

# **Socioeconomic Issues Faced by Housemaids in District Hyderabad, Sindh**

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## **Abstract**

Housemaids are domestic servants who are hired to work in people's houses. Their wages, generally, are found to be quite low, and working conditions are not very ideal. Most of them come from low social classes and offer their services on demand to conduct house chores. Their services fall under the informal category and, as such, are devoid of legal protection. This study examines the socioeconomic problems faced by housemaids in the district of Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. The qualitative research methodology is used in this study. Findings indicate that low wages and poor working conditions are major concerns, along with discrimination issues such as lack of access to social services, job security, and other opportunities. The results highlight pressing needs regarding legal protections for accurate certification under labour laws while ensuring their inclusion in social protection schemes by enforcing strict regulations and preventing wage withholding or deliberate delay in their salary. There's also important work to be done to overcome the social stigma against domestic workers in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Female domestic workers, discrimination, job security, legal protection, informal employment

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## **Introduction**

Housemaids are women and girls who are employed to do housework and are always in the service of other women, housewives. They are employed to do housework such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and caring for children on a part-time, full-time, or live-in basis for one or more employers on nominal wages. The need for such housemaids arises because of the generally busy schedules of housewives, the amount of work available in a home, and the fact that working women need to go to work or business whereas their children need to go to school and need to take care after at home. While working, housemaids are

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more exposed to physical or sexual abuse, exploitation, experience long working hours and illogical wages, lack bargaining power, and normally work without written contracts. In Pakistan, violence towards workers has become common, including shouting, frequent criticism of their performance, verbal abuse, and threats to their jobs. Pushing, manhandling and physical aggression have become the order of the day.<sup>1</sup> According to available official data published by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2018-19), about 4.8 million women are working as domestic workers all over Pakistan,<sup>2</sup> while the agriculture sector employs approximately 41% of the national labor force providing sustenance to the population at the national level.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to examine the prevalent socioeconomic issues housemaids face in District Hyderabad, Sindh. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicates that informal employment via domestic labour is one of the largest sectors, encompassing approximately 67 million domestic workers worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Within Pakistan, working women living below the poverty line comprise almost 90% of the around 4.8 million.<sup>5</sup> These hardworking individuals often do not have any formal employment contracts or protections, rendering them susceptible to several issues like underpayment, overwork, and physical or psychological abuse at the workplace. Housemaids

<sup>1</sup> Hira Tariq, Shiraz Shaikh, and Mehjabeen Musharaf, 'Working Conditions and Work-Related Health Issues of Female Domestic Workers in Four Districts of Karachi', *Annals of Work Exposures and Health*, 64:4 (30 April 2020), 380. <https://doi.org/10.1093/annweh/wxa019>.

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Bureau of statistics, 'Labour Force Survey 2018-19 (Annual Report)' (Islamabad, 2019), <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/publication/labour-force-survey-2018-19-annual-report>.

<sup>3</sup> Saima Kalwar, Melasutra Md Dali, & Norhaslina Hassan, 'Development Framework for Agro-Based Industries in Secondary Cities of Sindh Province, Pakistan: SWOT Analysis of Ten-Year Perspective and Medium-Term Development Framework Plans', *Sustainability*, 10:4 (2018), 2. Available at: [10.3390/su10041197](https://doi.org/10.3390/su10041197).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Oelz, 'The ILO's Domestic Workers Convention and Recommendation: A Window of Opportunity for Social Justice', *International Labour Review*, 153:1 (March 2014), 143-72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1564-913X.2014.00200.x>

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, 'Social Protection & Labor: Labor Force Structure', 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.IN?locations=PK>.

