

Visible Work, Invisible Workers: A Study of Women Home Based Workers in Pakistan

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Abstract The paper examines the socio-cultural and economic factors which are adversely affecting home based women workers; the interdependence of these factors and the needed intervention. It provides situational analysis and looks at those critical elements which construct the invisibility, vulnerability, social exclusion, gender disparity and vicious cycle of poverty among the home based women workers. This qualitative study used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study findings indicated that women home based workers were invisible and unrecognized; bound by socio-cultural barriers; and lacking awareness and access to social protection facilities. Suggestions on relevant policies should be crafted to properly recognize the home based women workers, including the need for minimum wage legislation, social security benefits, proper skill training, a more permanent work, timely wages, housing facilities and access to loans and credits for this population.

Keywords Women Home Based Workers, Invisibility, Vulnerability, Gender Disparity, Social Protection, Social Exclusion

Introduction

Home based work is becoming an important part of the economic transformation process. Its growth is significantly linked to the globalization of industry and the continuous search for cheaper labour and more efficient means of production. In today's global market, it is not unusual for a single garment or electronic device to be a collective effort of workers in two or three countries, most of whom are not even aware of each other's existence and the nature or type of final product they produce.

Home based work constitutes a significant part of an informal economy. According to one estimate, there are three billion home based workers working around the world. In South Asia, the number of home based workers is estimated at over half a billion, the majority of them (80%)

are women workers (Homenet Pakistan, 2005). In Pakistan, almost 80% of total labour force is engaged in informal sector and more than 50% of this consists of women. Approximately, 77% to 83% of the women in informal sector are home based workers (Homenet Pakistan, 2005).

Home based work is a "difficult empirical concept" (Cunningham & Gomez, 2004). In Asia, the term "home based worker" is usually used to refer to women who work in their homes with the work sourced from middlemen. In developed countries, "home based workers" are "piece-rate" workers who are involved in different phases of production and who also get work through middleman. The International Labour Organization (ILO) uses the term "homeworker" for those workers who work from their homes to produce intermediary goods. Other studies have used the terms home based workers and home workers interchangeably, while others have used varied criteria to define home based work (Bajaj, 1999).

Historically, there have been a strong link between women, home and home based economic activity. As home based work was seen as part of personal, private and domestic choice, it was thus invisible and unrecognized. Women, who have been restricted within the confines of their homes, found an opportunity to raise their family income by doing home based work. Due to the changing economic trends of shifting the formal economy into informal sector, decreasing employment opportunities in formal sector, growing practice of outsourcing, have all given rise to home based work. Women, being the flexible workforce, became the major source of home based work.

Pakistani women are generally assumed a non-productive population in the society. Although studies on labor and women are providing evidence of the growing share of the women's work in the productive economy, but this work force work under poor working conditions. Socio-economic and cultural value system of the society also affect women to a considerable extent. Those who work in their homes are victims of social restraints, evolved in the name of honor and dignity of women.

It is a matter of grave concern that home based women workers, while contributing to national economy, have

miserable lives. This research focuses on evaluating the socio-cultural, economic, political and legal issues of women engaged in home based work. In such a situation where definition of 'home based worker' is still under discussion and in the absence of structured institutional normative patterns for the informal economy, not much academic research have been conducted. The focus has also not been laid on the multidimensional issues of home based women workers in the context of social development and the contribution which they are making to the national economy in Pakistan. This neglect in research has occurred despite the fact that some organizations have expressed concerns about this type of employment.

Study Objectives

In order to understand the challenges and struggles faced by the women home based workers, the study had adopted various study objectives. It is the aim of the study to [1] examine the profile, type and nature of work undertaken by women home based workers; [2] analyze the some main challenges faced by women home based workers including low wages, invisibility, gender disparity and mainstreaming of their contribution in the national economy; [3] determine the level of awareness of the home based workers regarding their rights, micro credit schemes and market trends.

