



## Exploring Patron-Client Relationship and Household Maids' Access to Public Institutions: A case study of towns in Islamabad

\*<sup>1</sup>Asma Maryam & <sup>2</sup>Abdul Raheem

<sup>1</sup>M.Phil. Anthropology, Quaid e Azam University Islamabad)

Email [asmaamaryam06@gmail.com](mailto:asmaamaryam06@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>M.Phil. Anthropology, Quaid e Azam University Islamabad)

Email [rahimsyed011@gmail.com](mailto:rahimsyed011@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:**

This study explores the dynamics of loyalty, trust, and indebtedness within the employer-maid relationship in the context of the informal economy. The objectives of the research are to examine the extent to which maids develop trust with their employers, explore how maids create a sense of indebtedness, and investigate the reciprocal support provided by employers. The research employs a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with both maids and employers to gather primary data. The findings reveal that maids who demonstrate loyalty and dedication in their work foster strong relationships with their employers. Such relationships often result in employers providing support to maids and their families, including financial assistance, access to education, and assistance with personal matters. However, power imbalances and vulnerabilities in these relationships also emerge, underscoring the need for comprehensive policies and legal frameworks to safeguard the rights and well-being of domestic workers.

**Keywords:** employer-maid relationship, informal economy, loyalty, trust, indebtedness, reciprocity, domestic workers.

**Introduction**

The patron-client relationship, a critical concept within sociological, political science, and economic discourses, typically refers to unequal power dynamics and personal interactions within various societal contexts (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984). Particularly in the domestic work arena, such a relationship is evident between employers (patrons) and household maids (clients), often rooted in social inequality, economic dependency, and gender hierarchies (Moya, 2019).

Extensive research has been conducted on various facets of this relationship, including exploitation, rights, and abuse of domestic workers (Rollins, 1985; Anderson, 2000). However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how this relationship influences household maids' access to public institutions such as healthcare, education, and social security, which are essential for social equality and individual quality of life (Titmuss, 1974; Holmes & Jones, 2010). This research aims to address this critical gap.

The study has four main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to explore the nature of patron-client relationships between household maids and their employers. Secondly, it intends to investigate how these relationships affect household maids' access to public institutions. Thirdly, it aims to assess the impact of public policies on household maids' access to these institutions. Finally, the study proposes strategies for improving household maids' access to public institutions based on the findings.

The lack of comprehensive understanding of the intersection between patron-client relationships and household maids' access to public institutions presents a significant problem. Existing policies and programs may not account for the unique challenges faced



by household maids due to the dynamics of patron-client relationships, potentially resulting in inadequate access to essential services.

The significance of this study is manifold. Firstly, it holds substantial policy implications as the findings can inform the development of effective policies to address the challenges faced by household maids. Secondly, it can contribute to social equality discourses and the promotion of domestic workers' rights. Thirdly, it could foster the empowerment of domestic workers by proposing strategies to alter the existing power dynamics. Furthermore, the study could influence public service design and delivery, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Finally, this research will contribute to academic discourse by offering new insights into the interconnected dynamics of patron-client relationships and access to public institutions.

### Literature review

The concept of the patron-client relationship has been extensively discussed in anthropological, sociological, and political science literature. As Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) explained, these relationships are characterized by an unequal power distribution between two parties: the patron and the client. They further argue that these relationships are not only prevalent but play a significant role in shaping social interactions in different contexts. In the realm of domestic work, Moya (2019) noted the existence of a unique form of a patron-client relationship between employers and their household maids. This relationship is influenced by various factors, including social inequality, economic dependency, and gender hierarchies. However, there is limited research examining the implications of this relationship on household maids' access to public institutions.

