INTRODUCTION

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS
- Socio-economic background
- Age
- Gender
- Terms of employment
- Working conditions

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR WORK FOR CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS
- Respect for identity, selfhood and freedom
- Parental nurture and guidance
- Physical well-being
- Educational development
- Psycho-social and emotional development
- Gross abuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation

CHALLENGES FOR PRACTITIONERS: PROJECT RESPONSES
- Drop-in centres
- Crisis intervention
- Educational programmes
- Social life, recreation and counselling

CHALLENGES FOR PRACTITIONERS: RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY
- Raising awareness
- Gathering information
- Changing attitudes: advocacy at national and international levels

IS REGULATION POSSIBLE?
- National legislation
- International standards
INTRODUCTION

Only recently have campaigners against child labour begun to focus their attention on what is probably the largest group of child workers in the world: child domestics. In industrialized countries and in some emerging economies, there has been a steady decline in child domestic work as more children attend school and aim for a ‘modern life’ and qualified employment. In other parts of the world, the forces of demand and supply that propel women and children into menial occupations seem to be leading in the opposite direction. This is especially so in societies where the opportunity for employment is limited, labour cheap, poverty widespread, the sense of social hierarchy strong, and human energy rather than the labour-saving appliance still the linchpin of household management.

Within every household, a wide variety of domestic tasks need to be undertaken: cleaning, laundry, food preparation, cooking, shopping and looking after young children. In non-industrialized societies, the domestic workload required to support daily life can be extremely heavy, and often includes food production and processing, and walking long distances to gather water and fuel. Women have almost invariably assumed the role of domestic managers, often drawing on their children and other members of the extended family as helpers.

As some societies developed over time, these occupations became more formalized and took on the character of ‘employment’, with different types of workers — male and female — occupying different roles and undertaking different tasks for payment in cash and kind. In most industrialized societies today, social and economic trends, including rising labour rates and widespread availability of household appliances, have dramatically reduced the numbers of those who earn their living in this way. However, these trends are at different stages in different societies and in many parts of the developing world may yet have to make a dramatic impact on the way households are managed.

Domestic service is therefore one of the world’s oldest occupations, and one in which children have traditionally played a part. The servant girl, the ‘tweeny’ (a very young domestic shared between two older servants) and the orphaned Cinderella made to earn her keep by serving on others feature widely in pre-20th century literature. When families were very poor or a child orphaned, it was common in every society throughout history — and in some, is still common today — for one or more children to be sent to live in another household (usually, but not necessarily, related). In this placement, they perform tasks in return for shelter, care, nurture, and education or useful instruction. In some settings, these children are seen as additional family members, as if they have been ‘adopted’. Legal forms of adoption or guardianship may also be used for the purposes of exploiting such children’s labour. The difference between adoption and domestic employment is sometimes hard to pin down.

The important change in recent times is that ‘work as upbringing’ in the child’s own home or the house of a relative or friend is giving way to the ‘work as upbringing’ in the child’s own home or the house of a relative or friend is giving way to a commercialized, and therefore more potentially exploitative, arrangement. Long hours, low rewards, lack of childhood development opportunities, lack of love and affection, and other deprivations ensue. Increasingly, the sending out or the taking in of a child is not primarily designed to serve the child’s interests, but is the outcome of a transaction in which the traded commodity is the child’s labour.

As demand for young domestic workers grows in many societies, their supply also becomes more organized, and recruitment agents — and occasionally traffickers bringing boys and girls across borders from poorer neighbouring countries — are becoming more systematically involved. One result is that more children and young people today are working in households in no way related to their own, often at a considerable distance. They are under the control of adults who, whatever their intention to be nurturing, have as their first concern not the child’s well-being but that of their own household — to which the child must contribute. Usually they have chosen to employ a young girl because she is cheaper to hire, is more malleable and will cost less than an adult does to support. This is often the case in modern middle-class households where both partners go out to work, but can no longer rely on the extended family — younger sisters and cousins — for household help. So they seek out the cheapest available alternative.

The attention of researchers and children’s rights advocates has primarily focused on the exploitation, abuse and discrimination suffered by child domestics; and on the very young age at which some first enter a household other than their own home to serve others as the governing feature of their lives. All these things are to be deplored and are clear contraventions of the rights set out in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). They are also in violation of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, which specifically prohibits:

...any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour. (Article 1 (d))

Care should be taken, however, in any analysis of the situation of child domestics workers, especially in settings where domestic employment is the norm. Although engaging children at any age below the legal age of employment is an infringement of children’s rights, it is not necessarily the case that all child domestics workers suffer gross abuse, neglect or exploitation. For many parents, and for some child
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS

Information is scarce about this invisible child workforce — invisible because each child is separately employed and works in the exclusion of a private house, unlike children in a factory or on the street. They do not exist as a group and are difficult to reach and to count. Their jobs are invisible too: domestic work belongs in the informal labor market, is unregistered and does not show up clearly in employment statistics. In addition, since the status of a girl living in the household may be blurred with that of the family, her presence in the home may not show up in census or household survey data. The prevalence of under-age domestic work in any setting is especially difficult to assess.

The "invisibility" of child domestic workers also derives from the fact that the majority are girls. Doing domestic work in a household other than their own is seen as merely an extension of their duties, and the concept of employment is missing. In many value systems, girls and women's work is still economically disregarded — simply because girls and women do it.

Knowledge about child domestic workers remains patchy for other reasons as well. In societies where using children as domestic workers is not recognized as "child labor" but as a normal feature of society, motivation to inquire into their situation is likely to be limited. Indeed, even among children's rights advocates, there may be a reluctance to take special notice of child domestic workers, who are seen as a "cared-for" rather than an exploited group.

Despite these difficulties, some researchers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have undertaken studies, mostly on a small scale, in countries where the practice of child domestic work is common. These include in Africa, Kenya, Morocco, Tanzania, Togo, Senegal and Zambia; in Latin America, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay and Peru; and in Asia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. In Latin America, the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Household Workers, a network of domestic worker organizations, is also in the process of conducting research on the situation of adult and child domestic workers.
workers in seven countries in the region. Support for research has been provided by indigenous groups and the UNICEF (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (SADC), among others.

Some governments are conducting studies to learn more about child labour in South Africa, for example, the Government’s Statistical Service (Statistics South Africa) — in conjunction with ILO and with some technical support from UNICEF — will undertake a large national household survey in mid-1999 to assess the extent and nature of child work, including domestic work by girls and boys. The information generated by these studies generally shows that, although wide social, cultural and economic differences exist in its practice, child domestic work has features that distinguish it from other forms of child labour:

- **Domestic work** is among the lowest status, least regulated, and poorest remunerated of all occupations, whether performed by adults or children;
- **Most child domestics live in**, and are under the exclusive, round-the-clock control of the employer (normally the female head of household); they have little freedom or free time;
- **About 90% of child domestics are** girls; their powerlessness within the household renders them especially vulnerable to sexual abuse;
- **Since it is possible for very young children to undertake light household tasks, the age of entry can be** as young as five;
- **Many child domestics do not handle** their earnings; some are unpaid; the earnings of many child domestics do not handle their earnings; some are unpaid; the earnings of many child domestics do not handle their earnings; some are unpaid; the earnings of many child domestics do not handle their own in 1997 (the higher estimate counting care by members of the extended family), there was “considerable evidence of fostered children being obliged to work”; including in some cases as householders. Until the 1994 conflict, child domestic work, common in other African countries, had not been identified as a possibly significant phenomenon in Rwanda.

### Socio-economic background

The available research suggests that child domestic workers most commonly come from poor, often large, rural families. However, other factors that determine the likelihood of children becoming domestic workers must also be taken into account, such as orphanhood.

In some South Asian countries, particular religious or ethnic groups regarded as subaltern have traditionally supplied others with domestic workers. In India and Nepal, for example, children of low-status groups may be bonded to an employer to work as domestic workers. In countries with minority populations, children from indigenous groups are sent to work as domestic workers in the households of the majority population. This is the case in the Philippines, for example, where young girls from indigenous groups have few other opportunities. It is often also true in Latin American countries, where the child domestic worker’s ethnic background might reinforce the employer’s attitude of superiority and the child’s sense of inferiority.

In sub-Saharan Africa, it is similarly common to find that urban child domestic workers come from a particular area or tribal group, often one inhabiting an area subject to out-migration because of population, economic or environmental pressure. Here, as elsewhere, distances between the natal home and the place of work are typically expanding.

