

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Home truths behind closed doors: Reciting the lived experiences of child domestic workers in selected towns of Gedeo Zone, Southern Ethiopia**

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**This qualitative study was aimed at looking into the lived experiences of child domestic workers in the selected towns of Gedeo Zone. A triangulation of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations, non-participant observations, and life histories were employed to collect the required data from child domestic workers, brokers, urban residents, police officers, and officials and experts in concerned government offices. The finding reveals that poverty and parental death are among the principal factors that coerce children to join the sector. Being a solitary decision for a few, engaging in this sector is not a personal decision for many child domestic workers. Letting one or more child (ren) engage in domestic work in urban areas is often adopted by poor rural and urban families as a survival strategy. The decision of the families to send their children for domestic work is often mediated by brokers. With regard to the terms of employment of the child domestic workers, all interviewed child domestic workers were working without any written contract with their employers. Though the lived experiences of the interviewed child domestic workers were heterogeneous, most reported long working hours, poor remuneration, deduction, delay and denial of salary, denial of contact with family and friends, uncomfortable living arrangements, denial of access to education, and physical, verbal, psychological and sexual abuses to characterize their daily lives. As poverty was found to be the prominent reason for most child domestic workers to join the sector, the researchers suggest the integrated interventions of stakeholders to scale up the capabilities of rural and urban poor households thereby preventing children from entering into the sector. Furthermore, enforcing the existing legal frameworks related to child labor and enacting additional responsive regulations on child domestic work is imperative to protect those who are already in the sector.**

**Key words:** Abuse, child domestic workers, families, Gedeo, lived experiences, poverty.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Child domestic work refers to all sorts of works carried out by children under the age of eighteen who work in households of people other than their closest family

(UNICEF, 1999). It is one of the most common and worst forms of child labor globally and is even considered a form of modern-day slavery (UNICEF, 1999; Black,

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2002). According to ILO, there were an estimated 17.2 million child domestic workers in the world (ILO, 2013). The same source also shows the prevalence of a significant gender difference in child domestic work globally, that is, girls outnumber boys. Accordingly, about 5.6 million boys aged 5 to 17 years old were involved in domestic work (3.8% of all working boys) compared with 11.5 million girls in that age range (9.9% of all working girls).

It is well established in child labor literature that there are multitudes of push and pull factors for children's engagement in domestic work. Accordingly, poverty, lack of access to education, gender inequality, domestic violence in their own family and loss of parents are just a few of the multiple push factors for many children to join domestic work worldwide (ILO, 2013; Blagbrough, 2008). Furthermore, traditionally accepted perception for home-based activities as safe for children compared to out of home activities, seeking better living conditions including educational opportunities are some of the factors which lure children into domestic work (ILO, 2013; Global March, 2013). Employers also prefer child domestic workers for children are perceived as easy to manipulate (ILO, 2004 in Erulkar and Mekbib, 2007).

There is a dichotomy of views about child domestic work in the existing literature. However, due to the hidden and inaccessible nature of the work in their employer's household, and lack of specific labor laws or standards, child domestic workers are often highly vulnerable to exploitation by their employers (Caritas, 2012). Even where there are regulations to protect child domestic workers, it is extremely difficult to enforce because the workplace is a private dwelling, effectively giving the employer total control over the person in their 'service'. Thus, though it is clear that domestic workers are uniquely vulnerable, the degree of harm to which they are exposed is not clear due to its hidden nature (Jennie et al., 2015). In spite of this difficulty, exploitations reported by previous studies include low salaries, excessive domestic duties, long hours of work, limited freedom of movement, insecure accommodation and lack of privacy (Black, 2002). Restrictions on their mobility and communication often lead to social isolation (Black, 2002; Caritas, 2012). Moreover, they are also vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuses (Anti-Slavery International, 2013; Islam et al., 2013).

When one comes to Ethiopia, about 18% of children aged 5-11 and 40% of children aged 12-14 were in this sector (CSA, 2011). The vast majority of child domestic workers in Ethiopia are located in urban areas but originate from poor rural families (Erulkar et al., 2017). A study in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, found that 97 percent of domestic workers migrated to the area from rural areas (Erulkar and Mekbib, 2007). Domestic work is frequently the initial survival strategy for rural Ethiopian girls migrating to urban areas. Following migration from rural areas, most girls enter the workforce as domestic

workers, because it is a readily available form of work requiring little or no education (Erulkar et al., 2017).