Literature Review

Both micro and macro studies have shown that the informal economy is growing rapidly, and has formed an integral part of the modern capitalist economies, particularly in developing countries (Chen, 2004). Informal employment constitutes 72 percent of the work force that is not engaged in agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan countries, 65 percent in Asia and 51 percent in Latin America (Chen, 200; ILO, 2002). The fluctuations of global markets, impact of globalization and the pervasive dependency of capitalist intensive technology have collectively contributed to the informalisation of the workforce (UNHSP, 2006; Chen, 2004). Women constitute a major component of the informal workforce. Lack of employment, minimal education, chronic poverty and cultural and religious constraints have forced many women to engage in this type of work (Hiralal, 2010).

For example, studies in Latin America, Asia and Africa, where home based work is prevalent, the place of work (home) is a common determining variable in identifying and defining home based work. However, the nature of work undertaken, the degree of autonomy and remuneration vary in different parts of the world; thereby creating confusion in the conceptualization of these informal workers. Home workers are independently employed workers, piece-rate workers, contract wage laborers and small family firms who usually work for a "middle man" (Cunningham & Gomez, 2004).

Statistical data as shared by Homenet South East Asia (an NGO) that there are millions of home based women workers

who are over burdened and had been facing discrimination. Another statement issued by Kathmundu Declaration mentioned that out of 300 million home based workers in the world, 50 million are present in South Asia and among these 50 million; 80 percent are women. It cannot be said that these calculations are correct estimates, as home based workers are invisible and uncounted (Donna, 2007). In South Africa, another report disclosed that income of 65 percent women workers was less than the minimum wage rate. In Australia, women home based workers, locally known as out workers, earn about one third of the standard pay rate.

The great challenge with regards to women home based workers is the non-availability of statistics about them. Their presence on world level cannot be exactly determined. Very few countries have collected statistics about this population at the national level. In 1990, after reviewing 70 countries, ILO found that only seven countries have collected data on home workers. These countries include the Federal Republic of Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Italy, Japan, Morocco, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (Hiralal, 2010).

Another dimension which has been observed are the studies that focused on just a particular craft. However, the findings of such studies just give an idea of the concentration of home based women workers in a pertinent craft or sector across the world, for example, in Mexico, garment industry constitutes 30 percent of home based workers, 45 percent in Venezuela and 31 percent in Argentina, 38 percent in Thailand, 25 to 39 percent in Philippines and 20 percent in Portugal (Jhabvala & Tate, 1996).

In Asia, particularly India, home based work is both an urban and rural phenomenon. Women are predominantly visible in this form of work. They can be found working from home as weavers, *bidi* (cigarette) rollers, potters, *papad* (bread) makers, garment producers and craft-workers. Many work on a piece rate basis for selected companies. The company provides the raw materials such as bamboo-sticks. Women are often assisted by their children in the production of *agarbatti* (incense sticks) rolling. However, the overall income levels of these women are generally low. Self Employed Workers Association (SEWA) Academy in its study documented that in India, 85 percent of the workers sampled in 14 trades were earning 50 percent less than officially declared poverty rate. Subsequently, as in Latin America, given the poor remuneration, many women supplement their income by engaging in domestic labor, petty trading and hawking of fruit and vegetables (Bajaj, 1999).

In every country, women's representation in the informal economy depends upon the importance of their work type in that country. For example, the garment sector is valued and dominated in Bangladesh and Pakistan. So, the home based women workers are usually involved in crafts related to garments, like embroidery and stitching. Similarly, in India, about 45 percent of non-agricultural female workforce are home based. In Pakistan and India, women workers are involved in multiple home based economic activities. The

process of urbanization in developing countries has increased the proportion of home based women workers in cities and semi urban areas. Due to this urbanization process, a major shift in traditional crafts has also taken place from rural areas to urban areas, where new trends have also been introduced.

In Asia, particularly in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the education profiles of home based workers, predominantly that of women, remains low (Bajaj, 1999). Very few women enter formal school and thus remain illiterate (Hiralal, 2010). It can be inferred from the relevant literature that illiteracy has badly affected the status of women home based laborers. The government has not taken any special initiative regarding their education. The situation has become worst for home based women workers due to social exclusion, lack of mobility and gender discrimination.

