

Buhay Kasambahay: A Case Study on The Experiences of Female Domestic Workers in Los Baños, Laguna

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ABSTRACT

Domestic work has been an important source of paid employment especially among impoverished women in the Philippines in the recent years. Due to the nature of their work, however, domestic workers are considered as one of the most vulnerable sectors in society. This qualitative study sought to explore the experiences and responses of Filipino women employed as domestic workers and the role of the Domestic Workers Act as an institutional legal policy in addressing the issues related to their living and working conditions. Results from the study suggest that female domestic workers came from marginalized, disadvantaged families whose engagement in domestic work is a matter of choice to improve their own personal and family lives. Participants have favorable view toward domestic work; regarding it as economically beneficial and personally gratifying. Harmonious relationship likewise exists between the employers and the domestic workers. The participants, however, also recognize the existence of other unmet needs despite their positive perceptions toward their work. The Domestic Workers Act is considered to be significant, but the level of awareness and understanding about the law were very low. This research proposes the need for further evaluation of the implementation of the Domestic Workers Act in order to ascertain whether it truly delivers the necessary benefits and changes that it envisions to achieve.

Keywords: female domestic workers, Domestic Workers Act, institutional legal policy, level of awareness, marginalized

INTRODUCTION

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), domestic work is an important component of informal labor employment globally, with roughly 67 million workers employed in this sector at present. Various definitions of the terms “domestic work” and “domestic worker” exist in literature. For instance, according to the Domestic Workers Convention (2011), domestic work pertains to the type of service performed in or for a particular household or groups of households. In relation to this, the domestic worker is thus defined as “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment (or paid) relationship” (Domestic Workers Convention, 2011). The ILO identified two types of domestic workers (full-time or part-time) based on the nature of the employer-employee arrangement and relationship. A full-time domestic worker is usually employed by a single household, whereas a part-time domestic worker is commonly working with multiple employers. In the Philippines, the local labor code describes domestic work as “service in the employer’s home that provides convenience and personal comfort to the employer,” which draws similarity to its international definition of ‘paid household work.’ A salient difference with the nature of domestic work in the Philippines is that domestic workers are distinguished based on their physical work arrangement, meaning to say whether they are residing in their employers’ households (termed as live-in domestic workers) or if they are living in their own respective households and only go to their employers’ houses to work (or the live-out domestic workers).

Historically, domestic labor in the Philippines is seen as a consequence of the emergence of distinct social classes (Eviota, 1992 as cited in Asuncion, 2014). During the colonial times, domestic work is almost comparable to slavery, wherein workers (who were predominantly minors and females) were subjected to the different kinds of abuse by their masters (Camagay, 1995 as cited in Asuncion, 2014). Eventually, this slavery-type of relationship was replaced by formal, paid relationship; and households that could afford to pay one could hire as many as they wanted. This allowed and encouraged more individuals, particularly the poor and women, to participate in domestic work.

At present, the Philippines has a sizeable number of workers employed in the sector of domestic work (colloquially referred to as *kasambahay* or “house companions”) but the numbers vary and remain

inconclusive. The ILO estimates that there are around 1.9 million domestic workers in the country, but other sources claim that the population of Filipino domestic workers might be approximately 600,000 to as high as 2.5 million (Rappler, 2019). One reason perhaps behind the inconsistency of statistical record is that many domestic workers in the country remain excluded from the scope of labor registration due to unclear employment terms. Moreover, despite the considerable number of people employed in this sector, only a small percentage of the total households in the country employ domestic workers. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of workers employed in this sector are women.

Due to the nature of their labor, domestic workers are considered one of the most vulnerable sectors in society. Many domestic workers in the Philippines work for extended hours but are being paid with very low wages. Others experience maltreatment, abuses, discrimination, and marginalization. Despite these negative experiences affecting many domestic workers, there are still a number of people who choose to be domestic workers due to poverty and lack of alternative employment opportunities. In order to protect the rights of the *kasambahays*, the Republic Act No. 10361 or the “Act Instituting Policies for the Protection and Welfare of Domestic Workers,” otherwise known as ‘Domestic Workers Act’ or ‘Batas Kasambahay’ was implemented in 2013. The law aims to uphold the rights and dignity of Filipino domestic workers and protect them from abuse and exploitation by providing safe and humane working conditions.

