Protection and empowerment for Indonesian female migrant domestic workers

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PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT FOR INDONESIAN FEMALE MIGRANT
DOMESTIC WORKERS

By

Rosita Tandos

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the issue of transnational domestic work. There are three main points discussed: first, factors influencing the women’s decisions to work overseas; second, six stages of transnational domestic work including the recruitment process, training program, placement and signing the employment contract, working overseas, finishing the contract, and travelling back home); third, the women’s perspectives on solutions to the problems. Using a human capabilities approach, empowerment and feminist theoretical frameworks, the study examined whether being a migrant female domestic worker contributes positively to a woman’s and her family’s life.

The participants of the study had an opportunity to express their thoughts on problems and solutions in relation to transnational domestic work. A total of 20 female participants were involved in this study. They are returned female migrant domestic workers and live in Bondan village, Indramayu district West Java province. Data was collected using in-depth and semi-structured interviews with closed and opened-ended questions. The data was collected and analyzed using qualitative methods, and provided an opportunity for the women to experience relational empowerment, in which they could express their thoughts and learn from one another.

The processes of analyzing and writing findings were conducted in light of the socio-cultural context of the women’s lives including their families and communities. The results of the study reveal implications for social welfare practice, policy change, and future research.
DEDICATION

I dedicated this dissertation to three people who have inspired and completed my life:

My Father and Mother

My Husband
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My journey to finish my doctoral studies has been very challenging and meaningful, as it required supreme effort in terms of commitment, passion, and patience. First of all, Alhamdulillah, all praise belongs to Allah, God that saves, guides, and blesses me in this long journey. Then, I deeply realize the great support system that has continuously accompanied me from three continents (my father, my mother, my brother and sisters, and my husband), and the other people that greatly contribute to the success of my doctoral studies. May God give great rewards to those who have helped, supported, and taken care of me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has a great impact on people’s lives in both positive and negative ways. It presents new challenges and heightens many human organizational, institutional, and governmental needs (Lawson, 2001). Transnational domestic work is one part of the global system that affects social, cultural, economic, and political lives. In this case, women become the main actors of a multi-billion dollar business as they should leave their original countries to work overseas to take care of other people’s homes and domestic needs, children, and businesses. This chapter discusses four main points: Indonesian transnational domestic work, purposes of the study, significance of the study, and the study’s relevance to social work.

Statement of the Problem

Globalization has impacts across countries and aspects of life. It hurts the poor, especially poor women in the Third World (Mcgovern, 2009). Furthermore, the changes in socio-economic and political conditions become triggers for these women to work domestically overseas. The women are forced to leave their families, migrate, and become ‘transnational domestic workers’ with a lack of knowledge, education, and skills. The conditions for these women can become worse because of the lack of protection from both sending and receiving governments (Raharto, 2002; Novirianti, 2005; Parrenas, 2001; Sen, 2000; Silvey, 2003).

As mentioned previously, transnational domestic work is an impact of the global economic system that produces wide-open opportunities for people to migrate and work overseas. Barker and Feiner (2004) define transnational domestic work as “a feminist issue precisely since it plays a central role in shaping labor markets by reinforcing the status quo gender division of labor and undermining the ability of states to enact progressive social
policies” (p.6-7). This global business involves multiple layers of cooperation: sending and receiving countries, other stakeholders such as agents and brokers, and the private sector (medical insurance and travel agents). Such a global economic system not only shapes the transnational domestic work business, but also creates winners and losers that can exacerbate relations of dependency and exploitation.

Furthermore, transnational domestic work means the involvement of private corporations in the process of globalizing the world. Neoliberalism is the predominant philosophical and economic theory that drives the globalization economy today emphasizing economic liberalization, finance capitalism, labor flexibility and exports, deregulation and privatization of public sectors (McGovern, 2009; Pyles, 2009b). Privatization also plays an important role in foreign domestic markets and businesses. It is generally used to refer to policies that ‘shift’ responsibilities and resources from the public sphere to the private sector and the dismantling of the social safety net. Furthermore, privatization is connected to the free market ideology that underlies this shift (Stone, 2006).

Foreign female workers from South and/or Eastern Asia tend to be channeled into certain types of work within low-paying and low-skilled service sector jobs. This work is frequently located in the sphere of domestic service and entertainment that is social-legally not recognized as ‘work’. In addition, structural processes affect women’s migration and employment as domestic workers, especially the patriarchal ideologies and domesticity that incorporate both ‘local’ and ‘global’ formation (Silvey, 2001, 2004).

The majority of opportunities through legal channels of migration are in male-dominated sectors and put women at a great disadvantage in which many women illegally cross borders, enter unregulated and often-irregular work situations (Ehrenreich et al., 2004; Satterthwaite,
Therefore, another issue of transnational domestic work is related to the immigration process that has to be passed by female migrant domestic workers before working overseas. In this case, sending countries tightly control the migration process, but simultaneously allow private employers and recruiting agencies to operate ‘unchecked’ by regulations or inspections. Migration officials are known to falsify the documents of female migrant workers and the recruitment prerequisites are just on paper and cannot be seriously implemented (Raharto, 2002; Silvey, 2004).

Leaving for overseas employment through falsification of data (ID card and passport) puts female migrant domestic workers in a high-risk situation. For instance, passports often state the women’s age as older than their real age. One of the requirements for female migrant domestic workers to be allowed to work overseas is that they should be at least 18 years old. At such a young age, their bodies are not strong enough to manage the heavy and overloaded work that is mostly expected of female migrant domestic workers.

Falsification of immigration documents could also facilitate or cause human trafficking. Trafficking people has been embedded in the market of transnational migrant work under the modern capitalist system and has been found in the illegal placement of migrant workers, mostly from groups of women and children (Kimura, 2006; Sugiarti, Davis & Dasgupta, 2006). Hardani and colleagues (2004) define human trafficking as a “movement of persons (especially women and children), with or without their consent, within a country or internationally, for all forms of exploitative labor, not only prostitution and servile marriage” (cited in Kimura, 2006, p.8).

To make matters worse, many female domestic workers are often under-protected and disempowered due to being undocumented workers. Some studies investigated these phenomena (Anggraeni, 2005; Novirianti, 2009; Raharto, 2002; Silvey, 2001), but they did not
systematically capture the risk factors that affect the Indonesian women’s decisions to work overseas or the six stages of working domestically overseas (from the recruitment process until coming back to their family and community). The following discussion provides an introduction and the updated issues of Indonesian transnational domestic work.

**Indonesian Transnational Domestic Workers**

Since 2004, the Indonesian government has tried to develop the potential of the Indonesian migrant workers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*) program to face the 9.7% unemployment rate and increasing poverty. This sector contributes around half a million occupations per year (Saraswati, 2008). The National Body for Migrant Workers Placement and Protection (BNP2TKI) states that there are 512,168 Indonesian workers overseas; 285,197 formal workers (56%) and 226,871 informal workers (44%). If we add to that number those who work ‘illegally’, the number of migrant workers would be twice or even four times bigger (BNP2TKI, 2013).

Data from the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia (*Kementerian Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigration*) shows that in 2002, 94 percent of legal Indonesian female migrant workers served as domestic workers in the Middle East, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. 90 percent (240,000) of the domestic workers in Malaysia, one of the main destination countries for domestic work, come from Indonesia. If this number is added to the number of people who migrated illegally, the final figure could easily be doubled. It is mainly Indonesian females who are hired for domestic work and the services they provide are vital to those employing migrant workers (Indonesian Human Right Watch, 2005).

Remittances sent by Indonesian migrant workers are considered as the second source of revenue for the country after oil and gas production. In the period from January to July 2012, the
amount of remittances sent by migrant workers was US$ 3.9 billion. At the end of 2012, the remittances were US$ 6.8 billion; IDR 61.2 trillion (BNP2TKI, 2013).

Raharto (2002) added that migrant workers are motivated by factors such as the availability of promising jobs, the existence of social capital created by relatives and/or friends who migrated earlier, the encouragement and influence from local agents, middlemen, or recruiters, and the desire to gain a higher social status. The mechanisms of recruiting Indonesian female migrant domestic workers is completed in two ways: legally when women directly contact a labor recruiting company, known as the Official Agency for Indonesian Migrant Workers, called *Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* or PJTKI, and illegally when it is conducted through recruiters or middlemen who are called sponsor (*calo*) by the local people. The scope of a sponsor (illegal) is larger than that of the labor recruiting company (legal) that has a sub-agent generally located in cities far away from the villages from which the prospective female workers come (Raharto, 2002).

The recruitment and placement of migrant workers in Indonesia is undertaken by the official agency (PJTKI) that consists of several private companies. In addition to the licensed PJTKI, it is estimated that there are at least 800 illegal recruitment companies. Many of them are actually sub-contracted by the licensed PJTKI to conduct their initial recruitment drives (Anggraeni, 2006). Another issue is high capital requirements and deposits demanded by the PJTKI in Indonesia. Such conditions can simply drive recruitment agencies into the black market, to work ‘underground’ or in a situation that is difficult to prevent and monitor (ILO, 2006).

Most of the female migrant domestic workers are recruited from the official agency, (PJTKI). This official labor company reports that the women received pre-departure training that
was conducted for 1-2.5 months teaching skills for daily communication with their future employers and families. However, the female workers felt that the training was too short and the instruction material was not enough for communicating in the workplace (Raharto, 2002).

The contract system applied in the host country is another important issue that maintains oppressive working conditions and neglects the rights of the female migrant workers. Officially, as explained by the ILO report in 2009, foreign female domestic workers from East Asian countries fall under the category of contract workers in receiving countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In reality, they do not engage in legally binding contracts that set out their protection, rights, and responsibilities including earnings, working hours, relationship to the employer, or other aspects. Their status is just as ‘visiting workers’ who are permitted to work for two years.

Most of the foreign female domestic workers sign their contracts issued by the embassies. Regardless, this contract is not binding on the employers or any other officials in many host countries. Protection of the worker’s rights is often against the rules of the destination country. For instance, Sabban and Smith (2004) state that beyond the period of the four-month guarantee applied in the UAE, employers and employees must resolve any conflict by themselves in front of the police officers in the case of tragic incidents. Another option for female migrant domestic workers who get abused by their employers is to contact the Indonesian embassy, but not all of the women can do this since they were not provided with sufficient information regarding how to handle unexpected situations during their work as domestic workers.

Law No.39 of 2004 passed on October 28, 2004 produced by the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia ushered in several changes to the ways the PJTKI must conduct business. This private agency – appointed by the government authorities –
has the authority to monitor these sponsors (middlemen) and their practices. However, this system of recruitment costs more in terms of application fees, insurance, and work preparation. It is also considered time consuming and expensive (Anggraeni, 2006; Hugo, 1998; Raharto, 2002). Therefore, the illegal way is seemingly more favored by migrant women since the procedures are easier and ‘accessible’ for prospective female workers who do not meet Indonesian government requirements such as age, education, and pre-departure trainings.

Since the sponsors are not legally bound to anyone, they can make their own rules. Once the recruited candidate agrees to meet with PJTKI, the sponsor can extract a sum of money from her and will charge the PJTKI a certain fee for providing them with the candidate (Anggraeni, 2006). This system is still maintained through corruption and exploitative practices (Raharto, 2002).

As mentioned above, although according to Law No. 39 of 2004 on Migrant Worker Placement and Protection, recruitment process by sponsors or brokers is considered illegal, but states there is no special law against the brokerage practice. Perhaps the government realizes that brokerage also creates employment for many who would otherwise be unemployed. This condition gives more room for swindling and criminality, as well as allows criminal brokers for human trafficking to operate freely (Saraswati, 2008).

In destination countries, the Indonesian government has improved services through its Embassies to protect female migrant domestic workers by setting up counseling desks and accommodations for abused or illegal migrant workers. However, this effort cannot effectively address the problems if the roots (illegal brokerage) are not seriously cut (Saraswati, 2008). Brokers can easily control such conditions since most of the women have limited educations and do not understand their rights well (Loveband, 2006).
The women can also work overseas by falsifying their immigration documents. While many migrant women favor the illegal system, this type of contract system has failed to protect women’s rights. A significant number of female migrant domestic workers still experience poverty and stigma as women are considered unskilled workers and unacknowledged professionals.

Therefore, future protection relies on empowerment programs that should be implemented to improve the knowledge and skills of the female workers, they should involve collaboration and partnership from all stakeholders, and address people’s awareness of the issues related to the profession of migrant domestic workers. Addressing this issue, this study specifically discusses transnational domestic workers through the eyes of female participants and covers three main points: 1) factors affecting women’s choice to work abroad, 2) six stages of foreign domestic work, and 3) policies and programs that might be developed to enhance protection and empowerment for female migrant domestic workers.

**Purposes of the Study**

The study explores the lives of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers. It also explores the effectiveness of protection and empowerment programs available for them by using a qualitative method in collecting and analyzing data. There are four main objectives of the research:

- To understand the social, cultural, and economic factors that lead to the migration of the female domestic workers
- To examine the current issues female domestic workers face during each of the six steps of working domestically overseas
• To explore how the current policies and programs (at the local, national, and international levels) protect and empower Indonesian migrant domestic workers

• To find solutions of being transnational domestic workers using the perspectives of the local women, the participants of this study.

As mentioned above, the study explores the issue of Indonesian transnational domestic workers including the factors affecting women’s decisions, the processes of working domestically overseas, and the solutions from the perspective of female foreign domestic workers. I begin by discussing the conceptual framework and literature review that guides and clarifies this study. This study aims to discuss and analyze these points by applying four frameworks (human capabilities, intersectionality, empowerment, and feminist social work). The dissertation is structured first by presenting a detailed discussion of the conceptual frameworks and the literature review that guides the study. Secondly the study goes on to describe the details that will involve Indonesian migrant domestic workers as informants who worked in four different countries (The United Arab Emirates, Taiwan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia). The main research questions include: 1) factors driving the women to work domestically overseas and which women are affected by which factors, the women’s work experiences and how they impact the women’s lives, 2) available policies, programs, and services provided by the Indonesian government, and 3) how policies and services need to be improved in order to support the women’s well-being while working overseas. Finally, the consent forms and research questions are included in the appendices.
Significance of the Study and Relevance to Social Work

From a social work or social welfare perspective, the impact of globalization encompasses all levels including the micro (individual, family, and group), mezzo (organization and community), and macro (policy changes). Given the fact that globalization impacts so many systems, it is important that new discourses and theories of academic analysis and respective disciplinary frames incorporate the three levels of intervention.

When integrating social welfare perspectives into the discussion of transnational domestic work, there are at least three main points that should be seriously taken into account by all stakeholders, especially the institutions that produce welfare policies and programs for rights protection and empowerment of female foreign domestic workers:

1. International standard for female domestic laborers

   The International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2012 emphasizes two points that should be considered when reforming labor laws to enhance the protection of domestic workers. First, one must understand the magnitude of migrant domestic labor, the characteristics of domestic workers and their employers, and the prevailing patterns and arrangements under which domestic work is performed (living in or living with arrangements). Second, there must be an analysis of the existing national laws to identify the legal provisions that may already be applicable to domestic workers.

   The protection and empowerment of female domestic workers should address the issues existing in the host countries and the sending countries. The implementation of a binding contract and policy change between the sending and receiving governments, as well as between the employer and employee, should also be conducted to ensure the rights and obligations for all parties before the women start to work (Said, 2001). Additionally, standards for recruiting,
preparing, sending, living, working, and finishing contracts for foreign female domestic workers are needed. These standards should include guidelines to eliminate issues involving psychological and physical violations. Strict regulations are also needed that stop illegal agency practices and make it easier for women to file lawsuits if the agency fails to perform their obligation of protecting the women’s rights. This means that agencies that work with domestic workers should be reachable and responsible for unexpected situations experienced by the women (Raharto, 2002).

2. Empowering youth and families

Family members often pressure women to work as migrant domestic workers (Raharto, 2002). Kinship ideology and kinship groupings become powerful social forces that pressure daughters and young women to live overseas. This asymmetrical power relationship often results in young girls and women being the least powerful people in the family, controlled by family rules and kinship obligations (Heyzer et al., 1994). Similarly, ILO (2006) emphasizes the economic contribution of the female migrant workers to family life. With a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills, Indonesian female migrant domestic workers sacrifice themselves in dealing with the demands of their work environment and cultural shock (Migrant Care, 2011; Voice of America, 2011).

Considering the drawbacks associated with transnational domestic care, family intervention programs should integrate women’s needs for protection from the abuses and violations faced by many female workers who work overseas through illegal procedures (Lesmana, 2002). Therefore, improving the family’s role to prevent the influence of illegal agencies or sponsors can support the protection and empowerment efforts of women. However, family support programs have not been a concern for the Indonesian government. Therefore,
future policy changes should support low-income families of migrant workers and consider them as experts and partners. Policy makers should aim to gain more comprehensive understanding of the issue and enhance protection, empowerment for the women and their contributions to family lives, especially in caring for the children as a future investment of the family.

3. Supporting community

Resilience of female migrant domestic workers usually works as the main and immediate solution to tackling daily problems. Alternatively, the women workers who socialize with other Indonesian workers tend to discuss their problems and gather with their Indonesian friends. However, the majority of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers in countries such as Malaysia are not allowed to call home, communicate with other Indonesian migrant workers, or socialize with their employers (Orange et al., 2012). Consequently, there are significant cases of runaway female workers. This phenomenon of runaway Indonesian female domestic workers is caused by the numerous injustices, abuses, and negative conditions that the women face on a daily basis. They feel unsatisfied with the lack of protection from the agency or sponsor and the problems are frequently unresolved due to employers keeping the workers’ immigration documents.

These three points are the main areas through which social workers might contribute to improve the lives of female migrant domestic workers. Providing advocacy, education and training, and collaboration among stakeholders of transnational domestic work are among the types of assistances needed to protect and empower individual female migrant domestic workers.

Empowerment programs for families, youth, and communities can improve their awareness and support for female migrant domestic workers. Finally, all types of interventions, partnerships, and collaborations are needed to improve policies, programs, and services that will
consider female domestic workers as key partners and experts, not just as passive service recipients.
CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussions of transnational domestic work cover various disciplines such as sociology, politics, economics, and social welfare. As a result, there are a number of conceptual frameworks that can be useful in the study of migrant domestic workers. For example, some scholars use a legal-sociology perspective in studying domestic workers (Novirianti, 2011; Piper, 2004; Vlieger, 2011), the politics and gender of immigration (Esim & Smith, 2004; Parrenas, 2001; Silvey, 2003), and a transnational and globalization perspective (Bacchus, 2005; Lyons, 2006; Messias, 2000; Pyle, 2006). Several theories, approaches, or perspectives are provided and interconnected to analyze the issues and to find solutions to the problems related to the business of transnational domestic work.

Theoretical framework

This part highlights four main theories, or perspectives, used. The first is the human capability approach, followed by the intersectionality framework, and concluding with both empowerment and feminist theories in social work studies. These perspectives are discussed due to their ability to holistically address the context of helping Indonesian migrant domestic workers.

Human Capabilities Approach

The discussion of capabilities has been discussed by various scholars. Robeyns (2003) defined the capabilities approach as “a broad normative framework for the evaluation of individual well-being and social arrangement, the design of policies and proposals about social change in society” (p.5). This framework emphasizes people’s accessibility to the necessary positive resources and their ability to make choices that matter to them (Alkire, 2005).
Additionally, Clark (2006) states that the conceptual foundations of the capabilities approach can be found in Amartya Sen’s critiques of traditional welfare economics. Sen challenges the welfare, or utility, approach that concentrates on happiness, pleasure, and desire-fulfillment. He emphasizes that there are many other things of intrinsic value (rights and positive freedoms) that are neglected by the utility approach (as cited in Clark, 2006, p.3-4).

Sen’s capabilities approach focuses on giving every person the freedom to define his/her own set of functioning (Clark, 2005; Sen, 1990). Furthermore, Sen collaborated on a project that created an index to measure international human development using the capabilities approach as a guiding force. This index is known as the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI offers a way to measure development by utilizing a single statistic that focuses on three functionings: life expectancy, educational attainment, and income (Robeyns, 2003; UNDP, 2011). According to Kuonqui (2006), the Human Development Index sees development as a process of expanding real freedoms, rather than the narrow view that focuses on identifying development with economic growth or social modernization. Factors such as Gross National Product (GNP) and personal income are crucial means to expanding freedom. However, these factors should be interrelated with other factors such as education, health, and political and civil rights that give form to the substance of human freedom.

Martha Nussbaum (1995, 2000) further elaborated the ideas around the capabilities approach bringing more attention to people’s skills and personality traits as aspects of capabilities (Robeyns, 2003). She outlined a capabilities approach that can be used to analyze the issues related to transnational domestic work. The following is Nussbaum’s list of central human capabilities that can be applied to the lives of female migrant domestic workers:

1. Life: Being able to live to a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely.
2. Bodily health: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished; and to have adequate shelter.

3. Bodily integrity: Being able to move from place to place; to be secure against violent assault including sexual assault and domestic violence; and having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, imagination, and thought: Being able to use senses to imagine, think and reason; and being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. Emotions: Being able to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger, not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.

6. Practical reason: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life (this includes liberty of conscience and of religious observance).

7. Affiliation: Being able to live with and toward others, to engage in various forms of social interaction (this includes freedom of assembly and political speech); and to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others (this includes non-discrimination).

