

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THE ISSUES OF INDONESIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SINGAPORE**

This chapter explains and analyzes issues or problems experienced by most of Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore, mainly the Indonesian Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore. Approximately one in every seven Singaporean households employs a “live-in” migrant domestic workers in which doing the house chores such as child care work, domestic duties and elder care work these women perform help free up Singaporean men and women to work outside of their homes and leave the job for their domestic workers. There are more than 200,000 foreign domestic workers recorded by the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore in 2012 and the number is growing rapidly each year. Most of the foreign domestic workers are coming from the neighboring country such as Indonesia, Philippines, and Myanmar. According to IOM, most of the domestic workers are the unskilled (temporary) workers who earn less than SGD 1,800 per month.

The role of migrant women who work as a foreign domestic workers are all as both care and welfare providers can be analyzed from many different perspectives. The economic perspective emphasizes the rationality of live-in domestic work and the important impact of remittances on the material well-being and economy of the origin country of the domestic workers are come (Escriva & Skinner, 2008). According to the Indonesian government data, in 2014 of around 4.5 million Indonesian migrant workers who are mostly (around 70%) women were employed in domestic sector and they were in productive age margin between 18 to 35 years old (Surwandono & Azizah, 2015). Despite the fact of their household chores they

worked for, it is inevitably that there are several problems appeared faced by foreign domestic workers. The problems or issues they faced are divided into two types which are the pre-departure and the arrival in Singapore with their employers in Singapore. Most of the problems that they faced in Singapore are summarized in three Ds: Dirty, Dangerous, Degrade. Thus, this chapter elaborates in details of each problem experienced by Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore.

#### **A. Types of Problem Faced by Indonesian Domestic Workers in Prior to Departure**

Women and girls are often depicted in the media both in Singapore and more widely as entering trafficking situations as a result of being physically abducted, sold by relatives or sent away with recruiters by relatives for what they believe to be other forms of paid employment. Most of Indonesian foreign domestic workers who do not have specific skills or known as low-skilled workers applied job overseas, mainly the neighboring country such as Malaysia, Brunei, and even Singapore. Many agencies from Indonesia in each branches often offer the low-skilled women and girls to work overseas with its interesting promises and make them decided to work abroad as domestic workers. Through those fact, it is inevitably that some agencies also take benefit which bring disadvantages to the workers. Through some process in pre-departure, domestic worker may arrive in Singapore heavily in debt as they are charged exorbitant fees for the processing of documents, placement and airline tickets by such placement agencies (Yin K. F.). Those problems become one of the problem that often appears by the workers before they depart to the destination country.

## **1. Recruitment Process**

Discussing about migrant workers was not far of context from the first process called recruitment. Most of Indonesian domestic workers seek help for having a job from the recruiters in Indonesia. Recruiters takes a role actively in seeking out women who they think might be persuaded to work overseas as a domestic worker. Despite their recruitment process, there is a problem that often occurred at the pre-dispatch of Indonesian foreign domestic worker in which mostly come from an offer that in case they willing to be migrant workers overseas, most of the recruitment agencies give them interesting promise. They were promised that they will get high salary, easy procedure, and light job without any difficulties (Surwandono & Azizah, 2015). To convince the job given in the incoming time is a decorous job, the Indonesian migrant workers are asked to fulfill some payment financial.

Although some payments are required to be fulfilled by the migrant workers before they are working overseas, there are also some agencies that allow them to pay the payment while they are working overseas. The payment that required could be paid by the time they work, even though it is may be convinced to the migrant workers, however that kind of treatment may lead the migrant workers to have an opportunity to do inhuman job which called the three Ds: Dirty, Dangerous, Degrade. In addition, the workers lack of reliable information from authorized sources or the recruiters on safe migration and the risk of working abroad in which create a challenging environment and increases workers' vulnerability that leads to misled by recruiters (*calo*) in their recruitment process (ILO, 2015).

