

*A Stranger in the House*  
*Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong*

Stephen W. K. Chiu  
and  
Asian Migrant Centre

香港亞太研究所



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**HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF ASIA-PACIFIC STUDIES**  
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
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HONG KONG

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Asian Migrant Centre is a monitoring, research, information, publishing, training, support and action centre dedicated to the promotion of the human rights and empowerment of migrant workers and their families in Asia.

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# **A Stranger in the House**

## **Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong**

### **Introduction**

A foreign domestic helper (FDH), also a foreign domestic worker (FDW), refers to a migrant/foreign worker hired to carry out paid domestic help services in Hong Kong. FDHs in Hong Kong are covered by a uniform, standard employment contract (the same for all migrant nationalities and for all genders). The Hong Kong government formally uses the term “FDH,” while social action groups prefer “FDW.” For convenience and to avoid confusion, this research will use the government terminology (FDH). Making use of a sample survey of over 2,500 FDHs and data from the 2001 Population Census, this paper seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What are the composition and profiles of FDHs in Hong Kong?
- What are their basic employment conditions?
- Is there discrimination towards FDHs in Hong Kong?

The more strategic goal is to establish a scientific and authoritative baseline reference on this issue, so that the results and recommendations may be used by the Hong Kong government, the respective consulates, and policy-makers in general, to inform their decisions and help them come up with ways to address the problem. The research also aims to help educate the Hong Kong public about this issue by propagating the results through the mass media.

This is an action research because it also aims to help migrants and their advocates deepen their understanding of the realities, working and living conditions, and discrimination faced by FDHs. The study will provide well-researched information that they can use for organizing, training/education, and lobbying to address the problems

encountered by migrants in Hong Kong. This is a participatory research because it was conceptualized, implemented, analysed, and reported with the direct involvement of the FDHs themselves.

This has focused on the gathering of primary data to generate baseline information about the FDHs' own experiences and perceptions on discrimination. Thus, descriptive social research was employed (i.e., an attempt is made to describe the actual situation but not to establish causal relations).

### ***Significance of the Study***

Aside from figures on the total FDH population in Hong Kong (including a breakdown by nationality), there is little baseline information available to the public and to policy-makers on the demographic profile of FDHs (e.g., age, gender, education, length of stay in Hong Kong, marital status, etc.), or their working conditions (e.g., wages, rest days, working hours, etc.) — much less on the abuses, violations, and discrimination that they experience. Most of the information available is anecdotal, based on individual cases reported in the media, as well as consisting of “guesstimates” made by migrant/advocacy groups.

The most recent baseline study on FDHs in Hong Kong was conducted by the Indian Domestic Workers Association (IDWA), through the research support of Asian Migrant Centre (AMC) and funding assistance from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The research focused on the working conditions of Indian FDHs in the territory (Keezhangatte and Enos, 2000).

Therefore, this is a much-needed study that will contribute to providing a comprehensive and scientific baseline reference on the situation of the entire FDH population in Hong Kong and on their experiences with discrimination. This is the only study that has been conducted on this topic in at least the past 10 years.

As previously mentioned, this research is important to help educate the Hong Kong public about FDHs as a social group, the discrimination that they face, and their working and living conditions in the territory. FDHs have been called the “semi-invisible community” here, since the public usually gets nothing more than

stereotypical images of them on television or in newspapers. It is also important to help the Hong Kong government, consulates, and policy-makers formulate appropriate actions to combat discrimination, and to address the violations and problems experienced by the migrants. The results will help migrants/advocates deepen their understanding of the problem, and improve the effectiveness of their education/training, organizing and advocacy work.

### ***Methodology***

This is a social research that employed a systematic sampling strategy. The process used the participatory action research (PAR) approach, which means that migrant workers themselves were involved in the key stages of the process, especially in the conceptualization, implementation, analysis, and dissemination/use of the results. The outcome of the research will be used by migrant groups and advocates for their work in education, organization, and advocacy. Policy recommendations will be formulated and submitted to relevant authorities (the Hong Kong government and the respective consulates) to help inform/guide policy-making on FDHs. AMC implemented and supervised the sample survey, insuring the reliability and integrity of the process and the results. Stephen Chiu was involved as the adviser for the design and implementation of the fieldwork and was responsible for the data processing and analysis for this paper. He also conducted an additional statistical analysis of the 2001 Population Census in order to triangulate the information gathered from the survey. In particular, the characteristics of the employers and employing families have been analysed based on Census data because of data on this aspect in the survey was difficult to obtain.

To start the process, AMC identified four grassroots FDH organizations that were willing to become partners in this study:

1. Asian Domestic Workers Union (ADWU);
2. Forum of Filipino Reintegration and Savings Groups (FFRSG);
3. Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU); and
4. Thai Women Association.



AMC discussed the research concept, design, and timetable with these groups. Eight field survey teams (FRTs) including members of the partner FDH organizations were organized. AMC held several training seminars for the FRTs on the research design, concept of social research, PAR, scientific random sampling, and the administration of the survey questionnaires.

A draft questionnaire was formulated in English in consultation with the partner organizations. This was then pre-tested, refined, and translated into Indonesian and Thai.

**Sampling Strategy**

According to the Immigration Department (Census and Statistics Department, 2003:32), there were about 216,790 FDHs working in Hong Kong by the end of 2000. Therefore, even if the study focused only on the top three FDH nationalities, they constitute more than 98% of the total FDH population (Table 1).

A uniform sample size of 3% of the total Filipino, Indonesian, and Thai FDH population was originally targeted. This meant a combined sample size of 6,393 for the three nationalities. Later this was determined to be an unrealistically large sample considering the extremely short time available for conducting field surveys (altogether only about 12 Sundays/holidays) and the limited budget. Usually, in social science research, a sample size of 2,500 randomly generated respondents is enough for a 95% confidence level; this translates to a sampling error of 2%. Going higher than this does not

**Table 1** Nationality of FDHs in Hong Kong, 2000

Nationality	Number	Total (%)
Filipino	151485	69.88
Indonesian	55174	25.45
Thai	6451	2.98
Others (Sri Lankan, Indian, Nepalese, etc.)	3680	1.70
Total	216790	100.01

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2003:32).

significantly reduce the sampling error (we need to get a sample of 10,000 in order to achieve a 1% sampling error) (de Vaus, 1986:63). Therefore, we decided to set the sample size at 2,500 (1.2% of the FDH population).

Considering the widely disproportionate distribution of the three FDH populations (the Filipino-Indonesian-Thai ratio is 24:9:1), it was decided to set the sample at 1% of the population, but allow for the over-sampling of Indonesians and Thais. The over-sampling of the Thai and Indonesian populations was necessary to generate an adequate number of respondents in relation to the Filipino sample. If necessary, this over-sampling can later be compensated for (e.g., by assigning weights) during the statistical analysis. Table 2 gives the final sampling plan, and the actual number of valid responses that was finally gathered.<sup>1</sup>

The survey methodology was that of systematic cluster sampling. All of the clusters (locations) in Hong Kong where the three FDH nationalities converged on Sundays and holidays were identified, mapped out, and their sizes were estimated. The sample sizes were then calculated based on the above proportions.

Systematic sampling meant interviewing every *k*th person ( $k=1/\%$  sample size) in each cluster. This translated to every 100th FDHs for the Filipinos, every 67th for the Indonesians, and every 50th for the Thais. All clusters with at least these sizes (respectively for the three nationalities) were included in the survey. This sampling strategy certainly is not perfect, for we cannot adhere strictly to a

**Table 2** Sampling Plan and Actual Sample

Nationality	Population	Sampling plan		Actual sample gathered		
		% of FDH population	Target size	Number	Total (%)	Weighted total (%)
Filipino	151485	1.0	1515	1582	61.85	71.93
Indonesian	55174	1.5	828	826	32.29	25.04
Thai	6451	2.0	129	150	5.86	3.03
Total	213110	—	2472	2558	100.00	100.00

community-wide random sampling frame. Yet this is justified on the ground that a perfect random sampling frame is practically impossible in Hong Kong; the alternative would be to conduct a random household survey to first identify households hiring FDHs, and then obtain the consent of both the FDHs and the employers to complete the interview. Of course this is not feasible in the local context (it would be difficult to get the consent of employers because the FDH is always working), not to speak of the exorbitant cost that it would entail. Our cluster sampling strategy targeted all major locations where FDHs gathered during their holidays. Within these locations we tried our best to select a random sample *within* the delimited clusters. In our subsequent analysis, we will also attempt to make inferences about the underlying population, but certainly such inferences have to be interpreted with caution. This is an imperfect strategy, but given the constraints and the relatively large sample size, our sample could still offer a reasonably representative picture of the underlying population.<sup>2</sup>

The following clusters (locations) were surveyed:

1. Filipino FDHs:
  - a. Hong Kong Island: Central District (including St. Joseph's/ St. John's Cathedral, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation headquarters, Statue Square, Chater Garden/Road, General Post Office, World-wide House and premises, overpasses in these areas, City Hall and premises, Alexandra House, Star Ferry (Hong Kong side)), North Point, Mid-levels, Wanchai, Kennedy Town (Bayanihan Kennedy Town Centre), the Peak, and Admiralty.
  - b. Kowloon: Star Ferry (Tsim Sha Tsui side), Kowloon Park, Mongkok (ISS Centre), Whampoa Garden, Festival Walk, Lok Fu, Mei Foo, and Kwun Tong.
  - c. New Territories: Tsing Yi, Tuen Mun, Ma On Shan, Sheung Shui, Yuen Long, Tai Wai, and Shatin.
  - d. Outlying Islands and public beaches: Discovery Bay, Lantau, and various public beaches.
2. Indonesian FDHs: Star Ferry (Tsim Sha Tsui side), Victoria Park, North Point, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, and Kowloon Park.