8. Other species: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play: Being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one’s environment:

   A. Political: Being able to participate politically, have the rights protecting free speech and association;
B. Material: Being able to have the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; and having the freedom to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

The capabilities approach can be used to evaluate a wide range of aspects including social justice, inequality, and poverty (Nussbaum, 2000; Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 1987, 2000). Poverty is one of the major reasons that female domestic workers migrate. Severe economic conditions in their native villages, coupled with the opportunity to financially contribute to family life, force women to leave their homes. The decision to work domestically overseas might violate women’s process freedom (being forced to do something, with no freedom of choice) or their substantive opportunity (being obligated to do something that is not what one would choose to do if they had any plausible alternative) (Sen, 2005). Families often interfere in a woman’s decision to leave and work overseas, as well. Therefore, the needs of individuals and families must be taken into account in social and economic development agendas. Such an effort helps address social isolation, poverty and its correlates, as well as structural exclusion existing in social, political, and economic life (Briar-Lawson et al., 2001).

In considering how transnational migrant domestic workers’ capabilities have been violated by various social systems, seven of Nussbaum’s capabilities listed above are relevant to the conditions of female migrant domestic workers. These capabilities point to the need for the creation of healthy and safe work environments. The first capability is control over one’s environment in which female migrant domestic workers often do not have the right to seek employment on an equal basis. This condition is caused by the hierarchal relationship with their employers and the stigma of unskilled workers (Raharto, 2000). In addition, female domestic workers are often not able to engage in various forms of social interaction. Such conditions
preclude the women’s affiliation capability, as well. In response to these concerns, women’s organizations in Malaysia and Singapore have worked with female migrant domestic workers helping them to develop associations (Silvey, 2001). This capability is considered important for empowering female migrant workers and overcoming daily problems faced by the women overseas (Anggraeni, 2006).

The second capability is a practical reason. Female domestic workers are not able to form a conception of goodness and reflect critically on their lives. A lack of education and support systems affect the women’s practical reasoning capabilities and creates vulnerability to possible abuse and violations by sponsors, agencies, employers, and systems (Raharto 2002, Varia, 2010; Yazid, 2008). This capability influences women’s ability to use their senses, imaginations, and thought; namely to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain. The female domestic workers are often required to be available for around-the-clock household services (Varia, 2010). This situation might affect the other four capabilities (life, bodily health, play, and bodily integrity). These four capabilities are often threatened, forcing some female domestic workers to seek escape from their employers, yet they are not often allowed to leave the home, or to meet or interact with other people (Anggraeni, 2006; Novirianti, 2005).

Human capabilities are a key issue for understanding transnational domestic work. However, there is limited consideration of the capabilities of the female migrant domestic workers in current policies. Therefore, any attempts at creating healthy and safe workplaces must coincide with improving the individual capabilities of female workers in aspects such as education and skills, cultural adjustment, and resilience (Esim & Smith, 2004).

It is important to acknowledge that there are some criticisms of the capabilities approach. Hill (2003) argues that the capabilities approach does not pay sufficient attention to social power
that produces and reproduces power, affecting people’s opportunities and creating more social inequalities. Sue (1987) also explained that people’s ability to wield power and to shape their own fates is constrained by social forces such as discrimination, myriad institutions, and structures regulating behavior. Therefore, empowerment programs for enhancing the capabilities of female foreign domestic workers should be followed by creating systems that are more protective of the female migrant domestic workers’ rights and change their position into skilled workers who are protected by international law (Esim & Smith, 2004; ILO, 2009, 2012).

Intersectionality Framework

The use of the intersectionality framework in this study aims to enhance the protection and empowerment of female migrant domestic workers. This framework is used because it is an integrated analysis of ethnicity, race, gender, and other variables that affect the daily lives of women migrant domestic workers. It also includes an analysis of the forces of global inequality that render women vulnerable to abuse.

By focusing on the dynamic between multiple forms of discrimination, an intersectionality approach also emphasizes society’s responses to variously situated individuals and groups (Satterthwaite, 2004; Crenshaw, 2000). Satterthwaite (2004) explains that intersectionality calls attention to the ways in which race and gender interact or intersect to create specific forms of oppression and discrimination. For instance, native-born Asian women are likely to experience gender discrimination that differs from Native American women or women of another race. The different form of discrimination may require different remedial and preventive actions.

Additionally, intersectionality emphasizes how the policies and systems applied within the country (socio-cultural, economic, and political) can significantly impact the lives of women
migrant domestic workers. In this regard, the systems shape social classes in terms of citizenship status, race, class, and gender. They support the globalization of domestic work and regulate the institutions of domestic services (Shu-Ju & Cheng, 2006; Byrd, 2008). The governments of both sending and receiving countries open wide the opportunity for the private sectors to take a part in transnational work processes, from the recruitment and placement process to the completion of the contract, as well as the women coming back home.

Crenshaw and Bond (2001) suggested ‘institutional reforms’, policy and program changes, and more scholarship that applies intersectionality to human rights problems. They argue that such an attempt will be enhanced through developing greater awareness about the conditions of women of color, examining all of the relevant United Nation’s human rights treaties, especially the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). However, this convention has not completely been ratified by all state parties (both sending and receiving countries), especially considering that there is a lot of work on the part of different states and obligations that they should ensure on the issue of the rights of migrant workers and their families (Estrada, 2014).

The combination of the intersectionality framework, along with the capabilities framework, allows for a more in-depth analysis of the current capabilities of female migrant domestic workers and the need for enhancing their capabilities, as well as identifying the multi-layered discriminations experienced by the women. In addition, there are two other crucial frameworks that are used in this study to expand the analysis of transnational domestic work. These two final frameworks are the empowerment perspective and the feminist perspective.
Empowerment Theory

The term of empowerment is defined as a process of changing power relations in favor of those at the lower levels of a hierarchy. This perspective emphasizes accessibility and control over social, political, and material resources, strengthening individuals and communities, and the enhancement of well-being to strive for positive change (Presser & Sen, 2000; Inaba et al., 2001; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment takes place on many levels following a dynamic continuum of action from individuals and small groups to community, organizations, and policy change (Rissel, 1994). In addition, empowerment consists of intrapersonal and interpersonal interventions that focus on creating positive change at the social-political level (Wallerstein, 1992).

By incorporating the empowerment perspective into this study, the goal is to explore the extent to which the current policies and programs empower or support the life of female migrant domestic workers by capturing their experiences before, during, and after working abroad. The women’s experiences refer to legal protection, the processes, and empowerment programs that aim to develop the women’s capabilities, self-efficacy, knowledge, competence, and action. In other words, this study will focus on both empowerment as a process and an outcome.

Systematic and comprehensive interventions can help facilitate empowerment on all levels including individuals, groups, communities, and the larger society. However, the empowerment perspective is used in this study to analyze current policies and programs to protect and empower Indonesian female migrant domestic workers. The policies and programs this study will explore were produced at the local, national, and international governmental levels and address the recruitment, preparation of knowledge and skills, and the placement of migrant domestic workers overseas.
Social workers also use the empowerment framework to help oppressed groups gain power and authority and to pursue the fulfillment of their intervention goals (Lee, 1996; Maton & Saleem, 1995; Rappaport, 1987). In addition, social workers use this approach to relieve clients of social, economic, and personal privation by relocating power from the environment and systems that affect the clients’ lives (Feste & Anderson, 1995; Gibson, 1991; Payne, 2005). They should have equal opportunity to access resources (public facilities, education and trainings, capital, natural resources, etc.). By implementing empowerment programs, clients can develop their capabilities, self-efficacy and competence to access resources, make decisions, and take actions for their own lives (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000).

Furthermore, a feminist social work perspective develops understanding and analyzes power relations as an essential point for theorizing oppression and developing alternative ways to eliminate the privileging of one group over others (Dominelli 2000, 2002). Female migrant domestic workers also have witnessed such conditions. They often follow what has been dictated to them by family, cultures, and social, economic, and political systems in the forms of the decisions to work overseas, obligations to financially contribute to family life, their obligations as workers, and job descriptions. This power inequality maintains insecurity in the lives of these women. Through the empowerment process, a democratic relationship could help establish gender equality that might be achieved by providing sufficient knowledge for the women of their rights and obligations as migrant domestic workers. Those should be informed by the recruiting agencies and protected by both sending and receiving countries (Raharto, 2002).

In Indonesia, public services such as advocacy, counseling, and physical health treatments are available for female domestic workers. However, the empowerment framework is not always utilized. The services are mostly provided to returning migrant workers who have
been abused or those who need clinical assistances (BNP2TKI, 2013; Migrant care, 2012). While these programs provide assistance to individual women, the current legal protection of migrant domestic worker’s rights, as well as empowerment programs, have not seriously addressed the larger systemic issues such as factors that force the women to work overseas, stigma and cultural issues, and the socio-economic and political realities that still view female migrant domestic workers as second class, uneducated, and weak.

Furthermore, Breton (2004) argues that the empowerment process has to conceptualize the work as collaborative action between the social worker and the client, rather than just understanding the work as an ‘intervention’ given to the client. He added that an empowerment framework requires changes in oppressive cognitive, behavioral, social, and political structures. Therefore, the proposed study will include an exploration of the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects that influence the lives of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers.

Another aspect of empowerment is psychological empowerment intended to enhance resilience and capacity for community mobilization or collective action (Christens, 2012a). Zimmerman (1995) defined psychological empowerment as “the psychological aspects of process through which people gain greater control over their lives, take a proactive approach in their communities, and developed critical understandings of their socio-political environments” (p.543).

Empowerment programs that have been set up for female migrant domestic workers might consider the psychological aspect (increasing cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational capacities) of empowerment. These psychological aspects can be acquired through the women’s participation in collaborative empowering community settings, particularly in efforts to change collectively social and political systems (Christens et al., 2012). Through this process,
women are expected to develop their involvement as active learners, leadership abilities, interpersonal relationships and networks, and develop a belief in their own ability to have an impact on those systems (Christens, 2011, 2012).

Finally, it is expected that through the empowerment process the female migrant domestic workers will develop a sense of ownership of the programs designed for them. This sense of ownership can sustain the programs if they reflect the women’s aspirations, needs, and interests. Additionally, a genuine collaboration with all stakeholders is another crucial point for effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the policies and programs (Carigi et al., 2005; Smith & Esim, 2004; Lawson, 2001). This collaboration is necessary to achieve desirable outcomes and make fundamental change. In addition, it is important to address multiple dimensions of transnational domestic work.

**Feminist Social Work Perspective**

The final framework that guides this study is the feminist perspective. Feminist theory provides a basis for comprehending the gender inequalities that have serious negative impacts on many aspects of women’s lives including culturally, spiritually, economically, and politically. It aims to address these inequalities by increasing a person’s consciousness, social growth, and social development (Dominelli, 2002; Payne, 2005). Feminist theory provides a lens for analyzing women’s issues from women’s perspectives instead of through the dominant culture and male-created ideologies that have perpetuated the victimization of women (Frisby & Reid, 2009; Schriver, 1995). Due to the fact that feminist theory questions the norms generated by dominant male cultures, it is ideally suited for understanding and analyzing the existing policies and programs which currently lack participation and collaboration with female domestic workers (Novirianti, 2011; Yazid, 2008).
Dominelli (2002) argues that the practice of traditional social work reflects the dominant social order that assumes a woman’s subservient role within the family. However, feminist social work has shed important insights on this issue because it considers women’s well-being as an essential component to the work, creating an egalitarian social relationship between the client and the social workers (Dominelli, 2002; Payne, 2005). This egalitarian relationship is an integral part of feminist social work practice. Feminist social workers have begun building new parameters and redefining the profession’s loyalties more towards the people that they are committed to serve (Dominelli, 2002) which is important when working with transnational domestic workers.

Previous studies of paid domestic laborers have examined other aspects including socio-economic and legal aspects, as well as class, race, ethnicity, and nationality figures in household divisions of labor (Heyzer et al., 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Huang & Yeoh, 1996; Radcliffe, 1990). Using feminist theory as one of the four main conceptual frameworks of this study is significant to provide gender analysis.

In addition, feminist social work practices have often sought to empower women by listening to their stories, validating their analyses of their situations, and engaging them in decisions about their lives (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Hammer & Statham, 1998). If one uses the feminist perspective to understand the issues faced by female migrant workers, the main solution to the transnational domestic work problems -according to the feminist perspective- is by providing more spaces for the women to tell their stories of being female migrant domestic workers and have their voices heard related to their needs, aspirations, and interests.

By applying a feminist perspective in social work theory, this proposed study will incorporate three main principles of feminist practice that might be applied to help increase the
quality of life for female migrant domestic workers: 1) providing a space for Indonesian female migrant domestic workers to raise their voice and become active agents of change; 2) facilitating an understanding of how social, cultural, economic, and political factors interact to create discourses that affect how people behave towards the issues faced by Indonesian female migrant domestic workers; and 3) understand the local contexts and truths, establishing meanings, deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge and power (Dominelli, 2002; Healy, 2000; Van den Bergh, 1995).

**Literature Review**

The four frameworks of human capabilities, intersectionality, empowerment, and feminist theories are ideal for enhancing understandings of the issues of transnational domestic laborers. To extend the discussion of transnational domestic work, this part focuses on a literature review discussing two main points: feminization of transnational domestic work and protecting and empowering migrant domestic workers, as well as an analysis of the literature.

**Feminization of Transnational Domestic Work**

As one dimension of globalization, transnational domestic work influences the lives of women that mostly come from rural areas of developing countries. Mogdam (1999) defined globalization as “a complex economic, political, cultural, geographical process in which the mobility of capital, organization, ideas, discourses, and people has taken a global or transnational form” (as cited in Bacchus, 2005, p.2). Globalization involves profound changes in international relations, cuts the borders between nations, and creates interdependency of nations, institutions, organizations and people (Giddens, 1998; Lawson 2001).

Transnational domestic work includes the involvement of private corporations in the process of globalizing the world (McGovern, 2009; Pyles, 2009b). The socio-economic and
political conditions that are partially the result of globalization in turn trigger women who decide to work domestically overseas. Most female migrant domestic workers leave their villages, migrate to another country, and become ‘transnational domestic workers’ with limited knowledge, education, and skills. Such conditions are getting worse due to limited protections (from both the sending and receiving governments) (Raharto, 2002; Novirianti, 2005; Parrenas, 2001; Sen, 2000; Silvey, 2003).

Furthermore, feminization of transnational domestic work has created massive migration of women from East Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, and Thailand. The term feminization means that women become the main actors to fulfill the transnational domestic work sector, not their male counterparts. Women from these developing countries join the transnational female immigrants working as domestic maids in countries in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia. Both regions and cultures shape the nature of gender and the place-specific dynamics that contribute to shaping the diverse international geographies of gender and labor.

Many women who cross borders illegally may enter unregulated and often irregular work situations (Ehrenreich et al., 2004; Satterthwaite, 2004). The majority of opportunities through legal channels of migration are in male-dominated sectors and this puts women at a great disadvantage. Sending countries tightly control migration processes, but simultaneously allow private employers and recruiting agencies to operate ‘unchecked’ by regulation or inspection (Raharto, 2002). Therefore, migration officials are known to falsify the documents of female migrant workers. The recruitment prerequisites are just on paper and cannot be seriously implemented (Silvey, 2004).
The mechanisms of recruiting Indonesian female migrant domestic workers are completed in two ways: legally when women directly contact a labor recruiting company, known as The Official Agency for Indonesian Migrant Workers, called Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or PJTKI or PPTKIS; and illegally when it is conducted through recruiters or middlemen who are called calo, or sponsors, by the local people. The sponsors act as a sub agent in villages to recruit prospective female migrant domestic workers. The scope of a sponsor (illegal) is larger than the labor recruiting company (legal) that has a sub-agent generally located in cities far away from the villages in which the prospective female workers come (Raharto, 2002).

The recruitment and placement of migrant workers in Indonesia is undertaken by the official agency (PJTKI) that consists of several private companies. Besides the licensed PJTKI, it is estimated that there are at least 800 illegal recruitment companies. Many of them are actually sub-contracted by the licensed PJTKI to conduct their initial recruitment drives (Anggraeni, 2006). Another issue is high capital requirements and deposits demanded by the PJTKI in Indonesia. Such conditions can simply drive recruitment agencies into a black market, work ‘underground’, or in a situation that is difficult to be prevented and monitored (ILO, 2006).

Raharto (2002) mentioned that most of the female migrant domestic workers were recruited from the official agency (PJTKI). This official labor company reported that the women received pre-departure training that was conducted for 1-2.5 months in the form of skills for daily communication with their future employers and families. However, the female workers felt that the training was too short and the instruction material was still not enough for communicating in the workplace.
The contract system applied in the host country is another important issue that maintains oppressive working conditions and neglects the rights of the female migrant workers. Officially, as explained by the ILO report in 2009, foreign female domestic workers from East Asian countries fall under the category of contract workers in receiving countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In reality, they do not engage in legally binding contracts that set out the women’s protections, rights, and responsibilities including earnings, work hours, relationship to the employer, or other aspects. Their status is just as ‘visiting workers’ who are permitted to work for two years.

As globalization keeps providing an opportunity for transnational domestic workers, strategic efforts should be conducted to tackle all issues. Therefore, to deal with global impacts of transnational domestic work, listening to the interests or voices of the three-globalization actors (states or nations, corporations, and people) is helpful to address the challenges of globalization (Stiglitz, 2006). This effort should be followed by checks and balances supported by the democratic process in social life. Furthermore, protection and empowerment programs should be implemented for improving the knowledge and skills of the domestic workers, design collaboration and partnership from all stakeholders, and address people’s awareness of the issue and profession of migrant domestic workers.

**Protecting and Empowering Migrant Domestic Workers**

This section includes the discussion of four factors (lack of education, cultural values, high rates of unemployment and competition for gaining decent jobs, and illegal recruitment of migrant workers) that exist in socio-cultural, economic, and political lives that impact transnational domestic work. Another point of this part discusses the need for protecting and empowering female migrant domestic workers that might be understood from the downsides of
being migrant domestic workers and the failure of the existing policies and programs to protect rights and empower transnational domestic workers.

Factors of Transnational Domestic Work

The New Order regime, under the second president of the Republic of Indonesia (President Suharto), started to send female migrant domestic workers out of the country in 1984. In the intervening years, the Indonesian government continues to send laborers overseas as part of the country’s development plan, mainly to alleviate poverty. Remittances sent home by migrant workers are important not only for the workers, but also to the country as a source of revenue (Liow, 2003; Media Indonesia, 2003; Silvey, 2004). During the period of 1999 to 2004, the Indonesian government sent 2.8 million workers abroad and collected US$91 million in foreign exchange. The number increased significantly to US$3.4 billion in 2006 and US$53.36 billion in 2011 (BNP2TKI, 2011; Kemenakertrans, 2011; Media Indonesia, 2002). This income has become the second largest revenue source for supporting development in the country.

However, the policy of sending female domestic workers impacts women socially, culturally, economically, and politically. These four aspects propel Indonesian women to work overseas and present for rural Indonesian women at the individual, family, community, society, and state levels. First, most female migrant workers lack education and live in the rural areas of Indonesia. Only 5 percent of the female migrant workers graduated from a university and only 36 percent graduated from junior or senior high school. The remaining 59 percent either finished or dropped out of elementary school (Media Indonesia, 2003). Data from the Statistical Bureau of Indonesia show that the rural population is 119,321,070 (BPS, 2010) and the number of poor people living in these rural areas is 14.84 million. Women living in such rural areas lack education and skills. This condition often forces them to work as migrant domestic workers.
Raharto (2002), in his study of the Cianjur regency (Province of West Java, Indonesia) found that the majority of female migrants from this area who migrate illegally had only completed primary school and never attended special training related to their job overseas. A small number of them could write, read, and speak Indonesian fluently, but only in a local dialect (Sundanese). As the women lacked education and knowledge, they had difficulty in understanding the contents of work and their rights and duties mentioned in the work contract (ILO, 2006; Tirtosudarmo & Romdiati, 1998).

For several of Indonesia’s ethnic groups, women have traditionally played a significant role in generating household income through productive work both within and outside the household (Williams, 1990). However, performance on gender equality scales in Indonesia still lags behind other developing countries. In 2002, a combination of women’s lower literacy rate (86% as opposed to 94% for men), fewer mean years of schooling (6.5 years compared to 7.6 years for men), and a smaller share of earned income (38% compared to 62% for men) worked to counteract advances in life expectancy for women (World Bank, 2010).

A second factor arises from cultural values that emphasize children’s responsibilities for supporting their family. In traditional and patriarchal families, priority is given to educating the boys because of their broader responsibilities as future husbands and fathers. This inherent attitude in a community gives rise to female domestic helpers who are uneducated and unskilled, and who must therefore accept lower-paying jobs. Such social constructions have negative effects on women’s options and outcomes, and yet the women are also ‘praised’ as heroes for supporting their families and country with their income.

The third factor comes from the combination of high rates of unemployment and intense competition for desirable and skilled jobs. The unemployment numbers in Indonesia rose from
10.3 million in 2003 to 11.19 million in 2005 and the number of Indonesian migrant workers leaving the country increased at the same time. This condition was intensified by the lingering economic crisis of 1998 (Kimura, 2006; Stiglitz, 2003) that led to more Indonesian women working overseas.

The fourth and final factor is political in nature. It is the illegal recruitment of migrant workers, supported by illegal immigration procedures, and a lack of border protection between Indonesia and other neighboring countries. Liow (2003) states that the long-term and undocumented Indonesian migration to Malaysia is arguably the second largest episode of illegal migration; coming in just behind the number of immigrants crossing the Mexican border into the United States. Additionally, Indonesian governmental policies and regulations for sending and protecting immigrants have not effectively eliminated the existing problems and are still criticized for a lack of attention, commitment, and control.

