

Talking of Abuse: Critical Discourse Analysis of Migrant Women Workers in the News

**Familara, Aileen
aileen@apwld.org**

ABSTRACT - A critical discourse analysis of four news articles reporting on sexual abuse of Filipino migrant women workers show how they are variably represented in media in terms of agency, gender equality and access to legal protection. Despite the existence of international laws and conventions for the rights of migrant workers, this international legal and rights-based discourse is not reflected in the news texts studied. Instead, the news texts make use of stereotypical representations of migrant workers that characterize them as immature or lacking in capacity to gain readers' sympathy.

Keywords : sexual abuse migrant women worker critical discourse analysis
gender equality access legal protection international law rights

INTRODUCTION

Migrant women workers are vulnerable in many ways while they are in their host countries. In most cases, social benefits and legal protection are not available to migrant women workers, and they are also subject to abuse by employers, recruiters, and fellow male workers as well. This abuse can take many forms: verbal and psychological abuse, or physical and sexual abuse. Most cases do not gain the attention of media,

while those that do, are reported mostly at the national level, in the country of the migrant worker's origin. In the case of Filipino migrant workers, media reports on their lives and living conditions are constant in Philippine media, as there is a broad interest on this issue because many in the population have one or several family members working abroad. However, when news about migrant workers being victimized gain media attention, there is typically a call for government attention, as the matter becomes urgent and requires

both legal and sometimes diplomatic action.

This study looks into the incidence of sexual violence against Filipino migrant women workers and how these incidences are reported in mainstream media of the host country. Four news articles about sexual abuse against migrant women workers from the Philippines from 2012 to 2013 were studied, and a critical discourse analysis was conducted. The articles are examined for their use of words to represent migrant women workers who have experienced sexual abuse. Discourse analysis, particularly looking at transitivity, naming and modality (Language in Conflict, 2013) were used to analyze the texts.

Discourse analysis of news texts is a means of bringing to the foreground the ideologies, worldviews and frameworks contained in a piece of text (van Dijk T. A., 1983). News articles, while written under a supposed code of journalistic impartiality or factuality, are not totally impartial texts. The journalists may intentionally or unintentionally embed their own perspectives in the choice of words used in their reportage. In addition, a news report

is a process of bringing together different discourses; or as Van Dijk explains it: “news production is not a direct representation (biased or not) of events, but rather some form of discourse processing. Reporters will seldom be direct witnesses to events; rather, their data are mostly other discourses, such as eyewitness reports, press conferences, press releases, statements of officials, interviews, documents or news of other media and press agencies. Hence, the construction of news is most of all a reconstruction of available discourses.” (van Dijk T. A., 1983)

To make these perspectives visible, it is possible to look at the overall structure of the texts, the themes emerging from the text, and finally the linguistic structure of individual phrases or sentences such as the use of verbs and verb-subject relationships (transitive processes). These transitive processes show how actions reflect intentions, the perceived character of the one doing the action, or how one action can be described differently.

Transitive processes are categorized as: material processes (what is done); verbal processes (speech); mental processes

(thought) and relational processes (states of being). Linguistic analysis of transitivity also looks into the participants: the agents of action and the ones affected by the action as well as the circumstances of the action. In critical discourse analysis, the focus can be “whether agency, causality and responsibility are made clear or not in the text (Gallardo, 2006; Figueiredo, 2008).

Another way of looking at texts is by highlighting how people and objects are labeled or named (naming). Noun forms can also be examined in which actions are presented as more fixed concepts by turning a verb form into a noun form (nominalization).

Van Dijk (2008) explained that written texts operate as a systemic-functional grammar. This is an approach to understanding written texts as creating meaning, not just from the rules of grammar but also in the meanings that emerge from the choice of words used to describe the action, the person speaking, or the object and person being spoken of. The choice of words can reveal the writer’s perspective of how these subjects should be represented.

There are many examples of the use of discourse analysis in the study of news texts. One study looks at the newspaper headlines as a means of expressing national representations (Develotte & Rechniewski, 2001). In this study, the short, terse headline form was examined to show how the choice of words, use for writing headlines in French newspapers in 1995, expressed tense relations between France and Australia at the time when France was testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific near Australian waters.

Another study (Teo, 2000) shows how two newspapers can treat one topic differently, and more significantly, reveal racist perspectives in their choice of words to describe the subjects. The study examined articles from two Australian newspapers, the Sunday Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph, covering the activities of a Vietnamese gang allegedly involved in drug-related and violent crimes.

