

Remuneration and the Welfare of House Helps in Nairobi, Kenya

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200380>

Received: 12 February 2026; Accepted: 18 February 2026; Published: 12 March 2026

ABSTRACT

House helps propel the global labour industry yet are the most overexploited workers regardless of their complementary and substitution roles in sustainable development. They comprise predominantly marginalized women performing several domestic chores. In Kenya and particularly Nairobi, they face unique challenges as envisaged in the *Real Househelps of Kawangware* television comedy. Poor remuneration had engendered dwindling welfare domestically and Middle East exodus in search of greener pastures culminating to torture and even death. Thus, this paper examines remuneration and the welfare of house helps in Nairobi, Kenya. It particularly establishes the: job description of; determines the potential risks facing; and examines the welfare of; house helps in Nairobi. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design. Primary data was obtained from 100 purposively sampled house helps, complemented by secondary data. The study revealed that their amorphous job description of 42 chores comprised thirteen very frequently; nineteen frequently; nine rarely; and one unethical tasks performed. On average, they worked for 14 hours, commencing at 5.00am in hostile environment. With an average salary of Kshs.6225.40, most (69%) of them earned less than Kshs 7,500 which lay below the legislated minimum wage of Kshs.13,572.90. It was demonstrated that the prevailing chronic house help remuneration and welfare dilemma were a function of the philosophy behind the term 'help'. Thus, all these atrocities meted on house helps downgraded their welfare hence enforcement of compliance to the labour laws and formalising the occupation were behind schedule in Kenya.

Key terms: House helps, Remuneration, Welfare, Nairobi, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

House helps worldwide are a unique segment of domestic workers. These predominantly female informal employees remain outside the realm of policymaking on social and labour issues (ILO, 2013). Working in private houses and homes not only obscures them from the public view, attention and scrutiny, but also intensifies their vulnerability. Social ills - including sexual harassment/abuse, accidents, job insecurity as well as marginalisation, overworking and underpayment, delayed payment, and non-payment - characterize their working environment. Their amorphous and unscrupulous agents (Chacha, 2021 and Ruto, 2021) and careless employers have deficient human resource management skills deliberately impose a master-servant relationship over house helps. Unfortunately, labour movements, including the Central Organisation of Trade Union (COTU), and particularly the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA), are yet to address the plight of house helps, as noted by Nyaura and Ngugi (2019). This chapter argues that the marginalization and exclusion of house helps result in poor remuneration that undervalues their contribution Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and development agenda of Kenya, as revealed by Dynan and Sheiner (2018). Adequate remuneration of house helps could augment the country's GDP and improve the citizens' welfare and reiterate Kenya's commitment to resolving the gender equality debate.

The government has accorded considerable attention and support to the *Boda boda* transport sub-sector, *Jua kali* industry and informal settlements since the 1950s. This is manifested in the organizing for and sponsoring the acquisition of driving licenses for *Boda boda* operators as well as construction of *Jua Kali* shades under the burner in industrial estates and market stalls in mark places countrywide. Incidentally, this depicts open discriminate against house helps whose indisputable services directly and indirectly augmentation to the country's development agenda. similar predicaments have driven the welfare of banana farmers to the docks according to Akala (2021) despite enhancing food security in Kenya and being a staple food in Uganda. This double standard approach to enterprises, workers and human resource management widens the wage gap, compromise labour productivity and militate against a cohesive labour market that coalesce around house helps.

Consequently, the local house helps' labour market is in disarray and worsens the exodus and agony of the Kenyan house helps in the Gulf and Middle East. This concurs with, an elaborate rehabilitation scheme of the abused house helps returnee victims in Kenya, as argued by Gakuo (2013). High population of house helps together with the many nebulous recruiting agencies, predominantly low-to-middle income status house helps' employers, and blatant gender discrimination in Nairobi are critical. These vindicate the choice of Nairobi in examining the dilemma of house helps and conforms to Dave's (2018) choice of certain Asian, African, Latin American and the Caribbean countries to review domestic workers' economic and employment rights.

High rates of unemployment characterized by disguised unemployment has engendered house help as a new work form and professions of the last resort in Kenya's labour market. As a source of livelihood, it attracts the young, elderly educated (unemployed graduates), uneducated, orphans, widow and even minors (children). The resultant surplus in the house help labour market has engendered and "use and dispose" strategy among their employers where these workers are recruited and terminate unlawfully. To perfect this skill, employers invoke silent dubious means like non-under-delayed payment and harsh working environment to propel a spontaneous house helps' self-discard cycle. Promotion of such rudimentary work ethics is a critical hinderance to the national labour market policy that reserves people's right to decent work (ILO, 2010b) as enshrined in the eighth Sustainable Development Goal (UNDP, 2015). Contrary to the goal, house helps in Kenya to-date have been relegated inferior home-bases service providers with dwindling status and welfare in society as was reported in Europe by World Health Organization (1999).

Eighty three Percent of an estimated 67 million global domestic workers are women (ILO, 2016) and 92% in USA according to the Economic Policy Institute (2020). Most of them are house helps who constitute a critical but hidden segment of the most exploited, vulnerable, and underpaid or unpaid workers (Rombo and Lutomia, 2018), who not only selflessly take care of families and property but also clean houses and homes notwithstanding the ILO Pay Convention, No. 52 of 1936 (ILO, 2013) and Kenyan Constitution (2010). Regrettably, even the national minimum wage rate is not commensurate to the convoluted domestic chores performed by house helps since their services are usually undervalued and poorly regulated according to ILO (2010a). To this effect, they are confined in the dual vicious cycles of poverty and deprivation (Chambers, 1990). This concealed vice is replicated in Real Househelps of Kawangware (TRHK) comedies aired on televisions in and Kenya.

Pursuit for greener pastures abroad, particularly in the Middle East, has exacerbate the acceptance of hostile irreversible employment contracts, panic, pain, suffering, torture, harm, and death in Kenya. Fisher (2018) witnessed similar cases in where Ugandan maids were facing abuse in the Gulf despite new legal safeguards. Nevertheless, the destiny of Nairobi as a global economic hub is a direct function of the enormous multi-dimensional substitution and complementary effects of Kenyan house helps' service delivery on the national labour force and development. Probably in the absence of house helps services, numerous operations in the city, together with their substitution and complementary effects in their employers' labour supply could worsen human welfare in Nairobi. Without house helps, massive pain, suffering and loses to individuals, institution, organisations, Nairobi County and the national income are inevitable. This is because house helps comprise a vibrant hidden but fragile enabler of entrepreneurs, other employees, employers, state officers, initiations, county governments, national government and the international organisations to operate that ought to safeguarded. On the other hand, being the commercial and manufacturing industrial nucleus in Eastern Africa, the city remains the most appropriate viable job destination for the besieged house helps. Therefore, protection of house helps of Nairobi through building social protection systems in line with ILO's (2018) declaration of improving the lives of domestic workers. Given their precarious situation, house helps succumb to wide various amorphous chores besides persistent delayed, under and non-payment of their salaries.

