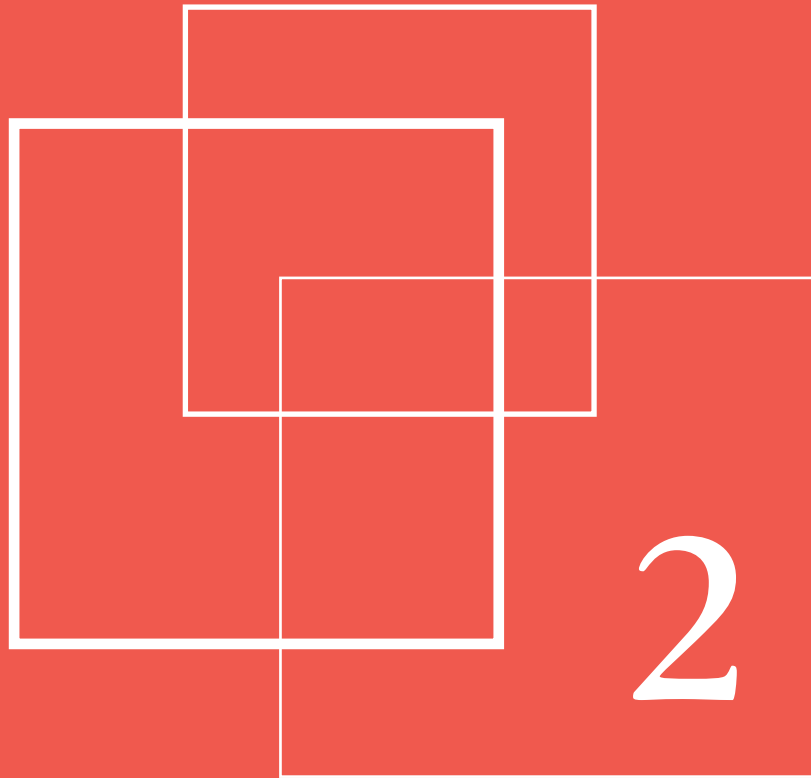


DOMESTIC WORK SECTOR



CHAPTER 2 : DOMESTIC WORK SECTOR

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2. DOMESTIC WORK SECTOR

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Domestic workers are often referred to as “the helpers” or “the girls”, this terminology suggesting that domestic workers are perhaps some kind of volunteers, and also denotes that the work has little or no value. On this point, domestic work is not recognized as work that contributes to Thailand’s gross domestic product (GDP). In fact, domestic workers are drivers for economic activity, providing support to employers’ families and culturally enriching the societies in which they live and work.²⁵ However, migrant domestic workers are not covered by laws or regulations to protect their rights.

Thailand’s MOL defines a domestic worker as, “a person who performs household chores, such as house cleaning, dish washing, and laundry”. If a domestic worker additionally works in the employer’s business, for example in a food, noodle or grocery shop, they are no longer considered a domestic worker.²⁶

In the context of this research, a migrant domestic worker is defined as a non-Thai female under 25 years old (or a male under 20 years old), registered or unregistered, who currently or previously worked and lived in an employer’s household for at least two months. In this research, however, no male domestic workers were identified. The job of a domestic worker includes any number of chores in the household and/or looking after children and/or the elderly.

1.2 Geographical site of research

Economic development and an increasing level of education, particularly in Bangkok and its vicinities, has led to a higher proportion of the population engaging in non-agriculture-related activities. In addition, there has been a shift in family structures from an extended family structure to nuclear families. Within newly-established middle class families, where both couples often work outside the home, there is an increasing demand for childcare and household assistance. Bangkok, as the capital of the country, is therefore a magnet for migrants in Thailand. The availability of migrant workers in turn fuels a large supply of domestic workers in Bangkok and its surrounding areas.

The research among employers and some of the in-depth interviews with migrant domestic workers were carried out in Bangkok and neighbouring provinces of Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakarn and Samut Sakhon. In addition, some relevant survey data covering migrant domestic workers in the provinces of Chang Mai and Mae Sot and Tak was also used. This was collected by IPSR during 2002-2003.²⁷

²⁵ Zaveri, 2002.

²⁶ Explanation 2 on Ministerial Regulation no. 4, LPA, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, MOL, 2004.

²⁷ For further details, refer to 2.3 Supplementary Data of this report.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Quantitative data²⁸

Sixty-two employers of domestic workers were surveyed in Bangkok and the five peripheral provinces of Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Pathumthani, Samut Prakarn and Samut Sakhon. As in other sectors, the researchers used a list of all employers who registered undocumented migrant workers between July 2004 and June 2005 as a sampling frame. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed, which firstly involves randomly selecting the district, and secondly randomly selecting the sub-district within each district.

IPSR obtained the list of registered employers of domestic workers from the MOL. However, when researchers called to request appointments with an employer, employers often said their worker or workers had already resigned. The team believes this may be because the employers did not want to be interviewed. In some cases, employers were willing to answer the questionnaire by telephone, and many

preferred to fill in the questionnaire by themselves and then post it back to the IPSR. However, the research team found the questionnaires completed by the employers themselves were rarely complete. Therefore, the team decided not to employ this method and did not include these results. However, the team continued to use telephone interviews.

During the first stage of the data collection, only 16% of the target sample size was interviewed. Bangkok was the most problematic area since there was a high number of ineligible respondents and high refusal rates. In order to obtain the target sample size, a second round of sampling was conducted in Bangkok and Samut Prakarn (refer to Box I, p89, for further details). In total, 62 employers were interviewed. Forty-five of them employed domestic workers of Burmese, Mon, Karen or Shan ethnicity, 14 employed Lao workers and three employed Cambodian domestic workers.

²⁸ Regarding quantitative data relating to surveys of migrants themselves, refer to 2.3 Supplementary Data of this report

Box I: Sample distribution of employers

Province	District	Sub-district	Designed sample size	Interviewed
Bangkok	<i>1st sampling</i>			
		Phayathai	30	1
		Bangkapi	30	5
		Phakhanong	30	5
	<i>2nd sampling</i>			
		Rachathevi	30	6
		Kunnayao	30	5
		Pravet	30	3
		Thalingchan	30	2
		Nong kham	30	5
<i>3rd sampling</i>				
	Chom thong	30	2	
Nakhon Pathom	Phuthamonthon	Salaya	30	5
Nonthaburi	Bang Yai	Bang Mung	30	5
Pathum Thani	Lam lookga	Khoo Kod	30	5
Samut Prakarn	Phrapadang	<i>1st sampling</i>		
		Sam Rong Klang	30	2
		<i>2nd sampling</i>		
	Sam Rong Tai	30	2	
Samut Sakorn	Kathom Ban	Orm-Noi	30	9
Total				62

2.2 Qualitative data

From the survey responses, the researchers selected employers, as well as migrants who had possibly experienced exploitation and who were willing to be interviewed in greater depth. Only employers who had registered their workers were willing to be interviewed in-depth. Fifteen employers were interviewed in depth for the purpose of this study.

To access female migrant domestic workers who had experienced trafficking or labour exploitation, the research team contacted government and NGOs, including the Foundation for Women, Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, the Thai Language School for Migrants from Myanmar, and Ban Kret Tha Karn, a government-sponsored shelter

for women. Nineteen domestic workers aged between 10-24 were interviewed in-depth, including eight living at Ban Kret Tha Karn. Eight domestic workers who took part in in-depth interviews came from Laos and Cambodia, the remainder from Myanmar.

2.3 Supplementary data

Supplementary data from the project, “Assessing the Life Experiences of Migrant Girls and Young Women from Burma who work as Domestic Workers in Thailand” was used in the compilation of this report. This project was conducted by the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR), the Shan Women’s Association Network (SWAN) and the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) during 2002-2003 in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Mae Sot and

Tak. The project was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP).

The previous research surveyed 528 domestic workers and interviewed in-depth 133 domestic workers (all female aged 13 and up). For this study, only the data relating to girls and women aged 13-24 years was included for analysis. This study has therefore only included the responses of 320 girls and women and the output from 46 in-depth interviews with domestic workers from the previous study. Not all the same issues were covered in the previous IPSR research when compared to the questionnaires for migrants participating in this research in the other three sectors. Hence only those survey results relating to the same issues are mentioned in this report. The remaining gaps were explored through the in-depth

interviews with migrants and on the basis of other relevant secondary sources.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 General characteristics of employers

About two thirds of the employers interviewed in this sector were women, all were Thai nationals. The majority had a reasonably high level of education - over half had attended university (52%). In terms of income, almost 40% of employers earned over 60,000 baht per month while 45% earned between 20,000-60,000 baht per month (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage distribution of employers by selected characteristics (sex, education and household income)

Characteristics	Percent	Number
Sex		
Male	35.5	22
Female	64.5	40
Education		
Secondary or lower	48.4	30
Bachelor	38.7	24
Masters or higher	12.9	8
Household income per month (baht)		
< 20,000	12.9	8
20,000-40,000	30.6	19
40,001-60,000	14.5	9
>60,000	38.7	24
No answer	3.2	2
Total	100.0	62

3.2 General characteristics of migrants

All the migrants surveyed were originally from Myanmar.²⁹ Approximately 40% of the 320 migrant domestic workers were ethnically Burman, just under a third were Shan and likewise just under a third were either Pa-O, Karen, Mon or from another ethnic group. In Chiang Mai, the majority of domestic

workers were born in Shan State, but in Mae Sot, about half were born in Karen or Mon States.³⁰ Ages ranged from 13-24 years, with only 3% below the age of 15, 19% between 15 and 17 years old and 78% aged 18 to 24 years old. In terms of education levels, 14% had never attended formal schooling and 56% had just completed primary school (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage distribution of migrants by selected characteristics (ethnicity, age and education)

Characteristics	Percent	Number
Ethnicity		
Burman	40.9	131
Shan	30.6	98
Pa-O	14.7	47
Karen	6.6	21
Mon	5.6	18
Other	1.6	5
Age		
< 15 years	3.1	10
15-17 years	18.5	59
18-24 years	78.4	251
Level of education		
No education	14.1	45
Primary (1-6 years)	55.6	178
Secondary (7-9 years)	23.8	76
High school or higher (10+ years)	6.6	21
Total		320

Local language ability is an important skill for migrants working in Thailand that can dramatically affect their working experience. Low proficiency in the language is related to lower salaries and susceptibility to abuse.³¹ While many migrant domestic workers can often speak more than one language, such as Burmese, Karen and/or Shan, the ability to speak Thai varies. Almost a third of migrant domestic

workers could not speak any Thai. Almost 90% of migrant domestic workers could not read or write Thai. The age of migrants correlates strongly with their Thai language abilities, with older migrants more likely to speak, read and write Thai. This is probably related to the length of time they have spent in Thailand. Almost 47% of migrants under the age of 18 can't speak Thai (Table 3, p69).