According to Briar-Lawson et al. (2001), there are four additional factors (pull, push, network, and keep factors) that are interconnected, affecting transnational domestic work. However, for Indonesian female migrant domestic workers, the reunification with families becomes a push factor to leave the host country, not a pull factor. The women tend to return home since their families are mostly still living in Indonesia. Push factors were defined by Briar-Lawson et al. (2001) as “local and national constraints, changing circumstances, social problems, and barriers related to employment and social and cultural exclusion” (pp.353).

On the other hand, the pull factor of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers refers more to the increased demand for female migrant domestic workers. This pull factor is affected by economic reasons which are caused by active recruitment and demand structures of transnational domestic work (Briar-Lawson et al., 2001). Such phenomena occur as countries
with a highly educated and skilled workforce often have difficulty finding local workers to fill low paying-jobs. Consequently, host countries often adopt immigrant friendly policies to entice female domestic workers (Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012). This creates extensive opportunities to work overseas, either legally or illegally, and results in immigration becoming an option for women to improve their economic conditions. In addition, stories told by previous female migrant domestic workers influence new women to immigrate. The message they receive is that successful workers can provide education for their children, fulfill their family’s needs, and build a new family home (Anggraeni, 2006).

These points also reflect the factors that push Indonesian women to work domestically overseas. The network factor significantly affects the flow of people gaining employment. Having a network of sponsors, families, and friends who migrated earlier has influenced female domestic workers to follow the same effort. Finally, the final factors to consider are the factors that keep female migrant workers returning because their families live in their home countries. These factors deal with cultural differences and preferences, such as abandoning infants, children, and elders. After explaining the push and pull factors affecting Indonesian transnational domestic work, the next explanation describes prior studies that speak about abuses and violations experienced by female migrant domestic workers.

The Repercussions of Being A Domestic Worker

The abusive conditions experienced by many female migrant domestic workers are considered to be one of the negative sides of transnational work. Female domestic workers’ rights are still violated as evidenced by the number of abuse cases (Migrant Care, 2011; Moniaga, 2008). Some female migrant domestic workers still come home with physical injuries. Currently, the National Agency for Placement and Protection of Migrant Indonesian Workers
(BNP2TKI) in 2012 reported that 328 female migrant domestic workers died overseas, with their bodies being returned home.

In Taiwan, Indonesians often have the double burden of working two jobs: helping the employers’ family business and working as maids at home. Such situations are the result of a socio-cultural lack of distinction between duties within the home and those outside of the home. Ironically, other parties such as brokers, bureaucrats, police, and the public at large seem to be fully cognizant of the illegal double-utilization of migrant workers (Loveband, 2003).

Ito (1992) and Hugo (2000) confirmed that incidents of unfair treatment such as physical and psychological abuses are commonplace and politically sensitive. Female domestic migrant workers are trapped in the power dynamics between the sending and receiving countries, as well (as cited in Piper, 2004, p.223-224). For example, threats of abuse and violence received by Indonesia migrant workers in Malaysia become a trigger for political tensions of both governments (Media Indonesia, 2013). This situation is worsened when the media exposes it causing the political climate between the two countries to become worse.

Female domestic workers experience similar negative repercussions in a variety of other countries. Parrenas (2005) illustrates reasons why women from the Philippines work overseas, serving households and their nation. Their situation is maintained by structural oppression as experienced by other East Asian domestic workers. In addition, Jureidini and Mourkarbel (2004) described the lives of Sri Lankan female domestic workers who experience a lack of freedom while dealing with the necessity of earning money for their families back home. Such conditions render them extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

*The Existing Laws And Policies*
For years, injustice and human rights violations experienced by female domestic workers have been a concern for national and international organizations. As a result, a number of foreign and migration policies have been changed to overcome the problems. At the international level, the concerns for worker rights began with the founding of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1919. The ILO conference adopted the convention concerning decent work for domestic workers and a recommendation supplementing it, referred to as the Domestic Workers Convention (No.189) and Recommendation (No.201). These two instruments produced in 2011 by the ILO contain specific standards and minimum protection for domestic workers. At the national level, the Indonesian government has made significant attempts to increase the protection of migrant worker rights through policies such as law No.39 of 2004, which focuses on the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant workers, and the Presidential Instruction No.6 of 2006, which focuses on encouraging nation-wide support to increase protection for migrant rights.

However, critics still consider the government to be failing in its efforts to overcome the problems faced by migrant workers (Novirianti, 2010). The Indonesian law of placement and protection of female migrant domestic workers lacks inspections and audits for placement agencies and their training facilities. In addition, the other issues of a lack of clear regulations, limited law enforcement, and corruption are still major problems that should be taken into account to protect female migrant domestic workers from health hazards and unsafe jobs (ILO, 2006).

One such policy was enacted in August 2011 by the Indonesian government to end female domestic workers going to Saudi Arabia. This decision was made in response to the Saudi Arabian government when it did not notify the Indonesian government when Ruyati (the name of
the Indonesian female domestic worker) was convicted of killing her employer and received the death penalty. Since that time, The Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (Kementerian Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi) renegotiated the policy with the Saudi Arabian government to ensure the protection of the rights of Indonesian female migrant workers. After achieving agreement, female migrant workers would be allowed to migrate and continue working as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia (Kemenakertrans, 2013).

*Programs and Services for Migrant Domestic Workers*

Efforts to protect and empower female migrant domestic workers have also been conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Silvey (2004) found that NGOs in both sending and receiving countries are taking up the issue of protection and empowerment to support foreign migrant workers. Based on these findings, transnational linkages among NGOs and researchers should be encouraged to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge. Furthermore, collaboration between academics, NGOs, and individual migrants aims to improve the condition of migrant workers and protective legal mechanisms.

Riker (1998) explained that NGOs in Indonesia have existed since the 1980s where they network and share experience, take collective actions, and express their concerns and interests. The development of these networks and coalitions has been extremely important for political change (as cited in Breton, 2004 p.6). Therefore, efforts aiming to protect the female workers’ rights should emphasize collaboration between sending and receiving countries (Breton, 2004). Similarly, Novirianti (2010) and Silvey (2004) confirmed that cooperation among local, national, and international bodies is needed to address structural problems through producing and implementing policies that reflect the needs and interests of Indonesian female domestic migrants.
In Asia, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) have initiated the first step for immigration cooperation. This is due to the absence of state involvement and public ignorance of migrant workers’ welfare and rights (Yamanaka & Piper, 2005). These organizations channel services and support female migrant workers in several destination countries (Bell & Piper, 2005).

Additionally, faith-based organizations (FBOs), including Catholic churches, are important institutions that provide support to female migrant domestic workers. The FBOs in Malaysia, Singapore, and Lebanon provide places or shelters for the female workers from Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, and India. Local mosques and Buddhist temples in Singapore have designed specific programs to welcome migrant domestic workers and provide physical and psychological assistance. These FBOs help connect women with embassies and lawyers, provide shelter, health care, and engagement with the government (Silvey, 2004).

In Indonesia, several organizations and institutions have provided programs and services to help migrant domestic workers by protecting their rights as workers and/or empowering them when they return to the home country. For instance, Migrant Care, one of the NGOs that provides legal assistance and economic empowerment programs for female migrant domestic workers, Dompet Duafa, that offers advocacy and empowerment programs by distributing financial support for the women, and the Union of Indonesia Migrant Workers that improves knowledge and assists migrant workers overseas.

**Summary**

The study of the domestic workers from Bondan village explored areas that have not been fully addressed by previous studies. This study explored the perspectives of Indonesian former female domestic workers on the factors affecting their decision to work overseas, the impact of
being migrant domestic workers, and the women’s experiences with the six stages of working overseas (recruitment, signing the contract, and placement of the workers, pre-departure program, living or working overseas, finishing the contract, returning home, and integration with both the family and the community). These six stages of working domestically overseas have not been comprehensively captured by previous studies. In response to this lack, this study mainly involved female migrant domestic workers, verses prior studies that were often limited to information given from the perspectives of the sponsors, agencies, and governments. A feminist social work perspective emphasizes the need to recall and reconstruct stories of transnational domestic work through the eyes of female workers and should include the real causes, silence of local communities, power inequality and social imbalances (Dominelli, 2002; Pyles, 2009b). The next part describes all points related to the study including objectives of this research, research questions, method, subject cooperation and human subject issues, and relevance to social welfare.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The study of transnational domestic workers coming from Bondan village used a qualitative research design in gaining samples, as well as collecting and analyzing the data. Additionally, the study considered cultural issues that should be taken into account, such as what are called taboos and what is acceptable or unacceptable in accordance with values and norms practiced in the daily life of the community. This chapter begins with a brief description of the study, followed by the discussions of research questions, method, sampling method, data collection and analysis, and subject cooperation and the subject issues.

Description of the Study

The opening of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, called Pembukaan Undang-Undang dasar 1945, says that the state has an obligation to protect all Indonesian people and improve their welfare. Therefore, any proposed new policy or program is expected to touch upon basic and fundamental problems and improve the welfare of Indonesian people. When using the four frameworks discussed for this study, any policy or program designed to address the issues faced by female migrant domestic workers should involve the women as the main actors or agent of change. Using the four frameworks to understand policy and program changes, the women may work together, develop their capabilities, and establish networks to protect themselves from the human right abuses perpetrated by irresponsible agencies, sponsors, and organizations or institutions. The women, their lives, and their experiences should be considered first and foremost during the policy and program design processes.

Previous studies highlight the importance of cooperation among all players including governments, embassies, recruiting agencies, employers, NGOs, and the ILO (Esim & Smith,
In Indonesia, the formal actors of transnational domestic work are the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (BNP2TKI), the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, and the ILO Jakarta. All of these institutions are centered in Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia).

The study utilized qualitative methods and its main purpose was to better understand the experiences of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers. By conducting interviews with a sample of female migrant workers, this study is able to better understand current transnational work from various perspectives. The results are able to inform policy and program changes that specifically address the needs of the female migrant workers.

As the title of this research is protection and empowerment for Indonesian female migrant domestic workers, it is necessary to provide operational definitions of the terms – protection, rights, and empowerment. First, the term ‘protection’ refers to the women’s experiences of healthy working conditions throughout each of the six stages of working overseas (wages, work hours, time off, facilities, incentives, etc.) and safety in the work place (free from verbal, physical, sexual abuse, and other kinds of violation). Second, the term ‘rights’ mainly refers to the capabilities that need to be owned by the female migrant domestic workers that can support their lives before, during, and after working overseas, as mentioned by Nussbaum (2000, 2001). The term ‘empowerment’ emphasizes intra-personal (personal strengths and coping strategies) and inter-personal empowerment (resilience and support systems). As mentioned previously, this study also reflects the points of the empowerment framework, feminist social work theory perspective (Dominelli, 2000; Payne, 2005; Pyles 2009a), and the psychological-relational empowerment perspective (Christens, 2011, 2012; Zeldin et al., 2012). These frameworks emphasize the imperative of providing opportunities for the women to raise their
voices, decide their own choices, and work actively to change to their lives. Finally, this qualitative study will explore the phenomenon of transnational domestic work, expand undocumented aspects of transnational domestic work (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006), explore the meaning of being female migrant domestic workers, and to uncover the multiple realities and perspectives of these experiences (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001).

**Research questions**

This proposed study has six major research questions:

- Why do female domestic workers decide to work overseas?
- What patterns derive from the push and pull factors identified by the women in the sample?
- What special sub-populations are suggested (or identified) by the data?
- How does domestic labor in other nations impact the women in the sample?
- What governmental policies, programs, and services have been provided for these women?
- According to the women in the sample, do these policies, programs and services develop their capabilities?
- According to the women in this study, what improvements are needed in existing policies, programs, and services?
- According to the women in this study, what new policies, programs, and services are needed?
Method

As mentioned previously, this study explored the research questions using primary data collected through in-depth interviews. It followed Rodwell’s (1998) approach known as social work constructivist inquiry that emphasizes alternative assumptions about what constitutes reality. Rodwell’s work provides practical guidelines for understanding and managing the context of multiple perspectives and diversity. Using social work constructivist inquiry as a basis, this study explored its research questions by talking with Indonesian female migrant domestic workers who worked overseas in four different countries (the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Taiwan, and Saudi Arabia). Such an effort aims to collect information relevant to female migrant domestic workers and in ways that exposes ‘facts’ useful for all sides, so that their credibility can be examined by all (Rodwell, 1998). The research findings might be used as recommendations for proposed policy change and action plans through future work with female migrant domestic workers, local NGO/s, and publications.

As mentioned by Lofland and Lofland (2006), in-depth interviews include a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended reflecting questions. The structure included episodes first (e.g. what female migrant domestic workers experience before leaving, after arriving in the host country, and returning home); second, social and personal relationships (e.g. their relationships with families, employers, friends and others); and third, aspects of cognitive and emotional feelings and thoughts (e.g. during working domestically overseas including the process of adaptation and coping with daily issues). The interviews gave the female participants an opportunity to further reflect on their experiences.

In addition to the in-depth qualitative interviews, this study included structured and semi-structured questions that explore protection and empowerment concepts in the views and
experiences of female migrant domestic workers. Structured questions, namely fixed written questions, were used to ask the women in relation to their experience on abuses and insufficient facilities to support their daily lives. In addition, a questionnaire was used to gather demographic data and information about their backgrounds. In this case, the informants may have filled in the form themselves or I would ask them the demographic questions out loud and write down their responses. The goal of giving the participants choices in answering the questionnaires was to create a comfortable situation for the women to explain their experiences while working overseas.

These questions were followed up with semi-structured questions, namely probe-mixed questions that aimed to explore additional details and the context-specific elements of their answers. The flexibility of semi-structured questions allowed participants to respond to particular dynamics of each interaction and helped them fully represent their individual perspectives (Mason, 1996). Additionally, the use of semi-structured questions helped establish a common understanding between the researcher and female participants.

**Sampling Method**

The sample was drawn from the Indramayu district of Indonesia. There were four factors taken into account when deciding on the sample and the location of this research. First, the researcher must consider the availability of the female domestic migrant workers - many female domestic workers come and leave their villages irregularly, based on the end of their job contracts. The women’s time at home was unpredictable, with stays lasting from three months to one year. However, data of returning female migrant domestic workers might be possibly gained from the key informants, including the Indramayu district immigration office and reports from village leaders and communities. Second, the women work in various destination countries and
face a variety of problems and challenges. Third, the Indramayu regency is one of the main sources of migrant women workers in Indonesia, making it an ideal place for studying and exploring the issue of transnational domestic workers. Fourth, the Indramayu regency is considerably close to Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia) where most of the recruiting agencies are located and operated. In addition, the transportation and communication systems are smooth and accessible to the capital city and the Bondan village is the best place to address all four of these points.

**Sample of Female Migrant Domestic Workers**

The women were recruited directly in their village called Bondan of the Indramayu district. This village was chosen because it is well known as the main source, or at least one of the biggest sources, of female migrant workers. The prospective participants were those women who finished a contract and/or were waiting for the extension of their work contract and living in their homes at the time of the study. Female migrant domestic workers from this village work in different countries.

The sampling selection process began with identifying female migrant domestic workers who were staying at home or returning from working overseas. Information on the women who were currently staying at home was collected from the district village leader and communities. These key informants knew the condition of the villages and how the women were recruited. The key informants were able to provide me with each woman’s name, address, contact information, and country of work.

The final number of female participants in this study was 20 women to achieve saturation. Only women who agreed to participate were included in this study. If the quota had not been met, I had found more participants until I could secure twenty female participants, or
reach saturation. After a woman’s name was gained, I visited her home or contacted her cell phone as the first contact. If a woman decided to not participate, I selected another female migrant domestic worker’s name with the same country of work until I met at least twelve female participants. For each woman who chose to participate, I met the selected participant in her home as the second contact or met her at another place if they preferred to meet the researcher there.

All female migrant workers in this study were 18 years old or older. At this age, the women were allowed to start working overseas. The women under the age of 18 were excluded from this study to avoid legal conflict. Therefore, I first asked the women’s ages to make sure that they were above 18 years old.

Female participants of this study were those who worked overseas from one to five years and I asked the women about their experience. The choice to focus on women in their first five years of working in overseas domestic work was because it helped the female workers to reflect on their cultural and environmental adjustment process which was reported as one of the issues initially faced by them. In addition, this period of working overseas was sufficient to show the extent to which the women had financially contributed to family life.

This study still included Saudi Arabia as a destination country as an effort to determinate the effectiveness of the policy to stop sending Indonesian female migrant domestic workers to this country. According to Silvey (2003), religious reasons often motivate the women to work in Saudi Arabia for they can also perform the pilgrimage. To this purpose, the women might still enter the country firstly by performing the pilgrimage and stay longer to work as female migrant domestic workers. This group was often called ‘illegal female migrant domestic workers’, as they did not follow official recruitment, placement, and immigrant procedures.
Previously, female migrant domestic workers from the village of Bondan (Indramayu district) mostly worked in Saudi Arabia, followed by the U.A.E, Qatar, and Taiwan. By selecting the four main destination countries of Qatar, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, this study intends to explore these different host countries’ policies in terms of providing healthcare and safe workplaces for female migrant domestic workers, the decisions of the women to choose the country to work in, and the women’s experiences living and working in different socio-cultural circumstances.

Data Collection and Procedures

The use of qualitative methods in this study was expected to reflect a democratic process that can share power and establish partnership between the researcher and the participants (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Pyles, 2009b; Lawson, et al., 2001, 2010). Punch (2005) explained that developing a more equal relationship based on trust and enabling greater openness, insight, and greater range of responses is possibly achieved if researchers and researched become co-creators of data through the interview. To achieve this end, I created research circumstances that allow female participants to raise their questions and comments as I conducted the interviews. I also encouraged the participants to discuss their own solutions to the issues being asked and emphasized that they were the experts and partners in the research.

In collecting the qualitative data, this study used questionnaires and in-depth interview methods. For the questionnaires of experiencing abuses, the female participants were asked firstly whether they wanted to read or to fill out the questionnaire. If a female participant was illiterate, I read each question to her. These qualitative data collection methods were used for exploratory purposes focusing on six main points: 1) factors that drove the women to work
overseas; 2) personal strengths, coping strategies and support systems; 3) current challenges identified by female domestic workers existing in each of the six stages of working overseas; 4) the impact of their profession on their lives and families; 5) existing policies and programs; and 6) theories of change and action from the female migrant domestic workers.

Next, in-depth, semi-structured questions were asked during the face-to-face interview. With the participant’s consent, each interview was audio taped. These semi-structured questions allowed the participants to discuss the particular dynamics of their interactions with a sponsor or agency while working domestically overseas. The interview portion of the study also included questions related to the protection and empowerment programs that stakeholders (BNP2TKI and agencies) have provided for the women.

**Recruitment of the Samples**

As mentioned previously, I conducted meetings with village leaders and submitted the letter of research permission. The purpose of these meetings or visits was to introduce myself, provide the village leaders with an opportunity to understand the intent of research, and gain the list of returned female migrant domestic workers. After getting official permission, I divided all the names of potential female migrant domestic workers into four groups based on their destination country of work. I contacted each potential participant by visiting her home or calling her cell phone and asking whether or not she wanted to be involved in the study.

Then, I sent an invitation for the interviews to prospective female participants once a woman agreed to participate. This process was conducted verbally by phone or in person before starting the interview phase. The invitation explained the purpose of the research and confirmed the time and place of the interview. If a participant was illiterate, I read the invitation to her. The first plan was to tape the interviews. Then, data such as recordings and transcripts were stored
securely (in the researcher’s personal computer that can be accessed only by the researchers using password or codes). The data will be destroyed after the findings of the study have been published.

It was expected that the in-depth interviews would be conducted over the course of eight weeks, from May to June 2015. The researcher stayed in Indramayu regency during this period of time. The interviews ran 90 minutes to 2 hours for each participant, as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010). Approximately three interviews with transcriptions were accomplished weekly, so that the initial interviews plus any follow-ups could occur during the designated calendar period (Appendix C). The interviews were conducted in a comfortable place chosen by the participant, such as female migrant domestic worker’s home or in the yard behind her home so we had privacy. Each participant chose the location where she felt safe to ensure her comfort in communicating sensitive issues. Additionally, cultural factors were likely to play a role during the interview process. These issues were minimized by confirming the female participant’s acceptance of things, such as the interview setting and what was properly asked or communicated (words, terms, and language used).

The next stage of the data collection process was conducted as I transcribed the information. Most of them can speak the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesian) and the average education level of female migrant domestic workers was junior high school. The questions of the interviews that the women found difficult to understand were repeatedly explained to them or explained in another way until they could understand. Finally, the whole process of collecting data was expected to create an opportunity, especially for the women, to reflect on their knowledge, to question situations and conditions that they experienced day by day, and to creatively strategize new solutions based on their own perspectives.
The follow-up session was conducted to confirm the collected data, as well as an opportunity to share and express their thoughts on the problems and solutions.

**Data Analysis**

Female migrant domestic workers who chose to participate in this study had supportive social settings to help them interpret meanings and understand the conditions and situations of being a female migrant domestic worker. Throughout the interviews, I listened to each participant’s responses to the questions and prepared for unexpected conditions that could be caused by control, power imbalance, undemocratic dialogue, and silence (Nygreen, 2010; Pyles, 2009b). Using a qualitative method enriched the interpretation of research findings through clarification of the meanings with participants of transnational domestic work.

