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KAFKA
ENOUGH VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION
كفى عنف و استغلال

Servant, Daughter, or Employee?

A Pilot Study on
the Attitudes of Lebanese Employers
towards Migrant Domestic Workers

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towards Migrant Domestic Workers

Sawsan Abdulrahim

Established in 2005 by a group of multi-disciplinary professionals and human rights activists, **KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation** is a Lebanese non-profit, non-political, non-confessional civil society organization committed to the achievement of gender-equality and non-discrimination, and the advancement of the human rights of women and children.

KAFA's mission is to work towards eradicating all forms of gender-based violence and exploitation of women and children through advocating for legal reform and change of policies and practices, influencing public opinion, and empowering women and children. Our focus areas are those of: 1) Family violence 2) Child sexual abuse 3) Exploitation and trafficking in women and 4) Socio-legal counseling and empowerment.

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FOREWORD

In recent years, the number of migrant domestic workers employed in Lebanon has greatly increased with official estimates stating 200,000 in the country; the vast majority of these workers are female. In parallel, stories of abuse and exploitation of these workers have raised concerns on both the national and international level. In November of 2009, the Lebanese press drew attention to a sharp increase in the number of domestic workers who committed suicide and pointed the finger in blame at inadequate government policies, employer abuse, and social isolation. A number of origin countries, such as Nepal, Ethiopia and the Philippines, currently ban their nationals from migrating to Lebanon for domestic work in response to the situation of widespread abuse and lack of protection. Many migrant domestic workers face a vast array of labor and human rights violations on a daily basis, including: overwork, nonpayment of wages, physical, psychological and sexual abuse, loss of the freedom of movement, among others. Since migrant domestic workers are tied to their employer for their legal status in Lebanon (the sponsorship/*kafala* system), many of these workers face detention and deportation if they run away from an abusive or exploitative situation. A number of non-governmental organizations have criticized conditions in detention centers, citing overcrowding, lack of hygiene, and male guards for female detainees as major problems.

International organizations and United Nations agencies have also pointed to migrant domestic workers' lack of rights in Lebanon, recommending a set of reforms to policy makers. Recommendations have targeted both the sponsorship system and the exclusion of domestic workers (whether foreigners or nationals) from the Labor Law as root causes for migrant domestic workers' vulnerability. In the 2008 Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee noted its concern at the abuse and exploitation of women employed as domestic workers and their exclusion from the Labor Law. The Committee recommended that Lebanon act quickly to establish procedures to monitor and safeguard the rights of women domestic workers and prosecute and punish abusive employers.¹ Similarly, the International Labor Organization has raised concerns over domestic workers' exclusion from the Labor Law as well as the sponsorship system, which leaves migrant domestic workers highly dependent on their employers and denies their rights as workers.² While other countries in the region similarly exclude domestic workers from national labor laws and utilize the sponsorship system, some have moved more quickly to address the situation of migrant domestic workers, notably Jordan, which in 2008 passed regulations to expand the coverage of the Labor Law to domestic and agricultural workers.

Moreover, Lebanon is not a signatory to any Convention on migrant workers, such as the UN Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the two ILO Conventions: Migration for Employment, Conv. 97, and Migrant Workers (Supplemental Provisions), Conv. 143. Despite Lebanon's lack of ratifications of Conventions on migrant workers, the state is party to a number of Conventions that uphold certain rights regardless of immigration status. These are: the ILO Fundamental Conventions³, the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Human Beings, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, among others. However, these have yet to be fully implemented, let alone extended to migrant domestic workers.

1 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Fortieth session, 14 January-1 February 2008, Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/3.

2 See ILO Regional Office for Arab States, Issue Brief 1: Promoting the Rights of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Arab States: The Case of Lebanon.

3 Lebanon is a signatory to seven of the eight fundamental Conventions: Freedom of association and collective bargaining, Conv. 98; Elimination of forced and compulsory labour, Conv. 29 and Conv. 105; Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, Conv. 100 and Conv. 111; and Abolition of child labour, Conv. 138 and Conv. 182. Denunciation as a result of ratification of Abolition of child labour, Conv. 138.

Recent reforms, including the approval of a unified contract for male and female migrant domestic workers, may not go far enough to protect these workers from abuse and exploitation. Although the unified contract guarantees certain rights to migrant domestic workers, there is no mechanism in place to enforce the contract or a sound basis in the law to penalize employers who violate its conditions. The existing regulations do not encourage employers to respect the rights of migrant domestic workers. Regulations uphold the employer's position of power over their employee and discourage workers who have suffered violations from seeking redress. In addition the reluctance to interfere with the privacy of the home prevents authorities from effectively monitoring the situation of migrant domestic workers or investigating allegations of abuse. A parallel can be drawn to the situation of Lebanese women who experience domestic violence since authorities are likewise reluctant to interfere with the privacy of home and thus will not act to investigate a report of abuse unless the victim herself files a complaint. In both cases, gender discrimination plays a role in perpetuating the violence and abuse and in maintaining the silence on what happens in the home.

In this context, the employer plays a vital role in determining the living and working conditions of the migrant domestic worker in his/her employment. The relationship between the employer and the worker consists of several facets; it is not only a work relationship, since the nature of domestic work at times creates emotional ties between the employer and employee. The study was conducted in response to the need to better understand the attitudes of Lebanese employers towards a range of practices and conditions that affect the wellbeing of the migrant domestic worker. It makes clear the need for action at the structural level (the legal framework) and at the micro-level where perceptions and attitudes contribute to discrimination against and exploitation of these workers.

This report, although not comprehensively mapping of employers' attitudes and perceptions of migrant domestic workers, is one of the few studies that provide a general picture of these attitudes and perceptions. The findings are based mainly on qualitative data collected, and offer available insight in how employers contribute to workers' marginalization in Lebanon. Dr. Sawsan Abdulrahim, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut, designed the methodology of the study and primarily wrote the report. Valuable support in the preparation for the study, data collection and management, and preparation for and drafting of sections in the current report was provided by Ms. Lina Torossian, MPH.

The study was commissioned by KAFA as part of a larger project to end the exploitation of migrant domestic workers. The larger project is implemented by KAFA in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and funded by KVINFO (Danish Centre on Gender, Equality and Ethnicity). The project approaches the situation of migrant domestic workers from multi-dimensions and includes a research component, advocacy, awareness rising, and training of front-line officials. KAFA's commitment to the achievement of gender-equality and non-discrimination, and the advancement of the human rights of women and children shape our commitment to advancing the rights of migrant domestic workers. Acknowledgement that the situations of violence and abuse experienced by Lebanese women are similar to those experienced by migrant women led KAFA to take up this issue. It is our belief that gender-equality and non-discrimination can only be achieved if the rights of all women are respected.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The exploitation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon has been the subject of heightened attention in the media and by international organizations. The nature of domestic labor as work performed in the privacy of homes and away from public scrutiny grants employers heightened power and control. Employer attitudes have received only limited attention in the past. A better understanding of employer attitudes and practices is warranted to inform policies and to guide awareness programs targeted at employers.

In the study on which the present report is based, we explored the general attitudes and practices of Lebanese employers towards domestic workers. We sought to move away from issues related to physical and sexual violence, which have been amply addressed in previous reports, and to focus instead on how employers justify and talk about normative attitudes and practices. The report is based on a mixed qualitative and quantitative study, employing focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews, as well as the collection of survey data. It delineates the findings of the study and integrates quotes by Lebanese employers with survey results.

The findings revealed that blatant violations of the rights of domestic workers – such as withholding their salaries, not giving them enough food, and subjecting them to forms of violence – are virtually unanimously rejected in Lebanese society. Conversely, practices that equally infringe on the rights of domestic workers and heighten employer power and control – such as withholding their passports, preventing them from going out alone on their day off, and, to a lesser extent, locking them inside the employers' house – receive less widespread rejection. In fact, employers hold the attitude that these practices are necessary and justified to protect domestic workers from harm and to protect themselves from bearing responsibility.