Breakdowns in traditional family systems through changing social structures, upheaval or war can increase the possibility of children becoming domestic workers. In Benin and Indonesia, it is clear that changing social structures coupled with rapid commercialization have helped fuel the demand for child domestic workers. In Sri Lanka, the migration of large numbers of women and adolescents as domestic workers (approximately 300,000 to the Middle East alone) has created a demand for younger children to work in their place. Moreover, ethnic conflict has left many children displaced or abandoned and consequently easy prey for job placement agents who pick them up on the streets, in villages or even from within refugee camps, and then sell them into employment. In post-genocide Rwanda, where 200,000-400,000 children lived in families other than their own in 1997 (the higher estimate counting care by members of the extended family), there was “considerable evidence of fostered children being obliged to work”; including in some cases as householders. Until the 1994 conflict, child domestic work, common in other African countries, had not been identified as a possibly significant phenomenon in Rwanda.

### Gender

The majority of child domestics are girls, with the world’s estimates putting the proportion at 90%. Individual country studies tend to confirm this estimate; for example, in the Philippines a 1997 study found that nine out of ten child domestic workers were female. Research carried out in Togo revealed that 85% of child domestic workers were girls. There are, however, strong regional differences. While in Latin America, virtually all child domestic workers tend to be girls, in parts of Asia there are significant numbers of boys. In Bangladesh, for instance, 17% of child domestics surveyed were found to be boys. In Nepal, a study in the Kathmandu Valley discovered that more than half of the child domestic workers were boys.

The predominance of girls reflects a traditional attitude that household chores are ‘women’s work’, but in Togo it is also a strategy to use the girls’ income to support the schooling of their brothers. The prevailing view in Nepal is that girls are preferred to boys because they are more silent and submissive and do not run away often. Social restrictions on girls are also an important factor. In Bangladesh (as elsewhere), girls are kept in for their “protection” and, apart from work in the garment sector (only open to older girls), they have limited job options outside the house. Boys instead have far greater mobility. Even the work they do as domestics is likely to be outside the house — tending the garden, looking after the car, or helping in the employer’s business. Because of these differences, evidence suggests that young live-in male domestics may feel less isolated than their female counterparts.

### Terms of employment

The terms of employment of child domestic workers are a reflection of the social, cultural and economic factors that have put them in
domestic work and hold them there. A universal characteristic of all child domestic work is the child's dependence on the employer. The attitude of the employer largely determines the child's level of vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The proximity of adults — parents or surrogates — who can protect the child also has a bearing, so the child's distance from home and whether or not he or she has crossed international borders is important.

In Indonesia, child domestic workers in provincial towns and cities tended to have much more family contact than those living further from their homes in the capital, Jakarta — thereby reducing the child's vulnerability. In cases where children must travel long distances in the care of recruiters, the trafficked child is dependent on the trafficker for his or her current well-being and future situation.

Children may be recruited informally by siblings or friends already working as domestics, through their extended families, or through an employer's links to other parts of the country. Even family ties, however, can fail to secure the well-being of children recruited in this way. In Benin, where child domestic workers (known as vídomegon) often work for distant relatives, a 1998 study has shown that family links do not necessarily ensure that children will be better protected. How and whether children are paid is also a factor. In Rwanda, a 1997 Ministry of Labour study found that child domestic workers, primarily girls aged 10 to 14, earn the equivalent of $4 a month. They work seven days a week from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m., with an entitlement, usually unclaimed, to one family visit per year. Their pay is generally an entitlement, usually unclaimed, to one meal a day or night.

Driving the growth of trafficking are the improving conditions they endure as they then travel, crushed together in lorries or boats, to Gabon and Nigeria. Some children are sent as far as the Middle East and Europe.

Child domestic workers spend almost all of their time inside employers' households and, even if they have time off during a day, are commonly not allowed to leave the house. Having friends is often discouraged as this represents a distraction from the child's duties. Due to the distance from home, regular visits are often difficult. In many cases, the only opportunity to return home during the year is at the time of major religious festivals.

Sleeping and eating arrangements typically separate child domestic workers from other members of the household and reinforce their sense of inferiority. In Peru, a young domestic worker reported how she has to eat different, lower-quality, food from her employer. At breakfast, for example, she must serve the family and complete a number of tasks before she is allowed to eat. In Bangladesh, child domestics are paid ‘either in kind or half as much as other women’.

In the severest of cases, children can find themselves bonded to an employer to pay off debts incurred by their parents. This practice has been well documented in India, where a survey found that children from villages are sent by parents to towns and cities to work as domestics, while the wages are paid directly to the parents of the child. They may be kept in bondage until a debt is cleared.

Main issues

Working conditions

Typically, there are no specified hours or tasks allocated to child domestic workers. They do what their employer asks them to, at any time of day or night.

Both the 24-hour nature of the job and the type of household tasks assigned to child domestic workers have been well documented in existing studies. In Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines, child domestic workers spend on average 15 hours or more working each day, seven days a week, and are generally on-call day and night. Typical tasks include cooking, washing and ironing of clothes for the family, cleaning, shopping, and looking after the employers’ children — including escorting them to and from school and carrying their bags.

In Guatemala, the trafficker for his or her current well-being and future situation.

Traffic in West and Central Africa

The trafficking of child domestic workers — within and across borders — is a fast-growing informal-sector activity in West and Central Africa. In most countries of the region, internal trafficking from rural to urban areas is common. Cross-border trafficking, instead, occurs mainly from Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo to the Congo, Côte-d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and, again, Nigeria, which like Benin is both a country of origin and a receiving country.

Children, whose ages range from 8 to 14, tend to be moved in groups from their rural villages. Reports from Togo have documented the extremely difficult conditions they endure as they then travel, crushed together in lorries or boats, to Gabon and Nigeria. Some children are sent as far as the Middle East and Europe.

The trafficking of child domestic workers is a burgeoning number of intermediaries. Professional agents direct the international clandestine networks, but procurement and placement within countries are usually the improvised jobs of illiterate adults. Among these are many former child domestics who have thus found a way to turn to profit the system that once profited from them.

Where employers withhold wages, the child is in exchange for taking part (on an unpaid basis) in a family’s household work, receives a board and lodging, and education and care.

Employers justified non-payment by the benefits they believed accrued to the children and their families, including, in some cases, a promise to contribute to the girl's wedding expenses. Average earnings for child domestics in Dhaka are Taka 150 per month (roughly $3), or about a sixth of what adult domestics are paid. Interestingly, upper middle class families were found to pay the lowest wages to child domestics. In Kenya, 78% of child domestics in one survey were also only paid in kind. In Haiti, a law has actually been adopted recognizing situations where "a
The implications of working as a child domestic worker depend on many variables, including age and sex, and whether the worker lives in the employer's household or goes there on a daily basis while living at home or with relatives.

Although some implications may also be influenced by the contract agreed between the parents or recruiter and the employer, much more depends on the attitude and behaviour of the employer and her (or his) family. Many studies emphasize that everything that happens to the child domestic worker is “at the whim of the employer”. Where the child domestic worker lives in, the employer exerts total control over his or her living and working conditions, health and well-being.

Although the CRC contains no one Article that specifically proscribes child domestic employment as definitively as the 1956 Supplementary Convention on slavery (see introduction), Article 32 clearly states the right to protection from any work that is harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The rights the CRC expresses provide a model of childhood, which can be used as a benchmark.

In addition to general rights to development (Article 6), non-discrimination (Article 2) and respect for the child’s best interests (Article 3), there are a number of specific rights in the CRC that child domestic workers do not, or may not, enjoy. These rights fall broadly into six categories of rights affecting child domestic workers: independent identity, selfhood, and freedom (Articles 8, 13, 15 and 37); parental nurture and guidance (Articles 7, 8 and 9); physical and psychological well-being (Articles 19, 27); educational development (Articles 28, 32); psycho-social, emotional and spiritual development (Articles 31, 32); protection from exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and trafficking (Articles 32, 34, 35).

Respect for identity, selfhood and freedom

The younger the child starts work as a domestic, the greater the risk to her or his sense of identity. In Haiti, the very young children given, or traded, away as restaveks often lose permanent contact with their families and do not know their pre-restavek identity. In many societies, the loss of identity may extend to the child’s being denied the use of her or his given name in favour of a term, or a designation, selected by the employer.