In fact, in the case of recruitment process, the domestic workers are mostly charged up to 11 months' salary as a recruitment fee in which this matter is contrary to the Article 15(1)(e) of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention which states that measurement should be taken to ensure that "fees charged by private employment agencies are not deducted from the remuneration of domestic workers" (HOME, 2012). In further matter, the practice of length salary deductions contributes to the acceptance by domestic workers of exploitative working conditions upon arrival in the destination country as they do not wish to perform any complain and its risk having an increase in their salary deductions and/or finding themselves in a position in which they are unable to pay the debt they owe to the agency. This case also leads to other issue that the workers often threatened by the agency that if they are not able to pay the fees required they have to pay their own airfare and the balance upon their return to home.

During the recruitment process the migrant workers also complained that they were lacked of adequate information in which means the workers are frequently given inadequate and/or inaccurate information about the nature of the job employment. For instances, they were required to work in much larger houses for much larger families compared to when they were initially informed before their recruitment process. Another case is that many of them did not clearly understand the contract they signed since it was written in English and the recruiters did not explain it to them. Moreover, the workers were discouraged by their recruiters and agents from asking too many questions. These problems, faced by most Indonesian workers during their recruitment process.

Lastly, another problem is the under-age girl recruitment HOME has represented a large number of Indonesian domestic workers who were recruited to work in Singapore were under the age of 18 (HOME, 2012). A research by HOME showed that two such women arrived at the HOME shelter since January 2012. The first girl arrived in Singapore in November 2009 aged 17 who had been recruited by the Putra Sanjaya Perkasa agency located in Jakarta and the other one arrived in Singapore in May 2011 who had been recruited by the Alkarim agency in Jakarta. Prior to their departure from Indonesia to Singapore, both girls were given passport by their respective recruitment agency showing their age to be 23 and they were asked to confirm their age is 23 whenever they were asked.

## **2. Training Center**

Another common problem faced by the Indonesian foreign domestic workers before they depart to Singapore is the time spent in the training center. There are some cases where migrant workers need to pay for their recruitment process including their training process. In the training center, they usually only get a chance for household chores training, it is inevitably that language training is highly needed for them. An Interview conducted by TWC2 also proved that the training for daily house care is higher and the most applicable training than the language training. In addition, the required payment that the workers have to paid do not generally included and receive adequate training by the Placement Agency of Private Indonesian Workers (*Pelaksana Penempatan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Swasta / PPTKIS*) (ILO, 2015). Due to this condition, in the training center, the workers do not receive adequate required training as well as clear information about

the nature of work, contract conditions, or even the laws and requirements of destination countries.

The migrant domestic workers also agreed that the training center do not provide adequate both developing skills required to fulfill the duties of the domestic worker and in terms preparing them to live in the destination countries. As a basic need, the language training is one of the most needed trainings for the workers, thus this training should be maximized to meet the require language while the workers work in the destination countries. Somehow, the problem appears that the language training is not fulfilled clearly and not maximally done that lead the workers not able to communicate effectively with their employers as they are unaware about their jobs, rights, or even their protection laws. Meanwhile, the training was primarily only focused on ensuring that they have sufficient English to pass the entrance test on arrival in Singapore in which this condition is not sufficient enough to communicate effectively with their employers. This matter causing another problem to appear while they are working with their employers.

On the other hand, many Indonesian domestic workers reported that they were subjected to a very poor treatment in the pre-departure training centers in which they were required to stay in for several months prior to departure. In addition, these women also experienced poor living conditions in which they had to sleep in a cramped room with many other women. Inadequate food also provided and the trainees frequently suffer verbal abuse from the training center staff. Whilst waiting for the placement, it is inevitable the workers also do not have a freedom movement and they are required to stay in the training center and they forbid to

leave. In addition, it is undeniable that in the training process all of the information are highly recommended to be inform regarding their working environment in order the worker to be prepared for the tasks or works they are required to carry out.

Thus, in this case, the Government of Indonesia must monitor effectively all recruitment agencies since these discriminatory violations of the rights of migrant domestic workers are however continue to take place in training centers in Indonesia.

### **3. Monitoring by Agency**

The extent of monitoring by agency after the workers being sent to the destination country is somehow required to avoid some issues that may appear in the future. In this matter, the agency tends to refuse the further process which happen to the prospective migrant workers regarding their excessive fees that the workers have to paid. There are cases where prospective workers who undertake training programs conducted by the agency are exposed to hazardous conditions and charged additional fees which are disproportionate to the training they receive. This monitoring problem can lead the migrant workers into debt bondage during their work in the receiving countries (ILO, 2015). Those three problem and this monitoring problem often appear to the workers before they are being sent off that somehow create a pressure for the workers. In addition, the role of domestic worker's agency is requiring the Indonesian foreign domestic workers to pay a high payment to the agency that somehow create a pressure. Meanwhile the payment is not match with the working condition or the promising work given to the workers.