It is argued that most of the Nairobi base employers of house helps also endured delayed-under-non-payment dilemma. Regrettably, the impact and incidence of these malpractices trickled down to the innocent and unsuspecting house helps, since their employers could hardly afford to pay prompt and enhanced salaries. In the worst scenario employers opted to lay-off the house helps who place unaffordable wage demands. This deteriorated the welfare of Nairobi house helps and engineered the irreversibility of the Gulf exodus plague as reported by Chacha (2021) and Ruto (2021). It is such emotional and hilarious state of house helps in Nairobi in that prompted this author attempt to establish their job description, working environment, remuneration and welfare status.

Therefore, this Chapter candidly demonstrated that house helps are the *invisible hand* as argued by Todaro and Smiths (2014) that sustain Nairobi and was guided by the following *eight* questions: i) what are the characteristics of Nairobi house helps? ii) what are the wage regulations of domestic worker in Kenyan cities? iii) what is the job description for house helps? iv) what are the domestic chores performed by house helps? v) what is the working environment for house helps, vi) what are the adverse working conditions? vii) are their average earning in conformity with the minimum legitimated wage? and viii), is philosophy embedded the house help delayed-under-non-payment dilemma? in Nairobi. These questions point to the indicators of welfare of house helps as the primary drivers of sustainable development agenda in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domestic workers are the least protected employees in the world despite global pronouncements on minimum wages and limited working hours, as well as social inclusion, job security and occupational safety and health (ILO, 2010c). according to Oelz and Rani (2015), low formal skills and educational levels, high incidence of informality, weak collective representation, weak individual bargaining power, limited alternative job opportunities, vulnerable social status, and undervaluation of domestic work largely account for the poor remuneration of house helps. The dominance of Kenyan women in this low paying house help occupation compromises their position and participation in sustainable development. Consequently, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) calls for the inclusion of domestic workers in minimum wage coverage and effective compliance with labour laws. Unfortunately, most developing countries are reluctant to conform to the ILO conventions due to high rates of unemployment, weak political will and enforcement difficulties as well as non-compliance by employers to the labour laws. This is manifested in Burnham's and Theodore's (2012) lamentation of the invisible and unregulated World of Domestic Work witnessed in home economics.

Delayed-under-non-payment lowers the house helps' purchasing power. This obscures house helps' income as an invisible leakage in GNI computations as argued by Dynan and Sheiner (2018). Under the current house help remuneration regime, delayed-under-non-payment cherishes common vices that underrate repatriated revenues from abroad. This not only confines women in the vicious cycle of deprivation and poverty but also impedes on the country's comparative trade advantage and lowers her foreign exchange earnings and bargaining power. These hamper sustainable development potential that engenders poor human welfare and social injustice among Nairobi house helps.

In Kenya, house helps are the most discriminated cadre of the women folk. They face double discrimination both from men and their fellow women employers. Surprisingly, women who are expected to empathize with house helps at times turn out to be more abusive than men leaving the house helps with nowhere to run to. Bargaining for better terms of service is a risky and volatile venture for the predominantly young-vulnerable-female-resident-domestic-service-providers (Rombo and Lutomia, 2016) as it could result in dismissal and immediate replacement. It is for this reason that many Kenyan women are easily lured by higher to the dreaded Middle East domestic jobs. Unfortunately, Gikuru (2013) reveals that the house helps abroad end up being blindly entangled in ambiguous irreversible contractual terms, distance barriers and the high air transport costs coupled with unforthcoming promised remuneration. Therefore, they are compelled to persevere to complete their contracts. Most of them are lucky to return to the country poorer than they went or otherwise arrive deformed if not dead as revealed in the Saudi Slavery that once the agent seals a deal, the house help is left on his/her own as Ruto (2021) reports.

Precisely, house helps comprise one of the reimagining Kenya's most committed but hidden working class according to Rombo's and Lutomia's (2016). They can be likened to banana farmers in Kakamega county whose investment in farming is yet to better their welfare (Akala, 2021). Analysis of The Real Househelps of Kawangware (TRHK) aired on Kenya Television Network and now on Nation Television, the comedy presents the plight of house helps in Kenya (Mpangu, 2016) and worldwide. Rombo and Lutomia (2016) argue that although the comedy is satirical, it raises pertinent issues concerning their terms of service, working conditions and welfare that exhibit a divide between workers and employers, private citizens and government officials, trade unions and barrage of stereotypes that boils down to poor remuneration. These inhibit their self-esteem; right to choices; access to opportunities and resources; power to control their own lives; and ability to influence the national development. Thus, TRHK episodes ably and candidly communicate the plight of house helps openly and could spontaneously and cost-effectively reform the employers who exploit, and abuse house helps.

Negligence of these facts has frustrated women's empowerment dreams, perpetuates gender discrimination, and lowers welfare of Kenyan house helps.

The Real House helps of Kawangware (TRHK) is a classic Kenyan comedy with witty dialogue and a hilarious account of the lives of ordinary Kenyan house helps (Mpangu, 2016). This excerpt of day-to-day live experience of Kenyan house helps in Kawangware estate is the most informative avenue for the plight of Nairobi's house helps. To complement their meagre wages, TRHK demonstrates that house help fall prey to sex pests, including their male employers, resulting in physical confrontation, unwanted pregnancies, and diverse health risks. This intensifies and widens the realm of domestic violence beyond the nuclear family roping in house helps who were quite vulnerable. The net desperation effect is the onset of slave like trade for rogue employment bureaus and agents, to illegally traffic unsuspecting innocent house helps to the Middle East according to Chacha (2021) and Ruto (2021). Such illicit maid trade has also been reported by Beydoun (2006) in Ethiopian where domestic workers were trafficked into Lebanon.

It is unfortunate that human trafficking in Kenya appears to be an invisible vehicle for enslavement that reduces trafficked persons to mere commodities for sale and suitable for servitude or other forms of exploitation. The paradox lies in the fact that despite the famous TRHK, the Kenyan Government and the COTU are yet to internalize, interrogate and resolve Kenya's house helps' dilemma in line with other professions, like law, teaching, and healthcare. The formulation of the draft Diaspora policy of Kenya 2024 (Republic of Kenya, 2024) is a step in the right direction to mitigate this scenario, vulnerable fork like house helps working abroad have received little attention.

Overlaps in the roles of house helps and Early Child Development (ECD) teachers in childcare reveal the critical role of house helps (Matang'i *et al*, 2013). Both the housemaids and ECD teachers augment mothers' professional pursuit and enhance the overall early development of children. Generally, nurseries overwhelm the influence of housemaids in early child development. However, housemaids are preferred to ECD teachers as their holistic children care in the natural spacious, friendly and safer home environment that boost development of local languages and provide a secure place to play. Thus, the wide wage disparity between house helps and ECD teachers is unrealistic and discriminative against house helps who perform other roles over and above childcare and work for longer hours.

A 2012 ruling of Kenya's High Court placed domestic workers under the national Employment Law, where verbal contracts have the potential to confer rights that are enforceable. In line with the court ruling and pressure from KUDHEIHA, the minimum wage for domestic workers was increased by 14% in 2013 from KES 8,579 to KES 9,780 per month. A further increment of 12%, raised the minimum wage to KES 10,954 per month in 2015, marking an overall 62%. Additionally, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) made it mandatory for employers to register domestic workers and contribute monthly payments to NSSF to cover workers' healthcare and pensions. Despite the increments, house helps still experienced extreme incidents of underpayment and non-paid work.

