

Employee/Employer Relationship: an Examination of Challenges Faced by Domestic Workers/House-Helps in the University Community of Kortright

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between domestic workers (house helps) and their employers within the university community of Kortright, Fourah Bay College, Mountain Rural District, Western Area, presents significant Socio-economic and institutional challenges. This study examines the dynamics of these relationships, focusing on issues such as unfair labor practices, poor working conditions, lack of legal protections, and power imbalances rooted in class and gender disparities. Domestic workers in this setting who are most times women and migrants face exploitation, low wages, excessive workloads, and emotional or physical abuse in silence, with limited avenues for redress.

The university community, comprising academics, administrative staff, and students, employs domestic workers for household upkeep, yet formalized labor agreements are rare, leaving workers vulnerable. Additionally, cultural norms and economic desperation further entrench these inequities. This research explores how institutional policies and or the lack thereof, within Fourah Bay College and the broader Kortright community contribute to these challenges. It also assesses the role of labor laws and social attitudes in perpetuating or mitigating worker exploitation.

Using qualitative methods, including interviews with domestic workers, employers, and key stakeholders; this study highlights the lived experiences of domestic workers and proposes policy interventions to improve their welfare. Some of the key findings that came out included: exploitation and unfair labor conditions for domestic workers, power imbalances and gender/class dynamics and lack of legal and institutional protections. Recommendations include formalizing employment contracts, establishing grievance mechanisms, and promoting awareness campaigns on workers' rights. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to broader discussions on fair labor practices and social justice within academic communities in Sierra Leone.

This research underscores the urgent need for structural reforms to ensure dignity, fairness, and equity in domestic labor arrangements within university environments.

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Introduction

Domestic work is one of the oldest and most important occupations for millions of people around the world. It is rooted in the global history of slavery, colonialism and other forms of servitude and this has rendered the sector undervalued. Today, care work at home is important for the economy outside the household to function (ILO, 2010)

Statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO 2012) informs that at least, 52.6 million women and men above the age of 15 were domestic workers. However, domestic work is undervalued and considered a woman's domain because they have been traditionally trained and nurtured into those skills that later in their lives become very useful for their and family's survivability

The employer-employee relationship between domestic workers and their employers is a critical yet under-explored area of labor dynamics, particularly in Africa, where domestic work remains a significant source of employment for many, especially women (ILO, 2018). Domestic workers, often referred to as house-helps, play an indispensable role in maintaining households, yet they frequently face systemic challenges such as exploitation, poor working conditions, and limited legal protections (Chen, 2019). These issues are particularly pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where informal labor markets dominate, and domestic work is often excluded from formal labor regulations (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). In Sierra Leone, a country with a high prevalence of informal employment, domestic workers constitute a vulnerable group, facing unique challenges rooted in socio-economic inequalities, cultural norms, and weak institutional frameworks (Jalloh, 2021).

In Sierra Leone, domestic work is often characterized by long hours, low wages, and a lack of formal contracts, leaving workers susceptible to exploitation and abuse (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). The absence of specific labor laws protecting domestic workers exacerbates their vulnerability, as they are often excluded from the protections afforded to other categories of workers (ILO, 2018). Furthermore, cultural norms and gender dynamics play a significant role in shaping the employer-employee relationship, with domestic work being predominantly performed by women and girls who are often undervalued and marginalized (Jalloh, 2021). This marginalization is compounded by the lack of awareness among domestic workers about their rights and the limited avenues available for seeking redress (Chen, 2019).

The university community in Sierra Leone, particularly in areas like Kortright, presents a unique context for examining these challenges. Employers in such communities often

include academics, university staff, and other professionals who may hold significant socio-economic power over their domestic workers (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). This power imbalance can lead to exploitative practices, including underpayment, overwork, and even emotional or physical abuse (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). At the same time, the university community also has the potential to serve as a platform for advocacy and reform, given its role in shaping societal attitudes and policies (Jalloh, 2021).

This study seeks to comprehensively examine the challenges faced by domestic workers in the Kortright university community, with a focus on Sierra Leone and the broader African context. By exploring the working conditions, power dynamics, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural factors influencing the employer-employee relationship, the study aims to shed light on the systemic issues affecting domestic workers and propose actionable recommendations for improving their welfare. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of domestic labor dynamics in Africa and advocate for policies that ensure fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers in Sierra Leone and beyond.

Aim and Objectives of the Article

Aim

The aim of this article is to examine the challenges faced by domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship within the university community of Kortright, Sierra Leone, with a focus on understanding the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to their vulnerability. The study seeks to provide actionable recommendations to improve working conditions, promote fair treatment, and advocate for policy reforms that protect the rights and dignity of domestic workers in Sierra Leone and across Africa.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the working conditions of domestic workers in the Kortright university community:
 - Investigate the nature of their employment, including working hours, wages, and access to benefits such as health insurance and paid leave.
 - Examine the physical and emotional working environments, including instances of abuse or exploitation.
2. To analyze the power dynamics between domestic workers and their employers:
 - Explore the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence the employer-employee relationship.

