

Aspiration and opportunity: The lived realities of women migrants who clean

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Background

Domestic cleaning work reflects global inequalities and the gendered and racialized division of reproductive labour.

- The domestic cleaning sector is predominantly female, and is a changing and growing part of the UK labour market;
- There is a lack of knowledge about the lived realities of migrants engaged in cleaning work in the East Midlands region of the UK;
- Women migrants' aspirations and ambitions are under-researched generally;
- Domestic cleaners are particularly hidden as they work in private spaces (even though they mostly 'live-out').

Research questions

- How do women migrants experience cleaning work?
- What are the challenges and opportunities associated with cleaning work?
- How do practitioners understand cleaning work?
- How might policy and practice be developed in this area to better support cleaners?

Emerging themes

1. Intimacy / interactions with clients, cleaning as care;
2. Finding one's place in British society;
3. Reconciling caring responsibilities with the need to work;
4. The role of cleaning work in realizing participants' aspirations and ambitions;
5. The gendered nature of cleaning work.

"She saw my name ... they been looking for a Polish girl."

- S, domestic cleaner

"How do migrant women experience domestic cleaning work and what contextual factors enable or constrain them in their work?"



Challenges facing cleaners

"In this country, children come first ... if anything happens, Children's Services will not accept it."

- R, domestic cleaner and carer

- Racism and discrimination in and out of work;
- Shame, stigma and lack of respect due to occupation;
- Exploitative working conditions, low wages, non-payment of wages;
- Precarious or insecure work, anti-social hours;
- Challenges accessing free or affordable childcare in order to work;
- Language barriers and 'de-skilling';
- Difficult or threatening clients;
- Time poverty and multiple jobs;
- Lack of affordable and reliable public transport;
- Lack of sick pay and insurances;
- Physical discomfort / ill-health due to chemical use and fatigue.

Study design

"No, no, no, no, no. I'll tell you the story, how it happened."

- K, cleaning business owner

"I will tell you - you write."

- M, cleaning business owner

- A sociological study of migration
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 cleaners using career timeline mapping tool, over three-year period;
- Participants a mix of ages (between 20-50 years old) and nationalities (Polish, Nigerian, Hungarian, Thai), all with experience of domestic cleaning;
- Semi-structured interviews with 15 practitioners over one-year period;
- Engagement events with practitioners;
- Thematic coding of interview transcripts.

Phase 1

Interviews with practitioners

Phase 2

Interviews with women migrants who clean

Phase 3

Engagement with practitioners for impact

"People thinking if you are cleaner you don't go to school or nothing. I finished university in Poland!"

- M, cleaning business owner