Regulations guiding domestic workers hardly rationalize the job description for house helps (Republic of Kenya, 2019b). Absurdity resides in the decision use in specific careers like caretaker, cook, driver, gardener and drivers to impute wages for house helps with conspicuous job description. Such a faulty wage determination criterion avails a multitude of loopholes, for employers to exploit house helps by subjecting them to all sorts of domestic chores without additional reward. Unfortunately, the numerous domestic chores are bedevilled with critical risks that often harmed the uninsured house helps catalysed by the advent of Covid-19 (Wolfe, 2020). Due to job insecurity in a broader social and health context (Marmot, 1999), victims of the risks eventually lose their jobs, retreat to their homes unceremoniously and incapacitated without compensation and terminal benefits. Under the circumstances, they are faced with unaffordable medical bills worsened by the unmet sustenance, self-esteem and freedom needs of their respective families. Gradually their families slide into bottomless pit of poverty and even death at worst in Kenya and Uganda according to Ruto (2012) and Fisher ((2018) respectively. The net effect is the declining welfare of house helps that form the gist of this chapter.

METHODOLOGY

This research is anchored on the economic liberalization paradigm whose key feature of policy drives international economic operations. Advocates of liberalism prioritize economic competitiveness-oriented

efficiency characterized by free trade (Wolf, 2004). However, Rudra (2008) argues that minimax market-based efficiency driven policies undermine the core human and societal values and rights. In Kenya, this is more critical among employees in the informal sector that strictly invoke the piece rate wage determinant criterion where house helps find themselves. This labour malpractice is fuelled by the assumption that that low labour costs attract foreign investment (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). Inferences have been made to economic tools including cost benefit analysis, opportunity cost, time/piece rates, and revealed preference approaches (RPA), reported by Perman *et al.*, (1999) help to affirm the poor remuneration and welfare of house helps working in Nairobi. These techniques are premised on market information and consumer behaviour that resides in economic thought and product (Mitchell and Carson, 1989) used to infer the economic value of non-market goods and services. Otherwise, remuneration of house helps is convoluted and distorted by market failures, externalities, surplus labour and unscrupulous agents and employers. Unfortunately, house helps have a weak collective bargaining power because of the enormous domestic chores and long working (18-24) daily hours and isolate hush working environment in home that minimise their interactions (ILO, 2010c).

A descriptive cross-sectional design to was use gather an in-depth understanding of the job description, domestic chore, risks, adversities, remuneration and welfare of house-helps. Observation and interview schedule tailored along the objectives were used to collect data. It was conducted in Nairobi city, since according to Nyaura and Ngugi, (2019); the county has the largest population of house-helps in Kenya.

Primary and secondary data were used to procure information on the domestic chores, risks and welfare status of house helps. Secondary data comprised review of research work, documentaries, ILO reports, constitutional acts, television programs and internet search on domestic workers and house helps. A purposive sample of 100 house helps with at least 5 years working experience was studied. It comprised 100% female accessible, willing, ready, and able to; and to attain permission from their employers and spare time to participate in the interview process. With less 5years working experience, the male house helps contacted illegible since they lacked the insight of the house help occupation. Additionally, gendered house helps chores are mostly performed by women as stated by Mantouvalo (2011). Key informants included their employers, parents, and spouses. Efforts to have focus group discussions were futile because it was difficult to for the households to secure permission from duty to secure their participation.

Data analysis was done using Tables and a Plate. Tables presented minimum wages, job description, risks, uncertainties, working conditions, adversities and wages of house helps. The Plate on the other hand was used to illustrate female house helps at work engaged in laundry and child care. These findings show the mismatch between the domestic chores performed, remuneration and welfare status of Nairobi house helps. Thereafter, the philosophy embedded in the term house help underlying the house helps dilemma is reviewed, and conclusions made notwithstanding the recommendations drawn from the chapter.

The tripartite relationship between remuneration, intervening variables and welfare of house helps was conceptualised in Figure 1. Remuneration, the independent variable, was expressed in terms of the minimum national wage rate for house helps. It is broken into salary/wages and allowances including but not limited to overtime, leave, house, medical, commuter, hardship, risk, and uncertainties. Alternatively, welfare indicators comprised physical-*cum*-psychological abuse, sexual harassment, accidents, job insecurity, overworking/long working hours, lack of offs/leave, delayed-under-non-payment, poor working environment, and deplorable accommodation typical of Todaro and Smiths (2014) core values of development. At the interface are the intervening variables like the ILO regulation, trade unions, minimum wage limit enforcement and compliance, unemployment, family ties between employers and house helps, ignorance among house helps, devious employers and employment agents and spiralling unemployment.

Context: Labour legislative framework on domestic work for house helps

The ILO Convention 189 established specific basic rights and principles for achieving decent work for domestic workers (ILO, 2010b). Moreover, the ILO Recommendation No. 201 provides practical measures on the implementation of Convention 189. Article 41 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and the Employment Act (2007) guarantees the welfare of all workers in conformity with high human dignity, a right that is hardly enjoyed by house helps. Characterised by the ambiguities in their job description, terms of service, remuneration, working hours and poor working environment, the welfare of house helps. Their rights and fundamental freedoms,

including occupational safety and health, improved standards of living, enhanced socio-economic-job security, remuneration remain below the minimum wage rate. These decent work deficits are contrary to ILO Convention 189 and the SDG 8 and lower the dignity and welfare of Nairobi house helps. Such social ills have been echoed by Owidhi (2017).

The Employment Act 2007 (Republic of Kenya (2007) defines statutory minimums that domestic workers in Kenya are entitled to. These include: a) At least 21 days annual leave; b) At least 7 days on full pay under sick leave and a further 7 days on half pay; c) At least 90 days maternity leave and 14 days paternity leave; d) At least 1 rest day in every 7 day period; e) Overtime payment; f) Remuneration not be less than prescribed minimum wages (currently Kshs.10,954 for Nairobi); g) requisite statutory deductions, such as Pay As You Earn (PAYE), National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) and National Social Security Fund (NSSF), made from their pay; and h) no employment of children below 13 years. Allowing children aged 13-18 years to be employed as house helps expose them to exploitation, denies them the right to education and condemns them to life-time modern form of slavery. So is the case in Morocco where child domestic workers are aged between 12 and 17 years with some being as young as five or six (International Trade Union confederation, 2010)

Unfortunately, emerging trends in the growth of Nairobi County in terms of population settlements and sprawling informal settlements, and a rapidly growing middle class impede on compliance to labour legislations. This has left house helps in a precarious state, susceptible to the vicious cycles of poverty and deprivation catalysed by myriad risks in their labour market (Pouliakas, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Demographic and occupational characteristics of the house helps

House helps working in Nairobi studied were female Kenyans had diverse characteristics. Their average age was 24 years being less than the average age of domestic worker in south Africa which Gobind et al. (2012) reported to be 37.04 year. The majority had attained secondary (46%) followed by 38 who had acquired primary education who decried of lack of fees to further their education. The 16% of them who had tertiary qualification lamented of lack of job opportunities. Both the resident (64%) non-resident/commuter (36) house helps experienced unique accommodation-related challenge ranging from poor housing to high transport cost. Their diverse working conditions ranged from the low-class (slum) through the middle-class to the high-class residential settlement of Nairobi subjected them to varied experience with their employers. 72% of the house helps had worked before and left their previous employers due to accumulate salary arrears. These predominantly young, less-educated and vulnerable house helps seemed to either to be ignorant of their constitutional, statutory, individual labour contract rights despite the call by Mantouvalou (2012) for human rights crusaders to legislate for the precarious domestic labour. Otherwise, they had to tolerate the situation due to their weak bargaining power (Chambers, 1990) and lack of alternative employment opportunity.

