

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF publishes first global report on Child Domestic Work

London, 17 May 1999 - Child domestics are the largest and most neglected group of the world's 250 million child workers. Placement by parents in another home in return for cash is accepted in many societies as a suitable upbringing for children from poor families. Child domestics are invisible since their workplace is a private home, and are totally at the command of their employer. Many work the clock round, are paid little or nothing and an unknown proportion are subject to violent abuse, including sexual abuse.

The Innocenti Digest on Child Domestic Work is the first report to compile and assess available information about this hidden form of child employment from all over the world. The Digest was written by Maggie Black (UNICEF) and Jonathan Blagbrough (Anti-Slavery International), and is published by the UNICEF International Child Development Centre in Florence. Some of the findings include:

Domestic work is among the lowest status, least regulated and poorest remunerated of all occupations.

Child workers can be as young as five years old, although most are between 12-17.

Approximately 90% of all child domestic workers are girls; their powerlessness within the household renders them especially vulnerable to violent and sexual abuse.

In Jakarta alone there are an estimated 700,000 child domestic workers.

In Venezuela, 60% of all working girls between 10 and 14 are employed domestically. In Brazil, domestics account for 22% of all working children.

Most child domestic workers live in, and are under exclusive round-the-clock control of the employer; they have little freedom, sometimes working 15 hours a day, seven days a week.

Child domestic workers are often cut off from their families, have very little opportunity to make friends, and rarely go to school; this severely limits their opportunities and makes them very pessimistic

about the future.

The daily experience of discrimination and the isolation endured by child domestics in the employer's household have been reported as the most difficult part of their burden.

Experience has shown that the problem of child domestic work cannot be tackled without the cooperation of the children's employers. Sensationalising the practice by pointing only to cases of abuse is bound to alienate employers and society as a whole, which may view the practice as acceptable -- even beneficial for the children. The Digest documents some of the ways in which the problem has been addressed, both by projects for child domestics and advocacy on their behalf. It points to the need to change the attitudes of employers, improve the terms and conditions of work, eliminate very small children from the domestic workplace, enable child domestics to have time off for school, and bring gross abusers to book.

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