



Domestic workers and global OHS risks and prevention

Domestic Work

- ▶ **Emphasizing** that domestic work consist of sweeping, cleaning, washing clothes, washing dishes, cooking, gardening, doing many other household chores, taking care of the most vulnerable members of our society such as children, elderly, sick and disabled people, using housekeeping chemicals without any protection, having their lives exposed to several risks

Introduction

Domestic workers make up more than 10% of the developing world's total workforce.

Emphazizing:

- ⇒ Important source of employment
- ⇒ A growing numbers of women and girls are pushed into the domestic labour market in their own countries and abroad.
- ⇒ Domestic work is often considered “women’s work,” because women are less likely to have alternative ways of earning a living.
- ⇒ Domestic workers earn only 41 per cent of the wage others in the urban workforce make. They earn significantly less than other groups of informal workers.

=> A number of countries have started to include domestic workers in labour legislation

in order to provide them with basic protections such as maternity leave, sick leave and social security.

However, the majority have not.

- ⇒ Low earnings and lack of effective labour protections mean that domestic workers are in a vulnerable position.
- ⇒ If they become ill or injured and cannot come to work, they may lose their pay or be fired. This situation seems particularly unfair to workers whose jobs caused their sickness or injury in the first place.

The houses in which domestic workers are active present a number of health and safety risks for the people who work in them. (Such as cooking with open fire, access to clean water, clean a water tank in various poor countries to working on a ladder, lift heavy furniture's, working with flammable products in more developed countries)

Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) regulations do not protect workers who work in private homes, which means that even though domestic work is such an important source of employment, even though there are many health and safety risks involved in the work, and even though domestic workers are vulnerable to poverty if they become sick or injured, OHS legislation in many countries does not cover them.

International Domestic Workers Federation

- ▶ Adopted an OHS resolution at Congress (Nov. 2018.)

IDWF Reaffirming our desire to contribute to the protection of DW in this difficult situation since our society does not offer support or protection in our work environment:

Analysis of occupational risks and working conditions

- ▶ Risks related to equipment
- ▶ Risks related to substances
- ▶ Risks related to physical conditions of work
- ▶ Risks related to the organization of work (schedule, content of tasks, no leave, etc)
- ▶ Risks related to traffic; handling and storage

Other risks related to exploitation in all its forms, with regard to all its elements we may say that domestic workers are also victims of occupational diseases:

- ▶ Security factors
- ▶ Ergonomic factors
- ▶ Psychological and sociological factors

Since he or she may use chemicals; carry heavy loads; cutting equipment; gas; repetitive actions and falls as a result of bad facilities of household equipment; circulation, handling and poor storage of several effects, domestic workers do not work in good conditions.

From all these observations we adopted the following resolutions:

- 1) Taking into account the health and safety of domestic workers in their duties
- 2) Development of an instruction manual of occupational safety education at work for domestic workers.
- 3) Training on health prevention and occupational safety for domestic workers.
- 4) Raising awareness as well as education on the use of protective equipment by domestic workers.

Belgium

Sector of the Dienstencheques (voucher system).

- ⇒ Declared and subsidized domestic worker sector (125000 workers)
- ⇒ Benefit from an employment contract (specific workconditions), social security, ...
- ⇒ Included in the labour legislation (only documented domestic workers)

The sector created a training fund that provides training sessions for domestic workers in the sector :

- Work related ergonomics training (cleaning and ironing)
- Safety and hygiene trainings
- Prevention of back pain trainings
- Safety regarding cleaning products

=> The social partners are still trying to do more on that topic

Future

► Scientific Source : Study Laura Van de Borre & Patrick Deboosere

Study on health risk in the cleaning industry

- Large mortality differences were observed between cleaners, manual and non manual workers. (Higher for cleaners)
- ⇒ Lung cancer
- ⇒ Pneumonia
- ⇒ Ischaemic heart disease
- ⇒ Cerebrovascular disease

Causes haven't been investigated. Nevertheless, depending on the specific tasks and work environments, cleaners may be exposed to chemical products, biological hazards, difficult physical working conditions and various psychological risk factors.

Future

- ▶ Sustainability fund has been created in the Belgian voucher system

Creation of 3 campaigns

THEMES

- Coaching of some workers in the sector
- Wel-being survey on the difficulties of domestic work
- Survey addressed to the Belgian society
- Sensibilisation campaign and training addressed to the employers
- Sectoral incentive bonus for workers when they reduce their working time (maternity leave)

Conclusion

▶ **Access to information, training and OSH services**
is essential to improve DW health and safety risks .

▶ **Workers' participation**

Workers are often left outside of OSH measures and policies and lack the necessary tools and information to adopt a safe and healthy working attitude.

▶ **Social representation and social dialogue**

to improve work conditions especially regarding health and safety.