

# **The work-place and OHS: Domestic workers' perspectives**

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## **The workplace: Key features**

- **Mostly hidden from public view: The residence/homestead is private property, accessible only to few people, mostly family members.**

**The work and the environment in which it is done is not likely to draw public attention or to be visited y labour inspectors**

# Workplace environment and OHS

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- ***Excessive control and close supervision***

***A confined environment enhances the powerlessness of individual domestic workers and the liberty of the employers to exploit and subjugate them.***

***The FGD has observed that:***

***“Domestic workers perform various tasks in the house and are faced with multitude of health safety hazardous “***

# Workplace environment and OHS

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The master-servant relationship between employer and domestic worker gives little room for the later to complain about or even report any health and safety problem such as overwork or an injury. Some employers are likely to ignore a workers injury or illness it comes to their attention.

Testimony by a domestic worker

*“....I was employed by one family. One day while arranging the bottles in a tray one bottle fell and broke into pieces, injuring my leg. I got a big wound. I told the employer that I was injured by a bottle. The employer didn't care. I went to the hospital I had no enough money therefore I had to tell the doctor the entire story therefore .....*”

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- **Multitasking** : Domestic work is not limited to a number of specific tasks. It is often the discretion of the employer to assign any piece of work. The multi-task nature of domestic chores enhances the exposure to risk and has implication on hours of work and the possibility for overwork/fatigue

*Testimony by a domestic worker:*

*“....At first when I was employed I thought that my work was only taking care of the animals but it was not the case. I am also doing other work. I am always the first one to wake up and the last one to sleep. I must wake up at 4am every day ....”*

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- **Living with the employer**

In most cases the employer and domestic worker live in the same house, something which enhances close , sometimes harsh supervision along with exposure to sexual harassment of the worker. A testimony “...**My employer wanted to have a love relationship ... his wife was far from home, he harassed me sexually and promised to buy a car and also to increase my salary. I disagreed and that was the end of my job...**”

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- **Most households employ only one domestic worker, who must therefore work in solitude. Given the fact that many employers do not interact/communicate with domestic workers who also may not be allowed to visit friends and neighbors loneliness and depression is a resultant health hazard.**