In some societies, cultural practices also play an important role in the development of home based work. For example, religious expectations like observing '*pardah*' in Islamic and South Asian countries determine the work place of women at home. The social exclusion from the main formal work also keeps women working at home.

There is no specific legislation all over South Asia including Pakistan and most of these women home based workers belong to the less privileged and less advantaged segment of the economic sector, with no social and legal rights. The home based workers are working silently in isolation and enjoy no rights, as they are not even regarded as workers by the law (Shahzad, 2008).

According to a report, Denial and Discrimination: Labor Rights in Pakistan, compiled by the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER), women home based laborers constitute 75 percent of the informal sector of the economy and constitutes about 90 percent of the total labor force in Pakistan. According to the same report, the economic statistics of the country does not have any classification called 'home based'. Nonetheless, the economic statistics reflect that 57.1 percent of the women (home based workers) are involved in production sector and 31.2 percent are engaged in services sector.

The national survey (2005), undertaken by the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) indicates that 51 percent of home based women workers put up six to eight hours of productive work, including three to four hours of care work. If domestic chores are added up, approximately a total of 9 to 12 hours work day emerges.

"Labor laws in Pakistan do not apply to home based work and have not been amended unlike in India where the Minimum Wage Act has been extended to cover some sections of the home based workers and several acts offer protection to home based workers," says the PILER (2008). Pakistan has not so far ratified the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on home based work enacted in 1996.

The home based workers are not eligible to social security, health care and child care facilities. The situation becomes more serious in the absence of proper social security system

and specific laws in developing countries to protect the rights of these workers. Their ignorance about these fundamental human rights diminishes the possibility to bring betterment in their status.

This state of affair is not better even in the more developed countries, as the home based workers, due to lack of education, language problems and legal barriers, do not have access to the benefits and social protection.

Apparently, it is propagated that women home based laborers have flexible working hours, comfortable work environment, able to perform multiple activities so they can save time. However, the hidden pressures of market and invisible but continuous exploitation by the subcontractors keep them under constant stress and anxiety. However, due to poverty, these workers continue to be dependent on the subcontractors.

In addition to lack of space, many of these homes lack adequate lighting or other facilities. They are also vulnerable to fire, theft and both natural and civil disturbances. As many of the workers have no title to their homes, they may also find themselves literally "out on the street" at the whim of husbands, in-laws, landlords or local governments (Jhabvala & Tate, 1996).

Women, due to gender discrimination, are excluded from the main stream of development sector. They are also not included in economic, social, cultural and religious activities. According to GDI (Gender-related Development Index), Pakistan ranks 107 out of 140 countries. GDI includes aspects of life expectancy, education and income status of women. However, GDI has limitations due cultural differences across countries including Pakistan.

Another parameter which reflects the condition of women relates to GEM (Gender Empowerment Measurement) which gauges gender inequality in economic and political participation and decision making, Pakistan ranks at 71 out of 88 countries in 2004-05 (UNHDR, 2005). The major reason for women's low economic status is their non-recognition as paid workers and they are taken as unpaid housewives.

In either of the economic sectors, formal or informal, women are generally employed in low level jobs; earn low wages, without any job security and facing sexual harassment at work place. Their illiteracy, lack of technical and vocational training and skills and their restricted mobility are the major factors for their low status. Women are usually given contractual jobs on the basis of gender discrimination and their work remains undervalued.

The issues of social protection in developing countries are framed in the context of making poverty alleviation policies and programs for home based women workers and to provide them with social security benefits including welfare benefits.

Methodology

Respondents

The respondents for this study are women home based

workers of 20 - 60 age group, were engaged in production activities, contribute to the family income, work on piece rate or own-account workers within the confines of their homes. The types of work vary from doing jobs such as peeling dry fruits, making money boxes to trouser stitching, book binding, shoe making and many other suitable and possible jobs.

Data Collection

The study was conducted in different areas and towns, depending upon the availability of respondents. For this purpose, snowball and purposive sampling techniques were used. Another important reason for using this theory was the diversified, scattered and distributed manufacturing processes involved in the various crafts of the respondents. Grounded theory was found to be suitable to record the original experiences of women workers, within their own home settings, capturing their own words and views, concentrating on their own interpretations. Finally it helped to draw results from respondents' perspectives.