The acute discrimination suffered by child domestic workers, especially in countries of Latin America and Asia where systems of social (and ethnic) hierarchy are often more evident than in Africa, is a constantly reiterated theme of research studies. Many children employed in domestic work have a poor self-image, and dislike their servant status. A survey in Bangladesh found that although child domestic workers were perceived by other working children as having some advantages (rest periods, work within the house instead of under the sun and in the public eye), on the whole their work was viewed more negatively than that of porters, street workers and factory workers because they are at the mercy of their employers.

Powerlessness and inferior status cause the child loss of self-esteem. The servility typically demanded of the occupation is one of the strongest violations of human rights. A sense of being enslaved is reinforced where the child is not allowed to leave the house. In Asia, this is common, although imposed in the name of the girl’s personal security. A study in Lima, Peru, found that one-third of young domestic workers never went out. Loss of freedom is the ultimate abuse of human rights.

Parental nurture and guidance

Removal from the nurture of the family has equally profound implications for the child...
domestic worker, especially when very young. Where parents expect their children to contribute to household work, their needs for love, care and a stable, nurturing environment will be better met in their own home than in one where the purpose of their presence is to serve others. However, research has revealed cases, such as one cited from the Solomon Islands, \(^{20}\) where child domestic workers describe their hired work burden as lighter than their home burden and their situation as preferable.

Although employers may allow visits from parents or relatives, few can afford to travel or be away from home. Sometimes, as in Bangladesh, oversight of the child is in the hands of an ‘auntie’ in town, often a domestic worker herself. Her loyalty, however, may be as great to the employer as to the child. The child worker may be allowed a home visit once a year, often at a festival time. \(^{5}\) Where she is illiterate, no possibility exists in between of maintaining any contact by letter. \(^{5}\) Links with the family can easily become tenuous. In Haiti, as mentioned earlier, loss of contact can be total. \(^{34}\) Accidents are also a risk, especially when the child worker is in transport to and from work. \(^{35}\) Children serving children

A survey carried out of 80 full-time live-in servants (71 girls and 9 boys) in Bangladesh \(^{13}\) found that the way the child domestic is treated generally has repercussions on the other children in the household. The young ‘masters’ or ‘mistresses’, even when far younger, often give orders to the domestic workers looking after them. This practice contrasts with the deference age usually commands in their society and reinforces the wealthier children’s sense of superiority and entitlement to privilege. Violent punishment inflicted on child domestic workers can be very distressing to the other children in the household: some have even stated when interviewed that they felt that it was wrong for their parents to slap or strike child domestics. \(^{44}\) On the other hand, cases have been reported of children, imitating their mothers, beating the child domestics themselves. The employer’s children also learn to regard as normal such serious abuses of children’s rights as the denial of education, leisure and contact with one’s own family. One eight-year-old domestic worker nearly turns up the inequity governing the relationship she has with the other household children: “When I play with the master’s children, I must always let them win.” \(^{45}\)

**Children serving children**

Physical well-being

The main physical implications of domestic work are less those integral to the tasks undertaken than the long hours most child domestic workers serve. \(^{17}\) In Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines, child domestic workers often work for 15 hours a day, seven days a week, at times extending to 18 hours. \(^{17}\) In Zimbabwe, the work day is 10-15 hours long; \(^{26}\) In Tanzania it can be as long as 16-18 hours; \(^{26}\) In Morocco, a survey found that 72% of child domestic workers began their day before 7 a.m. and went to bed after 11 p.m. \(^{26}\) In all studies examining physical well-being, children complain of fatigue, headaches and health problems.

Accidents are also a risk, especially when the child is exhausted. There are hazards associated with cooking, boiling water, chopping vegetables, using chemical cleaning fluids and carrying heavy items. Burns have been found to be relatively common among child domestic workers compared with other child workers. \(^{40}\) In case of breakage or poor performance, the worker may be punished severely. Accusations of laziness or bad work are often behind violent incidents against domestic workers. Injury or sickness suffered by the domestic worker may not be treated with the same urgency or medical attention as with a family member. \(^{44}\)

Domestic workers often eat leftover portions of food for their meals. However, malnutrition is not commonly reported as a problem. In fact, the employer’s home may provide more food and a nutritionally better diet than a poverty-stricken parental home, even where the food is inferior to that eaten by the employer’s family.

Some physical problems are triggered by mental and psychological distress. A health worker at the Marie Sixto Shelter for child domestic workers in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, for instance, reported that 80% of the children she sees suffer upset stomach and headache from emotional distress. \(^{44}\)

Finally, the possibility of sexual abuse or exploitation presents risks of sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV) and early pregnancy. Pregnancy often leads to dismissal and in some countries rejection by the young girl’s own family.

**Educational development**

Few children in domestic service attend school. Where the age of entry is lower than primary school completion, lack of education is one of the major losses. It is a loss that many child domestic workers, including those in Kenya and Togo, feel keenly. \(^{13}\) In Peru, ‘godmothers’ in urban areas purposely keep young domestics, generally of Andean origin, out of school so that they will not be ‘spoiled’ by contact with other girls in their situation. ‘Basically, the idea is to keep the girl unaware of her rights and alternative opportunities’ \(^{13}\). Similarly, in Bangladesh, employers admitted fearing that contact with others could lead to the child domestic finding better employment elsewhere. \(^{44}\) Even in countries where child domestic workers of school age are permitted to attend class part time, they have to fit their studies around their duties; the demands of the household take precedence. Thus they may be too tired and have too little time for homework to keep up. \(^{64}\)

Lack of schooling not only reduces skills and knowledge, but limits personal development. The substitution of a domestic apprenticeship for a proper education prepares a girl exclusively for marriage, childbearing, and further domestic work in her own home and those of others. Without the knowledge, broader horizons and experience of social interchange imparted by school-going, her sense of identity will remain impaired and her potential unrealized. In India, a common perception is that “if you can read and write you do not need to do this kind of work.” \(^{64}\) The reverse side of the coin is that if you cannot, a life of servitude is all you are fit for.

Studies from Indonesia and elsewhere show that young domestic workers are very pessimistic about their future because of their lack of education. Some even have difficulty thinking about the future beyond tomorrow. \(^{64}\)

**Psycho-social and emotional development**

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. \(^{17}\) Even if they have affectional relations with members of the household, these are not on equal terms. The capacity to resist sexual advances or negotiate fair treatment will be non-existent emotionally as well as practically. There will be little or no experience of expressing desires and opinions with a right to respect for them.

Children of the employer are also affected by the way young domestic workers are treated.

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**Main issues**

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Main issues

Learning to disregard the dignity and rights of others as part of their nature. Recreation and play may be non-existent, except when minding the employer's own children. The only experience may be to watch television, under carefully prescribed circumstances. Many children are reported to fantasize and develop a distorted view of the world. In South Asia, violence often takes the form of attack by a hot iron. In Sri Lanka, lawyers have spoken openly about the extreme violence used against child domestic workers, and in the juvenile Court in Colombo cases have revealed brutality by employers towards their child domestic workers including branding, dousing in boiling water, rubbing chilli powder on the mouth, beatings and stabbings. Deaths caused by starvation, burning and forcing excessive intake of salt have also been reported. Brutality has no socio-economic boundaries. In Benin, for instance, the wife of a former Minister was tried and sentenced to a prison term in 1996 for beating to death a child she employed under the rôlesgres system.

Gross abuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation

The degree of protection a child domestic worker enjoys from all forms of exploitation depends on the employer. If the child is unpaid, overworked, or treated violently, there is no opportunity to make friends or enjoy interaction with peers who share their cultural background and language. A 1987 study to collect quantitative health data using psychological tests and control groups, conducted in Kenya, found that child domestic workers experienced more psychological problems than other children (working and non-working), bedwetting, insomnia, withdrawal, depressive behaviour, premature ageing, depression and phobic reactions to their employers were common. Depression has also been reported in Bangladesh and in various Latin American countries.

Interventions on behalf of child domestic workers are still in their infancy, and there are still comparatively few projects that have been designed with child domestic workers solely in mind. Many of the projects currently providing services for them were originally meant to serve the needs of older, more visible, groups of exploited children such as street children, and have been adapted in response to need. As in the case in all responses to child labour, one of the greatest challenges facing practitioners is to take small NGO initiatives to scale.

Drop-in centres

Not only do drop-in centres provide a home-away-from-home for child domestic workers; they may also act as the venue for most other kinds of services. Such centres often consist simply of a rented room or space in the offices of an NGO. This provides the physical and emotional space away from employers to relax, meet with others like themselves, receive free medical or legal advice or counselling, and engage in educational activities. The centre often provides the opportunity to develop deeper relationships between carers and initially distrustful or nervous child workers and guide them along a new path. It can also operate as a place of help and safety in a crisis.