Review of Literature

Profile of domestic workers in the Philippines

Domestic workers in the Philippines are typically regarded as “maids” (*katulong*), “cooks” (*kusinera*), “nannies” (*yaya*), or all-around helpers (Rappler, 2019). The term being used to describe Filipino domestic workers depend on the kind of service that they provide for their employers (Sayres, 2007). A maid usually cleans the residence and performs other domestic chores such as washing clothes, ironing, and serving. The cook, on the other hand, performs matters related to food preparation such as grocery shopping and meal preparations. The *yaya* is the typical nanny who takes care of the children and infants. The “all-rounder,” as the term suggests, performs all of the aforementioned roles. A study conducted by the ILO in 2011, entitled: *Fact sheet on Domestic Workers’ profile and working conditions in the Philippines*, provides a comprehensive description of the different characteristics in terms of Filipino domestic workers’ socio-demographic profile. In terms of demographic composition, an overwhelming majority of domestic workers (84 percent) in the country are women. Moreover, they are also considerably young—34 percent of female domestic workers and 29 percent of male domestic workers in the Philippines are aged 15 – 24.

Statistics likewise show that they are better educated compared to workers employed in other types of low-skilled labor. Majority of domestic workers in the Philippines attained or have reached at least secondary level (44 percent of women and 54 percent of men). In terms of work arrangement, a greater majority of domestic workers are live-out (70 percent), which also means that most of them are working part-time. Among the remaining 30 percent live-in domestic workers, most of them are females, aged 15 – 24, and unmarried.

Considering their place of origin, majority of the domestic workers are from the rural areas of Visayas, Bicol, Southern Tagalog, and Northern Mindanao, and they are hired usually through informal methods such as referrals or by word-of-mouth (Rappler, 2019). In addition, the largest proportion of domestic workers (both live-in and live-out) tend to be more concentrated in high-income households in urban areas, primarily in the National Capital Region and CALABARZON. It should also be noted that the family structure of the employers plays a crucial role in employing domestic workers. It was found that high-income households that are female-headed have a greater tendency of hiring domestic workers compared to households which are men-headed. Notwithstanding the substantial number of domestic workers in the country, the continuous increase in their number, the proportion of households employing domestic workers in the country remain minimal. According to the latest findings of the Labor Force Survey, only 5.80 percent of all households across the country provide work for either live-in or live-out domestic workers.

Of the different socio-demographic characteristics of domestic workers in the Philippines, the gender composition in the domestic service industry appears to be the most striking. As stated earlier, domestic work in the country is highly feminized. This does not mean, however, that male domestic

workers do not hold an important role and thus rendered unimportant. Traditional work roles are still very much evident which further reinforce the gender divide. Household tasks that are deemed to be masculine (e.g. gardening, carpentering, automobile driving) are predominantly dispensed to men, while chores that are traditionally viewed as feminine (e.g. cooking, laundering, child-rearing, cleaning) are largely assigned to female domestic workers. This raises the question of why domestic work in the country is highly gendered and feminized.

Feminization of domestic work, however, is not unique in the Philippines but a global phenomenon. This global trend is due to the fact that women from impoverished households or disadvantaged communities across the world often have very limited work opportunities available to them which then force them to seek employment in sectors that are viewed as compatible to their skills and competencies (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing, 2019). As demand for human labor continues to rise, particularly in developed countries, women from developing countries became an easy source of cheap human labor. Putting this situation in the context of women and society in the Philippines, Lumayag (2004) argued that the normative view towards female domestic work among Filipinos stems from the social and cultural belief that domestic work requires “care,” “emotions,” and “attachment”—qualities that are socially attributed to women in general.

Working conditions of domestic workers in the Philippines: Issues and challenges

Indeed, domestic work has been an important source of paid employment especially among impoverished women in the Philippines in the recent years. Aside from that, it has also benefited other women to enter the workforce especially in the professional field. More and more professional women nowadays are freed from the burden of doing household labor and child care because of the labor of domestic workers; thus, allowing them to participate and occupy higher occupational positions previously dominated only by men (Lumayag, 2004).