3. Thai FDHs: Kowloon City, Central District, Tsim Sha Tsui, Wanchai, Tai Koo, and Yuen Long.

The field surveys were conducted every Sunday and every holiday during the period from September to December 2000. The eight FRTs went to their respective areas all over Hong Kong to conduct the interviews based on the sampling plan. As shown in Table 2, the final number of valid samples taken was 2,558. The original survey covered both males and females, but it turned out that only 24 male FDHs were interviewed.

### **Coding, Encoding and Processing of Results**

Based on the questionnaire, AMC made a coding guide and coding sheets for all FRTs. The FRTs then coded and encoded (using a computer) the completed questionnaires. The AMC staff supervised the coding/encoding process and ensured the reliability and accuracy of the encoded data.<sup>3</sup> In 2002, with additional funding from the Chinese University, a second wave of data checking and recoding was conducted.

AMC drafted the first research report incorporating the input from the FRTs. The preliminary report was released and presented to the media in 2001. It was also submitted to the FDH organizations, migrant support groups, the Hong Kong government (the EOC and Home Affairs Bureau), consulates, and other relevant groups. The current report was written by Stephen Chiu based on the first report after further data cleaning and a re-analysis of the dataset.

## **Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong: A Statistical Profile**

### ***Labour Migration and FDHs in Hong Kong***

There are today an estimated 15 million Asian migrants worldwide; 10 million of these are working in various countries in Asia (especially the Middle East, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore), Australia, New Zealand, and countries in the Pacific (AMC, 1999). This is twice the population of Hong Kong. Asian

labour migration, therefore, has become a major phenomenon in a globalizing world.

Hong Kong, one of the most cosmopolitan and intensely competitive cities in Asia and the world, is also one of the top migrant-importing countries in Asia. In proportion to its population, Hong Kong has a sizeable foreign population. According to the 2001 Population Census, there were 439,924 foreign-born people in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:41), constituting at least 6.6% of the total population. Of this number, 181,315 (41.2% of the foreign population) are FDHs coming mostly from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand (unpublished data of 2001 Population Census).<sup>4</sup>

This situation is a result, on the one hand, of Hong Kong's high demand for cheaper overseas labour, especially in the domestic helper, construction and services sectors. On the other hand, the territory's demand for foreign labour is more than matched by the massive supply of migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and other migrant-exporting countries in Asia.

Hong Kong is an attractive destination for migrants because of its comparatively higher wages for migrants, labour policies that are more protective of migrants than most migrant-receiving countries, more liberal social and political environment, and a high number of migrant-support groups.

However, due to its small land area and burgeoning population (estimated at 6.71 million in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:9), making it among the most densely populated cities in the world), the Hong Kong government is very particular about its population, workforce, and its ability sustain its high standard of living and competitive edge in the region. Therefore, it strictly regulates the importation of migrant labour, especially from the mainland. Only a selected number of industries can in fact import labour, and under strict quotas. While the importation of FDHs is more open (i.e., there is no ceiling or quota), Hong Kong imposes stringent requirements and "conditions of stay" for the FDHs. Local labour groups officially oppose the importation of foreign workers.<sup>5</sup>

The government's well-oiled machinery (including the

Immigration Department, Labour Department, police, etc.) is able to effectively monitor the migrant (especially the FDH) population; therefore, the percentage of undocumented migrants in Hong Kong is relatively small.

The first migrants who came to Hong Kong (then still a British colony) in search of a better life were from mainland China. However, since the 1970s, the population of non-Chinese migrant workers has steadily grown. Today, FDHs — the vast majority of migrant workers in the territory — play a crucial role in the daily life of Hong Kong. There are also smaller numbers of migrants who work in the construction, entertainment, service, and manufacturing industries. Labour migration has played an important role in making Hong Kong the thriving city and trade centre it is today. The AMC estimates that FDHs contribute more than HK\$13.7 billion annually to the Hong Kong economy (almost 1% of GNP in 2003) (AMC, 2004).

FDHs began entering Hong Kong in limited numbers during the early 1970s, a time when the territory's economy was just beginning to develop. As the Hong Kong economy began to boom in the mid-1970s, excess demand for labour resulted in the employment even of seniors and a higher level of participation of women in the labour force. To free more locals to enter the workforce, especially those traditionally engaged in housework, the Hong Kong government liberalized the importation of FDHs in the early 1980s. By 1981, there were at least 11,179 FDHs legally registered in the territory; and by 1988 there were 45,154, 92.4% of whom were Filipinos (Hong Kong Government, 1982:60, 1989:101).

Meanwhile, more migrants from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, south Asia, etc. looked for employment abroad, including in Hong Kong. For women, this meant mostly jobs in the domestic help, manufacturing, entertainment, or plantation sectors. In Hong Kong, the population of FDHs steadily increased each year. By 1992, there were 101,182 FDHs (88% Filipinos, 7% Thais, 5% all others). In 1997, the Indonesians overtook the Thais as the second-biggest FDH group; the total number of FDHs had also climbed to 170,971 (81% Filipinos, 14% Indonesian, 3% Thai, 2% all others). By the end

of 2000, the population of FDHs in Hong Kong had reached 216,790 (70% Filipinos, 25% Indonesian, 3% Thai, 2% all others) (Table 3).

### ***General Profile of FDHs in Hong Kong***

Table 4 and Table 5 describe the overall characteristics of this FDH sample. Using inferential statistics, these sample statistics can be used to make generalizations about the FDH population as a whole (95% confidence level). Although the vast majority of the FDHs in Hong Kong are female, there are also a small number of men who work as chauffeurs and gardeners. In our sample, we also have 24 male FDHs or about .95% of the sample.

Most of the FDHs in Hong Kong is between 26 and 30 years old. The mean age of all FDHs is 31.6 years, and the greatest number of FDHs are 30 years old (mode).<sup>6</sup> This is a relatively young labour force, with more than half the population below the age of 30 (Table 4).

The majority (50.5%) of FDHs in Hong Kong have a post-secondary education. It is noteworthy that 24.9% of all FDHs even have university or post-graduate degrees. This supports the conventional assumption that the FDH community in Hong Kong is a relatively educated group. Filipinos have the highest level of education, with close to 70% (69%) claiming to have some post-secondary education. Conversely, most Indonesians (97.4%) and Thais (93.3%) received a secondary education or less (Table 4).

**Table 3** Number of FDHs in Hong Kong, 1992-2002

Nationality	1992	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Filipino	89140	138085	140357	143206	151485	155445	148389
Indonesian	3541	24706	31762	41397	55174	68880	78165
Thai	6718	5142	5335	5755	6451	6996	6669
Others	1783	3038	3150	3342	3680	3953	3881
Total	101182	170971	180604	193700	216790	235274	237104

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2003:32).

**Table 4** Age, Education, and Marital Status of FDHs (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Age					
18-20	.26	10.89	.00	3.62	2.87
21-25	13.96	41.39	12.75	22.61	20.68
26-30	27.34	28.61	21.48	27.39	27.47
31-35	24.63	13.42	26.85	21.20	21.94
36-40	16.74	4.56	24.16	13.31	13.97
41-45	9.57	.51	8.72	6.64	7.31
46-50	5.24	.51	4.03	3.66	4.03
51-55	1.55	.00	2.01	1.09	1.18
56-60	.71	.13	.00	.48	.55
(N)	(1547)	(790)	(149)	(2486)	—
Highest level of education					
Primary/Elementary	1.59	22.22	52.00	11.22	8.29
Secondary/High school	29.24	74.85	41.33	44.66	41.02
University (undergraduate)	27.96	1.95	.67	17.96	20.62
University graduate	33.25	.12	2.67	20.76	24.03
Post-graduate	1.15	.24	.00	.79	.89
Vocational/Technical	6.62	.24	3.33	4.37	4.93
Others	.19	.37	.00	.24	.23
(N)	(1570)	(819)	(150)	(2539)	—
Marital status					
Single	49.90	53.17	50.67	51.00	50.74
Married	41.28	38.54	28.67	39.65	40.21
Separated/Divorced	3.68	3.54	12.00	4.12	3.90
Widowed	3.68	4.51	8.67	4.24	4.04
Others	1.46	.24	.00	.98	1.11
(N)	(1577)	(820)	(150)	(2547)	—

Half (50.7%) of the FDH are single/never married. If all of those who have ever married (i.e., are currently married, divorced, separated, or widowed) are combined, there is almost a 50-50 split with the single FDH. There is no significant difference across



nationalities on this variable, probably reflecting the young age of the FDH population and the higher propensity for single girls to seek overseas employment (Table 4).