WAO-Afrique in Lomé, Togo, is an example of an organization providing a specific drop-in centre for groups of former child domestic workers, teaching them the necessary skills to start their own food-selling businesses. Others were originally set up for street children, but expanded to work with housegirls in response to concern about their situation. This is the case of Kujeana, a Tanzanian NGO.
Drop-in centres need local-level advocacy work to let child workers, employers, parents and the local community know of their existence. As in the case of the Maurice Sixto Shelter in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, they need the cooperation of employers to be of use, or their domestic workers will be forbidden to go to them. Projects often need to invest a good deal of effort to gain the support of employers by appealing to their self-perception of being a caring employer, or by providing skills training for child domestic workers that in the short term might benefit the employers’ family.

Crisis intervention

Some of the most innovative programmes have developed in response to the need to protect child domestic workers from physical and sexual assault. Usually located in drop-in centres, such intervention takes the form of emergency medical and legal provision and counselling services.

Sri Lanka provides a successful example of crisis intervention. In 1992, the Department of Probation and Child Care launched a national publicity campaign against the exploitation of child domestic workers. As part of the campaign, a national telephone hotline was introduced to allow concerned members of the public and children themselves to report cases of abuse. Before the end of the campaign in 1993, hundreds of calls were received and investigated, resulting in a number of prosecutions.

Often 24-hour crisis lines are an effective tool for reaching child domestic workers. Access to telephones is, however, by no means universal, and tends to work more in favour of older children.

Educational programmes

The vast majority of live-in child domestic workers do not attend school. Those still below the age of primary completion may have left school early to go to work. Some, especially in very poor countries such as Haiti or Bangladesh, may never have been to school at all. Educational disadvantage is therefore a focus of many projects. Services are not only to equip child workers with basic knowledge and practical skills, but also to ensure that they have contact with the outside world, and gain in confidence and self-esteem.

The most common form of education programme is training in basic literacy and numeracy. A typical example is a non-formal programme run by the Working Women Association of Pakistan; a similar programme is run in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in a main market on Friday when it is closed. For older girls, skills training may be offered in occupations from cookery to secretarial courses, as is illustrated by the Aashi-based project, SINAGA.

In another Kenyan project, in Kisumu, the Municipal Council has made classroom space and teachers time available for evening continuation classes. In 1992, 108 working girls, largely child domestic workers, attended courses from 5 to 6.30 p.m. Despite their determination, few girls completed primary school, mainly because they were studying after a full working day, which began as early as 4 a.m. and often continued after the girls return from school in the evening. Today, given demand, classes for ‘house helpers’ are held in five primary schools. Students must pay a user fee, which helps cover the additional remuneration paid to teachers.

In cases where young children are removed from employment, project practitioners may seek to enter or re-enter them into mainstream schooling by negotiating with parents and the school authorities. This was the case in Brazil’s Rio de Janeiro State, where officials from the Municipal Child Foundation of Campos dos Goytacazes, with ILO/IPEC collaboration, managed to withdraw 50 girls, 8-13 years of age, from domestic service, and provide them with a subsidy and access to formal education and training. Key to the success of this project was the authorisation of employers to release the children.

Once in school, the child often needs ongoing support, in the form of homework classes and liaison with teachers and parents.

Social life, recreation and counselling

All children, young and old, need to relax, play and meet with others. Given the isolation, discrimination and chronic lack of self-confidence experienced by many child domestic workers, this is a very strongly felt need.

SUMAPI, a small Filipino organization for domestic workers, runs a number of recreational activities for child domestic workers every Sunday in a local park. Word has spread, and new child domestic workers arrive each week to relax, talk and share problems. The activities also have a serious side, with organizers using the time to provide information about basic rights, and keeping track of absent children through the informal network.

ENGDA, a Senegalese NGO, has managed to draw together child domestic workers from all over West Africa to share their experiences and to push for improved working conditions. Children are encouraged to express themselves in a variety of ways, including in drawings and paintings. Group solidarity has been fostered by using focus groups to bring children together with their peers to discuss problems. Many have also become members of a regional movement campaigning on
Main issues

A certain amount of research is needed for any type of intervention on behalf of child domestic workers, whether programmatic or advocacy. In the case of advocacy to the public, thorough research is an essential preliminary to any awareness-raising campaign. Where the employment of child domestic workers is not regarded as harmful, convincing evidence of damage to childhood will be needed for a campaign to be persuasive.

Raising awareness

Compared with a few years ago, there is more awareness, both in the relevant countries and regions, and internationally, of the situation of child domestic workers. This is a product of growing concern about child labour generally and about the situation of girls in particular. It is also the result of research studies undertaken by NGOs and others. In many settings, however, awareness-raising has barely begun, and even in those where it is more advanced, there is a long way to go before it is effectively translated into better lives for young domestic workers.

Awareness-raising depends on gathering data and disseminating it. The main obstacle to collecting data about child domestic workers is their statistical invisibility. The reasons for this have already been explored. There is another type of invisibility governing the situation of child domestic workers: attitudinal invisibility. In societies where it is normal to hire a young girl to help around the house, the practice comes to be regarded as beneficial. All parties would probably equally deplore abusive treatment of a domestic worker by others.

Thus, domestic employment is unlike prostitution or work in a sweatshop or factory, where the adults responsible for child exploitation are often employers of child domestic workers are speculative. In societies where it is normal to hire a young girl to help around the house, the practice comes to be regarded as beneficial. All parties would probably equally deplore abusive treatment of a domestic worker by others.

The Visayan Forum Foundation, Philippines

The Visayan Forum Foundation has a range of projects and services aimed at relieving the plight of child domestic workers in the Philippines. The earliest and one of the most successful of its ventures has been the Luneita Park outreach programme. By going out into the Park to talk to young female domestic workers, taking a stroll in their free time, the NGO was able to reach normally ‘invisible’ child workers. They offered counselling and support in the Park, and helped them to meet other domestic workers, especially those in the same ethnic group.

The full range of Visayan Forum’s services include:

- A telephone ‘hotline’ and round-the-clock venue where child domestic workers can come for emergency aid, counselling or just ‘time out’;
- Collection of textbooks and reference materials for use by child domestic workers in obtaining documents such as birth certificates and in schoolwork;
- Publication of a newsletter for domestic workers — Balitang Kasambahay (Kasambahay News);
- Support of alternative formal education centres and children’s rights groups offering legal advice to child domestic workers; and
- Self-help groups with older child domestic workers trained as leaders to support younger children, maintain and update databases and provide counselling and advice.

Prevention through awareness-raising

Trade unions for domestic workers in Kenya and Tanzania have concluded that “prevention through awareness-raising is the single most effective method in combating child labour in private homes”. Working with these unions as part of its “Integrated programme for building partnerships and capacity against child labour”, ILO/IPEC is developing a handbook on prevention, removal and rehabilitation, based on the experience of the unions and IPEC. It subsequently plans to create a training module, including the handbook and a methodology for awareness-raising, targeting people who employ children in their homes. The long-term objective of the project is to launch an international awareness-raising campaign directed at white-collar workers, teachers and employers. Called START AT HOME, this campaign would incorporate not only the newly developed handbook on prevention, but also a handbook for research and action (see box p. 11) reflecting NGO experience in this field.
The particular difficulties of undertaking research and the lack of information generally has prompted Anti-Slavery International and ILO/IPEC to develop a handbook for researchers into child domestic work.\(^8\) One of the key conclusions of this handbook is that, while it may be possible to collect basic data about the practice (age, sex, family, background, level of education, tasks) from house-to-house surveys, it is not possible to collect in-depth qualitative data in this way from the children themselves nor is it desirable to try to do so.

An important factor inhibiting the gathering of information about child domestic workers is that, since they work in private homes, access is difficult. Where it has been possible to gain cooperation of employers and access to the children, almost all information is from, or filtered by, the employers. Researchers find it difficult to conduct meaningful interviews with child domestic workers in their presence.\(^9\) The children tend to say very little. Younger children especially, given their mienal role and experience of life, have almost no capacity for self-expression. In the presence of the employer, the child is doubly inhibited and may be fearful. Certainly, no child will describe to strangers episodes of violence or sexual abuse. It takes great deal of time and confidence-building, by necessity in a place outside the employer’s household, before they can do such a thing.