The qualitative data will be analyzed in a thematic analysis, assigning codes and themes to the data. I also categorized the qualitative-data according to themes and comprised of three stages: reflexive, literal and interpretative (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Mason, 1996). First, reflexive analysis is a continuing process of determining and reflecting the female participants’ own perspectives and value position (Mason, 1996). Therefore, I identified themes, topics, and questions in a field memo book, followed by making transcriptions.

This process helped me differentiate between my own view and my interpretations of others’ words. Then, literal analysis was conducted in three steps: a) reading each piece of data from the memos and transcriptions to understand and/or become familiar with the data; b) coding the data according to the six main points: factors affecting migration, coping strategies and support systems, contributions of being female foreign domestic helpers, existing policies and programs, challenges faced in the six stages of working domestically overseas, and improvement of current policies and programs; c) the last stage in my qualitative analysis included
interpretative analysis, where I examined words and behaviors for what they may represent (Mason, 1996).

In this study, I extracted the meanings of protection and empowerment, guided by a conceptual framework map. The map referenced terms to clarify the distinctions and overlap among the different categories of factors impacting female migrant domestic workers decisions to work overseas; the six stages of working domestically overseas; and the protection and rights of the women for a healthy and safe workplace and the empowerment process reflecting the four theoretical frameworks (capabilities approach, intersectionality, feminist, and empowerment social work perspectives). The following table describes the main points of this study:
Table 3.1

The main points of data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon of interest</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Primary data source</th>
<th>Data analysis plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Factors affecting women’s decision | - What factors drive female migrant domestic workers’ decision to work overseas?  
- How do factors affect the women’s decisions?  
- Which women are impacted, how and why? | Female migrant domestic workers | - Reflexive analysis (determining and reflecting the participants’ own perspectives and value position) |
| 2. Six stages of working overseas | - What are the women’s experiences before, during, and after working overseas? | Female participants | Literal analysis (reading memos and transcripts and coding the data into six stages of working overseas) |
| 3. Protecting the rights and empowerment of the female migrant domestic workers | What policies, programs, and services having been provided by the Indonesian government to protect the rights of female migrant domestic workers, and develop the capabilities of the women. | Female participants supported by secondary data: BNP2TKI and Migrant Care. | Literal analysis and Interpretative analysis (examining words and behaviors for what they may represent) |

The researcher used the resulting data and analysis to create a conceptual model for understanding the current issues of female domestic workers, as well as to create a framework for potential, future intervention, and actions. Through the interview process and answering the
questions, the female migrant domestic workers were able to tell their stories, question their realities, and the women were empowered to explore how to solve the current issues. Thus, this study centered on the perspectives and voices of female migrant domestic workers. Their contributions to the research provided a different perspective to create a more comprehensive understanding of the issues and future change of policies and programs.

**Trustworthiness**

This qualitative research was generalized to a population (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), but it provided needed insights to help comprehend and understand the phenomena of transnational domestic work in Indonesia. In this study, I used a number of techniques to help establish the trustworthiness of the collected data and three criteria of trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, and confirmability) that apply in a qualitative study (Glesne, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Neuman & Kreuger, 2003; Shenton, 2004). First, credibility deals with the question, “How congruent are the findings with reality?” (as cited in Shenton, 2004, p.64) and this is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility involves reflecting on situations, explaining the attitude and behavior of people in question, and providing supporting data to provide a background of the issue being studied (Shenton, 2004). To achieve this, I ensured that female participants had the opportunity to raise their voices, reframe, and give meaning to the questions. Prior to the first data collection dialogues, I developed an early familiarity with the culture of participants or organizations by consulting appropriate documents, language used, and conducting preliminary visits.

To support the participants speaking honestly, the study would only include those individuals who were genuinely willing to be involved in the study. I also conducted member checking, met with female participants to review the transcripts, analyzed the transcripts, and
made a draft report. In this case, I set up a time to follow up with the women to confirm the
member-checking, especially on certain information that needed more clarification from them.

Member checking is defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to
improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research
interview (Barbour, 2001; Byrne, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Doyle, 2007; Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). It is also known as participant verification, respondent validation, and external
validity (Harper, 2012; Rager, 2005). This member checking process alleviated
misunderstandings that naturally occur between researcher and participants. Creswell (2009)
mentioned that the use of member checking is to determine the accuracy of the qualitative
findings. It was conducted by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to
participants and determining whether the participants felt that they were accurate.

Second, Lincoln and Guba (1986) explained the close ties between credibility and
dependability. To address the issue of dependability more directly, the processes within the study
should be reported in detail (data gathering process and reflective appraisal of the project) so that
future researchers might repeat the work and evaluate the effectiveness of the process of inquiry
undertaken (Shenton, 2004). I described the research process as clearly as possible so that
readers can follow the steps and be able to replicate it. Additionally, I classified questions based
on themes and categorizations so that each part of the description was differentiated from the
others.

Third, Corbin (1990) explained that confirmability was the action taken to control
subjectivity and biases in the interpretations. Peer reviews and debriefing processes guided this
study of Indonesian transnational domestic workers. The persons should be skeptical about the
findings and this process helped attain a strong level of rigor and coherence in the work (Glense,
In this case, I consulted with my Indonesian colleagues at the University at Albany School of Social Welfare; some of whom were familiar and some who were not familiar with the topic of transnational domestic work. Through this process, they might provide me more critical questions and analysis towards the problems addressed in my study. As the research participants (female migrant domestic workers and the representatives of Indonesian transnational domestic work) played an important role in the research process, they were mainly involved to interpret the research’s findings.

**Subject cooperation and human subject issues**

In this part, the discussion of protection from research bias is provided firstly followed by the points of extraneous factors and solutions, and ethical considerations. The most important thing is that interviewing the participants means that they should remember the good and/or bad experiences while working overseas. All of these are explained in the following points.

**Protection from Researcher Bias**

In this study, I went into the communities of Indramayu regency as a university student conducting field research. As an outsider-researcher, I entered the field with a perspective drawn from my own unique experiences. I explained my role to the best of my ability. Developing skills and habits of self-reflection were necessary to be conducted to diminish my personal bias in understanding the issue of transnational domestic work, involving experts and practitioners throughout the research process (Herr & Anderson, Lawson, 2007; 2005; Lipsky, 1980).

Participants’ details (age, religion, marital status, and monthly salary, etc.) were kept in confidence; no other people can access the data. The interpreters were trained to help ensure they understood confidentiality. I kept the data as my personal files in which no one else could access the data without my permission.
Furthermore, to reduce any bias during the interviews, I asked probing questions to more fully explore and understand the issue/s being asked. The researcher’s failure to probe the questions is a crucial problem in collecting qualitative data since it helps follow up by seeking more detail or elaborations on what informants provided (Creswell, 2009; Glense, 2006). To avoid such conditions, I maintained a respectful demeanor, was an active listener, attended to key messages, sought clarification for unclear words, and was certain that I understood what participants were saying. In relation to other stakeholders of transnational domestic business, bias might occur if I should make a judgment about their practices that may contradict what I have studied as a social worker. Therefore, I carefully attended to responses, was consistent in gathering information, and respected the participants.

**Extraneous Factors and Solutions**

As a female researcher who studies the issue of protection and empowerment for Indonesian female migrant domestic workers, I had more opportunities to engage, communicate, and increase the women’s participation. My previous experience living with domestic helpers, their siblings and children provides me with a picture of how the women have sacrificed to live far from home for the sake of their family life and social status. This experience may influence my subjectivity to reflect the processes, especially in conducting analysis and drawing conclusions.

My passion to create more equality and justice for these women motivated me to comprehensively understand the issues. However, I recognized that my gender sensitivity and personal bias should be minimized. I regularly reflected on my position as an outsider of the community and this self-consideration guarded the collecting and analyzing data processes. The four frameworks (human capabilities, intersectionality, empowerment, and feminist social work)
informed the data analysis process, guided me throughout the entire research process, and reduced my personal bias by focusing on developing capabilities and empowering those who participated in this study.

**Ethical considerations**

Applying ethics to this research helped protect the participants. Ethical considerations applied in this study were related to acceptable or not acceptable things and/or what ‘should be done’ or ‘should not be done’ by a researcher. To address ethical issues, informed consent forms were distributed and explained to participants before the study process was started. Participants also were provided with the copy of an Indonesian language version of the informed consent forms. If participants could not read the forms, I read or verbally explained the informed consent information to the participant. This helped them to understand the information about the study, particularly regarding the procedures, potential harm, anonymity, and confidentiality (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The forms also mentioned that participants could decline involvement in the research or choose to not answer every question. They could skip some questions without being penalized during the interview section and at any time they could withdraw themselves from the research without fear of being harmed (Glesne, 2006; Padgett, 2008). The participants were asked to provide verbal informed consent and they were not asked to provide written consent. This helped ensure confidentiality.

Padgett (2008) mentioned that participants have rights to derive advantages from the research. To compensate the women for their time, I provided an incentive for female participants who were involved in this study with a package that supports daily needs (rice, coconut oil, sugar, and tea) which is equivalent to US$8. The reason for providing this type of incentive was because giving money to people was not culturally acceptable. In addition, I
emphasized to them that their participation in the study was voluntary, but the results were invaluable in creating a better life for female domestic workers, families, and communities. In this case, the stakeholders did not receive an incentive since the process was conducted as part of their official roles.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of the interviews with the Indonesian women participating in transnational domestic work and consists of seven main parts: 1) Descriptive data of participants who worked in four different countries (Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia); 2) Factors affecting the women’s decision to work, followed by a discussion of the women’s decisions to be a migrant domestic worker; 3) The women’s experiences within the six stages of working domestically overseas (recruitment and pre-departure program, placement and signing contract, working overseas, finishing the contract, and returning back home). This part also discusses the women’s experiences in relation to a healthy and safe workplace, and opinions on the agents’ responsibility and support systems; 4) Reunification with family and community; 5) The impact of working overseas, and 6) Solutions for improving policies, programs, and services from the perspectives of female migrant domestic workers; 7) and finally, a summary of the chapter.

Descriptive Data of Participants

There were twenty (n=20) female migrant domestic workers who participated in this study. Of the participants, some were still active and others were no longer working overseas. The demographic data of the participants include age, marital status, education, age when first working, monthly salary, length of work as a migrant domestic worker, and number of countries of work.

Table 4.1 below provides a summary of descriptive data for the participants. Most of the participants were married (n=16) and a few of the women have been married twice due to
divorce or the death of their spouses. Only a few of the participants were single (n=3) or widowed (n=1). The age of the women ranged from 18 to 40 years old.

Table 4.1

Marital Status, Education and Monthly Salary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Salary (in Rupiah)*</td>
<td>1-2 juta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-3 juta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-4 juta</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-5 juta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 Juta Rupiah is equal to US$80

Table 1 also shows that the majority finished Elementary and Junior High School, while only one person finished Senior High School. Although the Indonesian government supports compulsory education, including Elementary School (1st through 6th year), Junior High School (7th through 9th year), and Senior High School (10th through 12th year), dropping out of school is a common phenomenon in the rural community of Bondan village, Indramayu district, West Java Province of Indonesia, from which these women hail. In this town, lack of education is a significant push factor for women to leave the country, in order to find work oversees.
Most of the participants explained that they started to work as migrant domestics before the age of 18 years old (n=12). They worked in up to 4 different countries and the length of their work has ranged from 1 to 10 years. The decision to enter this profession has resulted in the participants migrating to work overseas many times, as the contract lengths vary based on the regulations in host countries. The women earned monthly salaries of 1-2 juta Rupiah (US$80-US$160), while some were paid 2-3 juta Rupiah (US$160-US$180). Those who worked in Taiwan had higher salaries of 4-5 juta Rupiah (US$320-US$400).

Factors Affecting the Women’s Decision to Work

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some studies identified four major factors that commonly influence women to work overseas: 1) patriarchy or cultural values; 2) lack of education and skills; 3) high competition to access decent jobs at home; and 4) illegal recruitment and/or falsification of documents of migrant domestic workers (Anggraeni, 2006; Heyzer et al. 2006; Raharto, 2002; Silvey, 2003, 2004). However, not all of these factors were relevant to the migrant domestic workers who participated. In this study, the first factor of patriarchy was not clearly identified by the female participants as a factor that pushed them into transnational domestic work business, whereas the women do explicitly mention the other factors. For instance, a few unmarried participants explained that their decisions to work overseas were influenced by a willingness to make their parents ‘happy’ by fulfilling the daily needs of families by making money they could send home in the form of remittances. Additionally, some participants said that living with their families was not an ideal life and that pursuing a better life by working overseas was a solution to relieve their severe economic conditions. Overall though, the demand for female workers to do domestic work overseas is the main factor that pushes the women to leave their families.
The participants of this study have experienced four main contributing factors that influenced the women’s decisions to work overseas. The first factor is an easy recruitment process that facilitates the process. In Bondan village, the recruiters are called ‘calo,’ or sponsors. Some sponsors live in the village while others come from neighboring villages, but have close relationships with the community. In some cases, the sponsor was actually a family member of the woman.

The participants explained that each sponsor handles a specific destination country. This means that if a woman wants to work in a country different from her prior place of employment, she has to go to a different sponsor. After recruiting a woman, an agent (mostly from private companies) pays the sponsor for recruitment. Such a mechanism of recruitment is considered ‘unofficial’ since this process involves a middleman who works for a private agency instead of an official agency that is under the supervision of the National Body for Training and Placement of Indonesia Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI).

The second factor - falsification of immigration documents – can make the process of working overseas more accessible for the women. This study found that the average age when the participants started working overseas was 13 to 16 years old. This means that they started to work before turning 21, which is the minimum requirement by Law no. 39 enacted in 2004 (BNP2TKI, 2014). Previously, the minimum age for work was at least 18 years old. This means that the agents in Indonesia had to falsify the women’s ages to fulfill immigration requirements. More issues related to immigration documents are discussed further in the recruitment process section.

The third factor is related to severe economic conditions that push many of the women to leave their home country for the sake of a better future life for their family and themselves. In
this case, the participants emphasized a strong motivation to financially support their parents and/or husbands and to improve the family’s living conditions. As one woman states, “I want to help my husband…to have our own home. My husband is a teacher, but I still want to help…that was my first reason. The second was I could pay for my children’s and sibling’s education as well.” Thus, sharing financial responsibilities with husbands or parents was another motivation of the women to work abroad.

Most of the participants mentioned that the main symbol of their success was when their family could have ‘a proper home’. With the money the women sent from overseas, the families could purchase or build a new home or rehabilitate their existing homes. Their homes, not only showed the level of their successful achievement, but also could become a symbol of the improvement of the family’s social status. Interestingly, in Bondan village the women who worked as migrant domestic workers have a specific home style or design. Their homes have a veranda of the ‘Joglo’ style (a typical traditional Javanese home) that is mixed with a modern-minimalized architecture design. This is more expensive and having such a home design requires the family to spend much more money than what it cost to have the more common style home (See Appendix 1 for a picture of a typical female migrant domestic worker’s home and other community members’ home).

The participants realized that being a migrant domestic worker was one of the best ways to achieve the goal of helping improve their family’s income. If they stayed in the country, then their option was to work at factories located in the village or in other places around West Java Province. Working factory jobs inside the country paid less and resulted in lower savings compared with working outside the country. The participants explained this lower income was partially because when they lived at home and work, they had to pay for various items to fulfill
their daily needs as well as the cost of travel to and from work. The situation is different overseas, where the women stay at their employers’ homes without having to spend their salaries to meet daily needs. Working overseas allowed the participants to save their money and send it to their family in Indonesia. This study also found that some participants still want to continue working domestically overseas because of unpaid debts at home. The others express their hopes to have a new business and find a better job inside the country. According to one participant: “No… I still want to have my own business… If could do that, I won’t go abroad.”

Another economic factor contributing to their decision to work oversees was the ability of the women to help children or siblings access higher levels of education, including a university education. This could support the women and their families’ dreams to have a better future for their children and family members. One of the participants said, “I hope my children can finish their studies, even through university level so that they could have a bright future, not working as a migrant worker like what I did.”

Some other participants (n=7) also discussed the importance of having an adequate level of education, as required for accessing decent jobs inside the country. For the participants, their lack of education contributed to their decision to work overseas. One woman said, “What should I do? I only finished Junior High School, I cannot have a job with a good salary in the country.” Therefore, improving economic conditions, social status, and their children’s or siblings’ level of education were some of the key reasons that pushed the women to work overseas.

The fourth factor that contributed to few women (n=2) choosing to work overseas was their personal interests, such as their interest in traveling abroad. One of the participants explained, “I could travel and visit other countries by working domestically abroad… also living in different social circumstances.” Such individual interests motivated some of the women to
work abroad multiple times. Living in a different country gave the women the opportunity to
interact with different people, language, and cultures, and live a more luxurious life in an
employer’s home.

In addition to the factors influencing the participants’ decisions to work overseas, a few
of the women (n=3) talked about the factors that contributed to their desire to stop working
overseas. These women cited getting older, being married and having children as the primary
reasons why they did not want to work overseas anymore. One woman said she wanted to “focus
on [her] family.” Another woman described her current condition: “I am old now [laughing], I
still want to go, but I am not strong enough now...” Furthermore, some participants added that
they did not want other family members to follow them overseas. To reduce the chances a family
member would choose to work overseas, the women often paid the educational expenses of their
children and siblings so that they would have access to better jobs within Indonesia.

All of the women (n=20) acknowledged that the decision to work overseas was their own
choice, with higher wages for working overseas and a personal desire to travel being the two
most significant motivating factors for the women in the study. The next section discusses how
the women experienced a healthy and safe workplace. This section focuses on the female
participants’ experiences in each of the six stages of working overseas.

The Women’s Experiences within the Six Stages of Working Overseas

This study divides the stages of working overseas into six stages starting with the
recruitment process and ending with returning back to family and community. The first stage is a
woman being recruited by a sponsor or middleman. The recruitment stage also includes joining a
pre-departure (training) program. This is followed by signing a contract and being placed with an
employer. A woman then works overseas, usually for a 2-3 year contract. After finishing the
contract, the woman returns home and reunites with her family and community. The six stages of doing domestic work overseas can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Six stages of working domestically overseas

The findings are discussed through the lens of the six stages of transnational domestic workers.

**Recruitment process**

There are two mechanisms for recruitment of transnational domestic workers. The difference between them is whether the recruitment process involves a sponsor or “middleman” (calo). The first mechanism refers to the recruitment process whereby prospective migrant domestic workers come directly to an agent (PPTKIS) that is registered under National Body for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI). Then, they join a pre-departure training program followed by medical testing prior to leaving to go abroad. The second mechanism is a recruitment process that is conducted by a sponsor (‘middleman’) who accompanies a prospective worker to the agent. A problem emerges if the sponsor works for an ‘illegal agent’ that is not registered under BNP2TKI; thus there is not an obvious regulation that controls the sponsor’s practice.
According to the participants of this study, they were recruited by sponsors (calo) that would accompany them to meet an agent in Indonesia. The participants explained that they found out about the agents or sponsors from friends who worked previously as migrant domestic workers or directly from sponsors who came to the women’s homes to recruit prospective workers. In Bondan village, each sponsor or agent usually organized the transnational domestic work for a specific destination country. Therefore, the women had to find the right sponsor or agent for the country that they were interested in.

The women perceived that the agents worked in a legal way, particularly because the women were required to join a pre-departure training program at the agent’s place. In addition, all participants felt that they followed ‘the legal procedures’ for working abroad because they did not have any serious migration or legal issues during their time overseas. The participants insisted that all of the agents they worked with appeared to be practicing in a legal manner. In addition, the participants referenced a number of things which lead them to the conclusion that the agents were working legally, such as having an official office, requiring a formal application and interview process, and submitting the official documents for the employment contracts and migration procedures.

On the other hand, the participants explained that a domestic worker who was recruited illegally could be identified from her falsified passport or immigration documents. She might also leave the original country without having gone through a pre-departure (training) program. The women in this study believed the agents they worked with were following legal procedures as long as the women did not face serious migration issues when leaving and working overseas.
Some of the participants discussed how the recruitment process has changed over time and explained that there are still differences in the process, depending on the destination country. A few of the women had worked for several years overseas. They mentioned that when they were first recruited they were required to pay an application fee. The women spent about Rp800,000 (US$80) – Rp1,000,000 (US$90) such fees. Recently, this requirement was changed for at least three of the destination countries (Qatar, U.A.E., and Saudi Arabia). To work in these countries, migrant domestic workers no longer need to pay a recruitment fee. Instead, the women are actually paid when they are successfully recruited. The participants who worked in Qatar mentioned that after being recruited as domestic workers, they received around Rp3,000,000 to Rp5,000,000 (about US$250 - US$450). In contrast, participants who worked in Taiwan reported that they still had to pay the sponsor or agent a recruitment or application fee of about Rp4,000,000 (US$350).

Generally, in the application process the women had to provide a variety of documents, including photos, an Indonesian identity card, passport, marriage certificate, medical test results, educational certificates, a letter of permission from their husband or parent, and a copy of a family registration card. Not all of these documents are required, depending on the regulations of the destination country. Interestingly, it was important for a married woman to have a letter of permission from her husband. For those who were not married, a letter of permission for working overseas needed to be provided by her parents. This letter needed to include a signature of the parent/husband with an official stamp and was required to avoid any future complaints from the worker’s husband or parents.

Many married women (n=10) said that they could leave their home country upon getting permission from their husbands. The letter is important since husbands not only had to take on
the role of caring for the family at home, but they often had to support her while working overseas. For instance, one of the participants explained that she was abused by her employer and overseas agency or agent. Then, her husband flew to Taiwan to pick her up after finding out about this abuse.