- Identify instances of power imbalances, such as arbitrary dismissals, lack of formal contracts, and unfair treatment.
3. To evaluate the legal and institutional frameworks governing domestic work in Sierra Leone:
 - Review existing labor laws and policies to determine the extent to which they protect domestic workers.
 - Assess the awareness levels of domestic workers regarding their rights and the mechanisms available for seeking redress.
 4. To examine the role of socio-cultural norms in shaping the experiences of domestic workers:
 - Investigate how gender dynamics and cultural perceptions of domestic work contribute to the marginalization of domestic workers, particularly women and girls.
 - Explore the impact of societal attitudes on the valuation and treatment of domestic labor.
 5. To explore the unique dynamics of the university community in Kortright
 - Analyze the role of academic privilege and employer attitudes in shaping the working conditions of domestic workers.
 - Identify opportunities for advocacy and reform within the university community to promote fair labor practices.
 6. To propose actionable recommendations for improving the welfare of domestic workers
 - Suggest policy reforms to strengthen legal protections for domestic workers in Sierra Leone.
 - Recommend strategies for raising awareness about the rights of domestic workers among both employers and employees.
 - Advocate for the establishment of support networks and platforms for domestic workers to voice their concerns and seek assistance.

By addressing these objectives, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by domestic workers in Sierra Leone and provide a foundation for meaningful interventions that promote fair and dignified working conditions for this vulnerable group.

Statement of the Problem

Domestic workers, often referred to as househelps, play a vital role in maintaining households and supporting families, yet they remain one of the most vulnerable and

marginalized groups in Sierra Leone's labor force (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). Despite their contributions, domestic workers face systemic challenges, including poor working conditions, low wages, long hours, and a lack of formal labor protections (Jalloh, 2021). These issues are exacerbated by the informal nature of domestic work, which often excludes workers from the legal safeguards afforded to other categories of employees (ILO, 2018). In Sierra Leone, where informal employment dominates the economy, domestic workers are particularly susceptible to exploitation and abuse due to weak institutional frameworks and limited enforcement of labor laws (Adu-Amankwah, 2020).

Within the university community of Kortright, domestic workers face unique challenges shaped by the socio-economic dynamics of their employers, who are often academics, university staff, or professionals with significant socio-economic power (Jalloh, 2021). This power imbalance frequently leads to exploitative practices, such as underpayment, arbitrary dismissals, and even emotional or physical abuse (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). Additionally, cultural norms and gender dynamics further marginalize domestic workers, as the majority are women and girls who are often undervalued and subjected to discriminatory practices (Chen, 2019). The lack of awareness among domestic workers about their rights and the absence of formal mechanisms for redress compound their vulnerability, leaving them with little recourse to address grievances (ILO, 2018).

The problem is further aggravated by the absence of specific labor laws in Sierra Leone that address the unique needs of domestic workers. While the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011 provides general labor protections, it fails to explicitly cover domestic workers, leaving them excluded from critical benefits such as minimum wage guarantees, paid leave, and access to social security (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). This legal gap perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and marginalization, particularly in communities like Kortright, where domestic workers are essential yet often invisible.

This study seeks to address these issues by examining the challenges faced by domestic workers in the Kortright university community, with a focus on understanding the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to their vulnerability. By shedding light on these challenges, the study aims to advocate for policy reforms and practical interventions that promote fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers in Sierra Leone.

Relevance and Justification

Domestic workers, commonly referred to as househelps,

are an integral part of Sierra Leone's labor force, providing essential services that sustain households and support economic activities (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). However, despite their critical role, domestic workers in Sierra Leone remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, facing systemic challenges such as poor working conditions, low wages, and a lack of legal protections (Jalloh, 2021). These issues are particularly pronounced in the university community of Kortright, where domestic workers often serve academics, university staff, and professionals, creating a unique dynamic of power imbalance and exploitation (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). This article is highly relevant as it seeks to address these pressing issues, which have significant implications for social justice, labor rights, and economic development in Sierra Leone.

The relevance of this article is further underscored by the informal nature of domestic work in Sierra Leone, which excludes workers from the protections afforded by formal labor laws (ILO, 2018). The Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011, while providing general labor protections, fails to explicitly cover domestic workers, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). This legal gap perpetuates a cycle of marginalization, particularly for women and girls, who constitute the majority of domestic workers and are often subjected to discriminatory practices and cultural norms that undervalue their labor (Chen, 2019). By examining these issues, this article contributes to the growing body of literature on labor rights and gender equality in Sierra Leone, advocating for policy reforms that address the unique needs of domestic workers.

Moreover, the university community of Kortright provides a unique context for this study, as it reflects the intersection of academic privilege and labor exploitation. Domestic workers in this community often face challenges such as underpayment, arbitrary dismissals, and emotional or physical abuse, exacerbated by the socio-economic power dynamics between employers and employees (Jalloh, 2021). This article is justified in its focus on this community, as it highlights the role of academic institutions in shaping labor practices and advocates for their active involvement in promoting fair treatment and dignity for domestic workers.

The justification for this article also lies in its potential to inform policy and practice. By shedding light on the challenges faced by domestic workers in Sierra Leone, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening legal protections, raising awareness about workers' rights, and establishing support networks

for domestic workers (ILO, 2018). These interventions are critical for addressing the systemic inequalities that perpetuate the exploitation of domestic workers and for promoting inclusive economic growth in Sierra Leone.