²⁹ For the prior survey amongst domestic workers which provide the quantitative basis for this study, only Burmese domestic workers were targeted for the research.
³⁰ Punpuing et al, 2005
³¹ Punpuing et al, 2005.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of migrants by Thai language ability and age

Thai language ability	Age			Total
	<15	15-17	18-24	
Speaking				
Fluently	10.0	11.9	18.3	16.9
Some	40.0	42.4	60.6	56.5
None	50.0	45.8	21.1	26.6
Read & Write				
Fluently	0.0	5.1	1.2	1.9
Some	10.0	3.4	12.4	10.6
None	90.0	91.5	86.4	87.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(10)	(59)	(251)	(320)

Domestic workers specified the types of work their employers expected them to carry out, including cleaning the house, washing and ironing clothes, cooking, taking care of children, the elderly or animals and washing cars. In many cases household

work was extended to include cleaning an employer's store or helping in an employer's business, in addition to undertaking household work. A third of domestic workers have to give their employer a massage (Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of migrants by work assigned to them

Assigned job	Percent*	Number
Clean the house	95.9	307
Washing clothes and ironing	84.7	271
Cooking	64.7	207
Taking care of children, elderly	48.1	154
Washing cars/bikes	48.1	154
Taking care of animals	37.8	121
Cleaning employer's store	35.6	114
Do household work & help in the employer's business	32.5	104
Massage	33.4	107
Gardening	26.6	85
Number		320

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Employers also agreed with this description of the most common duties of domestic workers, except they did not point out that domestic workers are often required to help out in an employer's business as described by about a third of domestic workers.

More than 90% of employers expect their domestic workers to clean the house, while 87% expect them to wash and iron their clothes, cook (56%), and take care of the children (31%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Percentage distribution of employers by work assigned to migrants

Assigned job	Percent*	Number
Clean the house	91.9	57
Clothes washing and ironing	87.1	54
Cooking	56.5	35
Take care of baby/children	30.6	19
Gardening	21.0	13
Take care of elderly	19.4	12
Car washing	12.9	8
Take care of pets	11.3	7
Massage	3.2	2
Number		62

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

3.3 Legal status of migrant workers

a) Registration status and other characteristics

Overall, just over half of the domestic workers surveyed held a work permit (55%). There were

clear differences between age groups. While 62% of migrants over 18 years old had registered, only 36% of those aged 15-17 had registered. None of the migrants under 15 held a work permit, which is no surprise given that legally they are not able to register to work (Table 6).

Table 6: Percentage distribution of migrants by age and registration status

Registration Status	Age			Total
	<15	15-17	18-24	
Registered	0.0	35.6	62.2	55.3
Unregistered	100.0	64.4	37.8	44.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(10)	(59)	(251)	(320)

While the quantitative data is in line with the official government position on working age, data from the in-depth interviews suggests there are a significant number of children who lied about their age in order to get a work permit.

“I have a pink card, which is the work permit card. My boss paid all the registration fees for me and didn’t deduct it from my wages. I’m only 10 years old, but I still got a work permit” ([BL, 10 year-old female migrant, Lao](#))

“I have a work permit. My boss initially paid for the cost of the work permit and now deducts the costs from my pay every month. I lied and said I was 16 years old in order to get it. My boss kept the original work permit and gave me a copy. When I first got my work permit I felt very glad knowing that I could go out freely. I don’t have to worry about being arrested by the police.” ([S, 13 year-old female migrant, Mon](#))

The majority of employers pay registration fees in advance and then deduct the costs from the domestic worker’s salary. In some cases, domestic workers or their relatives pay registration fees themselves.

“Since I got the work permit, I am no longer afraid of being checked by the authorities. Now, I keep it on me. When I registered, my aunt paid the costs for me.” ([U, 17 year-old female migrant, Shan](#))

“When I arrived in Bangkok, my employer organized the work permit for me. He said he would pay for it for me. When I quit the job, he withheld all my salary. I didn’t really understand. He even seized my work permit. He still has it now, so I am finding it very difficult here.” ([M, 18 year-old female migrant, Shan](#))

Many domestic workers did not see the benefits of registration, but often viewed it as an additional cost or limitation on their freedom. Some workers said their salary level does not depend on their

registration status. Many are confined to the house, therefore they feel it does not matter if they do not hold a work permit. Many workers feel that by having a work permit, they are unable to leave their current employment since the permit is tied to a specific employer.

“I have the Thai work permit. When I started, I didn’t intend to get a permit because I didn’t have any money. My employer said if I didn’t do it, she would not let me work in her house. She said if the authorities knew this, they would arrest both the employer and the worker. So, I made a phone call to my mum and she paid the costs for me. Even though I have it, I have never made use of it or gone anywhere. I have to pay for the card extension myself. It doesn’t make any difference whether I have got the permit or not because I don’t go anywhere. When I didn’t have the permit, my salary was just over 1,000 baht and now, although I have the permit, I get the same amount. The employer has just told me that she was afraid and didn’t want me to go anywhere.” ([Q, 17 year-old female migrant, Shan](#))

Some workers do not have their original ID card either because it was never issued, it was confiscated while travelling, it was lost or because it is being held by their employer. Many domestic workers do not seem too concerned whether or not their employer holds onto the original work permit.

“The boss keeps the card for me. If I keep it, I fear it may get lost. I also don’t go out so it’s not necessary for me to keep it. If something comes up, the employer will show it to me.” ([W, 15 year-old female migrant, Pa-O/Karen](#))

b) Reason for not registering

Migrants were often not able to register due to constraints such as their age, employer restrictions or the fact they were not in the country during the registration period.

“I don’t have an identity card. During the registration period, I was back in Burma.” (P, 19 year-old male migrant, Karen)

“I don’t have a work permit. During the registration period, I worked for a difficult employer. My boss said I didn’t need to go out and I just worked inside the house so there was no need for a work permit. I worked there for eight months and then shifted to another place. By that time, I could not get an ID card elsewhere anymore as the registration period had finished.” (O, 23 year-old male migrant, Burman)

“I don’t know. They didn’t do an ID card for me. I also dare not go anywhere. When I go to take out the garbage, if I see the police I’ll run straight back inside.” (G, 15-year-old female migrant, Karen)

Some employers felt migrant workers ought to register so their identity could be verified and so that employers could complain if the worker flees or has other problems. However, employers also complained about the registration process, indicating it is time consuming, complicated and costly. Employers suggested a number of changes to the registration process, including allowing new migrants to register on arrival and offering year-round registration.

“The registration fees were high. We had to complete lots of forms and prepare many sets of documents. I think those who already have the old card should not have to start from scratch again. Because registration is complicated, some employers avoid registering their workers. However, I have registered my domestic workers so that if something goes wrong, we are able to trace it back as we have their photo and life history on file.” (D, age not known, female)

“The registration process was so boring, it took me three days and five separate trips to get it done. The service by the MOL officers was bad. Why do they have change the migrant card every

year? They should have everything stored in their computers. I don’t understand why we have to pay every year and waste so much time.” (B, 39-year-old female employer)

“If they want to improve, I would suggest they improve the registration system. It should be a one-stop service so we do not need to go to so many ‘Khet’ [districts] in Bangkok. We need to know which hospitals provide health examinations for migrants, we can’t just go to any hospital. If it was not against Thai regulations, I wouldn’t register my workers, although it is better for workers so they can travel freely or work openly.” (J, 29-year-old female employer)

c) Migrants’ and employers’ attitudes towards registration

Some migrants have positive attitudes toward the registration process and would like to register but were unable to do so for various reasons.

“When registration took place, the people who I stayed with in Bangkok said I was too young to register, so I don’t have a card. But I haven’t had any problems. The police have never visited my workplace.” (AE, 16 year-old migrant, Shan)

“During the registration period, I went home, so I wasn’t able to do it. When I returned, the authorities didn’t open the process for new arrivals again. They only provided extensions for those who had applied for it previously.” (BA, 21-year-old migrant, Shan)

Of the 62 employers, almost half (43%) agreed that the registration process is complicated and is often better to avoid it. At the same time, the majority of employers (66%) acknowledged that registration of employees helps improve their business (Table 7, p73).

Table 7: Percentage distribution of employers by their attitudes toward registration

Attitude	Agree	Not agree	Do not know	Total (N)
The registration process has so many problems, it's better to avoid it (not register workers)	46.8	53.2	0.0	100.0 (62)
The migrant registration process has improved my business	66.1	29.0	1.6	100.0 (62)

3.4 Indications of exploitation

a) Forced labour

Some migrant domestic workers are aware of the high risk of being exploited or being forced to work in a household.

“I don’t want to do this. I feel strange working in someone else’s house. If something happens to you, you are alone in the workplace and have to suffer whatever the boss says or does. In a factory most of the workers are foreigners. If something happens, we are in a group so we don’t have to feel afraid. There are also friends to consult with.” (A, 22 year-old migrant, Mon)

Many children and women who were interviewed said they or other people they knew had been forced to work, often in bad conditions, without payment. They were also forced to work in other places without being asked.

“I worked for two years, but never received any payment. I had to work all day, go to bed at 2 am. and then get up again at 5 am. I didn’t have enough sleep. The male boss was evil-minded, not only did he not pay me, he also slapped, hit or pinched me. His wife was laughing while her husband slapped me. She never tried to help. Their three children also hurt me, they always lied and made it difficult for me.” (C, 17 year-old migrant, Cambodian)

“After staying at this house for a month, my boss wanted me to stay at her sister-in-law’s house to look after her children, wash the clothes and clean the house. She didn’t ask me whether I would like to go or not. She just sent me. Having stayed at her sister-in-law’s house for a little while, my employer came and called me back saying she had another job for me. Then she sent me to another place.” (D, 17 year-old migrant, Shan)

“I worked seven days a week. The work was very hard. I had to wake up at 4.00 am and start work straight away. In addition, I worked standing up, selling things from morning till 6.00 pm in the evening. I couldn’t sit down. I worked in many places. Wherever I went, it wasn’t too good. Before coming here, I worked at a noodle shop for two months. During the first month, the employer said I hadn’t worked for a full month, so he didn’t pay me. In the second month, he said I hadn’t worked well, so he paid me just half my wages. Whenever I worked well, he said he would increase my salary. Despite this agreement, I received only 1,000 baht per month.” (B, 20 year-old migrant, Shan)

Some migrants had no choice regarding the type of job they did, many needing to work in order to repay a debt to their recruiter.

“I was trafficked. Initially I worked in a laundry where the carrier [recruiter] found me a job. I was told they would pay me 400 baht per month but I was paid nothing. Thet woman [the carrier] came

and took my salary.” (E, 14 year-old migrant, Karen)

“I had to pay money in advance to a carrier for the first trip. I’ve been to Bangkok twice to work. The first time was for a year. The carrier who took me to Bangkok received money from my boss then went back. After working for four or five months, I was paid 500 baht a month. I had to buy everything I needed with that money. The boss bought nothing for us. The boss told us, ‘You get 500 baht per month and you are lucky because you have all been trafficked and sold’. I didn’t know how much money the carrier received from that employer for sending us there.” (E, 22 year-old migrant, Karen)

The research shows that many girls and women working in the domestic sector are forced to work. They have no choice and are often in a situation of

debt bondage. They are forced to work long hours without a day off. Some don’t get paid, are paid irregularly or receive very low wages.

b) Constraints on migrant domestic workers leaving their current job, communication and contact with the outside world

There are significant restrictions imposed on domestic workers’ contact with friends and family. The majority of employers (80%) don’t allow their workers to use the telephone and about half the workers surveyed were not allowed to receive phone calls. About 35% of domestic workers reported that their employers did not allow them to receive or send mail. Unregistered migrants faced more restrictions by their employers than registered migrants. For example, about 65% of non-registered migrants compared with 35% registered domestic workers weren’t allowed to receive phone calls (Table 8).