Moreover, the study uncovered the existence of a racialized hierarchy that is not merely in the minds of employers but translates to a hierarchy in wages. This hierarchy is organized such that migrant women from the Philippines receive the highest salaries and those from Bangladesh receive the lowest. Domestic workers from Sri Lanka and Ethiopia receive salaries between the two extremes. Level of education and experience were two sought after characteristics for employers, but so were obedience and a low level of contact with other domestic workers.

Lebanese employers often project feelings of maternalism (and paternalism) towards migrant domestic workers, with many expressing preference for treating them like daughters. The study findings exposed obvious contradictions in participants' statements, leading us to believe that maternalistic assertions were symbolic at best. They showed inconsistencies between expressions of closeness in the relationship and employers' support for conditions that clearly circumscribe the space available for domestic workers. It is important to question whether the phrase "I treat my domestic worker like my daughter" works to reinforce the control of the employer (by making the domestic worker feel a sense of obligation towards a maternal or a paternal figure) yet at the same time maintains the employer as the main benefactor in the relationship.

The majority of employers included in the study agreed that inadequate policies contribute to the vulnerability of domestic workers and heighten employers' control. In cases when a Lebanese person attempts to support a domestic worker living and working under abusive conditions, he or she quickly discovers that the whole system, including the government and employment agencies, is on the side of the abusive employer. The findings further highlight that employers avoid resorting to employment agencies when faced with a conflict, and the majority indicated that they invite more government involvement and regulation of the employer-worker relationship. In spite of this, only a small proportion of employers knew about the existence of mechanisms that govern this relationship, such as the unified contract.

The findings delineated in the present report can guide future campaign plans that target employer attitudes and practices and that link to more comprehensive policies. Awareness campaigns should address practices and attitudes that violate the rights of domestic workers, even those that are perceived by the majority of employers to be normative and necessary. Efforts should focus on de-normalizing practices that constrain the autonomy and free will of domestic workers. They also need to work against widespread support for the idea that employers can control aspects of the domestic worker's life under the guise of protecting her.

Employers' acceptance of government enforcement coupled with a low level of employer knowledge of regulatory mechanisms highlights the need to spread awareness about the unified contract to both employers and domestic workers. Awareness efforts need to address employers' lack of knowledge concerning new regulations and changes in the legal framework. They should also focus on informing domestic workers of their rights and providing them with information on who to contact in cases when rights guaranteed by the unified contract are breached. In addition to awareness efforts, recommendations in the report draw attention to the need to dissolve the sponsorship system and institute more regulations of employment agencies, in the hope of limiting employer control and lessening the exploitation of domestic workers.

Finally, much of the work needed to improve the living conditions of domestic workers requires close collaboration between activist groups and policy makers who are willing to take on sensitive issues. Whereas physical and sexual violence against domestic workers have rightfully received attention, it is time to begin to work towards granting domestic workers basic human and labor rights – to grant them at least one day off from work and to allow them to decide how and where they wish to spend that day. The inclusion of domestic workers themselves or advocates on their behalf in the process of change is crucial. Change can only take place if activists maintain momentum and continue to press for support at the policy level.

INTRODUCTION

The exploitation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon has been the subject of heightened attention in the media and by international organizations. Human Rights Watch, the International Labor Organization, and the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights have all sponsored workshops on the rights of migrant domestic workers in recent years and published reports that put forth recommendations to policy makers.⁴ In the media, stories of employer abuse of domestic workers were highlighted in documentary films, newspaper articles, and on web-blogs.⁵

In Lebanon, a number of factors contribute to the vulnerability of domestic workers. The main factor is the sponsorship or *kafala* system which binds a domestic worker to her employer for a period of three years. This system allows the employer to withhold the passport and other documents that belong to the domestic worker in order to prevent her from breaking the contract. In addition to institutionalized policies and inadequate regulations of employment agencies, the attitudes and practices of employers are vital in determining the living conditions of domestic workers.

The nature of domestic labor as work performed in the privacy of homes and away from public scrutiny grants employers heightened power and control. Many domestic workers spend 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the homes of their employers. Some never receive days off from work and have little contact with the outside world throughout their entire contract period.⁶ Even when their basic right to a day of rest is respected, many may not be allowed to leave the home of the employer. This seclusion from the outside world invariably enables employers to exert full control over the lives of the domestic workers they hire.

What distinguishes domestic labor from other economic spheres is the fact that the employer-employee relationship is determined to a large extent by the beliefs and personal values of the employer, not by a well-defined framework. A number of work-related conditions that have direct bearing on domestic workers' wellbeing are privately negotiated within an extremely unequal relationship. As the domestic worker lives in the household of the employer, her autonomy and ability to protect her rights become severely compromised.

In order to raise awareness about the exploitation of migrant domestic workers and the employers' role in perpetuating this exploitation, well-meaning media accounts have focused on cases of physical violence and sexual abuse. Undoubtedly, it is important to bring attention to cases of abuse, even if rare and rejected by the majority of Lebanese, and to put in place mechanisms to protect domestic workers and enable them to remove themselves from abusive employers. It is also imperative to begin examining how normative attitudes and accepted practices related to hiring and managing domestic workers also contribute to reinforce the power and control of employers. The majority of domestic workers may live and work under

4 ILO (2005). Report of the Awareness Raising Workshop on the Situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon; HRW (2010). *Slow Reform: Protections of Migrant Domestic Workers in Asia and the Middle East*

5 See <http://ethiopiansuicides.blogspot.com/> and Carol Mansour's documentary *Maid in Lebanon*.

6 A study conducted by Brochmann in the early 1990s among Sri Lankan returned housemaids from the Middle East reported that 72% did not receive any weekends off during their contract period. Cited in Gamburd (2000) *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle*.

extremely compromised conditions, even if they are not subjected to physical or sexual abuse.

In the study on which the present report is based, we explored the general attitudes and practices of Lebanese employers towards domestic workers. We sought to move away from physical and sexual violence, which have been amply addressed in previous reports, and to focus instead on how employers justify and talk about practices that are perceived to be customary or even necessary purportedly to protect themselves and the domestic workers they hire. Thus we focused on examining the attitudes and practices of employers that are perceived to be normative in Lebanon.

The subject of employer attitudes has not been thoroughly examined through empirical research in Lebanon. One telephone-based study conducted in 2005 highlighted contradictions in employer beliefs. Whereas 85% of respondents believed that the relationship between the domestic worker and the employer is equal, 71% believed the employer has the right to restrict a domestic worker's movement outside the house and 40% believed the employer has the right to lock the door on the domestic worker.⁷ A better understanding of employer attitudes is certainly warranted.

The overarching goal of the present study was to produce more knowledge about employer attitudes towards domestic workers. This knowledge can be used in future advocacy by international and rights-based organizations and to design effective awareness campaigns. We collected data for the study through qualitative and quantitative interviews with women and men employers. A detailed account of the methodologies we employed is presented in Appendix A. In brief, we conducted 4 focus group discussions with female employers and 7 one-on-one interviews with male employers. The questions we asked in interviews are included in Appendix B. Moreover, we administered a quantitative survey with 102 women and men Lebanese employers. Tables showing descriptive results from the survey are presented in Appendix C.

We present both qualitative and quantitative results of the study organized under sub-headings. Henceforth, we refer to all findings from focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews as qualitative findings. We refer to findings from the quantitative survey we conducted as survey findings.

⁷ ILO (2005). Report of the Awareness Raising Workshop on the Situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon.

Power and control

Invariably, employers exert greater power in their relationships with domestic workers and they have substantially more control in determining the boundaries and quality of these relationships. They constantly endeavor to set limits in their relationship with the domestic workers they hire. The majority of employers we interviewed contended that, whereas the character of the domestic worker affects the relationship to a limited extent, it is really the employer who defines the nature of the relationship, sets boundaries, and makes sure that these boundaries are respected. In talking about what they perceived to be normative and acceptable and even in critiquing abusive employers, the participants revealed a surprisingly high level of control over the lives of domestic workers they hire.

The boundaries discussed and elaborated on by employers took on many forms, ranging from the symbolic – defining the emotional closeness an employer is willing to allow in the relationship – to the tangible – defining what and how much the domestic worker can eat and whether she can go outside the employer’s home on her own. When it comes to food, our participants expressed a unanimous rejection of rationing the food of domestic workers. They narrated with a high degree of objection stories about other employers who prevent domestic workers from eating enough or eating nutritious food.

