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Hourly wages and wage security in domestic work: the role of household, worker and relationship characteristics

Abstract

Purpose: It is often assumed that households that hire a domestic worker pay low and insecure wages. Given the high incidence of undeclared work in the sector, reliable insights into the wages that households pay in practice remain scarce. This study contributes to the literature by describing the wages that households pay to domestic workers and by identifying sources of wage differences across households. To provide a complete description of wages, we ask what household pay per hour (hourly wages) and whether they continue wage payments during cancellations (wage security). To identify sources of differences in hourly wages and wage security, we consider characteristics of households, workers and their relationships.

Design/methodology/approach: The study draws on survey data collected among a representative sample of Dutch households in October 2023, providing data on 440 households that hire a domestic worker.

Findings: Results show that most households pay above minimum wage and that few households provide wage security. Hourly wages are associated with household income, household composition and domestic workers' age and ethnic background. Wage security is associated with household income and the length of the relationship between households and domestic workers.

Originality/value: Findings suggest that it is worthwhile to distinguish between hourly wages and wage security, as both are substantively different things. This has implications for policymakers that seek to improve the position of domestic workers.

Keywords: domestic work, hourly wages, wage security, undeclared work

1. Introduction

Households around the globe are estimated to employ roughly 75 million domestic workers that help them out with household tasks, like cleaning and laundry (ILO, 2021). Up to 70% of domestic work takes place in the undeclared economy (European Labour Authority, 2021), meaning that labour relationships between households and domestic workers tend to stay under the radar, beyond the scope of labour inspectorates. Consequently, wages in domestic work are often not determined by policy, but through informal negotiations between households and domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Moras, 2008). Concerns exist that many households end up paying low and insecure wages (Schierholz, 2013). Nonetheless, it can be expected that different households negotiate different wages, with some households paying better wages than others (Milkman, 2023). It is crucial to understand where such wage differences come from as they help identify what households pay poor wages and what households should be targeted by policies. This study aims to describe differences in the hourly wages and wage security that households provide to domestic workers and to identify sources of these differences.

Reliable descriptions of wages in domestic work are scarce as the earnings of undeclared workers tend to remain hidden (Williams, 2013). Moreover, much of the literature focuses primarily on hourly wages (e.g., Gheasi *et al.,* 2014; Suleman and Figueiredo, 2018). Less attention is paid to what happens to wages when cleaning appointments are cancelled during illness or holidays (hereafter: wage security). Higher wages and secure wages may accumulate in specific jobs but may also be substitutes, meaning that households pay higher wages to compensate for less wage security, or vice versa (also see Suleman, 2015). In the latter case, higher hourly wages are not necessarily better, as domestic workers may need to set aside part of their wage to cover for future income losses. Considering both hourly wages and wage security therefore provides a more complete description of wages in domestic work.

Prior research has hinted at potential sources of wage differences in domestic work. These studies indicate that wage differences may be due to differences between workers, like differences in their ethnic background and skills (Nisic *et al.,* 2023; Suleman and Figueiredo, 2018; Theys *et al.,* 2020) or to differences in the relationship between households and domestic workers, like the level of trust and personal depth of the relationship (De Ruijter and Weesie, n.d.; Safuta and Camargo, 2019). What

is often overlooked, is that wage differences in domestic work may also be due to household differences. Higher income households may, for example, consider higher wages to be affordable. Similarly, households that face more competing time claims may be more dependent on domestic help and ascribe a higher value to it. While studies have examined the association between household characteristics and spending on domestic help (Kornrich and Roberts, 2018; Treas and De Ruijter, 2008), the association between household characteristics and wages paid to domestic workers remains understudied. This study therefore considers a broad range of factors to explain wage differences in domestic work, covering characteristics of households, domestic workers and the relationships between the two.

Moreover, prior research often uses qualitative methods or survey experiments. Qualitative inquiries often draw on small samples from urban areas, raising questions over the generalizability of findings. Relatedly, survey experiments study households' willingness to pay in fictive situations, which may not reflect what households pay in real-life. This study uses survey data collected among a representative Dutch panel in October 2023. Survey research adds to qualitative research and survey experiments by providing generalizable insights into the wages that households pay in real-life. Another advantage of survey research is that it can statistically test whether wage differences are attributable to characteristics of households (income, work hours, partner status and children), workers (ethnicity and age) and their relationships (recruitment channel and relationship length). The study takes place in the Netherlands. A Dutch regulation requires households to provide minimum wage, six weeks of sick pay and four weeks of paid leave. However, this regulation is not actively enforced and research shows that only 5% of households are well aware of their responsibilities (Panteia, 2014). In practice, households and domestic workers are thus free to negotiate wages themselves. This means that our findings may also be relevant to other national contexts that lack effective regulations on wages in domestic work.