Most FDHs assert that they work overseas in order to help their families. Since half of all FDHs are actually not married, the conventional assumption is correct that many female FDHs have taken on the responsibility of supporting dependents back in their home countries — not necessarily their own children, but their parents, relatives, and siblings. Traditionally, families in poorer countries “invested” in male children by sending them to school at the expense of girls, to later work and provide for the family. The high percentage of young (below the age of 30), single, female FDHs in Hong Kong seems to indicate that families in poorer countries could now be investing in their young daughters to provide for their needs. Viewed in a broader context, however, this might also indicate that traditional gender role expectations are being reinforced, whereby women, in the end, are expected to sacrifice themselves to support their families (parents, siblings, relatives).

The findings also reveal that 50% of all FDHs (i.e., those who have at least been married) have become the main breadwinners in their families. This has deep implications for the possible/potential changes in gender/family roles that the FDHs may be bringing about in their families back home.

Most of the FDHs have worked for two years in Hong Kong (Table 5). Half of all FDHs (median) have been here for three years. On average (mean), however, the stay of an FDH in Hong Kong is for four years. It is significant to note that 16.3% of the total FDH population (i.e., about 35,000) have worked for seven or more years in Hong Kong. This could have entitled them for residency, had they been non-FDH migrants in the territory. On the whole, Filipinos stayed in Hong Kong for the longest period, 59 months on average. Indonesians averaged only 27 months, and Thais, 52 months.

Noting that as many as 99% of these migrants are women — mothers, daughters, sisters, this means that those who have families/children back home have been separated from their families for an average of four years. This could be one of the reasons why almost

**Table 5** Length of Stay and Years with Current Employer of an FDH in Hong Kong (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
No. of months in Hong Kong					
<12	14.02	28.99	23.49	19.42	18.06
13-24	14.85	32.89	10.74	20.44	19.25
25-36	15.93	17.54	8.72	16.03	16.12
37-48	12.30	10.48	12.08	11.70	11.84
49-60	6.88	4.63	8.72	6.26	6.37
61-72	8.16	3.29	7.38	6.54	6.91
73-84	6.31	1.22	10.07	4.88	5.15
85-96	5.74	.37	6.04	4.02	4.40
97-108	2.55	.37	6.04	2.05	2.11
109-120	3.70	.24	3.36	2.56	2.82
>120	9.56	.00	3.36	6.10	6.97
(N)	(1569)	(821)	(149)	(2539)	—
No. of months with current employer					
<12	25.82	42.36	43.15	32.13	30.44
13-24	26.07	37.76	17.12	29.30	28.71
25-36	15.76	11.55	11.64	14.17	14.59
37-48	11.53	5.34	6.85	9.28	9.85
49-60	4.68	1.12	13.01	4.02	4.04
61-72	5.96	1.49	2.74	4.34	4.75
73-84	2.50	.25	2.05	1.75	1.93
85-96	2.37	.00	1.37	1.55	1.75
97-108	1.22	.12	.68	.84	.93
109-120	1.86	.00	.68	1.19	1.36
>120	2.24	.00	.68	1.43	1.64
(N)	(1561)	(805)	(146)	(2512)	—

half of the families of overseas workers suffer from family problems (infidelity/separation of parents, juvenile delinquency, unwanted pregnancies of children, children dropping out of school, taking drugs, etc.). This is a serious consequence of overseas work that makes the

stay in Hong Kong painful of those FDHs who are mothers. It is usual for these mothers to state that, for them, the most difficult aspect of working in their employers' homes is caring for their children, since they worry about who will take care of their own for all the years that they are in Hong Kong. The New Conditions of Stay (NCS) prohibits FDHs from gaining residency in Hong Kong and, thus, from applying for their families to join them in Hong Kong as dependents.

For single/never married FDHs, the length of their stay in Hong Kong can lead to their failure to marry. A further analysis of the data indicates that the average (mean) age of single/never married FDHs is 28 years old, and that they have stayed in Hong Kong for four years. This means that they first came when they were 24 years old.

An FDH contract is for a two-year period. Although FDHs have stayed, on average, four years in Hong Kong, they have been with their current employer for only 32 months. This means that they have changed employers at least once. The median and modal data (two years) indicate that most FDHs remain with an employer for only one contract period, and then seek other employers. Indeed, the great majority (59.2%) have stayed with their current employers only two years or less (Table 5). Again, Filipinos have stayed with their current employers for the longest period, averaging at three years, and Thais stayed with the same employer for 28 months on average. Indonesians have been with their employers for only 19.5 months.

This can be the subject of further study, but on the surface, this rapid turnover seems to indicate that there is a low level of satisfaction with employers (and so the FDH only waits to complete the two-year contract before finding another employer) or vice versa. Wages could not be the issue here, since they would be the same, or even lower, if the FDH moves to a new employer. The FDH would also have to pay the agency fee again, or risk being sent back home if she fails to find a new employer. Why the FDH would risk this and find a new employer after the first contract means that something needs to be done about FDH-employer relations at the first contract period. Or it could mean employers have high expectations of FDHs and are often dissatisfied with their helpers. From a human rights and administrative point of view, it would be to the advantage of the FDH, employer, and the

Hong Kong government if the FDH stayed longer with the employer. How to improve FDH-employer relationships should therefore be a subject of further inquiry.

### ***Profile of Employers***

While the survey also asked FDHs about their employers, it turned out, perhaps not unexpectedly, that most FDHs do not know a lot about their employers. The result is a great many missing answers for the questions in this section, for example, on the age and occupation of the employers. To remedy this problem, we conducted an additional analysis of the 2001 Population Census and will report the characteristics of the households with an FDH. While the Census does not cover non-live-in FDHs, it should give us more accurate information on the profiles of the employers. Non-live-in FDHs accounted for only 1% of all FDHs according to the 2001 Census. We are going to analyse the socio-demographic characteristics of the household head. In households with married couples, the husband of the couple with the highest income is taken to be the household head; while in other types of households, the household head is the person with the highest income.

Table 6 shows that most of the employers (defined as the head of the household employing FDHs) are in the 35-44 age group, with over half (51.9%) of all employers in this range. They are also mostly people with a higher level of education, with 44.1% having received a tertiary education and 36.2% an upper secondary education. Many of them are managers and administrators (43.3%), but some are also professionals (14.4%) and associate professionals (18.1%), suggesting that the employers of FDHs are mostly from middle-class households.

More interestingly, the Census data also shows that most of the households employing FDHs are those with at least four persons, with the highest percentage being those with five persons (35%). Still, there is a significant minority of small families of one to two members (8.3%) who prefer to enjoy the comfort of being served by an FDH. The presence of FDHs also increased sharply for households with \$25,000 or more, and most of the FDHs are actually being hired

**Table 6** Age, Education, and Occupation of Household Heads in Hong Kong

	FDH household heads			All households
	% within FDH household heads	% within all household sub-groups	N	
Age				
15-24	.36	1.23	583	47377
25-34	11.48	6.01	18452	307250
35-44	51.89	13.57	83407	614480
45-54	21.81	7.15	35060	490687
55-64	5.65	3.56	9077	254664
≥65	8.81	4.23	14163	335212
Total	100.00	7.84	160742	2049670
Education				
No schooling/ Kindergarten	1.84	2.15	2955	137590
Primary	7.00	2.26	11254	496984
Lower secondary	10.80	3.98	17357	436249
Upper secondary	36.23	9.64	58243	603961
Tertiary	44.13	18.92	70933	374886
Total	100.00	7.84	160742	2049670
Occupation				
Managers and administrators	43.25	25.09	61233	244058
Professionals	14.37	20.65	20348	98521
Associate professionals	18.11	11.79	25639	217410
Clerks	4.48	4.83	6345	131405
Service workers and shop sales workers	8.35	5.78	11820	204398
Craft and related workers	4.58	3.12	6483	207716
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	4.20	3.53	5944	168423
Elementary occupations	2.56	1.72	3623	211123
Others	.09	2.53	131	5170
Total	100.00	9.51	141566	1488224

Source: 2001 Population Census public-use dataset.

by relatively well-off households (38.3%) earning \$60,000 or more (Table 7).

Classifying the households employing FDHs by their composition also reveals that most of them (85.4%) are households with married couples. Some 62.9% of the households also contain a working wife, suggesting that FDHs are mainly being hired to substitute for the wife's domestic labour (Table 8). Table 8 also shows a further analysis of the composition of the households by special needs. The data show that the majority (68.3%) are households with at least one child of aged below 15 or a full-time student of 22 years old or younger. Another 11.7% of them are households with elderly persons of 65 years old or above, while 10.6% have both a child and an elderly person. Only 9.4% are without a child or an elderly person. Households that hire FDHs are obviously overwhelmingly those with dependent members.

## **Employment Conditions of FDHs in Hong Kong**

### ***The Legal and Regulatory Framework***

The wages of migrants (including FDHs) in Hong Kong are comparable to, or better than, those of other Asian countries (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia). The territory strictly requires, and is able to reasonably enforce, standard employment contracts for migrant workers. Therefore, FDHs and migrants enjoy relative security/certainty with regard to their working conditions in Hong Kong.