Conversely, other practices that reinforce the power and control of employers and that limit the autonomy of domestic workers and deprive them of basic rights received much less rejection. Even among the select group of employers who participated in focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews, granting the domestic worker a day off from work was viewed to be a question of employer preference or responsibility, rather than a domestic worker’s right to free movement. This has been addressed in a number of previous reports and will be discussed in more depth in the upcoming section on “Responsibility versus Rights.” What we found to be troubling is the almost unanimous acceptance of the idea that the employer can withdraw the right of a domestic worker to fulfill social needs which are highly regarded and sought after in Lebanese society – a woman’s right to get married and to bear children.

I drop off my domestic worker wherever she wants. I take her to church if there is a holiday and I pick her up. But if she comes and tells me that she wants a day off to go meet her husband, no way, never, I will not accept this.

The view that domestic workers are only here to work was shared by the majority of employers we interviewed. This brings to light that infringing on the basic rights of domestic workers is not limited to a handful of practices against which the majority of people in any society express an aversion. Normative attitudes can translate into practices which clearly limit the autonomy of domestic workers. The denial of basic rights can become engrained within the social structural fabric and becomes unseen or unnoticed by the majority.

Our survey results revealed widespread support for practices such as withholding the passport of the domestic worker, preventing her from leaving the house, and preventing her from connecting with individuals from her country of origin. Around 88% of those who responded to our survey agreed that the employer has the right to keep the domestic worker's passport in order to prevent her from escaping (see table 4 in Appendix C)

Exerting power and control can become incorporated into daily practices and in the process of hiring a domestic worker. Participants in the study explained that violating the dignity and autonomy of the domestic worker as a human being begins before she even leaves her country of origin, continues after she arrives to the Beirut airport where she is kept in a "cage" for hours and even days, and is exacerbated when she is "sold" by the employment agency to the end employer.

A friend of mine was telling me that she went and picked a domestic worker. She brought her home but did not like her. So she returned her and brought another one. She was talking as if she was describing picking [a] potato.

Regardless of the character and values of the employer, the first experience of selecting and being selected sets the stage for a future in which the employer certainly has greater power in determining the quality of the relationship.

Racism – the power to define and to categorize

In speaking about domestic workers, employers grouped them into different categories. Whereas this process of categorizing may seem benign on the surface, it hides underneath racialized employer preferences. Employers wish for relatively educated and fair-skinned domestic workers yet they also favor those who are obedient, who accept lower wages, and those who are not informed about their rights.

To begin with, the "character" and the "level of awareness" of the domestic worker were described as innate characteristics that had to do with the domestic worker as an individual. This issue was debated in one focus group discussion as follows:

- The character of the domestic worker is something that you cannot change...
- Also, different domestic workers have different levels of awareness.
- In intelligence as well. Some of them are extremely limited in intelligence. They are very limited. They are only good for work [domestic labor].
- Yes, some are only good for work, *haram*, but others are intelligent and cultured. You can give and take with them.

Oftentimes, conversations that revolved around the characteristics of "good" domestic workers used neutral terms and remained within the confines of what is viewed to be socially acceptable. In a few cases, however, participants projected stereotyped images of domestic worker. Nepali domestic workers were described by Lebanese employers as respectable women and compliant (i.e., always smiling and rarely complaining). On the other hand, Ethiopian domestic

workers were described as stubborn and difficult to deal with. Whereas some employers expressed a strong preference for Filipina women because they are relatively more educated, others described Filipina women as undesirable because they make demands that others (i.e., domestic workers from Sri Lanka or Bangladesh) do not make: “the next day after they [Filipina women] arrive, they demand a day off and a cell phone.”

The hierarchy of domestic workers is not merely in the minds of employers but translates to a hierarchy in salaries. Employers indicated that there is now an increasing preference for hiring domestic workers from Nepal and Bangladesh (because they are compliant and earn lower wages). Our quantitative survey data revealed that domestic workers in Lebanon receive unequal wages depending on their country of origin. Table 3 in Appendix C shows disparities in salaries paid to domestic workers of different national backgrounds, as reported by employers. Whereas 50% (19 out of 38) of Filipina domestic workers receive a monthly salary of \$250 or above, none of the Sri Lankan women and only 9% (2 out of 22) of Ethiopian women receive that amount. Moreover, 70% of domestic workers from Bangladesh get paid less than \$150 a month. According to our findings, the racial hierarchy in wages is organized such that migrant women from the Philippines receive the highest salaries and those from Bangladesh receive the lowest. Domestic workers from Sri Lanka and Ethiopia receive salaries between the two extremes.

The findings on disparities in salaries reveal that racism in Lebanon plays out through a complex process in which bias against dark skin color is important but does not fully explain the phenomenon. Even though references to the skin color of domestic workers were evident, for the most part, participants took a very critical position toward other Lebanese individuals who make objectionable comments about Sri Lankan or Ethiopian domestic workers. Comments about the existence of racism and prejudice against dark-skinned people in Lebanese society appeared throughout our qualitative findings. These comments were made critically and by way of projecting that racism is not socially acceptable.

Racist comments, however, were expressed during interviews. Oftentimes, this racism was coated with expressions of sympathy towards domestic workers because they come from “primitive” backgrounds or expressions of agony that the employer had to teach the domestic worker basic eating etiquette or hygienic practices. Notwithstanding efforts on the part of employers to be courteous towards those who are less fortunate, our qualitative findings revealed many subtle racist beliefs and, in one case, a blatantly open expression of bigotry against a domestic worker because of her dark skin color. Throughout the interview, the participant expressly displayed her repulsion towards dark skin, associating it with malice and lack of cleanliness. Later on in the interview, she described from her own perspective reasons for a fall-out between her and a domestic worker she used to hire:

It was not a big deal. My son was 4 years old and I don't know what happened but he slapped her [the 4 year old son hit the domestic worker]. She was very dark and my son was not used to her looks.

The issue of employers' children exhibiting disrespect and even physical or sexual violence

towards domestic workers was strongly critiqued by the majority of participants in focus group discussions. The statement quoted above, however, brings to light that the living and working conditions of a large proportion of domestic workers are affected by racism and an underlying bias towards dark skin.

Rights versus responsibilities

In exploring further the issue of power and control, we sought to examine attitudes towards certain rights that we found to be denied by a large proportion of employers. We inquired about employer practices such as locking a domestic worker inside the house, not giving her a day off from work or allowing her to go out alone on her day off. In general, there was strong opposition to locking domestic workers inside the house. Some participants argued against this practice simply because it may lead to unforeseen circumstances, such as the domestic worker getting trapped in the case of a fire for which the employer would have to bear the responsibility. Others adamantly expressed that they oppose “locking” because it is unethical.

The few participants who admitted to “locking” explained that they did so with a newly arrived domestic worker, for a short period of time and only until they began to trust her judgment. A participant explained that the domestic worker she used to lock inside the house now has her own keys to the house and goes out to shop and to run errands on her own. Our quantitative results revealed that 31.3% of the Lebanese employers we surveyed lock the domestic worker inside the house.

Allowing the domestic worker to leave the employer’s house for a whole day received less support compared to the sentiments expressed against “locking.” The two quotes below, the first by a male employer and the second by a female, illustrate the two opposing views expressed:

She [domestic worker] has a day and a half off every week. She goes out and I do not ask her where she goes. I do not care where she goes.

I do not accept to give [a domestic worker] a day off. She will go out and have a boy friend and get pregnant. I [do not accept because] I have a young daughter.

Some participants acknowledged that a domestic worker should have the right to free movement but explained that this right should be protected only if it does not threaten the “values and dignity of the Lebanese family.” Others strongly opposed granting the domestic worker autonomy to go out on her day off and to socialize with women from her country of origin. The majority of participants elaborated that they believed in giving the domestic worker a “day off” from work but not a “day out.”

I don’t like her to leave the house but I let her rest every once in a while. When I feel that she worked a lot, I keep her in the house but I don’t give her a lot of work. I let her sleep early and tell her that she does not need to mop the floor. So I give her a day off but I do not let her go out.