Notwithstanding the significant role of domestic workers as constant supply of human labor in different parts of the world including in the Philippines, these workers are also considered as one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (ILO, 2011). As part of the vulnerable sector of the society, domestic workers have a higher risk of experiencing different issues and problems as a result of the nature of their work and other economic, social, and institutional pressures. The different issues and problems encountered by domestic workers, women and children in particular, include exploitation, social isolation and exclusion, discrimination, abuse, and varying forms of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2019; WIEGO, 2019).

Numerous cases of labor exploitation among domestic workers have been reported and documented in the country. Common types of exploitation involve deceptions and fraud such as false contracts, violation of contract terms, or worse, no written contract at all (Sayres, 2007). Due to their lack of technical and legal expertise on matters affecting their work, some domestic workers are not properly oriented and are not well-aware of their rights and privileges guaranteed and protected by labor laws. Another concern among domestic workers is job security, since lack of formal contracts and written documents permit exploitative employers to terminate them without proper consultation or prior notice (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Another problem that is being confronted by some domestic workers involve social isolation and exclusion. There are reports wherein employers would lock up their domestic workers inside their homes, and would not permit them go outside or socialize with other people in the community. This marginalization from society impedes the potential for these oftentimes young women for self-growth and creates a dehumanizing effect, rendering them invisible from the larger social fabric.

Lastly, and most common forms of mistreatment among domestic workers in the Philippines, are the instances of abuses, discrimination, harassment, and violence. Abuses among domestic workers may take various forms, from physical, psychological, to emotional. One form of physical abuse among domestic workers is the rampant imposition of longer working hours. Arguably, domestic workers are the most overworked employees in the country. Almost 33 percent of domestic workers work up to 10 hours a day, while 20 percent work for more than 11 hours every day—well beyond the standard working hours in the Philippines which is eight hours (ILO, 2011). Not only that they are overworked, most domestic workers in the country are also disproportionately underpaid. Their salaries are significantly lower than the national average, and it also differs by region and municipal classification in the country. According to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the current monthly income of domestic workers in NCR (which is also the highest) is at 3,500 pesos (roughly 117 pesos per day), while the monthly wage of domestic

workers in lower class municipalities in Region IV-A (the lowest in the country) is at only 1,800 pesos or about 80 pesos per day. Some domestic workers face compounding forms of violence such as food deprivation, intimidation, physical threats, bullying, sexual harassment and assaults, and even brutal murders (WIEGO, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Sayres, 2007).

Not all experiences of domestic workers, however, are negative. Others also recognize the positive impacts of being employed in the sector of domestic work. Some employers are the exact opposite of the previously mentioned cases, and even treat their domestic workers as “part of their families” (Reyes, 2017). On the brighter side also, unwanted negative experiences in the past and of other people may serve as a learning lesson for these domestic workers to strive harder, be more assertive, smarter, and become more empowered (Reyes, 2017).

Towards decent work for domestic workers: Legislative and regulatory frameworks

Republic Act No. 10361 is an Act Instituting Policies for the Protection and Welfare of Domestic Workers, otherwise known as ‘Domestic Workers Act’ or ‘*Batas Kasambahay*.’ It was implemented on June 4, 2013 or 15 days after the publication of its implementing rules and regulations (IRR) on May 19, 2013 in The Philippine Star and the Manila Times.

The law aimed to uphold the rights and dignity of domestic workers to protect them from abuse and exploitation by providing safe and humane working conditions. Domestic workers are considered as one of the most vulnerable sectors in society due to the nature of their work. All domestic workers engaged in domestic work, whether on a live-in or live-out arrangement are covered by the law, such as, but not limited to: a) general house-help; b) *yaya*; c) cook; d) gardener; e) laundry person; f) working children or domestic workers 15 years and above but below 18 years of age; or g) any person who regularly performs domestic work in one household on an occupational basis (live-out arrangement).

