

RESILIENCE IN CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS FACING SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION



give child domestic
workers a voice

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Children Unite is the **only** organisation working internationally with an exclusive focus on **child domestic labour**

We work **in partnership** with organisations to **protect child domestic workers** from exploitation and abuse and **promote their rights** worldwide

How we work

1. We run **capacity building** and **advocacy projects** in partnership with organisations working directly with child domestic workers that build the capacity of staff to run **effective interventions with child domestic workers** and give opportunities for **children to identify their needs** and **advocate for their rights**
2. We run a **consultancy and advice** service offering flexible, tailor-made advice to organisations that run interventions with children to **set-up or expand services** for child domestic workers

CHILD DOMESTIC WORK

17.2 million children involved in domestic work

Two thirds of these children are girls

Child labour numbers are **DOWN** but there has been **no decrease** in the number of children in domestic work

Position (live-in) and **working conditions** are a threat to health and/or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development

Societies see what child domestic workers do as **filial duty**, and important training for later life as **wives and mothers**

Live-in child workers are **isolated** and **vulnerable** to discrimination exploitation and abuse

Child domestic workers are **highly dependent on their employers** for their basic needs

Children are working in people's homes but are **not recognised as workers**

SHIFTS IN POLICY

Traditionally seen as **'child labour'** but has increasing relevance to **other discourses**

ILO-IPEC has helped transform perceptions of child domestic work as a benign cultural practice to an acknowledgement of the ways in which it **undermines children's rights**

2011 the ILO adopted the **Domestic Workers Convention** and introduced a **shift in thinking and policy** on child domestic work.

It acknowledges the situation of young workers who are **over the minimum age** for employment **but who are not yet 18**, and who require special protection and attention to continuing their education.

In 2013 World Day Against Child Labour Report focused on child domestic labour . It **reinforced what has become apparent programmatically**:

- child domestic work circumstances, while creating vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, **need not always be harmful**
- conditions of work can sometimes be improved to provide **a decent alternative for those of legal working age**

CHILD DOMESTIC WORK AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Risk of **sexual violence is greatest** among children who **live-in** with employers

Many girls in **commercial sexual exploitation** were **former** child domestic workers

Typical trajectory: girls are **sexually abused by a family** member, become **pregnant**, thrown out of the house and forced to fend for themselves **on the streets**

Domestic work typically becomes a **precursor to prostitution**, as children have few other available options

Oak Foundation identify child domestic workers as **particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation**

BAMBOO RESEARCH INITIATIVE

What are the resilience factors in child domestic workers' lives in relation to their experience of adverse situations especially sexual abuse, violence and exploitation?

Methods participatory: life story interviews and focus group discussions with 117 children

Typical experience:

- migrated from Kathmandu valley because of poverty and to get a better education
- live-in domestic worker
- attended school or literacy classes for a few hours each day

12 children were on a reintegration programme

18 of 46 children interviewed had experienced sexual abuse, 24 had experienced physical abuse

RESILIENCE

'agents of their own development who, even during times of great adversity, consciously act upon and influence the environments in which they live.'

(Boyden, 2003)

Characteristics of resilience used in the Bamboo Initiative:

- Resilience encompasses **growth** as well as **resistance** and coping in the face of adversity;
- It is a **long-term** process, or a life path;
- It **may need adversity** to develop. Hence the phrase 'in the face of adversity' rather than 'in spite of adversity';
- A resilient child **cope with adversity better** than he or she should;
- Resilience should be seen as a **process of interaction with the environment**, not an inherent quality in the child;
- It needs more than positive qualities or resources – **actively using the resources** is required;
- It may be seen in **individuals** or in the **group environment**; and
- It is never absolute, but **varies with circumstances**, with **time**, and from **person to person**.

FINDINGS: FIVE THEMES

Theme 1: Someone to confide in

- strong urge to share their problems with a 'confidante' to help them develop a strategy to protect themselves from further harm
- conscious of the need to confide in someone when it came to sexual abuse
- made careful assessment of potential confidantes and the consequences of sharing a problem that could have a serious negative impact on their lives

Theme 2: Dawn after Dusk: hope enables children to endure hardship

- endured hardship at their workplace in the hope of a better future
- demonstrated an ability to change their understanding of the difficulties they faced and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome
- took charge of their destiny by striving for their goals

Theme 3: Positive attitude and self confidence

- displayed positive attitudes to themselves, to domestic work, and to the particular difficulties they faced
- a positive outlook gave children confidence that they could influence or change their situations

FINDINGS: FIVE THEMES

Theme 4: Ability to assess the situation and develop a protection strategy

- had the ability to assess situations where they were at risk of abuse or harm and develop strategies to protect themselves
- demonstrated a keen ability to assess and navigate the power differentials between abuser and victim, domestic worker and employer

Theme 5: Participation in festivals enables reconciliation

- festivals can be a time of opportunity for child domestic workers and a time when they can make the best of their situation
- festivals present an opportunity for children to reconcile their difficulties with their employers
- festivals have the potential to be a pivotal moment in children's lives

MAHIMA

Mahima's story represents almost all the themes from our research and demonstrates the structural barriers that exist for all children coping with sexual abuse – the power imbalance between victim and perpetrator

Mahima's resilience:

Mahima demonstrates acute consciousness of these factors, but nevertheless shows courage in **her ability to negotiate them**. For example, she would rather face the wrath of her female employer than be abused by her male employer.

She patiently waits for the right moment to **confide in a trustworthy person** who will not stigmatize her

She demonstrates cognitive resilience – an **aptitude for assessment and analysis**

She tries numerous **avoidance tactics and protection strategies**, some of these fail and her resilience wanes but she **learns from her mistakes**

She **endures her hardships**, protecting her mother from the truth and at the same time **draws strength** from their close relationship

She has a **faith in God** and a belief in her **own abilities to overcome** her problems

She is **driven to better the situation** for herself and her family which motivates her to keep on going

When she **judges** that the **time is right** she takes action and **speaks out** and just one year on is able to look back on her story and **learn from it**