Keeping in view the hidden status of women home based workers, the selection of the towns was made on the basis of their availability, identified primarily by the NGOs, which are working with them and then by getting information about other home based workers in close proximity to the one being interviewed. The selected areas of Lahore city for this study were *Shahdra Town, Badami Bagh, Shalimar Town, Kot Lakh Pat, Nishter Town and Baghban Pura*.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were collected to assess how gender, race, age and education levels impacted on this research activity. Detailed questions were asked about their work history, work conditions at home and occupational risks to identify some of the challenges the women confronted during work. This generated important information about family businesses and community life. It also permitted the analysis of gender roles in different households and in varied socio-economic settings. The details of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented as in Table 1 -Appendix I.

Data Collection Experience

It took 40 to 50 minutes to conduct an interview with a woman home based worker. Data collection was completed in 10 days. The women, who were interviewed, were initially suspicious, apprehensive and hesitant to respond. So, there was a need to build a rapport with them and in most of the cases they became cooperative. As most of the home based workers were illiterate, the researcher had to provide frequent clarification about the intent of questions.

Findings and Analysis

During the in-depth study of women home based workers,

it was observed that they were illiterate, dispersed (usually in clusters in different areas of Lahore), unrepresented, working in very poor conditions, they were earning low wages, having no legal and social protection. The major themes that emerged from the study is presented in the following.

Low Wages

The study found that the women home based workers were getting very low wages (between Rs. 30 – 40 or \$ 0.45 per day) for working 12 to 14 hours per day, while working in a difficult and unhealthy environment. According to the respondents, there were no specific rules and regulations on the wages; rather they vary for the same work in various or sometimes in the same locality. The wages were not paid regularly and to keep the workers tied to the employer, partial payments were made. Some of qualitative data gathered from the interview are as follow:

A woman home based worker (Respondent 2) who is making money boxes for the last six years receives only 12 rupees for cutting and painting one GURS (144 pieces) of money boxes. As highlighted by the respondent, *"We have to do this tedious job but we receive a meager amount in return"*.

An embroidery artisan (Respondent 9), 50 years old, had mentioned that *"I have to sit from morning till late night. My eyesight has become weak but the wages are quite low"*.

Persistent Poverty

The study gave the reflection of inter-generational poverty which persists in almost all of the families of the women home based workers. Their miserable circumstances spoke for appalling state of affairs which were needed to be addressed using social protection measures and other related policies as a mean of helping mechanism to reduce poverty and susceptibility among home based laborers.

A dry fruit peeler (Respondent 1), while talking about persistent poverty said, *"For the last 20 years, I have seen women doing this work. The home based workers cannot even raise their voice for enhancement of their wage rate. The reason being there are so many other workers available who are ready to do this work on minimum wages due to extreme poverty"*.

Middleman

The role of a middleman is substantial in the case of work at home. The middleman is usually a person who lives in the same vicinity and provides work to home based workers as an agent of the manufacturer or company owner. He engages women home based laborers and gives them work for meager remuneration. He decides to whom to give work and the amount of money to be given in return. This makes him very dominant, and allows him to take advantage of their poor circumstances.

This is evident from the statement of another dry fruit peeler (Respondent 5), 55 years old, confirmed that the middleman was living in the same community and became rich within days. *“I am paid Rs. 30 for one kg but it takes a whole day to finish my work but whenever I requested him to increase the wages, he always turns down the requests for better payment, citing some excuses. I know that I am paid very low for such a laborious work which requires lot of time to do but I know whenever I make requests he can replace me and will employ other workers, who are ready to work due to their extremely poor circumstances, because of the fear of replacement, nobody takes stand in front of him”* she narrated.

The home based workers generally depend on the middleman and contractors to take raw material and to sell their goods in the market to avoid fare of transportation, as they live in distant areas. They also have to look after their domestic chores and take care of their children as most of the times they cannot afford to go outside. In most of the cases, gender discrimination and social exclusion were also the major factors which drastically increase their reliance on the middleman.