To summarize, this study makes three contributions. Firstly, we provide better insights into wages in domestic work by considering hourly wages and wage security. Secondly, taking into account characteristics of households, workers and the relationships between the two, we pay attention to a broad range of potential sources of wage differences in domestic work. Thirdly, using representative survey data, we can use statistical tests to identify potential sources of wages differences in the sector.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1 Household characteristics

Income and paid work

To identify sources of wage differences, we first consider household characteristics. What wage a household can afford to pay, may depend on households' income level. Firstly, higher income households are less likely to be bothered when they have to pay a little extra, as they can better afford to. Secondly, given their higher earning capacity, higher income households may ascribe higher value to their time (Becker, 1965) and thus to time-saving services, like domestic help (Flipo *et al.,* 2007). The association between household income and wage security is less evident, as paying for a non-provided service does not buy time. Nonetheless, we assume that wealthier households are less likely to be put off by having to pay during cancellations as they can afford to. We are unaware of studies that test the association between household income and domestic workers' wages, but related work finds that wealthier households spend more on domestic help (e.g., Treas and De Ruijter, 2008). This could simply mean that higher income households buy more domestic help but may also suggest that they pay better wages. Hence, we assert that higher income households pay higher and more secure wages (**h1**).

Apart from financial resources, the available time in a household may also be a source of wage differences. With time being a finite resource, household members have to divide their time across multiple activities, like paid work, housework and leisure (Becker, 1965). Households that spend more time in paid work thus have less time for their housework. This is also illustrated by literature that shows that households that spend more time in paid work make more use of domestic help (De Ruijter and Van der Lippe, 2007). Having less time to do their housework, households that spend more time in paid work may be more dependent on a domestic worker. We assert that this higher dependency translates into a higher willingness to pay for a domestic worker (also see Flipo *et al.,* 2007). Besides, households that are more dependent on domestic help may run into greater problems when their help quits, as they lack the time to do their own housework while looking for a replacement. To retain a domestic worker,

households may not just pay higher wages but also provide benefits like wage security. In light of this, we assert that households that spend more time in paid work pay higher and more secure wages (**h2**).

Household composition

The dependency of a household on a domestic worker may also be contingent on household composition. Unlike single-headed households, co-residing couples can divide their housework, resulting in a lower amount of housework per person. While it is true that couples create more mess than singles, it is unlikely that couples face twice as much housework as singles. Moreover, partners are more flexible in dividing paid and unpaid tasks among each other. Singles cannot share the burden of housework with a partner and may therefore struggle more to combine housework with other responsibilities. Hiring a domestic worker that assists with their housework can be a strategy that singles use to make up for the 'absence of a partner' (De Ruijter, 2004, p. 220). This also means that singles may be more dependent on domestic workers than couples. We expect that this higher dependency translates into a higher willingness to pay. Additionally, we assert that singles go to greater lengths to retain a domestic worker, making it more likely that they continue wage payments during cancellations. We therefore hypothesize that singles pay higher and more secure wages than co-residing couples (**h3**).

Relatedly, children create mess and require care, placing additional demands on their parent(s). Given these additional demands, it can be difficult to balance family with other responsibilities (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001), especially with young children that require more care and that do not help with chores. Hiring a domestic worker is a strategy to deal with the additional housework and time claims associated with children (Windebank and Martinez-Perez, 2018). Taking over parents' housework duties, domestic workers help parents to keep the household running and enable them to spend their time in more valuable ways, like spending quality time with their children. Households with co-residing children may therefore be more dependent on and more appreciative of domestic workers, resulting in a willingness to pay higher and more secure wages. With this in mind, we expect that households with

co-residing children pay higher and more secure wages than households without children and that households with more and younger co-residing children pay higher and more secure wages (**h4**).

2.2 Worker characteristics

Ethnic background

Wage differences may also be due to differences between domestic workers. Statistical discrimination theory asserts that employers base their judgement of a worker's productivity on stereotypes about the social group that a worker is a member of (Guryan and Charles, 2013). This may be particularly so in sectors like domestic work, where workers lack formal credentials and other readily observable signs of their productivity. With ethnicity being a salient social divider and given that two-thirds of domestic workers in high income countries are estimated to be migrants (ILO, 2015), ethnic stereotypes may inform households' perception of workers' productivity. Prior work shows that ethnic minorities are viewed more negatively when it comes to work-relevant attributes like skill and reliability (Stone-Romero *et al.*, 2017), especially for minorities with a larger social distance to the majority. Stereotypes depicting non-native domestic workers as less skilled and reliable may lower households' expectations of their productivity, for example as they expect having to spend time correcting and monitoring them. Following human capital theory's premise that employers pay more for productive workers (Becker, 1962), negative stereotypes may depress what wage they want to pay. The same could apply to wage security, as households may be more inclined to offer benefits to recruit and retain productive workers.

Related empirical research on hiring preferences in domestic work demonstrates that ethnic preferences and prejudices play an important role in structuring demand in the sector (De Regt, 2009). It remains unclear how ethnic preferences matter exactly, however. Anderson's (2007) interview study among households, for example, shows that some households may prefer workers with an ethnic background more similar to that of their own as they consider those workers to be cleaner, while others express a preference for workers with an ethnicity different to theirs. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001) work further shows that American households often prefer workers from Latin America, as they feel that

these workers have good work ethics. In terms of wages, however, scarce previous studies indicate that groups of non-natives are likely to be worse off. In Portugal, Suleman and Figueiredo (2018) find that migrant domestic workers earn lower wages than native Portuguese. Similarly, Theys *et al*. (2020) show that Belgian households have a lower willingness to pay for Maghreb workers than for natives. Considering this, we hypothesize that households pay higher and more secure wages to natives than to non-natives, with differences being largest between native and non-native non-western workers (**h5**).