All legal FDHs in Hong Kong are protected by a standard employment contract that is the same for all FDHs, regardless of nationality or gender (this contract does not apply to local domestic helpers). The contract spells out the minimum working conditions and the responsibilities of the employer. The FDHs also have a legal minimum wage set by the government, which is unique in the territory. This is a form of protection in recognition of the specific vulnerability of FDHs.

FDHs in Hong Kong are covered by the Employment Ordinance, and thus enjoy the same legal rights as local workers, including

**Table 7** Size and Monthly Income of Households Employing FDHs in Hong Kong

	FDH households		N	All households
	% within FDH households	% within all household sub-groups		
Household size				
1	3.10	1.54	4987	323500
2	5.22	1.87	8396	448205
3	7.62	2.83	12256	433633
4	30.17	10.09	48498	480599
5	34.96	22.99	56202	244487
≥6	18.91	25.50	30403	119246
Total	100.00	7.84	160742	2049670
Household income (HK\$)				
<4000	3.38	3.28	5430	165698
4000-9999	2.84	1.39	4568	328144
10000-14999	3.51	1.77	5642	318617
15000-19999	4.26	2.60	6841	262765
20000-24999	6.89	4.90	11069	225753
25000-39999	20.88	8.87	33562	378399
40000-59999	19.91	16.47	32005	194341
≥60000	38.34	35.02	61625	175953
Total	100.00	7.84	160742	2049670

Source: 2001 Population Census public-use dataset.

the right to unionize, organize, demonstrate, engage in religious/cultural activities, and so forth. Hong Kong's more institutionalized and developed legal system, service mechanisms, and effective bureaucracy provide well-defined channels to redress the grievances of FDHs. There are also many non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/migrant-support groups that provide services and assistance to FDHs.

The Employment Ordinance defines not only the benefits/entitlements of workers (both local and FDHs); it likewise provides

**Table 8** Types and Composition of Households Employing FDHs in Hong Kong

	FDH households		All households
	% within FDH households	% within all household sub-groups	
Household types			
Single head without other adults	8.42	3.46	13534 391081
Single head with other adults	6.23	3.72	10007 269243
Couple without other adults but with economically active wife	49.77	19.03	80006 420310
Couple with neither other adults nor with economically active wife	15.11	6.18	24293 393190
Couple with other adults and with economically active wife	13.15	8.57	21133 246465
Couple with other adults and with non-economically active wife	7.32	3.57	11769 329381
Total	100.00	7.84	160742 2049670
Household composition			
With neither children nor elderly persons	9.44	2.10	15176 722019
With children but without elderly persons	68.32	14.23	109821 771714
Without children but with elderly persons	11.68	4.41	18782 425767
With both children and elderly persons	10.55	13.03	16963 130170
Total	100.00	7.84	160742 2049670

Note: Children are those who aged below 15 or full-time students of 22 years old or younger and elderly persons are those who are 65 years old or older.

Source: 2001 Population Census public-use dataset.



maternity protection and trade union protection for workers/FDHs. It is illegal for employers to terminate employees (including FDHs) due to pregnancy, or to dismiss them due to involvement to union activities. These offenses carry a HK\$100,000 penalty.

Therefore, FDHs in Hong Kong are well organized compared to most receiving countries in Asia. The first FDH trade union in Hong Kong, the ADWU, was established in 1989. Filipino and Indonesian FDHs now have their respective trade unions, in addition to several other grassroots societies/associations. A list of registered trade unions working on issues relating to migrant workers (including FDHs) can be found in Table 9.

But despite such protection and support, many FDHs experience contract violations and abuses — as reported by migrants, advocates, and the media. Prior to this research, there were no baseline statistics as to the extent of these violations/abuses. AMC estimates that the more than 20 migrant counselling centres in Hong Kong handle at least 1,500 cases a year. The Labour Relations Division of the Labour

**Table 9** List of Registered Trade Unions Working on Migrant Worker Issues

Name of trade union	Year of registration	Declared membership by the end of 2003
Asian Domestic Workers Union	1989	30
Bontoc (Filipino) Domestic Workers Union, Hong Kong	1990	26
Philippines Domestic Workers Union	1994	26
Filipino Migrant Workers' Union	1998	65
Indonesian Migrant Workers Union	1999	359
Filipino Domestic Helpers General Union, Hong Kong	2003	26
Overseas Nepali Workers Union Hong Kong	2003	7

Source: Labour Department (2004:Table 5).

Department handled over 2,000 claims from FDHs each year (Table 10). These cases account for only 1% of the total number of over 200,000 FDHs in Hong Kong, suggesting that the large majority of the employment relationships are amicable. These cases, however, accounted for some 7.9% of the total number of claims handled by the department (FDHs in turn accounted for about 5.3% of the total labour force in 2001; Census and Statistics Department, 2002:128, unpublished data of 2001 Population Census) and indicates its central role in regulating and mediating disputes between FDHs and their employers. Most of these cases are resolved through the conciliation of the Labour Department, while others are transferred to the Labour Tribunal and the Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board for adjudication.

Other areas of concern regarding FDHs are the overcharging of commission by employment agencies and underpayment of salaries. Under the Employment Ordinance and Employment Agency Regulations, the operator of an employment agency is not allowed to charge a job-seeker a commission of more than 10% of his/her first month's salary or any other fees, such as processing fees or registration fees. The maximum penalty is \$50,000 for each offence. In 2000 and 2001, for example, the operators of two employment agencies were convicted of overcharging FDHs and were fined \$30,000 each. In the same period, the Labour Department revoked the licenses of two employment agencies for overcharging and aiding and abetting the

**Table 10** Number of FDH Cases Handled by the Labour Department, 1997-2001

Year	Number of FDH-related claims	Total number of claims
1997	1972	20404
1998	2552	30204
1999	2280	31890
2000	2188	28620
2001	2461	31152

Source: Unpublished information supplied by the Labour Department.

breach of “conditions of stay” of FDHs, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Despite this regulation and vigorous enforcement, it is difficult for the Hong Kong authorities to control overcharging if it occurs outside of Hong Kong. Hence, they may not be able to come to the FDH’s assistance if her agency at home overcharges her.

In addition, there are occasional press reports about the underpayment of FDH salaries. Newspapers have reported that Indonesian FDHs are particularly vulnerable to such abuses. Agencies and employers sometimes conspire to enter into false contracts with the FDH by paying them less than the contracted salaries. Sometimes as little as half of the contracted salaries are actually paid. The government, for its part, has made public its concern over such cases and issued statements urging underpaid FDH to report their cases. It has also maintained that if an FDH was dismissed as a result of reporting the above offences and the case was verified to be true after investigation, the Immigration Department would exercise discretion and consider the FDH’s application for a change of employment in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2000).

Aside from contract violations, the media each year also reports several cases of terminations/dismissals, problems of underpayment, inhuman treatment, and exorbitant agency fees; some also report cases of physical and sexual abuse, including rape. One of the basic objectives of this research is to establish baseline reference data on the prevalence of these problems and abuses. More broadly, migrants have claimed over the years, that they are also constant victims of discrimination in Hong Kong. Aside from the abuses, contract violations and discrimination by the public, the FDH groups say that employers as well as the government have been acting in ways that specifically target, and hence discriminate, against them.

One of the long-standing criticisms by FDHs and advocacy groups is the NCS policy, adopted by the government in 1987. The NCS imposes particular restrictions on the “conditions of stay” of FDHs in Hong Kong, including restrictions on FDHs shifting to other employers without the approval of the Immigration Department, and an outright prohibition on FDHs shifting to other (non-domestic

helper) job categories. It also disqualifies FDHs from gaining the right of residency even if they have continuously worked in Hong Kong for over seven years. Another aspect of the NCS is the “two-week rule,” which stipulates that an FDH who is terminated has only two weeks, or until the expiration of her visa (whichever is earlier), to legally stay in Hong Kong.

Migrant groups or advocates contend that this policy discriminates against FDHs since similar restrictions are not imposed on expatriates or foreigners in the professional fields. For years, migrants and advocates have campaigned and lobbied for the scrapping of the NCS (e.g., the AMC). The employers’ association has lobbied for stronger restrictions and a tougher NCS. The Hong Kong government has continuously affirmed that the policy is necessary and appropriate given Hong Kong’s circumstances (AMC, 2000).

In addition to the NCS, migrants and advocates also cite certain proposals by employers and/or the government directed towards reducing the entitlements of FDH — e.g., several wage freezes since 1996, wage reduction in 1999, the proposal in 2000 to “relax” maternity protection for domestic helpers, and the proposal that year to impose a “service tax” for use by FDHs of public facilities.<sup>8</sup> Mass demonstrations by FDHs in 1998-2000 helped reduce the proposed wage cut from 35% to only 5%, and resulted in the shelving of the proposals to effectively remove maternity protection and impose a service tax on them (AMC, 1999). The Nepalese and Indian communities, the majority of whom are Hong Kong residents (but which also include FDHs), have also complained about the discrimination they experience in terms of a lack of access to education for their children, housing, and other social services. The Nepalese have criticized Immigration officials in 1998 for singling them out at airport immigration controls for urine and body strip-searches, on the suspicion that they are trafficking drugs.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, some law-makers have tabled anti-racism proposals in the Legislative Council (LegCo). In 1996, legislator Elizabeth Wong introduced a bill outlawing racial discrimination. This was followed by another attempt by another legislator, Christine Loh, to adopt an anti-racial discrimination law. Both attempts were

defeated at LegCo. Many of the legislators, echoing the government's position, believed that such proposals were not necessary, because it is better to confront racism through education than through legislation (Vines, 2001).

