Health issues prevalent among female FDWs

New report highlights problems of migrant workers in Asia

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SINGAPORE: A significant number of female foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Asia suffer from dental problems and other illnesses owing to adverse working conditions, a review conducted by institutes in the US, Singapore and India has reported. According to the paper by researchers from the Duke–NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore published online ahead of print in the International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health, most women who work as FDWs also have poor knowledge of the risks to their health.

In Asia, millions of women are currently employed as domestic workers, such as housemaids and domestic helpers, in a foreign country. They usually live with their employer, where they may be exposed to poor working conditions, such as overlong working hours, inadequate housing or a lack of privacy. In addition, owing to their alien status in their host country, they lack legal protection from psychological and physical abuse, among other threats.

Although their numbers are increasing, so far little has been known about their health issues, the researchers said. Their report, based on 52 studies and questionnaires conducted among FDWs in 11 different countries between 1995 and 2010, investigated health problems related to adverse working conditions, mental health and infectious diseases. Studies on knowledge and attitudes towards health were also reviewed. According to the scientists, the results indicate that more research into the occupational health hazards and health of FDWs is needed. They noted however that working conditions have improved slightly through new legislation in countries like Singapore, where some of the largest numbers of female FDWs are employed.

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