interview, and the risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. Please feel free to raise any questions or concerns with me, Pinash Akter, or my supervisor, Dr. Lindsay DuBois, using the contact details listed at the top of this page.

Description of the Project

This project seeks to understand how domestic workers of Dhaka city experience and understand the informal nature of their work as paid and unpaid care workers.

Participation

You may participate in this study if you work as a paid domestic worker, are married/widowed/divorced, and have children and elderly family members in the household, you live in Dhaka city, and if you are 18 years of age or older. For this focus group discussion, you can participate in the group of younger people if you are between 18

and 40 years of age. Or you can participate in the group of older people if you are above 40 years old.

The group discussion will last approximately sixty to eighty minutes and will be carried out at the time and place you all choose. With your permission, I will audio record the conversation, to enable me to produce an accurate transcription, which will be helpful in the data analysis stage of the project. I will also take written notes during the group discussion.

Audio recordings will be transcribed by myself and will be stored in an encrypted archive, on a local computer, locked with a strong, randomly generated password. Any notes including identifying information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a private residence. The researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants when writing the final thesis or presenting the research and will take utmost care to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. Only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the data.

Withdrawing from the Study

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until the end of the data collection period, in December 2023, at which point the data from your group discussion will be amalgamated with others for analysis and will become difficult to separate. You may stop the discussion at any time, refuse to answer any question and decline to participate in any aspect of the study. Participants can opt to receive a copy of their discussion transcript and will be able to revise or withdraw any information shared with the researcher until December 31, 2023. The data collection phase of this project will run until November 2023. Participants can opt to receive a summary of the final thesis for their perusal and reference.

Risks and Benefits

Participants in this study are not expected to receive any direct personal benefits. However, each participant of the focus group discussion will be compensated with 300 BDT (3.7 CAD) excluding snacks and will receive the gratitude of the researcher.

It is important to note that there are potential risks associated with participation. These risks include being asked questions that may evoke negative emotional reactions, feeling bored, experiencing fatigue, or feeling overwhelmed by the researcher's demands. To mitigate these risks, participants will have the option to pause or stop and express their discomfort at any time; can decline to answer any question they are uncomfortable with; they will be helped to leave the group discussion; local support services (government and non-government) contact information will be shared with them in case of experiences related to violence, legal and health-related issues; will be given the opportunity to review or edit their interview transcripts if desired; will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point during the data collection period, which extends until the end of December 2023.

Furthermore, participation in this study may carry employment risks, which is particularly critical considering the participants' roles as caregivers and breadwinners for their families.

There is also a potential risk of retaliation if an employer discovers their involvement. Moreover, there may be interpersonal risks, such as the possibility of family members, especially in cases where the husband is violent or the parents are controlling, becoming aware of a woman's participation. To address these concerns, participants will have the option to withdraw themselves from the group discussions. They will also be given sufficient time to discuss their participation with their families if they wish to do so. Furthermore, if requested by the participants, the researcher can share the research brief with the family members. Again, participants will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point until the end of December 2023.

However, ensuring full confidentiality is not entirely possible since other participants are aware of who is participating. Therefore, I would like to request you all not to disclose any of the discussion to others.
None of your responses will be judged as right or wrong as we are going to discuss our experiences that can be different from each other. Everyone will get equal opportunities to share and discuss their concerns. Participants will be requested to have mutual respect, when one person is talking others will listen to her and wait until she finishes. This study does not require any identification information, therefore, when any study or experience is shared with, it is not necessary to address any person. So that any reputational risk can be avoided.

Questions and Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you can contact the researcher, Pinash Akter at +8801713286953 or +17828823385 or by email at ms540200@dal.ca, at any time. You can also contact the project supervisor, Dr. Lindsay DuBois at 902-494-1254 or by email at lindsay.dubois@dal.ca. If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this project you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at 902-494-1462 or by email at ethics@dal.ca.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my study.

Best regards,

Mst Pinash Akter

CONSENT CONFIRMATION PAGE

Project Title: Informality and The Double Day: The Case of Domestic Workers in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

Researcher: Mst Pinash Akter, MA Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University, +8801713286953, +17828823385, ms540200@dal.ca

Have I been Clear? Do any of you have any other questions? I want to remind you that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time during the data collection period, which ends on December 31, 2023. I also want to remind you that that you can decline to answer any question and pause or stop the interview at any time. Your name and any identifying information gleaned from this discussion will not be used in the final thesis or any presentation of this research.

Have I answered all your questions? Can we proceed to the next step?

Do you agree that this interview can be audio recorded. ___ Yes ___ No

If Yes: Would like to receive a copy of the group discussion transcript, which will be produced within two weeks of the interview, or by December 20th, 2023, so that you can revise or withdraw any information. ___ Yes ___ No

Would like to receive a summary of the final thesis: ___ Yes ___ No

If Yes, please provide either your email or mailing address:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Guide

Because this will be a semi-structured interview, not all these questions will be asked; they will just serve as a guide, allowing for emerging themes to emerge. The questions may not be asked in this exact order or in their entirety: the interviewee's lead will be allowed to guide the conversation.

