

When Psychosocial Resources are not enough- Well-being of Female Domestic Help workers in the Informal Sector

Ms. Himakshi Sharma*

PhD Scholar, Department Of CESH, Delhi Technological University, Shahbad Daulatpur, Main Bawana Road, Delhi-110042, India

Dr. Saroj Bala

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, Delhi Technological University, Shahbad Daulatpur, Main Bawana Road, Delhi-110042, India

Dr. Harinder M Sandhu

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Mata Sundri College for Women, Mandi House, Central Delhi, 110002

ABSTRACT

Domestic help workers largely belong to marginalised communities, members of which are often found to be victims of triple exploitation. An inquiry into the psychosocial and economic resources available to these women shall be considered a preliminary and directive step towards the development of a potentially helpful intervention. The study aimed to examine the moderating impact of psycho-social resources like Hope and Resilience on the relationship of Social support and Well-being, in the structural backdrop of economic adversities. The study followed a cross-sectional and correlational research design. A sample of 117 female domestic help workers from the North and South districts of Delhi was constituted and approached for interviews. The participants were interviewed to complete Hope and Resilience items from the 12-item PsyCap questionnaire by Luthans et al. (2007), Social capital measurement through standardised items (taken from the dimensions of Healy and Acquah (2002) and WHO-5 Well-being index (Hindi version) (WHO,1989), all had been translated into Hindi language and adapted for cultural relevance. The findings from the research indicate no significant predictive relationship between social support and well-being. Hope and Resilience did not significantly moderate the relationship between Social Support and Well-Being. The findings further indicate the pertinence of structural economic difficulties as an overpowering determinant of well-being, especially in the informal sector. The descriptive results further indicated a moderate level of psychological resources despite the very low levels of Well-being. These findings, though unconventional, are directive towards the imminent need for contextualisation of psycho-social resources and their effects amidst the atrocious economic hardships. These findings are theoretically grounded in the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll,1989). The findings further underscore the urgent need to develop context-sensitive interventions that incorporate the chronic and adverse economic struggles and a compromised structural system deprived of fundamental resources.

Keywords: Informal sector, Structural economic adversities, Social Support, Well-being, Hope, Resilience

Introduction

Millions of women today are employed in the informal labour market as domestic help workers across the globe. This is a significant lived reality that is embedded in structural economic adversities. The impediments that they encounter along the structural and systemic organisation of their work are inclusive of an absence of a National Policy (Chadha,2021) for their recognition, poor and unsafe work environments, low wages, routine harassment, extremely low wages and no job security. In this community of female domestic help workers, the role of psycho-social resources is important. Social support is one such underacknowledged resource for women belonging to this community. Social support, better understood in the form of social capital, refers to the availability and accessibility of networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society. Social capital as a resource has been conceptually understood and analysed in the forms of structural, relational and cognitive constructs (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). This effect becomes even more pronounced in cases of

the vulnerable and under-resourced sections of society. Therefore, social capital must be recognised and acknowledged as an essential resource.

Ever since the inception of the field of Positive Psychology, concepts of Hope and Resilience have been intensively discussed and applied for their immense utility. Snyder (2002), has described the construct of hope as a motivational state which is based on an interactive intersection of successful agency (goal directedness) and pathways planning to meet. Hope-based training programmes can actually enrich individuals and the social fabric to build a positive and resilient personality, which is better equipped to deal with the struggles and impediments across the lifespan.