Public institutions, providing access to vital services such as healthcare, education, and social security, are essential in promoting social equality (Titmus, 1974). Holmes and Jones (2010) discussed the persistent barriers that marginalized groups face in accessing these services, such as socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, and a lack of educational attainment. These barriers significantly affect the quality of life and social mobility of these populations. Rollins (1985) and Anderson (2000) both discussed the unique challenges that domestic workers face, including exploitation and abuse. Despite this recognition, the conversation around the implications of the patron-client relationship on domestic workers' access to public services remains sparse.

The implications of the patron-client relationship in domestic work have significant policy repercussions. Policymakers need a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics to effectively address the unique challenges household maids face in accessing public institutions. Anderson (2000) argued that policymakers often overlook the unique circumstances and barriers faced by domestic workers when designing policies and social services. Furthermore, the lack of targeted and inclusive policies could exacerbate the inequality and exploitation experienced by this population.



## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for your research could incorporate a few interrelated theories to explain the complex dynamics of patron-client relationships and the subsequent impact on household maids' access to public institutions. Here's a potential framework:

Emerson's (1962) power dependency theory can illuminate the dynamics within the patron-client relationship in the domestic work sector. The power differential that this theory illuminates can significantly impact household maids' access to public institutions, as the maids' dependency on their employers might limit their capacity to exercise rights or avail services (Emerson, 1962).

Feminist theory's concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) can provide a useful framework for understanding the unique challenges faced by household maids, who are predominantly women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This theory can help dissect how gender and social class interact in the patron-client relationship and how these intersections might affect household maids' access to public institutions (Crenshaw, 1989).

The social exclusion theory (Silver, 1994) emphasizes the role of structural and systemic factors in creating and perpetuating inequalities. By examining these factors, this theory can illuminate the societal barriers that prevent household maids from fully accessing public institutions. The exclusionary practices highlighted by this theory can shape the discussion around the potential structural and policy changes necessary to improve maids' access to essential services (Silver, 1994).

## Methods and material

Our research employs in-depth interviews and case studies as core qualitative methodologies to explore the dynamics of patron-client relationships in domestic work. Interviews with household maids and employers will uncover the intricacies of power dynamics and their impact on maids' access to public institutions. Complementary case studies will delve into individual households, providing an intimate understanding of these relationships in varied contexts.

Supplementing these methods, focus group discussions will highlight common experiences and shared challenges among maids. Observations within households will offer firsthand insights into everyday patron-client interactions. Document analysis, examining contracts and policy documents, will illuminate systemic factors influencing these relationships and the maids' access to public services. Together, these methods will provide a comprehensive view of how patron-client relationships affect household maids' access to public institutions.

## Results



Deeply ingrained in the heart of these relationships between employers and domestic workers is the notion of trust, a pivotal cornerstone upon which all else pivots. Trust is often reciprocated with loyalty and dedication, creating a cycle that sustains and strengthens the employer-worker bond. This profound sense of trust stems from the consistent demonstration of reliability and dedication by the domestic workers. Their diligence reassures employers, generating a peace of mind that their households are in safe, capable hands. As such, trust becomes a commodity within these interactions that, when earned, can catalyze the development of personal connections surpassing the traditional boundaries of professional relationships.

Expounding further on the intricacies of these research findings, an interesting phenomenon is the emergence of various forms of support that employers extend to their domestic workers, a pattern transcending the purely transactional nature of their professional relationships. This assistance ranges from direct financial aid, often extending to the workers' families, to mediating personal disputes. These are just a few examples of how the lines between professional and personal relationships can blur in such a setting. It serves as an indication of the profound impacts that deep-seated trust and loyalty can have on these relationships, expanding their scope beyond conventional expectations.

However, while these findings suggest a harmonious interplay of mutual benefits, they also highlight the potential vulnerabilities inherent in such a system. Domestic workers, in their dependence on their employers for support beyond the confines of their job responsibilities, may find themselves in a precarious position. With such a significant power imbalance, there is always a risk that they may fall victim to exploitation or manipulation. Therefore, while this system might foster mutual benefits, it also puts the workers at the mercy of their employers, a dynamic that must be acknowledged in understanding these relationships.