In the area of migrant studies, news reports in Chinese media were studied regarding migrant worker’s representations. Findings in one study showed that migrant workers were typically characterized as “passive”

and as “beneficiaries of policies”, typifying them as “problems” that the government has to frequently address (He & Weninger, 2012).

Discourse analysis of news texts has been applied in the field of gender studies as well, such as in a study of the reportage on alcohol and substance abuse in Swedish newspapers from 2000- 2009 (Bogren, 2012). In this study, alcohol and substance abuse are presented as having gender characteristics and are encoded with moral status, where people were described as “hedonistic” and “selfish”, exhibiting “excessive masculinity” and “insufficient femininity.”

In applying feminist perspectives to discourse analysis, it is possible to make visible power relations between men and women, or show where women are represented in ways that can be disempowering or empowering. In this way, language use in texts can be examined for the subsurface messages that can serve to promote or set back the status of women (Lazar, 2007).

The objective of this study was to look at reportage of sexual violence against

migrant women workers from The Philippines, and to bring to the surface the representations of migrant women workers in the light of international and national policies on migrant workers. This study aims to answer the following questions: How are migrant women workers who have suffered sexual abuse represented in news texts? How can these representations reflect public policies on migrant workers?

METHODS

Four news articles on abuse of migrant women workers from the Philippines were selected for discourse analysis.

This study focused on four newspaper articles published and posted online, from 2012 to 2013. These newspaper articles deal with the same subject matter, sexual abuse cases reported in relation to Filipina women migrant workers. By identifying the transitive processes in the text, it was possible to identify the representations of social relations, and power relations between actors reported in the texts. All texts are included as annexes in this paper.

Text 1 (Ponce de Leon, 2013) is a report from Gulf News, published in the United

Arab Emirates. The article is about the factors that deter migrant workers from reporting cases of sexual assault to the authorities. In this article, there are two points of view presented: the women's advocates talking about the migrant workers who are survivors of sexual abuse, and the police authorities talking about the incidence of rape cases.

Text 2 (AsiaNews, 2012) is an article from AsiaNews, a news website covering Asian issues and events. The article highlights a statistic on the incidence of psychological and physical abuse suffered by Filipina domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and the inadequate legal protection they can avail from this host country. It also presents the story of one domestic worker who had suffered abuse from her employer. The text then mentions a similar situation suffered by Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.

Text 3 (Roncesvalles, 2013) is a report of a court trial being held in Hong Kong where a Filipina domestic worker accused her employer of rape. The article is reported in Hong Kong News, a news website for Filipinos in Hong Kong. This text reports

details of the trial including verbatim testimony in Filipino from the Filipina accuser. As a report of an on-going trial, it presents matters heard in court in one day, and does not have links to follow up reports.

Text4 (Singh, 2013) is a report posted on the website Asian Pacific Post. The article begins with a report from the point of view of the survivor of sexual abuse, a Filipina domestic worker. The rest of the article then gives a broader view of the circumstances that Filipina domestic workers face in Hong Kong. The main participant's point of view is repeatedly presented in the article, while discussing wider issues such as access to protection, government intervention, and legal recourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A critical discourse analysis of these texts yields insights into how news reporters write about domestic workers and the issue of sexual abuse. It is possible to show in each instance the different modes of reporting cases of sexual abuse and in representations of individual survivors of sexual abuse.

The discourse analysis of these four texts looks at three aspects: narrative themes, transitive processes and naming.

Narrative themes

Thematic aspects emerged upon close examination of the four texts used in this study.

Themes that can be seen from Text 1 include: the factors that deter reporting rape, the silent suffering of migrant workers who have experienced rape and the need to find legal support. The overall theme of this news article is the advocacy action to encourage migrant workers to seek justice for rape and sexual abuse crimes in a country that does not provide much legal protection. The repeated mention of institutions and organizations in the article serve as pointers on whom the migrant workers can turn to if ever they need to seek legal protection. The less overt but clear subtext is that even in a country with a difficult legal situation, people and institutions are present that migrant workers can turn to for support or protection.

Text 2 is about how 'unskilled' domestic workers suffer a broad range of physical,

verbal and sexual abuse. Another theme in the text is discrimination against unskilled workers. The text mentions the large number of documented abuse cases in Saudi Arabia. The major narrative theme of this article is how Saudi policies on foreign workers are most discriminatory against unskilled workers. This theme is emphasized with the mention of how abuse is suffered by workers of other nationalities as well, not just Filipinos. Thus, the broader theme of the article is the effort to make the Saudi government less discriminatory and more accountable to foreign migrant workers in its jurisdiction.

