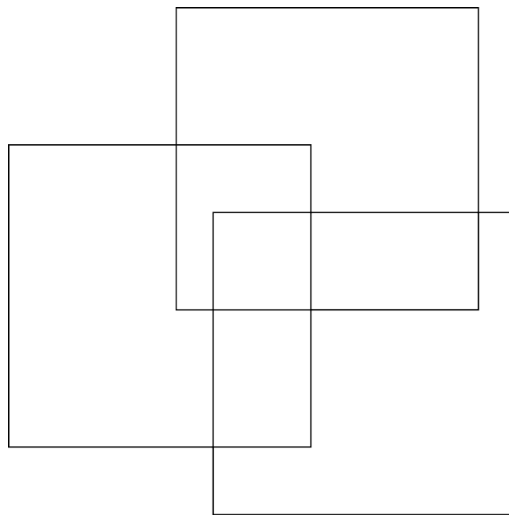




International
Labour
Organization

Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Jordan

A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationship



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Working paper

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First published 2015

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Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Jordan: a qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationship/ ILO Regional Office for Arab States = Beirut: ILO, 2015

ISBN 9789221305125 (web pdf)

ILO Regional Office for Arab States

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P.O.Box 11-4088 Riad El Solh 1107-2150

Beirut – Lebanon

Publications are available on: www.ilo.org/arabstates

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The International Labour Organization’s Migration and Governance Network (MAGNET) project – an initiative supported by the Swiss Development Cooperation – was launched in 2012 to strengthen labour migration governance and combat human trafficking throughout Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council States. Under this initiative, the project “Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Advocating Institutional Reform in the Middle East” was developed to provide options for the reform of national policies and to assist institutions that protect migrant domestic workers.

Within the ILO MAGNET project a qualitative study was carried out to assess the attitudes, perceptions and views of employers towards domestic workers. It aimed to understand the actual patterns of working conditions and employment practices and describe the nature of the employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers in Jordan.

This report was authored by Thoraya El-Rayyes. The research was conducted by Thoraya El-Rayyes and Ibrahim Al-Tarawneh. The report was supervised and finalized by Emanuela Pozzan, Andrea Salvini, Thoraya El-Khalil and Tina Oulie from the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) commitment to technical cooperation in the field of labour migration within the Arab region, the ILO's Migration and Governance Network project (MAGNET) aims to provide information that may enhance mechanisms for formulating labour migration policies in target countries.

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study of employer attitudes. In order to identify key themes related to the recruitment of migrant domestic workers (MDWs), employers' behavioural attitudes towards such workers and knowledge of their rights, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with employers and senior managers of recruitment agencies. A focus group with senior managers of recruitment agencies was also conducted.

Eleven broad themes relevant to the research questions were extracted from the interview/focus group data:

- **Theme 1:** Reasons for employing MDWs;
- **Theme 2:** Desired characteristics of MDWs;
- **Theme 3:** A 'necessary evil';
- **Theme 4:** Fear of material losses;
- **Theme 5:** Dehumanization of MDWs;
- **Theme 6:** 'Rebelliousness';
- **Theme 7:** Communication;
- **Theme 8:** The contractual nature of the employment relationship/rights;
- **Theme 9:** Homesickness;
- **Theme 10:** Attitudes towards freelancers;
- **Theme 11:** Impact of Syrian refugees.

The study revealed many dynamics of the employer/MDW relationship in Jordan and discourses around it. The key findings were:

- Interviewees did not express the view that they require MDWs to have *specific* skills prior to employment, with the exception of language skills.
- Insofar as some employers required workers to have certain characteristics, these included language skills, previous experience as a MDW, a certain marital status (either

single or married, depending on the employer's preference), and holding a certain nationality (also depending on the employer's preference).

- Various broad factors drive employer behaviour towards MDWs, including fear of material losses, dehumanization of the workers, empathy, pity, and a desire to motivate good work performance.
- Fear of material losses (such as the MDW leaving the workplace or theft) is commonly used to justify restrictions on the worker's freedom and, in some cases, violations of their rights. Various types of dehumanizing discourse also feed into this, including racist attitudes, racial stereotyping, and objectification.
- The extent to which the relationship with the MDW is perceived as a contractual relationship appears to vary according to the specific issue at hand. Rights-based discourses were invoked when relating to payment of wages, provision of food, and the worker's right not to be physically abused. However, we found a recurring discourse that the MDW is considered 'part of the household' rather than as an employee – a discourse which was used to justify limitations on the mobility of the worker and an unwillingness to give them a weekly day of leave/day of rest.
- Insofar as employers reported giving the worker benefits beyond their wages and basic living needs (e.g. phone credit or a day of rest), this was often described as being driven either by empathy, pity, or a desire to motivate good work performance rather than as part of their legal/contractual obligations.
- There was a conscious effort by many employers to control the power dynamic in their relationship with the worker and ensure that they retain a significant power advantage. This was evident from the discourse about not wanting MDWs to become 'rebellious' or 'strong-willed', the preference of some employers for inexperienced workers (who were described as 'raw material'), and the reasons given by employers for restricting the communication and mobility of MDWs.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the ILO's commitment to technical cooperation in the field of labour migration within the Arab region, the ILO's Migration and Governance Network project (MAGNET) aims to enhance the information used to develop and formulate labour migration policies in target countries.