To protect domestic workers as well as employers of the domestic workers, the law required them to enter into a contract of employment written in a language or dialect understood by them. The contract will include the roles and benefits of domestic workers. Employers may require the domestic worker additional requirement if they deemed it necessary. The mandatory benefits of the domestic worker that shall be included in the contract are the following:

- a. Monthly minimum wage;
- b. Daily rest period of 8 (total) hours;
- c. Weekly rest period of 24 (uninterrupted) hours
- d. Five days annual service incentive leave with pay;
- e. 13th month pay;
- f. SSS benefit;
- g. PhilHealth benefit; and
- h. Pag-IBIG benefit

Table 1 shows the distinct roles of specific government agencies responsible in the efficient and effective implementation of the Domestic Workers Act. The integrated and synergistic cooperation between and among these concerned institutional agencies are significant in order to facilitate better delivery of services as well as better implementation of action and sanctions against violators.

Table 1. Role of government institutions primarily responsible in the implementation of the Domestic Workers Act

Government Institutions	Roles
Local Government Units (LGUs)	Shall facilitate access of domestic workers to all existing programs and services
Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)	Shall oversee and provide technical assistance to ensure the implementation of the LGU on domestic workers’ programs and service
Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)	Shall be responsible for the continuous enhancement of standards for the employment and welfare of domestic workers
Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)	Shall institute a program designed specifically to provide emergency services to domestic workers in need of custody, shelter, healing or legal, medical, psychological, and rehabilitative services
Department of Education (DepEd)	Shall develop and administer equivalency test and alternative educational programs for the accreditation of educational qualification of the domestic workers
Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)	Shall be responsible for the continuous enhancement of training regulations which will serve as the basis for the development of curricula, registration, and delivery of training programs for domestic workers

Philippine National Police (PNP)	Shall coordinate with LGUs, DSWD, and other relevant agencies in conducting rescue operations for abused domestic workers
Non-government organizations (NGOs)	Shall equally contribute to the delivery of programs and services to be provided by government offices as prescribed in this law

Statement of the problem

In the recent years, domestic work has become an important source of paid employment among disadvantaged members of society, particularly among women who are historically and socially deprived of labor opportunities. This enabled many women to gain access to the labor force traditionally dominated by men. Despite the capacity of domestic work employment to lift people out of poverty, certain issues and concerns affecting many individuals likewise surround this sector. Some people, instead of reaping the benefits of paid domestic work employment such as better living conditions and quality of life, experience varying degrees of abuses, marginalization, and other work-related problems. This overt exploitation and oppression of an already disadvantaged sector necessitates the immediate response and action of concerned social institutions, particularly the government. This study, therefore, attempts to shed light on the challenges experienced by people employed in domestic work, the mechanisms and strategies they employ to deal with these concerns, and the key role of policy intervention in bringing necessary reforms and changes in the current status quo of domestic workers in the country.

Research questions

It is the primary aim of this research to explore the experiences and responses of Filipino women employed as domestic workers and the role of the Domestic Workers Act as an institutional legal policy in addressing the issues related to their living and working conditions. To be more focused and specific, this study will seek to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the different motivations and preferences underlying women's engagement in domestic work?
2. What are the different issues and challenges encountered by Filipina domestic workers?
3. How do these women deal with the problems they encounter?
4. What is the role of institutional legal policy, particularly the Domestic Workers Act, in addressing issues encountered by Filipina domestic workers?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the case study approach. The case study approach, according to Creswell (2007), tries to explore a particular issue by analyzing one or more "cases" situated within a specified context. Yin (2003, p. 4) further emphasized that case study is particularly appropriate in studying a phenomenon that is "not readily distinguishable from its context." The researcher ascertained that since this study attempts to examine the specific experiences and responses of domestic workers, the different ways they employ in order to deal with these concerns, and the role played by the legislative policy intervention which is the Domestic Workers Act in attaining better working conditions and reduce vulnerability among the domestic workers, a case-study approach is the appropriate research design to use so as to illicit a deeper understanding pertaining to these issues.

To be more specific, this study employed a descriptive, single-case study. It is important to note that it is not the aim of this research to make general assertions beyond the case being studied. The objective of the study is to have broad and in-depth understanding of the complexities of the case.