Text 3 focuses on narrating the circumstances around the sexual abuse and rape of a foreign domestic worker in Hong Kong. The article presents the testimony of the Filipina plaintiff. This testimony is intended also to portray her character, as somebody who suffered the abuse and was helpless to fight against it. Another theme that can be extracted from the article is the fact that there is a trial of the case, meaning the victim was successful in bringing the alleged perpetrator to court. Nevertheless, the story is incomplete since it only reports on the proceedings from one day of a

seven-day trial. It is not possible to see whether justice was actually given to the plaintiff.

In Text 4, the main theme made explicit is the high incidence of abuse cases in Hong Kong. This is emphasized in the title of the article, as well as in the statistics and cases provided in the text. The case study complements the statistics by showing the reality of how abuse is perpetrated, from recruitment, employment to lack of legal protection, particularly in the laws concerning visas and work permits. Thus the first underlying theme of the article is that Hong Kong laws are abusive to foreign domestic workers. Moreover, it is not just the individual abusers who perpetrate abuse but also the whole system of employment. The latter half of the article promotes the activities of the Office of the Vice President of the Philippines, wherein the main theme is that the Philippine government takes care of its foreign workers.

Processes, privileging and agency

In these texts, the ones identified speaking become the privileged perspective in the story, while people who are merely

described but not quoted become minor perspectives.

In Text 1, the main voices came from the women's advocacy groups and the diplomatic representative from the Philippine consulate. The transitive process presented is predominantly the verbal process, as in words such as "told" or "said." In each of these speech acts, the speakers describe the emotions, anxieties and fears of the domestic workers. In the entire article, the migrant workers are only spoken about, but they are never shown to be speaking. Thus it may be said the ones who are speaking, speak 'for' the domestic workers. It may carry the implication that they established themselves as the authorities that the victims must call upon to address the situation.

In Text 2, the report cites from a research paper done by the Committee on Workers Overseas Welfare and then shifts perspective to a woman whose experience is recounted. Finally, a broader context is presented by recounting the efforts of Filipino rights groups, and those of government officials from the Philippines and Indonesia to demand from the Saudi

government better working conditions and legal protection for their migrant workers. In this text, there are both material processes and verbal processes. The verbal processes in the first part of the text refer to the report based on a research study, which makes the organization that conducted the research one of the main perspectives in this article. Material and relational processes, in relation to migrant workers in the article have negative connotations, such as 'cannot sue,' 'have no guarantee.'

Meanwhile, the processes associated with the individual woman cited in the article are mostly verbal, she is telling her own story. The news text presents this person as having *agency* (being able to do things for herself on her own will). In this case, agency can be an indicator of empowerment. The woman who has survived the abuse is not portrayed as a passive victim for whom others must act. This representation or depiction of an individual's agency is placed alongside those of the established authorities (the government agencies working on migrant worker's rights), thus acknowledging the values of both.

Text 3 as a report of the course of a trial is concerned mostly on the testimonies of the individuals involved in the case. As trial procedures typically deal with presented testimony, the journalist must have reported pertinent details only. The verbatim account of the plaintiff (the accuser) provides a direct account of the procedure, using the words 'told', 'narrated' and 'admitted'. Thus the main focus of the article is on the verbal processes as these are meant to establish the speaker's truth. More than that, the narrative in Filipino is incorporated into the English article, as if to present the original speech as unvarnished evidence. Within her narrative, the plaintiff describes the actions of her employer (material processes) and her own reactions (mental and material processes). The mental processes in her narrative give evidence to her feelings of helplessness in the situation she found herself in.

Text 4, similar to text 3, also deals with Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. In this instance, the report presents various viewpoints. The first perspective is from an individual Filipina domestic worker who recounted how she fled from her employer

after experiencing rape. Her narrative is an active voice, helping the reader sympathize with her situation and understand the circumstances of her case. The article then shifts to a report compiled by the Mission for Migrant Workers, a non-governmental organization helping migrant workers in Hong Kong. For the first half of the article, the individual's story is interleaved with the contextual picture presented by the report and interviews. In this article, the broad perspective uses relational processes: 'violations *are* a way of life,' 'holidays *not being* provided', 'job security is the main reason.' Meanwhile, the individual perspective uses verbal, mental and material processes: 'I *plan* to look for' 'she *said*' and '*filed* a complaint'. In this manner, the report's relational processes give the context as facts and the individual's verbal, mental and material processes as representations of agency, as discussed above. The final half of the article deals more with the efforts of the Office of the Vice President of the Philippines (otherwise referred to in the text as OVP) to assist migrant workers. This part is mostly presented as material processes, to emphasize the active role that this office

takes in serving migrant workers. In this way, it serves as a kind of propaganda for the OVP, showing how much effort the Vice President of the Philippines Jejomar Binay is doing in behalf of the migrant workers.