endure various problems. It is unfortunate that there is no official recognition as formal workers. It further hinders access to paid leaves, pension benefits, and health provisions, along with social security as well.<sup>6</sup> A significant disparity continues between rural and urban populations inhabiting District Hyderabad, Sindh, where women are frequently targets of gender-based discrimination. Evidently, the ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence undermines efforts made towards overall societal progress for females labour within private spheres. Poverty and lack of education are common among housemaids, which have been increasing the plight of housemaids across the region. Poverty is responsible for placing low-income members, particularly female domestic labourers, on the margins of society.<sup>7</sup> Accessing essential areas such as healthcare and education continues to pose huge difficulties for them, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty and marginalization.<sup>8</sup> This study, through qualitative research methodology, sheds light on socioeconomic problems faced by housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. The research is based on interviews with housemaids and focus group discussions with key stakeholders like employers, civil society organizations, and government representatives. The aim is to better grasp the implications linked to a housemaid's lived experiences when considering potential interventions that are most likely to improve welfare outcomes for this marginalized group. The socio-economic problems faced by housemaids in the district of Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan will be highlighted.

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<sup>6</sup> Das Sajan et al., 'Socioeconomic Conditions and Health Hazards of Brick Field Workers: A Case Study of Mymensingh Brick Industrial Area of Bangladesh', *Journal of Public Health and Epidemiology*, 9:7 (July 2017), 198-205, <https://doi.org/10.5897/jphe2017.0927>.

<sup>7</sup> Shabana Tunio, Ghazala Shoukat, & Shakeela Shah, 'Sociological Analysis of Issues Faced by Domestic Working Women: A Case Study of Hyderabad, Sindh', *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities (IRJAH)*, 48:48 (2020), 81. Available at <https://doi.org/10.52806/grassroots.v55i1.3769>

<sup>8</sup> Dr Khalid Manzoor Butt and Arooj Khan, 'Female Domestic Workers of Lahore: A Neglected Community', *Journal of Political Studies*, 26:1 (2019), 119.

## Literature Review

The literature available on housemaids and their problems in Pakistan presents a very comprehensive understanding of the challenges confronted by this vulnerable and marginalized group. This job is distinguished by its invisibility, informality and private nature. Their rights to social and labour protections have also been infringed as a group of employees.<sup>9</sup> Domestic labour is one of several jobs classified as informal employment because working hours are uncertain and service delivery is very variable.<sup>10</sup> The number of informal domestic workers is 8.5 million which may include women, men and children. Some are working within the age of 14 or some are working in the age of above 60.<sup>11</sup> It is a fact that the work of housemaids is still considered an informal sector that is largely unregulated, unchecked, and even unrecognized resulting in their exploitation. Moreover, the housemaids lack access to decent accommodation and incur high travel costs to get to their jobs or workplaces.<sup>12</sup> Despite absence of legal protection, low wages, job insecurity, women's labour force participation in rural areas has increased.<sup>13</sup> Being in the informal sector under labour laws, housemaids lack legal protection and are thus vulnerable to exploitation and abuse at the hands of employers, such as long working hours, the absence of health insurance, paid leaves, medical leaves, or retirement benefits, which further exacerbate their vulnerability.<sup>14</sup> Another significant issue related to

<sup>9</sup> Martin Oelz, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Karin Pape, 'ILO Convention C189—a Good Start for the Protection of Domestic Workers: An Insider's View', *Progress in Development Studies*, 16:2 (April 25, 2016): 189-202, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993415623151>

<sup>11</sup> Zara Haroon, 'Impact of Housemaids on Social and Emotional Development of Children of Working Mothers in Lahore', 7:3 (July-September 2019), <https://doi.org/10.25215/0703.006>.

<sup>12</sup> M.A Tarique, 'Status of Domestic Workers in Pakistan: Legal and Human Rights Perspectives', *Paksitan Journal of Gender Studies* 14:1 (2019), 1-16.

<sup>13</sup> Ayesha Khan, 'Women and Paid Work in Pakistan' (Pathways of Women's Empowerment South Asia Research Programme Pakistan Scoping Paper), Karachi: Collective for Social Sceinces Research, 2007, 2-29.