The "last" Hong Kong government (before the handover to China) report to the United Nations (UN) about the fulfillment of its commitments to combat racial discrimination under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination detailed the government's efforts at addressing racial discrimination in Hong Kong. Among other moves, the government has set up a funding scheme aimed at supporting efforts by groups in the territory to combat racial/gender discrimination in Hong Kong. It has also launched publicity campaigns (e.g., through posters all over Hong Kong) highlighting equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination especially towards people of other races/colours.

Can it be therefore said that the government is doing enough to address the abuses, violations, and discrimination towards FDHs in Hong Kong? Are people in Hong Kong becoming more aware of the problems, and actively working towards their elimination?

Some relevant government agencies have made pronouncements that "racial discrimination is not a big problem here" and that "Hong Kong, one of the world's most compact communities, is a tolerant and cosmopolitan society where persons of every race and color and nationality live together in a remarkable degree of harmony" (Vines, 2001).

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyse the broader and policy-level aspects of racial/gender discrimination in Hong Kong. Let us therefore take the above statement as a given and the starting point of our examination of the issue of racial/gender discrimination towards FDHs in Hong Kong.

The FDH community, comprising 2.7% of the Hong Kong population in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:18, unpublished data of 2001 Population Census), is perhaps among the most significant minority communities in Hong Kong. It is also an excellent test group to use to more deeply examine the reality of racial/gender discrimination in Hong Kong. Their racial, gender, and

class composition puts them at the lower levels of minority groups in Hong Kong. Therefore, their situation — especially the extent and patterns of discrimination against them — is a very good indicator of the degree and patterns of discrimination that exist in Hong Kong. How well Hong Kong promotes, or refuses/neglects to promote, equal opportunities, a harmonious existence, and non-discrimination towards FDHs will, at the end of the day, determine whether it has really done enough to combat racial/gender discrimination.

This research will examine baseline information about the extent of the abuses and discrimination that FDHs experience in Hong Kong — from the FDHs' point of view. It will try to statistically analyse whether there is a significant association, even correlation between the abuses and discrimination experienced by FDHs and their gender or race.

Such knowledge would be essential in helping all of the parties concerned — the FDHs themselves, the Hong Kong government, the labour-exporting countries, and social advocates — to first, recognize/confront the problem, and then formulate appropriate responses/strategies to combat them.

This study is by no means comprehensive and complete. It is just one of the first steps towards addressing the issue of discrimination in Hong Kong. It is hoped that the results of this study will help motivate further studies and lead to policy reforms and effective strategies in eliminating discrimination, especially towards FDHs in Hong Kong.

### ***Employment Conditions of FDHs***

We began the examination of the employment conditions of FDHs by analysing certain areas relating to contract violations and discrimination over which complaints are often heard: wages, agency fees, and holidays. Three items of the FDH contract were included in the examination: monthly wages, regular days off, and annual holidays. These are the more readily quantifiable, standard, and clearly defined provisions of the contract. Therefore, the patterns of discrimination revealed here can give a strong indication of the violations and discrimination involving other less specific/definite provisions of the contract.

**Monthly Wages**

The current legal minimum wage is HK\$3,670 per month. A great majority (85.8%) of FDHs receive at least the minimum wage. But a significant 14.2% of all FDHs indicated that they have been underpaid — an outright violation of Hong Kong law affecting one in every seven FDHs. Projecting on the overall population of FDHs, more than 30,000 FDHs might possibly be suffering from this problem.<sup>10</sup> Breaking down by nationality, it is found that the problem of underpayment is most serious among Indonesians, with close to half of them (49.5%) receiving less than the statutory minimum. We were even told by 41.3% of them that they were paid less than \$2,670 (Table 11)! On the whole, the FDHs in Hong Kong are underpaid — receiving an average of HK\$3,613 per month. This is largely due to the widespread underpayment of Indonesian FDHs, who get only an average of HK\$2,967 per month (only 81% of the mandated amount). Thais and Filipinos, on average, receive more than the minimum wage, with Thais slightly better paid than Filipinos.

**Regular Days Off**

The legally-mandated day off (rest day) is one day for every seven-day period. “One day” is defined by law as a continuous period of 24 hours. While data was gathered about the actual length (hours) of the

**Table 11** Monthly Wages of FDHs by Nationality (%)

Wages (HK\$)	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
<b>&lt;2670</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>41.28</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>14.70</b>	<b>11.88</b>
<b>2670-3669</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>8.23</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>2.32</b>
3670-4669	94.75	50.48	90.67	80.22	83.55
4670-5669	1.90	.00	4.67	1.45	1.51
≥5670	1.01	.00	.67	.66	.75
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—

Note: Figures in bold-faced type are cases below the legal requirement.

rest day of the FDH, we will confine our analysis here to the number of rest days that the FDH gets per month. Table 12 shows that almost a fifth (19.1%) of all FDHs do not get one day of rest per week — again a widespread violation of Hong Kong law. This is more widespread than the problem of underpayment. More alarmingly, the data shows that 7.9% — i.e., possibly more than 16,800 of all FDHs in Hong Kong — get either no (which includes very infrequent days off, e.g., once every four or six months) or only one day off each month. This is a situation of virtual slavery/bondage.

**Table 12** Number of Days Off per Month and Holidays per Year of FDHs by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
No. of days off per month					
<1 day	.13	7.09	.00	2.35	1.85
1 day	3.26	14.94	.68	6.85	6.08
2 days	.98	39.75	3.42	13.53	10.67
3 days	.20	1.27	.68	.57	.48
4 days	93.60	36.71	95.21	75.49	79.54
5 days	1.70	.13	.00	1.09	1.26
≥6 days	.13	.13	.00	.12	.13
(N)	(1532)	(790)	(146)	(2468)	—
No. of holidays per year					
0-1 day	2.13	60.21	7.83	19.90	15.65
2-5 days	1.17	5.03	1.74	2.36	2.07
6-9 days	1.51	.15	6.09	1.34	1.32
10-11 days	5.15	.59	3.48	3.70	4.06
12-13 days	88.87	33.58	77.39	71.64	75.83
14-15 days	1.17	.44	2.61	1.02	1.04
≥16 days	.00	.00	.87	.04	.02
(N)	(1446)	(673)	(115)	(2234)	—

Note: Figures in bold-faced type are cases below the legal requirement.



A further analysis using the cross-tabulation reveals that, again, it is the Indonesian FDHs who most affected by this problem: a significant majority (63.1%) do not get the mandated rest days — as compared to less than 5% each for Thais and Filipinos. Of them, 22% get 0-1 day off per month (i.e., possibly more than 12,100 of the total Indonesian FDH population). It is significant to note that more than 3% of Filipino FDHs suffer from the same problem of virtual slavery (0-1 day off per month) — possibly more than 5,000 of the total Filipino FDH population. In contrast, less than 1% of Thais are affected by this problem. Overall, the summary statistics reveal that the average number of rest days per month is only about 3.5 days — i.e., below the legal minimum. This below-par adherence to the law is true for all three nationalities, but worst for Indonesians.

### **Statutory Holidays per Year**

Respondents who were already in Hong Kong in 1999 were asked how many statutory holidays they would enjoy during the year. There are typically 12 statutory holidays per year, which was the case in 1999. It can readily be seen that 23.1% of all FDHs in Hong Kong are not given the 12 statutory holidays per year. This violation is more rampant than the violations of both the regulations on the minimum wage and monthly rest days. Possibly, more than 49,000 FDHs are not given the statutory holidays they are entitled to each year. It is important to note that the next highest percentage in the distribution (15.7%) is for the group receiving 0-1 holiday per year. This is a violation of the employment contract that may affect more than 33,000 FDHs in Hong Kong (Table 12).

Table 12 also reveals that a large majority (66%) of Indonesians are not given the 12 statutory holidays per year — 60.2% in fact have 0-1 holiday in a year. This is a widespread injustice. It is also a significant problem for other nationalities, with 19.1% of Thais and 10% of Filipinos denied their statutory holidays. Among the Thais, 7.8% also have only 0-1 holiday per year; this problem is less common among Filipinos (2.1%).

On average, all FDHs get only 10.5 statutory holidays per year, significantly fewer than the mandated 12 days. Indonesians, as

before, are worst affected, with an average of fewer than 5 statutory holidays per year. Thais get an average of 10.7 days, and Filipinos almost all the 12 days. The statistics reveal that half of all Indonesian FDHs are actually blatantly cheated, with employers not giving them any statutory holiday at all and only a third of them enjoying all the statutory holidays. Certainly, we do not know under what circumstances the FDHs were not given their statutory holidays nor whether they agreed to give up their holidays voluntary for additional compensation. Nevertheless, the extent to which FDHs do not take statutory holidays as reported in the survey is too pervasive to ignore.