Naming

In each text there are distinct uses of naming that are typical for news reportage of migrant workers. It is these naming instances where the migrant workers may be referred to by the type of work or a depiction in relation to the crime they have experienced.

For Text 1, the migrant workers are referred to as 'Filipina' or 'victim.' The use of the word Filipina makes it clear for the non-Filipino audience of the news article about nationality. On the other hand, the use of the word 'victim' emphasizes the criminal and legal aspect of this status. They are not just victims, they are 'suffering victims' because they are not able to speak and find legal recourse. In this naming of rape victims, the intent is to make readers who have experienced the same crime seek out legal assistance from authorities who can help, while on the other hand, can also show them as helpless or disempowered.

In Text 2, the migrant worker is variably referred to as 'Filipina domestic worker', 'young woman', and 'the girl.' These portrayal of the rape survivor as a young woman or girl is perhaps a call for sympathy for the readers, or a way to portray them as innocents. In another paragraph, the article mentions "hundreds of young women and men tortured" which seems to imply that only young women and men are subjected to abuse. Nevertheless, to refer to a young woman as a 'girl' is also deemed sexist language since it reduces the character of the woman portrayed as someone immature and thus less capable. This seems contradictory to the effort to show the woman's capacity (or agency, see the discussion above), even if it can be read as another means to gain sympathy for the subject.

In Text 3, the characters in the narration are referred to as 'Filipina domestic worker' (later on referred to as either 'the Filipina' or 'the worker'). Meanwhile, the accused's full name is given in the report, but later in the text is referred to as 'the employer.' This format is written in the context of a criminal trial by identifying the protagonists (accuser and accused) without passing

judgment before the judge or jury members make their verdict. Withholding the name of the plaintiff is within bounds of legal reporting practice of protecting identities, while naming the accused might be a means of focusing readers' sentiments on him. Furthermore, the instances where the accuser is referred to as 'the Filipina' may be an attempt to gain the attention and sympathy of other Filipinos who may be reading this report. At the same time, references to the nationality of the accuser may also highlight power relations between the host country, a supposedly more 'developed' country, and a developing country such as the Philippines.

Text 4 names two main characters in the report, first is the woman whose case is narrated and given a pseudonym 'Maria,' and then there is the name of the Philippines' Vice President Jejomar Binay. While both names are given almost equal prominence in the text, the fact that one is a pseudonym while another is the name of a known political figure makes their appearance in the text an unbalanced portrayal. Maria's story is very compellingly portrayed, and she is given many opportunities to speak in her voice, while

also giving her tale a hopeful trajectory. Nevertheless the juxtaposition of both halves of the article and the presentation of 'Maria's' story seems to serve mainly to portray Binay in a positive light, as a hero who is there to save the migrant workers, instead of simply referring to the Philippine government's broader efforts to serve and protect its citizens working abroad.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Each of the texts examined have different ways of highlighting the main concerns of the authors in dealing with issues regarding sexual abuse of migrant workers.

Representations of abuse range from specific cases of sexual abuse to broader definitions of abuse. It is an important aspect of the texts 2 and 4 that they place these abuses on the same level as equally needing to be addressed by policy.

Furthermore, by showing individual stories within a broader context, they are able to frame the need to address migrant worker abuse through legal protection.

Meanwhile, the theme of legal protection may have been presented in different ways but the texts are quite explicit in how they are expressed. Legal protection for migrant

workers is an area of policy for both the sending countries and the host countries. It is a major concern for Philippine government bodies as well as international bodies and non-governmental organizations, and texts 1, 2 and 4 are very much vocal in advocating for better legal protection of migrant workers.