During the recruitment process, some participants stated that the sponsor explained their rights and obligations before referring the women to the agency. Once the women decided to work, the next step was to go to the agents, the women’s connection with the sponsors end at this point. Some women said this transition was a smooth process. However, it is important to note that not all women had a positive experience moving from the sponsor to the agent. One woman mentioned: “The sponsor did not care… He just wanted money from the agent after bringing me to the agent.”

Once the women transitioned to the agent, they stayed at the agent’s facility (i.e. training center) to receive training while waiting for a call to work. The length of stay in the training center depended on the migration process and job availability. The women stayed at the center for several months - the shortest was one month and the longest was eight months.

*Training (Pre-Departure Program)*

Attending a preparation or training program is required for everyone who is going to work overseas for the first time. In the training center, female migrant domestic workers develop their knowledge and skills, such as basic language skills for the destination country, household tasks (e.g. cooking, cleaning, and washing), and/or taking care of children and elderly people. The participants explained that they also were responsible for all housekeeping tasks (i.e., cooking and cleaning) at the training center, and had to conduct these activities interchangeably with the others.
Many of the participants discussed the negative conditions at the training center. They complained about the quality of the public facilities at the center, such as minimal toilet facilities, lack of clean water, and not enough beds for all of the residents. In addition, the women had to queue for food and received minimal financial compensation while participating in the training sessions. One woman describes the conditions: “Some of us would sleep on beds while another on the floor. We had to wait in line to go to the toilet and to have some food.”

While the conditions were bad, in general, the female participants were satisfied with the actual preparation and training program, although a few of the women explained they did not fully understand all of the lessons. This might be due to their lack of education (the majority of the female domestic workers participants had only finished junior high and elementary school). Many of the women found it difficult to follow the language lessons since they had to memorize and practice the words using a foreign language. The trainings were also challenging because many of the women had to study many things in a short time period.

The women also explained that prior to working overseas they had to take certain medical tests to process their immigration documents (i.e., passport and visa). A prospective domestic worker is not allowed to migrate if she is pregnant or is not successful with certain medical tests (a urine test and medical check-up). In addition, they had to purchase health insurance before leaving the country. While they waited for the immigration paperwork and tests to be processed, they stayed at the training center, or in their homes.
Placements and signing the work contract

The next step after joining the training program is placement in the country of work. Some of the women (n=9) stated that they could choose the destination country, whereas others (n=11) said that the agents in Indonesia determined it. A woman explained: “I did not choose the country where I worked, it was determined by the agent… in Taiwan, I could get a higher salary and it is a safer place for female domestic workers…”

For those who could decide their own country of work, their decisions were influenced by the women’s curiosity about the host country and her opportunity to socialize with others outside the employer’s home. Such conditions critically impacted the women’s decision to work in Taiwan, U.A.E., or Qatar. Religious concerns also affect some of the women’s decisions when selecting the country of work. For example, the dream of performing a pilgrimage inspired some Muslim women to work in Saudi Arabia.

The availability of employers was another crucial point. This influenced how long the women might wait for departure. Some women had to wait multiple months. Once the call finally came from an overseas agent, the worker signed an employment contract. The elements covered in the employment contract included: rights of the workers (amount of salary, time to rest, health insurance, break for holidays, incentives, and facilities), and obligations (length of employment contract, work hours, types of work, etc.). The participants explained that additional information, such as the employers’ name and the number of family members was also included in the contract. The contracts also covered the worker’s obligation to continue working throughout the determined time. The contracts explained that if the domestic worker broke the rules of the contract, she would not get all of her salary. In some cases she would only receive half of her wages, or nothing at all.
Another important element of obligation in many of the women’s contracts was the practice of ‘taking’ (*cabutan*). ‘*Cabutan*’ is when an agent takes a migrant worker’s salary to payback the agent’s expenses for the migration process, domestic transportation, international flight expenses, other expenses, and administrative fees. The participants who worked in U.A.E., Qatar, and Taiwan reported that the ‘*cabutan*’ ranged from one month to one year of income. It is important to note that the provision of ‘*cabutan*’ did not apply to the women who worked in Saudi Arabia.

The participants that worked in U.A.E. and Qatar experienced ‘*cabutan*’ for 1 month of their salaries, whereas the salaries of the women who worked in Taiwan were taken for 9 months to 1 year. However, if the women were lucky to have generous employers, the female workers did not experience the loss of income because some employers added extra money to cover the cost of the ‘*cabutan*’.

The participants described other ways that agents received money. One example was an agent moving a female domestic worker from one employer to another before the initial contract was complete. In such cases, the woman’s salary might be cut off or not paid at all and the agents received financial benefits by getting extra money from the new employer. Such exploitation of selling a female domestic worker to another employer happened both inside and outside Indonesia, as mentioned by some of the participants.

Before living overseas, the participants explained that they had to sign a work contract written in Bahasa Indonesian or in the language of the host country. If they wanted to go to Taiwan, the contract was written in English, while in Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., and Qatar the contract was written in Arabic. Some participants explained that they could not understand the content of the work contract because it was written in a foreign language. Although the
translation in Bahasa Indonesian was provided, they were rarely able to check all of the content of the contract due to a limited time to read all of the text. Commonly, agents just briefly explained the points of the workers’ rights and obligations. Some participants said that the agents provided them with the copy of the signed contract. In summary, the first and second stages of transnational domestic work are illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Procedures Prior to Working Overseas](image)

After arriving overseas, most of the women went to the agent offices first, while some others said that they met prospective employers at the airport. For this latter group of women, the agent’s representative had offered the woman’s services to the employers who want to hire them. If the employer agrees, the woman will work for him/her.

**Working Domestically Overseas**

This section looks at two aspects of working domestically overseas. The first aspect includes the healthy/unhealthy working conditions (salary, work hours, time off, facilities, and incentives) and the safe/unsafe working condition (verbal, physical, and sexual abuses). The second aspect includes how overseas agents and support systems help the participants face daily problems.
Healthy/Unhealthy Working Conditions

To understand the participants’ views on their working conditions, they were asked a series of close-ended question, and the data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics. The participants were given the choice to answer the questions verbally during the interview process or by writing their answers on their own; however all of the women preferred to answer the questions directly during the interview process. Table 4.2 shows the healthy/unhealthy working conditions identified by the female participants.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid on Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Amount in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Off for Rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to Socialize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Incentives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salaries. The first set of questions focused on their monthly salaries. The women explained that there are different payment plans depending on the agreements between the employers and workers. The salaries could be paid monthly, saved for a few months or years, or even paid in one lump sum at the end of employment contract.

Most of the participants (n=12) said that they received their salaries on time, with delays generally happening during the first few months. As mentioned previously, countries like U.A.E., Qatar, and Taiwan utilized the ‘cabutan,’ system, i.e. money taken by the overseas agents from the women’s salaries for several months.
A few of the participants (n=3) were unsatisfied with their salaries, reporting that some employers broke the contract by paying less money than the amount agreed upon in their work contract. As one woman explained: “I did not receive the same amount of salary as what was promised (AED1000)... I received only AED800.” Nonetheless, most of the participants (n=16) acknowledged that they received the correct salary as mentioned in their contracts. In some cases, the women were given even more money that the agreed upon salary. One woman explained: “If the employers are kind, they often add to my monthly salary.” This demonstrates that the kindnesses and generosity of employers could positively impact the amount of money received by the workers. However, this kindness was unpredictable and not something the women could depend on.

*Working hours and conditions.* Working extra hours was another aspect of the working conditions discussed by many female domestic workers. Some participants (n=7) were frequently pushed to work until midnight or work an overload during a day. They worked 10 - 16 hours every day (from 9 a.m –midnight). Some female participants explained that they worked from 5 a.m to 11 p.m, and still others often worked for almost 24 hours. A woman states, “It was written in the contract to work for 8 hours, but that was not the fact. If there were many guests I didn’t sleep. It was unpredictable… sometimes 2 a.m was when I could sleep.” Other participants discussed how hard it was to find an opportunity to rest. One of the women explained, “If I was tired and sleepy, I went to the toilet and slept there to avoid calls from the employers, or I would sleep under the ironing table.” However, some participants did not experience such difficulties. They had breaks during the day and had enough sleep at night. Figure 3 shows the work hours and time off reported by participants.
Most of the female participants (N=18) explained that they did not receive time off to socialize outside their employers’ homes, nor did they have time to relax. They could leave the house only when they went with their employers to malls, supermarkets, or on vacation. Many of the employers asked the women to join the family on vacations during school holidays, however the women were still expected to serve the employers during this leisure time. This was not a holiday for the female workers.

While they had limited down time, when the women did have time for themselves, most of the participants reported having a space of their own. The majority of the participants (N=18) explained that they had their own bedrooms with sufficient facilities. However, two participants explained that they slept in the children’s room or in the living room. Most of the female participants agreed that the employers provided them food, and some said the employers bought clothes for them.

*Health care.* Due to working so much overtime, the women were often at risk for getting sick. Each worker was asked to purchase health insurance before leaving Indonesia, however the insurance was only good for a short period of time. This meant that once the women arrived overseas, their employers had to purchase new health insurance that applied in the host country. If the women did get sick, the women were often dependent on the employers, asking their employers for medicine or care. A participant who worked in Taiwan explained that she could visit a doctor when she was sick with the aid of her employer. She explained, “I talked to my employer, and then she brought me to a doctor using a medical card ... The agent didn’t care at all”. Getting the medicine they needed became more challenging when there was a language barrier. If the women could not communicate in the employer’s language, they had to resort to more creative means to explain their condition. One woman explained, “If I was sick, I asked for
medicine from my employer using body language.” Overall, the women were dependent on their employers for any medical care.

Incentives. Regarding incentives, most of the women (n=17) answered that they often traveled and went shopping with their employers, whereas a few respondents (n=3) said that they never travelled with employers for holidays. Travelling to another place is a meaningful incentive for many of the women who choose to work overseas. Additionally, almost all of the women (n=19) said that they received incentives in the form of money or gold jewelry on special days, such as religious days. In one instance, the worker received a financial incentive when her female employer had a newborn baby. This was a family tradition as explained by the participants who worked in Saudi Arabia.

Safety and Abuse

The second aspect of the women’s working conditions is the safety of their working conditions and any experiences of abuse. To understand the women’s experiences with safety, they were asked a series of questions dealing with verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. All of the female participants (n=20) chose to answer the questions directly instead of write their answers on the survey. Table 4.3 contains a summary of the data regarding safe working conditions.
Table 4.3

**Participants Experiences of Abuse by Employers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal Abuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Employer’s Language</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Communicated Respectfully</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Listened to Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Abuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever Physically Abused</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse/Harassment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Verbal abuse.* Before asking questions about verbal communication, the participants were asked if they understood the language used by their employers. All participants (n=20) said that they could understand the languages, but in the beginning they did not understand the language well and most of them communicated with their employers using body language. This was because the language learned in the pre-departure training program was not exactly the same as the language used by employers. Once it was clarified that the participants eventually did understand the language of their employers, the participants were asked whether they ever experienced verbal abuse, such as calling the women bad words or scolding to them. A few women said they never experienced such verbal abuse. They (n=12) explained that their employers communicated with them in a respectful way, while other participants (n=4) said that their employers did not speak to them in a respectful manner, and the rest (n=4) had no comments about it.

The participants mentioned some common reasons why the employers spoke impolitely. The reasons were that the employer perceived that the women were performing their duties poorly, broke electronic equipment, or were not taking care of children or elderly family
members well. One participant told, “My employer usually complained about my work...such as the yard being swept, but because I was so busy I couldn’t do that.” Another woman said, “There were so much dust in my employer’s house. So, when I cleaned it in the morning, they woke up in the afternoon and found the house full of dust. They asked me to clean it again...or when I ironed the clothes they said it should be ironed again.”

A few women (n=2) who worked in Saudi Arabia said that when employers were angry, they often used impolite words. A woman said, “My employers called me sakala [a derogatory term for maid.]. They were rude, but they were kind to give us presents like new clothes and other things.” Another woman added, “They called me yahmar, which means cows or big horse... the situation was different in Abu Dhabi, in which my employers called me by my name or ‘baby sitter.’” Overall, many participants acknowledged that their employers often spoke loudly and/or yelled at them. However, talking loudly might be culturally appropriate and does not always mean speaking rudely or abusively.

After being asked about their experiences of verbal abuse, the participants were asked how they coped with verbal abuse. The domestic workers usually responded to the disrespectful comments or verbal abuse by asking for the employers’ forgiveness or trying to improve their work performance. A woman described this situation, “I just give my life to God, to protect me... I did not make bad mistakes, so my employer always forgave me... No problem... It was the way I solved problems”. One of the participants reported, “I asked apologized and promised not to do it again... We have to work well in order to not make employers angry with us.” Such mechanisms of asking forgiveness and promising to do much better were used repeatedly to handle daily problems. After doing such things, the situation usually would become normal again or employers forgave them.
Physical abuse. In addition to verbal abuse, the participants were also asked about any experiences with physical abuse to better understand their safety in the workplace. Almost all participants (n=19) said that they did not experience physical abuse. Only one woman said yes, describing how her employers often hit her head with a rice ladle or a frying pan. When this happened she cried but she could not call the agent. The woman explained, “I did not have my agent’s phone number. I was afraid… I cried and prayed.”

While most of the women in the study explained that they did not experience serious physical abuse, they were aware of friends who experienced these issues. One woman discussed an abusive condition experienced by her friend, “one of my friends ran from her employer after getting abused by her employer. Her body was injured by her employer… She was tortured and beaten… I was afraid and just cried with her… she worked at my employers’ child’s home.” This case was eventually exposed by the media and received public attention in Indonesia. Once it received media attention, the Indonesian government made serious efforts to bring the case to court, to pay or the woman’s medical expenses, and to send her home safely.

Sexual Abuse/Harassment. The final form of abuse that the research participants were asked about was sexual abuse and sexual harassment. A few women (n=4) explained that they experienced sexual abuse or harassment while working abroad. One participant explained that she experienced sexual harassment from her male employers. The other women (n=3) explained that their employers’ children (male sons) often treated them badly. The men did not physically hurt the women, but often seduced or touched the women’s body. To overcome such problems, the women reported what the male sons did to their parents. The parents responded appropriately to the children’s behavior and made sure that the workers were safe. One woman had a hard time telling about her experience of sexual harassment. She states, “Yes, I almost experienced sexual
abuse, but I couldn’t tell you in detail... I just run... run away... it was usually the son or my male employer who did it. I was touched but I fought and ran... I even cried... It was frightening.”

After experiencing such sexual abuses, the women would respond by running from the employers’ home to save themselves. In the next part, the participants of this study explained further some ways to cope with any type of abuses or violence.

*Responding to exploitation and abuse.* When the women experienced exploitation in their workplace, including serious physical and/or sexual abuses, they would take one of these actions: go to the Indonesian Embassy, go to the agent office, or run to a friend’s place. For instance, if they experienced abuse or very harsh working conditions they would often try to report the abuse to an agent or the Embassy. In this study, two of the women explained how they responded to abusive situations. One woman said:

“I went to my employer in Riyadh, but the agent sent me back. Then, the agent sent me to another employer… Her home is so big and I was the only household worker in it…There was enough food to eat, but I was so tired because of the work overload. Then, I decided to go back to the agent. My friend picked up me (at my employer’s home)… Then I had a new employer.”

Another woman explained:

“I was in Taiwan working as domestic worker. The agency was not caring at all, they said ‘it’s not my business’ when I complained about something related to my work conditions. Then, the agent brought me out far from the city. They threatened me by saying ‘we will leave you on this mountain and report to the police that you have broken the work contract.’ In that place, they kicked my body many times, but I tried to stand up. After that, the agency gave me to some employers with a short work contract without salary for 6 months. Finally, the agent reported me to the police, and then I was deported from Taiwan without money.”

From the two stories above, we can understand that some overseas agents, who are often Indonesian, are less responsible to the female migrant workers and often side with the employers. In some cases the agents were not taking care of the women at all. Some women expressed
concerned that going to the Indonesian Embassy would not be much better. A woman explained, “If we go to the Indonesian Embassy, they put us in the shelter (a place to stay temporarily) till someone picks us up there… If nobody comes, we stay there for a longer time.”

However, even if the women experienced abuse or harsh working conditions and wanted to go to the Indonesian Embassy, they often did not have any idea where the Indonesian Embassy was located or how to get there. A woman said, “Sometimes I want to go to the Indonesian Embassy, but I was afraid… I didn't know how to go there… and was afraid I’d get lost.”

Besides reporting the abuse to an agent or seeking assistance from the Indonesian Embassy or Consulates, many of the participants emphasized the importance of having a good relationship with their employers as a way of coping with abuse or trying to reduce the chances of future abuse. The women expressed that they could maintain a good relationship with their employers by being patient and obedient, communicating politely, listening to the employers, doing whatever the employers wanted, performing good work, looking after the children well, and respecting the employers. A few emphasized the importance of having good communication and positive relationships with their employers as the key way to handle unexpected challenges or daily work problems.

**Agents’ Responsibilities.** In addition to understanding the women’s experiences with abuse and challenging working conditions, open-ended questions were asked to understand the participants’ thoughts about and experiences with the agents or sponsors, their services, and support systems. An area of focus was the agent or sponsor’s responsibilities while the women were working overseas. The women (n=15) said that the agents did not take responsibility for them. One woman states, “The agent wasn’t responsible after we arrived here. It is a common
thing for them.” Another woman agreed, “The agent didn’t take care of us when we arrived there.” Conversely, only a few of the women (n=5) explained that their agents took care of them.

A little over half of the participants were not satisfied with services provided by their overseas agents. They felt unsatisfied with the services because they believed the agents were always on the employers’ sides and provided different services than what was mentioned in the work contract. One participant explained a terrible situation that occurred due to the lack of protection from her overseas agent:

“.. There was no support for me… I did not escape from my employer’s home, but just asked for someone to drive me to the agent who employs me… The agent gave me two choices: sell me to another employer…or go back home at my own cost... I chose the second which was to go back home…”

Regarding services provided by overseas agents, only a few participants explained that they were satisfied (n=4), as they believed they received good assistance or services from their agents. These women were satisfied mainly because the agents provided good employers and took care of the women. Providing a good employer for a domestic worker was particularly important because once a woman arrives at her employer’s home, the employer is generally in control of virtually all aspects of the woman’s life. The worker is largely dependent on her employer’s kindness.

When the participants were asked “to what extent the employment contract protects your rights as a migrant domestic laborer,” the participants’ responses varied. The women expressed their thoughts in relation to the implementation of the contract. Many participants complained that employers often break certain points of the employment contracts. To respond to these situations, the women spoke to the overseas agents, but they often did not listen to the complaints. This situation was also fairly similar if they went to the Indonesian Embassy. The problems primarily occurred when the requirements of the employment contract were not
completely accomplished by either the agents or the workers. For some of the women, they did not know the location of the Indonesian Embassy or Consulate, nor how to get there.

Conversely, some other participants explained that they did not experience these types of serious problems while working overseas. The women added that the agents took care of them as workers and the employers were also responsible. They also said that they had access to the Embassy, as they knew where it was and how to get there. To be sure, it is the responsibility of the overseas agent to make everything clear for the women, including information about Indonesian government resources overseas. In general, it seems that participants are saying that to have positive working and living conditions overseas depends on the agents meeting their responsibilities, employers’ kindness, and the women’s work performance.

In summary, the working conditions of the female domestic workers depended largely on the quality and behavior of their employers. The employers were largely responsible for the workplace conditions (salary, work hours, time off, facilities, and incentives) including the safety of the workplace (verbal, physical and sexual abuses). For a few of the participants, the agents became involved when there was an unexpected, unsafe, or abusive situation. However, the participants generally felt the agents would or did stand on the employers’ side and value the employer’s rights over the worker’s rights. The next section discusses the strengths and supports which helped the women cope with any unexpected challenges while working abroad.

*Strengths and Supports.* As mentioned in the previous section, the participants faced several issues while working abroad, particularly with regard to their relationships with their employers. Some women mentioned that the way to solve a problem with employers was by promising to work better and not repeating the same mistake. The common issues of concern included late payment of wages and complaints about their work (in cooking, cleaning, ironing
and taking care of children). In addition, the participants mentioned some issues with the overseas agents, such as not being paid or a reduction of salary, selling the worker to another employer prior to the end of the work contract, and a lack of accountability to the women.

However, the participants discussed a number of personal strengths and family support that helped them get through the challenges. Some participants identified that the way to keep working through the struggles was to remember their dreams of helping their family, building a home, or paying for their children’s education. The women chose to surrender to life and try to be patient to deal with all of the problems. One participant states, “I just surrendered to my life, it was the way to solve problems.” In addition, when the women faced a problem, they often called their husbands or families at home in order to share what they felt, gain advice, and pray that the problem would pass. The supports from family at home helped them to continue working overseas. As one woman explained, “I have my husband to support me. If I felt homesick, he advised me to be more patient… I was patient for 2 years, now I have my own home.” Therefore, having personal resilience and family supports were the best ways to deal with the problems since there was often no one else who could help them.