Domestic workers' age

Next to ethnic background, households may also use age as a proxy for workers' productivity (Van Dalen *et al.*, 2010). Younger workers may be associated with little work experience and could therefore be seen as less productive than older alternatives. It is likely, however, that the positive association between age and productivity reverses from a certain age onwards, as older workers may, for example, be associated with lower pace or reduced strength (Du Toit, 2016). This resonates with a qualitative ILO (2022) study, which finds that households expect older workers to be less productive and may feel uncomfortable delegating more strenuous tasks to older workers. While it is difficult to provide theoretical grounds for the age-point at which productivity is perceived to decrease, studies on age discrimination in the workplace often use a cut-off point of 50 years (Harris *et al.,* 2018). Drawing on human capital theory (Becker, 1962), we assert that households do not just see workers in intermediate age brackets as more productive but are also willing to pay higher and more secure wages to those workers. Related research on hiring preferences illuminates a preference for domestic workers from intermediate ages (ILO, 2022; Theys *et al.*, 2020), but we are unaware of studies that examine whether these preferences translate into better wages. Against this background, we expect a positive association between domestic workers' age and hourly wages and wage security, which reverses over age 50 (**h6**).

2.3 Relationship characteristics

Recruitment channel

To understand wage differences in domestic work, it is worthwhile to also consider the relationship between households and domestic workers. Domestic workers enter people's private home, touch their valuable possessions and may get the housekey. Trust may therefore pose an issue (Abraham *et al.*, 2023). Hiring someone you know personally or that is referred to you via your network may provide reassurance, especially in comparison to anonymous recruitment channels, like online marketplaces or door-to-door flyers. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, p. 102) states, 'network hires inspire automatic trust'. Qualitative studies also show that households prefer to hire via their network, wanting to know beforehand that workers are honest and competent (Moras, 2008). We assume that workers' trustworthiness is not just something that households value, but also something that they are willing to pay money for. A survey experiment confirms this, demonstrating that households have a higher willingness to pay for workers from their network (De Ruijter and Weesie, n.d.). Trust may further matter for wage security. For example, lacking knowledge on workers' honesty, households may be hesitant to provide sick pay as they are unsure whether a worker is genuinely unfit to work or taking advantage of them. Households that recruited a worker via their own network are therefore expected to pay higher and more secure wages than households that recruited a worker outside their network (**h7**).

Length of the relationship

Over time, relationships between households and domestic workers may develop on a personal level, which for example shows from the fact that households often see a domestic worker as 'part of their family' (Moras, 2008). This personal connection may cause households to care for workers and to start feeling more responsible towards them. If that happens, households may feel more inclined to shield a worker against financial hardship or may want a worker to enjoy a well-deserved holiday. This echoes findings that indicate that personal ties with households can be a resource, giving workers access to better conditions, like paid leave (Baiocchi, 2023; Safuta and Camargo, 2019). Assuming that

relationships between households and domestic workers grow more personal over time, we expect that households are more likely to pay secure wages when they have been hiring a worker for longer (**h8**).

The association between relationship length and hourly wages may be less clear-cut. On the one hand, a case can be made for a positive association between relationship length and hourly wages. Like the point above, households may be happy to pay more to workers that they care for personally. Furthermore, having hired a domestic worker for longer, households may know that a worker is good and trustworthy. Hiring a cheaper alternative that may not be as good and trustworthy can be less attractive than paying a little more for their current help. On the other hand, there is the 'job hopping' argument: workers that switch jobs regularly earn more than workers that stick to one job. Earlier work further shows that households often forget to provide periodic pay raises, meaning that, over time, wages in a job may fall behind market wages (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Given these contradictory arguments, we do not hypothesize on the association between relationship length and hourly wages.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data

To gain insight into hourly wages and wage security and sources of wage differences, we gathered survey data on households that hire domestic help. Data was collected in October 2023 through an online survey presented to members of the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel. The panel is based on a probability sample drawn from the population register of Statistics Netherlands and consists of 7500 persons in 4500 households. To enhance the representativeness of the panel, participation is invitation-based. A computer is provided to persons that could otherwise not participate (LISS Panel, n.d.-a). Researchers can pay LISS to present their survey to the panel. Our survey '[anonymized]' was self-constructed by our research group and survey items were reviewed by experts at LISS (anonymous source). LISS was responsible for programming the survey into their online environment. The survey was online for four weeks and panel members could receive two reminders. Upon entering the panel, respondents provide informed consent (LISS Panel, n.d.-b). The ethics

committee of [anonymized] granted ethical approval, filed under [anonymized]. In addition to surveys of external researchers, LISS presents core studies to the panel that can be merged. Next to our survey, we use the 'background variables' list for information on income, age, gender, education, children and partners. This information is updated monthly, enabling us to use data that matches the month of our survey. For work hours, we use wave 16 of the 'work and schooling' list (May 2023, repeated annually).

LISS randomly assigned the survey to either the head of the household (N=2654) or the co-residing partner (N=976), as both are expected to have knowledge on the wages paid to their domestic help. 3630 respondents started the survey (83.8%) and 639 respondents (17.6%) answered 'yes' to the question: 'do you currently hire a domestic worker who gets paid to clean your home?'. We removed respondents that received help via cash-for-care or care-in-kind schemes (N=140). Care-in-kind recipients play no role in negotiating wages and cash-for-care recipients need to use an intermediary that ensures compliance to wage regulations. For similar reasons, we excluded 27 respondents whose payments to domestic workers run via intermediaries. We further excluded 6 respondents that answered 'don't know' to the question about domestic workers' ethnicity, 9 respondents that hired help infrequently (few times per year) and 3 respondents with questionable responses. Lastly, 14 respondents that pay implausible wages were excluded (z-scores beyond +/- 2.5), resulting in a final sample of 440.