Table 8: Percentage distribution of employers’ control of migrants regarding their ability to contact the outside world, grouped by registration status

Migrants not allowed to...	Registration		Total*	Number
	Yes	No		
Make telephone calls	45.1	54.9	80.4	255
Receive telephone calls	35.3	64.7	50.8	161
Send mail	43.7	56.3	35.0	111
Receive mail	40.9	59.1	34.4	109
Number				317**

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

** There were three domestic workers who did not answer this question. Percent was calculated based on N=317.

Information from the in-depth interviews supports the survey findings.

“She [the employer] didn’t like it when friends or relatives came by to see me. Even when my mum came, I had to put her up somewhere else. The boss didn’t really like it. When my mum or friends called me, she wouldn’t let me take the

call. I could go out in the afternoon when she made me go to local market, otherwise I didn’t go out anywhere.” (J, 21 year-old migrant, Shan)

“The boss didn’t let me receive my mum’s phone calls. Sometimes he only let me say two or three words to friends [before making me hang up]. He kept my friends’ telephone numbers. I didn’t

call my parents in Laos for about seven or eight months.” (BJ, 14 year-old migrant, Lao)

“When my relatives call, they don’t let me take the call. The boss said if I want to contact other people or go out very much he would call the police to arrest me.” (M, 18 year-old migrant, Shan)

This information is fairly consistent with the in-depth interviews carried out with employers. Most employers said they allow workers to visit other people, but do not allow visitors into the homes of the workers. Employers say they take domestic workers out, such as on shopping trips, but are afraid of taking them to other provinces because of the travel restrictions placed on migrant workers. Some employers said they allow their workers to use the telephone, but that they charge them for any calls made.

In 2005, after this quantitative research had been completed, the majority of migrant workers had their own mobile phones. While this might increase

their (financial) outgoings, it does allow them the opportunity to keep in touch with other people and may help to reduce problems regarding exploitation and stress.

c) The retention of (and control over) identity documents

About half the domestic workers surveyed had registered for a work permit. Of those who were registered, many employers held onto their workers’ original work permits, sometimes giving them a copy. In this study, only 27% out of the 320 migrants surveyed held their original work permits, while 28% held a copy. For the remainder of workers, about 20% held another card, such as the Thai coloured card usually held by ethnic minorities who are not recognized as being Thai citizens or a Burmese identity card. The other 25% of migrants did not hold any form of card. The vast majority (90%) of children under 15 did not hold any kind of card, but a large proportion of adult migrants (aged 18-24) held an original work permit (33 %) (Table 9).

Table 9: Percentage distribution of migrants by possession of a work permit

Possession of Thai work permit	Age			Total
	<15	15-17	18-24	
Original work permit	0.0	11.9	32.7	27.8
Copy of work permit	0.0	20.3	29.5	26.9
Holder of Thai coloured card or Burmese Card	10.0	13.6	22.7	20.6
Does not hold any card	90.0	54.2	15.1	24.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(10)	(59)	(251)	(320)

Many migrants felt that holding a work permit would assist them in finding a new job more easily without realizing they must continue to work for the employer who registered them. Some registered workers said they still lived in fear of arrest and deportation despite the fact they had registered.

However, testimony from unregistered migrants illustrates their high degree of fear and how this limits their freedom of movement.

“I don’t have a card, and I’m afraid of everything. Every time I go out I’m very afraid. When I asked

my employer to go out, she would say that I didn't have any form of card and didn't let me go. Without a card, it's not easy to find a job, so although I get paid very little, I have to stay." (N, 25 year-old migrant, Shan)

"As I don't have a work permit now, it's difficult for me to get a job. If you don't have a permit, employers don't want to take you on. I had to suffer because my employer didn't deliver on her promises and I haven't received the wages I should have." (O, 23 year-old migrant, Burman)

Domestic workers, like all migrant workers, have the right to keep hold of their original ID cards themselves. However, employers don't recognize that they have no right to keep hold of their worker's cards.

Some say they hold the ID card to help the migrant if they were to be arrested by the police. Employers are aware of the risk of deportation that migrants face, even though they are registered. Another reason employers gave for keeping their workers' documents is because they are afraid their workers might run away. It seems likely that this is the main reason why employers hold onto the cards, rather than to protect workers from arrest or deportation.

d) Freedom of movement

About 60% of migrants were not allowed to go out to meet other people, or to invite visitors to their homes. This is especially significant given that all the workers lived at the employer's home and rarely, if ever, had a day off (Table 10).

Table 10: Percentage distribution of restrictions to freedom of movement and receiving of visitors placed on migrant workers by employers, grouped by registration status

Migrants not allowed to	Registration		Total*	Number
	Yes	No		
Go out to meet others	52.4	47.6	60.3	191
Receive visitors at the house	53.5	46.5	59.3	188
Number				317**

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

** There were three domestic workers who did not respond to this question. Percent was calculated based on N=317.

Registered migrants face more restrictions regarding their freedom of movement, indeed a slightly higher proportion of unregistered migrants are allowed to go out (52%) than registered migrants (48%). Often if an employer grants permission to a worker to go out, additional conditions are set by the employer.

"I couldn't go out as the boss kept my work permit, he would not give me the card when I wanted to go out. The boss told me not to venture far or the police would arrest me. I escaped once to see a friend." (BL, 10 year-old migrant, Lao)

Of great concern was the fact that well over half (57%) of employers felt they had the right to physically restrain workers from going out at night by locking them in the house. Only a quarter of employers felt migrants should be allowed to leave their workplace freely outside of work hours, a slightly higher proportion felt that migrants were entitled to this right under Thai law (30%) (Tables 11 and 12, p77).

Table 11: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes on migrants' freedom of movement

Attitude	Agree	Not agree	Do not know	Total (N)
We should lock migrant in at night to make sure that they do not escape	56.5	43.5	0.0	100.0 (62)

Table 12: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes and knowledge on migrant rights

Right	Should have				Have under Thai law			
	Yes	No	Do not know	Total (N)	Yes	No	Do not know	Total (N)
Can leave the premise freely outside of work hours	24.2	75.8	0.0	100.0 (62)	29.5	54.1	16.4	100.0 (61)

e) Violence in the workplace

Domestic workers commonly face both verbal and physical abuse at the hands of their employers.

“I don’t know how many times she beat me. But she scolds me often. She also hit me on the head. Sometimes she beats me up. When I was beaten with a stick, it left some bruises but they disappeared in three or four days so it looks like I never had a serious injury. They may regard me as a child and beat me, but since they are not my parents and not from my home country it makes me feel depressed. I’m also afraid of them. I feel sad. I say nothing. I can’t speak their language. If I say something I might be beaten even more. I feared that they might even kill me and no one would know, I also don’t know who to inform about the situation.” (G, 15 year-old migrant, Karen)

“The boss pulled my hair hard when I didn’t do a good enough job of cleaning. I’m afraid the boss will send me to work in other places. I have to do a good job and not be lazy to avoid punishment.” (BL, 10 year-old migrant, Lao)

Levels of verbal abuse are high within the domestic sector, over half of the migrant workers surveyed said they had been shouted at, over a third were sworn at, a similar number threatened and almost a fifth tricked through lies and cheating. In one case, the boss apparently kept hold of the workers’ money. Levels of physical abuse were also high with almost a fifth experiencing unwanted touching by their employers (17%). More serious forms of sexual abuse were also recorded in the survey. Eight per cent said they had experienced unsolicited sexual approaches (unwanted touching) while 1% said they had been raped. Domestic workers reported feeling powerless to stop such abuse as they were afraid of facing unemployment or deportation.

Age has a significant impact regarding forms of abuse, with younger workers much more likely to experience verbal abuse. Of child domestic workers under 15, 60% said they had been shouted at, 50% had been sworn at, 30% had been threatened, while 20% had experienced things being thrown at them.

Table 13 (p78) reveals that older migrants, aged 18-24, were more likely to have experienced sexual abuse (8%), unsolicited touching (17%), rape (1%), lying (16%) and cheating (14%).

Table 13: Percentage distribution of migrants by experiences of violence at work, grouped by age and registration status

Violence at work	Age			Registered		Total*	Number
	<15	15-17	18-24	No	Yes		
Yelled at in the workplace	60.0	57.6	56.6	57.2	56.6	56.9	182
Sworn at in the workplace	50.0	39.0	37.8	42.1	35.4	38.4	123
Slapped or hit in the workplace	10.0	8.5	8.8	10.3	7.4	8.8	28
Had things thrown at them	20.0	6.8	5.6	6.2	6.3	6.3	20
Threatened in the workplace	30.0	35.6	36.7	27.6	43.4	36.3	116
Pinched in the workplace	10.0	8.5	5.2	7.6	4.6	5.9	19
Pushed in the workplace	10.0	5.1	8.4	5.5	9.7	7.8	25
Locked/confined	0.0	11.9	7.2	8.3	7.4	7.8	25
Cheated/money withheld	10.0	3.4	13.5	8.3	14.3	11.6	37
Tricked by lies	0.0	6.8	16.3	6.9	20.0	14.1	45
Touched without consent	10.0	16.9	17.1	11.7	21.1	16.9	54
Unwanted sexual molestation	0.0	5.1	8.4	2.8	11.4	7.5	24
Raped	0.0	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.1	1.3	4
Punished	0.0	0.0	2.4	2.1	1.7	1.9	6
Other	0.0	5.1	7.6	3.4	9.7	6.9	22
Number							320

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Some migrant domestic workers suffered from stress and became depressed by the nature of their work, particularly those who have to take care of children. They can't go out as they worry about the children and because their employers do not like them to leave the child at any time. There is a lot of pressure on such workers and they often feel depressed if they can't meet their employer's demands. Domestic workers not only have to try to respond to any request made by the employer at any time of day, but also need to bear in mind their employer's mood. They often feel stressed if they are not able to please their employers, particularly those who have to take care of children.

"In my previous job, I felt comfortable. I did not have to worry about anything. I just did what I had to do. In my current job I have to worry about the baby crying. I have to do everything according to the needs and desires of the child. Sometimes

she isn't satisfied with what I have done and I feel anxious and worriedThe bosses are kind, but sometimes they scold me. If their child cries, I get scolded. Sometimes they won't even talk to me." (I, 16 year-old migrant, Tamil)

f) False information about the type of work to be carried out and working conditions

The majority of domestic workers didn't know what their working conditions would be like until they arrived at their employer's home.

"Before coming to Thailand, I didn't think about what work I would have to do. I considered doing any job because I borrowed money from other people. If it takes too long, my mum will definitely lose her land so I will do any kind of work." (AV, 19 year-old migrant, Shan)

“I didn’t know what I would do in Thailand and the recruiter didn’t tell me anything” (BN, 15 year-old migrant, Lao)

The majority of domestic workers didn’t seem to know what their working conditions would be like until arriving at the employer’s home.

g) Payment

Overall, the domestic migrant workers surveyed received a very low monthly salary, 41% receiving less than 1,000 baht per month. About a third receive between 1,000 and 2,000 baht per month. Just over 10% of domestic migrant workers earn over 3,000 baht per month. A much higher proportion of unregistered migrants (54%) receive less than 1,000 baht per month than registered workers. Wages seem to rise in line with a worker’s age, so in general

an older worker earns more. Almost 90% of child domestic workers (under 15 years of age) received less than 1,000 baht per month, of which the average was about 700 baht. The minimum was just 400 baht per month.