While many of the women drew on personal and family-based strengths to get them through the challenges, there were actually some support systems available to the participants overseas. When the women faced a very serious problem such as getting abused by their employers, they often escaped from the employer’s home and went to the place of a friend who also worked as a domestic worker. While not all women had positive experiences with the agents or embassy, some did in fact find support. In addition, some women (n=6) were able to consult the Indonesian Embassy and ask for protection, and a few women (n=3) contacted their agents to help them adapt to the daily work demands and a new life.
Conversely, a few of the female participants explained that they did not experience any serious problems. These women (10%) said that their employers were very kind or had many maids at home, so they were not required to work so hard. They described having an enjoyable workplace, and explained that their employers liked them so much that they asked the women many times to continue working beyond the existing contract. In these cases where the women did not experience significant problems it was largely due to the kindness of the employers. Therefore, it makes sense that many participants mentioned that having good employers was their big hope, and something they prayed for as they travelled to a new job overseas.

**Finishing A Work Contract and Travelling Back Home**

As mentioned previously, a strong and positive relationship between the workers and the employers was the main factor that helped the women survive working overseas, as most things related to the women’s daily lives were the responsibility of their employers. This continued to be the case for the ending of a contract. Few women reported that they counted the days of their work period themselves, and most did not know the exact end of their contract. The participants explained that they found out about the end of their contract from employers (80%) or agents (20%). This shows that the employers generally played a more important role in the women’s transition home compared to the overseas agents.

During the final days of a work contract, the women reported still paying attention to their responsibilities. Before returning home, the women still needed to tend to their duties such as cleaning the employers’ homes. The women continued to be mindful of their work responsibilities to show their caring behavior and responsibility. The other activities during the final days in the work country were for themselves, such as packing their things and buying
souvenirs for families and friends at home. Some women said that their employers accompanied them to finish all these activities before going back home.

The participants reported that prior to finishing a work contract, they did not have their passports. The overseas agents or employers generally kept the passports. After finishing the work contract, most of the women (n=17) mentioned that they followed a simple procedure to get their passports back and their tickets for a flight home. The women needed to sign a form confirming the completion of their work hours and verify that the employers paid them their entire salary. In most cases, employers also signed a form at the completion of the contract. The women also had to process forms for tax purposes.

The next step in the process included the women turning in their citizen ID (for permanent living) to the employer and reporting to the police office to complete the migration documents. The participants explained that the employers generally dealt with all immigration matters and arranged everything, including the women’s travel back to Indonesia. All of the women went through a similar process and reported being happy with the process, and equally happy to be back home.

In some cases, either the women wanted to extend their contracts and/or the employers asked if they wanted to work for additional years. If both parties agreed, the contract would be extended and the women would simply stay on. If not, then the contract would end. Once there was an agreement between both parties, the agents or employers would process the women’s passports and working visas.

Another option for women interested in gaining future work was to leave the host country and report to the overseas agent in Indonesia. When there was another call for work, the women would then process their immigration documents again. This happens if a female domestic
worker plans to return to the host country. In these cases, the woman could directly fly back home without renewing any documents, only needing plane tickets, their passport, and working visa.

However, not all of the women found it easy to end their contract. As one woman explains, “My employer tricked me. He told me that the ticket was too expensive so I couldn’t go home. So I prolonged my contract. A year later, he told me the same until I had worked for 3 years … and then I was able to go back home.”

From the women’s descriptions of the process of finishing or extending a work contract, it can be understood that while the women are under contract, all matters are arranged or become the employers’ responsibility. However, a few participants acknowledged that the overseas agents also played important roles in addressing the needs of the workers. The overseas agents’ and employers’ responsibilities extend until the end stage of work or until the workers travel back to the home country.

**Travelling Back Home**

Many participants stated that they did not face any serious problems during their trip home. Everything went smoothly until the women arrived at home. However, a few of the participants had less than satisfactory experiences. They had to pay extra fees to officers at the airport, which was clearly a form of corruption. A woman explained:

“Yes, I spent money at the airport in Indonesia. The rental car driver asked me for some money for tickets. As far as I knew, the employers paid all travel expenses. In fact, on my way home, the driver still asked me for extra money. If I did not give it to him, he said he would drop me on the street or drive dangerously fast. He asked me to change my money into Rupiah and give him some money.”

Unfortunately, this was not a unique experience. Another participant explained:

“When we arrived home, we did not want our money to be taken. In the airport, there should not be any expenses. However, on the way back home, the driver asked for some money. If we did
not give him the money, he said he would drop us on the street. Some of us were robbed or the driver said if we did not give him some money, he would crash the car or we would not be allowed to go home.”

From the stories above, the challenges and problems did not always end when the female migrant domestic workers arrived home. In some cases, the women often were victimized by Indonesian people who wanted their money at the airport or when they were travelling to their villages.

However, once they got home, the participants explained the reunification with their families and communities was an easy process. Indeed, many of them were viewed as a ‘hero’ in terms of her family’s success, as the women had made significant efforts to improve their family’s living conditions and social status.

**Reunification with Family and Community**

The participants described their families as being very happy and welcoming when they arrived home. All of the women explained that they reunited with their family members without any serious issues or challenges. They were fully accepted by their family and community. When asked about challenges to returning home, one woman responded, “Challenge? I didn’t have any challenge. I got a lot of money and since I was at home I felt happy. I was able to take a really nice rest.”

However, even with the warm welcome, some participants experienced later challenges and concerns, particularly regarding family and financial issues. These challenges were not unexpected, with many of the women acknowledging that while they were overseas they worried about encountering certain family and financial issues when they returned home.
Family Issues

The participants mentioned that family issues became their main concern, since they had been away from their husbands, parents, children and siblings for some years. The family issues that the female participants mentioned were primarily related to marriage, parents, and children. One participant said that while she was away, “I was worried about my husband, about whether he was going to marry again, whether my parents passed away, or if my children got sick… But, fortunately my husband is a good person; my parents and children are healthy”. The other women also expressed fears regarding their husband’s or other family member’s health conditions. For example, “I was worried about not seeing my husband again because in the last communication I had heard that he was sick.” Another women said, “I was worried about my family members passing away or getting sick.”

In addition, one of the female participants worried about the newborn baby boy she had to leave behind when she traveled overseas. When she came back to her family, he was a young boy and did not recognize her well. She explained, “My youngest child didn’t recognize me because I left him when he was a new born baby… my family took care of him.” Her son grew up with the warmth and care of other family members (husband, parents, and siblings). The situation has remained the same even though she has not worked recently overseas. The son still called her grandmother ‘mom’ although he understands who is his real mother.

The participants also discussed some of the ways they overcame the issues they faced when returning home. For marriage problems, a few women explained that asking for a divorce was the right solution, particularly if their husband had started dating or married another woman. “To solve [the marriage problem] I asked for a divorce because my husband married again.” Another woman experienced the same challenge when she returned home. “My husband had
another wife, so I asked for a divorce.” The other significant marital problem that leads to
divorce was the husbands spending their wives’ money. Although the overall number of divorces
is not considered high in Bondan village and only a few participants experienced a divorce, many
of the participants said that it was something they worried about while they were overseas.

Financial Issues

Another issue mentioned by some of the women was that their family could not manage
the money well while they were overseas, leading to new debts. Two women described being in
this situation when they returned home. One said, “Yes, I have a challenge, I worry about not
being able to work at home. I have many debts that were built up at home. So, how can I pay it
back while I am no longer working as a migrant laborer?” The other woman expressed a similar
sentiment, “My challenges are I have no more money, debts, and daily needs…” Therefore, some
participants explained that they were responsible for addressing the financial issues and family
debt while they were overseas. The women also had to find work when they are back home to
pay for the new debts. One woman explained, “I have to be patient… I also try to work here to
pay the debts.”

The financial difficulties continued or became more complicated if the women could not
find work at home in Indonesia and/or if their husbands worked for minimal salaries. Thus, for
those who still live in such economic conditions, working as a migrant domestic worker could
not completely address the economic problems that existed before and after the woman worked
overseas. These situations lead to a ‘a cycle of life’ of a migrant domestic worker, in which a
woman might be forced to re-migrate and continue working as migrant domestic worker to
ensure the financial stability of her family.
In sum, the reunification with family and community brings happiness, but can also come with a variety of challenges. The challenges are frequently related to the woman’s fear about her marriage status, her husband’s and family’s health and safety, and having unfinished or new debts. Many of the women could overcome the challenges with the supports of family, although this was not always the case. Working overseas again was the best choice, especially for those who are most in need of the financial advantages of being migrant domestic workers. The next section focuses on the impact of working domestically overseas from the viewpoint of participants. Financial contribution to family life is discussed as the main positive impact followed by an explanation of the negative impacts of being a transnational domestic worker.

**Impact of Being A Migrant Domestic Worker**

Working as a female migrant domestic worker had both positive and negative impacts on the women in this study. The positive impacts such as an improvement in family life and having more knowledge and experiences from living overseas are discussed first. This is followed by a discussion of the negative impacts of being a transnational domestic worker.

*Positive Impacts*

The participants identified the advantages of working overseas as being primarily associated with economic rewards. As many women said, by working overseas they could make higher monthly salaries compared to the salaries for the same type of work in Indonesia. The women felt that contributing financially to their families was a way to meet their familial responsibilities. As Figure 3 reveals, this study found that the 50% of the participants sent their money to their parents, and 40% sent it to their husbands; only a few of them (10%) said the money was sent to meet their children’s and/or siblings’ needs. For those who were married, the remittances were usually sent to their husbands and children while unmarried women sent their
money to their parents and/or siblings. Both parents and husband were mentioned as the persons responsible for handling the women’s money while they were overseas.

![Pie chart showing financial beneficiaries of female participants’ income](image)

*Figure 3. Financial beneficiaries of the female participants’ income*

The remittances were used for a variety of things, including buying land or a rice field. In one instance the money was used to buy a motorcycle. When the women returned to Indonesia, many of them used their money to build a new or “a nice and proper” home. Additionally, one of the women used the money to open a business at home, while another used it to buy items like fertilizer and rice seeds to cultivate the family’s rice fields. One woman explained, “Lots of advantages [laughing]… could take a flight for free… have a luxury car, trip to some places, sight seeing in mall with my employer, buy many things I want. If I stayed in Indonesia, I could not have those all. While overseas, I could have lots of things… Thank God.”

The women discussed the fact that the economic benefits of working overseas were more significant than if they had worked in Indonesia. One of the participants said, “The advantage depends on whether we could save the money to open a new business at home. We could work in Indonesia, but the salary was less… It was doubled overseas. Therefore, lots of people worked abroad because the salary was much bigger.” While working overseas, the women did not need
to spend money to fulfill their daily needs since their employers provided for all of their food, clothes, health, and recreational expenses.

As a result of making significant financial contributions to their family, the women’s positions in their family changed. For example, they could suggest how the remittances should be spent or what type of education their children should pursue. These kinds of economic contributions to family life also had a positive impact in terms of being respected by family members, as explained by most of the female participants. This increase in respect was largely due to the fact that they brought more income into the family than other members. In addition, working overseas had a significant impact on their ability to do some of the things they hoped and wished for, such as living at home, raising their children, cultivating their lands, and increasing their ability to make a good income within Indonesia by opening a small business.

**Negative Impacts**

While working overseas might eventually allow them to achieve several positive goals, many of the women were negatively impacted by their decisions to work overseas. Most of the participants spoke about the struggles of being away from their homes and families. The participants identified the disadvantages of working abroad to include homesickness and feeling very far away from home. In addition, some of the women explained that they felt isolated, spending all of their time at the employers’ homes, and not having time off or holidays. One participant states, “The disadvantages are that you just stay at their home, and can’t go anywhere. I would hope that when my employer went to the mall, she would invite me…”

The psychological burdens of homesickness and isolation became harder when the women worked extended hours and feared they would not be fully paid for their work contract.
One woman expressed her thought by saying, “The disadvantages are that I could not go to school, lived isolated, worked long hours, and did whatever the employer wanted.” Therefore, it is reasonable that a few participants explained that they worked like “slaves,” with long and difficult hours and little respect from employers.

As mentioned previously, the women explained how agents cut the women’s salaries and sold the women to other employers before ending their work contract. For these women dreams about working overseas did not come true. As one woman explained, “I went back home without money... my employer did not pay a few months of my salary and the overseas agent abused me and took all of my money.” Given the various negative impacts many participants experienced while working overseas, some worried about younger family members working overseas. One woman explained, “I do hope after being a female migrant domestic worker, I could have more experiences, and make my parents happy. However, I do not want my sisters to follow me in working overseas. It is enough, only for me to do that.”

The women also discussed some of the negative impacts that took place while home in Indonesia. A few women expressed difficulty returning home and integrating back into their community in Indonesia. Others faced economic challenges. After working overseas, many women still did not have enough capital to start a new business or cultivate their lands, and they struggled to make ends meet because they received even less income for doing domestic work within Indonesia.

Some women also faced negative impacts within their family lives. One woman explained that although she contributed financially, her family did not fully respect her contribution to the household. In a number of other instances, the participants (n=8) said that their financial contribution had no effect due to their parents or husbands’ inability to manage the
women’s money effectively. One of the participants expressed her emotional state as a result of this, “I suffered because of working so hard and when arriving home I found all of the money was gone… So, I could not do anything…” The situation becomes complicated when the women were getting older and have few, if any, supports. One participant explained, “I still want to go, but I am old now and not strong enough now to work as a migrant domestic worker”.

The negative impacts were primarily related to the women’s unhappiness and financial difficulties. To cope with these issues and challenges, the women often tried to maximize their strengths and seek out other supports. Considering the importance of improving the life of transnational domestic workers, the next section explores solutions that could help the workers keep working domestically overseas.

**Solutions in the Eyes of Female Migrant Domestic Workers**

Given some of the negative experiences that the participants had while working overseas, they had specific suggestions for improving the process and experience. The suggestions included listening to their voices, protecting their rights, and respecting their profession. This section covers the several suggestions offered by the women during the interviews and follow-up sessions, in which the participants had an opportunity to express their thoughts about solutions to the daily problems they faced while working as migrant domestic workers.

Many of the women provided suggestions for protecting their rights and improving the available programs and services. They identified a number of important issues that they felt should be addressed by all of the stakeholders of transnational domestic work, especially by the Indonesian governmental entities. In general, the participants’ suggestions include increasing the effectiveness of the pre-departure (training) program, reducing workloads, having sufficient
salaries, regulations regarding time off and holidays, and listening and responding to their complaints when unexpected things happen.

The participants’ suggestions covered the various stages of working overseas including the processes of recruitment, training program, placement and signing the contract, and working overseas. In addition, they mentioned some points to help the process of reunification with family and community. All of the solutions for improving the life of Indonesian transnational domestic workers can be seen in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4

*Solutions from the perspectives of female migrant domestic workers (FMDW)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage of Work</th>
<th>Suggested Plan for Action</th>
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| 1. Before working overseas | **Recruitment**  - Sponsors should clearly explain the work contract  
Sponsors should be responsible before and during working in overseas, not just leave the responsibility to agents in Indonesia and overseas agents  
**Pre-departure program**  - To change or end the pre-departure program, training place, and agents’ offices that cause the FMDWs to suffer  
- Agents should provide trainings for improving knowledge and skills that are needed in the workplace  
**Placement**  - Agents should provide the FMDWs with ‘good’ employers  
**Signing contract**  - Agents should clearly explain the work contract point by point in Bahasa Indonesia |
| 2. During working overseas | **Healthy workplace**  - Implementing all the procedures based on the work contract  
- Must be fair for employers and the FMDWs’ rights  
- Be responsible if unexpected things happened  
**Salaries**  - Agents do not apply ‘*Cabutan*’ system (Agents took some money from the women’s monthly salaries for the first few months)  
- Employers should pay the women’s salaries on time and with the same amount as promised to the FMDWs  
- To increase salaries of the FMDWs  
**Work Hours**  - Not working over load and over hours  
**Time off**  - Having time off to socialize with others outside the employer’s home  
**Facilities**  - Having adequate facilities, good workplace environment  
**Incentives**  - Providing incentives for extra work the women did  
**Safe workplace**  - Having an opportunity to report to the Indonesian Embassy on any unexpected things that may happen when working overseas  

*Verbal abuse*  
- To teach the language spoken by employers  
- Employers should speak in a polite way (not calling them animal’s names)  
- Employers should communicate with the FMDWs respectfully
Listening to the women
*Physical abuse*
- Employers should listen more to the FMDWs’ voice
- Agents overseas should take better care of the FMDWs
*Sexual Abuse*
- Agents overseas should be responsible if unexpected things happen

3. After working overseas

| Finishing contract | - All stakeholders should be responsible until the women finish their work contract |
| Returning back home | - There shouldn’t be any additional cost or payment at airport and trip to home town |
| Reunification with family and community | The Indonesian government should: |
| | - Help address daily problems (financial and marriage issues) |
| | - Support the women by providing capital (financial supports) and training skills to run a home-business |
| | - Provide job opportunities for the FMDWs |
The first set of suggestions focus on the recruitment and pre-departure training. As mentioned previously, the female participants complained about lessons and public facilities provided at the training facility. The women mentioned a number of solutions to fix these daily work problems. First, the language lessons in the pre-departure training program should be the same as what the employers use. Better language training would allow the women to communicate more effectively with their employers right from the start of the work contract. Second, the training for performing household tasks should be increased so the female migrant domestic workers know how to use the electronic devices in the employer’s homes and are prepared to handle all of work required of them while working overseas. Many participants were not satisfied with the training program because the lessons were not relevant to their needs at their workplace. As a consequence, they started working abroad without sufficient knowledge and skills. To address such needs, training programs could be continued after the women arrive overseas which might be provided by overseas agents. In addition, a few of the female participants also mentioned the need for cultural adjustment lessons to help them adjust to a new life and fit into a new culture.

However, not all of the women wanted extended training programs. Some participants felt that they suffered when they had to stay at the pre-departure place or training center, since the women were not learning anything and instead were for the call to working abroad. Therefore, the participants suggested the Indonesian government should close the irresponsible agents that make prospective female migrant domestic workers live in terrible conditions during the training program.

The second set of suggestions focus on the placement and signing stage. The women felt that it is necessary for the overseas agents and the Indonesian government to intervene in the
process of selecting prospective employers, to ensure the employers will be respectful to and responsible for the female domestic workers. The women felt the employers need to provide adequate facilities, a good workplace environment and pay incentives when the women work extra hours, and they felt the agents should help ensure these are all available for the women. The participants also gave suggestions for improving the implementation of the work contract. They said that agents should listen to the women’s complaints and provide supportive services. The Indonesian government should also take care of the women, responding immediately if the women report a problem at their workplace. As one participant states: “We want the Indonesian government to protect us, negotiate for improvement of our salary more, and reduce our workload.”

The third suggestions are concerned with the response to issues while working overseas. As mentioned previously, there are many issues related to the health and safety of the work environment. The participants expressed some thoughts for addressing these issues. Their primary suggestions include protecting their rights (such as time off and being able to get enough sleep) and more balance between the rights of employers and workers. Additionally, the female participants suggested proper facilities such as a bedroom and the basic things needed for daily functioning be required.

Most of the female participants acknowledged that they sometimes received incentives, such as extra money and gold jewelry as “gifts” on special days. The frequency of incentives varied from one participant to another, some receiving incentives monthly, yearly or occasionally. However, the women felt that the amount of the incentives was too small when compared with the extra work they did. Therefore, some women suggested that overseas agents should advocate for the women, asking the employers to provide sufficient incentives for extra
work. They also wanted the agents to help ensure that the entire contract was upheld, respected the female migrant domestic workers, listened to their voices, and actively worked to solve any problems faced by the women.

The final suggestions are related to the process of reunification with family and community. While this was the least stressful stage for the participants, as time went by, some issues emerged since most of the women did not have access to jobs while at home. Therefore, many female participants mentioned the needs for loans or micro-credit to help them establish their own business at home. In addition, they wanted to join training programs to enhance their capabilities and develop the skills needed for managing a small business.

**Summary**

As the literature review explains, transnational domestic work is dominated by female migrant workers who often migrate at a very young age and with minimum levels of education. The demand for female domestic workers is often the result of a stereotype that women are the best equipped to handle jobs in the domestic sphere. The business of transnational domestic work has contributed to a multi-billion dollar transnational exchange, with much of the money used for the development of the sending country (Heyzer et al., 2006).

This chapter provides some insights into the factors affecting the participants who worked domestically overseas. In this study, the main factor pushing the women to work overseas was severe economic conditions that force the women to leave their village in order to improve family conditions and income. By becoming migrant domestic workers, the women could use their income to help create a better life for their family in the form of a ‘proper’ home and financing children and siblings’ education. The second push factor discussed by the women was an easy recruitment process. Sponsors or middlemen, who have close relationships with the
women or families in the villages, actively recruited the prospective female migrant domestic workers in this study. Another way is that the women themselves go to sponsors or agents that are located nearby Bondan village. The possibility of migration documents’ falsification still happen and allow the women to work without any serious problems. The third factor motivating the women to work overseas was the cultural value of responsibility for parents and families. Personal interests, such as learning a new language, and enjoying the lifestyle of another country, also pushed some of the women to choose work overseas. The availability of domestic work overseas and a high demand for women to perform domestic labor was the main pull factor that led to the women entering transnational domestic work.