3.2 Measurements

Dependent variables

Hourly wages were measured with the question 'what do you pay your domestic help per hour?'. Respondents that pay per visit rather than per hour were asked to convert the price to an hourly wage. For wage security, respondents were presented three statements: 'if your domestic help is unable to work for two weeks during (1) illness or injury, (2) their holidays, (3) your holidays, do you still pay his/her wage?'. For the first two statements, respondents could answer with 'yes' or 'no'. An additional answer option was added for the third statement, as households may ask domestic workers to perform

a deep-cleaning when they leave for holidays, thus not cancelling. Using these items, we created a dummy variable. Respondents that answered 'yes' to one or more statement(s) received a score of 1.

Independent variables

Household characteristics

Household income is measured as the sum of household members' monthly net incomes, expressed in thousands of euros. To measure the time spent in paid work, we use respondents' weekly working hours. For couples, we also need information on partners. Given the large number of missings on partners' working hours, we distinguish between partners whose primary occupation is paid work (coded as 1) and partners whose primary occupation is not paid work (coded as 0). For respondents without a co-residing partner, we impute the most frequently occurring value, giving them a score of 1. The partner status of respondents is measured dichotomously, with co-residing respondents receiving a score of 1. To consider respondents' status regarding children, we first create a dummy where respondents with at least one co-residing child get a score of 1. Secondly, we use a variable measuring the number of children. Respondents without children get a score of 2, the most frequently occurring number of children in the sample. Thirdly, we include a variable measuring the age of the youngest co-residing child. For respondents without children, the mean age of the youngest child is imputed (12 years).

There were missings on household income (3.6%) and working hours (12.3%). To avoid losing these cases, 10 multiple imputed datasets are created via the Fully Conditional Specification method in SPSS 28. Relevant variables are used for the imputation, making it likely that imputed values are close to real values. Values of imputations were constrained to zero and could not take on negative values.

Worker characteristics

Given that respondents may not have detailed knowledge about domestic workers, broad answer options were used for items on worker characteristics. Ten options were presented for ethnic background: the

Netherlands, Türkiye, Morocco, Indonesia, Surinam, Dutch Antilles, Poland, western other (Europe, North America, Oceania, Japan), non-western other (Africa, South America and Asia except for Japan and Indonesia) and 'don't know' (these were excluded). Three dummies were created: 1) native Dutch; 2) non-native western (Poland, western other); 3) and non-native non-western (Türkiye, Morocco, Indonesia, Surinam, Dutch Antilles, non-western other). Six options were given for domestic workers' age: under 21, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60 and over 60. Dummy variables were created for each age group, but 'under 21' and '21 to 30' were combined as few respondents hired workers under 21.

Relationship characteristics

For recruitment channel, we use three dummies. 'Relative' refers to households that hire family, friends or acquaintances. 'Referral' refers to households that found their help through a network referral. 'Non-network' refers to households that found someone via (online) adverts or companies. For relationship length, we asked respondents how long they have been hiring their current help: 'less than a year' (coded as 0), 'about a year' (coded as 1) or 'more than a year, [fill in]'.

Controls

We control for respondent age, education and gender. Age is measured in years. Based on the distinction of Statistics Netherlands, we distinguish between low, middle and high education. Gender is measured dichotomously (1=female). Remember that the survey was randomly assigned to one of the two partners in couple households, meaning that gender does not meaningfully control for differences in the wages paid by men and women, but rather controls for gendered responses. Assuming that partners often have a similar age and educational level, this is less applicable to age and education.

3.3 Analytical strategy

We first run descriptive analyses to obtain an understanding of hourly wages and wage security. To assess whether hourly wages and wage security function as substitutes, we run an independent t-test to compare the average hourly wages paid by households that do and do not provide secure wages. To identify sources of wage differences, we use regression analysis which suits our aim to consider multiple potential sources simultaneously. Given the measurement level of the dependent variables, we use OLS regression for hourly wages (continuous) and logistic regression for wage security (dichotomous).

[Table I here]

4. Findings

Descriptive findings

Table I shows that the mean hourly wage is 15.16 euros. Although hourly wages range from 6 to 25 euros, the distribution in Figure I displays a clear 'going rate', as 41.6% pays 15 euros. Regarding wage security, Figure II shows that 16.4% continues payments when appointments are cancelled during at least one of three occasions: workers' illness, workers' holidays and households' holidays. Most of them continue payments on only one occasion (10.2%). 2.1 percent does on all occasions. Figure II further illustrates that continued payments are more common during illness (10%) than holidays (7.3%). Just over 40% of households, however, ask their help to continue working during their holidays. We also examine whether hourly wages and wage security function as substitutes, meaning that lower wages compensate for more secure wages or vice versa. The mean wage among those that pay insecure wages is 14.96 euros and 16.22 euros among those that pay secure wages. An independent t-test shows that this difference is significant ($t(438)=-3.534$, $p<.001$), indicating that there is no trade-off between hourly wages and wage security. If anything, higher hourly wages and more secure wages co-occur.