Some of the major factors that force children in Ethiopia to join this worst form of child labour include poverty, escaping from early marriage in rural areas, expectation of a better life in urban areas, lack of opportunity for schooling in rural areas, and orphanhood (Kifle, 2002; Kumar, 2015; Integrated Regional Information Network, 2004). However, they remain invisible because of the very fact that domestic work is performed in the homes of individuals (Kifle, 2002). Consequently, they are usually subjected to long hours of work for little or no payment and are also prone to various forms of verbal, physical and sexual abuse at their immature age (Abera et al., 2003; Kifle, 2002). Originating from poor rural areas and armed with little in the way of education, domestic workers receive low pay and frequently work in abusive situations, including sexual abuse (Erulkar et al., 2017). A study conducted in three Ethiopian cities found that domestic workers are vulnerable to sexual abuse, and they are nearly twice as likely to experience nonconsensual sex as girls who were not domestic workers (Erulkar and Ferede, 2009).

From the preliminary observation made by the researcher in the study areas, it became possible to understand that like other town of the country child domestic work is one of the rampant phenomena. This is mainly because a large number of children migrate to the towns from nearby and far rural and urban parts to engage in domestic work. Nowadays the route from Hawassa to Moyale is becoming one of the major routes wherein child trafficking mainly for domestic work is highly practiced. As the majorities of children who migrate to the areas have no skill to be employed in other forms of works, and as some are brought by traffickers for that specific purpose, the exploitative informal sector works like domestic work are the only available option for them.

Though there are a few studies on issues related to child domestic workers in the country (Erulkar et al., 2017; Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015; Erulkar, 2012; Gebre, 2012; Abera et al., 2003; Kifle, 2002), they were mainly confined to the country's capital and few other major cities. When it comes to the Southern part of Ethiopia, the existing studies are more focused on child migration and streetism than specifically addressing the issue of child domestic work and the lived experiences of child domestic workers. Thus, the existing literature provides inadequate information about the situation of child domestic workers in medium and smaller towns of the country. Therefore, this study was aimed at investigating the lived experiences of child domestic workers in selected towns of Gedeo Zone, Southern Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study was aimed at achieving the following specific objectives:

(1) To identify the underlying factors behind child domestic work and the recruitment process in the study area.

- (2) To look into the terms of employment of child domestic workers in the study area.
- (3) To examine the living and working conditions of child domestic workers in the study area.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Gedeo zone is one of the administrative zones found in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The administrative capital of the Gedeo zone, Dilla Town, is located at 369 kilometers South of Addis Ababa on the main Addis Ababa-Nairobi international road.

The study employed a qualitative research approach as it was aimed at investigating aspects of social life that are not amenable to quantitative measurement. It is a research approach that uses a range of methods to focus on the subjective meanings through which people interpret the world, that is, social events and phenomena are understood from the perspective of the actors themselves, avoiding the imposition of the researcher's own preconceptions and definitions (Jupp, 2006). Therefore, in this study qualitative approach has been favored over the quantitative one not only for it allows the researchers to investigate a non-quantifiable aspect of social life but also it helps the researchers explore the subjective meaning attached to domestic work. Thus, this approach was employed largely to understand the lives of child domestic workers from the point of view of child domestic workers themselves.

While child domestic workers and brokers were recruited through snowball sampling technique, the other participants (such as police officers, experts and officials of concerned government offices, urban residents) were purposively selected from three towns of Gedeo zone. The researchers used their own social networks to contact the first few child domestic workers and then with the help of the later the researchers managed to contact the other participants. For instance, one of the participants, who served as a domestic worker for three different employers in the same town, helped us access four other child domestic workers. With the help of one of them again, who told us to attend night school, we managed to access a few others in the school compound during their night school and two others on their way to market. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, life histories, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations, and non-participant observations. Accordingly, 13 in-depth interviews were held with child domestic workers. Most of the informant child domestic workers were girls and above 12 years old for it was difficult to access boys and younger girls. More than 9 key informant interviews were also conducted with experts, and officials from government offices such as Women and Children Affairs Office, Labor and Social Affairs Office and the Police. One focus group discussion was conducted with urban residents in one of the towns. In-depth interviews and informal conversations were also made with two brokers (but both of them were very restrictive). And finally, several informal conversations were made with urban residents in each town.