Apart from Hope, Resilience is another essential psychological resource that can offer support to individuals in general and marginalised sections in particular. It is one of the cornerstone concepts to have emerged in the field of Positive Psychology. Traditionally, Resilience has been defined as the ability to “bounce back” from stress or trauma. The psychological resources of Resilience and Hope are irrefutably significant in their role as buffers against the struggles of life. Studies by Luthans et al. (2017) have highlighted the concept of psychological capital. The conceptualisation and significance of psychological capital demonstrate its multidimensional structure. An extensive review of the literature suggests that social support, hope and resilience have a substantial impact on well-being. However, the impact and the buffering potential of these psycho-social resources may be altered in the context of the informal sector where economic hardships are debilitating. Despite several attempts to understand the social and psychological resources available to marginalised populations and the kind of impact they have on their well-being, many areas remain underexplored. These include a dearth of literature and research on the role of cultural factors and stigma in India. In addition, there is substantial ignorance of intersectional realities such as caste or migration status, and a scant focus on employer-employee dynamics. To contribute to this existing gap in the available literature, the present study would attempt to translate the existing scales into the Hindi language, to help explore culturally relevant dimensions and to ensure an essential transfer of intent. A thorough consideration of emographic details and realities of the participants, including their financial, migration and other social parameters, has been incorporated. In line with this rationale of diving into enquiring about such psychologically pertinent resources and their effects on the individual’s well-being, a research study was undertaken with a special emphasis on the variables of social support and well-being in the female domestic workers. The research also aims to integrate the moderating effects of other psychological resources, like hope and resilience, in having a crucial impact on the well-being of these women. Corresponding to the life struggles and challenges that these women are exposed to, we require a prompt assessment of the level of already prevalent social support in their lives, along with the presence of psychological resources like Hope and Resilience, which can act as buffers as well as mediators or moderators affecting the relationship between Social Support and Well-Being. The present research is theoretically in line with the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory states how an individual strives to protect, obtain and safeguard their resources. It also highlights how resource loss is seen to have a significant impact on the well-being of an individual. The theory also discusses how chronic resource deprivation (especially in the case of economic hardships) can cause a significant altering impact on the psychosocial factors and their influence. The rationale thus helps to build a context-specific understanding of psycho social resources and their impact against the backdrop of severe economic constraints in the lives of the workers of the informal sector.

Based on this rationale, the following objectives were formulated-

- To measure the level of Social Support in Female Domestic help workers present in the North and South districts of Delhi.
- To measure the level of Hope in female domestic help workers in the North-and South district of Delhi.
- To examine the relationship between Social support and well-being in Female Domestic Help Workers.
- To examine the moderating effect of Hope on the relationship between Social Support and Well-Being.
- To examine the moderating effect of Resilience on the relationship between Social Support and Well-being.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses were also formulated-

- H01-There is no significant relationship between social support and well-being among Indian domestic help workers.
- H02- Hope does not significantly moderate the relationship between social support and well-being.
- H03-Resilience does not significantly moderate the relationship between social support and well-being among female domestic help workers

Methodology

Participants

A total of 117 female domestic help workers employed in the region of North and South districts of Delhi were approached. All the participants belonged to the age range of 25-55 years. They primarily belonged to the lower socio-economic strata.

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was employed. All the participants were approached and interviewed in an ethical manner. The participation for the study was completely voluntary. Incentives in the form of small food packets were provided to the participants after the completion of the interviews. Names of the participants were also kept optional for disclosure and their anonymity was ensured.

Measures

Composite Social Capital Index

Social capital measurement through standardised items (taken from the dimensions of Healy and Acquah, 2002). The scale has been extensively used in the Indian context with proper standardisation and reliability measures (Banerjee and Kundu, 2022). This index was originally employed in a study involving informal workers in India. Given its credibility, it has been used as a suitable measure in the present study, which assesses the level of social support among female Indian domestic help workers. The index was translated in Hindi language and was adapted to suit the cultural relevance. The scale mostly has Likert scale items, the response format of these items mainly consists of options like agree-disagree, frequency based etc. Social capital scores were computed using Likert-scale responses. Since no standardized norms exist for the adapted scale, interpretation was based on sample mean and standard deviation to classify low, moderate, and high levels of social capital.

WHO-5- Well being index:

For the assessment of well being of the female domestic house helps, WHO-5 well being index (1998) was used. It is a brief 5 item scale which assess the subjective well being of the respondents over the past two weeks. It is a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("At no time") to 5 ("All of the time"). Total scores range from 0 to 25 and are multiplied by 4 to obtain a final score between 0 and 100, with higher scores indicating greater well-being. The standardised Hindi version of the scale was used in the research study to cater to the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of the sample. The scale has been known for its universal credibility and cross-cultural fairness. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale ranges from 0.82 to 0.9, indicating a high internal consistency.