The researcher identified Los Baños, Laguna as its study site. Due to time constraints and the proximity of the place to the researcher, participants for the research were gathered from this area. In selecting the participants, the researcher identified two important criteria: *gender* and *length of service* as a domestic worker. Based on literature, most workers employed in the domestic work industry are women, so the researcher limited the parameters of the study to women who experience greater risks and vulnerabilities as domestic workers. Furthermore, the researcher took into account the length of service as significant because it will enable them to explore and examine in-depth the working experiences of the participants, including their knowledge about the work, the challenges and issues,

and their coping strategies. For the purpose of the study, the researcher considered only those female domestic workers with at least one year of experience in domestic work. There was a total of three female domestic workers who participated in the study.

Data was gathered through multiple sources of information. In-depth interviews, using open-ended questions, were primarily utilized. Convenience sampling was used since the participants are limited only to the female domestic workers who are employed in the area.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant all throughout the data presentation and analysis. Direct quotations from the participants are presented and thematic analysis was employed. In essence, thematic analysis is a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and describing recurring patterns or 'themes' within a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of data analysis is particularly useful in reporting the meanings or realities that an individual attach to his or her own experiences as well as the ways in which his or her formation of these meanings or realities are being influenced by the broader social context where he or she belongs. The direct quotations were grouped together to form initial codes and then later, larger or general themes that are expected to satisfy the objectives of the study.

Informed consent was secured from the participants prior to the scheduled interview. The consent form included the objectives of the study and the expected extent of participation of the domestic workers. The researcher has also assured confidentiality among the participants. There is also an acknowledgement that the participants have the right to terminate their participation should any part of the interview make them feel uncomfortable. Aside from securing the informed consent, the facilitator also observed sensitivity in asking questions as some sensitive topics were discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three (3) domains were identified by the researcher: reasons and circumstances that motivated women to engage in domestic work, issues and challenges encountered by Filipina domestic workers and the ways they develop to cope, and lastly, the role of institutional policy, particularly the Domestic Workers Act, in addressing the issues encountered by Filipina domestic workers. Table 2 summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of the three participants of the study.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Age	Years working as domestic worker	Place of Origin	Educational Attainment	Monthly Wage (in pesos)
Patricia	18	4	Nueva Ecija	Elementary graduate	2,500.00
Eva	48	14	Samar	Elementary graduate	4,500.00
Merla	50	20	Negros Occidental	High school graduate	6,000.00

Domain 1: Reasons and circumstances that motivated women to engage in domestic work

Description of family life and position in the family prior to working as a domestic worker

The participants of the study are from lower-income family backgrounds from different rural regions in the country. In addition, they are the only members in their families to work as domestic workers. These characteristics affirm the findings of existing literature that most women employed in domestic work in the Philippines came from impoverished families that have very limited access to certain socio-economic opportunities such as education and high paying employment.

Primary motivations among women participants to engage in domestic work

According to the participants of the study, family strains and conflicts are the primary factors behind their decision to engage in domestic work. In the Philippines, the family provides an important source of physical and emotional support among Filipinos in times of great distress. There are certain instances, however, wherein the family itself becomes the source of emotional problems and sufferings among its members. Due to these strains, some members are forced to move out of the family to build their lives independently, as in the case of Patricia. Families also serve as a significant source of economic support, especially among poor individuals. Conflicts in the family, however, can result to financial insecurity especially when the burden of financially providing for the family is placed on the shoulder of the husband or

any male member of the family. Marital problems, therefore, oftentimes forces women (who carry the burden of taking care of the children) to seek for other sources of financial resources to sustain the family.

Meaning and experience of being a domestic worker

Contrary to the prevailing notions in literature that female domestic workers generally experience negative experiences toward their work, the narratives of the participants show that domestic work can also elicit positive meanings and experiences among the *kasambahays*. Interestingly, all of the participants regarded their experiences as domestic workers in positive ways. As women who continuously face challenges in society, they view domestic work as gratifying and empowering. Since opportunities opened up to them through their work, particularly the capacity to earn their own money without relying on anyone, the participants feel that they gain this sense of power to decide for their own. Furthermore, the perception of the participants toward their labor now transcends beyond mere source of income, but also an extension of their social self. They tend to regard their *amo* and other people that they work with as their “second families;” which also exhibits that not all employer-domestic worker relationships are hostile and oppressive.

