

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

INTERCEDE for the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers, and Newcomers

Toll Free 1-877-483-4554

October 2000



All Members, Family and Friends

WELCOME TO INTERCEDE'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ELECTION

Sunday, October 1st, 2000

3-6 p.m. at Cecil Community Center
58 Cecil Street, South of College/Spadina

Invited Guest Speaker: The Honourable Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P.
Secretary of State, (Multiculturalism), (Status of Women Canada)

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS DISCUSSED AT THE 6TH ANNUAL INTERCEDE CONFERENCE

58 delegates, 20 of whom traveled from other parts of the country, assembled in Toronto on September 8 for the 6th Annual Domestic Workers' Conference. At the top of their agenda were the initial findings of INTERCEDE's research entitled "Caregivers Break the Silence."

A discussion of these findings was based on a Summary of a 40-page preliminary report on the research into the abuse and violence, including the impact of family separation, experienced by women in Immigration's Live-in Caregiver Program. Written by Sedef Arat-Koc, assistant professor of sociology and women's studies at Trent University, this Summary is reproduced below:

Our research has so far involved questionnaires given to domestic workers; individual and group interviews with domestic workers, as well as professionals, activists and counsellors working with domestic workers; and analysis of all client files at INTERCEDE from 1992 to the present. In this research, we have found that several aspects of the Live-in Caregiver Program directly or indirectly cause stress, suffering, abuse and violence for foreign domestic workers and their families.

A) Separation from Family: The status of domestic workers under the LCP as temporary workers, and the consequent impossibility for them to bring one's family to Canada creates enormous complications and problems for family life.

A significant number of domestic workers have children. Some are married or are in long-term intimate relationships. On the part of mothers, separation from children produces feelings of anxiety, guilt and concerns over their care and well-being. On the part of children, there is often an inability to understand or appreciate the sacrifice their mothers are making for their future. Instead, many children respond to separation with feelings of resentment and anger toward the mother who, they think, has betrayed them. In the long term, some children adapt to separation, but feel alienated from their mothers. Separation from spouses/partners leads domestic workers to experience feelings of loneliness, emptiness, deprivation from emotional and physical contact and support. It often produces anxiety over loyalty of partners, and sometimes results in total disintegration of the marital or intimate relationship.

Reunification with family is a long and complicated process. It takes an average of 3-5 years, sometimes up to 7-8 years waiting in Canada. It involves significant financial expenditures for the sponsorship, immigration fees and travel of family members. If/when reunification occurs, it does not always and immediately involve a happy ending to all the suffering family members have experienced. In addition to general adaptation difficulties, newly-arrived children and spouses often feel emotionally distant from their mother/wife. In addition to having to help children deal with/heal emotions of abandonment, mothers often face difficulties reestablishing authority over their children as mothers. Reunification with spouses/partners is also complicated. Both parties have to deal with the emotional distance and doubts about faithfulness of partners. In addition, many newly-arrived husbands, who are dealing with adaptation to a new country and language and are struggling with unemployment, become resentful of being very dependent on their wives. Another common problem following reunification is that most children and partners (becoming aware of its low status in the ethnic community and in the larger Canadian society) become embarrassed with the occupation of the mother/wife and, instead of valuing it and appreciating it, choose to keep it a secret.

B) Experiences of Abuse and Violence: In our research, we have used the definition of violence against women developed by the 1995 United Nations Platform for Action and the Beijing

Declaration: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm, or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life".

Our research has found that some specific requirements of LCP lend themselves to abuse and potential violence by creating a particularly vulnerable group of workers:

- 1) The temporary status of the domestic worker and conditionality of getting permanent status on having a "good employment record";*
- 2) The requirement to complete 24 months of full-time work as live-in caregivers/domestic workers in a 3 year period;*
- 3) The live-in requirement.*

The combined effect of these requirements is that domestic workers feel pressured to accept and stay in undesirable, and sometimes abusive working conditions, as loss of employment does not just mean a financial loss, but also the loss of one's place to live, and a potential threat to permanent status in Canada.

Our research has revealed some cases of physical and sexual abuse of domestic workers by their employers. Most typically, however, we have found many cases of financial/economic abuse or abuse of working conditions; and emotional/psychological abuse.