Given the critical relevance of the migrant domestic work sector within the region, and that migrant domestic workers (MDWs) are overwhelmingly exposed to exploitative living and working conditions, MAGNET has decided to conduct a qualitative study in Jordan on this topic.

Transforming employers' attitudes and behaviour towards MDWs is a key step to securing the latter's basic rights to decent work. Unfortunately, little research has been done in the Arab world on how employers recruit MDWs, the motivations behind their behavioural attitudes, and their knowledge of domestic workers' rights.

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study to identify key themes related to the recruitment of MDWs, employers' knowledge of MDWs' rights and their behavioural attitudes towards them, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with employers and senior managers of recruitment agencies. A small focus group with senior managers of recruitment agencies was also conducted.

METHODOLOGY

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of MDW employers and senior managers of MDW recruitment agencies. Following that, a small focus group was held with the senior managers. The focus group aimed to validate and further explore the results of the recruitment agency interviews. The research involved:

- six semi-structured face-to face interviews with senior managers of MDW recruitment agencies (2 female, 4 male);
- fourteen semi-structured face-to face interviews with employers of MDWs (11 female, 3 male);
- a small focus group comprised of three senior managers of MDW recruitment agencies (all male).

The fieldwork was conducted in Amman, Jordan during the period 15 February–31 March, 2015.

Research questions

The broad research questions that drove this research were based on the same questions that the quantitative survey aims to answer:

1. For what reasons do domestic workers leave their employer?
2. What sort of recruitment channels do employers use and why?
3. What are the skills of current domestic workers and employers' expectations regarding the skills of their domestic worker?
4. What is the behaviour pattern of employers and household members towards domestic workers?
5. To what extent do employers follow the law regarding employment of domestic workers?
6. What are the working and living conditions of migrant domestic workers in Jordan?
7. What is the degree of satisfaction and main sources of dissatisfaction for employers of domestic workers?
8. What is the employer's knowledge regarding their legal obligations towards domestic workers?
9. Would employers be willing to engage in ethical recruitment practices (e.g. no passport retention, recruitment through a registered agency etc.)? If so, at what cost?

Two interview guides were developed by the research team in consultation with the MAGNET project and relevant ILO specialists – one for the interviews with MDW recruitment agency managers and one for MDW employer interviews. For the MDW recruitment agency managers, the interview guide was tested during the first interview then adapted to clarify questions. For the MDW employers, the interview guide was tested during the first two interviews and adapted to clarify questions. The interview guides are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this report.

The focus group aimed to validate and further explore the results of the recruitment agency interviews. The preliminary results of these interviews were presented to participants, who were asked for their feedback and comments on the findings.

Sampling

- **MDW recruitment agencies:** The sample was randomly selected from the Ministry of Labour's full list of MDW recruitment agencies registered in Jordan. To ensure representation of agencies dealing with all countries of origin, the randomly selected agencies were pre-screened by telephone to determine which two countries of origin they

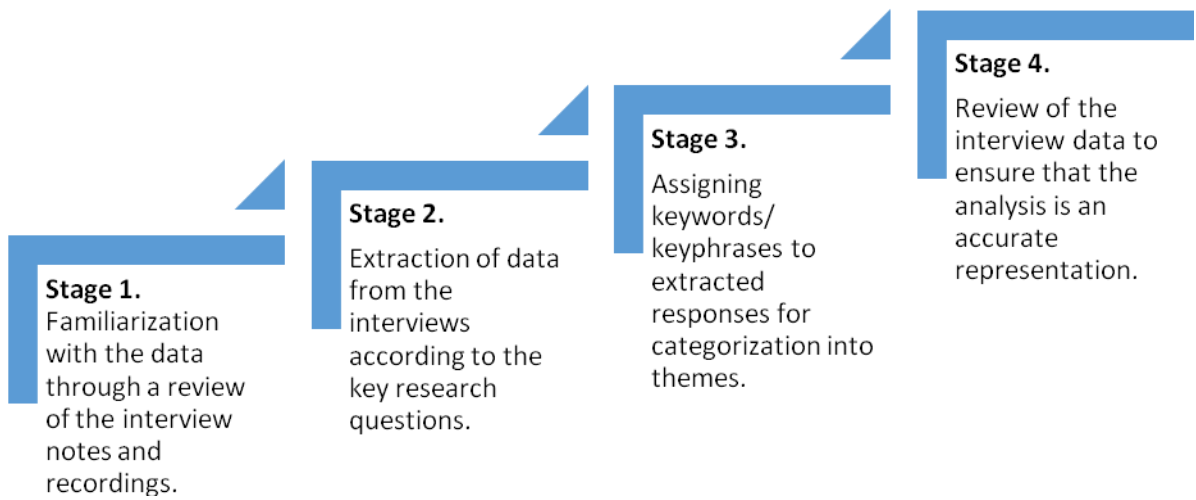
principally work with. All countries of origin were represented in the first six randomly selected agencies. All of the recruitment agency interviewees were invited to participate in the focus group, but due to various personal circumstances only three were able to do so.

- **Employers:** Four days of fieldwork were conducted at the offices of the Ministry of Labour's (MoL) MDW Directorate in Amman, where most employers are required to attend for the issuing and renewing of MDW work and residence permits. Interviewees were selected randomly from among the employers present at the Directorate offices, but only those with previous experience of employing MDWs were considered for interview (those who were applying for permits for the first time and did not have previous experience employing MDWs were excluded).