5.2 Regulation of minimum wages in Kenyan cities

Minimum legislation on employment and remuneration is a controversial theme in the global labour market. It is in Kenya, especially among the vulnerable semi-skilled and unskilled workers like all the Nairobi house who lament poor terms of service, working conditions and remuneration. This manifested the rot and slavery ailing Kenya's domestic workers' labour market. Probably, their employers' non-compliance to the Bill of Rights, due to negligence by the government and COTU largely accounted for this scenario. Consequently, house helps succumb to multifarious job description, overworking, risky-cum-uncertain domestic chores, inhuman working environment, and under-non-payment dilemmas that impede on their welfare. Their vulnerability could be attributed several futile industrial actions staged by renowned professionals like doctors in 2019 and 2024, pilots in 2022, nurses in 2020 and 2024, lecturers in 2018, teachers in 1997 and 2017 that culminated in arrest, conviction, disciplinary action, and dismissal of the striking workers.

The real wage of house helps remains below the legal minimum wage and hardly fits in the vague job descriptions. Table 1 presents the basic minimum consolidated wages for all informal sector workers as per the Regulation of Wages (General) (Amendment) Order, 2017. It reveals the precarious position domestic workers find themselves in since their Kshs13,572.90 wages are the lowest wage of all. House helps at times perform several tasks, some of which outlined in the table, in addition to any other duties allocated by the employers like

caretakers of buildings that attract higher (Kshs.28,147.60) wages. The tasks as will be elucidated latter in Table 2. However, their minimum wage is limited to Kshs.13,572.90 and Kshs.14,658.85 comprising of the first and second job categories respectively. They have joined many domestic workers globally who have to content with rewards below respective national minimum wages. Additionally, their employers hardly observe either the general working hours (52 per week) or normal working hours usually consist of 45 hours of work per week, that is Monday to Friday 8 hours each and 5 hours on Saturday under the special orders for different sectors subsidiary to the Regulations of Wages and Conditions of Employment Act, Cap 229. This depicts their vulnerability to abusive treatment, discrimination and poor working conditions exacerbated by their general isolation from other workers, socio-cultural barriers as echoed by Agaya and Masiga, (2013) among the domestic workers in Kenya. Therefore, the current author posits that minimum wage as an instrument to combat poverty and protect house helps and their families has achieved little in Kenya. This could be attribute to non-compliance labour laws and particularly minimum wage regulation among employers as reported by Gobind et al. (2012)

Table 1: Basic Minimum Consolidated Wages for worker in Kenyan Cities: Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu (Valid in June 2024)

Job description: Type / Grade	Per hour	Per day	Per month
1. Cleaner, Gardener, General Worker, House servant, Children's ayah, Sweeper, Day watchmen, Messenger	121.30	653.10	13,572.90
2. Cook, Waiter, Miner, Stone cutter, Turn boy, Logger line cutter	132.10	704.60	14,658.85
3. Night watchmen	136.55	726.55	15,141.95
4. Machine attendant, Sawmill sawyer, Machine assistant, Mass production machinist, Shoe cutter, Bakery worker, Bakery assistant, Tailor's assistant	141.75	739.05	15,383.45
5. Machinist (made-to-measure), Shoe upper preparer, Chaplis maker, Vehicle service worker (petrol and service stations), Bakery plant hand, laundry operator, Junior clerk, Wheeled tractor driver (light)	157.60	846.25	17,561.00
6. Car driver, Printing machine operator, Bakery machine operator, Plywood machine operator, Sawmill dresser, Shop assistant, Machine tool operator, Dough maker, Table hand baker, Table hand confectioner, Copy-typist, Light van driver	64.90	880.30	18,319.50
7. Clerk, Pattern designer (draughtsmen), Garment and dress cutter, Single hand oven men, Charge-hand baker, Telephone operator, Receptionist, Storekeeper	188.30	1,055.10	20,904.90
8. Tailor, Medium-sized vehicle driver	205.10	1,108.80	23,039.40
9. Dyer, Crawler tractor driver, Salesmen	228.60	1,219.80	25,435.20
10. Saw doctor, Caretaker (buildings)	253.25	1,355.45	28,147.60
11. Cashier, Heavy commercial vehicle driver, Salesmen-driver	275.95	1,474.50	30,627.45
12. Artisan- Ungraded	164.90	880.95	18,319.50
13. Artisan- Grade III	205.05	1,108.80	23,039.45
14. Artisan- Grade II	228.60	1,219.80	24,884.05
15. Artisan- Grade I	275.95	1,474.50	30,627.45

Notes: Minimum wage with effect from 1 May 2018; 2. The amounts are in Kenyan Shillings; 3. Valid in August 2024

Source: The Regulation of Wages (General) (Amendment) Order, 2017.

House help occupation is one of the few employment opportunities accessible to poor and less educated vulnerable women. Lack of alternative employment opportunities has, and continue to perpetuate poor working conditions and remuneration in the house help sub-sector notwithstanding the stated domestic workers' minimum wage in relation to Act, Cap 229. The 100 female house helps studied in Nairobi revealed this scenario

and painted a picture of the deteriorating and dwindling future of this noble that is invisible even by their employer despite being the prime beneficiaries

5.3 Job Description for Nairobi House Helps

Job description of house helps is informal and at variance with many other occupations. Table 2 presents 42 daily chores performed by house helps. They are categorized as 13-very frequently performed (***), 19-frequently performed (**), 9-rarely performed (*) and one (1)-unethical (#). This gravitated to modal and mean daily working hours of 12 and 14 respectively. The majority started working at 5am until midnight as they were first to wake up and last to sleep. This was quite exploitative since Gobind et al. (2012) report that the daily modal and mean were 8 and 10.89 respectively in South Africa.