## **A. Types of Problems Faced by Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore**

Responding to the amount of Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore and the problem appearing during their pre-departure, the issues and problems they experienced during their job in Singapore also appearing and has not decline year by year. In Singapore, the main problems faced by Indonesian domestic workers are harsh working conditions, which peaks in instances of violence against domestic workers and sometimes results in their death. In Singapore, local laws do not cover the employment conditions of domestic workers such as work hours, rest days, and minimum wages (Yin K. F.). The Ministry of Manpower, the agency in charge, has consistently argued that work in private sphere is different from normal employment terms in which this case makes it difficult for employment conditions to be applied. Thus, during the placement period, migrant workers face many challenges relating to decent work, including timely payment of wages, extreme working conditions experienced by Indonesian include below-standard wages such as; physical violence; illness; restrictions on access to information and communication; insufficient food; public humiliation; and specific problem employers (especially female) and their families (ILO, 2015). All in all, most of Indonesian domestic workers tend to be featured in cases where abuse occurred more than once as they tend to be less well educated or competent in the English language.

Although the Government of Singapore and Indonesia have made efforts to improve the situation for Indonesian domestic workers, the pattern of issues or problems they faced over recent years has not changed and yet still appeared.



(International Organization for Migration, 2010). Most of the problems that the Indonesian foreign domestic workers faced during their work in Singapore are summarized in three basic Ds: Dirty, Dangerous, Degrade. Each of the problem has its sub types of cases that will explain the current condition of the Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore. The table below shows the problem experienced by the Indonesian Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore, summarized by the International Organization for Migration.

Table 3.1  
Problems Faced by Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore  
(1999-2008) (IOM, 2010).

Problems Faced by Domestic Workers			
Rank (a)	1999 to 2005 (b)	Rank (c)	2008 (d)
1	No holidays	1	No holidays
2	High workload	2	Insufficient rest breaks
3	Insufficient rest breaks	3	High workload
4	Not permitted to leave the house	4	Not permitted to leave the house
5	Limited access to information and communication	5	Wages below standard
6	Not allowed to pray	6	Not allowed to pray
7	Problems with grandparents/children/ female employer	7	Working in more than one location
8	Humiliation in words and actions	8	Illness
9	Insufficient food	9	Physical violence
10	Working in more than one place	10	Running away from employer

### 1. Dirty

In order to receive accurate information regarding the main problem faced by Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore, HOME conducted an interview during 2013-2014 with 670 sample of foreign domestic workers who mainly come from Indonesia, Philippines, and Myanmar. The first D's problem is Dirty or inadequate accommodation the workers receive during their stay with the

employers. One of the main problems faced by foreign domestic workers faced is the food they have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in which they only have bread for breakfast and lunch, and they often have leftover foods for dinner. The employers often give their workers insufficient foods or expired food for their daily meal or less nutrition which do not adequate with the long hours working job they have done for their employers.

Ironically, these case like this are common in Singapore and become one of the main issues experienced by most of the foreign domestic workers there (HOME, 2016). Based on the interview with HOME, 83% most of the women always receive enough food meanwhile the rest of them were never given “good food” (Wessels, 2015). A data collected from the interview through the table below shows the current problem of the Indonesian foreign domestic workers in terms of lack good food and not enough food during their stay with employers.

