



Domestic Servitude Factsheet

Mary came to the UK with her employer as a servant. She was forced to work from 7am to 10.30pm. She was not paid any wages, only had leftovers to eat and slept on a thin mattress on the kitchen floor. Her passport was confiscated. Eventually, Mary became unwell due to the poor conditions, but her employer told her that she did not have access to the NHS. She also told her she could not go to the police without her identification papers. One Sunday, Mary met a lady at the church and told her about her situation. This woman talked to Mary's employer and asked to see Mary's passport. She quickly realised her visa had expired. Therefore Mary was an illegal immigrant. Incredibly, the woman took Mary away to her house and forced her – yet again – into domestic servitude. Mary's health seriously deteriorated at this point and the woman had no other option than to take her to the hospital. There, the NHS staff realised Mary had been subjected to slavery-like conditions and they called Kalayaan, the UK NGO that supports migrant domestic workers. Mary is now free but has a very serious respiratory condition, requiring a yearly hospital admission. She is not able to work anymore. (Case study courtesy of Kalayaan)

Domestic servitude involves children, women and men being forced to work in private households as maids, servants, housekeepers, personal carers, nannies, chauffeurs, gardeners and cooks in exploitative conditions. Abuse can take the form of difficult working conditions (no days off, long hours and minimal, if any, salary) and psychological, physical, or sexual abuse.

Victims of domestic servitude are entirely dependent on their employers. They often speak limited or no English. Many have their passports confiscated and are prevented from leaving the place of employment unaccompanied. Where 'freedom' is allowed, it is heavily curbed by extreme psychological control. Many victims do not have a private space, often sleeping on a mattress on the floor in an open part of the house. Domestic workers are particularly at risk of being exploited because authorities cannot inspect homes as easily as they can in formal work places.

Unlike other forms of modern slavery, domestic servitude, particularly that of adult migrants, does not usually involve organised criminal networks. There is evidence indicating that perpetrators may contradict the usual 'criminal' profile, holding positions of influence and wealth. Many victims of domestic servitude are children who are brought to the UK with promises of education and then grossly deceived once here. However, there are also adult victims of domestic servitude who are legal migrant domestic workers. These are men and women who enter the UK legally, willingly accompanying their employer to the UK but once here find that they are subject to extreme levels of abuse, control and exploitation.

Spot the Signs

Look out for:

- *Foreign national adult/child who lives with a family (possibly as domestic worker/ nanny).*
- *Person rarely allowed out of house, unless accompanied.*
- *Psychological / physical / sexual abuse.*
- *Poor sleeping arrangements (and/or no privacy).*
- *Poor diet / living on leftovers.*
- *If a child, poor attendance at school / no time to play.*
- *Person not interacting much with their host family.*

If you spot any signs call

Modern Slavery Helpline:
0800 0121 700

Police (emergencies) **999**

Police (non-emergencies) **101**

Salvation Army Helpline
0300 303 8151

Crimestoppers **0800 555 111**

If you are a migrant domestic worker and wish to get employment and immigration advice book an appointment and register with Kalayaan at **0207 243 2942.**

Tied Visa System

Tied visas mean that migrant domestic workers who accompany their employer to the UK cannot legally remain in the country if they change employers. In other words, their immigration status is tied to a named employer. They cannot change employer, extend their visa, bring dependents to the UK and they cannot settle in the UK permanently.

Therefore, they cannot legally challenge any form of exploitation and cruelty nor can they escape abuse. This restriction traps workers into exploitative conditions that can amount to slavery. Many organisations point out the fact that the tied visa system facilitates and enhances abuse.

Useful resources

Human Rights Watch, 2014, Hidden Away Abuses against Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK

Kalayaan, 2014, Still enslaved: The migrant domestic workers who are trapped by the immigration rules

Home Office, 2015, Modern Slavery Strategy

Links

National Crime Agency (NCA):

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk>

Modern Slavery (Home Office website):

<https://modernslavery.co.uk/>

Kalayaan (Justice for Migrant Workers):

<http://www.kalayaan.org.uk/>