While the authors of these texts may be commended for writing in the interest of migrant workers, they are far from ideal representations of migrant workers and sexual abuse. In each text, the approach towards framing the need for legal protections sometimes uses the narrative theme of 'innocents abroad,' to make them more sympathetic to readers. This portrayal of innocence, this paper argues, would not be necessary if the need for protection is framed under human rights. International laws and legal frameworks have tried to be consistent in applying human rights principles, and it is these laws that can be appealed to when promoting legal protection for migrant workers. For example, the Philippines was one of the first countries to ratify the International Labor Organization's Convention on Domestic Workers, which came into force

on August 2012. This convention recognizes the right of domestic workers to decent work and decent pay through such measures as the right to receive minimum wage, at least 24 hour rest period during the week, and the right to live elsewhere than the place of employment. It also has a provision requiring host countries to provide legal protection from violence and abuse, as well as provisions against child labor. A broader Convention on Migrant Workers has been in effect since 1990. The Philippines is also a signatory to this convention. None of these international laws were even mentioned in the text, or even any mention of human rights included in the reportage. This is also a lost opportunity for the journalist to point out that the host countries should be signatories to these conventions or should implement the laws if they are already signed on to the conventions.

It is understandable that journalistic practice uses themes and language that makes the story compelling to readers, to make characterizations that would portray 'good' and 'bad' characters. Even the portrayal of 'heroic' characters is an appeal to the readers' sensibilities. However,

human rights language has not entered into the broader discourse of journalism nor has it been generally applied in the representations of migrant workers. In writing about sexual abuse, journalists still fall into the pattern of portraying women as 'girls' or youth as if to make them more entitled to legal protection, despite the fact that sexual violence and abuse happens to women of different ages, and even to men as well.

As journalistic discourse evolves, it may need to recognize the greater global effort to protect and promote migrant worker's rights as well as gender equality. The current variance in discourses, as seen in the texts studied here, shows that there are still gaps to be addressed in terms of ensuring progressive representations of women migrant workers and their rights. Migrant workers who have experienced abuse can be represented more fairly, in a way that is uplifting and empowering.

REFERENCES

AsiaNews. (2012, March 17). *Saudi Arabia, 70% of Filipino domestic workers suffer physical and psychological violence*. Retrieved August 20, 2013, from AsiaNews.it: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Saudi-Arabia,->

70-of-Filipino-domestic-workers-suffer-physical-and-psychological-violence-24260.html

Bogren, A. (2012). Symbolic gender boundaries in news discourse on psychotropics use and drinking: An analysis of the Swedish press debate 2000-2009. *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist & Gender Research* , 57-73.

Develotte, C., & Rechniewski, E. (2001). Discourse analysis of newspaper headlines: a methodological framework for research into national representations. *Web Journal of French Media Studies* .

Figueiredo, D. d. (2008). An Analysis of Transitivity Choices in Five Appellate Decisions in Rape Cases. *Fragmentos: Revista de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras* .

Gallardo, B. C. (2006). Analysis of a Literary Work Using Systemic-Functional Grammar. *Proceedings 33rd International Systemic Functional Congress*, (pp. 735-762).

He, X., & Weninger, C. (2012). Media Images, Migrant Reality: A Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Migrant Workers in English Newspapers in China. *Sociolinguistics Symposium 19*. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

Language in Conflict. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Retrieved September 1, 2013, from Language in Conflict: <http://www.languageinconflict.org/how-language-is-studied/critical-discourse-analysis.html>

Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis. *Critical Discourse Studies* , 141-164.

Ponce de Leon, J. (2013, August 13). *Culture, fear should not deter Filipinas from reporting rape, groups say*. Retrieved August 20, 2013, from Gulf News: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/society/culture-fear-should-not-deter-filipinas-from-reporting-rape-groups-say-1.1219710>

Roncesvalles, C. I. (2013, July 12). *Filipina Domestic Worker Cries Rape*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://hongkongnews.com.hk/filipina-domestic-worker-cries-rape/>

Singh, A. (2013, August 8). *Hong Kong one of the worst places for Filipino maids* . Retrieved August 21, 2013, from Asian Pacific Post: <http://www.asianpacificpost.com/article/5689-hong-kong-one-worst-places-filipino-maids.html>

Teo, P. (2000). Racism in the News: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reporting in Two Australian Newspapers. *Discourse Society* , 7-49.

van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Critical Discourse Analysis. In D. T. Deborah Schiffrin, *Tha Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

van Dijk, T. A. (1983). Discourse Analysis: Its Development and Application to the Structure of the News. *Journal of Communication* , 20-43.

ANNEX A: Texts Used for Analysis

TEXT 1

Culture, fear should not deter Filipinas from reporting rape, groups say

Dubai: Fear and a non-confrontational culture should not deter Filipina victims of rape or sexually related crimes from reporting attacks to the police or seeking help from Philippine missions in the UAE, groups said.