Domain 2: Issues and challenges encountered by Filipina domestic workers and the ways they develop to cope

Problems encountered by domestic workers and the strategies they developed to cope

In general, the participants noted that they never experienced any instance of physical, emotional, psychological, or socio-environmental problems working as a domestic worker. Even if they mentioned in the interviews that they experience occasional physical tiredness or homesickness, they do not consider these as “primary concerns.” They believe that these experiences are just part of their job as domestic workers, and that there is nothing disconcerting about it.

Domain 3: Role of institutional policy, particularly the Domestic Workers Act, in addressing issues encountered by Filipina domestic workers

Awareness and understanding of the Domestic Workers Act

The participants are not aware at all about the provisions under the Domestic Workers Act. The participants confided that they had never heard of the law before and did not even know that such legislation protecting their rights exist. Due to their lack of understanding regarding the law, they cannot provide any opinion or perception regarding the impacts of the law in addressing domestic work-related problems. The low level of awareness and understanding of the Domestic Workers Act is a major concern particularly in the effective implementation of the policy program. Asuncion (2014) noted that the problem lies on both the employer and the worker: “raising awareness and educating both employers and domestic workers on the law is a challenge as neither appear to take this seriously” (p. 326). She stressed the need for wider information campaigns and greater participation among stakeholders on seminars conducted by the government related to the implementation of the law.

Provisions under the Domestic Workers Act being received by domestic workers

In terms of the provisions under the Domestic Workers Act being obtained by the participants, results from the study indicate that the domestic workers are getting considerably less than what they should be receiving. Their monthly wage is far less than the prescribed minimum wage pays and only one from the participants receive pension pay and medical insurance. Before the passage of the law, the amount of pay for domestic workers depends primarily on the capacity of employers to pay, since not all individuals who employ domestic workers have higher incomes themselves. In fact, one of the concerns during the passage of the law was its potential impact to middle class families employing domestic workers which might possibly result to massive layoffs (Asuncion, 2014). The Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, however, maintained that the mandatory monthly minimum wage for domestic workers will not result to terminations or retrenchments since an overwhelming majority of domestic workers in the country are employed by the top 10 percent income class in the country capable of following this new wage scheme (Asuncion, 2014).

Perception of domestic workers regarding benefits and importance of the law

Despite their lack of understanding about the law, the participants believe that the Domestic Workers Act is important particularly in upholding and protecting the rights of domestic workers in the country.

Primary challenges confronting domestic workers that should be further addressed by the law

For the participants of the study, necessary courses of action must be undertaken to ensure that the full benefits of the Domestic Workers Act will be fully realized. Since the *kasambahays* are earning below the prescribed minimum wage, they are appealing for the proper adherence to the payment of minimum wage and social security benefits such as SSS, PhilHealth, and PAG-IBIG. While they are not demanding changes in terms of the length of their working hours, the participants are requesting instead for adjustments in their working arrangements particularly the rest days in order to give them time to recover and rest.

