

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' R

May 1989

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WOMEN'S HEALTH CLOSELY LINKED TO SOCIAL SITUATION

The World Health Organization defines health as "not merely the absence of disease, also a state of social, emotional and physical well-being."

Often, however, the link between women's health and their actual social circumstances are largely ignored. Many of women's major health concerns are social problems, such as isolation, depression, stress and substance abuse (drug or alcohol), which have been redefined as medical problems.

Women tend to live longer than men, require more medical services and are hospitalized at a more frequent rate. Low-income women live 3-6 years less than higher income women. Women working in the home suffer more anxiety and depression than women outside the home. Depression is the leading mental health diagnosis for women. This diagnosis often leads to over-prescription of mood-altering medications.

Women working in the home must be aware of the occupational health risks they face daily. Attention must be paid to the household products used - products that can cause serious burns, skin irritations and rashes; products that emit irritating and dangerous fumes causing eye, lung and nasal irritation. Injuries are caused to muscles and back by improper lifting of heavy objects (such as furniture while cleaning). Pain, swelling and stiffness of hands, wrists and joints are common when doing household duties. Women working in the home feel frustration, boredom, and isolation when the job includes repetitive and unpleasant tasks. Stress from this demanding job is unhealthy and should be recognized as an occupational health risk.

Access to a comprehensive health plan is an important part of looking after yourself. Ontario's Health Care Accessibility Act ensures that everyone covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) will receive necessary medical services regardless of ability to pay. OHIP is a comprehensive provincial government-sponsored plan of health coverage for Ontario residents. A resident is a person who is legally entitled to remain in Canada and who makes her home in Ontario. Foreign domestic workers with valid work permits and living in Ontario are residents and can therefore be covered under OHIP.

A resident foreign domestic worker may enrol and participate in OHIP, paying premiums directly to OHIP every four months. These payments are made three months in advance of the benefit coverage period. Depending on your contract, the employer may pay whole or part of your OHIP premium but if your employer is not willing to pay for your premium, it is your responsibility to do so.

If you have difficulty covering the costs of your OHIP premium, you should apply for Premium Assistance. To be eligible, you must have been a resident of Ontario for the past 12 months. You will qualify for Premium Assistance according to the level of your income. If you do not qualify for Premium Assistance, OHIP will provide Temporary Assistance to those who cannot pay pre-

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Come to INTERCEDE's monthly meeting on Sunday, June 4, 1989 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.

Mr. Jim E. Campbell, Manager of the Toronto North Canada Immigration Centre will talk on the subject of "Misrepresentations: How Immigration is handling them".

There will be CLASP legal clinic but INTERCEDE counselling will not be available to allow staff to participate in the discussions.

PREPARING FOR YOUR ASSESSMENT

(This is a continuation from the April issue of the presentation made by Toni Schweitzer and John Petrykanin, CLASP law students)

SOCIAL ADAPTATION

It is difficult to explain exactly what is meant by "social adaptation". This refers to your efforts to get involved in the community while you are working as a domestic worker.

Almost anything you do apart from your work as a domestic worker can be considered evidence of social adaptation. Doing volunteer work (at hospitals, libraries, etc.) is seen as a serious effort to adapt to your new "home". Getting involved as a member or volunteer of a religious group or church, community organizations such as INTERCEDE, recreational and cultural groups, would impress an immigration officer that you are a good candidate for permanent residence.

Social adaptation can also mean getting involved in recreational and social activities such as joining sports leagues, sightseeing around Toronto or Ontario, visiting art galleries and museums. What is important is that the Immigration officer should see that you are getting involved with other people in the community and are developing social ties.

At your assessment, you should bring letters from any group you are involved with (for example, from your parish priest, the hospital where you volunteer, etc.) and membership or library cards you have. Feel free to tell the Immigration officer all the community, recreational and social, cultural and self-development activities you are doing during your limited spare time.

DEPENDENTS

The number of dependents of a domestic worker is relevant to whether or not she will be positively assessed at the end of her two years in Canada. She must be able to show that if she gets her permanent status, she will be qualified to work at a

job that will pay sufficiently to cover her dependents' and her own living expenses.

Misrepresentation of marital and family status seems to be one of the most common problems domestic workers are facing. People are "lying" about their family status on their visa applications to come to Canada because it is assumed that the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program is only open to single women without children. This misunderstanding is being generated by visa officers who believe that the FDM is open only to such women. According to the law, however, these visa officers are wrong and we, at CLASP, are working with INTERCEDE to clarify the matter.

Meanwhile, it is important for those concerned with this problem of misrepresentation to understand the consequences of not coming forward with the correct information about your marital and family status and what will happen if you do reveal this information. It is important to seek advice (with CLASP or INTERCEDE) before speaking to Immigration.

The INTERCEDE monthly meeting on June 4, 1989 will be an occasion to discuss misrepresentation with a representative from Immigration.

We wish to thank the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Ministry of Immigration (Canada) and the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) and Secretary of State (Women's Program) for providing our core funding.

We also wish to thank The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture (Ontario), the City of Toronto, and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto for their continuing support.

If you or someone you know have not received this newsletter because of a change of address, please tear the slip below and mail to:

INTERCEDE

489 College St., Suite 402

Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5

I have changed my address. Please send DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS to my new address:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY/PROVINCE:.....POSTAL CODE:

TELEPHONE:

?I HAVE A QUESTION?

My employer paid 15 days of my vacation last year. Should my employers pay two weeks of my vacation?