### **Incidence of Physical and Sexual Abuse**

For the purpose of this research, we put under the general heading of “physical abuses” various forms of psycho-physical abuse. But since psychological violence, emotional abuse, mental anguish, and so forth are hard to categorize/quantify in a baseline survey, we only identified the more obvious categories of psycho-physical abuse. We also separated the whole set of sexual abuses because of our particular interest in generating specific baseline information on this, since no such information is currently available. The categories of abuse (physical, sexual) were partly derived from the results of the pre-test.

#### ***Physical Abuses Suffered by FDHs***

According to the statistics, the most common form of psycho-physical abuse is verbal, affecting a fifth (22%) of all FDHs in Hong Kong. “Shouting” here is not simply raising one’s voice, but pertains more to the use of abusive/offensive language against the FDH (e.g., calling the FDH stupid, an idiot, lazy, and a host of more obscene Chinese and English terms). Slapping the FDH (on the face, hand, or other parts of the body) is the second most common form of abuse (4.2%). Nearly as prevalent is hitting the FDH with objects (including burning the FDH with a flatiron or hot objects): almost 3.4% or possibly more than 7,000 FDHs are abused in this way. Incidences of

kicking and beating are also significant, affecting 2.5% and 2.1% of FDHs, respectively (Table 13).

Verbal abuse is rampant among Indonesians, at 35.4%. Next to verbal abuse, slapping is the most common form of abuse (8.8%) — about three times the rate among Filipinos and Thais. Being hit with objects is the third most common form of abuse (5.5%). Kicking (4.7%) and beating (4.5%) are also common and more so compared to the other nationalities. The Thais do not suffer as much abuse,

**Table 13** Physical Abuses Encountered by FDHs by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Form					
Verbal abuse	17.32	35.35	23.33	23.49	22.02
Slapping with hand	2.59	8.84	2.67	4.61	4.16
Hitting with objects/ Throwing objects	2.59	5.45	4.67	3.64	3.37
Kicking	1.83	4.72	.00	2.66	2.50
Beating	1.26	4.48	1.33	2.31	2.07
Spitting	1.07	3.15	2.00	1.80	1.62
Others	.82	3.39	1.33	1.68	1.48
Overall (at least one encounter)	19.41	37.41	26.00	25.61	24.11
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—
Number of instances					
None	80.59	62.59	74.00	74.39	75.89
1 abuse	15.36	25.30	18.67	18.76	17.95
2 abuses	2.02	5.69	5.33	3.40	3.04
3 abuses	.88	2.06	2.00	1.33	1.21
4 abuses	.63	1.82	.00	.98	.91
≥5 abuses	.51	2.54	.00	1.13	1.00
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—

although they fare worse than Filipinos. Next to verbal abuse (23.3%), being hit with objects is the second most prevalent form of abuse for Thais (4.7%).

To get a rough estimate of the overall volume/magnitude of the physical abuses, including instances of multiple abuses, the data was further analysed by summing up the instances of abuse. Therefore, extrapolating our findings to the population, we can say that roughly 24.1% of all FDHs (those who cited at least one instance of physical abuse) have suffered from physical abuse. Almost 6.2% suffer from multiple physical abuses (two or more abuses cited).

By nationality, the Indonesians remain the most physically abused of the three nationalities. In fact, over one-third (37.4%) of all Indonesian FDHs have suffered at least one form of physical abuse. The overall volume is also high for Filipinos (19.4%) and Thais (26%), although not as serious compared to the Indonesians. About 12% of Indonesian FDHs suffer from multiple physical abuses, as compared to 4% for Filipinos and 7% for Thais (Table 13).

### ***Sexual Abuses Suffered by FDHs***

Table 14 reveals that 4.4% of all FDHs (i.e., those who cited at least one form of sexual abuse) told us that they had suffered from various forms of sexual abuse, ranging from verbal harassment (sexual language, pornographic material) to rape. This translates to more than 9,200 of all FDHs in Hong Kong having been victimized sexually. While the figure is much lower compared to physical abuse, both are intolerable in whatever form or magnitude in a modern civilized society. It should be noted that these figures are probably very conservative ones, since FDHs do not usually report such abuse for fear of termination of employment or out of personal shame.

Sexual and physical abuses towards FDHs are particularly alarming because unlike similar abuses in the office/factory workplace, there are usually no independent witnesses or effective channels through which the victim can lodge a complaint. Therefore, many of these abuses go unreported or suppressed, unless they become unbearable to the FDH, who will then run away or report the case at the risk of being arbitrarily terminated. Worse, years of experience have

**Table 14** Sexual Abuses Suffered by FDHs by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Was talked to in sexual language/Shown FDH pornographic materials	1.14	2.66	1.33	1.64	1.53
Was touched/kissed	1.33	1.94	.67	1.49	1.46
Was exposed to nudity	1.20	1.94	.67	1.41	1.37
Was peeped/watched in a malicious manner	.95	1.57	2.67	1.25	1.16
Was asked to do sexy acts	.38	1.09	1.33	.66	.59
Was asked for sex	.19	1.09	.67	.51	.43
Raped	.13	.36	.67	.23	.36
Other sexual abuses	.38	.36	.00	.35	.20
Overall (at least one encounter)	3.73	5.93	6.00	4.57	4.35
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—

shown that such cases progress slowly or are sometimes dismissed because of a lack of witnesses or material proof.

Table 14 reveals distinctive patterns of sexual abuse for each of the nationalities:

1. For Filipinos, kissing, touching, and sexual advances (1.3%) are the most common form; this is closely followed by the employer appearing naked to the FDH (1.2%) or talking to her in sexual language/showing the FDH pornographic materials (1.1%).
2. The use of sexual language/materials (2.7%) is the most common form of sexual abuse suffered by Indonesians; this is the highest figure among the three nationalities. Then, like the Filipinos, the next most common forms of sexual abuse are the display of nudity by the employer (1.9%) and touching/kissing by the employer (1.9%). These figures are also the highest among the

three nationalities. Being asked for sex (1.1%) is also more common for Indonesians than for Thais and Filipinos.

3. For Thais, the most common form of abuse is being maliciously watched or peeped at by the employer (2.7%); this is the highest figure among the three nationalities. The next most common forms of abuse for Thais are the use of sexual language/materials (1.3%) and being asked by the employer to do sexy acts, e.g., sexy dances, sensual massages (1.3%). The latter is the highest figure among the three nationalities.
4. It is significant to note that some respondents did reveal such abuses as having been asked for sex, having been pressured to have sex, or having been raped by their employer. Although only a total of six respondents actually reported such incidents, the fact that they happened at all should be a cause for serious concern. The actual prevalence is likely to be much higher. Ways to protect FDHs from these and other forms of abuse in general need to be speedily considered.

### **Perceptions of Discrimination**

In terms of actual experiences, overt displays of discrimination in the daily life of the FDHs are relatively small in number. The most common incidents occur at markets/grocery stores (6.8%) which, naturally, are the central sphere of the daily public interactions of FDHs outside their employer's home. The language barrier between FDHs and shopkeepers in the market also leads to the impression of discrimination. Of FDHs, 4.7% also felt discriminated against when patronizing other commercial establishments. Next is discrimination involves means of public transportation (9.2%) and, again, the language barrier could well be the cause of the perceptions. On the whole, the FDHs in Hong Kong reported few discriminatory encounters in public institutions, but quite a few (2.9%) said that they were discriminated against in the courts. It is interesting to note that, of the three groups, the Thais seem to have the greatest number of discriminatory encounters (Table 15).

**Table 15** Unfair/Discriminatory Encounters by FDHs by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Markets/Grocery stores	7.46	4.60	10.67	6.72	6.84
Other commercial establishments	5.69	1.69	5.33	4.38	4.68
Buses, trains, and ferries	4.24	1.45	4.00	3.32	3.53
Taxis and minibuses	3.60	1.57	4.00	2.97	3.11
Courts	3.16	2.54	.00	2.78	2.91
Airlines	3.10	1.33	.00	2.35	2.56
NGOs	2.59	.48	1.33	1.84	2.03
Hong Kong Immigration Department	1.58	1.57	2.00	1.60	1.59
Parks, beaches, and recreational facilities	1.20	.36	3.33	1.06	1.06
Hospitals	1.01	.73	.00	.86	.91
Hong Kong Police	.82	.85	2.00	.90	.86
Public in general	1.01	.24	1.33	.78	.83
Media	.44	1.82	.67	.90	.79
Banks	.76	.48	.67	.63	.69
Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department	.70	.61	.00	.66	.65
Hong Kong Labour Department	.38	.73	.67	.51	.47
FDH's consulate in Hong Kong	.32	.36	2.00	.43	.38
Churches	.32	.24	.00	.27	.29
Overall (at least one encounter)	15.49	11.14	22.67	14.50	14.62
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—

### ***Equality of Access/Rights***

The respondents were asked if they felt they can equally/freely access facilities/services or exercise the same basic rights (e.g., to join/form organizations, engage in activities) like all other people in Hong Kong. The great majority (over 60%) of FDHs in Hong Kong felt that they have equal or free access to facilities or services, can exercise their right to join or form organizations and engage in public activities in Hong Kong. But this also means that as much as a quarter of the FDH population felt or actually experienced having been denied such equal and fair access to exercise their rights. Again, the situation of the Indonesians is particularly unsettling, with less than 40% of them actually feeling that they enjoyed the same rights and freedoms as other people in Hong Kong (Table 16).