Registered domestic migrants receive a higher salary than unregistered migrants. The average monthly salary for registered migrants stands at 1,928 baht compared to just 1,525 baht for unregistered migrants. These averages are slightly skewed because an unregistered domestic worker received a maximum of 6,000 baht per month, for example, compared to a high of 4,500 baht among registered migrants. However, the median monthly income reveals that registered migrants received an average of 1,700 baht and unregistered migrants just 1,000 baht (Table14).

Table 14: Percentage distribution of migrants with regard to level of monthly wage, grouped by age and registration status

Monthly wage (baht)	Age			Registration		Total
	<15	15-17	18-24	Yes	No	
400-1,000 baht	88.9	63.2	34.0	30.2	54.3	41.0
1,001-1,500 baht	0.0	19.3	16.6	18.3	14.5	16.6
1,501-2,000 baht	11.1	1.8	15.4	18.3	5.8	12.7
2,001-3,000 baht	0.0	14.6	20.3	20.1	16.7	18.6
3,000-6,000 baht	0.0	1.8	13.7	13.0	8.7	11.1
Minimum	400	500	500	600	400	
Maximum	2,000	4,000	6,000	4,500	6,000	
Median	600	1,000	1,500	1,700	1,000	
Average	733.3	1,215.8	1,910.8	1,928.4	1,525.4	
(Standard Deviation, SD)	(502.5)	(796.9)	(1,082.9)	(1,001.8)	(1,113.5)	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(9)	(57)	(241)	(169)	(138)	(307)*

* There were 13 domestic workers who did not respond to this question.

Data generated by the in-depth interviews with employers confirms that employers pay their workers well below Thailand’s minimum wage. According to the employers they generally paid their workers

between 3,000 and 5,000 baht per month. The majority of employers say they pay their workers regularly.

h) Delayed payment and deductions for mistakes

While many domestic migrant workers receive a low salary, some are not paid at all, or receive late or irregular payments.

“I get 800 baht per month, but my boss keeps my salary. I’ve been working for eleven months but I still haven’t got all the money due. I was given 2,000 baht once and I sent it home. Sometimes they only give me a bit of pocket money.” (AC, 19 year-old migrant, Pa-O/Karen)

“My salary wasn’t paid up at the end of every month. My boss said I didn’t need to use any money and he would keep it for me. If I had it, he said, it would only be lost. I worked there for two years, but when I quit, I had no idea know why he deducted so much. I was left with just 16,000 baht. I don’t understand it at all. I withdrew some money once last year. I only sent home about 20,000 baht. My boss said he had deducted the money for the cost of the work permit and health treatment. I don’t know how much more he took. There was only 16,000 baht left, I just don’t understand it. Anyway, it was just as well that I resigned from that house.” (AD, 18 year-old migrant, Shan)

“After working for a month, I asked for my salary and the shop owner told me that somebody had sold me to them so I would never get paid. If I complain they will send me to the police, so I feel devastated.” (AT, 24 year-old migrant, Burman)

Some employers say they keep their workers’ salaries for them and that they give money to them if the workers ask for it. Employers don’t pay overtime, rather they say that they provide gifts for their domestic workers on special occasions, such as gold or clothes.

“She [a domestic worker] keeps all her salary with me. If her family is in trouble or needs to use the

money, somebody will call. My domestic worker can ask for the money from me... it’s up to her to request it.” (M, 36 year-old female employer)

Employers do not believe they are paying low wages and many point to the fact that they gave payments “in-kind” by providing workers with accommodation, water, electricity, meals and sometimes personal items. However, not all employers provide free accommodation and meals for their domestic workers. One female employer deducted about a third of the worker’s salary, which totalled 3,000 baht per month.

“I deduct 700 baht for accommodation and 300 baht for the electricity and water bills. However, I pay everything for them, including the full cost of registration.” (E, female employer, age not known)

It is standard practice for most employers to deduct the costs of registration from their workers’ salaries.

“I deducted the registration fees from her salary over two months, it amounted to 1,900 baht per time. If I deducted it in one lump she wouldn’t have any money left for the whole month” (A, female employer, age not known)

Employers do not pay overtime. They argue that domestic workers do not work for a “full” day (eight hours) and therefore should be available to work for longer hours. Many employers did not perceive that they were asking their employees to work unusual hours, although many migrants were asked to work early mornings, late nights, weekends or as requested by the employer. Even worse, sometimes wages were deducted if the domestic worker asked for time off or for durable household goods bought not specifically for the worker, but for the use of the whole household.

“Now, I am working as a domestic worker. The salary is 2,700 baht per month. Sometimes I get paid late. The boss doesn’t keep it for me. My

salary is always cut when I ask to go out. If I don't work for one day, they cut 150 baht from the salary. The salary is sufficient. If I only buy necessities, it only uses up about 400 baht per month." (K, 19 year-old migrant, Shan)

"When I arrived in Bangkok I was only 11 years old, and they didn't let me work. They asked me to take care of their children and said they would pay me 500 baht per month. But they never actually gave it to me. They said if the chance came along, they would send it to my family. I didn't see them send any money home during the five years I worked for them. While I was staying with them they bought a rice pot and cut it from my salary. When they bought a television for their family, they cut that from my salary, too. They said I ate rice and watched television with them. They cut all sorts of things from my salary." (AE, 16 year-old migrant, Shan)

i) Working hours and rest periods

Almost all domestic workers (98%) were required to work more than the standard eight-hour day. More than half the migrants surveyed work more than 14 hours a day. There are no clear differences in work hours based on legal status or age. The vast majority of domestic workers never have a regular day off. Only a very small number (7%) are entitled to a weekly day off, about 14% have a monthly day off and 17% an annual day off. Child domestic workers and unregistered domestic workers are more likely to work longer hours. The majority of child workers (aged under 18) do not receive a regular day off. A larger proportion of unregistered migrant workers have no regular day off. Only 2% of those aged 15-17 and 8% of those aged 18-24 years are permitted a weekly day off (Table 15).

Table 15: Percentage distribution of migrants by working hours per day, type of day off, grouped by age and registration status

Working hour/day off	Age			Registration		Total
	<15	15-17	18-24	Yes	No	
No. of working hours per day						
1-8	10.0	0.0	1.6	1.1	2.1	1.6
9-12	10.0	16.9	16.1	12.0	21.0	16.0
13-14	10.0	13.6	18.1	17.7	16.1	17.0
15-16	40.0	35.6	28.1	30.9	28.7	29.9
17-18	30.0	33.9	32.5	34.9	30.1	32.7
19-20	0.0	0.0	3.6	3.4	2.1	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Number)	(10)	(59)	(249)	(175)	(143)	(318)*
Days off permitted						
None	70.0	78.0	58.0	54.0	71.7	62.1
Weekly	20.0	1.7	7.6	5.2	9.0	6.9
Monthly	0.0	11.9	14.8	16.7	10.3	13.8
Annually	10.0	8.5	19.6	24.1	9.0	17.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Number)	(10)	(59)	(250)	(174)	(145)	(319)**

* There were two migrants who did not answer this question.

** There was one migrant who did not answer this question.

Many domestic workers are required to get up very early and often work until late in the evening. Some domestic workers say they have too much work to do.

“I work from about 4.00 am to 9.00 pm, amounting to 17 or more hours a day. On some days I work for longer than that. I wash clothes, the car and do the gardening. I don’t get any holidays, but I get some free time at the weekend. After finishing the housework, there is nothing else to do. Mostly, I watch television and read once the work has been done.” (AA, 15 year-old migrant, Shan)

“I was the only worker in the house. I worked for a couple that didn’t have any children, but they kept 12 large, rare dogs. At 6 am I used to get up and wash the dishes, clean the house and cook food for the dogs, then I had to sweep the compound with a broom. When I started cooking rice in the morning, my bosses stayed in bed. When my boss’ wife got up, she cooked curry and we ate breakfast together.” (O, 23 year-old migrant, Shan)

The high degree of responsibility which some domestic workers carry means they can’t take days off. In some cases they can only take a day off once they have finished all their household work. A few said they didn’t have regular days off but were able to rest during working hours.

“After finishing all my work I’m free, but I don’t have any ‘regular’ free time. I only have very short stints of free time so I’m not able to visit

anywhere. Instead, I just have to stay in the house and within the compound. During Songkran [festival] I saw other people playing happily and celebrating at night. I had no place to go and had no opportunity to enjoy the festival.” (G, 15 year-old migrant, Karen)

“I don’t get any holidays. When I finish work, I can only watch television. My boss talks to me, too. I’m the only housekeeper and the problem is that if I’m ever sick, I still have to work. There is nobody else to carry out the work if I’m sick so I just have to keep going. If I don’t work, I’m afraid my salary will be cut.” (K, 19 year-old migrant, Shan)

“During some months I can take a day off, but during others I can’t. If I want to rest, I have to finish all my work first. If I get any free time, I go to see my friend. I can’t read a book as I don’t get the time to.” (AR, 22 year-old migrant, Shan)

“I don’t get a rest day, but sometimes I get the chance to rest briefly. When I get time to rest, I just watch television or stay in the house.” (AB, 17 year-old migrant, Pow-Karen)

Employers were asked a range of questions to gauge their level of understanding of migrant rights under Thai labour law. Most agreed that migrant workers should have a regular day off (82%), however, about two thirds felt migrants were actually entitled to this right under Thai law (65%). More than half (54%) thought that overtime should be voluntary and 43% felt voluntary overtime was a right under Thai law (Table 16).

Table 16: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes and understanding of migrant rights

Rights	Should have				Do have under Thai law			
	Yes	No	Do not know	Total (N)	Yes	No	Do not know	Total (N)
Regular day off	82.3	17.7	0.0	100.0 (62)	65.0	28.3	6.7	100.0 (60)
Can have voluntary overtime work	54.8	43.5	1.6	100.0 (61)	43.4	38.3	18.3	100.0 (60)

Not all employers agree that they should give their workers a regular day off. Some give workers a day off when workers ask for it, for example, during relevant national holiday periods.

“Within the domestic work system, there are no days off for the workers. If they want to go out, it’s up to the employer to decide. They shouldn’t go out every week, as it’s difficult to control and is very dangerous. It’s our responsibility to protect them [domestic migrant workers]. Since they

work for us, we need to take care of them.” (G, 74-year-old male employer)

j) Written contracts

Just over half the employers surveyed agreed that migrant workers should have a written contract and a similar amount believed migrants already had this right under Thai law (Table 17). However, in practice, hardly any migrant workers had written contracts with their employers.

Table 17: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes and understanding of written contracts

Rights	Should have				Do have under Thai law			
	Yes	No	Do not know	Total	Yes	No	Do not know	Total
Written contract	53.2	46.8	0.0	100.0 (62)	50.0	30.3	16.7	100.0 (60)

A surprisingly large number of employers agreed domestic workers should be given a written contract.

“They should have a written contract even though they are migrants. Thai workers should get them

as well. It’s no good for us if they have no written contract because the workers can leave anytime they want. We should have a written contract for negotiating. It should be the same as when we rent a house and enter into an agreement.” (A, female employer, age not known)

3.5 Recruitment

a) Methods used and payment: employers' perspectives

Most domestic workers found their job through relatives, friends or recruiters. In many cases the recruiter is also either a relative or friend. Migrant workers still paid for transportation if they came with friends or relatives, but migrant workers tend to pay larger amounts to recruiters, if it is they who takes them across the border and finds them work.