The recommended way to collect information from child workers themselves is to do so within the context of an existing drop-in centre or educational programme in which they participate, or develop a programme for them with research as an integrated purpose. Interviewing children in depth is best done over a period of time in a relatively unstructured and informal way. Examples exist in Bangladesh, Haiti and the Philippines of programmes where interventions and research have been handled in tandem by teachers trained to use the classroom as an environment for encouraging written, drawn and spoken self-expression.\(^10\)

Focus group discussion has also been successfully used in Senegal\(^11\) as a means of eliciting information from adolescent domestic workers, and prompting a discussion among them. Groups of young girls were invited to attend semi-structured ‘tea debates’ in the community with their ‘aunties’ or informal guardians of a child in their care. Its messages are aimed not only at employers, but also at key actors at national and international levels.

Changing attitudes: advocacy at national and international levels

Child domestic work is an issue that touches on people’s private and family lives, local economic realities, customs and socio-cultural values. To point out the damage it can do to children requires holding up a mirror to the society and asking people to inspect their attitudes to many things, including social hierarchy and childhood. Advocacy is most effective when local actors take the leading role.

The primary roles of advocacy campaigns should be to break down attitudinal invisibility towards the practice, and reduce instances of abuse and exploitation. This is likely to include the condemnation of employment of children under the age of completion of basic education; a clear differentiation between adoption and employment; promotion of decent pay and conditions; and encouragement to employers to give time off for young domestic workers to attend school, meet peers and mix with the wider society.\(^12\)

One example of an advocacy campaign at the local level is the one undertaken by the NGO Shoishab Bangladesh. Another example is provided by the Tanzania Media Women’s Association (TAMWA), a group of Tanzanian women journalists and lawyers concerned about the increasing number of girls being brought into urban areas as domestic workers. After interviewing more than 4,000 girls in several cities, this group launched a multimedia awareness campaign, involving radio broadcasts, distribution of pamphlets and cartoon booklets, a...
Main issues

Innocenti Digest 5 – realities concerning the practice.

Innocenti Digest 5 – realities concerning the practice.

Advocacy efforts also targeted parents, since one observer noted, “Parents give their children to affluent families out of ignorance. The problem has existed for generations and constitutes a vicious circle which must be broken.”

In Morocco, the newly designated Department of Family and Child Welfare has launched a national campaign on violence against women, with an emphasis on child domestic workers. The Department produced television spots, one with UNICEF support, which were broadcast nationally. Abuses against child domestic workers are also regularly reported on the radio in an attempt to focus public attention on the critical situation of these young workers.

Advocacy at the international level should be based on local and national-level activity and be used primarily as a vehicle for spreading to an international audience the findings of local research studies and activities. The CRC can be used in advocacy to underline the difference between the vision of childhood agreed internationally, and the infringement of childhood rights experienced by child domestic workers.

Care should be taken by international bodies, whether NGOs or intergovernmental, not to adopt public positions regarding child domestic work informed primarily by the most sensational cases of abuse and deprivation of rights; this is a tendency in their literature. This is unlikely to persuade the societies involved to change their tendency in their literature. This is unlikely to persuade the societies involved to change their attitudes or practices, and may provoke antagonsism. All advocacy activity at the international level should take account of local sensitivities and realities concerning the practice.

International organizations with field offices in countries where child domestic work is prevalent, especially United Nations or other human rights organizations, should ensure that the advocacy stands they take are consistent with the practice of their staff. UNICEF has issued a directive to its staff worldwide not to employ children under 15 as domestic workers. If they employ domestic workers aged 15-18, staff should ensure that their health, safety and moral are fully protected, and that these young workers have clearly defined duties, reasonable wages, a work week that does not exceed 40 hours, and time off for education and vocational training. The staff associations of the UNICEF Sri Lanka and Maldives offices have taken the directive one step further by signing an agreement to adhere to its provisions and by involving the local ILO offices in the initiative as well.

IS REGULATION POSSIBLE?

The difficulties of operating any system of regulation of child domestic work are those integral to any type of informal labour, with the compounding factor that the place of employment is the private home. The use of law as a means of regulation and protection is even more problematic in countries where child domestic workers are not seen as paid workers but as helpers around the house. However, the law can be used to prosecute people guilty of violence and gross abuse of children, including child domestic workers.

National legislation

It is not surprising to find that few countries have legislation to protect child domestic workers, except in cases where physical or sexual violence against the child can be proven. Even in industrialized countries where effective labour regulatory systems do exist, much domestic employment is informal and remains outside the reach of the authorities generally, often rendering the law powerless to protect the children involved. In developing countries, existing laws are rarely implemented, and in the few instances where laws are invoked, child domestic workers can even end up being treated as offenders.

One of the key reasons for this situation is that, to date, national laws have, by and large, sought to abolish child domestic work by imposing laws and standards on societies where the practice is culturally sanctioned and the political will to implement such laws is weak. Moreover, “access to the law for the very poor is problematic, not the least for the complexity of the processes, the duration of time civil litigation takes and the ability of those with access to money, power and knowledge to influence the course of events, usually to the detriment of the poor.”

Groups working with child domestic have suggested that child labour laws in themselves will not stop the use of children as domestic workers. Some policy makers see the promotion by law of compulsory primary education as a more useful preventative method to bring about the reduction of all forms of child labour, including child domestic work. The Agenda for Action adopted by the OAU Conference on Child Labour, held in October 1997, for instance, recognizes that “education, particularly basic education, is one of the principal means of preventing and eliminating child labour.” It urges Governments to establish “a system of accessible, relevant, high-quality, universal, compulsory basic education that is free for all.” ILO and UNICEF have also strongly promoted the extension and improvement of schooling as “the single most effective way to stem the flow of school-age children into abusive forms of employment or work.”

National legislation in industrialized countries

Legislation regulating child domestic work exists in a number of industrialized countries, as evidenced in their initial reports to the CRC monitoring body, the Committee on the Rights of the Child:

In Denmark, children between the ages of 10 and 15 may, to a certain extent, perform light paid work, including light cleaning.

In Austria, children over 12 may perform light and occasional work, but only for a maximum of two hours per day, and provided that school lessons and employment combined do not exceed seven hours per day.

In Italy, children may be employed as domestic workers at age 14, provided the work does not interfere with school obligations and does not involve night work or work during holidays.

In Sweden, no rules set a minimum age for domestic work. The Domestic Employment Act, however, specifies that the working hours of minors must not be as long as those of adults, and the employers must ensure that minors are not engaged in dangerous work.

In France, it is legal to employ children as domestic workers even when they have not completed compulsory schooling, legislation that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged the Government to reconsider.
Certainly, the entrenchment of the idea of universal basic education as a social norm would help persuade employers to allow young domestic workers time off to attend school and, over time, help end the practice. Also needed in many developing countries are effective systems for recording births. According to UNICEF, the births of about 40 million children every year go unregistered. Laws setting minimum ages for employment and school leaving can obviously not be applied when the age of the child is debatable.

At present, many children’s rights advocates believe that the first step is to persuade employers to begin to observe some basic standards, such as allowing children regular time off to attend school. Only when employers have accepted these locally agreed standards do national and international laws become relevant in solidifying locally accepted norms.

Crucial to the acceptance of standards for the protection of child domestic workers is that employers recognize domestic work as a form of employment, and the child domestic workers in their households as workers and not children of poor parents whom they are ‘helping out’. Households as workers and not children of poor employers recognize domestic work as a form of employment — there should be prohibitions on the employment of children under a certain age, in certain conditions (such as debt bondage), and protection from physical and sexual abuse.

A good example of what can be achieved through grassroots action is employers in Mumbai, India. The National Domestic Workers’ Movement, representing adult as well as child domestic workers, is campaigning to gain recognition of domestic workers as workers under the Indian Legal System. It has convinced employers to allow workers one day a week off and a month of paid holiday a year, and it has also established minimum wage levels for the first time. In addition, the Movement is urging both the national government and state governments to adopt laws fixing the minimum age for entry into domestic work at 14 years.

International standards

If regulation is difficult at the national level, it is even harder to devise systems of international regulation of child domestic work that will be effective. However, attention to the potential or actual exploitation of child domestic labour at an international level through the establishment of standards helps influence national debate, the implementation of existing laws, and the changing of attitudes.

Internationally, there are a host of standards directly or indirectly applicable to child domestic workers. In addition to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and its precursor, the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, these include: the United Nations Conventions against slavery (1926 and 1956); the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. There are also a number of ILO standards that have been used, or interpreted, to cover the exploitation of child domestic workers, including Convention No. 138 Concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973); and ILO’s Convention No. 29 Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930. (See back page for some relevant provisions of the above legislation.) A new ILO standard on child labour is currently being prepared.

