

Around USD48 million Stolen from Indonesian workers by Hong Kong Employers Each Year!

“I asked my employer, why do I have to sign a receipt for HKD3,270 when you only give me HKD1,800? My employer said, it’s because you are new to Hong Kong and can’t speak Cantonese well.”

*An interview with Indonesian migrant worker in HK
From Malang, East Java*

The Asian Migrant Centre in collaboration with The Hong Kong Coalition of Indonesian Migrants Workers Organization (KOKTIHO) in late 2006 interviewed 2,097 Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong about their working and living conditions. The following are the important findings from the survey:

Wage Receipts

94% of workers signed a receipt for their wages each month. Of those that signed, 26% did not receive the amount stated on the receipt. The difference between the actual wage received and that stated on the receipt ranged from HKD 80 to HKD 2,370 per month. The average amount not paid which is the difference between the receipt and the actual payment, is HKD 1,390. Since 26% of all workers did not receive the wages stated in their receipt, and the average amount not paid is HKD 1,390 per month we can assume that approximately HKD 36,000,000 is stolen from DWs each month in this manner by their employers.

Rex Varona, the Executive Director of Asian Migrant Centre, states that “Hong Kong employers steal around USD48 million each year from Indonesian workers and Indonesia loses that amount as potential foreign remittances. In effect the government is sanctioning such irregularity with their loose monitoring and ineffective implementation of the Hong Kong laws and policies related to migrants’ wages and conditions”.

Underpayment

22% of all Indonesian migrant domestic workers (IMDWs) in Hong Kong were underpaid. For those workers that were not underpaid, 60% received only the minimum wage. Only 19% of IMDWs in Hong Kong received more than the minimum wage.

The 2005 AMC Underpayment report and HKDW survey found that at that time 42% of Indonesian migrant domestic workers were underpaid. The AMC’s 1999 survey found that 90% of MWs were underpaid. There has been an improvement over the years and there are less MWs who are underpaid today than 2 or 8 years ago however underpayment of workers remains a persistent and pervasive problem.

As Ani Yuniarti of Indonesian Migrants Workers Union (IMWU) said, “It is still unacceptable that 22% of Indonesian are paid below the legally mandated minimum wage. IMWU launches its demand of 0% underpayment now!”

Excessive Agency Fees

The majority of migrant workers, 59%, paid HKD 21,000 in agency fees. The second most common amount paid was HKD 9,000 by 10% of workers then HKD 10,000 by 7% of workers.

Workers reported having to pay agency fees for a period of time between zero and eight months. The majority of Indonesian domestic workers, 62%, paid their placement fees through 7 months of salary deductions. The next most common salary deduction period was 5 months for 20% of workers. Thirdly, 8% of workers paid their agency fees for 4 months. The average length of time for salary deductions to pay agency fees was 5.9 months.

Daily Work & Illegal Work

After cleaning, cooking and shopping, the most common daily tasks were to take care of children, the elderly and pets. 67% of MWs cared for children and 28% cared for the elderly.

Significantly 11% of workers were forced to perform tasks not included in their contract. The most common type of forced work was doing chores in other people's homes. 7% of MWs were forced to work in other people's homes. The other significant type of forced work, for 2% of MWs was being forced to work in the employer's shop/store/restaurant/factory. All other types of forced work were below 1% frequency among MWs.

Working Hours

“Underpayment is not just a function of how much the worker gets paid, but also how much work must be done to receive that payment” said Sumiati, the Secretary of Coalition for Migrants Rights (CMR).

Less than 1% of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong work 8 hours or less a day. Over half of all migrant workers worked 13 to 16 hours each day. The most common number of hours worked per day is 16 hours for 23% of workers. The second most common number of hours worked per day is 15 hours for 15% of workers and third most common is 18 hours worked each day for 15% of workers. The average number of hours worked per day is 16 hours. Out of the 2,032 responses to this question, only 13 workers worked 8 hours or less per day.

Rest Day

According to the Hong Kong law, domestic workers must receive one rest day each week. Unfortunately, only 44% of IMDWs received their legally mandated 4 rest days per month. 56% of workers did not receive 4 rest days a month and their employers are violating the law. 14% of workers received no rest days at all and must work seven days a week, every week. 8% got one rest day, 32% had 2 rest days, 1% had 3 rest days, 44% got 4 rest days and less than 1% got more than 4 rest days per month.

Even those DWs that regularly received rest days were sometimes still required to work on those days. When they had to work on rest days 36% of workers were never compensated when they were required to work in rest days. Only 31% of workers were always compensated when required to work on rest days. 9% was usually compensated, 6% was sometimes compensated and 1% was rarely compensated.

For more information or to arrange an interview with any of the panelists, please call Nurul Qoiriah 61533105 or Shella Zagada 9182 9651.