This location was considered optimal for obtaining a random sample because all MDW employers residing in central Amman, as well as in the central and southern governorates (provinces) of Jordan, submit their paperwork at this office. This ensured that our sample included employers from a wide range of social, economic and geographical backgrounds. It is worth noting that there are only two such offices in Jordan, with the other (located in the Northern city of Irbid) being much smaller. The main limitation of this sampling approach is the fact that it is possible for employers to send a representative (usually an employee from a recruitment agency) to apply for the permits on their behalf. Because sending a representative is costly, those who send a representative tend to be employers who either live far from central Amman or are very affluent. This may have somewhat skewed our sample away from the most affluent segment of employers, and those living outside Amman. However, it is worth noting that the vast majority of MDW employers live in Amman (personal communication with Ibrahim Al-Saket, Head Labour Inspector at MoL MDW Directorate), thus making the impact of the latter limitation minimal.

Data collection and analysis

- All the interviews, as well as the focus group, were conducted by the same research team, comprised of an interviewer and a note-taker.
- The interviews were recorded where possible. Eighteen out of the twenty interviews were recorded, as was the focus group. Two interviews (one employer, one recruitment agency manager) were not recorded upon the request of the interviewees.
- After each interview, a written summary of the interview was drafted. Recordings of the interviews were used as a reference for pulling out direct quotes and, where necessary, to add details to the interview notes.
- Thematic analysis of the data was undertaken as follows:



Ethical considerations

Interviews were conducted with informed verbal consent. Prior to the interview, the objective of the research was clearly explained to each interviewee and verbal permission was sought. Interviewees were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that they may refuse to continue at any time. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, the research data was anonymized by renaming direct identifiers.

RESULTS

Guided by the research questions, 11 broad themes were extracted from the interview/focus group data as presented below.

NB. All emphasis added to the quotations below in bold lettering was added by the research team for the purposes of this report, and does not necessarily reflect emphasis by the interviewee.

Theme 1: Reasons for employing MDWs

The interview and focus group data revealed various reasons why people in Jordan employ MDWs. It is worth noting that, in many cases, more than one reason may apply to a single household/employer:

1. To care for a sick older person and undertake domestic work in the household. This includes passive as well as active care work.

“My mother is a little bit ill. She has diabetes, and she doesn’t see very well. We need someone to be with her in the house, in case her blood sugar goes down.”

-MDW employer (female)

2. To undertake domestic work in the household of an older person who does not suffer from any illness, but does not have the strength and/or energy to undertake their own domestic work.
3. To undertake domestic work in a large house where the female household head perceives the amount of domestic work as being excessive.
4. To undertake domestic work where the female household head suffers from an injury or physical condition that is perceived as preventing her from undertaking her household’s domestic work.
5. To undertake child care work and/or domestic work in households where the female adults are all employed (e.g. the female household head, or adult female daughter of the male household head).

Theme 2: Desired characteristics of MDWs

Various subthemes emerged regarding the desired characteristics of MDWs:

- **Nationality.** A recurring theme was that Filipina MDWs are the best and most skilled among MDW nationalities, which include Filipina, Bangladeshi, Kenyan and Sri Lankan workers, in addition to a small number of Indonesian and Ethiopian workers. According to this discourse, Filipina workers are considered to be more sophisticated, to look more

presentable and to have superior English language skills. This discourse was especially strong among the senior managers of recruitment agencies.

“Filipinas are by far the best, but they are very expensive... They are very unique, they have language skills, and a high level of culture, and they are clean, and have good personalities. You feel that they are different, even if they come from the villages they are still elegant.”

-MDW employer (female)

“The Philippines is organized, there is a certain procedure by their Ministry of Labour to inform them about where they are going, raise their awareness, and get them ready for the job. That’s why they are more competent.”

-Recruitment agency manager

- **Skills and experience.** A recurring theme was that domestic work is low-skill work and thus employers are not particularly concerned with the skills of MDWs. One exception was in the area of language skills, which were considered important by many employers and senior managers of recruitment agencies.

“They don’t need experience, it is just cleaning and washing. It only needs one week of experience to learn.”

-MDW employer (female)

“If the employer is a working woman, she requires Arabic language skills so that she can communicate with the worker over the telephone when she is at work.”

-Recruitment agency manager

“Language is very important; employers prefer English skills to Arabic unless the domestic worker needs to care for an older person.”

-Recruitment agency manager

Previous work experience as a MDW was also a recurring theme, although there were a variety of views regarding whether employers seek MDWs with experience.

“Whether they prefer experience or not, it is a personal thing. It depends on the personality, if the sponsor wants to train her, and if the sponsor has time to train her or not.”

-Recruitment agency manager

Interestingly, the interview and focus group data also revealed a discourse that it is preferable for the worker not to have any previous experience. This discourse featured the common usage of the word *kham* (خام), which translates to “raw material” in English, to describe MDWs with no previous experience. The following quotes were typical:

*“Generally, they prefer them with no experience, which means that they have not served [as a domestic worker] in other countries. In this case, she will be **raw material**... [Sponsors] prefer **raw material** because it is the first time they leave their country. You can teach them your own way, in cleaning, in dealing with the children. You know, each country has its own way of living. If the*

*domestic worker has served in other countries, she will give us trouble here... For example, in our houses we bring the worker and we don't like her to leave the house. The ones that served in Lebanon, for example, they are used to going out with the Madam. To go on visits with her, to go with her – for example – when she takes the children out to play. When the girl that comes is **raw material**, we can make her behave according to our wishes."*

– Recruitment agency manager

"I bring her without experience so she doesn't learn the wrong things, so why would I give her a day off?"