Among the qualitative methods of data analysis, thematic analysis has been employed to analyze data collected from the sources discussed in the foregoing sections. As it was a study with children, the issue of research ethics was central to the study. In this regard, the informant children were informed about the overall aim of the study, their right to withdraw from the study at any time and the confidentiality of the information they provide. Accordingly, the researchers made maximum efforts to protect the informants from any harm that they may experience due to their participation in the study. In the study, the researchers also ensured confidentiality and anonymity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Though the main focus of this study was looking into the lived experiences of child domestic workers in the selected smaller towns, the paper begins with a brief analysis of factors for the children to join domestic work and their recruitment process. Then it goes to investigating their terms of employment; the nature of their treatment by their employers; and the types and magnitude of abuses they experience while living and working as domestic workers.

### Factors for children's engagement in domestic work and their recruitment process

As far as factors behind child domestic work are concerned, previous studies (such as Kifle, 2002) indicated that one of the most critical pushing factors is the poverty of the children's families. The present study also reveals that poverty takes the lion share in coercing children to leave their homes and work in households of people other than their closest families. In this regard, the participant child domestic workers disclosed that they were forced to join this sector because of the inadequacy of their families' income to support the whole family members.

As reiterated by the participant child domestic workers, brokers, and urban residents, the role brokers, other domestic workers, and rural and urban poor households was noticeable in the recruitment process of children for domestic work. Out of the interviewed children, only two reported having joined the sector on their own (without the channeling roles of their parents and brokers). A 15 years old girl had to say the following regarding the role of her mother:

*I am from a poor family with seven family members including my mother. We lost our father by motorbike accident four years ago. Since his death, our mother has been doing everything she could to keep me and my older brother in school. But she couldn't do so. Having heard about the opportunity for domestic work from our distant relatives, my mother consulted her brother and finally, they decided to send me with a man who brought me and other two girls to this town. ...I couldn't say 'No' to my mother because I believed that I have to help her raise my sisters and brothers. Now my employer is regularly sending half of my salary to my mother.*

The above narrative of the girl clearly shows why and how she joined the sector. She clearly attributed her family's decision to send her for domestic work to the poverty (manifested through low socio-economic conditions, large family size, failure to carry on with schooling) of her family that was actually worsened by the death of her father. The narrative further shows the

child's engagement in domestic work was based on the decision of her family and also mediated by a broker.

The participants of the study also disclosed that inducement of siblings (who themselves are domestic workers), often in consultation with parents, is playing a key role in instigating the children to join this sector. Two of child domestic workers who participated in this study disclosed that their older sisters (who themselves are domestic workers) channeled them to the employers in their neighborhood. A 13-years-old girl domestic worker said that:

*My older sister was the first one to come to this town for domestic work. When she returned to our home during a holiday, last year, she consulted my mother and they told me to accompany her. Then, I came with her and was hired by the friend (neighbor) of her employer. Now we are helping our family from our salary. My sister also helped our cousin in the same manner and she has recently got the same job in this town.*

Brokers also underscored that, in most cases, the families of the children are highly involved in the recruitment of children for domestic work. Furthermore, though they were suspicious of the interview, they didn't deny their crucial role in 'facilitating' the recruitment process. In this regard, one of the brokers we interviewed said:

The demand for domestic workers among urban residents is increasing as both husbands and wives work outside of the home and as their children spend their day time at schools. You know, currently, it is not an easy task to bring a child of your relatives from rural areas. Consequently, urban residents are facing great difficulty in employing a domestic worker. I and other brokers are engaged in facilitating this process.