In conclusion, this article is both relevant and justified, as it addresses a critical gap in the literature on labor rights in Sierra Leone and provides actionable insights for improving the welfare of domestic workers. By focusing on the university community of Kortright, the study highlights the unique challenges faced by domestic workers in this context and advocates for meaningful reforms that ensure fair treatment, dignity, and respect for this vulnerable group.

Central Argument Statement:

This article argues that domestic workers in the university community of Kortright, Sierra Leone, face systemic challenges rooted in power imbalances, weak legal protections, and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate their exploitation and marginalization. Despite their essential role in maintaining households and supporting economic activities, domestic workers are excluded from the formal labor protections provided under the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011, leaving them vulnerable to poor working conditions, low wages, and abuse (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). The power dynamics between domestic workers and their employers, who are often academics or university staff, further exacerbate these challenges, creating an environment where exploitation and unfair treatment are normalized (Jalloh, 2021).

The central argument is supported by evidence that highlights the informal nature of domestic work in Sierra Leone, which denies workers access to critical benefits such as minimum wage guarantees, paid leave, and social security (ILO, 2018). Additionally, cultural norms and gender dynamics play a significant role in undervaluing domestic labor, particularly for women and girls, who constitute the majority of domestic workers and face intersecting forms of discrimination (Chen, 2019). The university community of Kortright serves as a microcosm of these broader issues, reflecting the intersection of academic privilege and labor exploitation, where domestic workers are often subjected to long hours, arbitrary dismissals, and emotional or physical abuse (Adu-Amankwah, 2020).

This article contends that addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy reforms to strengthen legal protections for domestic workers, awareness campaigns to educate both employers and employees about workers' rights, and the establishment of support networks to provide domestic workers with avenues for redress (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020).

By advocating for these measures, the article underscores the importance of promoting fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers, not only in the Kortright university community but also across Sierra Leone and the broader African context.

Sociological Theories Addressing Domestic Worker-Employer Relationships in Sierra Leone's University Community

The challenges faced by domestic workers in the Kortright community of Fourah Bay College can be critically analyzed using key sociological theories that explain power dynamics, labor exploitation, and social stratification. The following theories are particularly relevant in the contemporary Sierra Leonean context, where informal labor arrangements, gender inequalities, and economic disparities shape domestic work relations.

Karl Marx's Conflict Theory

Marxist theory highlights the exploitation of labor under capitalist structures, where employers (the bourgeoisie) extract surplus value from workers (the proletariat) (Marx & Engels, 1848). In Sierra Leone, domestic workers—often from impoverished backgrounds—are paid meager wages for long hours of labor, reflecting a clear class-based exploitation (Jalloh, 2021). Many employers in university communities (academics, administrators) hold socio-economic power, reinforcing dependency and suppressing workers' bargaining power. The absence of formal contracts and labor protections exacerbates this imbalance, making conflict theory a crucial lens for understanding systemic worker oppression.

Feminist Theory (Intersectional Feminism)

Feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argue that oppression operates at the intersections of gender and class. In Sierra Leone, domestic work is highly feminized, with women and girls constituting the majority of the workforce (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). These workers face dual exploitation—both as low-wage laborers and as women subjected to patriarchal control within households. Employers often impose gendered expectations (e.g., childcare, cooking) while denying fair compensation. Feminist theory thus helps unpack how domestic workers' subjugation is compounded by their gender and socio-economic status.

Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Capital and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu (1986) posits that social hierarchies are maintained through cultural and symbolic power, where dominant groups impose their norms as “natural.” In

Fourah Bay College's community, employers often justify low wages and harsh treatment by framing domestic work as “unskilled” or “charity” for poor rural migrants (Abdullah, 2020). This symbolic violence normalizes exploitation, discouraging workers from demanding better conditions. Bourdieu's framework explains how class privilege is reproduced through everyday employer-worker interactions.

Arlie Hochschild's Emotional Labor Theory

Hochschild (1983) examines how workers manage emotions as part of their labor—a concept applicable to domestic workers who perform not just physical tasks but also emotional care (e.g., soothing employers' children, hiding their own stress). In Sierra Leone, where domestic workers are expected to show deference and gratitude, emotional labor becomes an unacknowledged burden (Kamara, 2023). This theory highlights the psychological toll of unequal employer-employee relationships.

Dependency Theory (Global South Context)

Originally applied to international economic disparities, dependency theory (Frank, 1967) also explains local labor hierarchies. Many domestic workers in Sierra Leone migrate from rural areas due to economic desperation, creating a supply of cheap labor for urban elites (World Bank, 2021). Employers in university settings benefit from this structural dependency, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

Justification for Contemporary Sierra Leone

These theories remain pertinent because: Economic Inequality persists, with 60% of Sierra Leoneans in informal work (ILO, 2023), including domestic labor. Gender Norms still confine women to undervalued care roles (UNDP, 2022). Weak Labor Laws fail to protect domestic workers, leaving them vulnerable (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2021).

Applying these sociological frameworks reveals how domestic worker exploitation in Fourah Bay College's community is systemic, rooted in class, gender, and institutional neglect. Addressing these issues requires policy reforms (e.g., minimum wage laws, formal contracts) and societal shifts in perceiving domestic labor's value. This theoretical approach provides a robust foundation for analyzing and addressing domestic workers' struggles in Sierra Leone's academic communities.

