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Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

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7 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

A report from the Human Rights Watch organization details "grave abuses" happening to foreign maids in Singapore. The 124-page study tells stories of physical and sexual violence and other abuses, including not being given food. About 150,000 women from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka work in Singapore as domestic workers. They have very few legal rights. A Human Rights Watch executive said this lack of legal protection leaves the workers "open to abuse." Singapore's government hit back saying the report "grossly exaggerates" the situation and that 80 percent of maids were happy.

The report has over 100 in-depth interviews with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "At least 147 migrant domestic workers have died from workplace accidents or suicide since 1999." It also says that: "Migrant domestic workers earn half the wages of Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a growing complaint." The workers cannot complain or even take a single day off during their contract. One worker said her life was the same as slave labor: "I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment," she said.

WARM-UPS

1. SINGAPORE SEARCH: Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about Singapore. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. What was interesting or surprising. Would you like to live and work in Singapore?

2. SERVANTS: Would you like a maid, home help, driver or butler? Are you too busy to do everything every day? In pairs / groups, imagine you have the following people working for you. How is life with this help?

- Maid
- Secretary
- Chauffeur
- Cook
- Physical trainer
- Gardener
- Babysitter
- Computer engineer
- Personal English teacher
- Other _____

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Human rights / maids / Singapore / stories / violence / having no food / legal rights / interviews / suicide / wages / complaints / days off / slavery / being in jail

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. I'M A MAID: You are a maid. Talk to the other "maids" in the class. Who do you work for? Are they good employers? What are the good and bad things about your job? What kinds of things do you have to do every day?

5. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES: The following abuses were in a new Human Rights Watch report about maids in Singapore. Rank them in order of the worst.

- a. The maid has no legal right to a day off.
- b. Maids are not given food for a day as punishment.
- c. The maid is slapped every time she is slow to finish her work.
- d. The employer always makes fun of the maid's country.
- e. The maid is not allowed to leave her workplace (the employer's apartment).
- f. The maid is sexually abused by the "husband of the house".
- g. The maid cannot have a boyfriend.
- h. The maid must work for 10 months without wages just to repay her employment agency fee.

6. MAIDS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with maids. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. A human rights report says maids in Singapore are gravely abused. | T / F |
| b. The report says employers tell the maids violent stories. | T / F |
| c. Singapore's labor laws give few legal rights to domestic workers. | T / F |
| d. Singapore's government said most maids are happy. | T / F |
| e. The report found 147 maid deaths from accidents at work or suicide. | T / F |
| f. Domestic workers earn a quarter the wages of Singaporeans. | T / F |
| g. Maids only have one day off a month. | T / F |
| h. One worker said her life was the same as slave labor. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. details | jobs |
| b. stories | overstates |
| c. very few | detailed |
| d. grossly | tales |
| e. exaggerates | prison |
| f. in-depth | almost no |
| g. earn | increasing |
| h. occupations | outlines |
| i. growing | hugely |
| j. jail | make |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. the Human Rights Watch | few legal rights |
| b. "grave abuses" happening | back |
| c. They have very | wages of Singaporean workers |
| d. Singapore's government hit | in-depth interviews |
| e. the report "grossly | accidents or suicide |
| f. The report has over 100 | to foreign maids |
| g. workers have died from workplace | as slave labor |
| h. domestic workers earn half the | take a single day off |
| i. workers cannot complain or even | organization |
| j. life was the same | exaggerates" the situation |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WORD ORDER: Put the underlined words back into the correct order.

Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

A report from the Human Rights Watch organization details "grave abuses" foreign to happening maids in Singapore. The 124-page study tells stories of physical and sexual violence and other abuses, being not given including food. About 150,000 women from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka work in Singapore as domestic workers. They very rights few have legal. A Human Rights Watch executive said protection of this legal lack leaves the workers "open to abuse." Singapore's government hit back saying the report "grossly exaggerates" the situation and that 80 maids were of happy percent.