Table 3. Data extracts and themes derived from the participant's narratives

Themes	Quotations Supporting Themes and Domains
Domain 1: Reasons and circumstances that motivated women to engage in domestic work	
Participants came from relatively modest or impoverished family backgrounds	<p><i>Mahirap lang po kami na minsan isang beses lang kumain sa loob ng isang araw. Nasa anim na taong gulang pa lang po ako ay alam ko na ang mag-uling. Ako lang po ang namamasukan bilang kasambahay sa aming pamilya.</i> (From an impoverished household; started working from a very young age)</p> <p><i>Bago ako naging kasambahay ako ay kasal at may sariling pamilya. Namatayan ng anak at iniwan ng aking asawa. Tanging ako lamang sa aming pamilya ang namasukan bilang kasambahay.</i> (Simple homemaker; husband left after the death of their only child)</p> <p><i>Noong nabubuhay pa ang aking mister, ako ay simpleng maybahay lamang. Halos mahigit sa tatlong beses sa isang araw kami kung kumain. Mister ko ang lahat na gumagawa sa aming bahay. Andyan yung pati pamamalengke ay kanyang ginagawa. Nasa probinsiya ang lahat na aking pamilya.</i> (Simple housewife; lived a modest lifestyle when her husband was still alive)</p>
Family strains and conflicts are the primary reasons why participants decided to engage in domestic work	<p><i>Minabuti ko po ang lumayas sa amin at magpakalayo-layo dahil sa 14 edad pa lang po ako ay pinagsasamantalahan na ako ng aking amain na hindi alam ng aking ina.</i> (Experienced sexual abuse from her stepfather)</p> <p><i>Napakalungkot ng aking buhay noong ako ay hindi pa namamamasukan bilang katulong. Hindi ko maubos maisip kung bakit dumating sa akin ang ganitong sitwasyon na pagkatapos mamatayan ng anak e iniwan ako ng aking asawa.</i> (Experienced emotional distress due to the unfortunate events that happened to her family)</p> <p><i>Nang mamatay ang aking mister, doon ko napagdesisyonan ang mamasukan upang kahit papaano ay may susuporta sa aking mga anak.</i> (Experienced financial difficulty in sustaining her children's needs following the death of the husband)</p>
Participants regard domestic work as liberating, source of hope, and important for their subsistence	<p><i>Malaki ang naitulong sa akin ng pagiging isang kasambahay dahil nakalayo ako sa amain ko. Nakakakain na ako nang higit sa tatlong beses sa isang araw. At higit sa lahat, ay may pera na ako buwan-buwan. Ang pagiging isang kasambahay ay para akong isang mag-aaral sa dami nang aking natutunan sa araw-araw lalong higit ay yung mga gawaing bahay.</i> (Emancipated her from her sexually abusive stepfather; gave her financial freedom to live on her own; and learned a lot of new things)</p> <p><i>Buti na lang at may kumuha sa akin bilang kasambahay kung saan tatlong bata ang aking inaalagaan. Nakatagpo ako ng pangalawang pamilya sa aking amo. Mabuti sila sa akin at napakabait. Hindi ako itinuturing na iba. Masaya ako sa piling nila dahil tanggap nila ako bilang isang miyembro ng kanilang pamilya.</i> (Gave her renewed sense of hope and strength; found a "second family" in her work employers)</p> <p><i>Kasambahay ay isang klase ng trabahong mapagkukunan ng suporta para sa mga anak. Masaya na mahirap ang maging isang kasambahay. Laking pasasalamat ko sa aking mabubuting amo dahil may pangsuporta ako para sa aking mga anak.</i> (Source of financial assistance and support for her family; difficult but satisfying due to kind work employers)</p>
Domain 2: Issues and challenges encountered by Filipina domestic workers and the ways they develop to cope	
Participants consider their experiences (e.g. tiredness, homesickness, etc.) as naturally part of the job,	<p><i>Wala naman akong nararanasang anumang pisikal na problema o suliraning kaugnay ng pagiging isang kasambahay ko. Natural lang na maranasan ko ang pagod. Maging sikolohikal na problema ay wala akong nararanasan ganun din ang emotional. Minsan ako ay nalulungkot dahil sabik ako makita</i></p>