[Figures I&II here]

Multiple regression findings

Table II shows that we find support for hypothesis 1, indicating that household income matters. For each 1000 euro increase in income, average hourly wages go up 25 eurocents ($p<.001$) and the odds of paying more secure wages increase with 17.7% (Exp(B)=1.177, p=.046). We find no support for hypothesis 2, as respondents' working hours and the work status of partners are not associated with hourly wages and wage security. Household composition is associated with hourly wages but not with wage security. Co-residing couples pay lower wages than singles (B=-.773, p=.037), finding partial support for hypothesis 3. Contrary to hypothesis 4, households with children pay lower wages than childless households (B=-.677, p=.029). Estimates of the number of children and the age of the youngest child are not significant, implying that having children matters more than the number or age of children.

On average, natives receive lower hourly wages than non-natives, contradicting hypothesis 5. Non-natives with non-western backgrounds earn 67 cents an hour more than natives and non-natives with western backgrounds earn 1.18 euros an hour more than natives. Hourly wages of non-native non-western workers and non-native western workers do not differ significantly (not shown). The estimates for wage security are not significant, indicating that households' decision to continue payment during cancellations is not associated with ethnic background. The age of workers is not associated with wage security either, but is related to hourly wages (hypothesis 6). On average, workers aged 31-40 get one euro an hour more than workers aged over 60 (p=.033). Changing the reference category to 41-50 yields comparable results but hourly wage differences with workers over 60 are not significant (B=.831, p=.059, not shown). Other changes to the reference category reveal no other significant contrasts.

[Table II here]

We find no support for hypothesis 7, which suggested that households pay higher and more secure wages to workers recruited via their network. Changing the reference category reveals no other significant contrasts (not shown). In line with hypothesis 8, we find that households that have been hiring a domestic worker for longer are more inclined to pay during cancellations. With each additional year, the odds increase by 5.3 percent (p=.004). We did not hypothesize on the association between relationship length and hourly wages. The size of this coefficient is small and not significant (p=.364).

Controls

None of the controls are significantly associated with hourly wages. Respondents' age is positively associated with wage security. The odds of paying secure wages thus increase with respondent age.

Additional analyses

We ran several additional analyses. Firstly, the positive association between household income and hourly wages may not be linear but could flatten from a certain income-level onwards, as there may be a limit to what households find a reasonable price regardless of their budget. A model with the quadratic term of household income (mean-centered) shows that the association between household income and hourly wages is linear (B=.001, p=.975, not shown). The same goes for wage security. Secondly, we ran two additional models to better understand the association between ethnic background and hourly wages. One model uses a different measure for ethnic background, creating dummies for Dutch, traditional migration countries (Dutch Antilles, Surinam, Indonesia, Türkiye and Morrocco), a more recent country of migration (Poland), western other, and non-western other. Hourly wage differences between natives and most non-native categories remain significant, with differences being largest between natives and workers from Poland, followed by 'western other' and traditional countries of migration. This suggests that hourly wage differences between natives and non-natives with western backgrounds are mainly driven by Polish workers and that differences between natives and non-natives with non-western backgrounds are driven by workers from traditional migration countries. Remember

that the number of workers per category is small, however. The second model controls for the urbanization of respondents' place of residence (N=437), as non-native workers may be overrepresented in urban areas where market wages are higher (Flipo *et al*., 2007). Controlling for urbanization, hourly wage differences between native and non-native non-western workers are not significant at 5%, indicating that hourly wage differences between native and non-native western workers are more robust.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Households and domestic workers negotiate about hourly wages and wage security. Due to the hidden nature of labour relations in domestic work, little is known about the wages that households pay to domestic workers in practice. This study aimed to describe what wages households pay and to identify sources of differences in wage payments across households. To describe wage payments in domestic work, we considered hourly wages and whether wage payments are continued when appointments are cancelled. To identify sources of wage differences, we took into account a broad range of factors, covering characteristics of households, domestic workers and their relationships. We used survey data on a representative Dutch panel, providing information on 440 respondents that hire domestic help.

Our first conclusion is that most households pay above minimum wage (12 euros in October 2023). 9.3% of households pay below the minimum, but the most common wage of 15 euros well surpasses it. Few households fulfill their legal responsibility to provide wage security. 10 percent of households continue payments during illness and even fewer do during holidays. This echoes prior findings on the high prevalence of labour right violations in occupations that take place in private households (Bernhardt *et al.,* 2009). Instead of treating domestic workers as employees, households treat them as self-employed gig-workers that are paid-per-task and need to arrange their own income protection. With 15 euros an hour, it is unlikely that they can afford to make such arrangements. This means that jobs in domestic work are not tailored to the needs of workers that derive their main income from domestic work, but to the needs of workers that use it as a supplementary income. While positive exceptions exist, most households provide 'bad jobs', offering low, unstable wages (Kalleberg, 2016).

Our second conclusion is that household income is the most consistent source of wage differences in domestic work. Households are inclined to pay higher and more secure wages when they have more financial leeway themselves. This means that household income does not just play an important role in explaining households' use of a domestic worker (Kornrich and Roberts, 2018; Treas and De Ruijter, 2008) but also plays a key role in explaining differences in the wage-paying behaviour of different households. This further implies that households that provide low or insecure wages may not do so out of ignorance or lack of will, but simply as they cannot afford to provide better wages.

