

# FINDINGS OF A MENTAL HEALTH NEED ASSESSMENT SURVEY FOR MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

2020



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## Summary

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Uplifters jointly conducted a survey with the aim to better understand the mental health needs of the migrant domestic worker community in Hong Kong.

Seventy-two percent (72%) of the migrant domestic workers who responded to the survey reported signs of depression. According to the results, they were most stressed by being separated from their families, worrying about the health of their family members back home and financial difficulties.

When support is needed they tend to reach out to their family and peers, and the majority of them have helped or supported a fellow worker.

MSF has used the results of this assessment in the design of a training course offered to community leaders of migrant domestic workers.

## Introduction

Since COVID-19 pandemic started in Jan 2020, Migrant Domestic Workers are being affected in many different ways. Uplifters and MSF want to better understand the mental well-being of the migrant domestic worker community in Hong Kong.

A questionnaire was sent out to migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, through social media platforms and organisations working with them, in September 2020.

## Data Collection

The survey (see [Appendix II](#) for survey questions) was conducted in English and Bahasa through an online platform called Survey Monkey, and distributed through various platforms: Facebook groups and NGO networks related to domestic workers in Hong Kong. Over a period of 2 weeks in September to October 2020, a total of 221 responses were received.

- Those who are not migrant domestic workers would be excluded from the test.
- Those who did not fully completed the tests will be counted as invalid input, and was being removed from the data set during analysis (102 respondents did not finish the test)
- For developing a suitable program for the migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, we also removed those who do not work in Hong Kong. (8 from Singapore and 1 from Saudi Arabia)
- As a result, the number of valid data was 100 (n=100).

**Main Findings:** see [Appendix I](#) for detailed data

### **Level of distress**

- 72% of those responded report signs of depression (56% report signs of mild level of depression; 13% report signs of moderate level of depression; 3% report signs of severe depression).
- Using correlation analysis, none of the demographic variables significantly correlate with depression level.

### **Stressful events in past 6 months**

- Most stressful event for the respondents in the past 6 months
  - Separation from family (47%)
  - Worrying about the health of their family back home (39%)
  - Financial difficulties (37%)

### **Support for Migrant Domestic Workers**

- Who do migrant domestic workers go to when they need support or are in distress:
  - Family (52%)
  - Community (47%)
  - NGO (22%)
  - Not seeking help (16%)
- Experience in helping another domestic worker (a friend or someone from the community) who was in need of support or felt distressed:
  - 91% have offered help to their community member
  - 62% listen to their friends
  - 53% offer companionship
  - 37% accompany their peers to seek help from NGO
- The frequency at which respondents feel nervous or stressed when they help another domestic worker in need of support or who feels distressed:
  - At least 51% sometimes feel stressed when they are helping the community \*Weak correlation with offering help to friends in distress
- Mental health information or psychological support resources domestic workers would find most helpful to the community:
  - Connection to other resources (55%)
  - Stress and anxiety Workshop (49%)

- Relaxation tips (43%)
- Peer-support from other domestic workers who have experienced mental health issues themselves (41%)

## **Findings Analysis and Discussions**

We have collected 100 valid samples from the survey. All of the valid responses were from Filipino domestic workers. 72% of them have reported signs of depression. This suggested that signs of distress could be very common among the migrant domestic worker community. The participants responded that separation from family (47%), worrying about the health of their family back home (39%) and financial difficulties (37%) are the most stressful events in the past 6 months. The data suggested that when they are in stress, aside from seeking help from their family (52%), they prefer seeking help within the community (47%).

Only 22% will seek help from NGOs. This may indicate that the migrant domestic workers tend not to seek help outside of their community. It is also worth mentioning that there is a weak significant correlation between signs of depression and the tendency of not seeking help when in distress.

91% of the participants have helped their community when their friends are in distress. Only 37% of them have referred help to NGO while the majority of them prefer listening to their friends (62%) and offering companionship (53%). At least 51% of the participants feel sometimes stressed when they are helping the community. The findings suggest that the migrant domestic worker community tends not to seek help outside of the circle, instead they have a tight and close community within themselves, potentially reinforced by their similar background and occupation identity.

Last but not the least, we asked what kind of resources they find most useful for their community. Approximately half of them responded they want connection to other resources (55%), having stress and anxiety workshops (49%) and learning relaxation tips (43%).

## **Community Care Training Programme**

With some of the findings in the survey and other observations that we have made, MSF sees it valuable to further build on the capacity of existing support networks by offering a training in mental health for community leaders. The training aims to provide psychosocial support to the migrant domestic worker communities in Hong Kong with the following specific objectives:

- 1) To enhance community leaders' general knowledge and understanding of mental health;

- 2) To help them safeguard themselves mentally while supporting their community; and
- 3) To help them provide better guidance and support to their community members;

The syllabus includes basic mental health concepts, psychological first aid, setting boundaries while helping others etc.