However, for the reasons already explored, most of these standards are not invoked to protect child domestic workers. The 1956 Supplementary Convention on Slavery, the only instrument with a specific provision to protect children from being given or traded into domestic service, has never been invoked by national authorities despite ratification by over 100 States. Since 1930, the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, which monitors the implementation of ILO standards, has commented on a wide variety of practices relating to child domestic workers.

It is clear, therefore, that child domestic work remains a difficult issue for international human rights and labour standards to tackle. It has also been suggested that many of these standards have been set unrealistically high to be achievable at national level (in the case of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on Slavery, the standard is 18 years). This has ensured that, in practice, all children working as domestics, including the youngest and most vulnerable, remain unprotected.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, has helped pursue child labour issues in its dialogue with States Parties. In its Concluding Observations, it has explicitly mentioned child domestic workers as requiring attention on more than 20 occasions, in most cases highlighting national legal reform as the primary need. It has also frequently commented on the lack of enforcement and, in the case of Bangladesh, failure to implement existing legislation at all levels, from law enforcement agencies to the judiciary. In a landmark observation on the initial report of Sri Lanka in 1995, the Committee urged the State party to ‘give due attention to domestic child workers and encourage, through the promotion and implementation of the Convention, a change of mentality and attitudes’. This sent an important signal to the Sri Lankan authorities, reinforcing the efforts of local NGOs as well as those of UNICEF and ILO.

Although national laws and international conventions appear to have limited effect in a regulatory sense, they can have an effect on the process of debate and on attitudes. Their existence can help to drive the process of social change to ensure greater awareness of, and subsequently greater protection for, the situation of child domestic workers. Indeed, it is clear that international standards have already been important in challenging prevailing attitudes, and as an advocacy tool in bringing to light this neglected form of child labour.

New ILO standard on child labour

Preparation is under way of a new ILO standard on the ‘worst forms’ of child labour. The new standard, scheduled for final discussion at ILO’s annual International Labour Conference in June 1999, is likely to consist of a Convention that is legally binding on States that ratify it, and a non-binding Recommendation containing guidelines on implementation.

The Convention currently proposes to prohibit four categories of child labour: slavery and similar practices, including sale and trafficking of children; the commercial sexual exploitation of children; hazardous work jeopardizing a child’s health, safety and morals; and involvement in other illegal activities such as drug trafficking. The Recommendation suggests that any categories except hazardous work should be classified as criminal offences. While child domestic work is not mentioned explicitly, the new Convention invites ratifying States to take “effective and time-bound measures to reach out to children at special risk and to take account of the special situation of girls”. In addition, the Recommendation requires that attention be given to the “problem of hidden work situations in which girls are at special risk”. In defining hazardous work, consideration should be given to work “... for long hours, during the night or without the possibility of returning home each day”. However, despite these guidelines, neither the Convention nor the Recommendation is explicit about the circumstances in which children should, or should not, work as domestics.
The realization that child domestic work is probably the most widespread, and at the same time the most neglected, form of child employment is a challenge to child labour activists. The additional realization that this kind of work is overwhelmingly performed by girls, and that their occupational vulnerability potentially exposes them to violence and sexual abuse adds fuel to the activists’ fire.

But as this Digest makes clear, great care must be taken in considering what to do on child domestics’ behalf if effective action, rather than the provoking of synthetic controversy, is the intention. Why? Because nothing can be done to improve the situation of child domestic workers unless those responsible for employing them are involved. And stirring up anger against employers of child domestics — many of whom are pillars of society — is not likely to enlist their cooperation.

The first thing to establish is what the key issues are. Child domestic work defies simple categorization. For some, it is a servitude issue: the child domestic is under the exclusive control of adults who are not her parents, her daily round serves their best interests not her own, and she receives no remuneration. For others, it is a ‘false adoption’ issue, whereby a child has been taken in and cared for in order to be exploited, not to be looked after. For yet others, it is an economic exploitation issue, even though domestic work is not a recognized form of labour in many societies or governed by employment regulations. For others again, it is a child development and protection issue, since children are denied schooling, parental care during upbringing, social interaction with peers, and other rights and attributes of normal childhood.

Then again the issues vary considerably, depending on the age of the child domestic. The spectacle of very young children being socialized as servile and exploited at a very young age is against any code of rights or ethics and is deeply distressing. In these cases, the issues of servitude and ‘false adoption’ are pertinent. Child development and protection issues are also significant since denial of schooling, play and recreation will seriously damage childhood. But the threat of sexual abuse and exploitation is undoubtedly less among younger children. Once the child domestic reaches puberty, this risk grows. At the same time, other issues may become somewhat less significant: many children in the relevant societies leave school at around 12 and start to look for earning opportunities. By their mid-teens, employment is legal and there may well be some element of choice in the ‘child’ domestic worker’s situation.

Yet to have any of these issues recognized at all is an uphill battle in societies where children are widely employed as domestic workers. Most of their employers think they are doing the children — even very young children — and their families, a favour. If they exercise a harsh kind of discipline, it is only for the children’s good. They are teaching them — after all — how to clean, cook, mind the baby and do all these things with docile self-sacrifice. What could be a better preparation for their future married lives?

In some instances, employers take their guardianship of their girls’ interests very seriously. They undertake the task of finding them suitable husbands — husbands who may, from the girls family’s point of view, be better than the husband they could have provided. The sense of social hierarchy in many of these societies is very strong indeed. In a country such as Indonesia, Philippines or Bangladesh, there really is no idea that the same rules and codes apply among the social group from which these children come, and those operating in the employer home. How can these employers — most of whom are women — be persuaded to see things from a different perspective — a perspective that stresses that these children have exactly the same rights as their own children? To do this requires an attack on social values that most people in the society — rich and poor, high and low — take for granted. That may be desirable, but it cannot be done effectively by confrontation.

It is much easier to raise a hue and cry around the torture and abuse of a particular child domestic — and such cases undoubtedly exist. They are not, however, the norm. If they were the norm, they would not be reported in the newspapers as aberrations. It is true that some of these incidents are met with inadequate police and legal action against abusers, and that such reports augment outrage against cruel and barbarous acts and increase the chances that violent and abusing employers will be properly dealt with by the authorities. However, that should be the reason for publicizing such cases — that and that alone. It is not helpful to the situation of the mass of child domestic workers to have all employers ‘labelled’ in this way.

Highlighting the issue of child domestic work by sensationalizing abuse can create major problems in attempts to convince employers and others to view the issue differently. While raising awareness that abuse exists, it can create the wrong climate for debate, strengthening the understanding that there are good employers and bad employers, not that child domestic work is itself problematic. Far from raising alarm bells in employers’ minds, it may send the message that the children working for the majority are benefiting daily from their kindness.

Undoubtedly, there are aspects of the practice that are universally unacceptable.
and necessitate immediate and systematic action. Children's rights and child labour activists, including Anti-Slavery International (ASI) — strongly support this view. The employment of children below the age of 12, or below the legally accepted minimum working age, is unacceptable. So are situations where children work in conditions akin to slavery, are bonded or trafficked. And all forms of gross abuse, neglect, torture, violence or sexual abuse against child domestics are unacceptable, and where they occur, active prosecution of abusers must take place and be seen to have taken place and severely punished.

For child domestic workers above the minimum age, advocacy must focus on improvements in their terms and conditions of work. This requires active efforts to persuade employers to review their whole attitude to the employment of young domestics and their employment practices. Unlimited working hours, lack of remuneration, isolation from family and peers, lack of opportunities for schooling and for play and recreation, being treated as the inferiors of the employer's own children and suffering other forms of discrimination: all these are violations of children's rights. But they will not be seen as such by an employer who does not accept that the child domestic is a worker or employee, not simply a child from a poor family she is looking after.

A fundamental shift in attitude is needed from the concept of 'work as helping out in the household' to the concept of 'work as employment'. That a job is involved, which should be subject to such notions as working hours and days off, should be an important part of advocacy. This will not be easy. Arrangements about duties and responsibilities between people living in the same household, whether they are members of the same family or not, have always been subject to private agreement, heavily influenced by social and family custom. Even where laws and regulations concerning domestic employment are supposed to operate, as in industrialized countries, informal arrangements still often prevail. So the attitude and behaviour of employers towards their servants will continue to govern the vast majority of their working situations for the foreseeable future.

