
***Addressing vulnerability and exploitation of child domestic workers:
An open challenge to end a hidden shame***

Prepared by

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

Child domestic workers (i.e. children in domestic labor) are people under the age of 18 who work in households of people other than their closest family doing domestic chores, caring for children, running errands and sometimes helping the employer run a small businesses from home. This includes children who are paid for their work, as well as those who are not paid or who receive 'in-kind' benefits, such as food and shelter.

Child domestic workers comprise the largest population of migrant working children, and they often work in conditions that can be considered a worst form of child labor. They are also mostly girls. Children as young as seven years ol

Child domestic workers are prone to verbal, physical and sexual violence, and the impact of this abuse can leave permanent scars.² In the Philippines, the Visayan Forum has documented cases of physical abuse that sometimes result in serious physical injury or even death. In one case a child died six months after her employer forced her to drink acid for unclogging drains; another was burned with an iron by her employer; yet another child was forced to kneel on a wooden stool for hours with fire extinguishers in both hands.

Many child domestics are also vulnerable to sexual abuse. In Cebu City, the Department of Social Welfare and Development revealed that in the 1990s, 80% of reported victims of rape, attempted rape, and other acts of sexual abuse came from child domestic laborers.

“500 pesos” (\$10)

Elena was just 14 years when her parents sold her for 500 pesos to a recruiter in Misamis Oriental to work in the city. “I refused to go to Manila with the recruiter. But my mother said she had already spent the money. I was crying because I had no choice,” Elena recalls. For two months, Elena worked as a full-time helper for a policeman. Then one night, her fears were realized: “He knocked on my door at 12 midnight and said I must iron his police uniform. When I opened the door, he got in and locked it immediately. He pointed a gun at me and was holding a pair of scissors. I tried to fight back but he was a huge man and he threatened to kill me. I pleaded and even knelt in front of him. Then I cried to him ‘Please bring me back to the recruitment agency. I will not tell anyone’,” she recounts. Elena was brought back to the recruitment agency, but they told her she might as well be a “sex worker” since she was no longer a virgin. With the help of another recruit, Elena eventually escaped.³

There is growing evidence of a link between child domestic labor and sexual exploitation. Sexually abused child domestic workers are often thrown out of the employer’s house and forced SexualD[*0.01

videos of me on their cell phones. They said they would post it on the Internet and earn money from it. They said they would also give me my s

the girls must fend for themselves once delivered to employers. To entice parents to allow their children to work, recruiters pay cash advances. As a result of these exchanges, children find themselves in a situation of bonded labor where they are forced to endure exploitative work conditions because of the debts incurred by the parents.

“Tarpaulin”

To hide Gelyn and 40 other recruits, the recruiter covered them with tarpauline and packed them inside a jeepney aboard a ferry during an inter-island crossover. They had been declared as “cargo.” Each jeepney was packed with double the normal capacity of 20 people. Some recruits were placed at the top load of the vehicle where their luggage was used to secure them. Some of them would vomit and urinate in the jeepney since they were not allowed to go out. The ordeal lasted for eight days.

The primary motivation of many children to work as domestics is the desire for a quality education. In an analysis of child domestic laborers carried out by VF as part of the Philippines Time Bound Programme, more than 20% of the children listed “came to the city to avail of better educational opportunities”. However, the same analysis shows that more than half of the 1,479 children listed had dropped out of school in the past and that 60% had yet to re-enroll.

The educational system in many countries fails to provide meaningful opportunities for CDW to go back to school. Most domestics fail to survive schooling because of heavy workloads, inability to pay tuition fees, and chronic absenteeism; most schooling curricula are not flexible enough to cater to the special needs of these children.

No single intervention can address the complexity of the issues affecting child domestic workers. Measures to protect these young girls from exploitation entail a combination of crisis interventions and long-term healing and societal reintegration. A child who runs away or is rescued from traffickers or an abusive household needs immediate temporary shelter in a caring environment and access to legal counsel.