The first training completed at the end of 2020 with participants identified through Uplifters and Pathfinders, local NGOs supporting migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. We expect to run the training programme for more participants in the first quarter of 2021.

## Appendix I: Data (see [Appendix II](#) for full questions)

### 1. Demographic

#### Age

Age	N
20 – 30	6
31 – 41	45
41 – 50	42
50+	7
Total	100

#### Years of experience as domestic workers

Years	N
0-2	10
2-4	23
4-6	26
6-8	13
8-10	8
10+	20
Total	100

#### Nationality

- 100% Filipino

#### If they are parents?

Child Age	N
No child	21
<15	46
15-25	30
25+	3
Total	100

- Using correlation analysis, none of the demographic variables significantly correlate with depression level. That means whether or not they show signs of depression is not significantly related to any of the demographic info. For instance, the age, years of experience and parenthood are not significantly correlated with the signs of depression.

### 2. Depression Level

- We used PHQ 9 as a template. The Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ 9) is a self-administered version of the diagnostic instrument for common mental disorders.
- We added two more questions to ask about their “stress and anxiety”, and “scared” level
  - Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt stressed or anxious?
  - Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt scared?
- 5 Likert scale was implied (1= Never, 5 = Always) for the ranking questions

- We combined the scores of all items and categorized it into the following categories of depression Level.

<b>Depression Level</b>	<b>N</b>
Not Depressed	28
Mildly Depressed	56
Moderately Depressed	13
Severely Depressed	3
Total	100

### 3. Traumatic Event in past 6 months

- Over the past 6 months, has anything traumatic happened to you? Did you feel emotionally traumatized about something? Emotional trauma means serious emotional problems caused by a specific event that happened in life.

<b>Traumatic Event in past 6 months?</b>	<b>N</b>
Yes	19
No	81
Total	100

- We also asked what the traumatic event was if there was any, and coded accordingly

<b>Traumatic Event Related to:</b>	<b>N</b>
Family	7
Friendship	2
Employer	7
Financial	2
Not specified	1
Total	19

### 4. Stressing event in the past 6 months

- What do you think are the top three situations that have been affecting the mental wellbeing of domestic workers for the last 6 months?

<b>Stressors</b>	<b>n</b>
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1. Experiencing difficulties related to Covid-19 restrictions including social distancing	32
2. Living in the same house as your employer	16
3. Being separated from your family*	47
4. Not having control over when you'll next be able to see your family	28
5. Facing financial difficulties	37
6. Being uncertain about your future	16
7. Being abused by your employer who does not respect your rights	24
8. Worrying about your own health	22
9. Worrying about the health of your family members back home**	39
10. Worrying about not being able to meet your employer's expectations	16
11. Living and working in a different country with a different culture	2
12. Having little to no friends	1
13. Having to speak a different language than your native language	2
14. Other	N/A

\*= p<.05; \*\*=p<.001

- All “other” could put under the option that was available
  - my last month they imprisonment me inside the house (1)
  - attitudes of my boss (2)
  - Having a colleague that is not easy to get along with... (2)
  - Uncertainty, afraid to go back to my country, fear of being alone (11)
  - Going home without any assurance what would be our source of income. (5)
- No significant correlation between depression level and stressor

## 5. Support for Domestic Workers

- Who do you go to when you are in need of support or feel distressed?

Support Network	n
Community	47



Not DH friends	14
Family	52
Employer	14
NGO	22
Not Seek Help*	16

- Some of those who picked “alone”, also picked the options above
  - Fix: Only those who didn’t picked any options aside from “alone” will be put in alone
- Weak significant negative correlation (-.268) was found between those who tend to not seek help and depression (p=.007)

- Have you ever helped another domestic worker?

Help Method	n
Advice seek help	41
Listen to friend	62
Companionship	53
Seek help from NGO	37
Offer Solution	48
Have Not helped	9

- Combined NGO related options (Research, Names, and Attend)
- No significant differences found for within group analysis.

- How often do you feel nervous or stressed when you help another domestic worker?

Frequency	n
Never	26
Almost Never	23
Sometimes	43
Regularly	4
Always	4

- Weak significant positive correlation between helping stress and depression level (.258; p=.013)
- No significant correlation was found between helping behaviour and depression level

- What kind of mental health information or psychological support is most helpful to the community?

Type of Support	n
Peer support from those experienced mental health issues	41

Peer support from those trained to provide psychological support	36
Health info and advice on Social media	34
COVID Health tips	30
Stress and Anxiety management workshop	49
Relaxation techniques	43
Free or affordable counselling	31
Connection to resources	55
Other (Venue, time to ventilate)	1

- Answers to Other:
  1. the only thing I can say to my fellow fd's always positive in every simple thing that happens around us, we always think we are far from our family, and must be strong and always have faith. we need to be strong and not despair. (Irrelevant)
  2. Ask help for Domestic WORKER a. NGO (irrelevant)
  3. Venue, time to ventilate (Other: Venue)
- No other significancy was found.