Awareness-building is nonetheless possible. Anyone who thinks about it for a moment will see that domestic workers, young and old, make an important contribution to the functioning of their employer's household. Recognizing that is a small step away from recognizing their working status, even if this is a conceptual rather than a legal recognition. While few countries have legal provisions specifically to protect people — adult and child — living and working in the households of others, most do set widely known minimum standards for the treatment of workers (especially child workers) relating to working hours, pay and time off. The implementation of these standards would radically improve the situation of millions of child domestics.

However, this change in attitude will have to be achieved by persuasion, social pressure, and the setting of examples by those in positions of influence. Enforcing legislation on a household-by-household basis is impracticable in the societies in question. The only way to ensure that individual child domestic workers are being afforded the protection they need is by ensuring that employers value children's rights and child protection norms for every child, and accept the importance of setting basic standards for the employment of all domestics, especially younger domestics, in their households.

An example of what can be achieved with employers can be seen in the pioneering work of NGOs such as Shoshab Bangladesh (see box p. 12), a group working with child domestics and their employers in Dhaka. Through intensive advocacy work in a suburb of Dhaka, Shoshab has helped bring about a change in the attitudes of employers. They now recognize the need to take moral and financial responsibility for the child domestic workers in their care, and have even begun activities to influence public opinion among other employers in their locality. They have established local norms for the treatment of childhood domestics which, despite the lack of legal enforceability, are upheld through peer pressure.

The basis of advocacy, too, must be assured. Anecdotal information is not appropriate for setting in motion a sea change in societal views. Proper information is needed — information collected, if possible, in the course of actions to help child domestics. These actions may include educational projects, on drop-in and social centres as described in this Digest; this is the kind of activity Shoshab initially undertook, and how it gained the confidence of both domestics and employers. And it should be automatic that advocacy should be led by local voices — NGOs, women's groups, human rights organizations — preferably in partnership with one another. Support can be provided by international organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental, but the lead must come from within the society.

In international discussion of child labour issues, the invisibility of child domestic workers is gradually being overcome. Ultimately, however, genuine improvement in their lot will have to come from attitudinal change in societies and households. And this should be the target. This is where the promotion of children's rights, and the creation of a climate in which the development of all children — however poor, however disadvantaged — is given proper weight, can make a fundamental difference. In time, the spectacle of one child waiting on another, absorbing as a part of upbringing an in-built sense of inferiority and servility, working round the clock and, like Cinderella, praying for a magical release, will finally be consigned to the past.
This section contains information about the major intergovernmental organiza-
tions and international and regional NGO's working on issues relating to child domes-
tic work. It also contains contact details for some of the local organizations mentioned in the text.

This listing is not meant to be comprehensive, nor does it represent a prioritization or ranking of
groups. The aim is to provide a starting point to anyone interested in learning more about
the work being done in this area. The information being collected is from Internet
sources and we hope that it can be used as a resource to provide information to
researchers, policy makers, and others interested in this area.

Links

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Information services
Campaigner's handbook available on the Internet.

Labour, promotes the National Forum on Child
Development; also is responsible for co-ordinating
Regional Network on Contemporary Forms of
Slavery. The National Committee against Child
Labour, promotes the National Forum on Child
Development;

Nations Working Group on Contemporary
Forms of Slavery; and the
World Health Organization. Many
UN agencies, international andegional NGOs and national bodies — whose
work may be relevant to the topic — are
also included. Some Internet
information has also been included, which reflects
web sites available in March 1999; this information is,
of course, subject to change.

Intergovernmental organizations

Many organizations within the United Nations family have responsibility for child labour issues and
policies, internationally, including those relating to
child domestic work. WHO and UNESCO have
looked into the issue from the point of view of
health and education. UNICEF has an established policy
for action on behalf of children in need of special
protection measures, which is grounded in the
Convention on the Rights of the Child and which is
being implemented in part through mainstreaming
within existing programmes such as education and
advocacy and the establishment of specific
country, regional and global technical support networks. The
Programme Division of UNICEF New York has a
section for Child Protection, which includes a focus
on child domestic workers. A number of United
Nations human rights treaty bodies have also looked
into the issue of child domestic work during the
course of their work, as is evident in the ‘General
References’ section of this Digest. These include the
Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee
on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the
Commission on Human Rights, especially through the
work of its Special Rapporteur on violence against
women, as well as that of the Working Group on
Contemporary Forms of Slavery. The
Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities has also called for
urgent action to combat slavery-like practices
and violent abuse of children in domestic work.

Country level action programmes for
child domestic workers in 30 countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, India,
Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines,
the United Republic of Tanzania and Thailand.
Activities include awareness-raising, skills training,
non-formal education, counselling, provision of legal
and medical assistance; and other support
and outreach services. It also carries out research to
identify significant gaps. At the international level,
concerted Against Slavery International in
developing a handbook to provide guidance for
research and action to organizations that would like
to start work in this area. It is preparing the
adoption of new international labour standards
that would have implications for child domestic workers.

International and regional NGOs

Anti-Slavery International (ASI)
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Contact
Jonathan Beagryn, Child Labour Officer
Year founded
1839

Geographical scope
Worldwide

Activities
Promotes the eradication of slavery and slavery-like
practices, and freedom for everyone who is
subjected to them. Has produced a handbook in
collaboration with ILO/PEC, for research and action on
child domestic workers - providing a step-by-step
guide to NGOs in finding out about and acting on
the situation of child domestic workers. Continues to
highlight the abuse and exploitation of child
domestic workers through research and campaigns.
Has completed studies on child domestic workers in
Bangladesh, Togo and Indonesia and is currently
undergoing studies in Benin, Chenna (formerly
Madrasi) and Costa Rica. Has also recently mounted
a campaign highlighting the trafficking of children
for domestic work in West Africa.

Information services
Members receive a quarterly newsletter, The
Reporter, as well as the list of videos and special
ofers an an all ASI publications. The ASI library is
open to the public Monday to Friday. A publications
list is available from the above address.

Child Workers in Asia (CWA)
Full mailing address:
P.O. Box 29-Chandrasekaram
Bangalore 29004
Thailand
Tel.: +662 9300855, 9305316
Fax: +662 930526
E-mail: cwa@hrdc.co.th
Contact
Taneeya Runchareon, Executive Secretary
Year founded
1985

Geographical scope
South Asia: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal,
Pakistan, Sri Lanka
South-east Asia: Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia,
Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam

Activities
Conducts regional activities with partner organizations in Asian countries; co-facilitates a
regional task force on Child Domestic Workers; publicizes first-hand information on child domestic
workers in collaboration with NGO partner organizations.

Information services
Issues a quarterly newsletter, Child Workers in Asia; publishes thematically-based publications, one of
which is 'Behind Closed Doors: Child Domestic Workers in Thailand'.

Web page home
http://www.cwa.bnet.co.th

Defence for Children International
Costa Rica Section (DCI Costa Rica)
P.O. Box 4596-100
San Jose, P.O. Box 4596
San Jose, Costa Rica
Tel.: +506 2283459/259414
Fax: +506 229322/229357
E-mail: dramos@telcel.com
Web page home: being constructed
Contact
Virginia Marillo, Executive President
Year founded
In Costa Rica, 1984

Geographical scope
Central America and the Caribbean

Activities
Carries out research on alternatives to child labour; commercial sexual exploitation, violence against
children and child domestic work; organizes training programmes; disseminates research results;
runs programmes for children and adolescents. A
member of the National Committee against Child
Labour, promotes the National Forum on Child
Labour.

Information services
Maintains a reference centre on children's rights that contains educational and training material.
Environmental Development Action in the Third World / Youth in Action Team (ENDA TM/jeuda)
B.P. 2137
Dakar
Senegal
Tel.: +221 22 311 1921
Fax: +221 32 314 192
E-mail: jeuda@enda.sn
Web home page: www.enda.sn
Contact
Fabrizio terenzia
Regional Coordinator of ENDA, Jeuda
Year founded
1972
Geographical scope
Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe
Activities
Supports self-help groups, economic and health initiatives; promotes self-defence; organizes alternative education classes; provides management training and training on participatory action research techniques; runs classes in knitting, crocheting, sewing, dyeing, and cooking.
Information services
Publishes a letter from the street, a liaison and support bulletin for working and shantytown children, with articles written by the children themselves. Releases one issue a year. In 12,000 copies, 17 issues released so far. Working children sell their own copies; also mailed free-of-charge worldwide. Produced in four languages (French, but some issues also in English, Portuguese and Spanish). Also publishes Jeuda (three to four issues a year), which addresses youth topics in Africa, Latin America and India. More than 100 issues released so far. The same issues are also in English, Portuguese and Italian. Also provides information on upcoming meetings of working children’s youth organizations and end of meeting reports or declarations.