Vice-Consul Geronimo Suliguin, head of the Assistance to Nationals (ATN) Section at the Philippine Consulate-General in Dubai, said two Filipina rape victims in Dubai and Umm Al Quwain recently got justice after their attackers were found guilty.

Suliguin said in the Dubai case, a Filipina security worker, was found raped by her supervisor in December last year after her drink was spiked. In Umm Al Quwain a court found four Emirati men guilty of abducting, raping and torturing a Filipina in the desert.

“These convictions are very significant in that they show that the country’s judicial system fairly applies to all,” Suliguin told *Gulf News*.

“This is a strong example for victims not be afraid to report to the police or to us if they have been victimized,” he added.

Gabriela, a Filipino women’s rights group that regularly helps Filipinas in distress, said “very few” victims report incidents to the authorities due to fear.

“If for example we have 10rape cases, we’d be lucky if two women

report it to the police. They are usually scared because they think the case might be used against them or it will be treated as sex outside marriage,” Melca Perez, Gabriela chairperson, told *Gulf News*.

This estimation tallies with statistics, released by Dubai Police last, year where a study found only one in ten sex crimes was reported in the UAE.

Perez said another reason for victims’ apprehension is they do not want to risk losing their jobs and be sent home.

Other victims think filing a case might be a futile exercise that will drain them emotionally and financially but will amount to nothing in the end, said Lalaine Chu-Benitez, organizer of the annual Day of Sisterhood event that aims to empower Filipinas in the UAE.

The non-confrontational culture of Filipinos could also be a factor. Chu-Benitez said Filipina victims usually suffer in silence, but it should not be the case.

“Most of the time, Filipinas try as much as possible to deal ‘quietly’ with cases of sexual harassment and rape — that could mean they just walk away or keep mum about the whole incident and suffer the consequences on their own,” Chu-Benitez told *Gulf News*.

Chu-Benitez urged Filipinas and all victims of rape or sexual harassment

to report the matter to the authorities and seek justice.

"Do not suffer in silence. Suffering in silence will only perpetuate the idea that aggressors can get away with acts of violence against women like this," she said.

TEXT 2

AsiaNews.it

Saudi Arabia, 70% of Filipino domestic workers suffer physical and psychological violence

Revealed by research of the Committee on Overseas Workers Welfare. The cases of rape suffered by Filipino young people are on the agenda. To avoid an increase in wages, the government of Riyadh bans unskilled workers from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Riyadh (AsiaNews) - Underpaid, exploited and often abused by their employers, Filipino domestic workers are one of the groups most at risk in Arabian countries, especially Saudi Arabia. A study published by the Committee on Workers Overseas Welfare, says that 70% of workers employed as caregivers or without a specific work qualification suffers continuous physical and psychological harassment. Despite repeated calls by human rights organizations and associations in defense of immigrants, to date the Philippine government can only defend the rights of skilled workers: engineers, doctors, nurses. They are the most

requested by the Saudi labor market and also the ones who have registered contracts, because they are employed in national hospitals, research centers or large companies. The unskilled workers who arrive in the Arabian country have no guarantee of employment, wages or protection.

With more than 10 million workers worldwide, the Philippines is the third country in the world for the number of emigrants after China and India. In 2008, over 600 thousand Filipinos have chosen to travel to the Middle East in spite of continued incidents of exploitation. For Christians, it also comes to the persecution. Mainly women are suffering: the cases of rape are commonplace and often those who suffer cannot sue because their employer seized the documents. Lorraine is a young 27-year-old Filipina who arrived in Saudi Arabia in early 2010 to work as a domestic worker for a family of Jeddah. She said that the violence began just days after her arrival at the airport. "When my boss came to pick me - she says - he tried to touch me at once to see if I was available. In the first weeks I constantly suffered his advances which became more insistent every time I refused." In nine months of employment Lorraine was raped five times.

She said that in addition to the sexual violence she suffered all kinds of abuse: "I worked 20 hours a day without a break. The wife of my boss insulted me and beat me because I

did not understand Arabic, and did not do her bidding. My lunch was a piece of bread and leftovers from the plates of the family. " After months of harassment on December 30, 2010, the young woman got in touch with the staff of the Philippines Overseas Labor Office (POLO), who reported the case to the police. After months of investigation the authorities arrested her employer. To date, the girl is hosted by POLO and must remain in Saudi Arabia until the case against the perpetrator is concluded.