The women in this study discussed a variety of experiences throughout the six stages of working domestically overseas (recruitment process, pre-departure training program, placement and signing contract, working overseas, finishing the contract and travelling back home, and reunification with family and community). The main findings of this study show that all of the participants followed a recruitment process that was facilitated by sponsors. They explained that they had to pay and join a pre-departure training program for their first recruitment. In addition, the overseas agents applied the practice of ‘cabutan’ to pay for their expenses especially for those women who worked in Taiwan. The women rarely have time to read and understand their work contract with most contracts written in the language of the host country and only a few participants receiving a copy of their contract in Bahasa Indonesian. When the women actually start their jobs overseas depends on the availability of employers or calls from employers. Only after there was a call to work from an employer overseas was a prospective female migrant domestic worker’s passport processed and plane tickets bought.
The participants explained that while they were working overseas, their lives were largely in the hands of their employers. The women relied heavily on their employers’ kindnesses in terms of having a healthy and safe work environment. Most of the participants agreed that they were paid on time and in the amount mentioned in their work contract. However, the situation was different in terms of their work hours and having time off. The women stated that they did not have time to meet and socialize with friends or others outside their employers’ homes. Therefore, the female migrant domestic workers were often isolated. For some, this situation was even worse because they were not allowed to communicate by phone with friends and family at home.

The safety of the women’s work situation was also largely based on the kindness, or lack thereof, of the employers. When asked about any experiences of abuse, many women said that they often experienced some form of verbal abuse in the form of calling the workers bad names. The women reported that verbal abuse most often happened when the women did not do their work well or correctly. However, they agreed that their employers mostly communicated in respectful way.

Additionally, most of the participants said that they never experienced physical or sexual abuse. For those who experienced physical abuse, they responded to the abuse by asking for an apology from employers, promising not to repeat the same mistakes that “led to” the abuse, and requesting that their employers behave in acceptable ways in the future. The women explained that when responding to the abuse they always had to consider that maintaining a good relationship with their employers was important for the women to be able to continue working at the employer’s home. While the women did not report experiencing sexual abuse, a few women discussed sexual harassment and the need to take steps to avoid being sexually abused. To avoid
sexual abuse, the women took certain actions in the moment, such as running to their bedrooms and locking their doors. For some female migrant workers, they escaped from the employer’s home and went to a friend’s place, the agent’s office, or to the Indonesian Embassy. However, in these instances the women received some negative consequences, such as a loss of pay, when they did not finish working as mentioned in the work contract.

The impact of being a transnational domestic worker was positive for some of the women and negative for others. The main advantages to working overseas were being able to financially contribute to the family, building a home, paying for children’s or siblings’ education, or buying land for a rice field. However, the main disadvantages of working overseas included the fact that the women often felt homesick and isolated, they were not always paid fully, they had to work extreme overloads, and they might experience verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuses. In addition, working overseas might not be enough to help their families out of financial debt, leading to a life cycle of domestic work.

Given the variety of challenges that female migrant workers face, the participants discussed the importance of both sending and receiving countries to intervene at all points in the processes of transnational domestic work to ensure that female migrant domestic workers are able to work well and live in safe and healthy conditions. This is a right for the women as they contribute to the economic and social welfare of both countries through foreign exchange, paying taxes, and taking over some portion of the state’s responsibilities to provide child and elderly care to their citizens. A further review of the implications for this study is described in the discussion chapter.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of transnational domestic work as experienced by women from the village of Bondan. It applies four theoretical frameworks: human capabilities, intersectionality, empowerment, and feminist social work. The chapter consists of four sections.

The first section examines socioeconomic and educational factors related to transnational domestic work. The second section examines the sequence of events associated with transnational domestic work, including those that take place before departure, while working abroad, and after returning home. The third section discusses efforts to protect and empower migrant domestic workers. The fourth section discusses the limitations of the present study, the implications for policy change and social work practice, and some recommendations for future research.

Section (I): Socioeconomic and Educational Factors Related to Transnational Domestic Work

As previously mentioned, migration is affected by four factors: “push”, “pull”, “keep”, and “network” factors (Briar-Lawson et al. 2001). These factors affect individuals’ decisions to work overseas. This study found that push and keep factors are tied to conditions in the home country. Pull factors are tied to conditions in the destination countries that provide employment opportunities. Meanwhile, network factors are tied to conditions in both the home country and the destination countries. Ultimately, all of these factors are interconnected and influence the lives of domestic workers in a variety of ways.
Socioeconomic status and family life in decisions to work abroad. Women from Bondan are deeply concerned with fulfilling obligations to their family members. However, these obligations differ depending on marital status. It is widely believed that children are responsible for offering financial support to their parents. Single women are often impelled to work abroad to fulfill this responsibility. On the other hand, married women are primarily concerned with their responsibilities as a wife. In considering whether to work abroad, they take the needs of their husbands and children into account. For both single and married women, severe economic need is a major push factor. When women can only fulfill the needs of their family members by working abroad, they often choose to do so.

Additionally, all of the women (n=20) from Bondan highlighted a concern with their families’ socioeconomic status in explaining their decisions to work abroad. These women felt that they could use money earned abroad to raise the status of their families, which in turn would raise their own social status. In particular, many women had the dream of building their family a new home – such a home is a major symbol of social status and success. However, to achieve this dream a woman would have to work overseas multiple times.

Concern for family is best seen as both a push factor and a keep factor. Concern for family is a push factor because it motivates women to seek work abroad. Concern for family is also a keep factor because it motivates women to return to the village of Bondan in order to build homes and enjoy the increased status that comes from their foreign earnings. Women repeatedly stated that they only intended to spend a limited time abroad, and that their ultimate goal was to live happily with their families.
**Demand for female domestic workers.** This study found that one of the main pull factors was high demand for migrant domestic workers, especially female workers. This is in keeping with local cultural beliefs which hold that women have primary responsibility for managing the domestic sphere. Prior studies have identified patriarchy as a major factor pushing women towards becoming migrant domestic workers (Astuti, 2005; Irianto, 2011). However, others emphasize the feminization of poverty in relation to transnational domestic work (Ehrenreich et al., 2004; Satterhwaite, 2004; Silvey, 2004).

Participants in this study of transnational domestic workers from Bondan explicitly mentioned that domestic work is a woman’s responsibility. Based on women’s comments, it might be said that patriarchal social structure remains strong. Women are influenced by the structure that confer elevated status upon boys and men within the family. This negatively affects girls and women, and limits their opportunities to acquire much needed education and skills.

The situation of female domestic workers can be analyzed using the feminist concept of a “double burden” (i.e., burdened by both unpaid domestic labor and outside work). Thus women from Bondan mentioned both their extensive responsibilities at home, as well as their need to secure an outside income to ensure their families’ wellbeing and needing to secure a positive economic condition for the family. Economic need pushes both married and unmarried women to become domestic workers. As indicated above, unmarried women work to fulfill responsibilities to parents and other close relatives. Meanwhile married women work to fulfill responsibilities to husbands and children. The heavy familial responsibilities placed on women reflect socially sanctioned patriarchal attitudes which limit women’s freedom.
Recruiters’ tactics often increase familial pressure on women. Recruiters approach families and convince them that they will receive significant benefits from sending women to work abroad. Parents and husbands demand that women accept recruiters’ offers of work. Parents and husbands then sign permission letters enabling women to work abroad.

**Educational issues.** Women from Bondan also mentioned their lack of education and skills as a major push factor causing them to seek work abroad. With limited education and skills, women had fewer opportunities to secure desirable well-paying jobs in their home country. Transnational domestic work pays comparatively well, but typically does not require advanced education, special skills, or professional experience. As such, it gives women with limited education and skills a chance to increase their incomes.

On the other hand, certain forms of education and training (especially in language) are important to transnational domestic work. Prior studies have found that female migrant domestic workers from Indonesia have insufficient skills compared to other domestic workers, especially since they frequently cannot speak English (Anggraeni, 2005; Raharto, 2002; Heyzer et al. 2006). The condition is often worse for domestic workers from Bondan, for many have only completed elementary school (n= 8) and junior high (n=11), giving them fewer chances to learn English. Furthermore, most women explained that what language training they had received did not significantly help them understand their employers’ language.

Failure to understand English negatively impacted female workers’ ability to perform their work well (Anggraeni 2006; Pitoyo, 2005). It is expected that pre-departure training will teach women how to use modern domestic equipment. Nevertheless, domestic workers from
Bondan often remarked that they lacked the training necessary to operate sophisticated domestic equipment used for cooking, cleaning, and washing.

Women from Bondan believe that lack of education affects a person’s ability to obtain decent jobs. Therefore, they are well aware that individuals need proper schooling if they wish to find well-paying work in their home country. Additionally, these women have been pushed to continue laboring overseas as domestic workers by the comparative high salaries paid for such labor. Given their belief in the importance of schooling, the women frequently feel obligated to help their family members acquire an advanced education. Hence, the women send their earnings back home specifically for the purpose of educating their children and siblings, with the hope that this will enable them to acquire desirable jobs, without the need to travel abroad.

Nevertheless, the women are not able to control whether their earnings are actually used for the purposes of improving life conditions of their families. In many cases women (n=10) from Bondan failed in their goal of helping their family members attain a higher level of education than themselves. Some women also hoped to establish a small business upon returning home, which would enable them to continue aiding their families financially. Nevertheless, their goal of establishing a small business was rarely realized.

Given the preceding facts, it is necessary to improve domestic workers’ capacity to engage in long-term financial planning. This requires empowering women with knowledge and skills relevant to financial planning. Such empowerment is a step towards achieving the ultimate goals advocated by a feminist social work perspective (Dominelli, 2002; Langan & Day, 2002). Furthermore, the goal of creating equality and justice for all members of the community can be achieved by changing the local patriarchal social structure, which prioritizes the education of
males. This structure should be changed such that females are given the same educational opportunities, not only in terms of access to twelve years of compulsory primary and secondary education, but also in terms of access to tertiary education. This will require raising awareness in society about the importance of equality and justice, for such is necessary to eliminating structural gender equality (Dominelli et al., 2002). Eliminating structural gender inequality will make it easier for women to find decent jobs in their home countries, and hence they will be under less pressure to expose themselves to the risks associated with transnational domestic work.

Section (II): The Sequence of Events Associated with Transnational Domestic Work

This section explains the sequence of events associated with transnational domestic work, including those which take place before departure, while working abroad, and after returning home. These events can be divided into six key stages: (1) recruitment and placement (2) pre-departure training (3) signing the employment contract and the migration process (4) working overseas including living conditions, working environment, physical and sexual violence, social exclusion (5) finishing the contract and travelling back home and (6) reunification with families and the community.

The Period before departing Abroad. On the surface, transnational domestic work is structured like any other business in a free-market society. However, there is often corruption at the first stage of the recruiting process because workers have no idea of their rights. Corruption is commonplace in this particular business for a number of reasons. First, potential workers are uneducated and forced to trust whatever they are told by recruitment agencies and employers. Second, the behavior of recruitment agencies is not monitored, so they can easily lie about young women’s ages when getting passports and completing other necessary paperwork related to the
immigration process. Additionally, sponsors and agencies in both home and host countries are primarily motivated by profit, seeking to gain as much as money as they can from workers, as mentioned by the participants living in Bondan. The existence of these problems has been confirmed in several previous studies of Indonesian transnational domestic workers (Irianto, 2011; Raharto 2002, Solidaritas Perempuan 2015; Sukamdi et al, 2007).

Moreover, the politics of immigration must be taken into account, as the immigration laws and policies of both sending and receiving countries are a key part of transnational domestic work. According to Castles and Miller (2003), the migration industry not only affects the policies of sending and receiving countries, it also affects various actors involved in transnational domestic work, starting from the recruitment process until the return of workers back to their home countries. Given the complexity of migration issues, and the large number of actors involved, it is necessary for the key stakeholders to enhance coordination between the governments of both sending and receiving as well as labor agencies tasked with the protection and safety of migrant workers.

Indonesia has passed a number of laws and regulations to provide increased legal protections for migrant domestic workers. These laws include (1) Law No. 39 (passed in 2004) concerning placement and protection for migrant workers, (2) Presidential Instruction No. 6 (passed in 2006) which reforms systems related to the placement and protection of migrant workers, (3) Regulation of the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration No. 18 (passed in 2007) concerning the implementation of measures for the placement and protection of migrant workers, and (4) Regulation of Ministry of Manpower Power and Transmigration No. 14 (passed in 2010) which allocates responsibilities between the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (Kemenakertrans) and the National Body for Placement and Protection of
Indonesian migrant workers (BNP2TKI). The law gives authority to Kemenakertrans to regulate the recruitment process. Meanwhile, it gives authority to BNP2TKI to conduct and control the recruitment process. Here the recruitment process includes the practices of agents who recruit prospective migrant workers and who are responsible for placement of these workers (Azmy, 2012).

Currently, migrant workers must register and take a placement test at the office of BNP2TKI. Prospective migrant workers can also choose their country of destination based on the availability of work. The test result is announced on the office website, and applicants can check it online. After passing the test, prospective workers join training programs provided by BNP2TKI.

However, at present, there is no special law against brokerage practices, and there is no specific law protecting prospective workers from swindling, entrapment, or extortion at the hands of their sponsors. Prospective workers are often tempted to choose illegal recruitment processes, given their comparative ease and speediness (Raharto, 2002; Sukamdi et al., 2007). At this point, both sponsors and agents are responsible for providing prospective workers with immigration documents. However, they sometimes falsify these documents if applicants do not meet one of the requirements to work overseas (e.g., ages and names can be falsified). This practice may escape serious sanctions (Azmy, 2012; Anggareni, 2005; ILO, 2009, 2013). Furthermore, lack of legal regulation also allows criminal brokers working in human trafficking to operate freely (ILO, 2006).

Following recruitment, the next stage for women is a required stay at a training center. Participants from Bondan mentioned that in this place they usually felt homesick and isolated, and had to endure a lack of facilities along with a difficult learning process. Other studies have
also found that women at training centers lack adequate facilities (Mantra et al., 2001; Pitoyo, 2005), and did not acquire sufficient knowledge and skills for the tasks to come (Pitoyo 2005; Raharto 2002; Sukamdi et al, 2007).

Applying a human capabilities approach, such experiences of isolation, exploitation, and oppression are problematic in that they potentially endanger one’s bodily integrity, one’s relationships with others, and ignore the human need for recreation and play (Nussbaum, 1995, 2000). Women domestic workers should be able to move freely and they should not be isolated either during training or when working overseas. Moreover, the women should be able to live with others, socialize outside an employer’s home, and enjoy recreational activities. The capabilities approach also emphasizes the need for women to express their thoughts and aspirations. This helps ensure that their needs are taken into account during the process of confirming placement and signing the work contract.

The next stage is the arrival in the various host countries. This process also puts female domestic workers at a disadvantage. They are completely dependent upon their recruiters and have no power to protect themselves. Women are grouped based on the agency that recruited them. Employers looking for a domestic worker “shop” for the person they want. Those who are not chosen are sent to the agency’s facility where their living conditions are determined by the agency and not monitored.

After women arrive in host countries, it is often the case that neither the governments of host countries nor recruiting agencies coordinate with one another or take measures to protect domestic workers. Thus, participants from Bondan explained that once they were overseas they generally had to depend on their employers’ kindness, receiving little attention from their
overseas agents after the initial arrival meeting. Irresponsible agencies put the women in a more risky and vulnerable work situation.

At the international level, transnational domestic work is categorized as unskilled work in the “informal” sector (Heyzer 2006; ILO, 2009; Satterhwaite, 2004), contributing to the general feminization of poverty that pushes the number of poor women leaving their families and migrating for working domestically in overseas. Sending and receiving countries are both obligated to protect female migrant workers’ human rights by taking measures to detect violations, and by punishing and redressing these violations. Furthermore, as noted by Satterthwaite (2014), states must protect human rights by preventing violations on the part of non-state actors. With regard to the present study, women from Bondan emphasized that governments should take care to enforce laws and punish agencies (in the home country and overseas) that do not protect the rights of domestic workers.

**The period of working abroad.** This section discusses the experiences of women from Bondan while working abroad as domestics in the receiving countries. It is important to explore this stage in more detail because the major findings from the present study concern this core stage.

**Risks associated with being a Transnational Domestic Worker.** In order to understand women’s experiences while working abroad it is essential to emphasize their position of complete vulnerability. Transnational domestic workers are isolated, living with their employers in the most intimate of settings. They have no other place to go, no one to complain to, little awareness of legal protections or how to report and enforce laws, etc.
The intersectionality perspective recognizes that women are vulnerable in terms of ethnicity, gender, social class, and cultural beliefs (Satterhwaite, 2014; Teater, 2014). For transnational domestic workers, power relationships are asymmetrical between workers and employers, making domestic workers one of the most (if not the most) vulnerable group of workers in the world. Employers are usually wealthy women in wealthy countries who hire (overwhelmingly female) domestic workers to perform burdensome labor, housework, and childcare. Within the home, these wealthy women manage the everyday rules of working.

Some families make efforts to establish positive relationships with their workers. Participants from Bondan state that sometimes families give workers expensive gifts like gold jewelry when a new baby is born or when employers celebrate ‘holy days’. Such family habits and traditions aim to show the family’s kindness. Furthermore, women mentioned examples such as going with their host families on family vacations. Their employers may provide workers with time off and opportunities to leave the home, thereby allowing workers to cultivate a social life outside the family and its associates.

Extensive social contact between female employers and domestic workers rarely leads to positive bonds of friendship. Applying the perspective of intersectionality, in many ways these women are divided by class, race, ethnicity, language, and religion (Bastia, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991). The interconnectivity of different identities shapes the relationship between the workers and employers (Anthias, 2011). Some participants (n= 7) living at Bondan village mentioned that they rarely talked to employers, considering their class difference as servants of the family. In addition, the language barrier in particular leads to many problems when trying to run a household. While it is important to have “pre-departure training” programs which provide
instruction in the host nation’s language, such instruction can involve difficulties as domestic workers have typically had very little schooling and do not have experience studying language.

Women from Bondan, especially those who worked in Taiwan (n= 5), mentioned that they were able to socialize outside their employer’s home. This provided them with a support system they could use to face daily problems in the workplace. Nevertheless, the women were not given time off and opportunities to cultivate an outside social life. Based on the human capabilities approach, as well as a feminist perspective, it is necessary for domestic workers to have an opportunity to talk about their problems, and to spend time or socialize with other Indonesian friends working as female migrant domestic workers. Furthermore, the women should be able to express their thoughts through informal gatherings or by establishing work unions to channel their voices or aspirations (Nussbaum, 2000; Teater, 2014).

The migrant domestic workers in this study experienced a terrible combination of culture shock and abuse. The experience of culture shock affects every level of human interaction. The intersectionality in form of ethnicity is reflected from the story of female migrant domestic workers from Bondan that feel being intimidated and upset by employers as she thought were yelling at her. This cultural habit for any conversation included speaking more loudly than the women are accustomed to. In Javanese culture, speaking politely with lower tones is understood to be good behavior, which demonstrates self-control, and which shows respect to others.

Furthermore, the intersectionality points of transnational domestic work can be seen from the requirements for clothing that are varied and typically influenced by the religiosity of both employers and employees. Even members of the same religion often wear different kinds of clothing. For example, Muslim women’s dress in Saudi Arabia is different than Muslim women’s dress in Indonesia. Even so, many Indonesian women choose to work in Saudi Arabia
because it is a Muslim nation, the salaries are good, and they think they might be allowed to go to Mecca for the hajj (pilgrimage). In fact, to fulfill an Islamic obligation to perform hajj (pilgrimage) is not easy due to waiting list or quota issue – for regular hajj mechanism in Indonesia, people should wait until 10 – 20 years to get call.

On the other hand, the line between what constitutes the “culture” of agencies (at home and host countries) and what constitutes abuse is not always easy to define. However, clear instances of abuse take many forms. One form is economic abuse. Recruitment agencies still engage in the practice of deducting expenses from domestic workers’ salaries, which is known as “cabutan.” Women must pay for various pre-departure expenses, such as obtaining passports, acquiring visas and completing other paperwork, language training, and learning skills required to operate equipment and appliances. Agencies list salaries, but they can easily structure the system so that women never actually get paid that much. Agencies pay the up-front fees and then take the costs out of workers’ paychecks. Agencies may also take money for vague “recruitment fees.” They decide whether to apply interest and how much “interest” to charge the workers. As a consequence, the size of the actual paycheck is often much less than the original listed salary would indicate. In many cases, workers only discover this after they have already begun working abroad and start receiving their paychecks. Although workers technically have a legal right (“de jure”) to take the agency to court, agencies know they will never actually do so (“de facto”) and the employers know this too.

In the privacy of the home, employers have the freedom to treat employees as they see fit. In nations with traditions of slavery, employers sometimes refer to their works as “slaves.” Some even make the workers work 20-hour days with no days off. Many give workers tasks that simply require 10-20 hours a day to finish. Working over loaded is among issue raised by most
women (n=18) from Bondan whereas few other (n=2) did not experience it as their employers hired some workers handling domestic tasks.

Within the home, the worker’s responsibilities may include taking care of young children day and night and also caring for elderly family members (which might also entail night time duties), as mentioned by some women (n=5) from Bondan. Similarly, some other studies confirm that sometimes the workers’ duties require working outside the home - at the family business or other places, and sometimes workers are forced to work in the homes of other family members (Arnando, 2002; Heyzer et al., 2006).

The worst kinds of abuse involve various types of aggression: verbal, physical, psychological, and sexual. Some women (n=4) reported continually being spoken to disrespectfully. Human Rights Watch (2014) cited cases where employers shouted, swore, used words like ‘idiot’, ‘animal’, and ‘dog’, threw clothes at workers, and slapped or hit them. Many women from Bondan described how their employers treated them like animals and referred to them as slaves.

Another type of slavery is being child domestic worker (Androff, 2010), which possibly happen by falsification age of the potential domestic worker. At this point, most participants (n=12) living at Bondan village migrated at the first time at under age as required by the government (below 18 years old). Such condition contributed to capabilities of the workers to adapt with new work circumstances.

