



## Violence Against Migrant Women

*Title* Bruises and Bracelets

*Target Audience* Foreign domestic workers, employers of foreign domestic workers, members of civil society organizations, activists, etc.

- Objectives*
1. To define violence against women (VAW).
  2. To distinguish foreign domestic helpers as victims of VAW
  3. To identify ways to prevent/end VAW

- Materials*
1. One volunteer
  2. Meta cards
  3. Permanent markers or crayons
  4. Masking tape
  5. Hand-outs
  6. White board or flip chart
  7. Markers
  8. Friendship bonds (bracelets that are in fashion nowadays). Or make simple bracelets using string—Thais use white threads.

*Time Needed* Minimum of one hour, maximum of two hours.

- Activity*
1. Ask for one volunteer to stand in front of the group.
  2. Distribute meta cards or pieces of paper (¼ sheet of A4 size for each participant) and marker pens to the participants
  3. Ask the participants to write down types of bruises and pains that foreign domestic workers suffer while working. Request that they keep it simple and short.
  4. Before they write down their answers, ask the participants to look at the volunteer standing in front of them and imagine that the person is a typical foreign domestic worker.
  5. Request participants to stick their answers to the particular area of the body of the volunteer.
  6. The facilitator should then read aloud all the answers.
  7. Give the participants some time to examine their answers posted on the volunteer.



Ask the following questions:

1. What are some of the common words associated with VAW and which parts of the body are often targeted for abuse?
2. Where do these acts of violence commonly take place?
3. Who usually abuses foreign domestic workers? Men or women?
4. Is there an example of violence stuck on the volunteer's mouth? If there is not, ask the participants whether or not the domestic worker's suffering goes reported to anyone. The expected answer: No or seldom. After discussing this issue, you should write down: Unreported or Silenced—and stick it on the mouth of the volunteer.
5. Ask a follow-up question: Why isn't this suffering reported?
  - a. Write down the answers on the board or flip chart.

Applaud everyone for their participation, especially the volunteer.

**Present the following facts:**

**FACTS:**

- Most perpetrators of violence are men.
- Most perpetrators of violence are more powerful than their victims.
- Most VAW occurs in the home.
- Foreign domestic workers spend the vast majority of their time in the home.
- Most cases of violence against foreign domestic workers go unreported.
- In order to escape violence, some women become migrant workers.

## **What is violence against women?**

Any act of violence, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

## **How does this definition specifically affect foreign domestic workers?**

### **Abuse in the home (by employers or their families):**

Foreign domestic workers may find themselves in some of these situations and apart of the “power and control” cycle of abuse.

#### **USING ISOLATION**

Abusive employers of foreign domestic migrant workers may deliberately isolate domestic workers from other migrant workers and from the local community.

#### **USING COERCION, THREATS AND INTIMIDATION**

Employers may threaten migrant domestic workers; a common threat: “If you report any abuse, the police will arrest you and deport you.” The migrant domestic worker may also be coerced into performing sexual acts against her will.

#### **USING ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Employers may refuse to pay domestic workers their wages if they file a report to the police or if they do not do what their employer wants them to do (working overtime, sexual acts, etc)

#### **USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Employers and domestic workers live together in the same household. Employers may manipulate the domestic worker into feeling sorry for him and his married situation.

#### **MINIMISING, DENYING AND BLAMING**

Employers or their families may make the domestic migrant worker feel unimportant, worthless and continually blame them for making minor mistakes.

## USING CHILDREN

The employer may use children (either their own children or the children of the domestic worker) to manipulate a foreign domestic worker.

## USING MALE PRIVILEGE

Some women come from a culture of male dominance where refusing to do what a man says or negotiating with a man is unacceptable, particularly in cases where the man is an employer.

### **What challenges must foreign domestic workers address regarding violence?**

- Lack of services available for victims of violence.
- Lack of translation services if such services exist.
- Fear of arrest in accessing such services.
- Loss of employment if the domestic worker reports abuse by her employer.
- Loss of legal status if she loses employment.
- Loss of accommodation if she loses employment.
- If undocumented, she may not be able to access shelters and assistance.
- Lack of legal or social protection in cases where her employer retaliates.
- Fear of publicity and the reaction of family and/or community.
- If the employer is a diplomat or international civil servant, he will have diplomatic immunity.

### **What are foreign domestic workers doing to address this violence?**

1. They are working together with other local foreign domestic workers and women's groups.
2. They are initiating awareness-raising activities to educate communities about violence.
3. They are running campaigns for a Charter of Rights for Foreign domestic workers in Europe "The right to work free from fear of physical, sexual and psychological abuse".

4. They are educating each other on how to use the legal process in cases of violence: Burmese migrant women have produced the Automatic Response Mechanism (ARM) for migrant and refugee women in cases of sexual assault.
5. They are taking cases through the legal system.
6. They are taking cases to the media.
7. They are organising rallies to increase visibility.

### **What else can be done?**

- Including violence against foreign domestic workers in domestic violence campaigns (i.e. The Body Shop campaign to Stop Violence in the Home).
- Combat social exclusion. Local women's groups can reach out and invite foreign domestic workers to join.
- Lobbying for legal status for victims of violence to recover, and proceed with legal action if they so choose.

### **What laws are relevant?**

Different countries have different laws about violence against women but any domestic worker organisation or support organisations should have research available explaining the laws. APWLD has a data-base of laws protecting women in Asia Pacific area. Other local women's organisations or Human Rights Lawyers should be able to provide relevant information.

The laws that may be relevant are:

1. The Criminal Code or Penal Law. This will usually protect against domestic slavery, confinement, violence, threat of violence, kidnapping and sexual assault.
2. Domestic Violence Act.
3. Labour Laws (if there is a clause on sexual harassment or violence at work).
4. Harassment Acts.
5. Anti-trafficking Laws.
6. Anti-slavery laws.

## STRATEGIES

- Campaigning for social inclusion and visibility of foreign domestic workers.
- Bringing foreign domestic workers and local domestic workers together to collaborate.
- Campaigning for legal clause that includes foreign domestic workers in all laws protecting women against violence. In some countries, migrant workers are excluded from this protection. For example, the Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia does not protect migrant workers.
- Applying Anti-trafficking laws and policies from a labour and rights perspective. Ensuring that when women are protected by the anti-trafficking provisions that this includes compensation for all forced labour performed during the period of being trafficked.
- Reforming Anti-trafficking laws to include provisions of legal status, accommodation, residence or at least temporary residence, and services to victims of all types of violence, not only trafficking.

## Bracelets of Commitment

To end the session, Ask participants what can they do to end VAW to foreign domestic workers? Distribute bracelets to everyone. Form a circle. Ask the participants to look for a person in the group who would like to wear the bracelet they are holding. Name the person and tell her what she can do to end VAW. After the person giving the bracelet, she should go to the person receiving the bracelet and let him/her wear the bracelet. The person who receives the bracelet should call another name and repeat her commitment to support ending VAW to foreign domestic workers. And so on...

\*You may distribute more hand outs appropriate to your session on how to end VAW to the foreign domestic workers.