-MDW employer (female)

"The ones that have experience, they want you to behave according to their wishes, instead of behaving according to yours."

-MDW employer (female)

- **Marital status.** The marital status of the MDW was a recurring theme, although employers had differing views regarding whether they prefer married or single workers.

"I prefer that she is not married, so she doesn't keep thinking about her husband and children all the time."

-MDW employer (female)

"I prefer that she is married, so that she feels more responsible and that her money is going to something, so she doesn't feel she is sacrificing for nothing."

-MDW employer (female)

"The thing is, when she is married she wants to call her children, and her husband, and I don't know what. It is a headache. I prefer that she is not married but at the same time, if she is not married she will start saying I want to go back to my country and get married. She starts to nag that she wants to go back to her country to get married."

-MDW employer (female)

- **Misrepresentation of MDW characteristics.** Several employers voiced their frustration that the characteristics listed in the MDW's resume or job application do not necessarily match the characteristics of the actual worker (regarding marital status or previous work experience, for example). The discourse around this theme tended to be critical of recruitment agencies for not being able to guarantee that the worker had the characteristics/skills listed in the resume or job application.

Theme 3: 'A necessary evil'

The interview and focus group data revealed a recurring perception of MDWs as 'a necessary evil', with interviewees expressing the idea that people should avoid employing MDWs where possible. The following quotes were typical of this discourse:

"I don't encourage young women to bring them, they will not feel free at home. It's wrong to bring them, even if you eat fast food and take your clothes to the dry clean, it's better than having a worker at home. It is wrong to bring them. Not because of the problems they have, because of the freedom at home. I would love to sell my house so that I do not need her."

-MDW employer (female)

"I always tell people when they come to me, that a happy home is one where there is no servant... Having a worker in the house has advantages and disadvantages, it is a constraint on freedom... There will always be someone strange in the house. But if a woman is working – she needs it, or if there an older person that needs care – it is needed. If the woman is a housewife, I don't prefer that she brings a servant. They affect the children, if there is no servant the child will learn to serve himself and the family will be closer."

-Recruitment agency manager

"My wish would be that if a woman doesn't need a worker, don't bring one. They are not appropriate for childcare. They ruin the children, the children will not be able to depend on themselves."

-MDW employer (female)

Theme 4: Fear of material losses

The interview and focus group data revealed a discourse that employers' behaviour towards MDWs was often motivated by a fear of material losses. Three key subthemes emerged:

- **'Running away' (leaving the workplace) and the material losses this would entail.** The fear that the MDW will leave the workplace was one of the most common themes in both the recruitment agency and employer interviews. All interviewees exclusively used the phrase 'run away' to describe a MDW that leaves the workplace.

*"The way it is now, it is not fair for everyone. For example, if she runs away, I have to bear the cost and I can't being another one until they find the first one. And you have to pay the fines – it is unfair. I need fair treatment, in case she runs away. If I hit her or harm her, she can complain and I am responsible. But if she harms me, nothing will happen. **That is why I lock the door when I leave her in the house.**"*

-MDW employer (female)

- **Fear of theft.** This was repeatedly mentioned as a concern of employers and a motivator of their behaviour. This theme arose in relation to live-in MDWs, as well as being mentioned as a principal reason for not hiring 'freelancer' MDWs, discussed further below (see Theme 10: Attitudes towards 'freelancers').
- **'Protecting' oneself.** There was a recurring idea that the employer must take measures to protect themselves from the worker 'running away' or stealing, with these 'protection' measures often involving violations of the worker's rights.

"I prefer she doesn't have a phone... I can't understand what she is talking to her family about. And it is possible that one of her relatives will also come here. I don't want her to visit her"

relatives. When they are in the car, they memorize, they memorize the landmarks. I don't want to accuse anyone, but I want to **protect** myself from the things that I hear about. They start to ask, "What is this area called?" So I became anxious about leaving her at home alone, about taking her out with me. You become really anxious all the time... And when I come to leave the house, to be honest, I **protect** the house, I lock it. I don't leave the key with her – I am afraid, to be honest, that she will run away. Her passport is with me, because if I give it to her I don't know what she might do with it. I keep a mobile phone with her with just enough credit that if something happens, she can call me, and I can call her when I am out. So that way if anything happens and she can't get out she can call me. You are worried about her well-being but at the same time, you don't trust her."

–MDW employer (female)

"Some sponsors want to retain a certain amount of her wages as a guarantee that she will not run away, while she wants to transfer the money immediately. They tell me 'we don't want them to run away', but I tell them her salary is a red line."