In many cases, recruiters deduct their fees from the migrant worker's salary. Some workers already had a job organized for them by recruiters before they left home, but others had to wait in order to find one.

“The recruiter, who was a kind old man, took me to see the boss and I started working straight away. He charged me 3,000 baht, which was equal to my monthly salary so I didn't receive the first month's salary.” (AS, 16 year-old migrant, Lao)

“When I arrived at the boss' house, my boss gave the recruiter 7,000 baht to cover my travel costs. As they had paid for my travelling costs, they gave me only 1,000 baht per month and said I had to work for them for two years.” (AZ, 17 year-old migrant, Burman)

“My aunt and relatives sent me to a woman who was a recruiter. I didn't even know her name. She demanded money many times. As soon as I arrived she placed me in a shop selling clothes. I worked there for more than two months. I didn't get paid anything. She came and took my wages many times.” (E, 14 year-old migrant, Karen)

“Those who could not pay the transport costs in advance agreed to have them deducted from their pay. If you can pay upfront it costs 5,500 baht.” (F, 22 year-old migrant, Karen)

“She [the recruiter] took two months salary in advance, I paid 1,600 baht for the travel costs. Afterwards, she never returned. I also heard she took money from the shop.” (I, 16 year-old migrant, Tamil)

“When I arrived at Pieng Loung [in Thailand], I had to stay at a relative's house. I waited 18 days to get a job. My relatives helped me find work in Bangkok. They paid another 2,500 baht to a recruiter. My travel costs were 3,000 baht. I had a work agent come and pick me up at Pieng Loung. After that they made deductions from my salary.” (M, 18 year-old migrant, Shan)

Employers recruited domestic workers primarily through their friends (26%) as well as through individual agents (21%), other workers (15%), parents or relatives of the domestic worker or members of their current domestic workforce (13%), employer's relatives (11%) and distant acquaintances (10%). Only a few employers said they recruited domestic workers by using formal agents (3%) and as Table 18 shows, only one employer said they recruited their worker through a police officer (2%). In terms of recruitment costs, employers paid the highest fee of 12,000 baht to a Burmese recruiter. On average, payments to recruiters were about 3,338 baht per worker (Table 19, p85).

Table 18: Percentage distribution of employers by recruitment methods used

Methods	Percent*	Number
Employer's friend brought them	25.8	16
Individual recruiter	21.0	13
Migrants' personal contact	14.5	9
Workers came by themselves	14.5	9
Workers' parents or relatives brought them	12.9	8
Current workers [of employer] brought them	12.9	8
My relatives brought/introduced them	11.3	7
Introduced by people I personally know	9.7	6
Formal agent or recruitment agency	3.2	2
Police brought/introduced them	1.6	1
Number		62

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Table 19: Average payment (Baht) paid by employers

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Number
Payment	100	12,000	3,338.5	13

When employers were asked to rank their preferred methods for recruiting domestic workers, about a quarter preferred to recruit domestic workers through their friends. The second most popular recruitment

method was through an individual recruiter (15%). About 11% of them ranked their first choice of recruitment method as existing migrants or their relatives' contacts (Table 20).

Table 20: Percentage distribution of employers by preferred recruitment methods

Methods	Percent	Number
Employer's friend brought them along	24.2	15
Individual recruiter	14.5	9
Migrants' personal contact	11.3	7
Workers came by themselves	6.5	4
Workers' parents or relatives brought them along	9.7	6
Members of existing workforce brought them along	8.1	5
Employer's relatives brought/introduce them	11.3	7
Introduced by people employer knows personally	9.7	6
Formal agent or recruitment agency	3.2	2
Police brought/introduced them	1.6	1
Total	100.0	62

Employers were also asked about standard recruitment practices used by other employers in terms of domestic workers. Most other employers primarily recruited domestic workers through individual agents (31%), followed by their friends (24%), current workers (21%) or through parents or relatives of the domestic workers (15%). Only a few employers said they

recruited domestic workers by using formal agents (2%). Since employers of domestic workers rarely discuss employment issues with other employers it was not surprising that almost a quarter of employers (23%) said they didn't know the recruitment methods used by other employers (Table 21, p86).

Table 21: Percentage distribution of employers by recruitment methods used by other employers in the same business

Methods	Percent*	Number
Individual recruiter (informal)	30.6	19
A friend of employer brought them	24.2	15
Existing workers brought them	21.0	13
Worker's parents or relatives brought them	14.5	9
Workers came by themselves	12.9	8
Introduced by people the employer knows personally	9.7	6
Migrants' network	8.1	5
Introduced through friends' worker	6.5	4
Formal agent or recruitment agency	1.6	1
Don't know about other employers' recruitment methods	22.6	14
Number		62

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

The results of in-depth interviews also suggested that employers often use personal contacts to find new migrant workers. It seems the majority of employers don't pay recruitment costs, or if they do, this is later recouped from a migrant's wages. Often migrants pay recruiters directly for providing transportation and helping them to find a job.

“How do I get in touch with migrants? I was given contact details from friends who employ migrant domestic workers. They asked their domestic workers so I didn't pay anything.” (E, 67-year-old male employer)

“There is a network, for example, within our village. People have friends who have migrated and who now send remittances home. The

migrant worker waits for his or her town. When friends tell you about the job at the destination, a number of you decide to go. You travel with someone who you know and can rely on in case of there being any problems during migration. These transporters are known as 'carriers' and they charge between 3,000-6,000 per person trafficked. I paid 2,000 baht to the carrier.” (G, 74 year-old male employer)

Some employers used formal private recruitment agencies but were not satisfied with the workers supplied. Such agencies can provide a replacement worker if the contracted worker runs away. None of the employers surveyed used the public recruitment service provided by the Ministry of Labour. Migrants from Myanmar have established strong networks

back home, both through the internet and telephone. Through these networks, they are able to organize additional workers who can come at short notice.

Employers also point out that migrants from Myanmar usually come to Thailand in a group, and they are often from the same village or the same province or are related. New arrivals are more likely to work as domestic workers initially and then shift later to work in the service sector.

“When there are new arrivals, they tend to have relatives or are able to contact friends. They have a network available already through the internet. They have mobile phones, which they can use to call each other. Now if you need migrant workers, they will call around and arrange what you need. They change jobs very easily and move from one

house to another over a short period of time. The migrants themselves also act as recruiters. They charge recruiter fees to the employers. We use this network to get our workers. We’ve never used the MOL recruitment service as it isn’t helpful.” (H, male employer, age not known)

b) Methods used and payment: migrants’ perspective

Almost one in three domestic workers borrow money from their family in order to come to Thailand. A quarter had sold valuable personal belongings to raise money for the trip and almost one in five borrowed money from others, including relatives and friends. Almost 17% of domestic workers are in debt to a broker (Table 22).

Table 22: Percentage distribution of migrants by methods used to pay for travel to Thailand

Payment methods	Percent*	Number
Sold personal items	25.3	81
Borrowed from family	29.1	93
Borrowed from others	20.9	67
In debt to employer	2.8	9
In debt to broker	16.6	53
Personal savings	17.5	56
Other	10.0	32
Number	320	

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Data generated during the in-depth interviews provides more information on the amount migrants pay for recruitment.

“I came with the son of a man I knew. When I came I ran out of money. I paid 3,500 baht. I had to sell my earrings and another small diamond ring to pay for car rental. But it was still not enough. A woman from my hometown lent me another 2,000 baht. Now I have to make some

money so I can pay off my debts.” (AU, 14 year-old migrant, Shan)

“As I worked in Rangoon I was able to save up some money and bought a gold chain. They took the chain and gave me 10,000 kyat [303 baht] for my travelling expenses. My chain had a fish locket and weighed one kyat.” (E, 14 year-old migrant, Karen)

Some women didn't know the real cost of travel as it depended on each carrier's individual rate.

“Previously I didn't know how much it really cost for travel. So to cover all the costs for travel, food and for the time waiting until I got a job I gave her too much. I gave the woman 16,000 kyat [485 baht].” (AW, 20 year-old migrant, Karen).

“My father brought me here. I didn't know how much it cost for my travel. On the way, they didn't check my ID. I don't have an ID yet. This is my first trip in Thailand.” (AX, 15 year-old migrant, Burman)

Domestic workers organize their trip to work in Thailand through recruiters, carriers, relatives and friends. They paid the recruiter and often paid the authorities during the journey to Thailand. Many came without their parents' permission.

“My mother asked me to come and work in Thailand and I also wanted to visit. I came with a Lao recruiter and then he sent me with another two Thai recruiters. We stayed one night at the recruiter's house. I was then sent to this employer. I didn't pay anything to any of the recruiters.” (BL, 10 year-old migrant, Lao)

“When we came to Chiang Mai, the police at the checkpoint didn't ask us for anything. We rented a car and sneaked past Chiang Mai. But in Burma each of us had to pay 1,000 kyat [30 baht] to the authorities to exchange our ID cards.” (AU, 14 year-old migrant, Shan)

3.6 Migration history/journey

Nine girls who were interviewed were under 15 when they migrated to Thailand. Some came to work at a very young age (under 10). This was also cited as an advantage because the border authorities did not check them out very carefully.

“I didn't see any problem. At that time I was only 12 or 13 years old and I'm also small so they said I was a child and said nothing more. They may have thought I was my aunt's daughter so they didn't question me any further.” (W, 15 year-old migrant, Pow-Karen)

“I came to Thailand when I was nine. We came in as a group of four girls and three boys. All the girls were the same age, but the boys in general were older. Aside from me, they were about 15 years old.” (BL, 10 year-old migrant, Lao)

“This is the first time I've come to Thailand. I came here three years ago with my relatives, who promised to take me home. But up until now they haven't come back.” (C, 17 year-old migrant, Cambodian)

In the 15-17 year age group, over half migrated to Thailand when they were aged 15-17 and almost 40% migrated when they were 10-14. In the 18-24 age group, 54% migrated to Thailand when they were 18-24, 35% migrated when they were 15-17, and 10% migrated when they were aged 10-14. Overall, the majority of domestic workers migrated to Thailand when they were 15-19 years old (Table 23, p89). This suggests most domestic workers are recent migrants and have lived in Thailand for fewer than five years.

Table 23: Percentage distribution of migrants by age when they first migrated to Thailand and their current age

Current age	Age when first migrated to Thailand				Total (N)*
	<10	10-14	15-17	18-24	
Less than 15	-	100.0	-	-	100.0 (9)
15-17	6.9	37.9	55.2	-	100.0 (58)
18-24	0.8	10.0	34.8	54.4	100.0 (250)

* There were three domestic workers who did not respond to this question.

3.7 Employers' attitudes/preferences for migrant workers

a) Attitudes towards employment and migrant workers

From the current research it is clear that employers tend to operate fairly independently, which is not surprising given the nature of the work in the private sphere. Employers in domestic work have not established any defined group or association. Fewer than half those surveyed (44%) would seek advice from other employers when facing worker-related

problems. More than half of the employers (53%) said employers of domestic labourers do not get together to discuss workers' welfare. Just over 40% of employers seem interested in how other employers treat their workers.