The second broker added that:

*These days, everybody knows how to employ a domestic worker. Though few urban residents still employ domestic workers with the help of their relatives in rural areas, the majority contact us whenever they are in a need of a domestic worker. We have our own social networks in different urban and rural areas. Sometimes we ourselves go to certain rural areas, contact poor families who have many children, convince them that their children would a better life and they will be benefited, and then some families decide to send their children with us. At other times, we receive children sent to us by other brokers from some other rural and urban areas. We do not steal children from poor families.*

The above narratives of the girl and two brokers clearly show that most child domestic workers do not migrate on their own. Also in agreement with Erulkar et al. (2017), this study finds that the interviewed child domestic workers didn't engage a step migration—migration in

stages from rural areas to small towns to bigger towns. However, unlike the findings of some previous study that argues that children migrate to towns often without the knowledge of their parents, this study reveals that poor rural and urban households continue to play a significant role in their children's engagement as domestic workers. It reveals that the urban residents' demand for child domestic workers is responded by poverty-stricken urban and rural households, often mediated by the brokers.

Our informant urban residents reiterated that relying on mature and trustworthy domestic workers to help them get a child domestic worker is one of the commonly pursued alternatives in the town. Some informants indicated that they prefer this alternative over recruiting a domestic worker with the help of a broker. Furthermore, informants disclosed that in some cases children are directly brought by their family members; and the family members discuss with the employing household about the salary and other conditions of the work on behalf of a child; and entrust the wellbeing of a child to the employer. Most key informant urban residents indicated that this kind of recruitment method is the most preferred one.

### Terms of employment

With regard to the terms of employment, a contract as a written document lays the basis for one to ask his/her right in case of a dispute. Regarding contract, article 7 of the ILO Convention No. 189 commends all the member states to take measures to enable domestic workers to be aware of their terms and conditions of employment in a clearly written contract in accordance with national laws and regulations. The convention also clearly indicates that, the written contract should have to enable domestic workers to know the detail information of their employer like his/her name, address, type of work to be performed, food and accommodation, working hours, remuneration, daily and weekly rest periods, working place address and condition of termination of the contract (ILO, 2011).

As it was indicated in the foregoing discussion, the convention calls attention to the need for the establishment of a formal contract between employers and domestic workers. This is because it will function as a written document for the terms agreed between the two parties in the event of a dispute. However, as our informant child domestic workers reported, none of them had any written contract before joining the work. Instead, there were oral agreements concerning their salary and promises regarding the benefits the children may enjoy by joining that family. In affirming the above idea, a 17 years old girl (domestic worker) explained her experience as follows:

*When I was brought to my employer, I didn't ask for any written contract. I didn't know it is important. I asked her only about my salary and if I can attend night school. I*

*started my job just by trusting her words about the overall living and conditions of work.*

Those already reached verbal agreements between the two parties are more trusted if the employer is from the children's place of arrival as informants revealed. However, this does not mean that they are not subject to violation of the employers. As the key informants reiterated, due to its absence, some employers easily violate the verbal agreement and dismiss children without giving any salary after working for several months on pretexts like behaving disrespectfully towards them, disagreement with their family, lying and so forth. Our key informants mentioned two main reasons for the absence of a written contract in most cases. Firstly, it was said that, since child domestic workers are children, they have no awareness about it and its importance for them. As a result, they never ask for it when the employers hire them. Secondly, it was reported that sometimes they get their jobs through their relatives and family member's networks. Accordingly, it is considered a shame to ask for a written contract because the employers might consider it as a sign of suspecting them; instead, they negotiate on behalf of the children. In some cases where the two families know each other, the sending family usually entrusts the overall well-being of the child to the employer.

As the key informant police officers at village community policing service centers indicated, the absence of a written contract between domestic workers and their employers is one of the problems they frequently face in their attempt to solve disputes occurring between the two. And it was also said that the absence of written contract paves the way for some employers to easily betray what they promised to child domestic workers on the employment agreement.

As far as their wages is concerned, the finding of the study revealed that they were paid either in cash or kind depending on the initial agreement. Among those who get payment on cash, as the majority pointed out, their salary (for some half of their salary) is sent to their parents as they joined the sector to financially support their families. In such cases, the parents of child domestic workers periodically receive the salary of their children from employers. On the other hand, three of the interviewed child domestic workers reported to work on a kind agreement that is they do not receive regular salary on monthly basis. These groups of children work for food, clothes, and to pursue education (night school) as they lack these opportunities in their families' home.