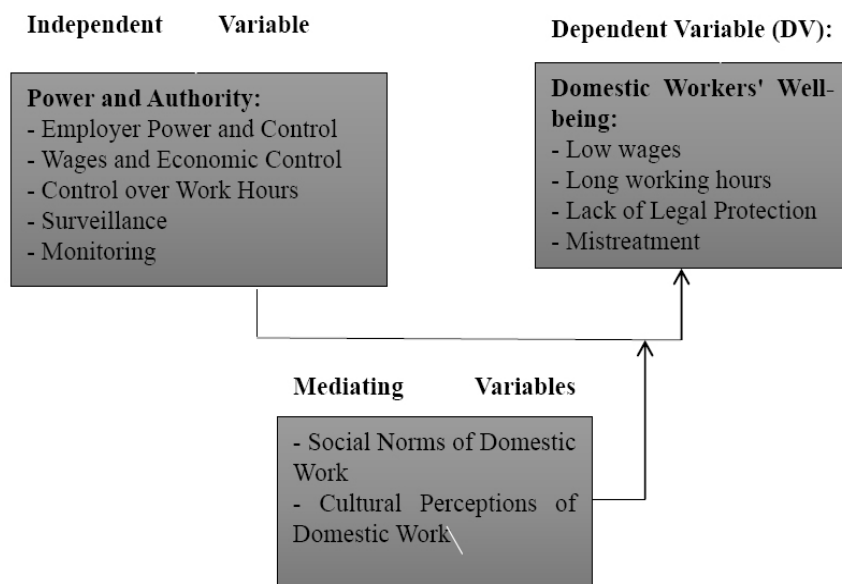
Conceptual Framework of the Study

Foucault's concept of power is not merely about domination or control but rather is dispersed and comes from various sources and forms. He theorized that power is relational,

not hierarchical, and exists within networks of relationships (Foucault, M., 1979). Power is exercised through practices, discourse, knowledge, and social institutions. Crucially, it shapes and defines the subjectivity of both the dominators and the dominated (Foucault, M., 1980). In the context of

the employer-employee relationship, especially among domestic workers, this can be understood as a power dynamic where workers and employers continuously negotiate power through their interactions.

The conceptual framework



Showing Conceptual Framework of the Study

In this study, the independent variable can be defined as the employer's power and authority. The employer exerts influence over the domestic workers, shaping their working conditions, remuneration, social status, and personal freedoms. This reflects Foucault's idea of power as relational, where the employer holds power through their control over the worker's labor, time, and sometimes even living conditions. Employers can also shape the discourse around what constitutes "acceptable" working conditions or behavior (Foucault, M., 1980). This control is not absolute but rather fluctuates depending on various social, economic, and legal factors (Foucault, M., 1979).

The dependent variable in this framework is the challenges faced by domestic workers. These challenges may manifest in various forms, such as low wages, lack of job security, long working hours, mistreatment, and lack of legal protections. Foucault's framework suggests that these difficulties arise from the power dynamics in place. For instance, workers may internalize certain societal norms or rules that place them in subordinate positions, thus affecting their well-being, employment rights, and overall quality of life (Foucault, M., 1980).

The challenges faced by domestic workers are shaped by the unequal power dynamics in the workplace. They could be seen as both a result of the employer's authority and control, as well as a reflection of broader societal structures

and norms that influence the nature of the domestic labor market. Foucault's concept of the "docile body" could also apply here, as domestic workers are often subjected to disciplinary power (Foucault, M., 1979).

The mediating variable is the social and cultural norms that influence both the employer's authority and the worker's challenges. These norms are the societal expectations around labor, gender, class, and race that shape the way the employer-employee relationship unfolds. In the case of domestic workers, cultural expectations often dictate the legitimacy of certain power dynamics. For example, gendered expectations regarding women's labor or class-based assumptions regarding the roles of domestic workers may mediate how power is exerted and accepted in these relationships. Foucault's notion of discourse becomes relevant here, as societal norms and ideologies about work and power structure both the internalized beliefs of the workers and the external actions of the employers (Foucault, M., 1980).

For instance, if societal norms dictate that domestic work is undervalued or relegated to a lower status, the employers may feel justified in exploiting their workers, and the workers may internalize these beliefs, thus accepting poor working conditions as normal (Foucault, M., 1979). These cultural norms, while often invisible, play a critical role in shaping the experiences of domestic workers by mediating the direct power dynamics between the employer and the employee.

In this conceptual framework, the independent variable (employer's control and authority) directly influences the dependent variable (the challenges faced by domestic workers) through the mediating influence of social and cultural norms. These norms either reinforce or challenge the power dynamics that exist within the employer-employee relationship. Social norms can either legitimize the employer's control or encourage resistance and advocacy for better working conditions.

For example, if social norms around gender and class are particularly oppressive, domestic workers may face greater challenges (such as mistreatment, wage theft, and exploitation). On the other hand, shifts in cultural or legal norms (such as the growing movement for workers' rights) can challenge these power relations and mitigate the difficulties faced by workers (Foucault, M., 1980).

Foucault's Power Relations Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics at play in the employer-domestic worker relationship. The employer's control and authority, as the independent variable, influence the challenges domestic workers face as the dependent variable, while the social and cultural norms mediate this relationship. This dynamic highlights how power is not just a top-down imposition but is also shaped by underlying societal expectations and norms.