Answer: After one year of service, you are entitled to two weeks vacation. You may prefer to get these two weeks in cash instead of days off, but this must be agreed upon by you and not imposed by your employer.

I'm taking a Health Care course part of which is a "clinical period" of 8 hours a week when I work at a hospital. This work is not paid; can I consider this as volunteer work?

Answer: Yes. Obtain a letter of certification from your supervisor and present this to Immigration during your assessment interview.

If I go back and get married in my home country after I have submitted my application for landed status, would this application be affected?

Answer: Advise your Immigration officer of your plans. After you get married, upon your return to Canada, inform Immigration of the change in your status and your change of name. Your application will be revised to include the sponsorship of your husband. Immigration will want to make sure that you can "support" your husband while he is in the process of looking for a job after he arrives in Canada. There will be a delay in the processing of your permanent residence caused by the change in your family status.

According to an Immigration officer, we need to send 20% of our income to our home country, is this true?

Answer: No.

Questions about INTERCEDE membership and Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be dealt with at another time. Please refer to some answers given in previous newsletters. General (not too specific) questions about misrepresentations can be raised during the June 4, 1989 meeting. Questions about sponsorship will be dealt with in coming issues.

COCO'S CALENDAR

For lack of space, let me just greet everyone celebrating their birthdays in May. Let me also thank our office and monthly meeting volunteers for making our work lighter. Welcome back from holidays to our Board treasurer, Yola Grant.

KNOW YOUR ORGANIZATION

The Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights (Intercede) is an advocacy and lobby group for domestic workers. It was formed in 1979 as a coalition of community, women's and immigrant organizations. Today it has a membership of over 1,000, the majority of whom are domestic workers from the Caribbean, the Philippines, other countries of Southeast Asia and Europe.

It is incorporated as a non-profit organization in the Province of Ontario and its work is coordinated by a board of directors elected by the membership at the annual general meeting.

Service Unit

Intercede has a Service Unit to work in cooperation with the community and immigration officials in ensuring that all foreign domestic workers benefit fully from the landed status program.

At present, there are two counsellors, Coco Diaz and Joan Ann Gravesande. They:

- * provide in-depth counselling on how to meet landing criteria;
- * liaise with immigration officials, provide escort services to government offices;
- * provide counselling on employment related problems;
- * liaise with Canada Employment Centres; do advocacy work with the Ministry of Labour and the Human Rights Commission;
- * provide information and referral on health, social services and emergencies;
- * provide workshops, forums, seminars on domestic workers' rights.

Other activities of the organization include lobbying for legislative change, speaking at conferences and community events, publishing a monthly newsletter, organizing social, recreational and other events.

Monthly meetings take place on the first Sunday of each month (second Sunday in case of a holiday weekend), and are presently held at Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, from 3 to 5 p.m. A free legal and counselling clinic is available. An informal social hour is usually part of the afternoon's activities.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

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miums because of unemployment, illness, disability, financial hardships or if you have not lived in Ontario for the past 12 months.

With OHIP, you are covered for various medical and hospital services including doctor's fees, surgery, x-rays, lab tests, standard ward accommodation and nursing services in a hospital etc. However, OHIP does not cover dental costs except when a dental procedure is performed in an approved hospital by a dental surgeon who is a member of that hospital's staff.

The Academy of Dentistry (tel. 967-5649) will provide referral information regarding dentists who will accept new patients and dentists willing to see patients on a short term emergency basis. The University of Toronto Dental Clinic (tel. 979-4335) provides services performed by supervised dental students, at a reduced rate. Some dentists have special rates for students, seniors or employees with low incomes.

OHIP pays for visual assessments performed by an optometrist but not for the cost of eyeglasses and contact lenses. The Optometric Vision Institute of Toronto (461-6222) does visual assessments for free if OHIP is not available.

If your income is not enough to cover the purchase of prescription drugs, eyeglasses, dental and denture services or specific medical supplies such as backbraces, canes, etc., call the welfare office nearest you (blue pages of telephone book) and inquire if you are eligible for this type of assistance.

Community health centres are non-profit, locally controlled health services funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health. Staff and members of these centres believe that total health care is better than good medicine. We believe that prevention of health problems through education and community action is an important goal. Community health centres will provide services to patients even if they are not covered by OHIP.

To know the health centre nearest you, contact Khurshid Tarapore at the Association of Ontario Health Centres, telephone: 236-2539.

by Susan Shaw

(Ms. Shaw spoke on the subject of women's health at INTERCEDE's May 7 educational meeting. She is a Community Health Educator at the Parkdale Community Health Centre, 1257 Queen St. West, Toronto, Ontario M6K 1L5.)

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Canada Immigration Centre	973-4444
Employment Standards Enforcement	965-5251
Revenue Canada (Taxation)	869-1500
Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre	656-8933
Educ & Skills Training Ctr, Labour Council	971-5893
Legal Services	
Parkdale Community Legal Services	531-2411
CLASP (Osgoode Law School) Legal Clinic	736-5029
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Serv.	363-0304
Metro Tor. Chinese & SE Asian Legal Clinic	971-9674
Emergency Housing	
Nellie's Hostel	461-1084
Evangeline's	762-9636

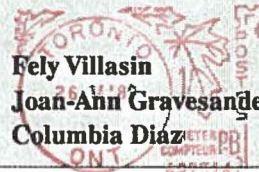
Unemployment Insurance	973-4727
Ontario Human Rights Commission	965-6841
OHIP	965-1000
Immigrant Women's Health Centre	367-1388

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