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Silent Voices, Untold Stories: Women Domestic Workers in Pakistan and their Struggle for Empowerment

Ayesha Shahid

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Silent Voices, Untold Stories is a socio-legal study about law, empowerment and access to justice for women domestic workers in Pakistan. The study advances the argument that women's lives are shaped by sharp gender and socio-economic disparities leading to unequal power relations vis-á-vis their employers, state and society. Access to justice through formal legal system is very often contingent upon the socio-economic position of the users, and women in domestic service have to negotiate the barriers of poverty and inequality before being able to employ the law as their ally.

To analyze the efficacy of formal law as a measure for achieving justice for women domestic workers, a small empirical component is also included in the study. These responses from the field open an often closed window into hidden lives. The voices and experiences of women domestic workers service expose various aspects of domestic service carried out in the privacy of homes. These lived realities also highlight that despite being poor, illiterate and having no means to take recourse justice, domestic workers can still not be called passive victims because in their own ways they resist against oppressive forces and struggle hard for the sake of their families.

Silent Voices, Untold Stories finally argues that in the presence of plural legal frameworks, formal law alone cannot empower women in domestic service. Therefore for an effective implementation of law it is equally pertinent to look into other non-legal strategies so that access to justice can be made possible for these women.

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