Methodology and Data Collection Methods

The study employed a qualitative research approach using descriptive research design. Qualitative research seeks to understand a situation from the inside by investigating the lived experience of research participants. Qualitative research seeks to understand a situation from the inside by investigating the lived experience of research participants (Alston & Bowles, 2003). In the case of life-worlds, researchers focus on naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to their experience. "Life-worlds include emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other selective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups" (Berg, 2001, p 9). Non-probability sampling technique namely snow ball sampling method was used to select participants of the study. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations," that the groups are not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies (Mack et al., 2005). After the researcher selected and interviewed the available participants then asked for a referral of other individuals for interview. Eight participants were selected and interviewed. The number of participants was determined based on theoretical data saturation where there was no new data emerged or similar data came from our respondents.

Research Design

The study employs an exploratory and descriptive research design, which is appropriate for investigating under-researched topics and providing detailed insights into complex social phenomena (Bryman, 2016). The design allows for the collection of narrative data (qualitative) to address the research objectives effectively. The methodology is designed to capture the lived experiences of domestic workers, the perspectives of their employers, and the broader socio-economic and institutional factors influencing their working conditions listening to the lived narratives of the domestic workers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection tools

Qualitative data collection methods are time-consuming and consequently data is collected from smaller numbers of people than would usually be the case in quantitative approaches such as questionnaire surveys (Hancock, 1998). Data was collected through interacting with the participants by using in-depth interviews and observation by using a schedule with open-ended questions. In-depth interviews are generating detailed information and knowledge regarding the experiences of domestic workers who are employed in private households. In this regard, the open-ended interview questions were prepared based on the objectives of the study. The interview was conducted based on the informed consent of the research participant.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was organized, transcribed, sorted and arranged based on the sources of information. A thematic analysis was then used to analyze the data and assign meaning to reoccurring descriptive patterns or emerging phenomenon in relation to the domestic work.

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with domestic workers with open ended questions to gather qualitative data on their lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Interviews were also conducted with employers (academics, university staff, and professionals) to understand their perspectives on the employer-employee relationship and their attitudes toward domestic workers. The interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were organized with domestic workers to facilitate group discussions on shared experiences and collective solutions to their challenges.

Separate FGDs were held with employers and community

leaders to explore their perceptions of domestic work and potential strategies for improving working conditions. FGDs are particularly useful for capturing diverse viewpoints and generating rich, interactive data (Kitzinger, 1995).

Document Review

A review of relevant documents, including the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011, policy reports, and publications by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the International Labour Organization (ILO), were conducted to analyze the legal and institutional frameworks governing domestic work.

This review helped to identify gaps in existing policies and provided a basis for recommending reforms (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020).

Case Studies

Selected cases of domestic workers and their employers were studied in depth to provide detailed insights into specific employer-employee relationships. Case studies were particularly useful for highlighting unique challenges and successes within the Kortright community (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data

Interview and FGD transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to challenges, power dynamics, and potential solutions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Triangulation

Data from interviews, FGDs, and document reviews were triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, as outlined by the Sierra Leone Ethics Review Board and international standards (ILO, 2018).

The mixed qualitative methods approach is justified as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by domestic workers, combining the strengths of all

qualitative data collection methods. Interviews and FGDs offer depth and context to these experiences. Document review and case studies further enrich the analysis by situating the findings within the broader legal and institutional framework. This methodology ensures that the study is robust, credible, and capable of generating actionable recommendations for improving the welfare of domestic workers in Sierra Leone.

Results/Findings

Based on the methodology and focus of this study, the following are the results or findings regarding the challenges faced by domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship within the university community of Kortright, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone:

Poor Working Conditions

Domestic workers reported long working hours, often exceeding the standard 8-hour workday, with limited breaks or rest periods (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). Many workers equally, described inadequate wages that fell below the national minimum wage, with delayed or irregular payments being a common issue (Jalloh, 2021). A significant number of domestic workers lacked access to basic benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or retirement plans, leaving them financially vulnerable (ILO, 2018).

These quotations from the respondents interviewed go to reinforce and bring to light clearly the issues raised here:

"My day starts at 5 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m. I cook, clean, wash clothes, and take care of the children. There's no time to rest."

Another Female domestic worker who was employed as a cook had this to say:

"I work from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, but my salary is not even enough to feed my children. I don't get any breaks, and I'm always tired."

"I've been working for this family for five years, but I've never had a day off. If I ask for leave, they say I'm being ungrateful."

On the issue of the working environment another respondent lamented:

"The kitchen is very small, and there's no proper ventilation. I feel dizzy sometimes, but I have to keep working."

"I sleep in a small storeroom with no window. It's hot and uncomfortable, but I have no choice."

"I do everything in the house, but my employer still complains that I'm not doing enough. It's exhausting."

Talking about wages and benefits some of the interviewees expressed the following:

“I earn Le 500,000 a month, but it’s not enough to take care of my family. I can’t even save anything.”

“My employer promised to increase my salary after six months, but it’s been a year, and nothing has changed.”

One senior lecturer responding to some of these contentious issues had this to say:

“ My friend hold on in a difficult country like ours; We pay her what we can afford. Times are hard, and we have our own financial struggles too. In fact, she lives with us, so we expect her to be available whenever we need her. That’s just how it works.”