Table 2: The multifaceted job description for Nairobi house helps

1 Baby-sitting and child caring***	22. Fixing buttons, hems and clothes**
2. Laundry: machine wash and hanging out to dry***	23. Cleaning outside rooms**
3. Laundry: hand wash and hanging out to dry***	24. Preparation and cooking breakfast***
4. Tidying of the house***	25. Preparation and cooking lunch***
5. Sleep over from time to time to house-sit**	26. Preparation and cooking dinner ***
6. Dusting and Wiping furniture and ornaments***	27. Setting the table ***
7. Making the beds***	28. Sweeping and cleaning the compounds**
8. Cleaning the cupboards**	29. Ironing clothes, sheets etc.**
9. Cleaning baths, showers, taps, basins, and toilets***	30. Mow the lawns and trim/clean fences*
10. Sweeping and mopping of floors**	31. Weed, trim and prune garden/flowers**
11. Washing the curtains**	32. Wash cars, motorcycles bicycles*
12. Cleaning up after breakfast, lunch and dinner***	33. Clean swimming pool *
13. Vacuuming the carpets and upholstery**	34. Clean the balcony area*
14. Cleaning the vacuum cleaner*	35. Nursing and feeding pets e.g., dogs/cats**
15. Defrosting and cleaning the fridge and freezer**	36. Wash and pets and dolls *
16. Cleaning stove, oven, microwave, and fridge**	37. Driving*
17. Cleaning windows and glass doors**	38. Nursing the sick/elderly**
18. Cleaning of walls, lights switches, and doors**	39. Wiping the blinds*
19. Cleaning brass and silver*	40. Others: Washing cops etc.#
20. Packing/unpacking groceries***	41. Garde-malade: Care for sick/disabled**
21. Removal of refuse for collection**	42. Caring for the elderly: Male and female**

Notes: 1. *** Very frequent (daily); 2. **Frequent (4-6 times weekly); 3. *Rarely (1-3 times weekly) 4. # Unethical

5. Responsibilities', such as *sex with employer* are not included since might be common but difficult to substantiate

Source: Primary data

House helps had no training in performing domestic chores. This exposes them to high of potential occupational and safety risks especially due to the increasing use of electronics, cutlery, and liquified cooking gas in home. It was also hard to give a comprehensive daily progress report to enable the application of performance contracting to determine the most appropriate reward for this noble service. On average, house helps perform 30 chores daily that when the current minimum wage is divided by 30, each task attracts an average pay of about Kshs.430.90 per month. This concurs with the revelation of Oelz and Rani (2015) that compliance with minimum wage requirements in Africa was less than 40%. It also breached the 2012 ILO requirement of regular, direct and full payment of workers.

Employers capitalize on the multifaceted job description of house helps to coerce them to perform risky and unethical tasks that could attract higher payments if appropriate labour was sourced. The worst of all incidents involved forcing house helps to wash corpses in Kibera (Odenyo, 2017; Nyota (2018); and Muyela, 2018). It was revealed that a house help was forced at gun point by her employer for 40 days to clean a corpse which was

used to produce money. The case was filed before Kibera Senior Principal Magistrate Elizabeth Juma, who was informed that Mohammed Abdi Noor refused to pay the petitioner Kshs13,000. This was contrary to the ILO (2012) presumption of effective protection for domestic workers from forced labour. To entice her do the job repeatedly, the employer’s wife promised her a meagre Kshs500 wage increment. Regrettably, she was not the increment together with even paid for the previous 47 days she worked for Noor’s family in spite of scary ordeal. Such occurrences could be on the rise because house helps work in homes and houses epitomised by privacy that hamper effective conviction of their employers.

5.4 Domestic chores of house helps: characteristics, risks and uncertainties

House helps perform several, complex, tedious, risky and uncertain chores in homes as reflected in Table 3 that either directly or indirectly threaten their job security. The tasks range from specific to multifarious and complex house and home management operations which compromise the house helps’ health and safety. Unfortunately, their terms of service hardly incorporate health care, health insurance scheme, and the economic value of their daily duties that are intertwined and convoluted. Isolating specific household chores and allocating them to different people could help upscale wages for house helps and ratify their contribution to Kenya’s GDP. Thus, this chapter argues that the assertion that estimating the value of domestic work was hard by Gikuru’s (2013) is retrogressive and detrimental to fair remuneration and blind to the welfare of house helps, given the weak trade union movement in Kenya. It is argued here that, the piece rate, time rate, opportunity cost, production function, revealed preference and stated preference approaches (Perman *et al*, 1999) could adequately provide the most appropriate criteria for the determination of a fair wage rate for house helps serving Nairobi residents.

The psychological, emotional and physical risks and uncertainties associated with domestic chores in Nairobi are many. These contravenes the principle of effective protection for domestic workers (ILO, 2012). The blurred boundaries between tasks in the interconnected nature of domestic chores tie down house helps to long working hours (ILO, 2013). Similarly, working in isolation impedes their sharing of work experiences; and in the long run, they consider their daily routine to be normal. This is worsened by the emerging ‘automatability risk’ (Pouliakas, 2018), where house helps find themselves in jobs with high risk of substitutability by machines, robots or other algorithmic processes. Direct and indirect recruitment and placement of house helps by employers and private employment agencies manifests a divide and rule strategy that impedes on success of potential collective bargaining movements (ILO, 2012). Thus, the risks and uncertainties embedded in domestic chores demanded addition rewards that were ignored intensifying both underpayment and non-payment of house helps.

Table 3: Common risks and uncertainties associated with domestic chores.

Domestic chores	Characteristics of the chores	Risks and uncertainties [#]
Baby Breast feeding* Baby and child care	Breast feeding and management of the breast milk bank Feeding, cuddling and bathing	Over/under feeding babies Breast milk perishability and baby harm. Injuries, sickness and child trafficking
Cooking Waiters: Serving food	Frequent and wide variety Spontaneous	In-door pollution, burns and fire outbreaks. Fragile utensils and sharps
Washing utensils	Frequent	Breakages, cuts
Washing clothes/beddings	Voluminous/too dirty	Temperaments, spies, strangers
Washing automobile/toys	Muddy, oil spills	Temperaments, spies, strangers
Cleaning/mopping	Main house, kitchen and toilets	Slippery floors, detergents and disinfectants
Cleaning the compound	Too large/dirty	Injuries and bites from flies, ants and snakes
Tendering pets/toy	Feeding/cleaning and washing	Flue and bites
Waste management	Toxic odour liquid, solid and gas	Contamination and pollution
Nursing	Medication: children/elderly	Overdose and contract infections
Caring for the elderly	Conservative and sickling	Temperaments
Caring for the disabled	Varied disabilities	Communication breakdown and bodily harm
Security	Guard the home	Fraud and hostile visitors/strangers
Reception	Receive visitors	Hostile debtors and creditors
Gardening	Kitchen gardening	Bites, cuts,

Messengers	Deliveries: goods/messages	Accidents, lateness and delays
Driving	Licence/loading/unloading	Arrest, accidents and overworking
General Workers	Multifarious emerging duties	Uncertainties

Notes: 1. Covid-19 is a risk that runs through all the domestic chores

- 2. *: An emerging trend of feeding the baby on breast on their mother’s milk from the milk bank;
- 3. #: *Keeping both family and home secrets is a risk embedded in all the domestic chores*
- 4 *All these risks threaten their job security that might result in to a grand risk of job loss.*

Source: Primary data

Contracting covid-19 was the riskiest encounter by the house help since both the options to work at home or adhere to social distancing were unavailable for them not forgetting its unaffordable treatment. Unfortunately, the services they offer conspicuous missed on the list of essential services. Being predominantly care takers, social was inapplicable especially in caring for infants, children, sick, elderly and handicapped. Additionally, their employers operate in crowded places termed hot spots; including public vehicles, public places, social places and work places. In most cases, it was the prerogative of house helps to do purchases and deliveries as well as take children to schools and family members to hospitals intensifies their vulnerability notwithstanding their basic homecare responsibilities. Worse still, they could be directed serve unconfirmed Covid-19 in isolation rooms and even wash the beddings and clean the room without the appropriate personal protective equipment due to the Global Shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (BRIEFS NO. 130 APRIL, 2020). Basically, their working environments were hostile including covid-19 dens for the susceptible house help who risked infecting their desperate family members with the same. In the interest of their health most house helps opted out of the employment, resulting in lose of income and declining welfare.