Health Hazards

During the study, it was found that most of them were living in very small houses, occupying one room with a small veranda. They were cooking and doing the work at the same place. Their children were sleeping at the same area. Double burden of domestic duties with their work multiplied their health to be at risk.

Other working conditions that can affect health of the women home based workers include long working hours, contact with dangerous work material; and unhygienic and uncomfortable work environments.

Invisible Status

The study also revealed that invisible and non-recognized status of home based women workers led to the perception that they are just housewives, who work during their leisure time. The realities in the field were altogether different. They were full time earners who work for long hours. Being confined within the four walls of their homes was another fact which is responsible for the low status as workers in the eyes of the people. They definitely have the fundamental right of doing productive work, but this right should be accompanied with the right of dignity and right of decent standard of living.

The study observed that most of the home based workers were involved in work from morning till night and working for 12 to 14 hours continuously, to meet the challenges of their poor circumstances. A trouser stitcher (Respondent 14) mentioned that *“Normally I stitch 20 pieces in a day. I earn 300 rupees daily. I work from 7:00 am till 11:00 pm”*. She was making a significant contribution in the family income.

Gender Perspective

The gravity of the situation increases when women also face gender discrimination with this work exploitation. This gender discrimination, in terms of cultural barriers and social exclusion increases their vulnerability.

A trouser stitcher (Respondent 14), aged 50 years, narrated her experience of working in a factory, *“Before doing this, I worked for another factory and it was really a bad experience for me. The environment was not congenial and women friendly as there were so many staring eyes around me”*.

Another myth which prevails about the home based women workers is that they are mere “house wives” who do their work in free time and their home based work is a leisure time activity. This study confirms that home based workers are indeed “full time earners”, who contribute substantially to the family income.

There are strong evidences of gender discrimination with women home based workers. Women were doing all types of economic activities, which was different from unpaid domestic responsibilities such as preparing food, bringing water, family care and cleaning.

Another gender perspective of women home based work was that in most of the cases their daughters were also involved in home based work. Their children were between the ages of 8 to 25 years old, which is a potential period for an individual to obtain education, to learn more skills, to get formal trainings and to be economically independent but all these aspects were missing in context of home based women workers.

Human Rights

All women home based workers were uneducated. They did not send their children to school due to poverty and especially when the girls were also contributing with their mothers in the home based work. In addition, since the government schools were situated far away from their homes, schooling becomes not as important target in their daily activities. No proper arrangement for education was available in these schools. The fee of private schools was also quite high and this has somewhat hinder the children to obtain the necessary education.

Dissemination of knowledge is a human right and is necessary to bring attitudinal change in human beings to make their behavior civilized and productive. In a society where educated segment of the population is not aware of the basic rights, the poor, uneducated home based workers did not have any knowledge of human rights which is necessary for the enjoyment of healthy and constructive life.

Social protection is needed when women home based workers cannot fulfill their needs by their own efforts. The basic fundamental need is a decent income. If a person can work, this need can be met by giving him more work. The provision of work will make workers self-reliant and ultimately they will contribute to the national income. The

home based workers also lack continuous work. If they are provided with continuous work, their social protection and social security needs can be addressed adequately.

The social security needs of women home based workers are basically health, insurance, old age pensions and housing. Further, the invisibility and non-recognition of the home based women workers do not provide them access to any social security facilities.

Discussion

An effort has been made in this academic investigation to locate the roots of the allocation of physical and social spaces for women in patriarchal system of society. Society identifies two types of categories: public and external; and private and domestic. Public and external sphere of life is allocated to 'men' exclusively and private and domestic for 'women'. The structural patterns of public sphere were not women friendly but rather these were prohibited areas for women. As a result, this division and possession of public / private segregation became an uneven allocation of powers.