12 items PsyCap Questionnaire or PCQ-12

The level of Psychological capital in the female Domestic help workers was assessed using the standardised subscale items of Hope and Resilience from the entire Pscap-12 scale (Luthans et al,2007). The scale consists of a total of 12 items across 4 subscales of Hope, Resilience, Self- efficacy and Optimism. Out of these subscales, only two subscales consisting of the items corresponding to Hope and Resilience were utilised for this research study keeping in mind their relevance with respect to the context of female Indian domestic help workers. Hope and Resilience were chosen as the suitable measures because of their potential significant contextual impact in determining the study sample's well-being. The responses of the participants were recorded on a 6-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The subscale scores were computed averaging item responses with the presence of higher scores indicating greater levels of Hope and Resilience.

Procedure

On the basis of an intensive review of literature, the study was designed to understand the relationship between Social support and well-being in the Indian Domestic help Workers with the moderating effects of Hope and Resilience. In order to fulfil the objectives of the research, Composite Social Capital Index, Social capital measurement through standardised items (taken from the dimensions of Healy and Acquaaah, 2002), WHO-5 well being index (1998) and subscales of Hope and Resilience from PCQ-12 questionnaire were used as measures. The participants were approached through local NGOs and referrals were obtained through snowball sampling. House helps were also approached in public parks for brief interviews. A structured interview schedule consisting of the items from each of the measures, along with the items pertaining to the demographic information of the participants were used for data collection. The participants were first given a brief introduction regarding the interview, followed by a complete description about the process of interview which would be followed. An informed consent was then taken prior to interviewing. Interview technique was used owing to the fact that most of the house helps were illiterate and could not self-report their responses. A total of 117 interviews were conducted over a period of 3 months. The entire process of data collection took about 15-20 minutes per participant. The interviews were conducted with utmost ethical sincerity, wherein the principles of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality were followed indiscriminately. The participants were also provided with incentives in the form of food packets for their invaluable participation. Post the collection of data, all the responses obtained on each of the dimensions were scored for further statistical analysis and interpretation. Correlation and Regression analysis were conducted for understanding and analysing the available data comprehensively. Jamovi by R studio was used to compute the statistical results corresponding to descriptive, correlational and regression analysis.

Results and Findings

Table 1 -Demographic characteristics of the sample of Indian Female Domestic Help Workers (N=90)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	20-25	5	4.9
	26-30	18	17.5
	31-35	35	34.0
	36-40	25	24.3
	41-45	13	12.6
	46-51	4	3.9
	51 and above	2	1.9
Duration of employment	5 years	75	83.3%
	>5 years	15	16.7%
Educational level	No Formal Education	67	74.7%
	5 th -8 th (Primary)	70	78.1%
	8 th -10 th (Secondary)	14	15.6%
	10 th -12 th (Senior Secondary)	6	6.3%
No. of members in the family	3	5	5.3%
	4-6	74	82.1%

	More than 6	11	12.6%
No. of children in the family	2	28	31.6%
	3	37	41.1%
	4	18	20%
	More than 4	7	7.8%
Monthly Income (INR)	1500-2000	7	7.8%
	2000-6000	52	57.8%
	>6000	31	34.4%

The participants were mainly women from lower socio-economic backgrounds with limited or no formal education

Note- Demographics are based on valid responses. Some demographic information was unavailable for all the participants.

