

Towards Achieving Total Decent Work: Occupational Safety and Health Issues, Problems and Concerns of Filipino Domestic Workers

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Abstract : The nature of their work and employment relationship make domestic workers easy prey to abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation. Considering their plight, this research was conceptualized and examined the: a) level of awareness of Filipino domestic workers on occupational safety and health (OSH); b) their issues/problems/concerns on OSH; c) their intervention strategies at work to address OSH related issues/problems/concerns; d) issues/problems/concerns of government, employers, and non-government organizations with regard to implementation of OSH to Filipino domestic workers; e) the role of government, employers and non-government organizations to help Filipino domestic workers address OSH related issues/problems/concerns; and f) the necessary policy amendments/initiatives/programs to address OSH related issues/problems/concerns of Filipino domestic workers. The study conducted a survey using non-probability sampling, two focus group discussions, two group interviews, and fourteen face-to-face interviews. These were further supplemented with an email correspondence to a key informant based in another country. Books, journals, magazines, and relevant websites further substantiated and enriched data of the research. Findings of the study point to the fact that domestic workers have low level of awareness on OSH because of poor information drive, fragmented implementation of the Domestic Workers Act, inactive campaign at the barangay level, weakened advocacy for domestic workers, absence of law on OSH for domestic workers, and generally low safety culture in the country among others. Filipino domestic workers suffer from insufficient rest, long hours of work, heavy workload, occupational stress, poor accommodation, insufficient hours of sleep, deprivation of day off, accidents and injuries such as cuts, burns, slipping, stumbling, electrical grounding, and fire, verbal, physical and sexual abuses, lack of medical assistance, none provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), absence of knowledge on the proper way of lifting, working at heights, and insufficient food provision. They also suffer from psychological problems because of separation from one's family, limited mobility in the household where they work, injuries and accidents from using advanced home appliances and taking care of pets, low self-esteem, ergonomic problems, the need to adjust to all household members who have various needs and demands, inability to voice their complaints, drudgery of work, and emotional stress. With regard to illness or health problems, they commonly experience leg pains, back pains, and headaches. In the absence of intervention programs like those offered in the formal employment set up, domestic workers resort to praying, turn to family, relatives and friends for social and emotional support, connect with them through social media like Facebook which also serve as a means of entertainment to them, talk to their employer, and just try to be optimistic about their situation. Promoting OSH for domestic workers is very challenging and complicated because of interrelated factors such as cultural, knowledge, attitudinal, relational, social, resource, economic, political, institutional and legal problems. This complexity necessitates using a holistic and integrated approach as this is not a problem requiring simple solutions. With this recognition comes the full understanding that its success involves the action and cooperation of all duty bearers in attaining decent work for domestic workers.

Keywords : decent work, Filipino domestic workers, occupational safety and health, working conditions

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