

Fact Sheet

Child Domestic Workers: *How you can help children instead of employing them in your homes?*

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which the government of Pakistan has signed and ratified, a person who is less than 18 years old is considered a child with fundamental rights.

Employment of children as child domestic workers (children working in households other than their own) is rampant in Pakistan and other developing countries posing a serious child rights' violation. These children do all sorts of work ranging from cooking, cleaning, doing odd jobs to looking after children their own age or younger.

While there is a dearth of concrete data, however, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are 17.2 million children either in paid or unpaid domestic work in the home of a third party or employer. Globally, there are more girls under the ages of 16 years working as domestic labourers than any other profession. In most countries work starts at the age of 12 years and many may also start working as young as 6 years.

Employing under age children both boys and girls (more often girls) in households has become such a deeply entrenched practice that it is often not recognized by many as a form of rights violation or/and many justifications are given by the employers for hiring children as domestic labourers.

The dearth of concrete laws and clear polices on child domestic labour despite international and regional commitments adds to the issue remaining unrecognized as a threat to children with potentially hazardous and life threatening consequences. Some of these commitments includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; ILO's Conventions 138 (the Minimum Age) and 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour); South Asian Initiative to Eradicate Violence Against Children Regional Action Plan.

In the recent past, many socially aware citizens of Pakistan have shared experiences of calling out on families that employ children to be met with comments to mind their own business, reacting aggressively or ignoring the issue, etc.

This fact sheet has been created to help better understand the threat child domestic labour poses and offer alternatives to supporting children and their families.

Common Misunderstandings and facts related to Child Domestic labour

Misunderstanding: *We are helping the poor families by employing these children.*

Their lives will improve by earning for their families.

Fact: While poverty is a major cause of child domestic labour, yet it is also a consequence of child domestic labour as children employed in households are unable to stay in schools, complete their education and develop vocational skills. A society can not progress till the adults have had substantial opportunities for positive emotional and physical development, quality education, training and skills to contribute towards its development. The absence of emotional care and love as children, that all human beings need and deserve to lead more healthy and constructive lives is gravely impacted.

Child Domestic labour has become a lucrative business where the parents need for money is exploited. Many of the children employed at homes are **internally trafficked** with little contact with their own parents who are provided with a monthly wage and an initial lump sum money. The benefit of this employment is more to the trafficking mafia than to the child's family.

Misunderstanding: *The child's family owes us and we are doing them a favour by helping them pay off their loans.*

They are from our village and hold our family in high esteem and voluntarily send their children to us.

Fact: Gender, ethnicity, feudal mind-set and class-based discrimination against certain groups, makes it difficult for adults from these groups to secure good jobs, forcing them to have their children to look for work. The imbalance of power between groups that are disadvantaged and groups who feel that they have a right to 'own' them continues for generations. As a result the child domestic workers may grow up feeling subservient and behave like 'slaves', without having experienced independence, dignity, respect and autonomy as citizens.

Misunderstanding: *We don't make them do hard work, they just give company to our children and play with them.*

Fact: More often the reality is that they are making the employers' children play while their role is to watch, go along with the wishes of the employer's child, play what the child wants to play. Hence there is no freedom of choice and expression for the child domestic worker, an important building block for children's development.

Misunderstanding: *They are better off in our homes than their own. At least they get decent food and living here.*

What difference will it make if we don't employ them as someone else will while in our house they are safer.

Fact: The children are more vulnerable to injury, burns and accidents due to carrying heavy load, operating electrical and gas appliances and exposure to household chemicals and sharp objects, etc.

They often work longer hours with little or no time for rest, recreation or education. They are underpaid and do not get the pay in their own hands which is either given to the parents or the person who has employed the child in the house.

Misunderstanding: *At least they are safer in our homes than their own.*

Fact: Due to a number of factors such as the children's age, not being with their family and limited information of their rights, these children are less powerful and thus more vulnerable to all forms of abuse including emotional, physical and sexual abuse as well as exploitation.

The actual and perceived fear of adults, lack of power to say 'No' makes these children an easy prey to the advances, physical punishment and emotional abuse of not just the employers but other employees and guests, etc.

What you can do?

- Recognize 'child domestic labour' as a rights violation that has serious implications on reinforcing and further perpetrating power imbalances, caste, ethnicity and gender based discrimination.
- Say 'No' to employing children below the age of 16 years in your home. Instead employ the parents or other adults from the child's family. Make employment of these adults conditional to the parents not sending their children to work at any other home and putting their children in school.
- Provide for the education of the adult domestic workers' children, get children enrolled in a neighbouring schools, speak to the local administration of the area (education, health and social welfare departments) for better educational facilities.
- Inform the parents about the potential threats and dangers to the well being of the children
- Encourage parents to use family planning methods to better plan the size of the family and promote the concept of happy and healthy families.
- Create pressure groups to urge the government to develop effective and stricter laws, policies and services to address the plight of child domestic workers.
- Employ adult domestic workers and pay them at least the legal minimum wage of Rs. 15000 /- per month.
- Share this information with others so that collective efforts can be made to put a stop to child labour.
- Report any case of violence against child domestic labour to the nearest police station or child protection services in your area.

Remember that the vicious cycle of employment of children as domestic workers can only be broken if we the citizens stop employing children and instead supporting and offering safer alternatives!

By the Child Rights Movement (CRM)

Sources: Child Rights International Network (*Child Domestic Workers-The dawn of a new convention?* & Labour Rights-*Child labour and protecting working children*); International Labour Organization-*Child Labour and Domestic Work* ; The Child Rights Movement (CRM) Punjab, the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ), Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (PILER)-*The unending plight of child domestic workers in Pakistan, National Action Coordination Group to Eradicate Violence Against Children (NACGG-Pakistan)*.