The report has 100 interviews in-depth over with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "At least 147 workers died domestic have migrant from workplace accidents or suicide since 1999." It also says that: "Migrant domestic workers half earn of the wages Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a growing complaint." The workers cannot even take or complain a single day off during their contract. One worker said the life was her same as slave labor: "I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment," she said.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

A report from the Human Rights Watch organization _____ "grave abuses" happening to foreign maids in Singapore. The 124-page study tells _____ of physical and sexual violence and other abuses, including not being given food. About 150,000 women from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka work in Singapore as _____ workers. They have very few _____ rights. A Human Rights Watch executive said this lack of legal protection leaves the workers "_____ to abuse." Singapore's government hit back saying the report "_____ exaggerates" the situation and that 80 percent of maids were happy.

The report has over 100 in-_____ interviews with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "At _____ 147 migrant domestic workers have died from workplace accidents or _____ since 1999." It also says that: "Migrant domestic workers earn half the _____ of Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a growing complaint." The workers cannot complain or even take a _____ day off during their contract. One worker said her life was the same as slave labor: "I felt like I was in jail. It was _____ imprisonment," she said.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**domestic**' and '**worker**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WORD ORDER: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers.

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "DOMESTIC WORKER" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about domestic work, maids and their working conditions.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| • report | • in-depth |
| • stories | • 147 |
| • 150,000 | • earn |
| • very few | • growing |
| • open | • single |
| • hit back | • truly |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Is Singapore a country you would link with human rights abuses?
- c. What is your image of Singapore?
- d. Would you like a maid?
- e. Why do you think Singapore welcomes foreign domestic workers but then gives them few legal rights?
- f. What can be done to stop employers from abusing maids?
- g. What do you think of the Singapore government for saying the Human Rights Watch claims are "grossly exaggerated"?
- h. Why do you think employers do not let maids out of the workplace?
- i. Some maids must work from 6am to 10pm. What do you think needs doing in an apartment that takes 16 hours every day?
- j. Do you think a 124-page report into human rights abuses is a lot?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think the Indonesian, Philippine and Sri Lankan governments should do about the mistreatment of their citizens?
- d. How are the foreign workers treated in your country?
- e. Would you like to live and work overseas?
- f. How do you think the Singapore government would explain foreign domestic workers' salaries being half those of Singaporeans?
- g. Do you think maids working for ten months to pay employment agency fees is illegal?
- h. What do you think Singapore's government should do about the many foreign domestic workers falling or jumping from buildings?
- i. Do you think employers who keep maids in their apartments should be punished?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

MAID ABUSES: You have the power to make new rules and punishments in Singapore regarding foreign domestic workers. In pairs / groups, discuss and make the rules for the points in the left hand column. Decide on the punishments for employers for breaking the rules.

POINTS	RULES	PUNISHMENTS
Working hours		
Holidays and days off		
Talking about the maid's country		
Social life		
Salary		
Payment of employment agency fees		
Freedom to change employer		
Boyfriends		

- Change partners often and compare and share your ideas. Discuss which rules and punishments are best.
- With your original partner(s), discuss which of the rules you thought were best.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the story of the abuses of foreign maids in Singapore. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MAID RULES: Make a poster containing rules about the rights that all maids around the world should have. Include the working conditions of maids and the kinds of things they should not have to do. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

4. MAID: You are a maid. Write your diary / journal entry for a day in your working life. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. T d. T e. T f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. details | outlines |
| b. stories | tales |
| c. very few | almost no |
| d. grossly | hugely |
| e. exaggerates | overstates |
| f. in-depth | detailed |
| g. earn | make |
| h. occupations | jobs |
| i. growing | increasing |
| j. jail | prison |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. the Human Rights Watch | organization |
| b. "grave abuses" happening | to foreign maids |
| c. They have very | few legal rights |
| d. Singapore's government hit | back |
| e. the report "grossly | exaggerates" the situation |
| f. The report has over 100 | in-depth interviews |
| g. workers have died from workplace | accidents or suicide |
| h. domestic workers earn half the | wages of Singaporean workers |
| i. workers cannot complain or even | take a single day off |
| j. life was the same | as slave labor |

WORD ORDER:

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