Less than a fifth of the employers surveyed indicated that other employers would follow if one employer increased the salaries of their workers (Table 24). These findings demonstrate that there is very little association, even of an informal nature, between employers of domestic workers.

Table 24: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes towards and practices on employment

Attitudes and Practices	Agree	Not agree	Do not know	Total (N)
You seek advice from other employers when you are facing problems related to workers	43.5	54.8	1.6	100.0 (62)
Other employers also treat their workers as you do	40.3	46.8	12.9	100.0 (62)
If an employer increases the salary for their workers other employers will follow	17.7	75.8	6.5	100.0 (62)
Employers in this area discuss workers' welfare	35.5	53.2	11.3	100.0 (62)

Employers were also asked about their attitudes towards migrant workers. The key attitudes expressed were that migrants were easier to control (74%) and worked harder (53%) than Thais. A large number of employers felt that migrant workers were good for Thailand because they are cheap labour (69%)

and that the government should allow for more legal migrant workers (81%). About two thirds of employers surveyed did not think that migrant workers had any impact on Thailand's national security (Table 25, p90).

Table 25: Percentage distribution of employers by attitudes towards migrant workers

Attitude	Agree	Not agree	Do not know	Total (N)
Migrants work harder than Thais	53.2	46.8	0.0	100.0 (62)
Migrant workers are easier to control than Thais	74.2	24.2	1.6	100.0 (62)
Migrant workers are good for Thailand because they're cheap	69.4	30.6	0.0	100.0 (62)
Migrant workers affect Thailand's national security	33.9	66.1	0.0	100.0 (62)
Government should allow more migrants to come and work legally	80.6	17.7	1.6	100.0 (62)

However, the results of in-depth-interviews suggested that some employers felt migrants were a threat to national security, while others did not believe this at all.

“I agree to some degree that migrants from Myanmar will affect national security, but not entirely. I think there are also Thais who weaken our national security. There are also some other nationalities who impact on our national security. We can't get enough labourers so it's necessary to bring in migrant workers. However, it is crowded in Thailand, isn't it? Thai workers also want to work abroad, such as in Europe, the Middle East or North America. It's a case of trying to find a balance as some Thais leave the country to work, but are replaced by migrant workers.” (A, female employer, age not known)

Employers believe the Thai government should limit the number of migrant workers according to demand for such labour. Some employers acknowledged that migrant workers tend to be employed to carry out basic menial jobs, and suggested Thai workers shift to more skilled occupations.

“Actually, I don't want any foreigners to come and work in our country whether they are from Laos, Cambodia or Myanmar. However, we should allow Westerners or Chinese who come here to trade. I think we should help our own people. Don't forget, there are still many Thais who have to beg, are paralyzed, or living in remote areas. Why don't we use government money to help them instead of helping the migrant workers?” (A, female employer, age not known)

“We should allow migrant workers to come to Thailand, but we should limit the type of work they can do. Similarly, many Thais who work abroad are also limited to particular occupations in destination countries. We need to be selective and have standard criteria for bringing in migrant workers.” (J, 29-year-old female employer)

b) Preference by ethnicity

According to employers, migrant workers from the following countries account for most migrant employment in the domestic sector - Karen (32%), Lao (24%) and Burmese (16%).

Table 26: Percentage distribution of domestic workers by ethnic background employed by Thai employers

Ethnicity	Percent	Number
Karen	32.3	20
Lao	24.2	15
Burman	16.1	10
Mon	11.3	7
Shan	11.3	7
Cambodian	3.2	2
Pa-O	1.6	1
Total	100.0	62

Employers were asked for their reasons for hiring from a particular ethnic group. Overall, employers indicated a preference for Karen domestic workers. More than half of employers currently hiring Karen workers did so because Karen workers are readily available, are responsible/logical, hard working, flexible, easy to control, and are “clean” in comparison with other ethnic groups. There was also a preference

for domestic workers from Laos, with some employers suggesting they are more readily available and easier to control (Table 27). Employers also expressed a preference for Lao domestic workers because they can speak and understand basic Thai since Lao and Thai are very similar languages. Some employers did state that Lao workers are lazier and ask for more days off than migrants from Myanmar.

Table 27: Percentage distribution of employers by reasons for wanting to hire a specific ethnic group

Reasons	Ethnicity*						
	Burma	Shan	Mon	Karen	Pa-O	Lao	Cambodia
Hard working/willing to work/well prepared/flexible	20.0	14.3	14.3	35.0	0.0	0.0	50.0
Easy to control	20.0	14.3	42.9	5.0	0.0	33.3	0.0
Have no alternative	20.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
Responsible/logical	20.0	71.4	57.1	55.0	0.0	20.0	50.0
Readily available	40.0	71.4	42.9	30.0	100.0	46.7	50.0
Nice/look clean	10.0	42.9	57.1	25.0	0.0	0.0	50.0
Honest	0.0	28.6	14.3	20.0	0.0	6.7	50.0
Similar culture	0.0	0.0	28.6	0.0	0.0	20.0	50.0
Other (legal/pity)	0.0	0.0	14.3	5.0	0.0	13.3	0.0
Number	10	7	7	20	1	15	2

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Employers felt Thai domestic workers always asked for higher salaries, do not work as hard and change jobs more frequently. Workers from Cambodia were the least preferred choice, with some employers suggesting they do not always look very “clean”.

“Moreover, employers prefer Karen people for domestic work. They think the Karen are more honest and more loyal to them.” (AX, 15 year-old migrant, Burman)

“I choose to hire Lao workers because our language is similar, and we can easily understand each other. I don’t like to hire domestic workers from Myanmar because of bad publicity suggesting they have killed their employers, and also because of the historical conflict between Thailand and Myanmar.” (A, female employer, age not known).

“I don’t like the Burmese. In the past, there have been conflicts between Thailand and Burma and the Burmese were very cruel. Lao people don’t have any conflict with the Thais. I feel closer to the Lao than the Burmese.” (L, female employer, age not known)

“Migrant wages are much lower than Thai wages. If I employed Thai domestic workers, their salary would be 6,000-7,000 baht. They would not work if they were paid less than this amount. Thai

workers often ask for days off. If it’s a holiday, you can’t ask them to do anything. Some return home and stay there for up to a month. The Karen workers don’t go home often.” (D, female employer, age not known)

“In two years, my domestic worker, who is 20 and a Karen, has never gone back to her home in Myanmar. This is because I told her not to go back home. ‘There is nothing there, your area is very poor and you do not have enough in order to survive,’ I told her. She believes me.” (E, 46 year-old female employer)

c) Preference by age

Employers were also asked about any age preference for domestic workers. Employers were able to provide more than a single response regarding an age group as well as more than a single reason for each preference regarding age groups. Twelve employers preferred to hire domestic workers under 18 years old. Child domestic workers were preferred due to various reasons, such as being more obedient (cited by 100% of those who expressed a preference for hiring children) and are prepared to work flexible hours (25%). Fifty-three employers preferred to hire domestic workers aged 18-25 because they said they were more obedient (49%), responsible and logical (43%) and more experienced (19%)

Table 28: Percentage distribution of employers by reasons for preferring migrants aged under 18 years old and aged 18-25

Reasons	Age	
	<18	18-25
Work harder	8.3	9.4
Cheaper wage rate	8.3	3.8
More obedient	100.0	49.1
Higher skills	0.0	7.5
More experienced	0.0	18.9
Responsible and logical	16.7	43.4
More prepared to work flexible hours	25.0	15.1
Others (including, for example, honest, legal and young)	25.0	3.8
Number*	12	53

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Nineteen employers expressed a preference for more than a single age group.

Employers who did not express a preference for hiring children were also asked why they did not express

a preference. Some said the children are too young (37%) and it is illegal (21%). As for reasons why some employers did not like to hire workers aged 18-25 (Table 29, p94), a small number suggested they were lazy (13%) or too expensive (8%).

Table 29: Percentage distribution of employers' reasons for not hiring workers aged under 18 and 18-25

Reason	Percent*	Number
Not hiring employees aged <18		
It's illegal	21.0	13
They can't work as domestic workers	16.1	10
They should be at school	1.6	1
Too young to work	37.1	23
Not responsible enough	8.1	5
Will have problem regarding sexual relations	3.2	2
Have no age preference	3.2	2
Do not work for long duration	3.2	2
Stubborn	1.6	1
Not hiring employees aged 18-25		
Lazy	12.9	8
Create problems	3.2	2
Too expensive	12.9	8
Have no experience	4.8	3
Stubborn	8.1	5
Not responsible enough	1.6	1
Other	1.6	1

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

Information generated by the in-depth interviews supports these findings. In general, employers prefer to hire migrants aged 18-25 as they feel they are more mature. Employers preferred not to hire those aged under 18 as they feel they may not listen to them. Some were reluctant to hire those aged over 25 as they are more likely to get married and perhaps discontinue their employment.

“The preferred age in my opinion is between 19 and 25. If they are older than this, they get married or want to go back home and get married. And if they are younger than this, they can't work and have no sense of responsibility.” (B, 39-year-old female employer)

“The preferred age is under 30. My wife would prefer to teach the young ones. She said they are active and obedient. The ideal age is 18-19, while at 14-15 they are too young. For those aged over 30, it's too difficult to change their behaviour.” (C, 72-year-old male employer)

d) Attitudes towards migrant rights

Half of the employers asked about their attitudes towards migrant rights agreed that, “migrants should have the same rights as Thai nationals”. Less than a third, however, felt that migrant workers should have the right to join a labour union (Table 30, p95).

Table 30: Percentage distribution employers' attitudes towards equal rights and the right to join a trade union

Attitude	Agree	Not agree	Do not know	Total (N)
Migrants should have the same rights as Thais	50.0	50.0	0.0	100.0 (62)
Migrant workers should have the right to join a trade union	29.0	69.4	1.6	100.0 (62)

Some employers felt migrant workers should not have access to the same rights as Thai workers, with the exception of healthcare. Some employers felt migrants should receive fewer benefits than Thais because Thais performed better or in order to protect the Thai labour market.

“I think it’s okay for migrants to have equal access to health services. I think we should not give them too many rights though. In terms of wage rates, I would pay the same wages as for Thais, but I would provide more fringe benefits for the Thais. For example, during special holidays, I would give Thais 3,000-4,000 baht, but limit the payment for migrant workers to 1,000 baht. This is because we can’t ask migrant workers to do everything that we want as they are limited by their abilities. But we can demand a lot from the Thais.” (E, 46-year-old female employer)

“At the moment, I can’t give an opinion on whether or not migrants should have equal rights to Thais. We need to improve and protect our Thai workers first. If we give the migrants equal rights now, the Thai workers may be in trouble. This is because employers already perceive migrant workers to be more diligent than Thais, leading to more Thai workers becoming unemployed, as well as an increase in the number of migrants. I believe it’s enough to have organizations look after them [migrants] and give them fair treatment.” (B, 39-year-old female employer)

“I don’t agree that we should allow migrants to form a labour union. If the government were to allow it, it would mean that they accepted their

illegal status. There are many groups of migrants from Myanmar in Thailand. Each group is normally made up of people from the one village, the same province or they are relatives. They already use this kind of group to pressure us. For example, they want us to give them days off during their special festivals, or they would like to go out as a group. The employers have to let them go, even though sometimes they don’t want to.” (H, male employer, age not known)

As far as migrant domestic workers are concerned they are not permitted under Thai law to join trade unions because they are not recognized as workers under Thai labour law.