A number of reasons or arguments were advanced to justify this position. The first argument is that domestic workers themselves do not ask for a day off let alone demand to go out on that day. As such, the right of the domestic worker is not respected by the employer so long as the domestic worker herself does not know that she has this right and does not demand it. The second, and equally troubling argument, is that allowing the domestic worker to go out was exaggerated by employers to lead to extreme social consequences. Often, participants equated granting the right to go out with terrifying threats such as catching AIDS, getting raped, or even being killed. The threats awaiting domestic workers the minute they leave their employers' premises were clearly overstated.

In posing exaggerated threats, employers painted an uncharacteristic picture of Lebanese society, as dangerous and criminal, while at the same time portrayed domestic workers as naïve children who could easily fall prey to delinquent men. In some cases, participants referred to legitimate concerns such as the young age of domestic workers and their inability to communicate in Arabic. In other cases, they simply stated that domestic workers are prone to make wrong decisions and to engage in socially unacceptable relationships with strangers.

Numerous statements and responses revealed that employers felt the right to make decisions for domestic workers, first, "for the good of the domestic worker" and, second, in order to protect themselves from bearing the responsibility of any negative consequences. Protecting the employer's responsibility, however, came at the expense of infringing on the rights of the domestic worker and constraining her movement.

She [the domestic worker] is under my name. I am responsible for her in everything. So, I would feel worried if she goes out or if she sleeps outside my house. I would be scared that she might do something wrong, that she might engage in a relationship with someone and come back pregnant. I would be responsible for that. I would be responsible if she catches a disease or something.

The dichotomy between responsibility (of the employer) and rights (of the domestic worker) came out forcefully in participants' statements as they defended their position to allow or not allow the domestic worker to go out on her day off. It was clear that participants gave more value to protecting themselves from responsibility than to the rights of domestic workers. Even employers who showed a relatively high level of sensitivity to the rights of domestic workers expressed that they were constrained by the sponsorship system: "as her sponsor, I am responsible." Under this system, Lebanese employers feel that, in order to protect themselves from bearing responsibility, they are obliged to act in ways which deny the rights of domestic workers.

Given the tension that emerged in qualitative interviews, we explored the issue of responsibility versus rights in the quantitative study. Our results revealed that Lebanese employers are split on the two issues of locking a domestic worker inside the house and giving her days off from work. First, whereas the majority of participants in the qualitative study opposed "locking," we were surprised to find that 31.3% of the survey respondents indicated that they lock the domestic workers they hire inside the house when they leave. Moreover, 45.5% of the survey respondents indicated that they do not give the domestic worker a day off. Of those who give a

day off, only 37.7% allow the domestic worker to leave the house of the employer on her own. In sum, only 20% of the Lebanese employers we interviewed give the domestic worker a day off and a day out. These results show an alarming trend and highlight that a large proportion of domestic workers in Lebanon (80% of the sample of employers we interviewed) cannot separate themselves from their employer, even if they were allowed time to rest.

A daughter! To protect or to control?

A number of international scholars have argued that a close relationship between employer and domestic worker can be used as a mechanism of power and control.⁸ In portraying a relationship in personal terms, employers may be more concerned about validating themselves, as kind and fair, rather than truly equalizing an inherently asymmetrical relationship. Oftentimes, expressions of maternalism (or paternalism) may reinforce asymmetry and inequality by making the domestic worker feel obligated to reciprocate with gratitude, obedience, and extra hours of service.

It is common to hear Lebanese employers state that they treat domestic workers they hire as they would treat a “daughter” or a “member of the family.” On the surface, these references are well-meaning and uttered to project a sense of closeness and maternalism in the relationship. We sought to examine whether, underneath the surface, references to maternalism and personalism served to absolve the employer of responsibility towards the rights of the domestic worker as an employee. We explored the dichotomy of the domestic worker as a daughter versus an employee. Inquiring about this dichotomy revealed a great deal of contradiction whereby a typical dialogue in focus group discussions went as follows:

- She is treated like a family member but she is still an employee.
- So, how? There is a contradiction [in the statement]. What do you mean that she is treated like a family member but she is still an employee.
- She is treated like a family member because she is living in the house. But she is an employee because you have to put limits.
- I say she should be treated like a family member but, at the end of the day, she is a guest in the house.

Similar to the conversation quoted above, our results revealed a pervasive confusion about the status of the domestic worker in the family. Participants sometimes used the terms daughter, guest, stranger, and employee in the same sentence.

Even though respondents generally spoke about setting limits in the relationship, many expressed preference for treating the domestic worker like a member of the family or like a daughter. When probed about what it means to have a mother-daughter (or father-daughter) relationship, participants replied that they take the domestic worker shopping, ask her to sit with them at the dinner table, and give her time to rest when she is tired or not feeling well.

⁸ See Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo's *Doméstica* and Michele Ruth Gamburd's *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle*.

Most importantly, the mother-daughter relationship implied that the employer exerts more control but also bears responsibility to protect the domestic worker from harm.

I see a lot of similarity between her and my daughter. Since my daughter was young, I used to teach her right from wrong. I do not accept that she [daughter or domestic worker] go out to the corner store alone because she is vulnerable. She is still young. Someone can exploit her. My daughter is 24 years old now and I still tell her to stay away from bad things.

Yet, what happens when a domestic worker who is treated as a family member does not stay away from “bad things?” The study findings revealed obvious contradictions in participants’ statements, leading us to believe that maternalistic assertions were symbolic at best. For example, a participant who used to treat a 20 year-old domestic worker as she would treat her own daughter was shocked to find out that the domestic worker had built a romantic relationship with a 45 year old man. When the domestic worker confessed that the man had offered her to work in a bar, the employer bought a one-way ticket and sent the young woman back to her country of origin. The employer in this case simply removed the domestic worker from her life in order to protect herself from responsibility.

We inquired about the daughter-employee dichotomy in the quantitative study. Our results showed that 40.1% of Lebanese employers felt it would be better to treat the domestic worker like a family member, exactly twice as many as those who preferred to treat her as an employee (20.5%). When we asked about actual practices, the overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) indicated that they themselves treat the domestic worker like a member of the family. However, we found clear incongruity between this almost unanimous disclosure of closeness and responses to other questions we posed to gauge whether a domestic worker is really treated as a family member. For example, only 43.4% of respondents allowed the domestic worker to sit with them at the dinner table and only 53.6% allowed her to enter the living room in the presence of guests. A large proportion of employers indicated that they would send a domestic worker home if she got sick with a chronic illness that required long-term care or if she got pregnant (83% and 90.7% respectively). Please see results in table 6 in Appendix C.

Whereas, in Lebanese culture, maternalism (and paternalism) mandates a high degree of both inclusion and protection, half of the Lebanese employers we interviewed circumscribed the space available in their homes for domestic workers; for example, designating the dinner table and the living room in the presence of guests as off limits. Moreover, the overwhelming majority expressed that they would not take care of a domestic worker, who might have dedicated years of her life to serving and caring for members of the family, if she gets sick. Given the low cost and the relatively easy recruitment process, an employer can simply hire a new, healthy, and non-pregnant domestic worker and send the old, ill, or pregnant one home.

Our findings highlight the importance of questioning whether the phrase “I treat my domestic worker like my daughter” works to reinforce the control of the employer (by making the domestic worker feel a sense of obligation towards a maternal or a paternal figure) yet at the same time maintains the employer as the main benefactor in the relationship. A daughter or

not, the domestic worker's status in the family and her limited options, in case she gets sick or becomes pregnant in a context which does not give her the right to do so, remains the vulnerable party in the employer-employee relationship.

Abuse is “inhumane” but can happen in “good” homes

Participants in focus group discussions and interviews recalled witnessing the mistreatment and abuse of domestic workers in their neighborhoods and among their extended social circles. They narrated these accounts critically and in a manner intended to express their objections to what they saw as culturally unacceptable behavior.

Narratives on abuse resonated with what has already been addressed in numerous scholarly writings and reports by international organizations and described as a clear violation of domestic workers' human rights.⁹ These included coarse forms of abuse, violence, and inhumane behavior: physically hitting the domestic worker; subjecting her to sexual harassment by the male employer; not paying her wages on time or at all; treating her like a machine and expecting her to work around the clock; not giving her enough, or any, food; locking her inside the house; and allowing the children of the employer to verbally abuse her.