This study raised several queries which require several comparative analyses: Do inequalities present in existing legal system give birth to economic inequalities or do economic inequalities develop unjust legal codes? What is the relationship between gender and poverty? Is gender discrimination the major factor for the poor status of women or is poverty the main axis to keep them discriminated? (Statistics show less Gender Disparity in developed countries). Does existence determine consciousness or consciousness is determined by existence? (Marxist perspective)

A deep connection was found between the poor circumstances of home based workers and gender discrimination. The economic perspective of home based women workers was analyzed on the basis of grounded theory. The dual standard of society has created tension in the social system of family and community. On the one side, economic inequalities of society push women to struggle hard to meet the basic needs of the family while doing work at home. While on the other side, man due to fear of losing control over their female relation put restrictions on their external mobility and their interaction. So there is a need to change the social perception about gender roles.

The life of women home based workers reflects the historical continuation of gender discrimination. Social attitudes and local cultural realities also conceal the contribution of women in family income. Women, as the social product, themselves also do not like to come out of those traditional cultural costumes which the society allocates to men and women to wear. These cultural costumes carry the masks of different roles, for males, as bread earners, in the role of head of the household, and women, as house wives, in the role of subordination. This ideology completely denies the real life situation where they

both are tied in the vicious circle of poverty. Women are making the substantial contribution in the family income but according to the social norms the both gender have to keep their faces according to the acceptable standards of society.

Acute poverty is a major problem of Pakistan, like other developing countries. The poor in Pakistan have not only economic problems but social services and infrastructures are also critical issues in case of women home based workers. There is no specific legislation for women home based workers, all over South Asia including Pakistan, and most of them are among the most under privileged segment of the society. They have no social and legal recognition of their work. They are working in isolation and enjoy no rights, as they are not even regarded as workers by the law.

The difficulty in the context of home based workers exists in two dimensions. Firstly, the activities of home based workers remain invisible so they could not be included in international statistics of labor force. Secondly, appropriate guideline to define home based work is not available. So, this population cannot be estimated in the light of confused parameters present on international level. This state of affairs also create problem in the way of international comparison of home based women workers.

Home based work is usually confused with house work or domestic work. There are many reasons that create misconception about the clear definition of home based work. For example, in traditional societies of South Asian countries, where women's social mobility is restricted, women need permission to go outside and cannot develop their social relations on their own. In many cases, they interact with outside people only on family level. In South Asian Region, family honor is attached greatly with women, which leads towards women traditional isolation within the society. This social construct influence women themselves and home based women workers, who spend 12 to 14 hours in economic activities to support their families, do not know from where they are getting work, where does it go after finishing. They do not perceive themselves as workers or bread earners who are supporting their families after doing a hard labor of 12 to 15 hours. This perception of not being workers or earners does not give them the confidence to negotiate their wage rates, to adopt some measures to make their working conditions better. Their only objective to earn more is not achieved by making contacts with markets and learning more skills, instead only with more work.

The first most important step towards their empowerment is to internalize the concept that they are actually the 'real workers' who are doing work to support their families, who are involved in production process, contribute in national income and ultimately to the global economy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study indicated that women home based workers were invisible and unrecognized, bound by

socio-cultural barriers, lacking awareness and access to fundamental human rights and social protection facilities, living and working in extremely miserable, unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. They are also terribly exploited by middlemen, completely ignored by the Government, despite of the fact that they are major contributors in the national economy and living in persistent poverty, compelled to face all these circumstances to earn their subsistence. Specific findings with respect to gender discrimination and disparities being faced by women home based workers and their practical and strategic needs were also studied.

The other factors which have adversely affected the home based workers are non-conformance of labor laws by the employers or the middleman, poor enforcement of existing laws by the Government, for example provision of leaves, fixed work hours, overtime and better working and living conditions. The formal sector workers enjoy these facilities and privileges, in comparison to home based workers, which prove the unequal treatment practiced by the employers, affecting the market equation. The home based workers are the best human resource available to the employers and the factory owners to prepare their finished goods with minimal cost and no liability. These facts are further proved as the home based work and workers have substantially increased in the previous years, all across the world.

Non-documentation of this vibrant and intensive labor in national economy and official statistics, create hurdles in making labor laws for the rights of women home based workers. Consequently, they do not have job security, they cannot avail, medical, pension and provident fund facilities or paid holidays.

Based on these study findings, several recommendations were made by the researcher highlighting critical and potential areas which require decision making on the part of policy makers and the government, to improve the circumstances of women home based workers.