Exploitation and Abuse

The study revealed instances of exploitation, including underpayment, overwork, and arbitrary dismissals, particularly among live-in domestic workers (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). Emotional, verbal, and even physical abuse were reported by some domestic workers, highlighting the power imbalances in the employer-employee relationship (Jalloh, 2021). Employers justified these practices by citing cultural norms or economic constraints, further perpetuating the cycle of exploitation (Chen, 2019). These concerns and naked lamentations are expressed by both employees and employers alike:

“My employer shouts at me all the time, even for small mistakes. Sometimes, I feel like I’m not even human to them. I was fired without any warning because they said I broke a plate. I didn’t even get my last month’s salary. My employer doesn’t talk to me unless they’re giving me orders. I feel like I’m invisible. Sometimes, my employer shouts at me in front of their children. It’s so embarrassing and hurtful.” In-depth Interview-Domestic Worker

On the question of abuse of power and harassment one respondents had this to say:

“I can’t say no to anything because I’m afraid, I’ll lose my job. They have all the power, and I have none. My employer treats me like I’m less than human. They don’t even let me eat from the same plates as their family.”

Another respondent expressed this on unusual advances:

“One time, the husband touched me inappropriately. I told the wife, but she blamed me instead. I’ve been called lazy, stupid and mama grumble-grumble so many times. It makes me feel unheard and worthless.”

The part of an employer she had this to say:

“If she doesn’t do the work properly, I have to correct her. Sometimes, I raise my voice, but it’s for her own good. I let her go because she wasn’t meeting our expectations. I don’t think I and my family owe her an explanation.”

Lack of Legal Protections

This finding confirmed that domestic workers in Sierra Leone are excluded from the protections provided under the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011, leaving them vulnerable to unfair treatment (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). Many of the respondents demonstrated limited awareness of their labor rights, with few avenues available for seeking redress or reporting grievances (ILO, 2018). The absence of formal contracts was a recurring issue, leading to job insecurity and arbitrary changes in job responsibilities (Jalloh, 2021).

As expressed in one of the interviews a pregnant domestic worker lamented thus:

“I don’t know if there are laws to protect me. I just pray that my employer treats me well. You see my brother; I’ve never signed a contract. They just told me my salary and when to start work.”

Another respondent was so bold to express:

“Wait, you are asking me all these questions, but how can you work in a place for over four years and your salary does not change? I don’t think if they do so to my madam, she will accept it. But I have to accept it because there are not laws that govern our own type of work”

Accepting to the anomaly of no formal contract agreement with their domestic worker, one lecturer

“We don’t have a written agreement with her. It’s just an understanding between us. She came begging to have something to do for her survival. My wife and I took pity on her and gave this work she is doing. But I don’t know; I don’t think domestic workers are covered by labor laws. It’s just informal work.”

Gender and Cultural Dynamics

Majority of the domestic workers were women and girls, reflecting the gendered nature of domestic work in Sierra Leone (Chen, 2019). Cultural norms that undervalue domestic labor and normalize exploitative practices were identified as key factors contributing to the marginalization of domestic workers (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). Many lecturers and Administrators who were the Employers on their part expressed attitudes that reinforce the subordinate status of domestic workers, viewing their labor as less skilled or less valuable compared to other forms of work (Jalloh, 2021).

On the issue of gender and the dogged cultural dynamics, these were expressed from both the domestic workers and Respondents:

“This work is a women’s work, so people don’t value it. They think anyone can do it, but it’s not easy. I dropped out of school to work as a house-help because my family couldn’t afford my fees. Now, I feel stuck in this job.”

Lamenting over how this vicious cycle of poverty, abuse, harassment and a rather doomed future not to be the faith of their own children; one respondent reacted by saying this:

“This is very discouraging, we work for very educated people and we live in a university environment, yet we find ourselves doing this kind of work. May our children don’t at all do this kind of job”

An employer reinforcing the stereotypical notion about domestic work being the domain of women and girls had this to say:

“Domestic work is something women are naturally good at. It’s just how things are in our culture. In our case, we hired a young girl because she’s more obedient and easier to train. Older women can be difficult to manage.”

Role of the University Community

The university community of Kortright reflected a unique dynamic, where academic privilege and socio-economic power exacerbate the vulnerability of domestic workers (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). Employers within the university community “seemingly” demonstrated a lack of awareness and concern about the challenges faced by domestic workers, despite their reliance on their services (Jalloh, 2021). However, the university community presented opportunities for advocacy and reform, given its potential to influence societal attitudes and policies (ILO, 2018).

“My employer is a lecturer, but they don’t treat me with respect. They act like they’re better than me because of their education.”

“I thought working for someone at the university would mean better treatment, but it’s the same as everywhere else.”

Employer

“We’re busy with our work at the university, so we need someone reliable to handle the house. We don’t have time to worry about their personal issues.”

“The university community should do more to educate people about fair treatment of domestic workers. We have a responsibility to set an example.”

Awareness and Advocacy

Domestic Worker

“If I knew my rights, I would speak up, but I’m afraid of losing my job. I have no other way to support my family. We need someone to fight for us. No one listens to domestic workers because they think our work is not important.”

Employer

“I didn’t realize how difficult their lives are until I heard some of their stories. Maybe we need to do more to support them. There should be workshops or training for employers to learn how to treat domestic workers fairly. Many of us don’t know any better.”