<sup>14</sup> Rufina Augustine and Dr. Rupesh Kumar Singh, 'Condition & Problems of Female Domestic Workers (With Special Reference to L.D.A. Colony in Lucknow City, India)', *Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, 4:2 (2016), 110-17, <https://doi.org/10.15640/jssw.v4n2a11>.

housemaids is low and unorganized wages without any defined time period, which further makes it difficult for them to make ends meet.<sup>15</sup> Usually housemaids have to support the entire family as the only breadwinner, but meager wages and the absence of legal protections maintain the cycle of poverty for them. In Pakistan, the social status of domestic workers is also a major issue. Domestic work is often considered a low-status position, which leads to the discrimination and marginalization of domestic workers in society.<sup>16</sup> Domestic workers are often mistreated and subjected to verbal and physical abuse. One significant hardship faced by housemaids in Pakistan is a lack of access to necessary social services. Social amenities like healthcare, education, and even housing is denied to many domestic workers.<sup>17</sup> Depriving themselves of such basic facilities poses considerable difficulty for housemaids, who have been struggling under harsh conditions that impede their progress in elevating their living conditions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, employers generally refuse or postpone paying salaries or wages, causing an added layer of financial instability for housemaids. Siddique in his study 'Socioeconomic Status of Domestic Workers in Pakistan' points out how inferior it is to be a housemaid, which results in lower esteem and further leads towards mistreatment such as physical and mental abuse.<sup>19</sup> In Pakistan, due to increasing poverty and unemployment, women are compelled to work outside the home. They face discrimination, sexual harassment, and exploitation when they work at different homes.<sup>20</sup> It has also been revealed in research that women's harassment is a routine practice at the workplace in Pakistan,

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<sup>15</sup> Farah Naz, 'Doing the Dirty Work: The Experiences of Female Domestic Workers in Pakistan', *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 3:II (2022): 171-82, [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2022\(3-ii\)17](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2022(3-ii)17).

<sup>16</sup> F. Siddique, 'Socioeconomic Status of Domestic Workers in Pakistan', *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9:2 (2019), 23-36.

<sup>17</sup> Shabana Tunio, Ghazala Shoukat, and Shakeela Shah, *op.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Rufina Augustine & Dr. Rupesh Kumar Singh, *op.cit.*

<sup>19</sup> F. Siddique, *op.cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Seema Manzoor, et.al., 'Analyzing Level Of Sexual Harassment And Exploitation Of Female Domestic Workers', *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 13:1 (2016), 235-52, <https://doi.org/10.46568/pjgs.v13i1.193>.

which has genuinely impacted their work at the workplace.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, accessing social services remains another significant issue identified in existing literature, which tightens the cycle of poverty amongst this already vulnerable group.

### **Research Questions:**

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the living and working conditions of housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh?
2. What are the common forms of abuse and exploitation faced by housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh?
3. What are the coping strategies adopted by housemaids in response to their socioeconomic challenges?

### **Methods and Materials**

In order to thoroughly explore the challenges experienced by housemaids, both at work and in their personal lives, qualitative research methodology is adopted for this study. The approach relied on semi-structured interviews with twenty housemaids from Hyderabad, Sindh, paired with focused group discussions (FGD) involving employers, civil society organizations, and government officials concerned about such issues. Purposive sampling technique was employed, for participant selection, based on their experience and representation of our target population, along with informed consent ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher was able to attain significant insights into their difficult socioeconomic realities, including working conditions, wages paid out, social standing among Pakistani communities interacting closely with them day-to-day, as well as access or lack thereof to important social services. Twenty housemaids in the research area were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in the regional language, and audio recordings were made for analysis. The interviews centered on the socioeconomic issues encountered by housemaids at work and in their personal lives, such as their pay, working conditions, social

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<sup>21</sup> Munir Moosa Sadruddin, 'Sexual Harassment at Workplace in Pakistan-Issues and Remedies about the Global Issue at Managerial Sector', *Journal of Managerial Sciences*, 2013, 113.