Through telling stories they witnessed first-hand, participants sought to underscore that coarse forms of abusive and violent acts against domestic workers constitute culturally and socially unacceptable forms of behavior in the Lebanese context. The quantitative results lend support to the qualitative findings, though they show that sexually assaulting a domestic worker is viewed most negatively, followed by physically hitting her, followed by depriving her of the right to free movement. Whereas all survey respondents (100%) agreed that an employer who sexually assaults a domestic worker should be punished as severely as one who sexually assaults a Lebanese woman, only 87% believed that hitting a domestic worker deserved the same punishment as for hitting a Lebanese person.

In focus group discussions and interviews, the stories narrated and the manner in which they were told shed light on two important themes. First, the fact that abuse of domestic workers in Lebanon takes place across the social spectrum and is often perpetrated by those who are educated and well-respected within their social circles. The second important theme is that existing structural constraints and social pressures prevent a conscientious person from acting against abuse committed by other Lebanese employers. We present cases and quotes below to illustrate these two themes.

In one focus group discussion, a participant spoke of another Lebanese employer, a woman she used to know, who burnt a domestic worker's hand because she did not iron a shirt as well as she was expected to:

⁹ See Jureidini (2002). Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon. *International Migration Programme: Geneva*; Jureidini and Moukarbel (2004). Female Sri Lankan Domestic Workers in Lebanon: A Case of <Contract Slavery>? *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 30(4), 581-607.

Once [because the domestic worker] did not iron well, her employer burnt her hand with the iron. And the employment agency did not do anything about it. There was going to be a lawsuit against the employer, but her husband is a very good man. It was because of his [good] name in the community that the lawsuit was later dropped.

In addition to expressing her objection and dismay at an incomprehensible act of physical violence, the participant's telling of the story highlighted that abuse of domestic workers oftentimes takes place in the homes of "good" Lebanese people.

Another participant recalled a conversation she had with a former acquaintance who locked a domestic worker inside the house while she went on a two-day skiing vacation. Again, the participant expressed dismay at how educated Lebanese employers perpetrate "inhumane" acts against domestic workers.

I told [the woman I used to know] you cannot do this [lock the domestic worker for days inside the house], this is inhumane! What if the house catches on fire? And she responded, 'don't worry, these people [in reference to domestic workers] are like monkeys, nothing happens to them.' And, this woman is educated and is a graduate of an American institution!

The system protects the employer

The absence of strong policies and government regulations were two of the main reasons provided by employers for the prevalence of a large number of domestic workers in Lebanon. Participants often compared Lebanon to other countries to make the point that the system makes it easy for employers to hire domestic workers:

I think the Lebanese hire domestic workers because the system makes it easy for them to bring one. In France, if a person wants [to hire a domestic worker], he needs to treat her like an employee, to give her all her rights. The domestic worker [in France] is expected to work 4 hours and to get a rest. She has rights just like anyone else. The employer also has to register her. In Lebanon, it is much easier. When the French come to Lebanon, they tell us that if they had the same [easy] policies they would also bring more domestic workers.

A permissive system contributes to the vulnerability of domestic workers and heightens employers' control. A few participants in the study indicated that, despite the system, they have gone out of their way to help a domestic worker by connecting her with an embassy or testifying at the police station on her behalf. The main problem, however, was that their attempts ended in failure because the whole system, including the government and employment agencies, is on the side of the abusive employer and against the domestic worker. For example, a participant narrated how she made attempts to intervene on behalf of a domestic worker who was repeatedly subjected to abuse but her attempts were not fruitful.

In my old house, our next-door neighbors were really reasonable people, and the wife was employed as a teacher. I used to hear noise [coming from the neighbor's apartment] all the time. She [the employer] used to hit her domestic worker, and she did not allow her to answer back. For example, I used to hear [the employer say] 'who told you to do this?' and the [domestic worker] would answer 'Madame ...' and then I would hear the slap! The domestic worker was not allowed to answer, to defend herself! This went on for a long time ... I could not take it anymore!

In response to this situation, the participant asked around about the possibility of informing an entity that could help save the domestic worker from abuse. She first inquired whether she could knock on the neighbor's door and plead to her senses. However, the police informed her that the law protects the employer as long as the hitting has taken place inside the house. Unfortunately, policies that protect those who perpetrate violence against Lebanese women in the domestic sphere also protect male and female employers who perpetrate violence against domestic workers in the privacy of their homes. The participant ended her story with a statement that expressed both her frustration and resignation: "The law protects the employer!"

Employment agencies also contribute to the vulnerability of domestic workers and to reinforcing the control of Lebanese employers. Understandably, employment agents do not wish to incur the financial cost in the case of a fall-out between the employer and a domestic worker. In order to avoid this cost, some resort to intimidating or harshly disciplining a domestic worker rather than resolving a conflict through acceptable or legal channels. Almost all participants in the qualitative study indicated that they prefer to resolve a conflict with a domestic worker on their own and without resorting to employment agencies. Many have heard or witnessed first-hand accounts where the employment agent screamed at or hit a domestic worker without inquiring about or understanding the source of the conflict.

[The domestic worker who used to work for my mother] insisted to go the employment agency. She did not accept [to stay home] and insisted to complain to the employment agency. So, my mother called the agent and told him about the situation. [She told me that] as soon as they arrived to the office, as soon as he saw [the domestic worker], he slapped her. [My mother said] I swear to God, her body spun around from the slap. Both [the domestic worker] and my mother began to shake from fear. My mother told the agent: 'but I did not tell you to do this' and he responded: 'don't worry, they do not learn unless you hit them.'

Many other stories narrated by participants revealed that employment agencies indeed play an important role in disciplining domestic workers and in supporting oppressive employers. The agents were perceived to be an integral part of a system that protects abusive employers and severely diminishes domestic workers' capacity to remove themselves from compromised settings.

Social pressures against fairness

We presented in previous sections numerous stories of abuse as narrated in the qualitative study. Participants also recounted numerous examples of how they, or others they know, made efforts to treat a domestic worker fairly and with compassion. These examples served to highlight that, oftentimes, social pressures and social norms can make challenging even individual acts of kindness. We illustrate with a couple of quotes which best illustrate that sometimes even simple and far from radical gestures, such as giving the domestic worker a break from work during the day or acknowledging one of her basic human needs, may be criticized as unconventional and outside the accepted norms.

Everyone criticizes me. Even my sisters criticize me; they tell me that I am too much. My domestic worker goes down to the ground floor of the building every day in the afternoon to sit with other domestic workers. She socializes with three women from her country of origin. This does not affect me at all. She does it after she finishes all her work responsibilities and it does not affect me. But everyone I know makes me feel like I am doing something wrong.

While visiting friends last night, I saw a nice man from Bangladesh, he works as a concierge. I immediately thought it would be nice to introduce him to the domestic worker we hire. He seemed to be a few years older than her. I mentioned this to my wife and my daughter. I thought wouldn't it be great to introduce them to each other! But in our society, saying this is like committing blasphemy.

In addition to social norms that deny domestic workers a basic level of fairness, entrenched prejudices can seriously undermine their wellbeing in critical situations. We illustrate how social and structural prejudice rendered an employer who wielded a relatively high level of influence helpless and, more importantly, denied the domestic worker the basic right of receiving much needed medical treatment. Tamara recalled during a focus group discussion an experience that left her embittered and emotionally drained. The domestic worker she hired had fallen ill with a severe bone-marrow infection. Tamara felt a deep sense of responsibility towards a hard-working and a faithful employee and wanted to help her in the process of obtaining treatment.

I was very concerned, upset, if I let her go back [to her country of origin], who will take care of her? She is sick, but she does not have a mother, she does not have a sister! Who will embrace her and take care of her [when she goes back]? I asked my husband to keep her here [so I can take care of her] even if it was going to cost us a lot.

Yet, Tamara's good intentions and financial resources were not enough to ensure that the domestic worker would receive medical care. Even though she had paid for insurance, the domestic worker was denied admission and treatment in quite a few hospitals in Lebanon under the premise that there were no empty beds. Finally, she was admitted to one hospital after Tamara and her husband made some contacts with people they knew. It was clear to Tamara, however, that the domestic worker received bad treatment and denied care because of her origin.