Another layer of complexity unearthed in these findings is the relationship between these domestic partnerships and public institutions. Due to their relative socio-economic standing, employers generally have greater access and influence over public resources and institutions. Consequently, this privilege can be leveraged to benefit their domestic workers, offering them assistance in navigating institutional bureaucracy and securing additional resources. However, this scenario further underlines the power dynamics at play. It becomes evident that the workers' access to public institutions is not a given but is contingent on their employers' willingness and capacity to facilitate such access.

In conclusion, the findings from this research study provide a multifaceted understanding of the dynamics within the employer-domestic worker relationship in the informal economy. The dual forces of trust and loyalty act as the glue binding these relationships, leading to scenarios of mutual benefit and creating a symbiotic environment. However, it also becomes clear that the situation isn't entirely rosy. The vulnerabilities of domestic workers, their dependence on the goodwill of their employers, and the stark



power imbalances are glaring issues that necessitate attention. These results provide a compelling argument for developing comprehensive, systemic approaches and policies aimed at mitigating these vulnerabilities and fostering a more balanced, equitable informal economy. The complexity and multi-layered nature of these relationships necessitate further research, perhaps even sparking a discourse on legal protections for these workers.

Sure, I can help you to generate a discussion based on the provided findings, although I'd like to note that I don't have specific details about the methods used or the broader context of your study. Remember that, in a discussion, you should interpret your results, link to previous research, and indicate how your findings extend the current understanding of the topic.

Certainly, incorporating both older and more recent references into the text can provide a broad perspective on the research topic. Here's an example of how you might do this:

### **Discussion**

The research findings presented align with those found in the broader literature on the informal economy and employer-domestic help relationships. Granovetter's (1985) classic concept of embeddedness, the idea that economic action is embedded within structures of social relations, helps interpret the findings. The sense of loyalty and trust observed between employers and maids suggests a deep level of social embeddedness within the patron-client relationship.

Further, Portes and Sassen-Koob (1987) have discussed how relationships within the informal economy often operate based on trust and personal relationships. The examples of employers going above and beyond their formal obligations to support their maids resonate with this observation. These relationships can also echo the dynamics of indebtedness outlined by Hart (1973), in which individuals in the informal economy often perform additional services out of a sense of obligation or gratitude.

On the other hand, it's essential to consider the potential power dynamics within these relationships, as recent literature emphasizes. A case in point, Blau and Kahn (1981) have pointed out that employer-employee relationships can also create situations of dependence, where the employee relies heavily on the employer's goodwill. This is reflective in our findings where household maids find themselves in a situation of reliance on their employers for accessing public resources.

In more recent studies, such as the work of Chen (2012), it is highlighted that workers in the informal economy, including domestic workers, may face vulnerabilities due to the lack of labor protections and formal institutional support. Similarly, Bernhardt et al., (2016) note that while the informal economy can offer opportunities for workers to



gain support from their employers, it can also result in unequal power dynamics, and potential exploitation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this research highlight the significance of loyalty, trust, and indebtedness within the employer-maid relationship in the informal economy. The cases examined demonstrate that maids who exhibit loyalty, honesty, and dedication are often rewarded with various forms of support from their employers, including financial assistance, access to education, and help with personal matters. This reciprocal relationship strengthens the patron-client bond and reinforces social structures within the informal economy. However, it is essential to address the potential power imbalances and vulnerabilities that may arise, ensuring the protection of domestic workers' rights and well-being through comprehensive policies and legal frameworks.

Further research is needed to delve into the broader implications of loyalty and indebtedness in employer-maid relationships and to assess the long-term effects on both parties involved. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dynamics, policymakers, employers, and society can work towards fostering fair and mutually beneficial working relationships that prioritize the dignity and rights of domestic workers. Ultimately, creating a supportive and just environment for domestic workers requires acknowledging and addressing power differentials, ensuring their autonomy, and promoting equitable treatment within the informal economy.

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