The Government should craft policies according to the indigenous specific conditions of women home based workers so that their contribution in the informal economy should be properly recognized to ensure the provision of social security benefits to them. A cover of minimum wage legislation should be provided to all home based women workers, irrespective of their work place. The home based workers should be given skill training, more work, timely wages, housing facilities and access to loans and credits.

The mechanism of governance is not user friendly and the complicated bureaucratic set up hinders the provision of services at grass root level. The illiteracy and poor status of home based women workers; with their gender disparity, does not allow them to be benefited in a useful manner. Therefore, the Government initiatives should be based upon

the situational analysis of women home based workers and should be simple and easily accessible to them.

The home based workers should be provided the opportunities to have direct links with markets so that they can avoid manipulation and exploitation of the middleman and consequently this will enhance their profit margins and earnings. The employers and middlemen should be made responsible and accountable for the maintenance of employment records of home based workers. It is the role of the employers and middlemen to ensure provision of legal and fundamental human rights, which includes the working conditions, wages, benefits, health and safety of home based women workers.

The rights of home based workers, which may include the reduction in child labor and fundamental human rights, should be protected by practicing the International Labor laws. The Government should ratify International Labor Organization Convention on Home Based Work and should develop a national policy to recognize home based women workers and should adopt appropriate legislation and provides safety nets for them.

The culture of unionization should be introduced as it is extremely lacking in case of the women home based workers. They should be supported by NGOs and labor unions, which can prevail to build sufficient safeguards for this large segment of the population.

The cooperative centers should be established to impart training to women home based workers with an objective to improve the quality of their work, to make them capable of negotiating better employment terms and conditions with their employers. Ultimately, home based worker should be able to look for own work orders without the involvement of a middleman and with good marketing skills to explore better markets for their products.

A comprehensive and focused research study needs to be commissioned at the earliest to collect valid and reliable statistical data about women home based workers so that the enormity of the situation could be gauged.

It is hoped that this study will not only add to the present sparse body of knowledge, rather it will also suggest to inculcate the acceptance level and the visibility status of home based women workers and to enhance the awareness level about indigenous, informal development sector of the country, which has not yet signed and ratified International Labor Organization's (ILO) Homework Convention C-177. This study will also be helpful in establishing comparison between different sectors or trades of home based women workers and will prove instrumental in determining the factors and their interdependence which is responsible for the low status of home based workers.

Appendix-1

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Item	Home Based Worker / Respondents	Nature of Work	No. of children	Age (Years)	Address
1	Respondent 1	Dry Fruit Peeling	06	45	Shahdra Town
2	Respondent 2	Money box making	08	55	Shahdra Town
3	Respondent 3	Jewelry Making	05	49	Shahdra Town
4	Respondent 4	Curtain Hooks making	03	40	Shahdra Town
5	Respondent 5	Dry Fruit Peeling	7	55	Shahdra Town
6	Respondent 6	Badge Making	07	45	Badami Bagh
7	Respondent 7	Badge Making	05	40	Badami Bagh
8	Respondent 8	Decorated frills & milk glass making	3	28	Badami Bagh
9	Respondent 9	Embroidery	5	50	Shalimar Town
10	Respondent 10	Decorated Balls Making	7	50	Badami Bagh
11	Respondent 11	Lace Making	5	50	Kot Lakh Pat
12	Respondent 12	Card Punching	Unmarried	25	Kot Lakh Pat
13	Respondent 13	Embroidery	3	30	Nishter Town
14	Respondent 14	Trouser Stitching	1	50	Nishter Town
15	Respondent 15	Book Binding	5	45	Nishter Town
16	Respondent 16	Shop Keeping	1	40	Nishter Town
17	Respondent 17	Shop keeping	7	55	Badami Bagh
18	Respondent 18	Garment's Stitching	4	55	Nishter Town
19	Respondent 19	Dry Fruit Peeling	8	60	Shahdra Town
20	Respondent 20	Shoe Making	5	40	Baghban Pura

Note: Respondents have been codified to ensure their confidentiality.

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