You should have seen how mistreated she was. I sat in the cafeteria [at the hospital] and started to cry. A doctor came in, a respectable doctor, and asked me why I was crying. I told him the story and he answered: 'Are you serious? You are crying because of an Ethiopian?' I wanted to hit him but my husband held me back.

The unified contract

In 2009, the Lebanese Ministry of Labor, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labor Organization released a unified contract for migrant domestic workers. This was seen by NGOs and activists to be an important step in the right direction. It would also help provide better oversight and monitoring of employment agencies, which previously used their own contracts. Despite its importance, the contract has serious limitations some of which have been previously highlighted.¹⁰

Based on a thorough reading of the contract and during the course of our data collection, we also found a number of limitations in the unified contract, of which we list a few. The first relates to the fact that the contract contains ambiguous language. Specifically, whereas certain clauses attempt to clarify the responsibilities of both the employer and the employee, boundaries in the relationship remain defined according to the "values and principles of Lebanese families." This statement is very vague. Our qualitative and quantitative findings clearly revealed the absence of consensus when it comes to quite a few employer practices, attitudes and values. Even though participants unanimously rejected hitting or withholding the salaries of domestic workers, practices such as giving them a day off from work or allowing them to socialize with women from their countries of origin were accepted by some Lebanese employers and rejected by others.

Second, the unified contract is available in Arabic and the domestic worker signs it after she arrives in Lebanon. Given that the majority of domestic workers do not read or write Arabic, many may spend years in Lebanon without finding out about the minimum rights guaranteed by the unified contract. As long as the contract is not available in the native languages of domestic workers, basic rights will be granted or withheld according to the discretion of individual employers.

Third, the contract stipulates that resolving any conflict between employer and domestic worker is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor. However, nowhere is the process or a mechanism to lodge a complaint defined. Even if a domestic worker reads Arabic, she would not know from reading the contract how and where she can file a complaint. Moreover, the contract does not address important issues, such as withholding the domestic worker's passport or locking her inside the house. These were in fact the important issues which our study revealed an absence of general agreement. As such, whether a domestic worker is granted the basic rights

¹⁰ See The Limitations of the Unified Contract by KAFA in the Stop the Exploitation of Migrant Domestic Workers Newsletter, issue 1, 2010 www.kafa.org.lb.

to possess her identification documents and to move freely, would depend on the individual values and principles of a Lebanese employer and not on standards which are agreed upon and monitored by a governmental institution.

In addition to these limitations, our quantitative results revealed a very low level of knowledge on the part of employers of recent changes in Lebanese law that promise to provide slightly better protections for domestic workers, if monitoring takes place. The results revealed contradictions related to Lebanese employers' knowledge and attitudes towards government regulations when it comes to the rights of domestic workers. That the overwhelming majority of respondents (82.3%) agreed with the statement that "the government should be more active in enforcing laws" points to the general population's acceptance of policies that define the nature of the relationship between employers and domestic workers. Yet, only a small proportion of respondents (21.6%) knew about the existence of the unified contract as a mechanism that in theory ought to provide a certain level of protections. An even smaller proportion could list more than one or two of the terms of the contract.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of the present report was to provide a nuanced view of prevalent perceptions and attitudes about domestic workers, from the perspectives of the employers themselves. This has not been thoroughly addressed in the past. Acknowledging that atrocious physical and sexual violations are perpetrated against domestic workers by a small number of Lebanese employers, we advocate for the importance of examining the range of normative attitudes and practices that affect the majority of migrant domestic workers.

In the report, we highlighted that locking a domestic worker inside the house receives some support in Lebanese society and preventing her from going out on her day off seems to be normative and an accepted practice by the majority of employers. Both practices seriously infringe on the rights of domestic workers and grant employers heightened power. Under the current system of policies, pervasive acceptance of limiting the autonomy of domestic workers calls for serious attention on the part of activists, advocacy groups, and government institutions.

A number of employer-targeted awareness campaigns have been recently launched in Lebanon.¹¹ These campaigns addressed important issues such as a domestic worker's right to a weekly day of rest and to receive her salary on time. The most recent "24/7 Campaign"¹² has also incorporated cultural awareness in an effort to highlight the rich cultures from which domestic workers come. These efforts are crucial, in that they promote a culture of non-discrimination and respect for the rights of domestic workers.

We hope that the findings delineated in the present report can guide future campaign plans. Awareness campaigns should address practices and attitudes that violate the rights of domestic workers even those perceived by the majority of employers to be normative and acceptable. Efforts should focus on de-normalizing practices which constrain the autonomy and free will of domestic workers. They also need to work against widespread support for the idea that the employer can control aspects of the domestic worker's life under the guise of protecting her from harm. This can be supported through advocating that the government should shoulder its responsibility in protecting both migrant domestic workers and Lebanese employers.

Our study revealed employer acceptance of government enforcement when it comes to protecting some rights, such as paying the domestic worker's salary on time and setting the maximum number of work hours. However, we found a low level of employer knowledge of the unified contract, which guarantees domestic workers the previously mentioned rights. This clearly highlights the need to better publicize information about the unified contract to both employers and domestic workers. Awareness efforts in this regard need to address employers' lack of knowledge concerning new regulations and changes in the legal framework. They should also focus on informing domestic workers of their rights and providing them with information on who to contact in cases when rights guaranteed by the unified contract are breached.

¹¹ "Put Yourself in her Shoes" campaign was organized by Human Rights Watch and launched in May of 2008

¹² "24/7" campaign was launched on Labor Day 2010 by a group of activists and non-governmental organizations.

The unified contract is a first step in the right direction. The contract, however, does not address issues such as locking a domestic worker inside the house or allowing her to go out on her day off. It also does not address how a domestic worker can report employer violations in a timely manner. As such, the unified contract ought to be seen as a policy in progress that still needs more work and amendments. The Lebanese Ministry of Labor should encourage further discussions of the unified contract and invite advocates on behalf of domestic workers at the table during these discussions.

Notwithstanding the importance of developing and amending the unified contract, it is vital to underscore that the institutionalization of the sponsorship or *kafala* system is a main contributor to the exploitation and lack of autonomy of domestic workers. The sponsorship system grants employers heightened power and control but it also places most of the responsibility of managing the relationship with domestic workers on their shoulders. Some employers welcome the opportunity to exert control because, they argue, it protects them from bearing responsibility and protects the domestic worker from harm.

Reforming the sponsorship system would lessen employers' control over domestic workers. It would also alleviate employer fears of bearing responsibility if the domestic worker is harmed or runs away. Small steps ought to be taken in order to release both the employer and the domestic worker from this binding and potentially exploitative relationship and to enable domestic workers to change employers without jeopardizing her legal status. Amendment of the labor law to include domestic workers under its coverage would provide them with better protection and a firm basis to demand rights.

In the meantime, we advocate for stronger monitoring of recruitment and employment agencies to ensure respect for domestic workers' rights. This call for better regulations and oversight has been put forth by advocacy groups and international organizations, and it is time now to make real and practical progress in this regard. Given the private agencies' vested interest in lowering the cost of placing domestic workers with Lebanese employers and of reducing the rate of failed placements, it is vital that a neutral party resolves breaches of the unified contract whether on the part of the domestic worker or the employer. The Lebanese Ministry of Labor has established an office where complaints can be lodged. Resources should be invested to enhance the quality of services provided and the training of Ministry staff. Most importantly, steps should be taken to facilitate the access to these services by domestic workers and not only employers.

Finally, much of the work needed to improve the living conditions of migrant domestic workers requires close collaboration between activist groups and policy makers who are willing to take on sensitive issues. Whereas physical and sexual violence against domestic workers have rightfully received attention, it is time to begin to work towards granting domestic workers basic human and labor rights – to get at least one day off from work and to decide how and where they wish to spend that day. The inclusion of domestic workers themselves or advocates on their behalf in the process of change is crucial. Change can only take place if activists maintain momentum and continue to press for support at the policy level.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study employed mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. Triangulating two types of methods allowed a systematic examination of employers' attitudes and assured greater validity of the findings. The qualitative data themselves provided a portrait of salient issues from the perspective of employers themselves. Emergent qualitative themes were employed to construct the quantitative survey questionnaire. In turn, the survey findings presented a complementary picture to qualitative ones and provided us with estimates of the percentage of Lebanese employers who agree or disagree with certain statements. In addition to attitudes, the survey questionnaire asked employers about whether they engage of specific practices.