In Thai culture, migrant domestic workers are often treated almost as a part of the family. Employers, who are usually older than the migrant domestic worker employed, often assume a role of having the right to “protect” their family members, and implicitly the domestic worker. This attitude may actually increase the vulnerability of the domestic workers as their personal issues, such as freedom to leave the house of their own accord or go and see friends becomes a “family” matter.

3.8 Support mechanisms

a) Who migrant domestic workers live with and their living conditions

All of the migrant domestic workers lived with their employer during the term of employment, however, only 85% currently lived with their employers. This

is because some of the workers interviewed were no longer working as domestic workers, and were interviewed based on their previous experiences. Only 27% of migrant domestic workers had their own private room, 37% shared a room with others

in the household, and 23% slept in an open room (Table 31). They were required to share a room either with other domestic workers or employers' family members. This means that they are available for work at all hours.

Table 31: Percentage distribution of migrants by living arrangement

Accommodation	Percent*	Number
Private room	26.5	84
Shared room	35.6	113
Open room	23.0	73
Number*		317**

* Since the question was worded regarding current living conditions, those domestic workers (N=50) who were no longer working and living in households did not respond on whether or not they had private or shared facilities during the time of their employment. Percent was calculated based on total study domestic workers (N=320).

** There were three migrants who did not answer this question

Domestic workers often share a room with children or elderly people who they care for.

“At night my boss doesn’t wake me up but if the child wakes up I have to get up. Their two children sleep with me. When one of the children cries in his sleep or when he feels hungry I have to get up. I have to give him a bottle and lull him to sleep again.” (AF, 21-year-old migrant, Karen)

“I have a small room close to the kitchen. I only have an old mattress. To listen to music they gave me a old cassette player.” (Z, 24 year-old migrant, Karen)

In addition to the accommodation, domestic workers said their employers provided them food, however, there were some limitations regarding cooking and eating.

“I can’t eat whatever I want to. I’m not able to cook my own food. If their children don’t eat everything, the leftovers are for me. My boss’ wife doesn’t allow the food to be thrown away. I must

eat all that’s left over. If it is food that I want to eat like soybeans and shrimp paste and chilli, they say it gives off a bad smell in their house and don’t let me have it. I can only cook what I want to cook when they are away.” (B, 20 year-old migrant, Shan)

“If there is any food, my employer will give me some. I can’t eat whatever I want, I’ll eat whatever there is in the house.” (U, 17 year-old migrant, Shan)

b) Problems at work

“I don’t know where I could ask for help if one day my boss hurts me. If my boss does hurt me, I won’t know what to do.” (BE, 25 year-old migrant, Karen)

Domestic workers have fewer support mechanisms than other workers since they are isolated in the employer’s household and have fewer opportunities to meet other people. As discussed earlier, the fact that many employers restrict domestic workers’

ability to go out, receive visitors, use the telephone or receive mail means the workers often don't have anyone to turn to, especially when they have problems at work. Domestic workers often don't ask for help from anyone. They try to solve problems by themselves, or simply have to bear the difficult times on their own. A recent positive development in terms of support is the growing use of mobile phones amongst migrant domestic workers. Now a significant number of domestic workers can use their mobile phones to contact other migrant workers. In some cases, domestic workers call friends, but usually they don't want to contact their parents by phone as they don't want them to worry.

“I've been here for a year... I don't often meet other Karen women since I do not have regular holidays but occasionally I have been to Suan Benjasiri³² in Bangkok on public holidays. I do have several friends who I talk to on my mobile phone. Some I've never met, but I got their phone numbers from other friends. They are also domestic workers or work in factories here.” (BP, 18 year-old migrant, Karen)

“When I have problems, I talk to my friend. My friend told me it doesn't matter, when the boss is in good mood, everything will be fine. I don't want to speak about problems with my parents as I'm afraid my mother will be worried.” (BD, 22-year-old migrant, Burmese)

Recruiters can sometimes play a supportive role for domestic workers, as they are often the only people outside of household members who physically see the worker. Some visit domestic workers in order to assist them with sending remittances home, for which they charge a commission fee.

c) Who to turn to if sick

According to the migrants, more than half receive medicine from their employers if they are sick and almost a quarter will be accompanied to a clinic by their employer if they fall sick. Just over 30% of domestic workers say they continue to receive some form of payment while they are sick (Table 32).

Table 32: Percentage distribution support received when migrant is sick

Support	Percent*	Number
Employer provides medicine	62.0	183
Migrant must buy medicine	46.8	138
Go to clinic with employer	22.7	67
Go to clinic alone	20.7	61
Go to clinic with a friend	14.2	42
Paid sick leave	31.2	92
Unpaid sick leave	12.9	38
Number		295**

* Respondents could select more than a single response.

** There were 295 domestic workers who never got sick. The percentage was calculated based on domestic workers who had been sick (N=295).

³² A well-known park in Bangkok where many migrant workers congregate, particularly those from Myanmar.

Only a few domestic workers complained that they had received bad treatment from their employers in relation to their healthcare. The majority of employers seem to take care of their domestic workers when they are sick.

“I had malaria and went to hospital. At that time, I didn’t have a work permit. I spent over 2,000 baht. I paid the cost of the medicine myself. I asked my boss to deduct 500 baht from my salary each month. When I was sick, my 200 baht was deducted for being sick for two days, even though I was actually sick for six days.” (AK, 20 year-old migrant, Shan)

“I don’t usually get sick. When I was pregnant, I had some minor morning sickness while I was working. More recently, I was cleaning the house and cut myself on the metal roof and needed to get four stitches. My boss was away so he couldn’t do anything for me. I hurt myself once before at work. I slipped and fell onto the ground and couldn’t walk. My boss was around at that time so he sent me to a clinic. I had to rest for a week.” (H, 23-year-old migrant, Pa-o)

“When I was sick, my boss bought some medicine for me. Yesterday and today I have had a cough, again she bought me some medicine.” (U, 17-year-old migrant, Shan)

d) Community contacts outside of work

Only a handful of migrant domestic workers have joined any formal or informal groups in Thailand. This is partly due to the nature of their job where they stay in the house and have very little contact with the outside world.

“The only friends I have are Palaung [hill tribe] women. When I wasn’t happy at work, I always

got in touch with them. They always helped me. They also helped me find my job.” (O, 23-year-old migrant, Burman)

e) Communication with families at home

Many migrant domestic workers don’t visit home regularly, normally working for at least a year before thinking about visiting home. This is partly related to the cost and difficulty of travelling across the border and within Thailand.

“I went to work in Thailand for more than three years. During that time I went home twice. I just travelled between Mae Sot and my home. I never went anywhere else.” (A, 22-year-old migrant, Mon)

“My employer never asks me if I’d like to go back for a visit. If I did go, there would be no one to look after her child. I also never asked if I could go home. I only get paid a little and it will cost me a lot to travel home, so it is better if I don’t go home.” (AH, 19-year-old migrant, Karen)

Some migrants remain connected with their families despite not returning home, by getting their families to visit them or by keeping in touch by mobile phone.

“I don’t need to send money back home. Since I arrived my mother has visited me twice. My mother is only just over 40, so she can still travel.” (AH, 19 year-old migrant, Karen)

f) Sending money home

About three out of four migrant domestic workers sent remittances home. They send it through friends (57%), carriers (33%) or by themselves (21%) (Table 33).

Table 33: Percentage distribution of methods migrants use to send remittances home

Remittance	Percent	Number
Send remittance		
No	24.8	79
Yes	75.2	240
Total	100.0	319*
Send by (only those who send remittance, N=240)		
Themselves	20.8	5
Through a friend	56.7	136
Through a carriers	32.9	79
Through a shop	11.7	28
Through a bank	6.3	15
Other	4.2	10
Total	100.0	240

* One migrant did not respond to the questions.

Migrants pay different rates for remittance transfer services. Sometimes they are not aware of what has been done with the money they have sent.

“The boss made a bank transfer to my carrier. I paid all the bank charges to my boss.” (AK, 23-year-old migrant, Burman)

“Every time I send money home, they receive it. When I send 10,000 kyat [303 baht] I have to give the recruiter 1,000 kyat [30 baht]. I have to give a tenth to the carrier.” (AO, 18-year-old migrant, Karen)

“The man who brought me here comes sometimes and I have to send money through him so I can’t save much money here. My parents haven’t let me know whether or not they’ve received my money. Only the person who I sent the money through has told me that they’ve received my money.” (G, 15 year-old migrant, Karen)

g) Social networks, groups and associations

During their free time, domestic workers normally watch television or listen to the radio. Very few say

they like to spend time reading.

“I don’t take days off. In my free time I listen to radio broadcasts in Shan in Thailand.” (AQ, 25-year-old migrant, Shan)

Another domestic worker said she would like to have more time off so she can meet other workers and they could then share their experiences.

“I think it would be useful if domestic workers could meet up and have a chat. I could meet new people and we could share our experiences. We could hear about new things and gain more useful information. Unlike a factory worker, domestic workers don’t have many friends and acquaintances. If domestic workers are not treated fairly, no one is necessarily made aware of what happened. The boss and the worker are living in the same house and this often reinforces the feeling that the worker is inferior. It’s not very easy for domestic workers to meet. Employers don’t like their workers going out very often. Most domestic workers don’t have a set break time. If it were possible to meet up with others, it would be good.” (AF, 21-year-old migrant, Karen)

h) Education

Some domestic workers are interested in studying or continuing their studies, and hope for a better future.

“I want to study an evening course. I want to be literate like some of the other villagers. I used to ask my boss about this and he said he would definitely let me go on the next course. I think if I had some education, I would be more comfortable. I might be able to work in a factory, where there are fixed working patterns. I’d then have more time to rest.” ([AP, 15-year-old migrant, Shan](#))

“I don’t know yet what to do because I’m still young. If I get a chance, I would like to study an evening course. I used to ask my boss, but she wouldn’t let me go. She said her children taught me and so it wasn’t necessary, so I didn’t dare ask again. I don’t think I’ll work here for very long. If I get the chance, I want to do some other work so that I can study.” ([AA, 15-year-old migrant, Shan](#))

Some domestic workers were forced to work with other workers in other businesses, and some didn’t have any choice in the type of jobs they performed. Some domestic workers worked for free for extended periods of time as a result of their debt bondage to employers or recruiters. As “live-in” workers, employers often expected domestic workers to be available to work at all times.

Migrant workers can’t freely change employers since they lack control over their documentation as examined previously in greater depth. Domestic workers, like other workers, have the right to hold onto their original ID card. However, only half of the registered domestic workers manage to keep hold of their original card.

Socio-cultural values and attitudes of employers often play a role in justifying control over domestic workers’ freedom of movement. Employers don’t recognise that they have no right to keep hold of their workers’ documents. Employers may be well-meaning and do this in the name of “protecting” domestic workers from dangers outside the household, but such “protection” violates the workers’ basic rights to freedom of movement.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Indications of labour exploitation

The findings illustrate a clear pattern of severe labour exploitation of migrant domestic workers, and in various cases evidence of forced labour. Domestic workers surveyed in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot reported being locked in the house unable to readily communicate or contact the outside world. This combined with widespread verbal and physical abuse, extremely long working hours, a lack of adequate rest days and non-payment, under-payment or delayed payment of wages shows how easily sub-standard working conditions can turn into working situations tantamount to forced labour.