No program will be successful without active

measure of dignity to the sector rather than throwbacks from slavery such as *alipin, alila, and katulong*. From this term was born the *Alipin*, which addresses the specific vulnerabilities of domestic workers and aims to change social perceptions and policies to recognize the dignity of the sector. Recognizing the link between trafficking and forced labor, the Visayan Forum also set up a comprehensive anti-trafficking program to identify victims as they pass through hotspots such as ports, bus stations and, most recently, the Manila international airport.

a. *Direct interventions*

Child domestic workers, because they are scattered and invisible, are most difficult to protect. The Visayan Forum and its partners have worked together to provide direct services including temporary shelter, fact-finding investigations, removal and rescue efforts, hotline/childline/ helpline, and emotional/material support or counseling. In these centers, service providers offer healing and empowerment support to build up resiliency and life skills. These include legal, medical, psycho-social counseling, return to families/repatriation, and skills/alternative education.

Across eight strategic regions, VF and its partners coordinate to ensure access to education by domestic workers. More than 4,000 have been mainstreamed in the past two years. Teachers are crucial in ensuring that domestics engage, instead of drop out of school. Truly, the call for universal access to education needs to be supported with efforts to protect and withdraw children from abusive situations. This is particularly true in the case of domestics who, because of lack of alternatives, often decide to work and go to school at the same time.

One innovative approach currently being undertaken by the Visayan Forum is its partnership with the Microsoft-Unlimited Potential Program. Together, VF and Microsoft provide computer training to prepare domestic workers for better employment opportunities. Community-based technology learning centers (CTLCs) have now been set up across the country, and the private sector is being mobilized to help absorb these future graduates.

b. *Lobby for enabling national laws*

Domestic work falls outside labor legislation in many countries, thus domestic workers are unable to access their rights. The non-recognition of domestic work as legitimate work combined with the hidden nature of the worksite results in exploitative living and working conditions and sometimes forced labor and trafficking. Reports of abuse are many, with workers facing, among other things, extremely long hours of work, absence of rest and leave periods, deprivation of food and adequate shelter, delayed or non-payment of wages, wage deductions for dubious debt, and physical and sexual violence.

For this reason, the VF has embarked to mobilize governments and employers to provide decent working conditions especially to adult domestic workers. Special registration schemes are organized to encourage access to social security, raise worker awareness about their rights, create opportunity for fair mediation, and allow for days off and participation in self-organizing activities. Work contracts are encouraged to formalize the relationships between domestic workers over the age of fifteen and their employers. More efforts are focused in monitoring hours of work and rest, access to schooling, and access to social benefits and facilities.

An ILO study of national laws revealed that only 19 out of 65 countries have enacted

Pilipinas). This self-help organization originated from VF's early efforts to reach out and organize young girls at the Luneta Park where they congregated during their days off every Sunday.

As a matter of urgency, it is important for countries to bring domestic work under the purview of existing labor legislation or to introduce specific laws for the protection of adult domestic workers and the prevention of underage worker recruitment. We should press governments to enforce these new laws and demonstrate their adherence to existing international standards to protect women and chil

Protective measures in schools, such as counseling and abuse prevention, detection, reporting, and handling; and
Increased capacity of educators to understand and respond to the needs and development of child domestic laborers.

Establish and support self-help groups of domestic workers;
Design interventions that seek to maintain or reestablish contact between child domestics and their immediate family;
Explore direct, non-confrontational involvement with employers in order to reach out to more CDWs;
Engage the active participation of employers in developing solutions to domestic work problems;
Train educators on CDW issues;
Assist in seeking redress from abusive and/or exploitative employers;
Sustain long-term interventions focused specifically on CDWs;
Design interventions with broader outlook on social issues that impact on child domestic work, such as teenage pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, etc.; and
Provide more educational opportunities in both formal and non-formal schools.