The findings of this study underscored the systemic challenges faced by domestic workers in the Kortright university community, including poor working conditions, exploitation, and a lack of legal protections. These findings provide a foundation for advocating for policy reforms and practical interventions that promote fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers in Sierra Leone. By addressing these issues, the study aims to contribute to a broader movement for labor rights and social justice in Africa.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study reveal significant challenges faced by domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship within the university community of Kortright, Sierra Leone. These challenges are deeply rooted in systemic issues such as exploitation, poor working conditions, lack of legal protections, and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate the marginalization of domestic workers. The discussion below contextualizes these findings within the broader socio-economic and institutional framework of Sierra Leone, while also reflecting the stance of the researcher.

Poor Working Conditions and Exploitation

The study highlights that domestic workers in Kortright often endure long working hours, low wages, and a lack of access to basic benefits such as health insurance and paid leave (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). These findings align with broader trends in Sierra Leone, where informal labor markets dominate, and domestic work is excluded from formal labor regulations (Jalloh, 2021). The researcher argues that these conditions are not merely a reflection of economic constraints but also a result of power imbalances between employers and domestic workers. Employers, often academics or university staff, wield significant socio-economic power, which can lead

to exploitative practices such as underpayment, overwork, and arbitrary dismissals (Adu-Amankwah, 2020).

The researcher contends that addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy reforms to regulate working hours and wages, as well as awareness campaigns to educate employers about fair labor practices. The university community, with its influence and resources, has a moral obligation to lead by example in promoting ethical treatment of domestic workers.

Lack of Legal Protections

A key finding of the study is the exclusion of domestic workers from the protections provided under the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011 (ILO, 2018). This legal gap leaves domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, with limited avenues for seeking redress. The researcher emphasizes that this exclusion is a systemic failure that perpetuates the vulnerability of domestic workers, particularly women and girls who constitute the majority of the workforce (Jalloh, 2021).

The researcher advocates for the amendment of the Labour Act to explicitly include domestic workers, ensuring they are entitled to the same rights and protections as other categories of workers. Additionally, the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing labor laws in the domestic work sector is critical to ensuring compliance and accountability (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020).

Gender and Cultural Dynamics

The study underscores the role of gender and cultural norms in shaping the experiences of domestic workers. Domestic work is often viewed as “women’s work” and is therefore undervalued and marginalized (Chen, 2019). This perception is deeply ingrained in Sierra Leonean society, where traditional gender roles dictate that women and girls are primarily responsible for caregiving and household chores (Jalloh, 2021).

The researcher argues that challenging these stereotypes is essential for promoting gender equality and improving the welfare of domestic workers. Public awareness campaigns and educational programs can play a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes and recognizing domestic work as skilled labor deserving of respect and fair compensation.

Role of the University Community

The university community of Kortright presents a unique context for this study, reflecting the intersection of academic privilege and labor exploitation. Employers in this community, who are often highly educated and influential, have a responsibility to treat their domestic workers with dignity and respect (Adu-Amankwah, 2020).

However, the findings suggest that many employers are either unaware of or indifferent to the challenges faced by domestic workers.

The researcher believes that the university community has the potential to serve as a catalyst for change. By adopting ethical labor practices and advocating for policy reforms, universities can set an example for the rest of society. The establishment of support networks or committees within the university to address the concerns of domestic workers is a practical step toward promoting fair treatment and improving working conditions.

Opportunities for Advocacy and Reform

The study identifies several opportunities for advocacy and reform, including the formation of domestic workers’ unions, the creation of safe spaces for workers to share experiences and access resources, and the development of training programs for both employers and employees (ILO, 2018). The researcher emphasizes the importance of collective action in addressing the systemic challenges faced by domestic workers.

The researcher also calls for improved data collection on the domestic work sector to better understand the scale of the challenges and track progress over time. Including domestic workers in national labor surveys and ensuring their voices are represented in policy discussions are critical steps toward achieving meaningful change (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020).

Researcher’s Stance

The researcher takes a firm stance that the exploitation and marginalization of domestic workers in Sierra Leone are unacceptable and must be addressed through a combination of policy reforms, awareness-raising, and collective action. The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for systemic changes to ensure fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers. The researcher believes that the university community of Kortright, with its unique position of influence, has a critical role to play in driving these changes and setting an example for the rest of the country.

Ultimately, the researcher argues that improving the welfare of domestic workers is not only a matter of labor rights but also a reflection of the values of dignity, equality, and respect that are essential for a just and equitable society. By addressing the challenges faced by domestic workers, Sierra Leone can take significant steps toward promoting social justice and inclusive economic growth.

Key Recommendations

Based on the expected findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges

faced by domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship within the university community of Kortright, Sierra Leone. These recommendations aim to promote fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers while addressing systemic issues such as exploitation, poor working conditions, and lack of legal protections.

Strengthen Legal Protections for Domestic Worker

Amend the Sierra Leone Labour Act (2011)

Domestic work should be explicitly included under the Labour Act to ensure that domestic workers are entitled to the same rights and protections as other categories of workers, including minimum wage guarantees, paid leave, and access to social security.

Specific provisions should be added to address the unique needs of domestic workers, such as limits on working hours, mandatory rest periods, and protection against arbitrary dismissals.

Enforce Labor Laws

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security should establish mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing labor laws in the domestic work sector, including regular inspections and penalties for non-compliance.