### **The living and working conditions of child domestic workers**

#### ***Types of activities performed***

According to the information that we obtained from the

interviewed child domestic workers, they perform various tasks both inside and outside the home such as cooking, boiling coffee, mopping floor, washing clothes, cleaning the compound, doing the dishes, making beds, taking care of children, fetching water, washing legs and feet of their employers children, shopping from nearer shop, carrying vegetables and other food items from the market and sell goods in the market. Besides, as two of the participants described that they sell local foods/dishes in informal street-side restaurants in the evenings and hand over the money earned to their female employers.

Two girl domestic workers indicated that if adult domestic workers stay at home, cooking is seen as their routine task because it is believed that cleaning and taking care of their children constitute lighter and more suitable work for them. In the absence of the adults, they are required to carry out the overall household tasks. In this regard, a 15-years-old girl domestic worker recounted:

*I open the gate, tie dogs in their house, clean the house, fetch water, prepare breakfast, serve food for the family, prepare the children and take them to school, then I go shopping, do the dishes, cook lunch, return children from the school....*

Another 16 years old girl described the types of tasks she performs in the following way:

*I am busy throughout the day. I wake up at 6 am, boil the coffee, I mop the floor, clean the compound, clean the toilet, wash everyone's clothes, cook lunch, do the dishes, return children from the school, feed them, and many others.*

The boy domestic worker described that they perform tasks like fetching water, cleaning the compound, running the errands, washing clothes, keep the house, carrying goods to and from the market. In describing the types of tasks he performs in his employer's home, a 14-year boy domestic worker stated that:

*I wake up at 7 am in the morning. Then, I fetch water, take the children to school, take goods to the market, clean the compound and return my employer's children from the school.*

Another 16-year girl domestic worker described her working and living condition as follows:

*....I am always at work throughout the week. Even I am not allowed to go to church on Sunday because my female employer usually orders me to keep the house and prepare food until they return from church. As a result, usually, I am busy doing household chores.*

#### ***Length of working hours and payment***

Regarding the length of hours that child domestic workers

are required to work and take rest, no fixed hours have been reported during the fieldwork. During the interview, children were asked to estimate the number of hours they spent on work. In view of that, on average, most work for 15 h per day (7 am-10 pm). Few others disclosed that they work for 18 h per day (6 am-12 pm). When we look at the rest time, it was reported that their possibility to take little rest largely depends on their ability to finish the tasks assigned for them. Many of them disclosed that sometimes they are awakened from their sleep by their employers for work. Thus, their working hours are highly determined by the needs and interests of their employers.

With regard to their monthly payment, their remuneration is very low compared to their actual hours of work. Apart from the fact that it is meager, four of the interviewed child domestic workers disclosed that their employers sometimes withhold their salary for several months and then use it as a means of preventing them from leaving their homes. A child domestic workers, who have experience working for three different employers reported that, in such conditions, they wait until they get the salary and then they plan to leave that household. On the other hand, our key informants pointed out that some employers sometimes never pay the initially agreed-upon salary to force them to leave their homes. Consolidating the above point, a 40-year old key informant from Labour and Social Affair Office said that:

*.....In some cases, child domestic workers are not paid for three or four months even sometimes throughout the year. When they ask their salary to leave their home, employers accuse them of stealing to avoid paying what should be paid for working.*

Apart from delaying and denying monthly salaries, the child domestic workers during an in-depth interview reiterated that deduction from their salary is also common. It is mainly made for broken and lost household items even if they are not the ones responsible for it in some cases. In this regard, a 13-year old girl domestic worker disclosed her experience as:

*My former employer used to deduct some amount from my salary if I break something like a coffee cup while cleaning. And likewise, if some household items are lost in the home, it was me who is the first to be suspected in the home and deduction is made for things without any compassion.*

### Feeding conditions

It has been disclosed in the foregoing discussion that children join the sector expecting a relatively better living conditions that they lacked in their family of origin. Of the child domestic workers who participated in this study, three recognized that their employers treat them in an

almost similar way they treat their children (for instance, they share the same dish with their children). However, for many others, this is not the case. Except for the three domestic workers who reported to often eat in the same dish with their employers' household members, the other child domestic workers reported that they never eat in the same dish with their employers' household members. In this regard, a 16-years-old girl domestic worker said:

The female head of the household I am working in treats me badly. She never gives me and my friend the same dish. Always, we are required to prepare other types of a meal for us. And, she often orders us to finish their leftovers.