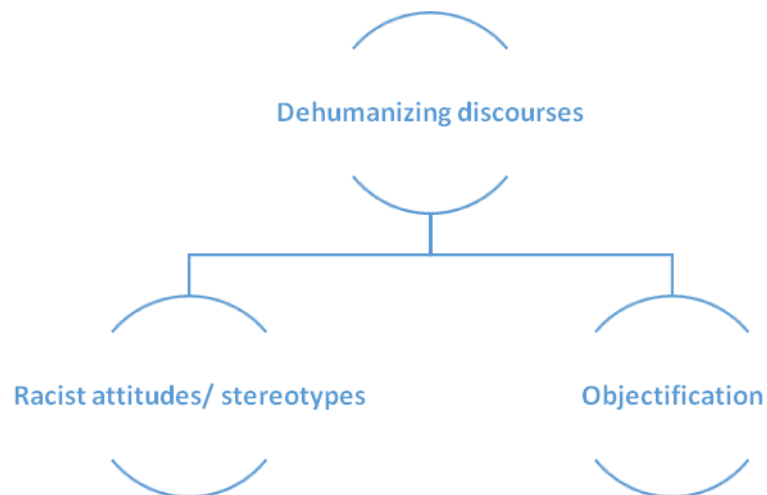
-Recruitment agency manager

"I don't allow her to have a phone. I give her a [phone] card every month, and she calls twice a month, and also in Eid. I am afraid of those around her teaching her bad things. She uses my Facebook as well. This way I **protect** her and myself."

–MDW employer (female)

Theme 5: Dehumanization of MDWs

A number of themes emerged that indicate discourses used to dehumanize MDWs, and which can be broadly divided into two categories:



- **Racist attitudes and stereotypes.** These were predominantly directed at Bangladeshi and Kenyan MDWs. There was a recurring theme whereby Bangladeshis were described as being from a “low level” and “backwards” culture – an idea which was sometimes

used to justify actions taken to discipline and control Bangladeshi MDWs. In some cases, this was linked to ideas that people in Bangladesh practice black magic.

*“People don’t prefer workers from Bangladesh. The problem with Bangladesh is that they have a **low level of culture** which creates problems.”*

-Recruitment agency manager

*“Bangladeshis come from a place where there are **no signs of civilization**, they don’t even know how to wash the dishes.”*

-Recruitment agency manager

Racist attitudes towards Kenyan workers, on the other hand, tended to be related to their physical appearance, with several interviewees remarking on their skin colour in a derogatory way.

“We in Jordan are not used to Africans, I mean in terms of skin colour. Yes we are all humans, but children are scared of the way they look.”

-Recruitment agency manager

- **Objectification.** The description of MDWs using language that is usually used to describe objects rather than people feeds into dehumanizing discourses about MDWs.

Manifestations of this included the widespread use of the term “raw material”, as discussed above (see Theme 2: Characteristics of MDWs). Other examples included the widespread use of the phrase “brought her” (جيناها) to refer to the hiring of a MDW and “returned her” (رجعناها) to refer to ending the contract of a MDW. Both of these phrases are usually used to describe the purchase of objects rather than an employment relationship.

In addition to these commonly used terms, employers’ discourse when describing MDWs often featured other (more idiosyncratic) forms of objectifying language, as illustrated by these quotes:

*“[A domestic worker] is **like a pack of cigarettes**, you can’t live without it... Even if the price of a pack of cigarette goes up to ten dinars, you have become addicted to it, so you will buy it for ten dinars. And the worker, a long time ago we used to bring her for 1,200 dinars, and then 1,500, then it became 2,500, and 3,000, and now 4,000. But you can’t live without her, she has become one of the basic needs of life.”*

-MDW employer (male)

*“We would be very relieved if they gave **discounts** on [Filipinas]... The recruitment agency is very important when it comes to solving problems [with the worker]... You have to find an agency with good **after-sales service**, I mean after-contract services, let’s not say after-sales, she is a person.”*

-MDW employer (female)

Also related to this was the use of the Arabic word *Khadima* (خادمة), which translates to 'servant' in English. This term continues to be widespread for referring to MDWs in Jordan. Although the term cannot strictly be described as "objectification", it is clearly dehumanizing.

Theme 6: 'Rebelliousness'

The discourse of strong-willed and 'rebellious' MDWs was a recurring theme in the interview data. The Arabic word *namrudeh* (نمرودة) was often used by interviewees in the context of describing 'rebellious' MDWs. *Namrudeh* is a gendered term which is used to describe women who are not docile when relating to those in authority, and may connote the use of manipulative behaviour. Interviewees generally used the term to describe situations in which they were unable to exert control or discipline the worker. The following quotes were typical of this discourse:

"Filipinas have a very strong personality, and they are liberated. They want to go out and you can't control them. I don't like them."

- MDW employer (female)

"We got an Ethiopian. She was nice actually, but she was also namrudeh, and my mother doesn't like rebellious behaviour so we had to return her."

- MDW employer (female)

"I don't bring Filipinas. They are very strong-willed. I don't like it... The servant I have now still asks what she should eat, what she can have for breakfast."

- MDW employer (female)

The idea of controlling strong-willed and/or 'rebellious' workers also emerged repeatedly in relation to attitudes towards freelance workers and will be discussed further in Theme 10 below.

Theme 7: Communication

Fears related to MDWs communicating with people outside the employer's household were a recurring theme in the interviews and focus groups. This was partly related to the MDW's usage of telephones, which was often seen as threatening because:

- it could lead the MDW to learn too much about their surroundings, thereby facilitating them to leave the workplace ('running away');
- it could lead to the MDW becoming strong-willed;
- employers felt unease with the MDW talking in their own language as they cannot understand what they are saying.