International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB)
Bureau International Catholique de l’Enfance (BICE)
63, rue de Lausanne
CH-1215 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 22 733 2446
Fax: +41 22 733 1793
E-mail: bic@tal.nunet.ch
Contact
Secretary General
Year founded
1949
Geographical scope
International
Activities
Carries out activities that include psychosocial support, awareness raising about rights and responsibilities, building on resilience and current and potential strengths of children and their self-help capacities; legal aid, particularly in case of dismissal (reimbursement of indemnities), educational and vocational activities (literacy, home economics, sewing); health education, including sexual education and AIDS prevention; primary health care; easing working conditions (one day off); facilitating participation in training opportunities offered by ICCB; mediation between domestic employers and their employers; support to obtain valid identity cards; training of placement agencies for domestic workers; networking with government and other NGOs; media campaigns to raise public awareness and initiate social mobilization.
Information services
Publishes surveys, provides non-formal education, organizes income-generating activities, carries out advocacy and promotes social mobilization.

International Save the Children Alliance
275-281 King St.
London, W6 9LZ
United Kingdom
Tel.: +44 181 748 2554
Fax: +44 181 273 8033
E-mail: info@savechildren-alliance.org
Contact
Rachel Marcus and Diana Dalton
Year Founded
1989
Geographical scope
International
Activities
Carries out advocacy in local, regional and international forums on child labour issues, including child domestic work. Through individual members, or coalitions of members in some regions, provides technical and/or financial support to organizations active on child domestic work.
Information services
Publications and annual report.

Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC)
No. 7, Second Floor, 109 West, Santar Begum Plaza, Blue Area, P.O. Box 301
Islamabad Pakistan
Tel.: +92 51 279255
Fax: +92 51 279256
E-mail: secret@associates.sdnpk.undp.org
Contact
Anees Jillani, National Coordinator
Year founded
1992
Geographical scope
South Asia
Activities
Conducts research into children’s rights issues; seeks to create awareness through advocacy, dissemination of information and lobbying with Governments. Recent awareness raising campaign, under heading “A child employed is a future destroyed”, targets employers of child domestics in Abidjan and newspaper articles, publication of Child domestics in Abidjan (in French), 8 minute video on “jeune, child domestic worker in Abidjan (in French).”

Activities
Conducts surveys, provides non-formal education, organizes income-generating activities, carries out advocacy and promotes social mobilization.

Information services
Survey results, experiences with the grass-roots programme.

Local organizations
Foyers Maurice Sixto
Bouchee 99, rue St. Louis #69
Carrefour,
Box 1289
Haiti
West Indies
Tel.: +509 396267
Contact
Miguel-jean Baptiste, Director
Fundação Abrinq pelos Direitos da Criança
Rue Lobina, 324 - jardim América
CEP 05433-000
São Paulo - SP
Brazil
Tel.: +55 11 8830899
Fax: +55 11 8830889
E-mail: info@fundabrinq.org.br
Web home page: http://www.fundabrinq.org.br (see section: trabalho infantil)
Contact
Sérgio Mindlin, President

Kuleana
P.O. Box 29
Mirenga
Tanzania
Tel.: +255 66 509911
Fax: +255 66 509946
E-mail: kuleana@akumenet.com

National Domestics Workers’ Movement
206A, St. Marys Apartments
Nespil Road
Mazagon
Mumbai - 400 010
India
Tel.: +91 22 3790803, 3792498
Fax: +91 22 3771211
E-mail: admin@hwm.ilbom.ernet.in
Contact
Jeanne Devos, ICM

Shoishab Bangladesh
9/7, Iqbal Road
Mohammadpur
Dhaka - 1207
Bangladesh
Tel.: +880 2 819873
Fax: +880 2 9122130
E-mail: shoishab@bluebroad.com
Contact
Kuleana

Visayan Forum Foundation
2871 Lamayen St.
Sb. Ana
Quezon City
Metro Manila
Philippines
Tel.: +63 2 563 4514
Fax: +63 2 812837
E-mail: vfforum@skynet.net
Contact
Cecilia Flores Oebanda

World Association for Orphans (Action to Stop Child Exploitation)
(VIAO-AFRIQUE)
396, 66 Rue Tokain Solidarité
B.P. 18242
Lome Togo
Tel.: +228 21 4313
Fax: +228 21 7345
E-mail: wao-afrique@bibway.com
Contact
Céphas Mahy, Director
Year Founded
1990
Geographical scope
Eight countries in Africa
Activities
Acts as an umbrella organization for NGOs, media campaigns to raise public awareness and initiate social mobilization.
Information sources

Selected readings

- Anti-Slavery International, ‘Domestic Child Labour in Nepal’; report made to the Child Labour Section of the Conference on Urban Childhood, organized by the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Childwatch International and other partners, Trondheim, Norway, 9-12 June 1997.


General references


Chaney, E. M., Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Household Workers, personal communication with authors, November 1998.

Deveř, J., National Domestic Workers' Movement, India, panel discussion at the ILO/IPEC-supported Asian Regional Consultation on Child Domestic Workers, Manila, 19-23 November 1997; and e-mail to UNICEF ICDC, 22 January 1998.


Lhalungpa, S. and R. Noble, e-mail to UNICEF ICDC, 4 February 1999, citing findings of the forthcoming UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office study entitled 'Prevaling opinions and attitudes to child domestics in urban middle class families';


Mystrand, G., ILO/IPEC, e-mail to UNICEF ICDC, 4 December 1998.


UN Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Summary record of the 1st meeting: Paraguay', 23/05/FRC/C.15/11/SR.1, para. 44.


UN Secretariat, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Summary record of the 422 meeting: Togo', CRC/C/SR.422, 3 February 1998.


UN Secretariat, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Concluding observations: France', CRC/C/15/Add.20, 25 April 1994, para. 27.


New Release

UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office has just published a report of and a study prepared for a sub-regional workshop on 'Trafficking in child domestic workers, in particular girls in domestic service in West and Central Africa', held in Cotonou, Benin, on 6-8 July 1998.

The report is available in French and English. Contact UNICEF, Bureau Regional pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre, 04 BP 443 Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, Fax +225 22 76 07.
Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959

Principle 7: The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form.

The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age: he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973

Article 1. Each Member for which this Convention is in force undertakes to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons.

Article 2. Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall specify... a minimum age for admission to employment or work... that shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years.

Article 3. National laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age on light work which is
(a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development, and
(b) in a measure required to protect their educational and vocational career, their occupation in vocational orientation or training pro-

Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

Article 32. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

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PAST ISSUES


This Digest provides information on the recent and expanding phenomenon of ombudsmen/commissioners for children. It discusses the history of ombudsmen; patterns in the origins, development, mandate and status of the different types of ombudsmen/offices; the functions of ombudsmen in theory and practice; and characteristics essential to this kind of work. It ends with details of 16 existing ombudsmen/commissions for children and a selected bibliography on the topic.


This Digest explores interpersonal violence to and by children, using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as its framework. Sexual abuse and exploitation, children’s involvement in armed conflict, the prevalence of violence involving children and the reasons that children become violent are among the main issues explored. The Digest ends with a discussion on strategies for combating violence involving children. Contact and programme details of regional and international NGOs working in this area, and a compilation of selected readings are also provided.


The third Innocenti Digest deals with the main issues connected with children and young people coming into conflict with the law and the justice system. It looks at standards and problems from arrest through to the court hearing and sentencing, use of custodial measures and ways of avoiding the child’s unnecessary and counter-productive involvement with the formal justice system. It also covers prevention questions. Like previous publications in the series, it contains practical information on the major players and sources of further, more detailed information.


This fourth Innocenti Digest looks at intercountry adoption as one of a series of possible solutions for children unable to live with their families. Broadly accepted international instruments specify the conditions under which intercountry adoption should be undertaken if the rights and best interests of the child concerned are to be protected and fully respected. Although substantial efforts are being made to implement the standards and procedures set, current practices are often in violation of these norms. This Digest identifies abuses of intercountry adoption as well as the measures required to combat such violations and to uphold best practice in this sphere. It also provides information on existing Central Authorities under the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, details of some major international and regional organizations active in this field and suggestions for further reading.