Some of the Covid-19 protocol including social distancing, working at home and constricted public transport are major threats to the house help profession. To achieve the social distancing call in most of the small residential houses in Nairobi, dispensing with the house help was the easy bet. This was catalysed by working at home, and closure of learning institutions practically rendered house help redundant. Additionally night-time curfews at Nairobi limited public transport made commuting difficult and unaffordable for the house helps. All these resulted into huge job losses for the house helps just as reported by SunJung *et al.* (2021) in the air transport and tourism industry, in line with the ILO monitor’s (2020) observation that Covid-19 pandemic had already transformed itself into an economic and labour market shock

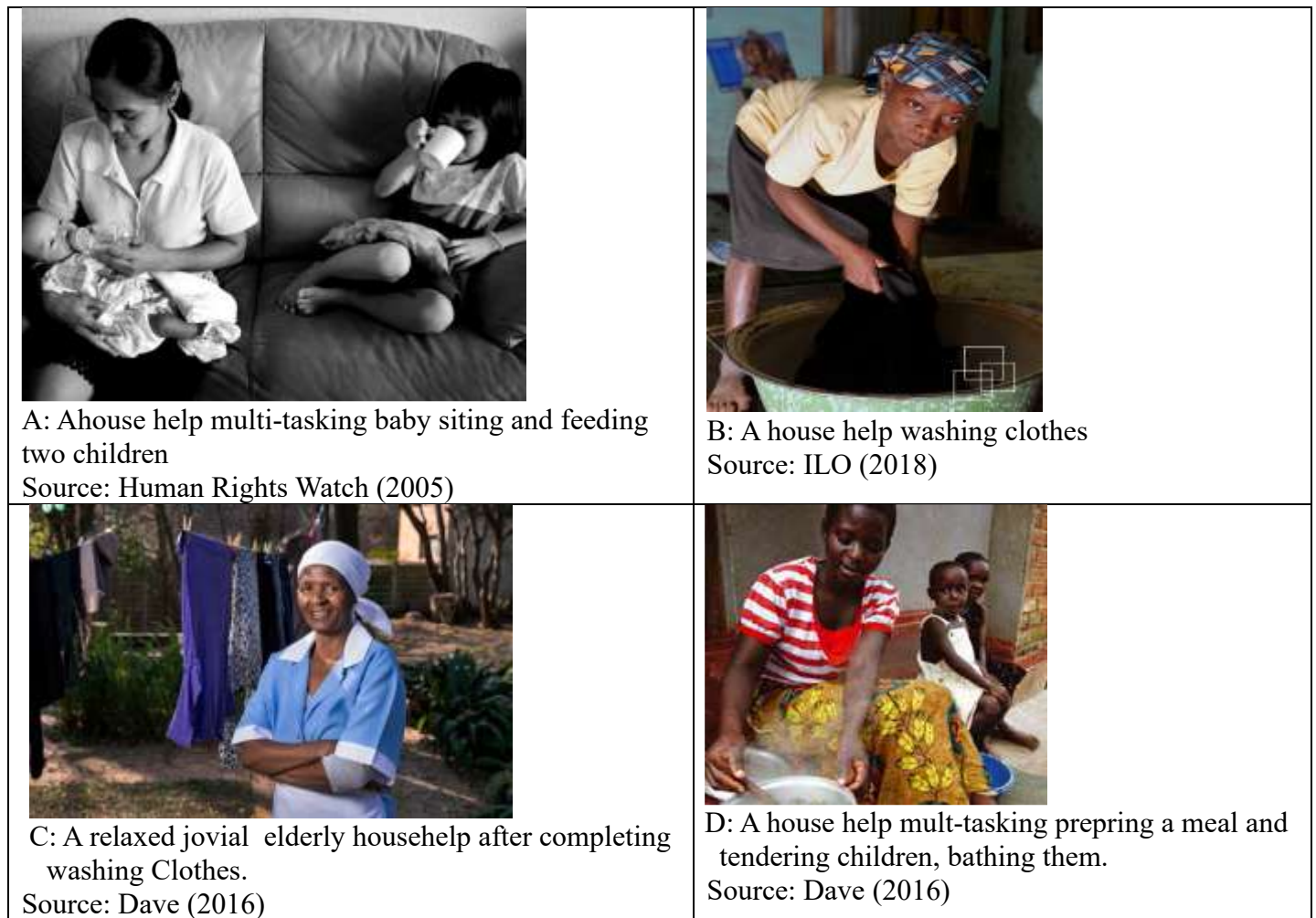
5.5 The working environment for house helps

House helps working in Nairobi are deployed in private homes marred by draconian rules that limit freedom. Divulging information about the home including their own terms of service as it served was strictly unauthorised and was treated as an integral part of their job security as reported by all the house helps studied but perpetuated ills like non-under-delayed payment among other occupational mal-practices. This was Contrary to Articles 27 and 41 that prioritise the right to freedom and labour relations of all workers (Republic of Kenya 2024). This closed all the avenues for house helps to bargaining for better working conditions, terms of service and remuneration in particular. It states that every person has the right to fair labour practices.

Plate 1 shows that lonely house helps working in isolation without supervision, and their commitment to duty is indisputable despite the poor remuneration. Panels 1A and 1D present two young house helps, with each caring for two children. In 1A, the househelp is baby sitting tand feeding two children and pay more attention to the fragile infant. On the other hand 1D shows a househelp who has just bathed children and dressed one (as inferred from the blue basin on the ground) and hurriedly preparing food for them as they watch. She is strategically positiond in between the cooking place and the children in order to buffer the hungry childer from potential burns. Thus aware of the potential domestic children-orientted risks like food chocking in 1A and fire burning in 1D, house helps ably incorporated the precautionary principle in their working environments as embeded Okidi’s (2008) concept, function and structure of environmental law. Panel 1B depicts a bare-footed house help without protective clothes including boots and gloves, which exposes her to numerous health risks like pnemonia and

feaver. This depicts the true life lived by most house help under the full glare and watch of their employers. Finally Panel 1C displays a relaxed and jovial, elderly house help posing for a photo after having washed and aired clothes on the line.