Some of these attitudes were demonstrated in the quotes related to Theme 4. Other quotes typical of these discourses include:

*“Giving her a telephone is the route to her **running away**.”*

-Recruitment agency manager

“This one is raw material; she doesn’t know a single number. She calls her kids and that is all. I don’t give any of them phones. The one before this one was aware; she got a phone, but I took it away. I let her call but I don’t like to give them phones.”

- MDW employer (female)

*“I don’t allow them to keep a phone with them. They start saving each other’s numbers and ruin each other. It makes them **stronger** and more aggressive. I buy her a card and she uses my phone to call her family.”*

- MDW employer (female)

“We tell her to only answer the Madame’s number. She knows it, and she doesn’t answer any other number.”

- MDW employer (male)

“We had a lot of problems. One of them had a relationship with someone who used to come to the house when we were out. We had to catch him and take her to the agency. After that, we started to only let her use our phone. Every month she calls once and we sit next to her.”

- MDW employer (male)

On the other hand, some employers expressed that they do not mind the MDW communicating with people outside the household and having their own telephone.

“She has a mobile phone for Jordan, and one for the Philippines which is roaming. She likes to keep in touch with her family. If she is happy, she will work better... She talks with the girls who work for our neighbours and family.”

- MDW employer (female)

“I don’t see a problem with her having a telephone. She has her telephone and I bring her credit. I trust her.”

- MDW employer (female)

Theme 8: The contractual nature of the employment relationship/rights

“To be honest, when you go to the agency, they just say ‘sign here and sign here’ and you can’t really read all the boring details. And there are some things that you wouldn’t understand. As an agency, they understand these things, but there are things I wouldn’t understand. But if I am honest with you, no one here works according to the contract and the day off. I hear from the people around me “Why should she rest? She is here to work” I have heard that with my own ears.”

- MDW employer (female)

The interview and focus group data revealed various recurring themes regarding the extent to which the relationship between employers and MDWs is perceived as a contractual employment relationship. One of the key subthemes that emerged was the discourse that because the MDW is 'a member of the household', they are not entitled to certain workers' rights. This discourse was repeatedly employed to justify limitations on the mobility of MDWs and not giving them a weekly day of leave or rest.

*"She is **part of the household**. Do your kids have a day off? Does the husband have a day off? So since she is part of the house I deal with her with the positive and negative points in this case. If I give her a day off she will not be part of the household, not **part of the family**. When I make food they eat with us, and when we go on a picnic, they join us and I give them chocolate like the kids."*

-MDW employer (female)

"No she doesn't have [a day off]. In the house, we both work together, hand in hand. So if she gets a day off, I should get a day off too. I want to demand a day off."

-MDW employer (female)

Some employers reported giving the worker a day off, although this tended to be restricted in some way. There was a notable absence of rights-related discourse in the discussion of the weekly day of leave/rest.

*"The same way I work and take a day off, on Friday I tell her **if we are at home and there are no visitors**, I tell her don't work today, take today as a break."*

-MDW employer (female)

"On Friday, I tell them it is our day off together, we go to the farm. I tell her buy whatever you want... But I don't like to leave her go out alone, they might run away because they think working hourly is better."

-MDW employer (female)

"If she is new, I don't let her out because they run away. They meet other people and they get jealous of the others. But the one I have has been with me for six years now, so she goes out to meet her friends, to the embassy for their events, or she goes to the mall."

-MDW employer (female)

"Having a day off doesn't mean she is allowed to leave the house or that can she sit around and do nothing. It means give her fewer working hours and some more breaks in between."

-Recruitment agency manager

It is worth noting here that when employers reported giving the worker certain benefits (e.g. phone credit or a day of rest), this was often described as being driven either by empathy, pity, or a desire to motivate good behaviour rather than as giving the worker a right stipulated in the labour law or employment contract.

“Like they say, too much suppression leads to an explosion. So you have to show mercy, like they say if you don’t show mercy, no one will have mercy upon you.”

-MDW employer (female)

The interview and focus group data revealed rights-based discourses towards MDWs in relation to certain issues, specifically payment of wages, provision of food, and the right not to be physically abused. There was a recurring theme that presented the idea of MDW rights as a problem. The following quote is illustrative of this discourse:

“They used to run away less, they were more compliant. Now there are a lot of human rights, like that the passport is with her – imagine having the passport with her – like having a telephone with her, a day off every week, eight hours of work in the house. The girl has a lot of rights now.”

-Recruitment agency manager

Theme 9: Homesickness

In asking interviewees about the issues affecting MDW employment, homesickness emerged as a recurring theme. The theme of homesickness was generally linked to newly employed workers who do not have previous experience as a MDW, and the problems they have in adapting to their new life.

Some interviewees linked the theme of homesickness to the idea that some MDWs do not have accurate expectations about their working conditions as a MDW before they arrive in Jordan.

“When they come in the beginning, they cause trouble. It takes time for her to get used to the situation. She wants to go home. I sent her to the agency twice, they yelled at her and sent her back, and now she is fine.”

-MDW employer (male)

“For Bangladeshi workers the problems during the first two months are usually related to language and cultural issues. With Filipinos there aren’t these kinds of problems because they know why they are coming here.”