Qualitative Data Collection

The study commenced with collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with Lebanese employers of migrant domestic workers and managers/owners of employment agencies. The initial plan was to conduct focus group discussions with Lebanese men and women who hire domestic workers, employing slightly different interview questions for each gender group. We conducted 4 focus group discussions with women, each of which had between 4 and 6 women (a total of 20 female participants). Recruiting male employers to focus group discussions proved to be difficult for reasons related to time constraints. Therefore, instead of conducting focus group discussions with men, we carried out 7 one-on-one interviews. Additionally, we conducted 6 informal interviews with managers/owners of employment agencies. In Table 2 (in Appendix C), we present a summary of the number of focus group discussions and interviews conducted. The study/research questions and the open-ended questions we used to answer these questions, with each group of respondents, are included in Appendix B.

In recruiting employers to focus groups and one-on-one interviews, we utilized a purposeful sampling strategy relying on social networks to generate a diverse sample. It is important to acknowledge that the employers who provided their subjective accounts were a select group and may not represent all Lebanese employers or domestic workers. Some participants in fact expressed a keen interest in discussing issues related to migrant domestic workers. We expected this. We also expected that employers who mistreat domestic workers or harbor prejudices towards them would not wish to share their views knowing they were socially undesirable. Despite this limitation, the qualitative data collected from concerned employers fit within our goal to move away from addressing only extreme cases of violence and to critically evaluate attitudes and practices that may be perceived as culturally acceptable in Lebanese society when it comes to the rights of domestic workers.

Qualitative data collection took place between March 10 and April 30, 2010. Focus group

discussions and interviews were carried out in convenient and central locations, such as the home or office of a participant, a coffee shop in Ras Beirut with a semi private room, or the KAFA offices. Each focus group discussion lasted between one hour and an hour and a half. One-on-one interviews lasted between 35 minutes to an hour.

All focus groups and interviews with employers were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim in colloquial Arabic, except for one interview with a male employer that was conducted and transcribed in English. As to managers/owners of employment agencies, the interviewer took copious notes to capture most of the ideas expressed by the respondents.

Analysis of qualitative data was carried out promptly after an interview or a focus group was conducted and transcribed. We employed standard qualitative analysis methods, whereby we developed a large number of codes based on the data followed by organizing these codes into categories. In the Results section, we present the most salient categories (which we also label as themes). The quotes we present reflect the codes under each category or theme.

Quantitative Data Collection

Based on the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis, in addition to information published in reports and studies, a survey questionnaire for the quantitative part of the study was constructed. The questionnaire included 63 closed-ended questions on the characteristics of employers, their attitudes, and their actual practices. The questionnaire was pilot-tested for comprehension and length before quantitative data collection commenced. Based on the pilot test, we changed the wording of 4 questions. Moreover, in order to speed up the process of completing the survey, we created response cards for respondents to look at as the interviewer was reading the questions.

Data were collected face-to-face with the interviewer reading the question and response options out loud (except for the “don’t know/no answer” option) and circling the answer provided by the respondent. Most questions required one response only; this was the case for all the attitudes questions that requested from respondents to select one category on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A few questions, on the other hand, allowed the respondent to select all options that apply; one example is the question on reasons for hiring a domestic worker.

A total of 102 survey questionnaires were completed with Lebanese men and women between April 18 and May 3, 2010. We recruited participants in 3 locations in Beirut – the Ministry of Labor Office of Migrant Workers, Downtown Beirut, and City Mall. We selected these locations to reach a diverse group of employers. Recruiting at the Ministry of Labor enabled us to reach Lebanese employers from diverse social backgrounds who were at the Ministry to renew

documents for the domestic worker they hire. Recruiting in Downtown Beirut and at City Mall also enabled us to reach Lebanese families of diverse backgrounds, a large proportion of whom hire domestic workers. We recruited both men and women to complete the survey. Frequently, men deferred to their wives making statements to the effect that women would provide better informed answers to questions related to domestic workers. Despite our attempts to oversample men, our sample consisted of 22.5% men and 77.5% women. Table 3 (in Appendix C) presents the characteristics of the study sample.

In Appendix C, we present descriptive findings on how respondents answered all questions on the survey. Tables 4 and 5 in the appendix include answers to attitude questions and Tables 6 and 7 include answers to questions which asked about specific practices.

APPENDIX B – RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW GUIDES

Research Questions:

1. What are the prevalent opinions about migrant domestic workers among Lebanese employers?
2. What are the challenges experienced by Lebanese employers as they go through the process of hiring a migrant domestic worker?
3. How do Lebanese employers think about the roles played by employers, government institutions, or global forces when it comes to protecting the rights of migrant domestic workers?
4. Where do Lebanese employers draw the line between good versus bad treatment or mistreatment versus impinging on the rights of migrant domestic workers?
5. What are the arguments Lebanese employers employ to justify certain practices which impinge on migrant domestic workers' rights?
6. Do Lebanese employers extend culturally accepted norms to migrant domestic workers? What rationales do they employ for not doing so?

Interview Guide with Men:

1. In your opinion, why is the phenomenon of hiring domestic workers from Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Ethiopia prevalent in Lebanon?
 - a- Why do so many Lebanese families hire domestic workers?
 - b- Why do you think so many people are migrating from Sri Lanka, the Philippines or Ethiopia to for employment in domestic work?
2. Some Lebanese employers treat their domestic worker fairly and others mistreat her. How would you describe "good" treatment and "bad" treatment?
 - a- Hitting, locking the door on her, preventing her from going out alone on her day off, withholding her salary.
 - b- Preventing her from talking to or sitting with the guests, preventing her from using the family's plates, cups and utensils.
3. What are the reasons that made you (you and your wife) hire a domestic worker?

4. What challenges did you face during the process of hiring the domestic worker? What are the challenges that still persist? With the employment agencies, the Lebanese regulations, with the domestic worker herself?
5. In your house, who bears the responsibility of the domestic worker: you or your wife? Could you explain why it is better for the wife/husband to be responsible for the domestic worker?
6. How would you describe your relationship with the domestic worker you hire? How does the domestic worker's presence affect your relation with your wife? How does it affect the general atmosphere at home? What would you do if a conflict arises between your wife and the domestic worker?
7. What would be your opinion if the domestic worker you hired asked to get married and to go and see her husband every Sunday for example? In your opinion, how would the majority of Lebanese employers react to such a request?

Interview Guide with Women:

1. In your opinion, why is the phenomenon of hiring domestic workers from Sri Lanka, Philippines and Ethiopia prevalent in Lebanon
 - a- Why do so many Lebanese families hire domestic workers?
 - b- Why do you think so many people are migrating from Sri Lanka, the Philippines or Ethiopia to become domestic workers?
2. Would you rather have the domestic worker live with you or on her own and come to work in your house for limited hours?
What are some of the inconveniences and advantages of each case?
3. In your opinion, is it better to treat the domestic worker as an employee or as a member of the family?
What are some of the inconveniences and advantages of each treatment?
4. What challenges did you face when you hired the domestic worker?
 - a- Notably, what challenges did you face when you dealt with the employment agencies?

5. Some Lebanese employers treat their domestic worker fairly and others mistreat her. How would you describe “good” treatment and “bad” treatment?

a- Hitting, locking the door on her, preventing her from going out alone on her day off, withholding her salary

b- Preventing her from talking to or sitting with the guests, preventing her from using the family’s plates, cups and utensils

6. What do you think of allowing the domestic worker to go out alone on her day off? Would you agree with such practice?

7. In December 2009, the media covered the stories of a number of migrant domestic workers who committed suicide in Lebanon. In your opinion, what reasons could have caused them to commit suicide?

a- What responsibility should the employer bear? What responsibility should the embassies of the countries of origin of these domestic workers bear? What responsibility should the Lebanese government bear?