The other type of mistreatment that can be closely related to this is the timing of taking food. In this regard, some child domestic workers disclosed that they always eat only after the entire family members had finished their meal. One of our respondents said that he is the one who is always ordered to eat when his employer's children throw away some food they dislike.

### Other forms of abuses experienced by child domestic workers

It is well established in child labor literature that, child domestic workers are vulnerable to various forms of abuse due to the hidden nature of the work. In the current study also, only three of the interviewed children reported that they less often experience the abuses some of their friends reported to often experience. The in-depth interviews with the child domestic workers revealed that majority of them have experienced various forms of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual abuse at the homes of their previous and/or current employers.

Regarding physical abuses, the participants reported that slapping, pulling off their ears, choking, kicking by foot, punching, beating with shoes, splashing with water, knocking them against a wall and pinching are the most common forms of physical abuses that they frequently encounter. They disclosed that materials like electric cords, belts, sticks, and others are frequently used for this purpose. A 15-years old girl domestic worker described her experience of physical abuse in the following manner:

*...She is never pleased with the things I carry out inside the house. She always gives me so many orders. But sometimes due to workload around the house, I will be so tired and forget to do some of the tasks she ordered me. When this occurs, she will pull my hair and pinch me.*

Our informant child domestic workers reported that the abuses are mainly inflicted on them often for committing little mistakes while on work, behaving disrespectfully towards their employers, responding back to their employers, breaking objects, disagreements with family

members, failure to follow orders, cleaning poorly, responding slowly to orders and so forth. In this study, the children were asked to point out the main perpetrators of physical abuse against child domestic workers. The girls ranked wives at the first level. Most reported that this mainly happens because wives are the ones who regularly give them orders regarding tasks to be carried out. On the other hand, fathers and children are pointed at the second and third levels respectively. Verbal and psychological abuses were also found to be frequent and widespread. As informants pointed out they mainly occur in the form of ridicule, nagging, demeaning, belittling, criticism, sarcasm, blaming and the use of derogatory labels. Some of the most repeatedly experienced verbal abuses mentioned by the child domestic workers are:

“You are deaf.....  
You are crazy..... You are a rotten child.....  
You are stupid.....You are dead .....

Telling you is like pouring water on a stone and other similar phrases too”. The informant child domestic workers recounted that they are subject to such abuses on a daily basis especially if they do things in a wrong way, argue with their employers, fail to finish the tasks on time, break objects and lose money or items while shopping and/or on streets. Like physical abuse, here also, girls ranked wives as the main perpetrators of verbal abuse. As was already described in the previous section, this is perhaps associated with their high level of interaction with wives as compared to other family members in their day to day life. Also, they pointed children and fathers in the second and third levels respectively. A 15 years old girl domestic worker described as follows:

*My male employer [husband] is a kind person, but his wife is a very aggressive person. When she goes out to a market, church and her friend's home, she usually tells me to take care of her child; and, warns me that, if her child goes out, she would kill me. If he goes out, when I do tasks, she kept shouting and insulting me with bad words like stupid and poor.*

Sexual harassment and abuses are prevalent but few child domestic workers were willing to disclose it. In this regard, previous studies (such as Erulkar et al., 2017) also indicated that few current domestic workers reported such abuse, perhaps because of fear of retaliation or fear of losing their jobs and accommodations. Furthermore, it is perhaps related to the taboo of openly speaking about issues related to sex among the majority in Ethiopia (Tesfaye, 2007). Notwithstanding the culture of hiding, in the present study only three girls disclosed their various experiences. A 15-years old girl domestic worker recites her experience as follows:

When my employers leave the house, a boy domestic worker takes advantage of the condition and asks me to sleep with him. One day as usual, when the employers leave the house, he came to the kitchen while I was preparing food. For I know his intention, I shouted out and he left me alone.

Another 17-years old girl domestic worker started her experience in the following manner:

*My employers are civil servants. In the day time, I take care of their 2 kids. When they return from their office at 5 pm, I go to school. There are boys who attend night school with me; when we return home at 8 pm, they approach me and induce me to talk to them by tightly holding my hands. They will not leave unless I talk to them politely.*

A 16 years old girl (domestic worker) portrayed her experience of uncomfortable accommodation and lack of privacy as:

*My former employers live in a rental house. I think they were forced to employ me for the wife got pregnant. The day I was hired, they managed to secure another small room adjacent to the one they live in. I was ordered to sleep there though the room was crowded with household utensils. When she gave birth, her younger brother (aged 19) came to stay with us. They gave him a foam and told him to share the room with me. I couldn't sleep for the first few days for I was very worried.*

According to the data we obtained from the girls, relatives of the employers, adolescents in their neighborhood and boy domestic workers who live with them were the main perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse.