In recent years, POLO and the Philippine embassy in Riyadh have collected hundreds of testimonies of young women and men tortured and abused in the workplace. The cases also involve important companies. On February 24, 89 Filipino employees of the Swayaeh cosmetics Company, launched an appeal to President Aquino to ask to be repatriated as soon as possible. In recent years they have been abused, left hungry, unpaid for over 5 months. In October, to quell a factory protest the owners called the police armed with shotguns to force workers to work.

Indonesian employees see similar cases. The relations between the two countries broke down after the decapitation of RuyatiBintiSatubiSaruna, an Indonesian migrant of 54 years, sentenced to death for murder. The Saudi authorities prosecuted the woman and sentenced her on 18

June 2011 without any consultation with the Indonesian government.

Since November 3, the government of Manila and Jakarta have been trying to reach an agreement with the Saudi Ministry of Labour to ensure migrant workers a minimum wage and protection from physical and psychological violence. Riyadh has so far responded to these requests by closing its borders to the unskilled. In recent days, the Saudi Minister for Labor has defined the demand for an increase in wages and greater protection of workers illogical, stressing that his office has already contacted the governments of other countries that have no such pretensions.

TEXT 3

Filipina domestic worker cries rape

A Filipina domestic worker took the hot seat as she testified against her former employer for alleged rape and indecent assault. The worker, whose name was withheld for privacy and security reasons, testified at the Court of First Instance early this month. The jury, composed of four women and three men, heard that the alleged rape incidents happened in the employer's home in Kowloon City last July 25 and 31; and two incidents of indecent assault happened in the swimming pool last July 31.

Alleged abuses

The employer, Leung Wing-yu, denied the charges during the court trial that was conducted in Cantonese. The Filipina told the court that the alleged abuses happened a little more than a month after she started working for her employer. With the aid of a local interpreter and a Filipina interpreter, she told the open court that her employer entered her room and lent his laptop to her. The worker had second thoughts about using her employer's laptop. But she could not refuse the seemingly kind offer to use Facebook to check her kids' photos. "Hindi pa nagtatagal nang gamitin k ang Facebook, nagulat nalang ako nang inihilig niya ang ulo niya sa balikat ko. Nanigas ang buong katawan ko. Tapos hinalikan niya ang balikat ko at inilagay ang kamay niya sa likod ko. Natakot ako," the Filipina narrated. "Hindi ko alam ang gagawin ko. Na-blangko ang isip ko. Sinubukan kong tumayo pero yung katawan ko nanigas talaga sa gulat. Ginamit ko ang kamay ko para itulak siya pero hindi ganoon kalakas ang katawan ko dahil sa gulat at takot. Pero hindi niya pinansin iyon at patuloy pa rin siya... Binastos niya ako," she continued. The court had to take occasional breaks as the Filipina found it difficult to narrate the incidents. The domestic worker admitted that she felt disgusted so she cleaned herself immediately after the incident.

"Hindi ko alam kung kanino hihingi ng tulong kapag nawalan ako ng trabaho. Halo-halo ang nasa isip ko-

takot, pandidiri at galit," the Filipina said. She also told the court that her employer touched her breast on two occasions when she was looking after her ward by the swimming pool last July 31. The Filipina added that she was again raped by her employer later that day when they returned to the flat, while her ward was sleeping.

The seven-day trial was still in progress as of press time.

TEXT 4

Hong Kong one of the worst places for Filipino maids

The first time "Maria" was raped, she didn't tell anybody. "The first thing that came to my mind was that I didn't want to lose my job."

The 25-year old domestic worker from the Philippines was just a month into her job with a family in Kowloon City when the first attack happened. A second attack forced her to flee.

"I left at midnight, without anything. I just had a small bag. I was still in my pajamas," she recalled, according to a report in the South China Morning Post.

Maria's ordeal - which ended recently when her case collapsed due to the deterioration of evidence because she was too late going to a doctor - is at the extreme end of what new figures reveal is the widespread abuse facing the city's

tens of thousands of domestic workers.

Data gathered by the Mission for Migrant Workers, which surveyed more than 3,000 women last year, found 58 per cent had faced verbal abuse, 18 per cent physical abuse and 6 per cent sexual abuse. Experts believe the figures represent only the tip of the iceberg, as many victims are too scared or ill informed to lodge complaints.