APPENDIX C – TABLES

Table 1: Summary of qualitative data collection methods and participants in the study

	Gender	Data collection method	Number
Employers	Women	Focus group discussions	4
	Men	One-on-one interviews	7
Managers/owners of employment agencies	Women	One-on-one interviews	3
	Men	One-on-one interviews	3

Table 2: Characteristic of the study sample

Characteristic	N	%
Gender (<i>N</i> = 102)		
Men	23	22.5%
Women	79	77.5%
Age (<i>N</i> = 101)		
21-30	13	12.88%
31-40	41	40.6%
41-50	25	24.73%
51-60	10	9.89%
61 and over	8	7.91%
Refused to answer	4	3.99%
Education (<i>N</i> = 102)		
High school or less	30	29.42%
Technical or University	72	70.58%
Marital status (<i>N</i> = 102)		
Married	93	91.18%
Divorced, widowed, single	9	8.82%
Women working outside the house (<i>N</i> = 79)		
Yes	41	51.89%
No	38	48.10%

Table 3: Proportion of domestic workers in each salary category by national background

Nationality	Less than \$150	\$150-200	\$250 or more	Total
Philippines	1	18	19	38
Sri Lanka	2	5	0	7
Ethiopia	1	19	2	22
Nepal	2	14	0	16
Bangladesh	7	3	0	10
Other	1	4	1	6

Table 4¹²: Employers' general attitudes towards migrant domestic workers

Statement	Agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)
There should be a policy for the minimum salary a Lebanese employer pays to a domestic worker (N=101)	84 (83.1%)	15 (14.8%)	2 (2.1%)
There should be a policy for the maximum number of hours a Lebanese employer asks a domestic worker to work (N= 100)	61 (61%)	32 (32%)	7 (7%)
There should be a policy that requires employers to give domestic workers one day/week off from work (N=101)	38 (37.6%)	47 (46.5%)	16 (15.9%)
The employer should allow the domestic worker to call relatives/friends from her country of origin (N=102)	100(98%)	2 (2%)	-
The employer should allow the domestic worker to call relatives/friends in Lebanon (N=98)	55 (56.1%)	33 (33.6%)	10 (10.3%)
The employer should allow the domestic worker to attend community events or religious prayers (N=102)	62 (60.8%)	31 (30.4%)	9 (8.8%)
The employer should provide the live-in domestic worker with a private room (N=102)	97 (95.1%)	3 (2.9%)	2 (2%)
The employer should keep the domestic worker's passport in order to prevent her from escaping (N=102)	90(88.2%)	9 (8.8%)	2 (3%)
The employer can ask the domestic worker to work extra hours if there is a need (like a family gathering or a party) (N=102)	92 (90.2%)	7 (6.9%)	3 (2.9%)
The majority of Lebanese employers treat migrant domestic workers well but problems are caused by employment agencies and policies (N=99)	35 (35.3%)	48 (48.4%)	16 (16.3%)
The relationship between the employer and the domestic worker can be very good if both know their limits and responsibilities (N=102)	98 (96.1%)	1 (1%)	3 (2.9%)

¹² The total number of surveys filled is 102, however there are some questions to which respondents did not answer and thus were considered to be missing.

Table 5: Employers' general attitudes towards migrant domestic workers (continued)

Employer agrees that	N (%)
A domestic worker should be treated as a member of the family (N=102)	41 (40.1%)
A domestic worker should be treated strictly as an employee (N=102)	21 (20.5%)
A domestic worker should be treated as both a family member and an employee (N=102)	40 (39.2%)
It is better to hire a domestic worker who is not married and does not have children (N=101)	33 (32.6%)
It is better to hire a domestic worker who is married or has children (N=101)	22 (21.7%)
It does not make a difference whether a domestic worker is married or has children (N=101)	46 (45.5%)
The government should be more active in enforcing laws to protect both employers and domestic workers (N=102)	84 (82.3%)
The government should not enforce laws because the relationship between the employer and domestic worker is a private one (N=102)	17 (16.7%)
The domestic worker should get days off but is not allowed to leave the house on her own (N=101)	43 (42.5%)
The domestic worker should get days off and is allowed to leave the house on her own (N=101)	23 (22.7%)
The domestic worker should not get days off (N=101)	35 (34.6%)

Table 6: Practices of employers towards migrant domestic workers

Practice	Agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)
Hiring a domestic worker is a necessity for employer since he/she cannot manage to get through without a domestic worker (N=99)	77 (77.8%)	18 (18.2%)	3 (4%)
Employer treats the domestic worker hired like a member of my family (N=99)	92 (92.9%)	5 (5.1%)	2 (2%)
The domestic worker sits with the family to eat lunch or dinner. (N=98)	43 (43.4%)	46 (46.5%)	9 (10.1%)
When employer has guests, the domestic worker is not allowed to come into the living room (N=97)	52 (53.6%)	37 (38.1%)	8 (8.3%)
Employer requires the domestic worker to wear a uniform (N=98)	52 (53%)	46 (47%)	-
Employer requires the domestic worker to use designated utensils, cups, and plates (N=99)	17 (17.2%)	81 (81.8%)	1 (1%)
In employer's house, the domestic worker eats from the same food we eat (N=99)	98 (99%)	1 (1%)	-
The employer orders food for the domestic worker if they are out for lunch or dinner(N=98)	79 (80.6%)	12 (12.2%)	7 (7.2%)
If the domestic worker hired gets sick with a sore throat or has back pain, the employer would pay for her medical bills (N=99)	96 (97%)	3 (3%)	-
If the domestic worker hired gets sick with a long-term chronic illness, the employer would pay for her medical bills (N=98)	45 (45.9%)	37 (37.8%)	16 (16.3%)
If the domestic worker hired gets sick with a long-term chronic illness, the employer would send her back to her country and hire another one (N=94)	78 (82.9%)	3 (3.1%)	13 (14%)
If the domestic worker hired gets pregnant, the employer would send her back to her country and hire another one (N=97)	88 (90.7%)	2 (3.2%)	6 (6.1%)

Table 7: Practices of employers towards migrant domestic workers (continued)

Practices of Employer	N (%)
Employer gives the domestic worker time off from work (N=99)	54 (54.5%)
Employer gives the domestic worker time off ¹ : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 days a week/on Saturday and Sunday (N=53) - One day a week/on Sunday (N=53) - One day a week that is convenient for the employer but not on Saturday or Sunday (N=53) - A few hours during the day but not a whole day (N=53) 	3 (5.67%) 33 (62.26%) 6 (11.32%) 11(20.75%)
Employer does not give the domestic worker time off from work (N=99)	45 (45.5%)
Employer allows the domestic worker to go outside the house alone during her time off (N=51) ²	20 (39.21%)
Employer does not allow the domestic worker to go outside the house alone during her time off (N=51) ³	31 (60.78%)
Reasons for not allowing the domestic worker go outside the house alone during her time off: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She might escape (N=31) - She might be exploited by strangers (N=31) - She might go out with a man and catch a disease (N=31) - Domestic worker is scared and does not want to go outside the house alone (N=31) - Employer is thinking about the domestic worker's security (N=31) - Domestic worker might die while outside the house (N=31) - Domestic worker is the employer's responsibility (N=31) 	12 (38.7%) 23 (74.1%) 14 (45.1%) 1 (3.2%) 1 (3.2%) 1 (3.2%) 3 (9.6%)
Employer locks the door on the domestic worker (N=98)	31 (31.6%)
Reasons why employer locks the door on the domestic worker: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She might escape if employer leaves the door unlocked (N=31) - She might open the door to strangers who can hurt her (N=31) - She might let a man inside the house (N=31) - Employer is protecting his/her house (N=31) 	11 (35.4%) 26 (83.8%) 15 (48.3%) 1 (3.2%)
Employer does not lock the door on the domestic worker (N=98)	67 (68.3%)

13 54 respondents give the domestic worker time off from work. However only 53 stated which days since there was one survey in which the answer is missing.

14 54 respondents give the domestic worker time off from work. However only 51 answered to whether they allow the domestic worker to leave the house alone.

15 *ibid.*