As it was indicated by the participants of the study, from the three types of abuses, physical and psychological abuses are commonly experienced by the majority of child domestic workers in their day to day life. In most cases, verbal abuses are never considered as abuses. As our interview with the child domestic workers, residents of the towns, and the police show most of the abuses experienced by the domestic workers remain unreported to the police and other concerned bodies. As the key informants reiterated, the reluctance of domestic workers to report the abuse for anybody is highly associated with their immaturity, lack of awareness about how to contact the concerned bodies. As a result, they are forced to hide their agony in their employers' homes.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Poverty among rural and urban families was found to be a prominent factor for children's engagement in domestic work. Most of the interviewed children attributed their reason for engaging in domestic work to the lower

socioeconomic condition of their families. In this regard, most reiterated that it was due to the extreme poverty (inability to fulfill basic necessities added up on large family size) that their family members initiated the idea to send them to urban areas to engage in this sector. Hence, engaging in this sector is not a personal decision for many children. Rather, it is part of the survival strategies of poor rural and urban households. In this regard, poverty-stricken rural and urban households decidedly give away their children to the brokers with the hope that their children will live a relatively better life and will economically assist them from their income. This fact is revealed by the interviewed child domestic workers who reported that their employers send full or half of their monthly salary to their families. Apart from poverty, however, parental death and the resultant abuses by their relatives/guardians/and the influence of their peers (mostly who themselves are domestic workers) have been also identified by few.

The study also found that the engagement of children in such worst forms of child labor is often mediated by brokers who convince the families of the children by extremely exaggerating the living condition in the families of destination and even the likely high return to sending family in cash and/or kind. The study revealed that at least two brokers are involved in recruiting and supplying children for domestic work. As the pieces of evidence obtained from the informants suggest, the activities of the brokers often go to the level of trafficking in human beings.

With regard to their terms of employment, all of the contacted child domestic workers did not get into written contracts before joining their work. Instead, they indicated the existence of oral agreements concerning salary, clothing, education, workload, and others often in the presence of the broker. However, many reported their employers rarely adhere to the initial oral agreement. Thus, the lack of a written contract between the child domestic workers and their employers is one of the factors that pave the way for the employer to exploit the labors of child domestic workers.

With regard to the living and working conditions of the child domestic workers, the experiences of the interviewed child domestic workers were not homogeneous. The study reveals that the living and working condition of the child domestic workers clearly depends upon the nature of the relationship between the child domestic worker's family and the employing family. Where the two families are distant relatives or at least know each other, the child domestic workers experience relatively better living conditions. Nonetheless, majority of the interviewed child domestic workers reported to have experienced various forms of exploitation initially by brokers and later on by their employers. All reported their experiences of mild to serious physical, verbal, psychological abuses in their day to day life in the homes of previous and/or current employers and few reported their experiences of sexual harassment and abuses. In

relation to the types of abuses they faced the children reiterated imposing workload beyond the initial agreement; insults and bodily harms; denying contact with their family and friends; deducting, delaying and denying salary (for some); preventing from going to religious places and night school; sexual harassment and abuses and so forth.

Based on the finding, the researchers argue that the issue of child domestic work in Hawassa–Dilla-Moyale route is alarmingly worrisome and is also clearly interlinked with human trafficking. Therefore, the researchers suggest that integrated interventions of stakeholders are needed to scale up the capabilities of rural and urban poor households thereby to address the underlying push factors that expose children to exploitative domestic work. Furthermore, inaction and enforcement of robust legal frameworks on child domestic workers are called upon thereby to protect children already in the sector. In this regard, among others, minimum age of employment, a minimum wage for domestic workers, decent working hours and conditions, and protection from all forms of abuse, harassment, and violence should be emphasized. Programs that raise awareness on the rights of domestic workers are also imperative.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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