standing, and access to social assistance and basic facilities at work and home. In the study area, focused group discussions and interviews were held with the most important stakeholders, including employers, members of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, and government officials interested in the problems faced by housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh. A total of four group discussions were conducted among them to gain a deeper understanding of the issues faced by housemaids from different perspectives. The collected data from interviews and focused group discussions was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and analyzing patterns and themes in the data, which were then used to draw conclusions and make recommendations relevant to improving outcomes for housemaids working within District Hyderabad, Sindh. Themes from in-depth interviews of respondents in this study were screened with the help of the software NVivo, which included long hours at meager wages, no permission to leave the workplace, fear of dismissal, no platform to raise the voice, no provision of loans in the times of crises, delayed payments, financial exploitation, long working hours, sexual harassment and work/life imbalance. The pattern within these themes was analyzed with the frequencies of the observed statements.

The qualitative method used in this study provided a clear and nuanced understanding of the socioeconomic challenges faced by housemaids in Hyderabad. The research brought together the perspectives of housemaids and stakeholders, providing comprehensive views of the issues at hand.

### **Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussions with Key Stakeholders**

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted in which housemaids shared their miseries; verbatim employees drew painful pictures of their lived experiences. The names of housemaids are kept secret. The following explanations are noted for the discussion.

1. ‘Usually we have no choice, but to work for long hours at meager wages’.

2. 'We work in the houses of employers, feels like in jails. We have no permission to leave the job without their permission.
3. 'Owing to the fear of dismissal and having no other source of income we work unquestionably. We have no written contract or legal aid to sue the employers for the injustices'.
4. Sometimes, we are threatened with dire consequences and suspension of jobs if we ask for leaves or additional money.
5. 'Sometimes, we feel we are not humans because treated like animals. We have no unions, no platform to resolve our matters'.
6. 'As a single breadwinner, I have to work in four to five houses to keep my family alive. We beg our employers for loans and charity at the time of crises'.
7. 'We wash their dirty clothes even their washrooms but are not given timely wages. We are dealt with as inferior citizens'.
8. 'We are considered as purchased slaves, dealt with as we have no self-respect. We know about social activists, but never get a chance to talk to them'.
9. 'Our wages are deducted upon little things; many times we are paid very late. Government is only for riches, we (poor) housemaids have no facilities'.
10. 'Usually, we are insulted on late arrival and snubbed by the employers. Few of them reported that they were beaten with shoes'.

### **Lack of Legal Protection**

There is growing concern among stakeholders in Hyderabad, Sindh, regarding the inadequacy of legal protection available for housemaids in their capacity as domestic caretakers. A crucial point highlighted by them was the recognition of these workers' legitimate status with associated fundamental rights such as minimum wage rates as well as social security and healthcare entitlements.

### **Social Stigma**

The stakeholders have highlighted the existence of social stigma that housemaids face, hindering their recognition as legitimate workers. They also recommended raising awareness through

sensitization campaigns. They underlined that educating employers and society about treating them with dignity and respect is imperative. This would lead to a better understanding for an improved working environment.

### **Role of Civil Society Organizations**

Upon close inspection of advocacy efforts for housemaid's rights, in Hyderabad civil society organizations were found to have played a negligible part, contrary its role played in other cities. Moreover, their provision of aid seems inadequate for those desperately seeking it. To address these issues effectively, stakeholders believe allocation of more funds to CSOs and enable them to impact more people positively.

### **Role of the Government**

The stakeholders have drawn attention to the state's responsibility for safeguarding housemaids' rights. Their recommendations include enforcing labour laws that cater specifically to these workers, granting them legal recognition, and developing policies that enhance their quality of life given their marginalized position within society.