A dedicated task force or unit should be created to handle complaints and grievances from domestic workers, ensuring that they have access to justice.

Promote Awareness of Labor Rights

Awareness Campaigns

Launch nationwide campaigns to educate domestic workers about their rights and employers about their responsibilities. These campaigns should use radio, television, and community outreach programs to reach a wide audience. Distribute simplified versions of labor laws in local languages to ensure accessibility for domestic workers with low literacy levels.

Training Programs

Provide training sessions for domestic workers on their rights, negotiation skills, and how to report abuse or exploitation.

Offer workshops for employers on fair labor practices, ethical treatment of domestic workers, and the importance of formal contracts.

Formalize Employment Relationships

Encourage Written Contracts

Employers should be required to provide written contracts to domestic workers, outlining terms of employment such

as wages, working hours, duties, and benefits.

The government or labor organizations could develop standardized contract templates to simplify the process for employers and ensure compliance with labor laws.

Promote Registration of Domestic Workers

Establish a national registry for domestic workers to formalize their employment status and ensure they are covered by labor protections.

Provide incentives, such as access to social security or health insurance, for employers who register their domestic workers.

Address Gender and Cultural Norms

Challenge Stereotypes

Launch public awareness campaigns to challenge cultural norms that undervalue domestic work and perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

Highlight the importance of domestic work in supporting households and the economy, emphasizing that it is skilled labor deserving of respect and fair compensation.

Empower Women and Girls:

Provide educational and vocational training opportunities for women and girls who are currently engaged in domestic work, enabling them to access better-paying and more secure employment. Support initiatives that promote gender equality and women's empowerment, such as microfinance programs and leadership training.

Leverage the University Community for Advocacy

University-Led Initiatives

Universities in the Kortright community should take a leadership role in promoting fair treatment of domestic workers by adopting ethical labor practices and encouraging their staff to do the same.

Establish support networks or committees within the university to address the concerns of domestic workers and provide them with resources and assistance.

Research and Advocacy

Universities should conduct further research on the challenges faced by domestic workers and use their platforms to advocate for policy reforms at the national level. Collaborate with labor organizations, NGOs, and government agencies to develop and implement solutions that improve the welfare of domestic workers.

Establish Support Networks for Domestic Worker

Form Unions or Associations

Encourage the formation of domestic workers' unions or

associations to provide a collective voice for workers and advocate for their rights.

These organizations could offer support services such as legal aid, counseling, and skills training.

Create Safe Spaces

Establish community centers or safe spaces where domestic workers can gather, share experiences, and access resources such as legal advice, health services, and financial literacy training.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Regular Assessments

Conduct regular assessments to monitor the implementation of labor laws and the impact of awareness campaigns and training programs. Use feedback from domestic workers and employers to refine policies and interventions.

Data Collection

Improve data collection on the domestic work sector to better understand the scale of the challenges and track progress over time.

Include domestic workers in national labor surveys and ensure their voices are represented in policy discussions.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has examined the challenges faced by domestic workers in the employer-employee relationship within the university community of Kortright, Sierra Leone, shedding light on the systemic issues of exploitation, poor working conditions, and lack of legal protections that characterize the domestic work sector. Domestic workers, who are predominantly women and girls, play a vital role in maintaining households and supporting economic activities, yet they remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone's labor force (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). The findings reveal that domestic workers often endure long working hours, low wages, and a lack of access to benefits such as health insurance and paid leave, while also facing emotional, verbal, and sometimes physical abuse (Jalloh, 2021). These challenges are exacerbated by the informal nature of domestic work, which excludes workers from the protections provided under the Sierra Leone Labour Act of 2011 (ILO, 2018).

The university community of Kortright presents a unique context for this study, as it reflects the intersection of academic privilege and labor exploitation. Employers in this community, who are often academics or university staff, wield significant socio-economic power over their domestic workers, leading to power imbalances

that perpetuate exploitation and unfair treatment (Adu-Amankwah, 2020). At the same time, the university community has the potential to serve as a platform for advocacy and reform, given its influence on societal attitudes and policies (Jalloh, 2021).

Cultural norms and gender dynamics further compound the challenges faced by domestic workers, as domestic work is often undervalued and viewed as "women's work" (Chen, 2019). This perception, coupled with the lack of awareness among domestic workers about their rights, leaves them with little recourse to address grievances or seek redress (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2020). The absence of formal contracts and the exclusion of domestic workers from labor protections create a cycle of vulnerability and marginalization that is difficult to break.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a series of recommendations, including strengthening legal protections for domestic workers, promoting awareness of labor rights, formalizing employment relationships, challenging cultural norms, leveraging the university community for advocacy, establishing support networks, and monitoring progress (ILO, 2018). These measures are essential for ensuring fair treatment, dignity, and respect for domestic workers in Sierra Leone.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for policy reforms and practical interventions to improve the welfare of domestic workers in Sierra Leone. By addressing the systemic issues of exploitation, poor working conditions, and lack of legal protections, Sierra Leone can take significant steps toward promoting social justice and inclusive economic growth. The university community of Kortright, with its unique position of influence, has a critical role to play in driving these changes and setting an example for the rest of the country. Ultimately, ensuring fair treatment for domestic workers is not only a matter of labor rights but also a reflection of the values of dignity, equality, and respect that are essential for a just and equitable society.

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