### ***Discrimination by Sectors of Society***

The FDHs were asked which sector of society tended to discriminate against them. They were asked to rank their answers from always to

**Table 16** Feeling of Equality of FDHs by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Can freely form or join groups/organizations, like all other people in Hong Kong	77.88	38.74	67.33	64.62	67.76
Can conduct group activities (meetings, parties, cultural events, etc.) like all other people/groups in Hong Kong	77.24	37.53	66.00	63.76	66.96
Can access facilities fairly and without discrimination, like other people/groups in Hong Kong	71.68	38.50	63.33	60.48	63.12
(N)	(1582)	(826)	(150)	(2558)	—



never with regard to each of the items. In order to analyse the answers, the following scores were assigned to the answers: “Always” = 5, “Frequently” = 4, “Sometimes” = 3, “Rarely” = 2, and “Never” = 1. Missing data were excluded from the overall total. The mean was reported in Table 17 for each of the items. Overall, the majority of the FDHs feel that they are not discriminated against — as reflected by the mean, which shows FDHs in Hong Kong feel that they are rarely or never discriminated against by any of the listed groups (an average of over 30% agree on this point). The exception is “local women,” who received the highest score for the frequency of discriminating against FDHs. The groups that most FDHs feel discriminate against them are “local women” and the “public in general” (with highest means); but, on average, these groups only discriminate against FDHs “sometimes.” The next groups that are deemed discriminatory sometimes (almost rarely) are the FDH’s compatriots and “local men.”

**Table 17** Groups that FDHs Feel Discriminate against Them

Groups	All FDHs	
	Weighted total (%)	Weighted mean (with “5” as the highest score)
Local women	66.23	2.48
Public in general	59.39	2.53
Compatriots	57.68	2.19
Local men	56.80	2.16
FDHs (countrymates)	55.81	2.17
Local workers (non-FDHs)	53.79	2.09
Foreign (Asian) residents	48.25	1.96
FDHs (other nationalities)	46.31	1.91
Foreign workers (non-FDHs)	44.47	1.86
Foreign (non-Asian) residents	37.92	1.74

### ***Causes of Discrimination***

The FDHs were also asked why they thought they were being discriminated against. A large majority (87.4%) of the respondents cited class/status discrimination (because they are domestic helpers) as the main reason. The next major reason, they felt, is the fact that they are foreigners (racial discrimination) (33%). Only a small percentage (7.9%) felt that gender was the main reason (Table 18). Overall, the respondents felt that the combination of being foreigners, domestic helpers, and women marked FDHs in the minds of employers, the public, and even the government as “low status,” “second-class” people in Hong Kong.

Domestic work is one of the currently stereotyped low-paid, low status jobs in Hong Kong. At the height of the economic recession in Hong Kong (1998-1999), the contracts of about 25,000 FDHs were reportedly terminated/not renewed in Hong Kong (AMC, 1999). The government encouraged local women to take jobs as domestic helpers and offered a government-funded training and placement service. To date, only a few local women have taken such jobs, saying that the pay is too low, the working hours too long, and only desperate people would take such jobs.<sup>11</sup>

To this day, Asian societies have not properly recognized and valued the reproductive and productive labour of women — especially work relating to the caring of the home and family. Although this is a

**Table 18** Perceived Cause for Discrimination by Nationality (%)

	Nationality			Total	Weighted total
	Filipino	Indonesian	Thai		
Because I am a domestic helper	89.70	80.59	88.80	87.93	87.36
Because I am a foreigner	40.69	15.69	22.40	35.16	32.96
Because I am a woman (man)	8.81	7.45	1.60	8.25	7.88
Because of my age	5.35	3.72	16.00	5.49	5.82
(N)	(1010)	(376)	(125)	(1511)	—

universal phenomenon, as England, Budig and Folbre (2002) suggest, it is perhaps more prevalent in Asian societies. The stereotype of women's labour as being of low value has been institutionalized and elevated to a *de facto* international standard through the worldwide trade in maids. Sending and receiving countries have played an important role in this by officially classifying domestic helpers as "low or unskilled labour." The Hong Kong government's policies have only served to reinforce this stereotype — e.g., by ensuring low wages for FDHs (normally below the median wage in Hong Kong), restrictive conditions (e.g., NCS), and the denial of certain benefits/privileges enjoyed by other workers in Hong Kong (e.g., residency, job mobility).

The FDHs themselves cited very strongly the recent moves by the government/policy-makers specifically targeting FDHs and aimed at reducing/limiting their benefits — e.g., the refusal to review/change the two-week rule and NCS, the proposed removal of maternity protection, wage cut/freeze (see the next section for details) — as manifestation of the government's discriminatory treatment of FDHs.

### ***Discriminatory Laws, Policies, Actions, Language, Practices, and Gestures***

We asked the FDHs two separate open-ended questions on the discriminatory laws and policies of the Hong Kong government; and on the discriminatory actions, language, practices, gestures, symbols, etc. that other people in Hong Kong used against them.

The answers given by the respondents to these two questions overlapped with each other, so we processed and categorized them accordingly. Many cited abuses/problems that they had experienced. When further asked why they felt these were discriminatory, they said that these were done to them to take advantage of them (e.g., unfairly treatment, discrimination, regarding them as second-class people) because they were domestic helpers, foreigners, and women. These things would not happen, they believed, if they were migrant professionals, especially from the West. Among the more common answers given by the respondents were:

Discriminatory policies, laws, and practices of the Hong Kong government:

- The “two-week rule” — an unfair restriction targeting FDHs.
- NCS; the employment status of FDHs — limitations applied particularly to FDHs; difficulties in changing employers; the prohibition against changing to other jobs.
- Difficulties in extending their stay — FDHs are required to go home to wait for a visa.
- Low salary, wage cuts — the salaries of FDHs have been kept very low; frozen since 1996; reduced in 1999.
- Maternity rights — the proposal to remove maternity protection for FDHs; actual difficulties in getting pregnant as an FDH; can be terminated if she becomes pregnant; likened to a form of “population control against the FDH.”
- Not being allowed to work if an FDH has a pending case (e.g., with the Labour Department, courts); some cases last for months/years; this is a way of stopping FDHs from filing cases against abuse.
- Family members of FDHs are not allowed to join them in Hong Kong — this is not true for other foreign workers in Hong Kong, especially Western people — in fact, they are the employers of FDHs.
- Library — FDHs cannot borrow or become members since application requires proof of residence (FDHs live in with employers so they do not have these records).
- Arbitrary termination — although either can terminate, the FDH is at a disadvantage (nowhere to go); employers use this to control/intimidate the FDH.
- Agencies — even if abuses (e.g., excessive fees, underpayment) are rampant, the perpetrators are not punished.
- Employers — are not punished for abuses, underpayment.
- Immigration, government offices — are more strict about processing the papers of FDHs.
- Holidays — other people in Hong Kong enjoy all public holidays; FDHs are only allowed certain holidays; many times,

employers do not allow FDHs to go out on holidays or require them to return on the same day.

- Police — identity checks are common for FDHs and target FDHs (e.g., for jaywalking offenses even if other local people do the same); they side with employers and talk between them in Chinese when there is a problem/dispute.
- No lawyer for domestic helpers.
- Working hours — very long; no specific times; on call anytime.
- Long-service benefits — employers deny giving this; “depends on the boss.”
- Severance pay — denied; employers decide whether or not they want to give.
- Day off — not allowed to take; not granted the 24-hour off to which they are entitled.
- Health benefits — very limited for FDHs; some employers do not give.
- Part-time jobs — not allowed, but only for FDHs.
- Laws — lack of protection for FDHs.
- Residency status — not granted to FDHs.
- Voting — FDHs have no right to vote or are not consulted/represented in policy-making.
- Opportunities — FDHs do not have the same opportunities as other people in Hong Kong have; they are restricted in terms of jobs, opportunities for growth, education, development, and family life.

Discriminatory treatment, actions by various sectors:

- Racism.
- Markets — discriminatory treatment.
- Consulate — unfair treatment of domestic helpers.
- Working conditions — poor.
- People look down on maids; low status of domestic helpers.
- Transportation services — discriminate against FDHs.