Descriptive Statistics

Techniques of descriptive statistics, including analysis of mean, median, standard deviation and regression, were utilised to understand the characteristic features of the measures of Social support, Hope, Resilience and Well-being in the constituted sample of the Female Domestic Help workers. The overall mean scores were suggestive of moderate levels of Psychological resources with hope ($M=4.60, SD=0.75$) and Resilience ($M=4.54, SD=0.77$), both of these variables revealed higher values. The mean score obtained on the dimension of Well-being ($M=7.49, SD=4.89$) were indicative of its poor levels among the participants. The total social capital score ($M=21.68, SD=7.37$) were suggestive of variability in perceived social support.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of the study variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Social Support	21.68	7.37
Hope	4.60	0.75
Resilience	4.54	0.77
Well-being	7.49	4.89

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

The findings of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis were as follows-

A multilevel hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether social support is predictive of Well-being in the sample. Analysis was further conducted to analyse if Hope and Resilience moderated the relationship of Social support and Well-being. The findings indicated that Social support was not a significant predictor of Well-being ($B=0.286, p=0.518$). On similar lines, Hope was also not found to be a significant predictor ($B=2.818, p=0.286$). Resilience also showed a negative trend ($B=-3.785, p=0.075$), it was reflective of a high value, however, it did not reach the level of significance either. The interaction effects of the variables were also found to be insignificant ; Social support and Resilience ($B=0.104, p=0.306$); Social Support and Hope ($B=-0.145, p=0.232$). On the basis of these findings, the null hypotheses (Ho1-There is no significant relationship between social support and well being among Indian domestic help workers ; Ho2- Hope doesnot significantly moderate the relationship between social support and well-being and Ho3-Resilience doesnot significantly moderate the relationship between social support and well being among female domestic help workers) were retained.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Well-being

Predictor	B	p-value
Social Support	0.286	0.518
Hope	2.818	0.286
Resilience	-3.785	0.075
Social Support × Resilience	0.104	0.306
Social Support × Hope	-0.145	0.232

Note: **B** =Coefficient of Regression; Statistical significance was considered at $p < 0.05$

Discussion and Interpretation

The findings of the study were in sharp contrast to the expected and conventional assumptions of Positive psychology. The results were indicative of no significant relationship between social support and well-being. Resilience and Hope were also not found to have a significant moderating effect on the relationship of social support and well-being.

The findings of the present research study are indicative of a qualitative difference in the understanding and conceptualisation of the psycho-social variables for this community. For instance, the presence of social networks for these workers maybe based on a sense of shared vulnerability which may further strengthen emotional bonding. In this context the functionality of social support as a resource may completely change. The other key findings also revealed moderate levels of hope ($M=4.60$) and resilience ($M=4.54$) and poor levels of well-being. This is reflective of how inner psychological strengths are often not found to be linked to an externalised enhanced well-being. The explanation of this finding is grounded in a socio-economic reality of extreme poverty and hardship. Gurtoo (2017) has intensively discussed how the workers of the informal economy, especially the women get trapped in a state of economic impoverishment. A survey of 1256 such informal women workers from Karnataka is suggestive of the state of existing power imbalance between the employers and the employees and how it results in a compromised state of well-being of the workers. In contexts of extreme economic struggles, gender based hardships, abuse and harassment, psychological resources are often found to have an insignificant impact. In these contexts, resilience can be previewed as a survival mechanism or an additional burden which must be borne to sustain through their lives. These findings and results highlight the imperative need for curation of a contextualised framework to understand the relevance of Positive psychology and its associated principles especially for formulating an adaptive intervention for the welfare of the marginalised communities.

Limitations

The current research is limited to a sample of the Female Domestic Help workers only from the North and South districts of Delhi-NCR. This could have resulted in a limited generalisability of the results. The use of a cross-sectional research design and self-report measures could have also resulted in a brief and limited understanding of the psychological mechanisms. The future research work can incorporate longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to obtain a more comprehensive picture of reality.

Conclusion

The research study highlights an attempt to understand the psycho-social realities of the Indian Female Domestic Help Workers by assessing the prevalence of multiple resources like Social support, Hope, Resilience and their relationship with Well-being. The findings of the study indicated that Social Support, Hope, and Resilience did not predict Well-being among the Indian Female Domestic Help Workers. The findings are strongly suggestive of the predominant effect of structural economic hardships in altering the impact of psychosocial resources, especially in vulnerable communities. There is a requirement of a collaborative, intersectional and comprehensive approach to understand Well-being in the Female Domestic Help workers, especially from a socio-culturally sensitive lens, which helps in curating a nuanced understanding.

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