“The number of unreported cases is obviously unknown,” said Cynthia Dacanay, a case worker at the mission, adding: “Some consider abuse a normal thing for maids to experience.”

After a night of wandering the streets, Maria’s friends took her to the mission in the grounds of St John’s Cathedral in Central, which has been providing resources and legal aid for domestic workers since 1981. “I was empowered when I came here. I became stronger,” she said.

Dacanay said the Philippine consulate advised Maria to return to the Philippines and not pursue legal action, a charge the consulate vehemently denies.

Hong Kong’s often-criticized employment laws for domestic helpers compounded Maria’s situation. When a contract ends, a foreign worker has only 14 days to find a new employer, which many say is not enough time. If

unsuccessful, a worker must return home or face prosecution.

Maria was granted several visa extensions as her case went through the legal system but she was forbidden by law from working and had to rely on charity. For more than a year she has been living at the Bethune House shelter in Jordan in a cramped dormitory with other women.

Sri, 40, from Indonesia, did not know her employer was supposed to provide medical treatment. “I just signed the contract without reading it because I don’t know English,” she said.

She said that when she became ill with a throat ailment, her employer of six years tried to trick her into going back to Indonesia. Sri now also lives at Bethune.

For many women, violations are a way of life. Reports of no food or food allowance, delayed pay, working on holidays and not being provided reasonable privacy are common. As with Maria, job security is the main reason most chooses to remain silent.

Another source of exploitation can be the agencies that place most foreign workers, with many charging exorbitant commissions despite the law.

In the Philippines, many agencies also insist on a steep upfront fee as a condition for placement in Hong Kong, even though this violates Philippine law.

Despite losing her legal battle, Maria recently filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission, which she hopes will launch a further investigation, but she is also looking to move on. "I plan to look for another employer," she said. "I have to work for my kids."

Meanwhile, another report said a total of 3949 requests from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) were acted under the leadership of Vice President Jejomar Binay, Office of the Vice President's (OVP's) midterm accomplishment report revealed.

Binay, who started his term as the vice president since 2010, also serves as the Presidential Adviser on OFW Concerns.

According to the report, in the last 3 years, his office provided repatriation, assistance on salary and benefits claims, legal assistance for detained OFWs, and grievances against recruiters and agents.

To respond to these requests, OVP coordinated closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, and Philippine embassies and consulates. One of his most notable accomplishments was the secured release of Rodelio "Dondon" Lanuza, an OFW sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia for killing a Saudi national out of self-defense.

The government secured his release on February, after collective efforts between the Saudi Embassy in Manila and the OVP.

In coordination with the concerned agencies, Binay's office also helped on the repatriation of a 3-year old boy whose mother was deported to the Philippines and was fostered by his mother's friends in Kuwait.

Among other OFWs that the OVP had helped were Alfredo Salmos, survivor of an accidental electrocution in Saudi Arabia in 2010; Milagros Villarín, who died of natural causes in her home in Belgium; and the two Filipina maids of the relatives of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The vice president's intercession also helped in reconciling the families of OFWs Jonard Langamin and Robertson Mendoza. Langamin was sentenced to death after he killed Mendoza due to a work-related dispute in Saudi.

He also led efforts in repatriating thousands of OFWs in war-torn Syria.

Aside from OVP's direct assistance to the requests, the report also showed that Binay's foreign visits have also resulted in strengthened relations with the countries he has been to, which opened opportunities for employment for Filipinos.

After Binay's trip to Germany in June, he even announced that an initial batch of 50 nurses from the

Philippines will be deployed to Germany in 2013, while a group of 500 will be deployed by 2014.

overseas workers in the world after India, China and Mexico.

Binay also got the assurance of European businessmen that the Philippines' 80,000-strong contingent of seafarers based in Europe will be safe from blacklisting.

In 2012, Binay also announced that the ban on Filipino au pairs (French term meaning "on par" or "equal") to Europe and came up with the new "Guidelines on the Departure of Au Pairs to Europe."

Filipinos under the au pair program allowed to be at par or equal to locals, by being treated as a member of the family instead of a domestic servant.

The ban was imposed to reports of maltreatment, unfair compensation, excessive working hours, discrimination and sexual assault, and abuse of the system by illegal recruiters and syndicates.

Remittances from more than 10 million Filipinos living overseas largely fuel household consumption and plays a crucial role in the economy's growth.

Cash remittances have helped boost the nations foreign exchange reserves, which stood at \$81.64 billion as of June.

The Philippines is the fourth-largest recipient of remittances from