- Use of sexual language, gestures against FDHs (Chinese and/or English words); given the dirty finger.
- Use of abusive language (Chinese and/or English), gestures, making faces at FDHs — e.g., bastard, idiot, stupid, lazy, crazy, *panmui*, etc.
- Being belittled — e.g., “just a domestic helper/maid,” “just a Filipino/Indonesian,” “from the Third World,” “Filipinos/Indonesians are bad,” “Filipinos are only domestic helpers,” “maid in the Philippines,” “no good Filipinos/Indonesians,” “poor country people,” “alien,” “ambitious people,” “nothing to eat in the Philippines,” etc.
- Entertain others first, FDHs last.
- Shop people, market people are disrespectful, impolite if they know you are a domestic helper; cannot afford to make purchases; drive you out of the shop; sales people become angry.
- Rude; snobbish; indifferent; do not respond when greeted; ignore what the FDH says; do not want to talk to FDHs.
- Stare at the FDH from head to foot.
- Insulting actions directed at FDHs; stares/insulting stares; insulting smiles, laughter; whispering about FDHs; pointing fingers at and insulting/mockling them; shouting.
- Intimidating/Threatening looks, actions.
- Laughing/Enjoying the spectacle of kids kicking and abusing FDHs.
- Do not accommodate, entertain you if you are an FDH.
- Separate the FDH’s food.
- Shouted at/Degraded in public.
- Abuses; slave-like treatment; sexual abuses.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The first half of this paper provides an overview and profiles of FDHs and their employers in Hong Kong. The second half focusing

on the perception and experiences of discriminations on the part of FDHs allows us to draw the following main conclusions:

- Overall, this survey reveals that violations of the contracts of FDHs with regard to the paying of the minimum wage and the granting of days off and annual leave are prevalent — affecting at least one fifth of all FDHs in Hong Kong. A substantial minority of them had been paid less than the statutory minimum salary, and received fewer days off and less annual leave than they are legally entitled to. These contract violations are more severe among Indonesians than Filipinos and Thais.
- Almost a quarter (24.1%) of the FDHs surveyed have suffered from some form of verbal and physical abuse. Indonesians are the most widely abused (37.4%), although the problem is also high among Thais (26%) and Filipinos (19.4%).
- As many as 4.4% of the FDH surveyed reported to having been subjected to sexual abuse.
- The FDHs have identified the areas of public life where they are most often unfairly treated or discriminated against. The following were cited as the places where they have experienced the most discrimination: markets/grocery stores, other commercial establishments, and among public transportation personnel. Among government offices, the incidences are highest in the courts, in the Immigration Department, and among the police. The Labour Department appeared to have treated them the most fairly among the government agencies.
- Among the sectors of Hong Kong society, the FDHs cited the following as among the most discriminatory against them: local women, the public in general, and local men.
- The FDHs believe that the top reason for why they are discriminated against is the nature of their job (class discrimination; cited by 87.4%); the second is because they are foreigners (racial discrimination; cited by 33%).
- The FDHs cited several policies/laws/moves by the Hong Kong government that they felt discriminated against them. The following are the most commonly cited ones:

1. “Two-week rule”;
  2. NCS: especially restrictions on job mobility, residency, etc. that specifically restrict FDHs but not other foreign workers in Hong Kong;
  3. Wage freezes, wage cuts targeted at FDHs; keeping the salaries of FDHs low;
  4. Working hours: very long, no specific times; on-call at any time;
  5. Not allowed to work while having a case heard (e.g., Labour Department, courts): the cases normally stretch for months or sometimes years;
  6. Not allowed to do part-time jobs, although other people can;
  7. Maternity rights: the proposal to remove protection; difficulties in becoming pregnant as an FDH, including the risk of being terminated;
  8. FDHs’ families not being allowed to stay with them in Hong Kong;
  9. No voting rights; no representation in policy-making on matters relating to FDHs.
- Overall, the research has established the disturbing occurrence of contract violations, physical abuse, and unfair/discriminatory treatment of FDHs in public life. The analysis showed that the cases covered by the study are not rare or isolated, but affect a significant portion of the FDH population. The violations and abuses are especially rampant or severe on certain nationalities. They are therefore manifestations of the unequal treatment of FDHs because they are foreigners, women, and domestic helpers.

In view of the severity and frequency of the “irregularities” of the employment conditions of FDHs in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong government and consulates/countries concerned need to take immediate action against the abovementioned and other violations experienced by FDHs. While the implementation of the relevant laws and regulations is extremely difficult because of the nature of live-in domestic work as well as the background of the FDHs, the community



and the responsible public agencies should strive to minimize these irregularities as far as possible. In particular, the plight of Indonesian FDHs is a cause for concern, and efforts should be stepped up to improve their situation.

The government needs to provide more assistance to NGOs/social groups supporting FDHs/migrants, including providing space and financial assistance for their work. Up until now, the churches and NGOs have assumed much of this burden with only limited support from the government. Also, some of the NGOs serving the FDHs have been stripped of their status as charitable organizations by the Inland Revenue Department, on the policy that support work for FDHs is not considered charitable work with a public character. This has undermined the work/services that such groups provide for migrants.<sup>12</sup>

Local support groups, especially those subvented by the government, need to extend their counselling/shelter/redress services to FDHs. This is especially true for Indonesians, Thais, Indians, Sri Lankans, Nepalese, and other nationalities who have nowhere to turn to once they have been victimized. Although several NGOs that support migrants currently provide some form of service to abused/distressed FDHs, these services have long been outstripped by the magnitude of the violations/abuses.

The creation of a standing consultative body where government, migrants, and NGOs can discuss, comment on, and recommend policies relating to migrants can play a positive role in reducing discrimination against migrants, including avoiding such costly but potentially discriminatory moves as the removal of maternity protection for FDHs and the imposition of service taxes.

There is a need for sustained general public education about the human rights of the migrants, and about racism, discrimination, and gender-fairness. Public education is also needed to help people recognize the value and contributions of FDHs, women, and migrants to Hong Kong society. In addition, awareness-raising programmes with more focus and purpose are needed for specific sections of Hong Kong society, relating especially to their dealings with FDHs and minorities.

Finally, the Hong Kong government needs to consider (if not actually adopt) the 1990 UN Migrant Workers Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and relevant UN and International Labour Organization conventions as core standards in guiding/informing its policies on FDHs, if the territory to truly realize its aim of becoming a world-class city not only economically but holistically. The situation of FDHs serves as one of the bottom-line indicators of the territory's capacity to progress as a multi-cultural, fair, and world-class society.

## Notes

1. The sample used here (2,558) is larger than the one that was used in the preliminary report (2,500) submitted by the AMC to the EOC in 2001. A number of questionnaires were not coded in the first report because of limitations in funding. With additional funding from the Department of Sociology, all of the questionnaires completed were coded, including those from 56 Indonesian respondents. For this paper we have also been able to code all the questions instead of only some of the questions as in the preliminary report.
2. Comparing our Filipino sample to that in the population in 2001 Census, we found a rough similarity in the age distributions of both groups:

Age	Population		Sample	
	N	%	N	%
15-24	11283	8.89	149	9.42
25-34	58972	46.48	796	50.32
35-44	43904	34.60	458	28.95
45-54	11576	9.12	129	8.15
55-64	1079	.85	15	.95
≥65	75	.06	35	2.21
Total	126889	100.00	1582	100.00

3. In the first stage of the coding process, some questions were not coded (e.g., regarding agency fees) but when we attempted to do this in the second stage of the coding process, some of the

questionnaires (the Thai responses) already could not be located. This is unfortunate but understandable, given the stringent resources available to NGOs and the less than desirable research environment for a small NGO. We had to depend on volunteers and part-timers and their mobility in a protracted research process made it difficult to ensure a consistent standard.

4. The Census reported only 126,889 Filipino FDHs and 46,166 Indonesian FDHs in March 2001 (unpublished data of 2001 Population Census), but the Immigration Department reported 151,485 Filipino FDHs and 55,174 Indonesian FDHs at the end of 2000 (Census and Statistics Department, 2003:32). The Census data is substantially lower than the immigration records.
5. See Chiu (2003) for an overview of labour migration in Hong Kong.
6. For the sake of simplicity, only the weighted sample statistics are reported in this paper.
7. I am grateful to the Labour Department for supplying this information.
8. Interview with the Coalition for Migrants' Rights, January 2001.
9. Statement by the Far East Overseas Nepalese Association, Hong Kong in 1998.
10. All extrapolations in this paper are based on the 213,110 FDHs of Filipino, Indonesian, and Thai nationality in Hong Kong in 2000 (see Table 1).
11. Interview with a local domestic helper association, February 2001.
12. Refer to the list of charitable institutions that are exempt from tax (Inland Revenue Department, 2004).

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## **A Stranger in the House**

### **Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong**

#### **Abstract**

Although foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) are the largest group of foreign residents in Hong Kong, the public usually gets nothing more than stereotypical images of them from mass media. FDHs have always been a “semi-invisible” community here. Also, there is little baseline information available to the public and to policy-makers on the profile of FDHs.

Making use of a sample survey of over 2,500 FDHs done by the Asian Migrant Centre in 2000, this paper seeks to describe the socio-economic characteristics and working conditions of FDHs in Hong Kong. Also, an analysis of the 2001 Population Census has supplemented the profile of their employers and the characteristics of the households employing FDHs. The analyses have outlined the difficulties that the FDHs face in Hong Kong, such as the occurrence of contract violations, physical abuse, and unequal treatment of FDHs in public life and social policies.

# 同住的陌生人

## 香港的外籍家庭傭工

趙永佳  
及

Asian Migrant Centre

(中文摘要)

外籍家庭傭工（外傭）是香港人數最多的外籍居民，但社會大眾對他們的認識往往只透過零碎的傳媒報道，並一向視他們為「半隱匿群體」。政府亦甚少公開外傭的資料供市民大眾以至決策者作參考。本文除運用Asian Migrant Centre於2000年訪問2,500多位外傭的問卷調查資料，以闡述在港外傭的社經背景和工作待遇外，亦會利用2001年香港人口普查的數據，分析僱用外傭的僱主及住戶特徵。本文旨在綜合兩組數據，勾勒外傭身處香港所面對的問題，包括僱主合約違規、人身傷害，以及在日常生活和社會政策中遭受的不公平待遇。

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