Household income is the only predictor that is associated with both hourly wages and wage security. Next to household income, hourly wages are associated with household composition and domestic workers' age and ethnic background. For differences in wage security, the length of the relationship and respondent age matter. This brings us to our third conclusion that hourly wages and wage security are substantively different things. Different than for hourly wages, wage security is seen as something that domestic worker 'earn' over time, rather than something that workers are simply entitled to. This resonates with previous findings that households may take more responsibility for their domestic help once they have established longstanding personal relationships (see Baiocchi, 2023). Given that respondents' age is also positively associated with wage security, wage security could also be a matter of experience. That is, households with longer experience of hiring domestic help (relationship length) and more life experience (respondent age) may be more aware of the fact that a domestic worker depends on them, making them more inclined to take responsibility for their help.

It should be stated that some findings were different to what we expected beforehand, most notably that native workers receive lower hourly wages than non-natives. This contradicts findings on wage differences between natives and non-natives in domestic work (Suleman and Figueiredo, 2018) and the general labour market (ILO, 2020). One explanation could be that households stereotypically associate specific ethnicities with traits relevant to domestic work, like being discrete or hard-working (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). In that case, households may prefer workers from specific ethnicities over natives, potentially resulting in a higher willingness to pay. Another explanation may be that non-natives often use domestic work as their main source of income, while natives tend to use it for

supplementary income (Panteia, 2014). Workers that derive their main income from domestic work may negotiate different wages than those that see it as an add-on. Future research could further unravel the association between ethnic background and domestic workers' wages. Regarding workers' age, we find that only older workers face a wage penalty. This suggests that age discrimination affects older domestic workers, echoing findings that households question if older workers are physically fit for a job in domestic work (ILO, 2022). We further did not expect that households with children pay lower wages. A reason for this could be that children are expensive and thus reduce the household budget.

Our conclusions should be interpreted considering the study's limitations. Firstly, while our data provides unique insights into labour relationships in domestic work, the sample is small, which may partly explain the many null findings. Secondly, although our data provides information on households, domestic workers and their relationships, the data adopts the household perspective. The advantage of this is that we can include private information about households, like their incomes. Yet, it also means that we lack detailed information on workers. Furthermore, focusing on households, we can only study the wage-paying behaviour of households, not what this means for the actual incomes of domestic workers. Ideally, future studies could use data that matches data on households with data on workers, yet such data is difficult to obtain. Thirdly, good employership involves more than wages. Future studies could consider non-wage related job quality indicators, like autonomy (see Stacey, 2005).

Our findings have implications for policymakers in the Netherlands and other national contexts that lack effective policies to protect domestic workers. Our first conclusion suggests that the biggest policy challenge does not lie in getting households to pay minimum wage, but in getting them to continue wage payments in case of cancellations. Echoing previous research, the Dutch context shows that it is not enough to only grant domestic workers legal rights to sick pay and paid leave (see Kim, 2020). Additional policy measures are needed that ensure compliance to those rights. Our findings also provide insights into what such policy measures could look like. Our second conclusion on the importance of households' income level indicates that wage security is largely a matter of affordability. This calls for policies that provide financial assistance to households that hire a domestic worker, like the tax deduction and voucher schemes that have been introduced in several European nations

(Farvaque, 2013). Findings further show that households may start feeling more responsible for a domestic worker over time. Awareness campaigns that stress the importance of providing basic wage protections may help trigger this sense of responsibility in an earlier stage of the labour relationship.

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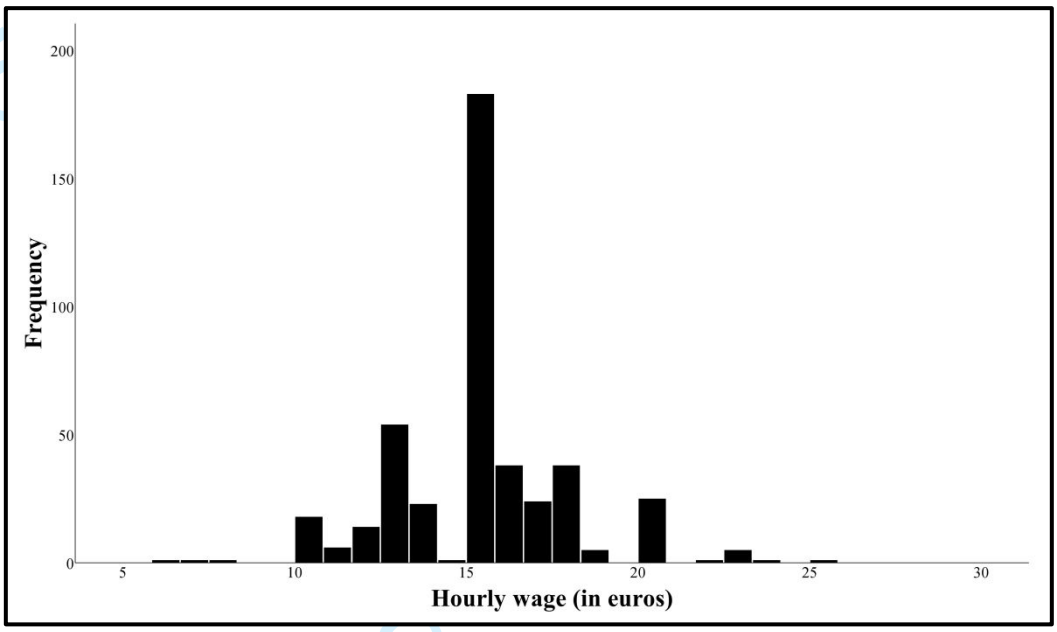
Figure I