**Appendix II – Full Survey Questions** (note that Bahasa translation was available alongside the English version in the actual survey)

1. **Are you a Migrant Domestic Worker ("Foreign Domestic Helper") in Hong Kong?**
  1. Yes
  2. No
  
2. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been feeling little interest or pleasure in doing things?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
3. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
4. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you have trouble falling, or staying asleep, or sleeping too much?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
5. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been feeling you had little energy even if you had enough sleep?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
6. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been feeling you had poor appetite, or you were overeating?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
7. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself, you friends or your family down?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
8. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you been having trouble concentrating on things, such as following your employer's instructions or listening at what your friends or family tell you?**

1. Never	4. Regularly
2. Almost never	5. Always
3. Sometimes	
  
9. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt stressed or anxious?**

1. Never	2. Almost never
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- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Regularly
- 5. Always

10. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt sad or frustrated?**

- 1. Never
- 2. Almost never
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Regularly
- 5. Always

11. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt scared?**

- 1. Never
- 2. Almost never
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Regularly
- 5. Always

12. **Over the past 6 months, how often have you felt hopeless?**

- 1. Never
- 2. Almost never
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Regularly
- 5. Always

13. **Over the past 6 months, has anything traumatic happened to you? Did you feel emotionally traumatized about something? Emotional trauma means serious emotional problems caused by a specific event that happened in life.**

- 1. No, I haven't felt traumatized over the past 6 months
- 2. Yes, I have felt traumatized over the past 6 months.

If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

14. **What do you think are the top three situations that have been affecting the mental wellbeing of domestic workers for the last 6 months? You can tick up to 3 answers.**

- 1. Experiencing difficulties related to Covid-19 restrictions including social distancing
- 2. Living in the same house than your employer
- 3. Being separated from your family
- 4. Not having control over when you'll be able to see their family
- 5. Facing financial difficulties
- 6. Being uncertain about your future
- 7. Being abused by your employer who does not respect your rights
- 8. Worrying about your own health
- 9. Worrying about the health of your family members back home
- 10. Worrying about not being able to meet your employers' expectations
- 11. Living and working in a different country with a different culture
- 12. Having little to no friends
- 13. Having to speak a different language than your native language
- 14. Other (Please be specific):

15. **Who do you go to when you are in need of support or feel distressed? Feeling distressed means your emotions feel very painful, a feeling of great sadness and despair is an example of distress.**

- 1. Someone from my domestic workers community
- 2. A friend who is not a domestic workers herself/himself
- 3. A member of my family back home
- 4. My own employer, a previous employer or a friend's employer who you trust
- 5. A volunteer or staff from a domestic workers support organization

16. **Have you ever helped another domestic worker (a friend or someone from your community) who was in need of support or felt distressed?***You can tick as many as needed.*
1. Yes, I already took time to listen to the concerns expressed by another domestic worker
  2. Yes, I already spent time with another domestic worker to bring her support by being together
  3. Yes, I already advised another domestic worker to seek help
  4. Yes, I already researched for organisations or people who can help another domestic worker
  5. Yes, I already gave another domestic worker the names of organisations who can help
  6. Yes, I already went to (or call) an organisation who can help together with another domestic worker to support her
  7. Yes, I already suggested solutions to another domestic worker who has a problem.
  8. No, so far I have never helped another domestic worker in need of support or who felt distressed (Skip to Q18)
17. **How often do you feel nervous or stressed when you help another domestic worker in need of support or who feels distressed?**
1. Never
  2. Almost never
  3. Sometimes
  4. Regularly
  5. Always
18. **What kind of mental health information or psychological support would you find most helpful to your community?**
1. Peer-support from other domestic workers who have experienced mental health issues themselves
  2. Peer-support from other domestic workers who are trained to provide psychological support
  3. Mental health information and advice on social media
  4. Health and medical tips about Covid-19
  5. Stress and anxiety management workshops
  6. Relaxation techniques
  7. Free or affordable one to one counselling sessions
  8. A platform where to find most of the resources available to domestic workers such as legal support, social and psychological support, courses to improve professional skills, courses for fun, etc.
  9. Other (Please be specific):
19. **How old are you?**
1. Between 20 and 30 years old
  2. Between 31 and 40 years old
  3. Between 41 and 50 years old
  4. Above 50 years old
20. **How many years have you been working in Hong Kong for?**
1. 0 - 2 year
  2. 2 - 4 years
  3. 4 - 6 years
  4. 6 - 8 years
  5. 8 - 10 years
  6. More than 10 years
21. **Are you a parent?**
1. No, I don't have children of my own
  2. I have one or more children below 15 years old
  3. I have one or more children between 15 and 25 years old
  4. I have one or more children above 25 years old