-Recruitment agency manager

“With workers who have no experience, there is the problem of homesickness. That is why some employers prefer workers who have experience... When Bangladeshi workers refuse to work, a lot of the time it is related to homesickness. She feels like she is in a world that is different from the world she used to be in. The freedom she has is different from the freedom she used to have. She starts crying, asking to go home, playing sick. Most of the cases involving refusal to work are in the first three months, or even the first and second month, and this is related to homesickness. The ones who refuse to work later on are much fewer.”

-Recruitment agency manager

Theme 10: Attitudes towards ‘freelancers’

The following discourses emerged in relation to the issue of ‘freelance’ MDWs (i.e. workers employed informally and paid an hourly, daily or sometimes weekly rate):

- Freelancers are expensive when compared to live-in MDWs with employment contracts.
- Freelancers are unreliable.
- Freelancers are strong-willed and difficult to control.
- Employing freelancers is risky.
- Domestic workers who do not live in the household do not fulfil the household’s needs.

“I have heard of workers that are paid by the hour, but we need someone who is always there at home and knows how to deal with my mother.”

-MDW employer (male)

*“I am scared of the ones that come on a daily basis. **I can’t depend on them.** They can leave any time and they are **not safe**, I have to search her every day before she leaves. I don’t like servants to go out of the house.”*

-MDW employer (female)

*“We were offered [a ‘freelance’ worker] but we are not interested. **They might rob you** and run away and you have no rights or way to bring them back, not even from the agency.”*

-MDW employer (male)

*“They are **unreliable** and **expensive** and they work slowly... In the beginning the freelancers were good, but then it became a problem. They became **rebellious**, they were **strong-willed** and they would **demand** things.”*

-MDW employer (female)

*“I tried freelance workers and I didn’t like them... They are very **expensive** and they **set their own conditions**. You can’t **control** them the same way you can control a worker that you have brought yourself, and paid for.”*

-MDW employer (female)

Theme 11: Impact of Syrian refugees

The most notable finding regarding the influx of Syrian refugees on the domestic work labour market is that their impact in Jordan was perceived as negligible. Indeed, all of the interviewees considered this phenomenon to be either negligible or non-existent.

With one exception, those interviewees who stated that they had heard of Syrian domestic workers in Jordan had only heard of this phenomenon indirectly and did not personally know anyone who employs a Syrian domestic worker. The exception to this was one female MDW employer interviewee whose relative has a Syrian domestic worker in her company.

Moreover, all of the senior recruitment agency managers stated that their office had not provided any Syrian domestic workers to clients. A recurring theme among the senior managers of recruitment agencies was the idea that even if there were Syrian domestic workers in the market, this would not affect MDW recruitment agencies' business. According to this discourse, Syrian domestic workers would not be live-in MDWs as the clients who use recruitment agencies specifically require a live-in domestic worker.

"[Syrians] do work in this sector, but not in a big way because I don't think people will have this nationality live in their house. Maybe [they would employ them] on a daily basis... [Recruitment agencies] work with yearly contracts, so the impact on us would be very minor. Maybe Syrians would affect the market for those [domestic workers] who work on a daily basis."

– Recruitment agency manager

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Skills and worker characteristics

MDWs in Jordan perform a variety of tasks, including cleaning, cooking, care work for older people and childcare. Despite this, interviewees did not express the view that they require MDWs to have *specific* skills prior to employment, with the exception of language skills. This seems to be related to the idea that skills can be acquired with on-the-job training.

Insofar as some employers required workers to have certain characteristics, these included: language skills, a certain marital status (either single or married, depending on the employer's

Suggested topics for further research

- Rate the importance of language skills to the employer in general, specifically English and Arabic.
- Ascertain whether the employer prefers workers with or without experience.
- For employers who prefer workers with experience, ascertain to what extent this preference is related to the MDW's skills, and to what extent it is related to their knowledge of the nature of being a MDW (i.e. to avoid homesickness and mismatched expectations). Rating the importance of specific skills to employers who prefer workers with experience (e.g. cooking, cleaning, childcare).
- For employers who prefer workers without experience, ascertain to what extent this is related to salary costs, and to what extent it is related to the ability to teach them the employer's preferred style of working and the ability to control the worker.
- Ascertain whether the employer prefers MDWs who are single or married.
- Rate the preference of employers for workers of different nationalities, both in view of the differing recruitment and salary costs of these nationalities and in the hypothetical scenario that costs are the same.

personal preference), and a certain nationality.

Behaviour pattern of employers towards MDWs

The findings of this research suggest various broad factors that drive employer behaviour towards MDWs: fear of material losses, dehumanization of the workers, empathy, pity, and a desire to motivate good work performance.

Fear of material losses (such as the MDW 'running away' or theft) was commonly used as a justification for restrictions on the worker's freedom and, in some cases, violations of their rights. Various types of dehumanizing discourses also fed into this, including racist attitudes,

racial stereotyping, and objectification. It is worth noting that racist attitudes and stereotyping seemed to be directed more towards particular nationalities.

Insofar as employers reported giving the worker benefits beyond their wages and basic living needs (e.g. phone credit or a day of rest), this was often described as being driven either by empathy, pity, or a desire to motivate good work performance.

