

No rations, no proof that we work: Domestic workers

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J AIPUR: About 300 women arrived dressed for the special day for a meeting on Friday at the Scouts and Guides maidan to mark seven years of the formation of the association of domestic workers. The women were in holiday spirit - many had brought their little children along. The gathering was addressed by the members of the women's commission. Shrichand Tatarwal, joint labour commissioner, was also present.

Ashok Khandelwal, Supreme Court commissioner for the right to food, Rajasthan, spoke of how the women were denied rights to rations and also were often not covered under schemes of the state government like the health insurance plan, as they did not have any proof of being workers.

One speaker said they could plan to get their employers to offer a certificate of their work, so that they could produce it for purposes of identification as workers. However, others noted that such documents often do not suffice for availing government benefits.

Maya Burman, 56, who was in the audience on Friday told TOI that she had been working for over 10 years in Jaipur, having moved here from West Bengal. "I have no ration card, and cannot claim anything. And no, I have never received any free treatment at private hospitals. The work is hard, the hours are long. And it's not like one is paid a great deal."

Tatarwal spoke of maternity benefits and the health insurance scheme of the government, but Harkesh Bugalia of the CPM

pointed out that these schemes seldom extend to domestic workers, who are neither members of a union nor registered with the government.

Khandelwal tried to get Tatarwal to agree to a meeting that would involve representatives of domestic workers, officials of the labour commission and the women's commission so that matters could be sorted out. Tatarwal explained that even an affidavit that they themselves have signed, which attests that the women earn less than Rs1.2 lakh annually and are over 18 years of age would suffice for the matter of availing benefits that are available to construction workers.

Khandelwal told the gathered women that given how little the government was willing to do for them, they had a long battle ahead. It would be advisable to plan future strategy, he said.