Table 3.2  
Nutritional attention by employer (Wessels, 2015)

<i>Does your current employer's family...</i>	<b>Answers in %</b>				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<i>...give you enough food?</i>					
All FDWs <sup>184</sup>	2.2	2.3	6.1	6.3	83.2
Indonesian <sup>185</sup>	2.2	2.6	4.3	6.5	84.3
Filipino <sup>186</sup>	0.9	2.2	8.4	8.4	80
Burmese <sup>187</sup>	4.9	1.9	4.9	1	87.4
<i>...give you good food (no left-overs, expired food etc.)?</i>					
All FDWs <sup>188</sup>	17.8	3	7.2	6.3	65.7
Indonesian <sup>189</sup>	15	2.7	2.2	7.1	7.3
Filipino <sup>190</sup>	12.2	3.2	12.2	5.4	67.1
Burmese <sup>191</sup>	38.5	3.3	7.7	6.6	44
<i>...give you your kind of food (rice, balal etc.)?</i>					
All FDWs <sup>192</sup>	12.7	2.6	10.3	8.8	65.6
Indonesian <sup>193</sup>	3.9	0.9	5.3	10.5	79.4
Filipino <sup>194</sup>	2.3	4.1	12.8	9.6	71.2
Burmese <sup>195</sup>	56.7	3.1	16.5	3.1	20.6

From the table above, the problem faced by the Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore is in terms of their food accommodation, sometimes they still receive left-over food as seen in Indonesians FDWs that 15 % of them eat left-over and expired food given by their employers. It is the same as it is categorized by the issue faced by Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore regarding the insufficient food matters that has been summarized by the IOM data.

## **2. Dangerous or Difficult**

Despite their dirty works or lack of accommodations they receive, the workers also often experience hard or difficult work which often lead to the long working hours, as one of the problems. The domestic workers in Singapore often experienced dangerous and difficult job to fulfill required by their employers. As authorities have acknowledged, many of the death cases are also due to their dangerous work. Several workers fell to their deaths due to many stories up as the cause such as cleaning window from the high apartment outside or drying clothes on bamboo poles suspended from window sills in their employer's apartment. The duty that the foreign domestic workers have to be done often have a high risk towards their protection. Although the employers know that it is such a dangerous job to do, but there are still many employers that deny the fact.

Aside from that, a research conducted by HOME through interview also provide an information towards the privacy matters and limited access to information and communication. Some cases the Indonesian's employers in Singapore restrict their domestic workers to make a communication and limit their association. Despite the fact that allow them to make private calls, Indonesian

FDWs reported that they seldom allowed to make a phone call compared to the Filipino and Burmese respectively. Indonesian FDWs also reported that they allowed to talk with the people outside the family less than the Filipino and Burmese FDWs. Due to those facts, it is then accurately summarized that another problem faced by the Indonesian FDWs in Singapore is limited access to information and communication.

Table 3.3  
Restrictions on communication by employer or employer's family  
(Wessels, 2015).

<i>Does your current employer's family...</i>	<b>Answers in %</b>				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<i>...allow you to make private phone calls?</i>					
<b>All FDWs<sup>150</sup></b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>36.6</b>
Indonesian	37.5	12.5	17	10.7	22.3
Filipino	15.6	1.8	23.2	9.4	50
Burmese	15.3	1	26.5	18.4	38.8
<i>...let you talk to people outside the family?</i>					
<b>All FDWs<sup>151</sup></b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>34.9</b>
Indonesian	22.3	13.8	25.4	13.8	24.6
Filipino	13.1	6.3	27	7.7	45.9
Burmese	22.5	2.9	23.5	5.7	33.3
<i>...let you talk to people from your own country?</i>					
<b>All FDWs<sup>152</sup></b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>45.3</b>
Indonesian	14	12.3	22.8	16.7	34.2
Filipino	4	4.9	19.6	13.4	58
Burmese	21.6	5.9	16.7	13.7	42.2

Therefore, considering the data through the interview with FDWs by HOME, it is then issues faced by Indonesian FDWs in Singapore is included with the table summarized by IOM. Aside from that, as it is entitled as a dangerous and difficult job, another issue appeared as eight Indonesian domestic workers found death in 2012 while cleaning a window from high-rise apartments in Singapore which reach a peak from the previous year in 2011 there are four Indonesian FDWs fell to their deaths while cleaning the window from the high rise apartments (The

Telegraph, 2012). In addition, it is also found that this issue also appeared while the workers hang a clothes in a high apartment in Singapore.

