



DOMESTIC WORK
IS NOT
SLAVERY

CHANGING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DOMESTIC WORKER

PROFESSIONALISM. RESPONSIBLE AND DIGNIFIED WORK.

PREPARED BY 146 DOMESTIC WORKERS FROM DELHI, HARYANA
(GURUGRAM, SONIPAT, PANIPAT) AND WEST BENGAL.
SUPPORTED BY MARTHA FARRELL FOUNDATION

Note: This document has been put together by domestic workers as part of a community-led participatory research study with the help of Martha Farrell Foundation, which provided support for documentation. As a first of many manifestos, this document lays down a few directives for employers that will help the community recover from the humiliation and deep sense of indignity and abandonment that they have experienced during the pandemic.

Every individual deserves to work with dignity.

Domestic workers account for 4.2 million of the working population in India, according to official statistics, while unofficially the numbers are said to be estimated at 50 million.^[1]

Women make up a substantial number of them. Most domestic workers are the sole bread-earners in their families and the lockdown has created debilitating economic challenges and job insecurities for them.

They ease our employer's burden considerably, doing all kinds of household chores from cooking, cleaning, looking after their children and the elders of the house. Lending unequivocal support, their work enables us to go to the office and pursue our career. However, their work doesn't receive the same recognition it deserves. Workplace harassment and job insecurities are ever-present for them. The insecurity is intensified because of the absence of regulatory structures, redressal mechanisms and labour laws to protect them and them work.

It is imperative for employers to review their working relationship with their domestic workers. It is also essential that domestic workers have the same recourse to time-bound justice in cases of sexual harassment at the workplace through Local Committees as other workers do.

Employers must create working environments which provide a sense of security and confidence for their domestic worker. Their work must be given due recognition; their concerns understood as serious and working conditions should facilitate better pay, social security and psychological support. During times of distress such as the present pandemic, they are more vulnerable than ever before.

Lack of jobs, no money in our pockets to feed ourselves and our families, or to pay rent have compelled many of us to leave or try and leave the city to go back to our villages. But we stayed back, hoping that we can begin working again soon.

The effects of the pandemic and not having received salaries since March have placed us in very difficult situations, compelling us to be pushed back into the vicious cycle of poverty and violence.

We fear that our employers will not take us back after the lockdown ends as we have neither received any calls from them nor have they answered our calls.

Our relationship with our employers is more intimate and personal and we go above and beyond in taking care of the families we work for. However, this crisis has been a rude shock for many of us having received no support from our employers whatsoever.

Our employers have not bothered to call us even once to find out how we are doing, let alone send us money.

Many of us have been surviving on food offered in nearby schools and ration delivered by NGOs.

We are unable to deal with the humiliation of having to stand in long lines every day for just a plate of food.

Many of us sleep on empty stomachs and substitute one meal with a sugarless cup of tea.

When we resume work, we expect that our employers will treat us well, with dignity and not like Corona carriers.

We expect them to provide us with the same professional and safe environment that they would expect from their workplace.

-Domestic Workers' Action Network

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR EMPLOYERS

(COMPILED BY MFF BASED ON DOMESTIC WORKER'S ACTION RESEARCH)

DO'S

Your home is your domestic workers workplace. Remember the following constitute sexual harassment:

- Requests for sexual favors, which can include threats, implied conditions of employment, etc.
- Pressure for unwanted sexual activities
- Verbal harassment or abuse which could be in the form of sexual comments
- Unnecessary or unwanted physical touch
- Displays of lewd image

DON'TS

Do not create a hostile work environment for your domestic worker.

- Desist from performing favours for your domestic worker, expecting something in return (quid pro quo)
- Don't be overly familiar with your domestic worker (physical gestures like hugging) or use phrases that objectify women.

Hygiene and safety:

- Wear masks when your domestic worker is in the house
- Keep all your waste in the dustbin
- Ensure that your domestic worker is equipped with health and safety gear such as masks, sanitisers, soaps and gloves, especially if they are cleaning dustbins and toilets
- Respect that health and safety norms are the same for all - maintain physical distance from your domestic worker while they are working
- Ensure domestic worker's access to drinking water and encourage her to fill bottles of water to carry home if she lacks access to clean drinking water
- Ensure your domestic worker has access to wash room. If there is a common washroom for domestic workers in your building, make sure it is clean, has running water and soap

Hygiene and safety:

- Do not stigmatise/label your domestic worker as “Corona-Spreaders”
- Do not flout physical distancing norms within the apartment complex, lifts, and departmental stores in your society.
- Do not crowd around her, especially when she is working in the kitchen

Salaries:

- Pay your domestic worker her full salary; treat the lockdown as paid leave
- Instead of paying your domestic worker their full dues at the end of the lockdown, divide the amount by giving them a proportion of it beforehand.
- Encourage contactless transfer of salaries through digital payment channels such as Paytm, Google Pay, or direct bank transfer etc.

Salaries:

- Do not deduct salaries if your domestic worker is unable to come to work due to illness since most domestic workers are sole earners in their families
- Even if you have asked your domestic worker to come in for a limited number of days in the week because of RWA guidelines, please continue to pay her the full salary
- Avoid cash payments for salaries

Professionalism and Timing:

- Extend the same levels of professionalism to your domestic worker as you would expect from your workplace
- Ensure that your domestic worker has enough time to reach home before the government-mandated curfew
- Give your domestic worker a specific time to report to work so they can leave and go to their other workplaces on time
- Ensure that your building/complex has a space for domestic workers to rest in between jobs so that they don't have to leave and enter multiple times.

Professionalism and Timing:

- Do not make your domestic worker defy government-mandated guidelines
- Do not make your domestic worker work overtime unless you compensate them for it
- Do not make your domestic worker wait for you in the park or stand outside your door/in the stairwell for extended periods of time. Open the door as soon as she rings the bell
- Don't force your domestic worker to come to work if you have been placed under home quarantine (until your quarantine period is over)

Support:

- Educate yourself and your domestic worker about symptoms of COVID-19 and precautionary measures
- Support your domestic worker to apply for ration cards, e-coupons online
- If your domestic worker is unwell or has visible COVID-19 symptoms, advise them to access medical help
 - Offer to pay the fees for a medical examination and required testing
 - Keep a list of helplines handy for providing medical and psychological help
- If your domestic worker is facing domestic violence at home and sexual harassment at her other workplaces, follow the below-mentioned steps -
 - Listen to them carefully and patiently
 - Keep helpline numbers handy with you
 - Help them get access to domestic violence helplines
 - Offer to support them with legal assistance, in filing a complaint or for any other matter.
 - Help your domestic worker access time-bound justice through Local Committees in case of SHW

Support:

- Do not ignore your domestic worker's call. She might be in a difficult situation and calling you for support
- Do not force your domestic worker to report to work if they are unwell
- Do not withhold identification documents of your domestic worker