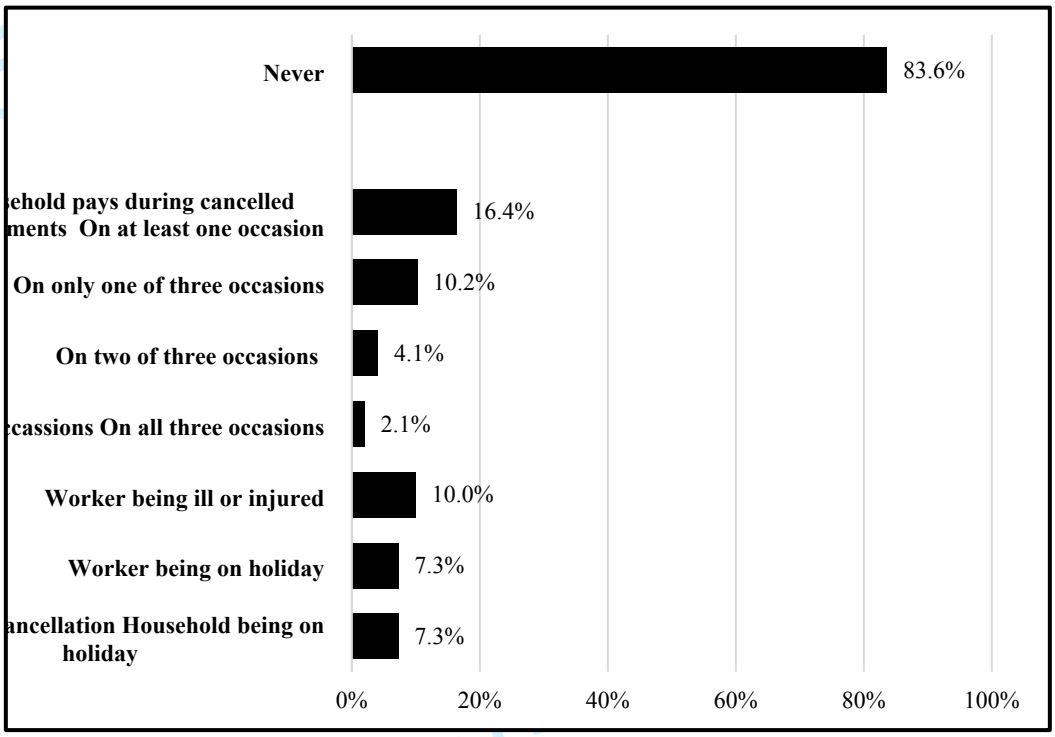
Distribution of hourly wages



Source: Authors own work.

Figure II

Percentages of households that continue wage payments during cancellations



Source: Authors own work.

Table I

Descriptives

	Mean	SD	Range
Hourly wage (euros)	15.16	2.52	6-25
Wage security	.164		0-1
Household characteristics			
Household income (1000s)	4.91	2.25	0-14
(Pooled)	4.90		0-14
Respondent's weekly working hours	19.01	19.29	0-72
(Pooled)	20.40		0-72
Partner's primary occupation is paid work [a)]	.675		0-1
Partner	.64		0-1
Co-residing children	.31		0-1
Number of co-residing children	.59	.99	0-4
Age youngest child [b)]	12.22	9.76	0-53
Worker characteristics			
Ethnic background			
Dutch native	.59		0-1
Western	.15		0-1
Non-western	.25		0-1
Age			
Under 30	.07		0-1
31-40	.15		0-1
41-50	.26		0-1
51-60	.37		0-1
Over 60	.14		0-1
Relationship characteristics			
Recruitment channel			
Non-network	.15		0-1
Referral	.64		0-1
Relative	.21		0-1
Length of the relationship (years)	5.66	7.39	0-46
Controls			
Age	59.31	17.1	26-94
Female	.52		0-1
Education			
Low	.09		0-1
Middle	.19		0-1
High	.72		0-1

Notes: N=440; [a)] Calculated for co-residing respondents (N=280); [b)] Calculated for respondents with co-residing children (N=136). Source: Authors own work.