Plate 1: House helps at work under different working environments



Source: Adapted from Human Rights Watch (2005), Dave (2016) and ILO (2018)

Two facts can be drawn from the four scenarios displayed in the plate. *First*, house helps work and even multi-task without supervision, a state that either manifests both their commitment to duty and fear of their barbaric and ruthless employers. *Secondly*, it candidly displays the deplorable condition under which house helps perform their daily chores. Surprisingly, their efficient service delivery was yet to persuade employers to accord them human treatment and better remuneration. In fact, common scenes of tired, emaciated, malnourished, frustrated, sickling and often poorly dressed and poorly characterise many affluent homes and families. Most (63%) of the house help studied noted that they regularly borrowed food and clothes from the siblings of their employer. Given these dehumanising tags, any stranger, visitor or by-passer could easily identify house helps as the 'inevitable evil' in the home. This has exposed the hidden momentum behind the worsening discrimination, marginalisation and vulnerability of house helps. It militates against their rights to decent working environment, social security and standard employment contracts (ILO, 2013) as witnessed in Malaysia. Incidentally, Marmot (1999) decried welfare decadence typified in job insecurity in a broader social and health context that Phillip (1990) attributes to the 'divide and rule' strategy used by employers to exploit house helps.

Ninety percent of the house helps interviewed noted that employers micro-managed both their financial and social economic affairs, and decisions. Significant proportions of their wages were withheld under the pretext of saving for them so as to invest in the long run. Such mentoring strategies were good but repeatedly degenerated abused and turned out to be a disguised exploitative strategy. It even restricted the house helps mobility in search of greener pastures as they risked losing their earnings retained by the employers. This concurs with Agaya and Asunza's (2013) view that, women domestic workers in Mukuru informal settlement of Nairobi were being

exploited. This urgently required a rights-based regulatory framework as argued by Abimourched, (2011) in the Mashriq for migrant domestic workers. Thus, their employers contravene the Employment Act that no employer shall limit or attempt to limit the right of an employee or compel the employee to dispose of his wages or a portion thereof in a particular place or for a particular purpose. Such ill driven initiatives curtail the freedom of house helps and bar them from seeking or even accepting alternative employers in fear of losing their accumulated salary arrears.

Thus, the notion that home-based childcare is cost-effective perpetuates poor remuneration of house helps in Nairobi. Similar situation exists in the Arabian Gulf where 58% of children are cared for by housemaids for 30 to 70 hours per week exceed the nursery 3-5 hours per week (Roumani, 2005). This Gulf concerns concurs with the ILO's (2010c) revelation that the number of hours of work, working-time arrangements and rest time has significant adverse effects on the quality of work and employee's life and health.

Unpaid wages and irregular wage deductions a common feature of domestic work in Kenya according to all the interviewed house helps. House helps endured delays and non-payment of wages despite the payment itself being quite low. Their requests for regular payment soured their relationship with the employers and compromised their job security. In the meantime, the employers enticed them with the meagre personal effects to culm and blindfold them. Additionally, they are surcharged by their respective employers and agencies in event of breakages and other damages in the house, most of which are exaggerated. Eventually, they would be dismissed without notice and pay even after long working hours for years. This culminates to non-payment that is agonizing for the women who had numerous dependents including their old, sick and poor parents and siblings. This has relegated Kenyan house helps to go abroad for better employment terms where in contrary Fisher (2018) the blatant abuse of Ugandan maids in the Gulf prone to abuse despite new safeguards. The Human Rights Watch (2005) reported a similar scenario in Singapore and Indonesia hence the Kenyan case requires appropriate action to restore the dignity and decency of this noble occupation.

5.6 Adverse working conditions

House helps are exposed to a wide range of occupational health risks. For instance, a house help was accidentally knocked down and killed by her employer's driver (Ombati, 2015). On the other hand, women casual workers suffer income loss when they fall pregnant and deliver children through illegal wage cuts and dismissals; (Erdoğan and Toksöz, 2013). For instance, a dispute between Linet Shikoli, a house help (claimant) and Lilian Otundo, the employer (respondent) over unfair and unlawful termination Case No. 527 of 2013 in the Industrial Court at Nairobi exemplifies the problem of unpaid work that house helps face. The verdict was that the respondent was to pay Kshs. 44,999 to the claimant, within 30 days of the award (Republic of Kenya Industrial Court, 2013). Without court intervention, such payments were unforthcoming though this is only but one out of the many cases that occur.

Adverse working conditions characterize the housel profession. Nairobi house helps identified twenty adverse working conditions financial compensation they encountered in their line of duty as outlined in Table 4. the severity of each one of the 19 out of 20 adversities were reported by more than 60% of the house helps, underscores the plight of the house help. Paradoxically, this author discovered that the least adversity reported by 37% of the house help was the most critical. For instance, the house helps in this cadre were instructed to respectively reconnect and disconnect in the evening and morning all the disconnected public utilities like water and electricity. Either Ignorant of the dangers associate with such action or through coercion, this was regularly done as instructed by the employer and definitely exposed the house helps to great risks to the extent of losing their lives. All these adversities are a glaring significant proportion of unpaid dues accruing house helps concurs sentiments of with Agaya and Masiga (2013).

Table 4: Adverse working conditions that require financial compensation

Adverse working conditions	Counts/%age	Adverse working conditions	Counts/%age
Limited rest days	64	Abuse/harassment: physical/ sexual	84
Long hours of work	97	Inadequate/inhumane accommodations	68
Illegal deployments	37	Limited freedom and security	94
Commuting is costly and odd hours	66	Restricted interaction with family & friends	71

Food deprivation	79	Restricted right to religion	74
Discrimination	63	Violence within the work place	81
Limited rest periods/breaks daily	67	Low and unequal wages	98
Limited right to Justice	83	Verbal abuse and threats	88
Limited job security	88	Insecurity (Vulnerability)	78
General mistreatment	60	Others: Being negated	86

Note: n=100

Source: Primary data

All these contravened the seven major laws governing employment laws in Kenya according to *Kituo Cha Sheria*. These include the Constitution (2010), Employment Act of 2007, Labour Institutions Act of 2007, Work Injury Benefits Act of 2007, Labour Relations Act of 2007 that guarantees freedom of association, Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2007 and Industrial Court Act No. 20 of 2011. Practically there seems to be no justice at the grassroots where house helps operate. Additionally, house helps are susceptible to extreme job insecurity, a reality that which has been aggravated both natural and human induced calamities and disaster. Natural disasters include floods, prolonged droughts, diseases especially the Covid-19 pandemic of the year 2020. On the other an, artificial disaster include terrorism, human trafficking, collapse of buildings, post-election violence/trauma, and crime.

Under the circumstances, house helps find themselves at the cross-fire. On one side, they are indefinitely battered by the disasters yet their employers expect too much from them at this critical moment. This not only exerts pressure to the house helps but also boil down to stress and loss of earnings whenever they fail to meet their employers' targets and expectation due to the biting effects of disasters. Similar views in the broader socio-economic and health context were echoed by Marmot (1999) in Britain. The resultant wage reduction and job loses perpetuates income inequalities echoed by Todaro and Smith (2014) that worsen gender inequalities given that women dominate the house help labour-force. Such widening income inequalities can lower standards of living and welfare of house helps. This calls for an in-depth understanding of domestic workers' protection & welfare policy in Kenya as echoed by Islam and Amin (2016) in the informal sector in Bangladesh.