Introduction

1. Establish rapport – small talk, make the interviewee comfortable.
2. Interviewer's brief introduction - repeat name, that I'm an MA student in Social Anthropology at Dalhousie, and that I'm undertaking research on domestic workers' informality and care work. Include specifics regarding all methods of study and what constitutes complete involvement. Apart from the interview, the research project would benefit from the participant's participation in the small group discussion and the researcher's day-to-day observations with the participants. Explain what they are and mention that I will request involvement in those activities at the end of the interview, and the participant may choose to participate at that time.
3. Explanation of the purpose of the interview – to understand the participant's experience as an informal worker and care worker.
4. Read out loud the consent script, discuss confidentiality, discuss questions that participants may have, and request permission to audio record.

Informality

1. Please tell me about yourself and your family members in brief. Who do you live with? Who else do you have in your family? What do they do for earning money?
2. When did you start working as a domestic worker? How did you get your first job?
3. Do any of your family members also work as domestic workers?
4. What did your mother/grandmother/sister do for a living?
5. How long have you been working as paid domestic worker?
6. Why did you choose to work as a domestic worker? how did you feel about that? Did you consult with someone before taking the decision?
7. How did you get your first job? What was the process? Contract? How did you feel about the contract and everything?
8. How many tasks do you do now? Under how many employers do you work?
9. What are the benefits? How do these get fixed? If you don't like anything, can you discuss that with your employer?
10. What kind of challenges do you face at your workplace? What do you do when you face any challenges?

11. What are the things that you like about your work? What are the things that you don't like about your work? Have your shared this with anyone?
12. What do you expect from your work?
13. How do you define your relationship with your employer?
14. Do you think someone other than your employer can contribute to improve your work condition? Who? How?
15. What do you expect your daughter or children to do for a living? Would you recommend them domestic work as a profession? Why?
16. As a worker, do you get any benefit from the government or any other organization? What do you think about that?

Care Work

1. Could you please share about your workplace? How many people are there? What do they do? Is there any other domestic worker work with you at your workplace? If so, what do they do? Who decides your work?
2. With whom do you interact the most? How is your relationship with your employer(s)?
3. What kind of chores do you do at your workplace? In the absence of any domestic workers, who does the chores at your workplace that you used to do?
4. How do you feel about the chores you do regularly at your workplace?
5. Who does the household chores at your home? Who takes care of your children?
6. When you go to work, do you take your child with you? If not, where do you leave your child? How do you feel about that?
7. Who do you care for every day? Who does care for you? Who helps you with doing the household chores? Why?
8. How do you spend a typical day? Do you get time for taking rest for yourself?
9. When you are sick who does the chores that you regularly do?
10. Do you see any differences between the household chores you do at your home and at your workplace? How do you feel about those differences?
11. What kind of recourses (personal, community, and local) do you have that help you to do your household chores (cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.)? Do you have access to all the resources?

Appendix E: Group Discussion Guide

Because this will be an open-ended group discussion, not all of these questions will be asked; they will just serve as a guide, allowing for emerging themes to emerge. The questions may not be asked in this exact order or in their entirety: the interviewee's lead will be allowed to guide the conversation.

Introduction

1. Establish rapport – introduction with all the participants and small talk to make them comfortable.
2. Facilitator's brief introduction - repeat name, that I'm an MA student in Social Anthropology at Dalhousie, and that I'm undertaking research on domestic workers' informality and care work. Include specifics regarding all methods of study and what constitutes complete involvement. Apart from the group discussion, the research project would benefit from the participant's participation in one-to-one in-depth interviews and the researcher's day-to-day observations with the participants. Explain what these methods are and mention that I will request involvement in those activities at the end of the discussion, and the participant may choose to participate at that time.
3. Explanation of the purpose of the group discussion – to understand the participant's experience as informal worker and care worker.
4. Read out loud the consent script, discuss confidentiality, discuss questions that participants may have, request permission to audio record.
5. Request participants to follow some ground rules during the group discussion – such as everyone shall be able to equally participate one by one, there is no right or wrong answer, we shall respect everyone's opinion even if it might differ from each other.

Informality:

1. What kind of work do the women in your community choose as a profession? Why?
2. Who usually chose paid domestic work as their means of living? Why?
3. Do they consult with anyone while making the decision?
4. How do you manage work? Who helps to find the work? What are the processes of getting started as a paid domestic worker? Is there any change in this process over time?
5. What are the benefits of this profession? Who decides the benefits? What is the role of the workers in this process?
6. What are the challenges of this profession? What do you think about them?
7. Do you take any collective action to improve your work situation?
8. What do the workers do when they need support (legal, mental, health)?
9. What is the expectation of domestic workers from their work?
10. Who can work on meeting these expectations?

Care Work:

1. Please explain the usual care roles in the community. Who does what? How are these roles determined? What do you think about these roles?
2. Who takes care of the children of the domestic workers? when they go to work where do they leave their children?
3. What is a typical day routine of a domestic worker?
4. How do they manage their care role at home and at the workplace?
5. Are there any differences between the chores they do at home and at their workplace? What are those differences? What do you think about these differences?
6. Please explain domestic workers' relationship with their employers.