and do not deem them as forms of physical, psychological, emotional, or social problems	<i>ang aking ina at mga kapatid pero sa tuwing maaalala ko na ay uuwi sa amin ay dun ako nagigising sa katotohanang ayaw ko nang umuwi sa amin dahil naroon ang aking amain, pangalawang asawa ng aking ina.</i> (No experience of physical, psychological, nor emotional problems; tiredness and homesickness were viewed as natural component of being a domestic worker) <i>Mula sa unang araw na ako ay namasukan sa kanila bilang kasambahay ay wala akong naranasang anumang pisikal, sikolohikal, at emotional na suliranin. Masasabi ko na napagdaanan ko na ang mga iyun noong ako ay nasa aking pamilya pa. Wala ring anumang problema sa komunidad kung saan ako nakatira ngayon.</i> (No encounter of physical, psychological, emotional, nor social problems; been through far worst situations before) <i>Wala akong nararanasan na mga pisikal, sikolohikal, at emotional na problema. Yung pagod sa sobrang trabaho lalo na kapag may okasyon sila.</i> (No encounter of physical (except during demanding occasions), psychological, nor emotional problems)
Domain 3: Role of institutional policy, particularly the Domestic Workers Act, in addressing the issues encountered by Filipina domestic workers	
Participants are not knowledgeable about the nature and components of the Domestic Workers Act	<i>Wala po akong alam hinggil dyan sa Batas Kasambahay. Ngayon ko lang po nalaman na merong batas na ganyan.</i> <i>Wala po akong alam na may kaukulang batas na pala para sa mga kasambahay.</i> <i>Wala akong alam na batas para sa mga katulong.</i> (Not knowledgeable about the Domestic Workers Act; first encounter of the said law)
Participants view the law as essential in asserting the needs and protecting the rights of domestic workers	<i>Naniniwala po ako na malaki ang maitutulong ng Batas Kasambahay sa kapakanan ng mga namamasukan bilang katulong.</i> <i>Napakahalaga nitong Republic Act 10361 para sa aming mga namamasukan dahil nakasaad dito yung mga benepisyo na dapat ipinagkakaloob sa amin ng aming mga amo.</i> <i>Mabuti naman kung ganon na 'yang Republic Act 10361 na nag uutos sa mga amo na ipagbayad ang mga kaukulang benepisyo ang bawat katulong.</i> (Helpful in asserting the needs and rights of domestic workers)
Participants are seeking for the proper implementation of enough pay, better working arrangements, and other significant benefits for domestic workers	<i>Tulad na lang ng isyu sa taas ng suweldo. At yung bigyan ka man lang ng isang araw na day off o yung pahinga ka sa lahat ng klase ng trabaho. Higit sa anupaman dapat po yung laki ng suweldo ang dapat na pagtuunan ng pansin ng mga mambabatas upang maiahon sa hirap ang buhay ng mga kasambahay.</i> (Below minimum wage pays; lack of rest day) <i>Magandang mapagtuunan ng pansin ng mga mambabatas ang suweldo, benepisyo, at yung dami ng trabaho.</i> (Below minimum wage pays; overloaded work) <i>Sana ay mabigyang pansin ang mababang pasuweldo at mga dagdag benepisyo pa para sa mga kasambahay.</i> (Below minimum wage pays; lack of other important benefits)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings from this qualitative study yield some important points. Essentially, the picture of a female domestic worker is from a poor family background with limited access to adequate social services (e.g. education).

Results from this study also show that participation in domestic work is not a deliberate personal desire and decision, but rather an outcome of external influences, primarily the family. Participants' narratives exemplified that adverse familial circumstances exhort them to engage in domestic work, either to help with the needs of the family or to depart from the conflicts brought by strained family relationships. Thus, the participants tend to view domestic work in a more positive manner—a kind of employment that is both empowering economically and personally gratifying.

Moreover, findings from the study suggest that despite the pervasiveness of exploitative and oppressive employer-domestic worker relationships, harmonious and collaborative relationships can also exist between domestic workers and their employers. In the case of the participants of this study, all of them recognized that as domestic workers, they found great social support from their employers who treated them like an extension of their families.

Despite their positive perception toward their work, the participants still recognize the importance of acquiring proper remuneration and other essential benefits. Institutional legislative policies like the Domestic Workers Act is an important tool in ensuring better working conditions and providing a decent way of life to people employed in domestic work. The level of awareness and understanding of individuals, particularly domestic workers themselves, however, toward the policy intervention individuals remain very limited.

There are certain factors to be considered when understanding and interpreting the findings of this research. Due to time constraints and the difficulty of identifying participants who will fit the criteria, there are only three participants involved in this study, a sample size too small to permit any forms of generalizations about the results of the study. In addition, since the intent of this study is to explore the experiences of domestic workers as disadvantaged groups in society, the perspective of the employers was not elicited.

The results from this study indicate the need for future qualitative researches that will include a greater number of participants to capture as many viewpoints and perspectives as possible. Moreover, since one of the major findings of study is that there is a very low level of awareness among domestic workers regarding the significant aspects and components of the Domestic Workers Act, the researchers strongly propose the need for an intensive information and education campaign to all stakeholders spearheaded by local government units. It is essential that all stakeholders (both the employers and the domestic workers) know their rights, duties and obligations to be able to raise understanding and to better appreciate the importance of the law.

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