4.2 Legal status and registration

Possession of legal working documents can partly protect domestic workers from harassment and reduce the risk of arrest or detention while they are in Thailand. However, it has been found that even registered migrant workers continue to live in fear of deportation.

The majority of both employers and domestic workers have positive attitudes toward Thai policy on registration. Despite this fact, it was pointed out that the registration process is too complicated, is not clearly explained to those who need to understand it and that the timeframe for registration is too short. The registration policy, in turn, encourages employers to take more control over, and diminish the rights of their workers. Not only do many employers keep

their worker's original ID card, but some also refuse to allow their domestic workers to register. Many domestic workers can't afford the registration costs, which can be equal to several months of their salary, or end up being in debt to their employers who pay for them. This becomes a reason for employers holding their worker's original work permit. There is no mention of whether or not the workers receive their original ID back once the debt to an employer is repaid in full.

Non-registered domestic workers are more likely to face a greater degree of oppression in terms of constraints on leaving their employment, and with regard to payment and days off permitted than registered migrant workers.

4.3 Working conditions

The risk of labour exploitation is high in light of the fact that the majority of domestic workers don't know about their working conditions until they arrive at the home of their employer. Employers determine working and payment conditions. A third of domestic workers have to do both household chores and work relating to the employer's business. According to the Thai LPA (1998), this means they should no longer be referred to as "domestic workers", and they should be protected under Thai labour law.

Almost all (98%) the domestic workers surveyed worked more than a standard eight-hour day. About two thirds work more than 14 hours a day. It is worth noting that they have to be available for work at any time, whether it is inconvenient or not, based on the needs of the employer.

In general, the amount earned by a manual worker varies depending on the number of hours worked, but this is not the case among migrant domestic workers. Migrant domestic workers earn less than workers in other sectors. About 40% receive a monthly salary of less than 1,000 baht, while only 11% receive more than 3,000 baht per month. This is well below the Thai national standard minimum wage, with most

Thais earning at least 4,500 baht a month depending on their workplace. Nobody involved refers to overtime payments.

The situation is even worse when considering that only a small proportion (7-17%) of domestic workers receive regular weekly, monthly or annual leave. Younger and unregistered domestic workers, on average, work longer hours, receive lower pay and receive less or no regular day off.

Employers perpetuate a number of myths to justify the long working hours, lack of regular days off and low wages of domestic workers. Firstly, it is widely thought that domestic workers are able to relax while employers are not at home. The current study debunks this myth since many domestic workers were overworked, working in more than one workplace, with many different tasks to do and rarely any time alone in the house. The second myth is that domestic workers are able to take rest days whenever they want. Most domestic workers were unable to take leave and didn't receive the minimum number of annual days off, to do so would risk them losing their job or having their pay reduced.

4.4 Child domestic labour

In-depth interviews were held with two extremely young domestic workers, aged 9 and 10. In the survey of domestic workers, 20% were aged under 18. Employers suggested they like to hire children as domestic workers because they are easy to control, more obedient and diligent. Recruiters cited similar reasons for recruiting children. Domestic work is sometimes seen as work that is considered more "appropriate" for children, however, child domestic workers worked longer hours under worse conditions for lower wages, in situations that were commonly equivalent to a "worst form" of child labour under ILO Convention 182.

Employers indicated in the in-depth interviews that they treat migrant domestic workers, particularly child domestic workers, as family members. Child

domestic workers also pointed out that they are often seen as part of the family. While this may sound warm and friendly, in fact it can increase the children's vulnerability to abuse. Child domestic workers may be treated worse since they can't complain or resist because they feel they are facing a "family" obligation. Moreover, it becomes more difficult for outsiders to intervene in "family" matters.

4.5 Support mechanisms

Since domestic workers are isolated in their employers' residences they lack the usual mechanisms of family and friends as support mechanisms for work-related problems. Recruiters, who are sometimes relatives or friends of the migrant, offer a key support structure for domestic workers as they live in Thailand, have the ability to visit the domestic workers regularly and speak the same languages. Recruiters at least offer domestic workers some contact with the outside world and may be a starting point for possible future interventions.

As live-in migrant domestic workers, contact with the outside world is limited. However, mobile phones now help many workers feel less isolated so they can talk to other people, even if they can't meet with them. The migrant domestic workers express their willingness to meet and share their experiences with others. And some of them are interested in studying or continuing their studies in order to create a better future for themselves.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Working conditions

Issue:

Domestic workers suffer labour exploitation and a lack of recourse to address such exploitation since they are not accorded the full protection of the LPA,

unlike formal sector workers. The legal and socio-cultural framework reinforce the justifications of employers in not providing basic rights, such as minimum wage rates, maximum working hours, rest days and written contracts for domestic workers.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Include domestic work as a category of the formal sector so it can be properly recognized and fully protected under the LPA and LRA. This would be in line with many other destination countries for migrant domestic workers, such as Hong Kong SAR, Canada, South Africa and the United States.
- Establish a standard employment contract that protects migrant domestic workers' rights, including a definition of the duties to be considered domestic work, wage rates, hours of work, payment conditions and numbers of days off according to the LPA. This might cover, for example, a minimum wage, a minimum of one rest day per week and annual leave. The contract should be written in two languages that both the migrant worker and employer can understand (such as Thai and Burmese).

5.2 Living conditions

Issues:

Domestic workers usually receive accommodation and food, which forms a part of their wages and justifies them being paid less than the minimum wage. However, many domestic workers receive sub-standard accommodation and food.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- If domestic workers are required to live in their employer's house, then any amount deducted from their salary for accommodation and food must be clearly specified. This is so the actual amount received in proportion to the minimum wage can be clearly identified.

For example, in Canada the minimum wage rate is C\$7.75 (256 baht) an hour, and C\$2.55 per meal with a weekly maximum of C\$53.55 permitted to be deducted for food. The rate of a weekly private room is C\$31.70, and none for a non-private room. Deductions for food and accommodation should usually account for less than 20% of the total salary to be in line with section 76 of the LPA.

5.3 Labour protection

Issues:

The migrant domestic worker's workplace is a private home. Domestic workers usually live at the employer's house. The authorities, particularly labour inspectors or other officials don't have the right to investigate what is taking place in a private home, unless there is a request to do so. There is a clear shortage of labour inspectors.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Increase the number of labour inspectors and revise their authority to investigate working conditions in informal workplaces, which are households that hire domestic workers. Inspection should be done regularly, but not on request.
- Inform employers of domestic workers of the inspections to alert them and ensure they must be prepared for inspections at any time.
- Work in collaboration with local community leaders and NGOs in order to develop practical inspection strategies.

To the Ministry of Interior (MOI)

- Review the authority of MOI officers and local community leaders so they can collaborate with labour inspectors and NGOs. Their work includes providing appropriate supervision for the employment of migrant domestic workers.

5.4 Knowledge and awareness

Issue:

The key attitudes expressed by employers relate to the idea that they believe they have the legal right to hold onto their worker's registration card. About half of them do not think migrants should have equal rights to Thai nationals, and two thirds don't think migrant workers should have the right to join a labour union. A large number of employers felt migrants are easier to control, and worked harder than Thais. Migrant workers are good for Thailand because they are cheap labour, and that the Thai government should allow for more legal migrant workers.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Prepare and launch public awareness campaigns regarding the laws and regulations concerning migrant domestic workers. It is important such campaigns should particularly focus on the rights of both employers and workers in the domestic labour sector, their working and living conditions. For example, apart from the standard working and living conditions, domestic workers also have the right to keep their identification cards or work permits, and to freedom of movement, so employers can't limit their workers' contact with other people.
- Develop positive public perceptions of migrant domestic workers to appreciate their value as human being as well as the value of the work they carry out. This could be done through mass media, particularly local soap operas or other television programmes as well as in schools. This is to counteract the image of domestic workers as women with low education or a low social status in Thai society as reflected in interviews with employers as well as the mass media).

5.5 Complaint mechanism

Issue:

Although the level of violence faced by domestic workers is always under-reported, more than half experience verbal abuse. One third of migrant domestic workers have been sworn at or threatened, and about a fifth have been touched when such advances are unwanted. Domestic workers, particularly those who have been abused, have no information on how to report their difficulties and often can't contact those people who may be in a position to help due to the language barrier.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Improve the use and efficiency of hotline services by increasing the number of staff who can communicate in the languages commonly used by the migrant workers. Ensure domestic workers have access to the hotline service numbers. In Hong Kong, for example, the hotline numbers are reproduced in a pocket calendar. The LPO should likewise disseminate the hotline numbers widely to domestic workers, such as when they register for a work permit.

To the Ministry of Justice

- Take serious action to punish employers who abuse and/or break Thai law. Ensure cases are widely publicised to improve awareness among the population.

5.6 Registration

Issue:

Some employers keep a hold of their employees' original ID cards, refusing to register their workers, and even threatening to report unregistered migrants to the police. Migrant and employer concerns are: the complicated registration management process; the limited window of registration opportunity, a lack of clear procedure during registration, poor management and not enough information provided in migrants' languages.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Ensure that employers who keep their workers' original ID card or refuse to register their employees are punished/fined.
- Provide registration information in migrants' languages and allow sufficient time between the dissemination and registration period in order to prepare for registration.
- Improve registration management, using clear instructions and efficient systems and manpower.
- Revise regulations to permit migrants to register for work as translators. This will provide domestic workers with official and efficient translators.
- Provide the mass media with more audio-visual materials, with information in migrants' languages, such as for transmission on radio and television.

5.7 Education and regular days off

Issues:

Levels of abuse faced by domestic workers seem to be explicitly related to migrants' Thai language ability. The vast majority of domestic workers don't have any kind of day off and therefore not only are they unable to rest, but they are unable to share their problems or find solutions, or to learn new skills, such as the Thai language.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Education

- Provide Thai language classes for migrants by allowing for flexible times and through different learning medias, such as photographs, DVDs or simple language manuals suitable for migrant workers. This should be carried out in collaboration with local community organizations and NGOs.

To the Ministry of Labour

- Designate Sunday as a regular day off for domestic workers. A regular day off is important since the domestic worker can then

plan activities, such as studying or joining groups. This would support the existing government policy of strengthening family ties, and Sunday is designed as being a family day in Thailand. In Hong Kong SAR, migrant domestic workers have Sunday as their regular weekly day off. They use the opportunity to regularly meet one another in various public spaces.

5.8 Child domestic labour

Issues:

About 20% of migrant domestic workers are under 18. These children are considered to be employed in a “worst form” of child labour as referred to in ILO Convention 182, which has been ratified by Thailand. Domestic workers, especially child domestic workers, are often perceived and treated as family members. Thus any abuses in such a relationship are seen as a private “family” matter.

Recommendations:

To the Ministry of Labour

- Empower groups or support activities run by local communities or NGOs in order to increase knowledge among communities, particularly children, on child labour as well as the right to an education.
- Establish campaigns regarding problems facing child workers and the rights of child domestic workers in order to increase understanding and encourage local government authorities to help inspect workplaces, which in this case are private households.

To the Ministry of Education

- Ensure all migrant children in Thailand have an equal opportunity to access education by providing flexible school times, such as during the weekends or in the evening. This should be worked out in collaboration with local educational institutes, community leaders and NGOs, who are likely to be in a position to reach out to child domestic workers.

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