Table II

Pooled OLS and logistic regression results for hourly wages and wage security

	Hourly wages		Wage security		
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Household characteristics					
Household income (1000s)	**.246*** **	.071	**.163***	.081	1.177
Respondent's weekly working hours	-.010	.010	.005	.012	1.005
Partner's primary occupation is paid work	.153	.397	-.105	.470	.901
Partner	**-.773***	.370	-.459	.461	.632
Co-residing children	**-.677***	.311	-.074	.439	.928
Number of co-residing children	-.192	.296	-.643	.437	.526
Age youngest child	.007	.026	-.013	.033	.987
Worker characteristics					
Ethnic background					
Native Dutch (ref.)					
Western	**1.184*** **	.348	.504	.380	1.656
Non-western	**.674***	.287	-.155	.359	.856
Age					
Under 30	-.394	.535	-.682	.840	.506
31-40 (ref.)					
41-50	-.188	.378	-.079	.432	.924
51-60	-.573	.363	-.472	.420	.624
Over 60	**-1.023***	.479	-.759	.582	.468
Relationship characteristics					
Recruitment channel					
Non-network (ref.)					
Referral	.348	.352	-.558	.404	.572
Relative	-.138	.411	-.176	.481	.839
Relationship length (years)	-.016	.018	**.053** **	.018	1.055
Controls					
Age	-.003	.013	**.039***	.016	1.040
Gender					
Male (ref.)					
Female	.210	.249	.140	.297	1.150
Education					
Low (ref.)					
Middle	.213	.477	.737	.704	2.090
High	.215	.438	1.168†	.659	3.217
Constant	14.907		-3.909		.020
R^2 (lowest-highest) [a)]	11.7%-12.6%				
Nagelkerke R^2 (lowest-highest)			15.2%-16.2%		

*Note: *** p< .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .1 [a)] R^2 measures are computed for regressions on ten imputed datasets, highest and lowest values are reported. Source: Authors own work.*

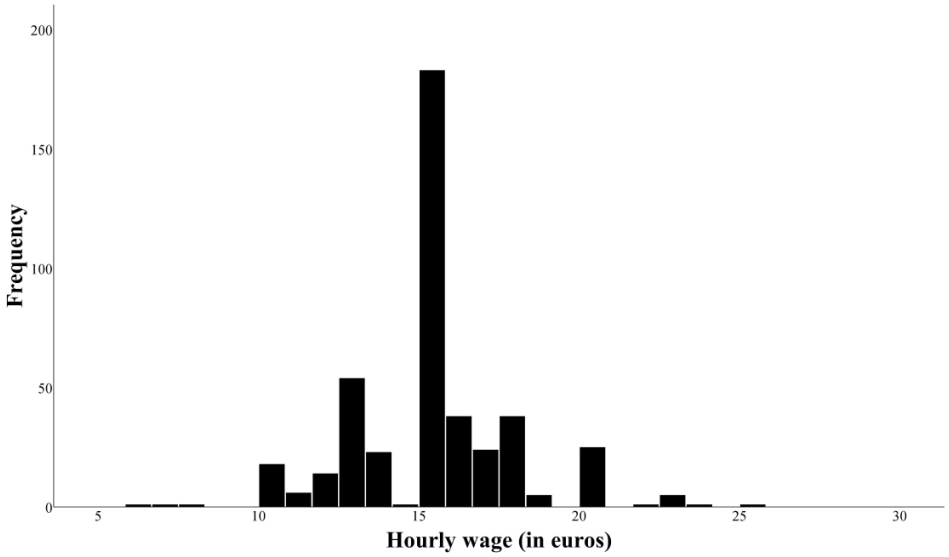


Figure I. Distribution of hourly wages
Source: Authors own work.

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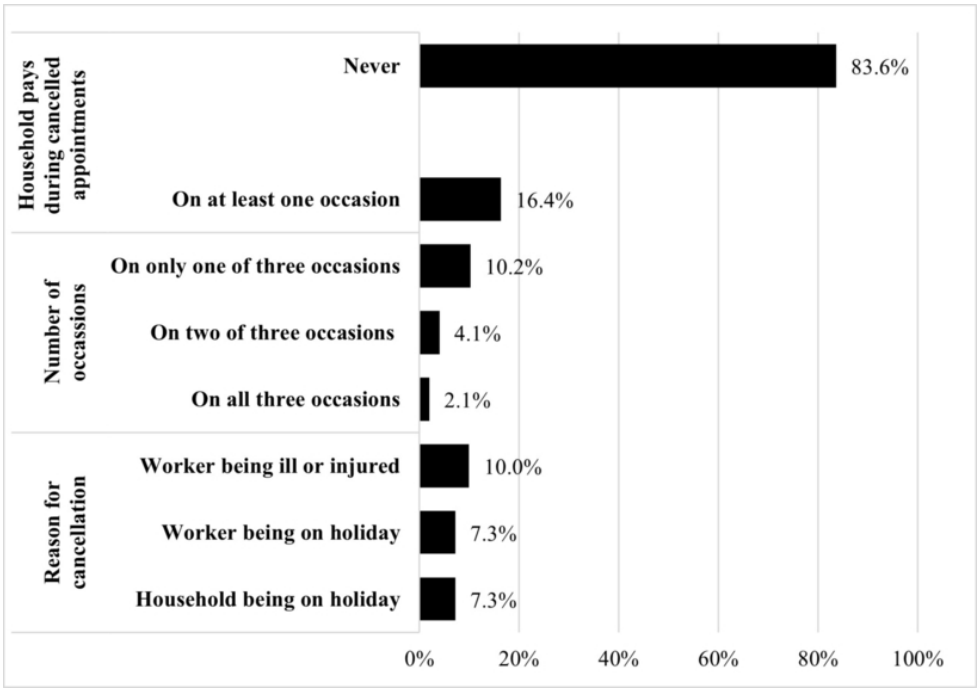

Figure II. Percentages of households that continue wage payments during cancellations
Source: Authors own work.

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