### **Results**

In-depth interviews with respondents from a range of socio-demographic backgrounds were done in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of women domestic workers (see Tab 1). The demographic and socioeconomic profile of respondents is a tool that offers a top-down perspective which shares certain characteristics. It is helpful in finding distinctive and common traits of a group being studied.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

No	Name	Age	Caste	Religion	Education	Marital Status	Family Size	Monthly Income in (Rs)
01	Respondent 1	40	Bhati	Muslim	No	Widowed	04 Members	5000
02	Respondent 2	45	Daya	Muslim	Sixth	Single	03 Members	5000
03	Respondent 3	38	Shaikh	Muslim	No	Single	06 Members	8000

04	Respondent 4	48	Mughal	Muslim	No	Married	04 Members	7000
05	Respondent 5	51	Mallah	Muslim	No	Divorced	05 Members	8000
06	Respondent 6	53	Lohana	Non-Muslim	Four	Widowed	04 Members	6000
07	Respondent 7	42	Rajput	Muslim	No	Married	06 Members	7000
08	Respondent 8	44	-----	Non-Muslim	No	Married	07 Members	10000
09	Respondent 9	52	Shaikh	Muslim	No	Married	03 Members	7000
10	Respondent 10	43	Bhatti	Muslim	No	Married	02 Members	6000
11	Respondent 11	39	-----	Non-Muslim	No	Widowed	02 Members	7000
12	Respondent 12	56	Bhand	Muslim	No	Divorced	04 Members	8000
13	Respondent 13	55	Kalwar	Muslim	No	Divorced	04 Members	9000
14	Respondent 14	49	Rajput	Muslim	No	Divorced	03 Members	6000
15	Respondent 15	58	-----	Non-Muslim	No	Widowed	3 Members	6000
16	Respondent 16	38	Mughal	Muslim	No	Widowed	02 Members	7000
17	Respondent 17	44	Rind	Muslim	No	Widowed	06 Members	10000
18	Respondent 18	46	Daya	Muslim	No	Married	05 Members	12000
19	Respondent 19	55	Bhand	Muslim	No	Married	03 Members	6000
20	Respondent 20	39	-----	Non-Muslim	No	Married	05 Members	13000

## Economic Exploitation

The circumstances of housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh embody exploitation as they are forced to work long hours without fair wages. This results in many individuals having to endure a grueling schedule for meager earnings, which causes financial constraints. In addition to this unfair pay system, certain employers withhold payment for extended periods, ultimately worsening the situation further.

## Physical and verbal abuse

In Hyderabad, Sindh, a vast majority of housemaids experience both physical and verbal abuse. Many have reported that their employers hit, slapped, or beat them if they made any mistake.

## Lack of Respect and Dignity

Housemaids in Hyderabad, Sindh, have shared their sentiments about feeling undervalued and disrespected by their bosses. It's sad to note that these workers are commonly treated with inferiority. They are treated inhumanely at times. They are sometimes humiliated by the children of their employer's families.

## Limited Access to Education and Healthcare

Hyderabad's housemaid community is experiencing hindrances when it comes to obtaining basic facilities such as education and health care due to financial constraints. Consequently, countless housemaids face trouble enrolling their kids in school or receiving satisfactory medical treatment when needed.

## Discussion

The interview of housemaids in the district Hyderabad revealed significant perspectives on the challenges encountered by this vulnerable group. A comparative study of these findings with literature regarding housemaids from different regions worldwide suggests some similarities as well as differences. The most common issue among the housemaid community around the world is economic exploitation, where they work overtime at lower wages without receiving fundamental benefits such as health insurance or sick leave.<sup>22</sup> The study results indicate that similar situations exist within many households in Hyderabad where housemaids are paid below minimum wages and there are payment delays.<sup>23</sup> Abusing physically and verbally is another widely prevalent issue across regions. The research indicated that such abusive behavior exists within households in Hyderabad District too, where several housemaids were physically beaten up and verbally abused, including being insulted on various occasions by their respective employers'.<sup>24</sup> These traumatic experiences left deep-seated scars on their mental health, too, while amplifying their sense of disempowerment, including social exclusion. The lack of respect and dignity for housemaids in Hyderabad remains alarming, echoing similar contexts elsewhere around the world.<sup>25</sup> It