5.7. Earnings received by house helps

Basic salary was the only form of income received by the house helps as shown in Table 5. The majority of house helps 69% earned a salary of between 5,000-7,500 shillings, followed by 23% whose salary ranged between 2,500-5000 shillings and thus the most exploited. Only eight percent of them who had the highest pay earned 7500-10,000 shillings. None of the allowances and overtime chores attracted no payment. Ordinarily, overtime pay is one and a half times the worker's normal hourly rate for any time worked over the normal working hours, and twice if the overtime is on the worker's normal rest day or public holiday according to Republic of Kenya (2010). This reveals that unpaid overtime chores constituted the greatest loses house helps endured that proportionately lowered their welfare. This is quite intricate and can likened to the banana waste that impede on the welfare of banana farmers in Kakamega county Kenya as reported by Akala (2021) as such it calls for commitment on the part of all the stakeholders to mitigate the scenario.

Table 5: Earnings received by house helps in Nairobi

Type of income	Average
-Salary	6225.40
-Allowances: Leave, house, medical, commuter, hardship, risk etc.	-
-Overtime payment (within and outside the stipulated working time)	-
Gross salary	6225.40

Notes: The lowest minimum wage mark for all domestic workers is Kshs.13,572.90

Source: Primary data

The delayed-under-non-payment trend witnessed was attributed to the fact that most of the employers were either civil servants or self-employed in the informal sectors hence could not afford to pay house helps better salaries.

Additionally, 19% of the house helps had family relations with their employers hence desperately took any amount they were offered. In event of no money especially during Covid 19 pandemic they often painfully went without pay or accepted payment in kind in terms of food and clothes for their families. This was done in most cases without prior notice. Consequently, all the house helps were underpaid given that all their earnings averaging Kshs.6225.40 were below the minimum wage of Kshs.13,572.90. This not only concurred with the less than 40 compliance report by Oelz and Rani (2015) but also breached the 2012 ILO requirement of regular, direct and full payment of workers. This low remuneration largely accounts for the spell doom in the current survival and future welfare of Nairobi house helps.

5.8. The philosophy embedding the house help

The remuneration and welfare dilemma ailing Nairobi house helps prompts this author endeavours to explore the origin, letter and spirit of the term ‘house helps’ in the ideal and real realm of domestic workers. Basically, it constitutes two terms being ‘house’ and ‘help’ in that unique deliberate order, and the devil lies in the latter. The *first* term house is a proxy for home that defines the employees’ workplace propelled by the old saying that *East, West, South or North, Home is best*. Regrettably, it was the opposite for house helps since 78% of them lamented that the homes were icons of extreme torture, suffering and pain in their lives. Surprisingly, when approached as key informants’ employers claimed that homes were quite conducive for the house helps since they had been integrated in the family. Practically, house helps were vulnerable strangers and no one could either notice their predicament or come to their rescue and had no one to turn to in the long run.

The *second* term ‘help’ is the culprit and most critical in the genesis of the house help occupation dilemma. Old as mankind, its origin traceable to the Bible with the advent of the first woman “Eve” on Earth referred to a helper, which probably explains why house helps are predominantly women today. Prophets, kings, disciples, and apostles in the Bible and Quran were servants of God also referred to helpers. Over time, the term “helperx” had mutated to *slave* in the era of slave trade/slavery), referred to as *boi* during the colonial times, *mukokoteni* (hand cart) pushers in transport industry and *grave diggers* at funerals. The bottom line is that these venerable cadre of the community is usually oppressed, exploited as they are overworked, underpaid, and not paid at all. Today they are well known as *hustlers in Kenya* who heavily rely on house helps who keeps vigil for them as burn mid-night oil to earn a living. This puts house helps at the centre as the agents of political change and sustainable development in Nairobi and Kenya at large.

The term *help* in this context attempts to specifies the house helps’ terms of service with regard to the scope, type and nature of services the provided. Thesaurus reveals that the predicament of the term *help* resides in its 50 synonyms that depict the 42 domestic chores displayed in Table 2 that are performed by house helps. The synonyms are: abet, advance, advise, aid, assist, attend to, back, backstop, bail out, bear a hand, benefit, bolster, boost, buttress, care (for), champion, comfort, counsel, deliver, ease, embolden, encourage, endorse, facilitate, favour, forward, foster, further, guide, hearten, indorse, launch, mentor, minister (to), nurture, oblige, patronize, profit, promote, prop (up), re-enforce, reinforce, rescue, save, serve, sponsor, succour, support, sustain stand one in good stead. A closes scrutiny of the letter and spirit of the term *help* does not attract any monetary reward, apart from the word *thank you* which opens a Pandora box for their exploitation by employers.

It is worse when both the terms are put together in that order to form one word as ‘house help’. In this format, it either implies and dictates or advices these workers to help their employers as such cultivates ground for overworking and delayed-under-non-payment. Consequently, house helps continue to selflessly offer multiple services in homes expectation commensurate remuneration which more often than not was unforthcoming. Unfortunately, this form of servitude is the most inhumane characterization of the house helps occupation in the 21st century. Additionally, it is unethical if not suicidal to mistreat, exploit, discriminate against and under pay or fail to pay the house helps who cares for your family, home and property notwithstanding making for and serving you with meals. In this context, improved payment can optimize the house helps service delivery and boost human relations between them and their employers in Nairobi City.

Therefore, this author argues that a complete paradigm shifts away from master-savant status quo relationship between house helps and their employers is inevitable to sanitise the house helps’ service delivery system. This can be achieved by establishing a wage middle ground where both the employers and house helps harmoniously communicate freely and co-exist. This is in concurrence with revelation that that in South Africa, good

communication between house helps and their employers tend to improve their respective welfare according to Muasya (2014). Otherwise, this noble profession is on the verge of devastation and our home may be exposed to destruction, resulting to immense loss of property, and injury and even death of the young ones and those abled differently who receive care from the house helps.

CONCLUSION

Demographic and occupational characteristics show that house helps with at least 5 years working experience in Nairobi were predominantly young females. Regulation of wages for domestic workers in Kenyan cities was not adhered to resulting in vulnerable house helps. The job description was amorphous hence expose house helps to numerous occupational and safety risks. Domestic chores characterised several tasks performed simultaneously ranging from specific chores to general house and home management operations to baby care and managing breast milk harm and traumatise house helps. The working environment was unfriendly typified by stringent rules and conditions whose non-adherence to prompted dismissal and lose on benefit. Earnings received were below the minimum wage while allowances and overtime chores attracted no payment. Unfortunately, the philosophy embedding the house help remuneration and welfare dilemma remain the most critical deprivation trap enslaving house helps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Girl-child protection and women empowerment at work place should be intensified probably through regulation of wages for domestic workers in Kenyan cities. Redefining, restructuring, reviewing and formalising house help sector would enhance the working environment by unlocking the privacy and draconian rules in homes as their work place. Adverse working conditions expose house helps to numerous occupational health hazard and risks as well as illegalities. Enhancing the meagre earnings received by house helps and enforcing compliance to allowances regime could gravitate to conjoined better remuneration and improved welfare. The net effect would be sanitised the house help labour market domestically and abroad hence guarantee safer and wider employment opportunities. This emerges to be the most appropriate and rational sustainable path to breaking the deprivation trap enshrined in the philosophy embedding the house help remuneration and welfare dilemma.

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