Following the deaths of several Indonesian FDWs who fell from Singapore's ubiquitous high-rise apartments while cleaning windows and hang the clothes, the Indonesian government has put pressure on Singapore government to ban its domestic workers from performing such dangerous and risky job (Mahtani, 2012). In this case, Singapore's Manpower Ministry is working with Indonesian officials to identify and possibly blacklist agencies and employers in who do not ensure the safety of the Indonesian FDWs in Singapore. In responding to this issue, the Indonesia's embassy in Singapore has somehow pushed employment agencies in Singapore to include a clause in work contracts for Indonesian FDWs in order to prohibit the workers to clean the outside windows or hanging laundry from apartments without any clear instruction or training required to decrease the cause of falling from the high apartment.

### **3. Degrade**

Other poor working conditions that the workers faced is maltreatment of domestic workers by the employers in which involve violence, sexual abuse or – even rap, sometimes it is also refer to their unpaid salaries because the employers do not pay and some even doing work until tortured their works to death (Susilo, 2007). Migrant domestic workers in Singapore are particularly very vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Due to their regulations and protection are excluded from

the Employment Act Singapore – which the Act used to deal with labor conditions such as overtime, and provide legal option of appealing unfair dismissals, among others – and are required to live in the homes of their employers (Han, 2015). HOME reported that in 2014 and 2015 remain rose regarding the case of abuse experienced by the domestic workers. The cases recorded by home such as; physical abuse, sexual harassment, economic abuse, and verbal/psychological abuse. Most of the abuse that included as a degrade issue experienced by the Indonesian FDWs are calculated through this circle chart.

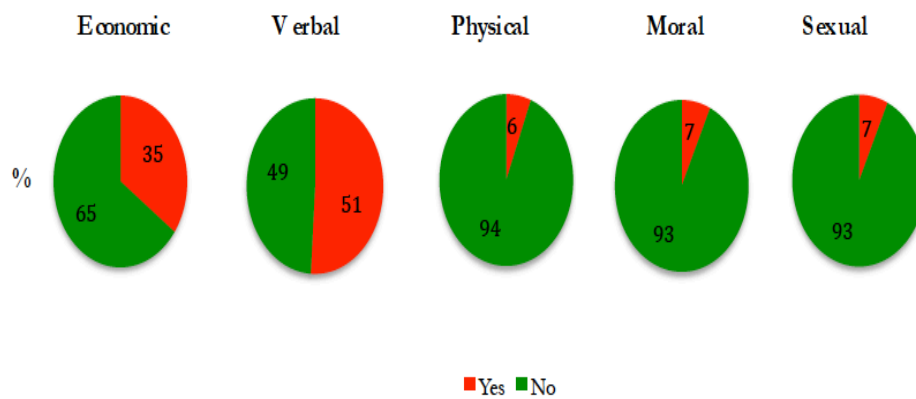


Figure 3.4  
Existence of abuse by employer or employer’s family (Wessels, 2015).

From the data above, 35% of the participants reported experiencing some form of economic abuse at least once which commonly reported is late salary payments. Generally, 51% of the respondents reported experiencing some kind of verbal abuse such as scolding, screaming, calling the workers names, threaten to send the workers back home, cursing, and some form or threatening the employers give to the workers. Aside from that, some form of physical abuse was found in some participants in which 6% of them experienced at least once the form of

physical abuse that mostly reported physical violence such as throwing objects or pushing or pulling, and shoving or poking or pinching. Indonesian FDWs also reported that they are being mistreated daily with different forms of physical abuse by their employers or employer's family and from the Filipino and Burmese nationalities' respondents there were no significant differences of the abuse.

In terms of moral abuse, in the recent years the Indonesian FDWs were not really faced this kind of abuse compared to the sexual abuse. There were some reports of the sexual abuse during their placement with the employers in which 7% of the participants experiencing improper sexual comments by their employer or employer's family.

In summarize, the Indonesian foreign domestic workers tend to be featured in cases where abuse occurred more than once as they tend to be less educated and not really competent in the English language, compared to others foreign domestic workers like Filipino or Sri Lanka (Yin K. F.). Thus, this language barrier and its skill-limitation to limits their ability to seek help if they faced some abused from their employer. Furthermore, the Indonesian foreign domestic workers also lack of support such as religious or self-help organization structured. Due to those fact, HOME served as the organization which plays a role as a general organization with its purpose to advocate the protection and provide its service to them.