The findings of this research suggest a conscious effort by many employers to control the power dynamic in their relationship with the worker and ensure that they retain a significant power advantage. This is evident from the discourse about not wanting MDWs to become 'rebellious' or 'strong-willed', the preference of some employers for inexperienced workers (who were described as 'raw material'), and the reasons given by employers for restricting the

Suggested topics for further research

- Ascertain the extent to which specific aspects of employer behaviour towards the MDW (e.g. access to a telephone or allowing the worker to have mobility) are motivated by each of the following factors: legal/contractual obligations towards the worker, fear of material losses, dehumanization of the worker, empathy, pity, and a desire to motivate good work performance.
- Determine the extent to which racist attitudes and stereotypes towards MDWs are prevalent among employers. This could include: employer perceptions of the extent to which the MDW's culture and/or home country is considered backwards and/or uncivilized, attitudes towards the MDW's religious practices and/or beliefs, and attitudes towards skin colour. These attitudes should be tested for correlation with the MDW's nationality to determine whether racist attitudes/stereotypes tend to be directed towards certain groups.
- Ascertain the extent to which employers report a preference for MDW personality types that are not 'rebellious' or 'strong-willed'.

communication and mobility of MDWs.

MDWs' rights and the contractual nature of the employment relationship

The extent to which the relationship with the MDW was perceived as a contractual relationship appears to vary according to the specific issue at hand. Rights-based discourses were invoked when discussing payment of wages, provision of food, and the worker's right not to be physically abused. However, the findings show a recurring discourse that the MDW is considered 'part of the household' rather than an employee, a discourse which was used to justify limitations on the mobility of the worker and an unwillingness to give them a weekly day of leave or rest.

Suggested topics for further research

- Determine the extent to which the worker is considered to be 'part of the household' rather than an employee.
- Ask employers why they provide MDWs with certain benefits (e.g. phone credit or hours of rest) to determine the extent to which they perceive these as contractual/legal obligations, and the extent to which they perceive them as a privilege provided by the employer because of empathy, pity or a desire to motivate good work performance.

Employers' sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with MDWs

The results suggest that the following factors affect employer satisfaction/dissatisfaction: language skills, docility, work ethic, previous experience as a MDW, personal hygiene, 'presentable' appearance, and interpersonal skills (with the latter being particularly important for MDWs who conduct care work for children, older people or disabled/sick people). The claim by participants that MDWs are a 'necessary evil' and should not be hired unless 'necessary' is also related to the idea of employer satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Suggested topics for further research

- Rate the importance of the following factors for employer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with MDWs: language skills, docility, work ethic, previous experience as a MDW, personal hygiene, 'presentable' appearance, and interpersonal skills.
- Ascertain the extent to which employers view the presence of a MDW as necessary but undesirable.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: MDW recruitment agency interview guide

1. What are the main requirements of future employers when they contact a recruitment agency? Do they require specific language or other skills from the domestic worker?
2. Do employers prefer a specific nationality? If so, why?
3. What are the main problems that arise between employers and domestic workers? Why do they arise?
4. Do you sometimes refuse to work with a potential employer because of his/her behaviour? If so, why?
5. To your knowledge, are employers aware of the laws related to employing domestic workers? Which aspects of the law are they most/least aware of?
6. To your knowledge, which aspects of the law are employers most/least likely to comply with? Why?
7. How does your agency contribute to ensuring minimum acceptable treatment of domestic workers by employers?
8. Are there any codes of practice/conduct for MDW agencies in Jordan? If so, who is involved and how is compliance guaranteed?
9. Do you work with specific countries of origin or all of them? On what basis do you choose your recruitment partners in countries of origin?
10. What problems have you faced with recruitment agencies in countries of origin? Why do they arise?
11. Do travel bans from countries of origin affect your work? If so, how?
12. Can you describe monitoring undertaken by the MoL and/or other government agencies of the performance of your agency?
13. Has the Syrian refugee crisis affected your work in any way? If so, how (e.g. do employers ask for Syrian domestic workers)?

Appendix 2: MDW employer interview guide

1. Ice-breaking question.
2. Why did you choose to hire a domestic worker?
3. What are the most important criteria in selecting a domestic worker (e.g. nationality, age, gender, skills level, language capacity, other)?
4. Have you ever had a serious problem with domestic worker? If so, what? Did it affect your attitude/approach towards working with domestic workers? If so, how?
5. How did you choose the recruitment agency you are working with?
6. What do you know about the laws related to hiring a domestic worker? What are your responsibilities as the employer of a domestic worker?
7. Do you think it is necessary to have a contract between the domestic worker and yourself, if so, why? What are key elements that should be covered in the contract?
8. What is the best way to pay a domestic worker (cash, bank account, other)?
9. Do you think giving a domestic worker a day off outside the house causes problems? Why/why not? What, in your view, is a fair number of idle hours per day/week for rest/recreation by a domestic worker?
10. What is your view on a reasonable number of working hours per day/week of a domestic worker?
11. What, in your view, is a fair amount of monthly compensation for a domestic worker? Explain why.
12. Do you think giving a domestic worker a mobile phone causes problems? Why /why not?
13. We hear that many employers keep the domestic worker's passport? What do you think the reasons for this are? Do you think it is a good idea? Why/why not?
14. In case the domestic worker is unhappy with his/her working environment with you, what should s/he do in your view?
15. Have you heard of Syrian women in Jordan working as domestic workers? If so, would you be interested in hiring a Syrian domestic worker?
16. In your view, who should cover the costs of bringing the domestic worker to Jordan?