Join us for the
**World March of
 Women in Ottawa**

Sunday, October 15, 2000

Call (416) 483-4554 to reserve bus seat

Many live-in domestic workers face financial/economic abuse in the form of very long working hours, often with no compensation or inadequate compensation. Emotional/psychological abuse was sometimes a result of bad treatment or lack of respect by employers. In addition to direct, intentional acts of employers, however, psychological abuse also resulted from some of the structural limitations of living-in with the employer: Lack of privacy, limitations on personal autonomy and freedoms; problems with amounts of or quality of food (often lending themselves to feelings of deprivation, humiliation, indignity);

being entangled with the personal lives and problems of employers (especially in cases of divorce or custody battles).

The results of these rather common forms of abuse for domestic workers are stress (often with physical symptoms such as back pains, headaches, sleeplessness), low self-esteem and depression.

A Report on the Conference and resulting plan of activities will be written in the coming issues of this newsletter. Funding for the Conference was provided principally by Status of Women Canada.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

INTERCEDE CAREGIVERS COOPERATIVE'S
*Annual General Meeting
& Halloween Dinner/Dance*

Saturday, October 28, 2000 - 5 pm to 1 am

The INTERCEDE Caregivers Cooperative has been established to provide employment services, benefits & better work conditions for domestic workers.

For place & ticket details, call (416) 486-0548

Infant / Child Care Workshop
Sundays November 5 to December 17

Seneca College, Newnham Campus -1750 Finch Ave E
(Between Don Mills Road and Highway 404)

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Cost: \$80.25
Seneca College Certificate of Completion will be issued

Call INTERCEDE Caregiver's Cooperative
to register (416) 486-0548

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO BILL C-31 AND LCP

The proposed Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Bill C-31, was also a hot topic during INTERCEDE's weekend conference.

Participants discussed and debated the points made in a Brief submitted by INTERCEDE to the House Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, entitled: "Bill C-31 – The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act Viewed Through Migrant Women's Eyes".

INTERCEDE's recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. We recommend that before final reading of Bill C-31, this proposed law and all pertinent Regulations to it be subject to gender-based analysis or gender impact study in fulfillment of Canada's obligations and commitments under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
2. We recommend that Bill C-31, just as it makes reference to important international agreements such as the Convention against Torture, also make specific reference to Canada's principal commitments to the equality and empowerment of women under the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

3. We recommend that the validity of temporary status of workers, particularly women, not depend on any individual employer or company and that no temporary status workers, particularly women, are tied, indentured or bonded in any way to any employer in order to legally remain in Canada. This is a recommendation seeking to eliminate any system or form of indentured or bonded labour or slavery-like practices, which give excessive power to employers, making workers, particularly women, vulnerable to various forms of abuse and violence and to violation of their rights.

4. We recommend that the skills of Domestic/Caregiver workers and the consistently high demand for their labour, be appropriately and justly recognized and that they be admitted to Canada as permanent residents based on the experience, educational level and acquired skills appropriate and practical to their line of work. This seeks to eliminate the current Live-in Caregiver Program and its restrictive requirements including making living-in the employer's household a condition of valid status – these requirements have given rise to exploitation, abuse and violence, including long years of forced separation from spouse and children. The Live-in Caregiver Program requirements for caregivers and domestic workers are discriminatory and they violate women's human rights.

5. We recommend that Bill C-31 provide for a transparent and accountable process, including gender and human-rights screening, particularly anti-racist screening, of setting Immigration Regulations so that these are submitted to public scrutiny, including by Non-Government Organizations and by other affected groups, before they are put into effect.

Organizations of domestic workers were asked to endorse INTERCEDE's position and coordinate activities towards its adoption. These activities will be reported in the forthcoming issues of this newsletter.



FREE JOB SEARCH WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Saturdays November 4, 11, 18, & 25
10 am to 5 pm

Learn how to:

- identify your interests, skills & career goals
- write an effective resume
- network and find jobs
- conduct successful job interviews
- gain self-esteem and confidence

Classes at George Brown College, St. James Campus
200 King St. East, Rm 544-E

Certificate of completion to be issued
Call now to register, space is limited
(416) 483-4554 ext 25

*Funded by Citizenship & Immigration Canada * Sponsored by COSTI & OCASI*



Job Search Workshop Graduates happily display their George Brown College certificates!

Front l-r: Juvy, Julia, Susana

Back: Gloria, Mary Ann, Anita, Dilshad, Yisiel, Diana, Grace & Arlene

We wish to thank Citizenship and Immigration Canada: ISAP Program and Job Search Program with COSTI-OCASI; Federal Status of Women & Status of Women Ontario; and the Municipality of Toronto CSGP for their financial support.

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