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<sup>22</sup> World Bank (2018), 'Domestic Work, Occupational Health and Safety, and Workers' Rights: A Review of the Literature. World Bank Group', 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Shabana Tunio, Ghazala Shoukat, and Shakeela Shah, *op.cit.*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> El-Bushra, 'Protecting Women Domestic Workers in the Arab Region: A Call for Action', *Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)-Legal Aid.*, 2020, <https://ardd-jo.org/Publications/2020/Protecting-Women-Domestic-Workers-in-the-Arab-Region-A-Call-for-Action>

<sup>25</sup> Martin Oelz and Uma Rani, *Domestic Work, Wages, and Gender Equality: Lessons from Developing Countries*, International Labour Office, Gender,

appears these workers are treated unfairly compared to their peers, making them feel vulnerable.<sup>26</sup> While this is a disconcerting problem on its own, interviews conducted in the region reveal additional findings that do not parallel existing literature. For example, many housemaids across Hyderabad express serious difficulty accessing education beyond primary school. Such a limitation drastically limits their potential for new career opportunities or progression.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, healthcare access has proven problematic; many encounter difficulties trying to obtain timely medical attention if needed. These findings all point towards immense socio-economic problems confronting this marginalized group in Hyderabad. Although some of these challenges are reflective of wider issues facing similar populations elsewhere, others highlight unique struggles that necessitate tailored interventions and support. The local authority bodies, civil society, and employers will need to come together with relevant stakeholders to ensure safe and dignified working conditions, providing requisite protections where warranted.

## Conclusion

This research in District Hyderabad, Sindh, indicates that housemaids face similar socio-economic troubles as those outlined in previous assessments of Pakistani communities. It was found that housemaids confronting comparable hurdles like inadequate salaries, deplorable working conditions and inferior environments, bias, and a lack of access to social services, along with being deprived of job security, had limited opportunities for professional advancement too. Consequently, there is an urgent requirement for legal defenses that protect households' interests, along with acknowledging their occupation under employment laws formally. It is also necessary to include them within various social welfare

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Equality and Diversity Branch (GED). - Geneva: ILO, 2015 (Working paper ; No. 5/2015).

<sup>26</sup> Shabana Tunio, Ghazala Shoukat, & Shakeela Shah, *op.cit.*

<sup>27</sup> N. Akram, W., Mustafa, N., Ali, N., & Memon, 'Exploring the Socio-Economic and Occupational Health Hazards Faced by Female Domestic Workers in Hyderabad City, Pakistan', *Annals of Global Health*, 87:1 (2021): 1-8, <https://doi.org/. https://doi.org/10.5334/aogh.3113>.

schemes like health insurance or retirement benefits programmers. Employees should receive timely compensation, while authorities must strictly observe that rules have no lacuna to withhold or delay payments unnecessarily to the private domestic workers as per Islamic injunction ‘give the employee his/her wages before the sweat is dry on him’<sup>28</sup> and stipulating that ‘the rich, despite his riches, cannot delay of payment to the worker, for it is a crime.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, significant indicators imply a necessity to counter skewed perceptions associated with domestic duties within Pakistani culture, giving rise to undesirable consequences that impact this group’s general standings within society negatively. Therefore, raising awareness regarding their role along with their rights is necessary so that they get more inclusive treatment overall. Ultimately, we believe housemaids’ challenges necessitate joint efforts by civil society proponents, employers’ representatives, and government authorities to embark upon achievable, sustainable policies designed to curtail their troubles. A collaborative approach inclusive of civil society organizations, employers, and individuals involved with the government is needed immediately when it comes to addressing issues among domestic workers.

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<sup>28</sup> It is narrated in a hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ), ‘Mishkat Al-Masabih 2987,’ n.d.

<sup>29</sup> Narration of a Hadith by the Prophet (ﷺ), “Bukhari 2287,” n.d.