Furthermore, some studies confirm that there exists a perception that domestic work is dirty, difficult, and dark work (Silvey, 2004; Varia, 2008, Sumadi et al., 2007). These three points are also reflected in stories from women in Bondan, which described lack of facilities, overwork, and being abused when laboring abroad. Nevertheless, most women still remained
committed to finishing their work contracts, although a few of them (n=2) decided to escape from their employers’ homes due to physical abuse. The next section takes a closer look at the risk of sexual abuse facing domestic workers.

**Sexual abuse is a serious problem.** Domestic workers live in conditions of intense personal intimacy with their employers and have no way to protect themselves, or prosecute offenders, in cases of sexual harassment, abuse, and rape. Women from Bondan frequently described experiences of sexual abuse and harassment. Male employers and their sons groped them or tried to seduce them. Pitoyo (2005) describes different degrees of abuse: (1) verbal abuse, including attempts to seduce workers; (2) physical abuse, such as kissing or touching a woman’s private parts, and (3) requests for sexual intercourse. These requests, whether or not the worker complies, are usually followed by physical abuse such as beating, hitting, kicking, choking, and hair pulling (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Solidaritas & Perempuan, 2015).

Some studies show that domestic workers have very different ways of coping with physical or sexual abuse. Some women try to escape by smashing windows or walls or by jumping out of windows in apartment buildings (Arnado, 2002; Irianto, 2008; Migrant Care, 2011). In contrast, most women (n=17) in Bondan mentioned praying to God as the most common means of coping with such unexpected work experiences. Prayer was seen as appropriate given their isolation in employers’ homes. Some women said that running to friend’s home was another means to escape from serious abusive situation. Workers resorted to this solution until they could find a way to meet with recruitment agencies or obtain work elsewhere.

The empowerment perspective in social work highlights the importance of resilience. Resilience refers to a person's capacity to handle difficulties, to adjust conditions, and to respond to demands and pressure without experiencing negative effects (Grant & Kinman, 2014; Luther,
et al., 2011). Programs and services must develop the resilience of domestic workers, and ensure that they have access to good support systems involving families, friends, agencies, and government’s representatives.

Applying relational empowerment theory can enhance domestic workers’ resilience and capacity for collective action (Christens, 2012a), so that they can gain greater control over their lives, and so they can gain a critical understanding of the cognitive-behavioral and social-political structures which negatively affect their lives (Breton, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995).

Women are encouraged to develop their abilities to work for social change through strategic organizations devoted to improving the life of transnational domestic workers.

**The benefits of transnational domestic work.** Many different actors reap benefits from transnational domestic work. At the micro level, there are benefits for workers, their families, and employers. At the mezzo level, there are benefits for the local communities from which workers originate and for the institutions that manage (or are otherwise involved in) transnational domestic work. At the macro level, both sending and receiving countries gain various benefits from a massive flow of migrant workers. There are a variety of benefits that different actors receive from transnational domestic work, which is discussed below.

At the micro level, transnational domestic work has a positive impact on improving workers’ economic status and social position within their home communities (Hugo, 1995; Raharto, 2002; Varia, 2010). As indicated previously, women from Bondan asserted that with cooperation from their families, they could build a new home that would serve as a symbol of their success. Thongudai (1982) states that in Thailand, having a home represents the most secure form of investment for the migrant domestic workers.
Another benefit at the micro level is that working overseas potentially increases domestic workers’ knowledge of other cultures and languages as they meet and socialize with different people. Families in the host countries also gain various benefits from transnational domestic work. In Saudi Arabia, hiring a domestic worker is a sign of prestige, and it can increase a family’s social status (Esim & Smith, 2004; Heyzer, et al., 2006; Raharto, 2002).

Sending countries also reap benefits from the business of transnational domestic work. The National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI) reported that from January to July 2012, the number of money transfers (remittances) from Indonesian migrant workers abroad reached $3.9 billion (US dollars). By the end of the year the number reached $6.8 billion (US dollars). The amount of remittances sent by migrant workers in July 2012 from Malaysia was as much as $1.3 billion (US dollars), followed by Saudi Arabia with $1.1 billion (US dollars).

Of the 512,168 Indonesian migrant workers stationed abroad in 2013, there were 235,179 men and 276,998 women, with the women primarily employed as domestic workers. BNP2TKI (National Body for Placement and Protection of Indonesian migrant workers) reported that in 2013, the amount of money sent by migrant workers to their families was huge, reaching US $7.4 billion or around Rp88 trillion. Women must also pay service fees to send remittances, which results in financial gains to both the sending and receiving countries.

The transnational domestic work industry also contributes to increased income for travel agencies, health clinics, health insurance companies, banks, and other business ventures. Such businesses significantly contribute to the economic sector of both sending and receiving countries. Additionally, the transnational domestic work business helps the receiving country by
supplying cheap labor. This allows governments to reduce welfare expenditures that would otherwise assist working families meet their needs, as the families can pay for things themselves (Esim & Smith, 2004; Heyzer, et al., 2006; Yeoh & Annadurai, 2008).

Considering the advantages that the transnational domestic work business provides to sending and receiving countries, health and savings systems should be created to ensure the protection of workers’ rights. As the participants from Bondan suggested, sponsors and agents should be more responsible to workers before, during and after work overseas. In order to increase sending and receiving countries’ attention and responsibilities, international conventions and protocols should be ratified and implemented by both countries without any excuses.

To sum up, transnational domestic work produces benefits for both the sending and receiving countries, the private sector, and other stakeholders, while offering more modest benefits to female workers and their families. For this reason, sending and receiving countries strive to improve their relations and facilitate transnational domestic work. On the other hand, it appears that many female workers, while working for a better future, are ultimately sacrificing themselves by working in abusive conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the lives of future domestic workers through measures which further protect and empower them. The next section discusses measures of this type.

**Section (III): Protecting and Empowering Transnational Domestic Workers**

This section offers three general recommendations for further protecting and empowering transnational domestic workers. The point of empowering individual and family depicts from the interviews with the women from Bondan village. These recommendations are relevant to social work interventions at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. They include: 1) developing
individual capabilities, 2) empowering families and communities, and 3) improving partnerships between sending and receiving countries. These partnerships should aim to enhance legal protections for migrant domestic workers at the local, national, and international levels, while improving institutional and organizational responsibilities and professionalism.

**Developing the individual capabilities of domestic workers.** Efforts to protect and empower migrant domestic workers must begin in the sending country. As mentioned by participants from Bondan, workers should be provided with a comprehensive training program that not only imparts the necessary knowledge and skills, but also does not require women to pay additional fees for training before leaving for employment abroad.

Moreover, providing training and a pre-departure orientation would significantly aid in developing domestic workers’ capabilities. To the extent that resources are a concern, some studies suggest that a placement test should be given prior to the training session. The test can be used to decide what training level a prospective migrant domestic worker should enroll in and the length and the level of training needed to cope with daily work issues (Azmy, 2012; Irianto, 2011; Varia, 2008).

The ability of the workers to understand, anticipate and adapt to unexpected circumstances is one goal of the human capabilities approach, which has relevance to the domestic work context. To further this goal, training sessions should offer information on the law (especially as related to agencies and employers), on working conditions, on workers’ rights and responsibilities, and on where to seek assistance in cases of difficulty (Orange et al., 2012; Heyzer et al., 2006; Piper, 2005; Satterhwaite, 2014). According to Briones (2008), efforts that aim to protect the domestic workers’ livelihoods create opportunities to develop capabilities for securing the worker’s rights.
In terms of placement and signing the contract, women from Bondan suggested that they should be allowed to choose the country of work. It is also necessary that they fully understand all provisions in the contract without other people’s influence or manipulation. Additionally, the ILO (2009) recommends that migrant workers be provided with a legal contract that specifically addresses the need for a safe and healthy working environment.

Efforts must also be made to empower and support migrant domestic workers in facing challenges once they return to their own communities. Women from Bondan village asserted that the largest challenges they face upon return are financial issues, especially unpaid debt or the accrual of new debt. The women suggested that government bodies and other institutions concerned with transnational domestic work should assist returning workers with financial issues by providing them with knowledge, skills, and funds for opening new businesses. Ideas of this sort are promoted in recent work on entrepreneurial studies.

Community economic development (CED) programs might be a viable solution for the financial issues that former workers experience when they return home. Currently, Indonesia’s Ministry of Manpower offers programs on financial education, banking for business, People's Business Credit (KUR), remittances, and empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers. These programs involve inter-ministries and agencies (BNP2TKI, 2013; Kemenaker, 2017). Other Ministries distribute microcredit loans to help needy individuals or families to access capital (e.g., Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance).

At the grass-roots level, NGO-based economic empowerment programs focused on entrepreneurship and distributing microcredit loans assist former migrant domestic workers in establishing or developing businesses. There is emphasis placed on collective commitment to the programs and responsibility for achieving collective success (Tandos, 2017). These CED
programs involve strategic stakeholders, particularly women who decide to stop working abroad and establish their own businesses at home.

Such CED programs could provide funds for women to borrow and help them develop knowledge on entrepreneurship and small business management. Programs could also strategically develop women’s leadership and teamwork skills, requiring them to support one another. Christens et al. (2012) argue that a sense of collectivism improves women’s participation in collaborative community settings – possibly producing broader social and political change. This model of economic empowerment might be used with others involved in transnational domestic work, whether from Bondan or other places in Indonesia.

Thus, enhancing women’s capabilities through a community economic development program would provide women with capital to establish their own businesses. Moreover, learning how to run a small business or home-based industry would serve to empower domestic worker groups. Such programs could support women as they strive to continue financially contributing to their families.

Former female migrant domestic workers might also be encouraged to reflect on their experiences and to share their successes with others. This could bring positive change to themselves, their groups, and the whole community. Additionally, women could enhance their capabilities by creating unions (Paguyuban). These community-based organizations, would help them channel their voices and interests (Dominelli, 2000, 2002). A human capabilities approach also suggests that domestic workers’ unions should have integrated programs that help improve their members’ capabilities. These programs could promote development of language skills and work skills, and encourage workers to share and learn from each other’s experiences. These
efforts would improve women’s personal and collective capabilities and increase their access to assets, resources, and support systems.

**Empowering the family and community.** Relationships with husbands and families are another major challenge for returning migrant domestic workers. Therefore, efforts should be made to change local patriarchal values. Even so, women from Bondan said that their families had a significant role in cultivating their resilience in facing daily problems.

Applying the human capabilities approach and the empowerment perspective in relation to transnational domestic workers suggests that women should be given opportunities to develop their potential, to make decisions about their own lives, and to support one another. Social arrangements and assumptions that primarily serve the interests of men should be altered. Additionally, a feminist perspective suggests that women should use their financial contributions to demand redistribution of power within the family structure in accordance with goals of equality and justice (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Hanmer & Statham, 1998). Women should also be able to make their own decisions and have their voices heard, not only because they have made financial contributions to the family, but also because they are human beings with inherent rights and dignity.

Moreover, village leaders and community figures should be involved in addressing issues faced by the women and their families. They should work together to address issues emerging throughout all the stages of transnational domestic work. They should also work together to control the recruitment process that currently harms women’s lives, particularly in terms of illegal practices on the part of agencies and employers (ILO, 2009).

With such support, women would be better able to manage remittances, use money for future investments, and address various issues when returning to families and communities. A
human capabilities approach emphasizes that importance of humans gaining control over their environments, both political and material. Transnational domestic work should provide domestic workers opportunities for exercising their natural human capabilities in the form of political and economic power. Therefore, communities and governments from both the sending and receiving countries, should ensure that women participate in creating policies and systems that are more responsive to women’s lives and needs. Furthermore, bilateral and multilateral coordination and partnership among countries should enhance the protection and empowerment of transnational domestic workers. The next section explores this idea in more detail.

**Improving partnerships between sending and receiving countries.** Lack of adequate regulation and monitoring in the ‘informal’ business sector of transnational domestic work leads to inadequate protection of workers’ rights, extreme discrimination, and different degrees of humiliation and oppression. Sending and receiving countries have maintained the systems underlying this highly profitable business even though it victimizes countless women. They are often raped, beaten, and abused leading to great trauma (Pitoyo, 2009; Silvey, 2004; Solidaritas Perempuan, 2014).

Therefore, sending and receiving countries must cooperate to address the dangers associated with transnational domestic work. Their combined efforts have the potential to significantly improve the health and safety of the women while they are working overseas. The following discussion offers suggestions for enhancing the coordination and partnerships between governments, with a focus on managing the recruitment processes and addressing issues faced by women while working overseas.

The first stage of transnational domestic work is the recruitment process. This process is conducted in both the sending and receiving countries, and it involves recruitment agents
working in both countries (Heyzer et al., 2006; Varia 2008). The mechanism of supply and demand requires bilateral coordination and partnership between actors in both the sending and receiving countries (Esim & Smith, 2004; Heyzer et al., 2006; ILO 2006, 2009). According to the ILO (2009), sending countries should cooperate with receiving countries to oversee implementation of the employment contract. Agents in the receiving country should work together with all stakeholders to provide sufficient information about all aspects of migrant work, such as any fees required to obtain the job, the migration process, and the actual terms and conditions of working in the receiving country.

However, these suggestions have not yet been fully implemented. Cooperation among governmental institutions in Indonesia has not effectively ensured a system of exporting labor that respects human rights (Solidaritas Perempuan, 2015). As a result, women’s rights are often violated. Regarding their victimization by irresponsible sponsors and unscrupulous private recruitment agents, many women from Bondan suggested that there should be strict punishment for parties who violate the rights of the migrant domestic workers. The women suggested that the punishment might take the form of legal penalties including closing their offices.

The next issue with the current systems (or lack of systems) between countries is related to the employment contract. The employment contract is useless when the receiving countries are reluctant to enforce its provisions. The failure of receiving countries to provide adequate regulation is reflected in the fact that most agreements are made by foreign agents and tend to serve the interests of employers (Heyzer, 2006; Hugo, 1995; Raharto, 2002; Sukamdi et al., 2007; Yazid, 2008). Lack of contract enforcement by the receiving country, as well as the self-serving interests of foreign employers and their agents, exacerbate the potential for abuse and victimization of migrant domestic workers.
However, there also exist some positive examples of cooperation, as some countries have made significant efforts to improve protections for domestic workers. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, domestic workers can complain to the Labor Court if their employers do not pay their salaries. The Court can then order their employers to pay the workers’ salaries. If the employers do not do so, they can be sent to jail (Anggraeni, 2006). This is a good example of how the government of a sending country can enhance coordination and cooperation with the receiving country to empower their workers and ensure their workers’ rights are protected.

A further issue related to empowerment concerns policies and programs available for domestic workers. Efforts to improve policies and programs – in all stages of transnational domestic work – should take into account women’s voices and stories, respond to their needs and interests, and engage them in decisions about their lives (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Hanmer & Statham, 1998). Listening to and understanding domestic workers’ aspirations sheds light on problems and helps produce adequate solutions.

Agents in both the sending and receiving countries should be required to write contracts that explain worker’s rights, as this could minimize certain risks (ILO, 2009). Additionally, it is necessary to facilitate dialogue between women who have worked overseas and those new to the profession in order to empower all involved. From a feminist perspective, such a conversation would be most effective if women are encouraged to share their experiences, including the kinds of oppression they have endured (Howe, 2009). Moreover, collaboration and partnership among all players in the transnational domestic work business (state, private sector, and workers) could enhance protections and increase empowerment for migrant domestic workers.

**Enhancing collaboration among other stakeholders.** Addressing the multiple issues faced by transnational domestic workers requires collaboration and partnership among
stakeholders. In this section, attention is given to the roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia and in destination countries, in addressing violations of migrant workers’ rights. Standing on the side of workers is a crucial step in improving policies, programs and services.

Implementing the social welfare value of social justice is necessary to eliminate discrimination, recognize diversity, enhance accessibility to resources, challenge unjust policies and practices, and develop the solidarity needed to tackle stigmatization and social exclusion (BASW, 2012). Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources as well as equality of opportunity and meaningful participation in decision-making for all people (NASW, 2008). The value of social justice needs to be implemented in improving the effectiveness and sustainability of policies, programs and services available for women starting in the early stage of working domestically overseas.

At the first level of intervention, prevention programs should help prospective workers anticipate risks they may face, and inform them about how to protect their rights (Azmy, 2012; BNP2TKI, 2014; Silvey, 2003). According to Dominelli (2002), awareness-raising programs and public campaigns involving all stakeholders in transnational domestic work may provide alternative ways to empower women and communities.

Such programs could tackle the stereotype of domestic work being a part of the “3D” sector (difficult, dirty and dangerous) (Azmy, 2012; Piper, 2004; Varia, 2010). An effort to reform the migrant labor system could ensure that migrant workers have “decent work”. In the ILO’s (2006) terms, this means “productive work” with conditions of freedom, equity, security, and dignity.
As mentioned previously, faith-based organizations (FBOs) located in Malaysia, Singapore, and Lebanon provide shelters for runaway migrant workers, provide lawyers for legal assistance, and provide healthcare and other programs to help assist workers physically and psychologically (Silvey, 2004). In Indonesia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) put great emphasis on improving the lives of female migrant workers. Migrant Care is among NGOs that work with the women, primarily by providing legal assistance and raising public awareness on the issue.

Another Islamic organization (Dompet Duafa) also has advocacy and economic empowerment programs, and works with other NGOs to help Indonesian migrant workers. For instance, the organization has worked with the Indonesian Migrant Workers’ Union to assist female workers in Hong Kong. Santos (2005) explain that, in Hong Kong, Christian organizations and NGOs play an important role in assisting migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. Another active NGO in Hong Kong is the Asian Migrant Center (AMC). With the Coalition for Migrants’ Rights (CMR), it conducts baseline research on racial and gender discrimination towards Filipino, Indonesian and Thai domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Applying an intersectionality perspective helps reveal the intersection of various forms of discrimination in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and other variables relevant to transnational domestic work (Satterthwaite, 2012). Women are not homogenous groups (Teater, 2014). Therefore, policies, programs and services should be adapted to domestic workers’ backgrounds, including their ethnicity, social class, religiosity and cultural beliefs.

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Children’s Protection has a national program called Center of Comprehensive Services for Empowering Women and
Children (P2TP2A). This program provides services to women and children who have been abused. Services are designed to further the causes of protection, justice, empowerment and rehabilitation, and to promote gender equality and justice. The P2TP2A involves communities, governmental institutions (under the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Police Department), NGOs that are concerned with gender equality and justice, the Center for Gender and Children’s Studies (existing at universities), as well as other women’s and community organizations. Services are also available for returning migrant workers who have been injured or who have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.

At the airport of Indonesia, there is a special terminal for returning migrant workers with problems such as abuse or being denied their pay while working overseas. The government is responsible for taking care of them until they reach their hometowns. Previously, this terminal was used for all returning migrant workers. However, due to extortion on the part of airport officers (through illegal charges) the policy was changed such that workers generally arrive in the same terminals as other passengers (BNP2TKI, 2014).

Serious and comprehensive efforts should be made to improve international legal protections binding upon all parties involved in this multi-billion-dollar business. The large and growing number of transnational domestic workers has brought the industry into the public spotlight. For instance, the United Nations and other international rights organizations have become increasingly aware of women’s rights and the many ways women are mistreated and abused. Such abuses are also reported more often than in the past (ILO, 2009, 2012).

The “International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families” and the “Domestic Workers Convention” were produced by ILO in 2011. These widely distributed conventions outline women’s rights and how to enforce
them. The conventions require non-discriminatory health and safety protection for domestic
workers. These developments are leading to a system of written regulations, institutions of
enforcement, and a cultural climate that actually punishes bad behavior. Furthermore, states are
required to adopt regulations, conduct inspections, and create measurements to eliminate risks
and hazards for domestic workers (Satterthwaite, 2014). Having healthy and safe workplaces has
also become a concern for participants from Bondan.

Finally, key stakeholders should be involved in all these efforts. In pursuing these efforts
using the feminist social work perspective and the human capabilities approach, it is necessary to
value domestic workers perspectives and take their experiences into account, including their
experiences prior to, during, and after working overseas. Ineffectiveness in policies, laws, and
regulations results from the absence of women’s participation and a failure to take into account
their aspirations (Azmy, 2012). This study of transnational domestic workers living in Bondan
has emphasized the voices of the women in formulating policies for protecting and empowering
women. Input from workers must be used as a basis for future improvements in policies,
programs, and services. Efforts to better the situation of domestic workers should support the
implementation of local and national laws and regulations, as well as international laws,
including ILO and UN conventions and treaties.

Section (IV): Limitations and Implications of the Present Study, and Recommendations for
Future Research

Limitations of the Study. Every kind of social science research involves problems of
bias, including social desirability bias, which makes it difficult to get accurate results (Fortune
and Reid 1999). Since social standards regulating what to say and do are almost always stricter
for women than men, studies focused on women may contain more social desirability bias than
those focused on men. In particular, results related to questions about abuse (especially sexual abuse) might be inaccurate. As indicated above, many women are not supposed to talk about such things and are socially marginalized if they do. This is generally true in Indonesia, and it also applies to women from villages like Bondan. Furthermore, these women might consider it inappropriate to discuss their relationships with husbands and other family members with a researcher. Discussing certain topics might also cause emotional trauma for the women. They have little reason to trust the researcher’s claim of anonymity and every reason to protect themselves when the consequences are so profound for their own future well-being.

To minimize problems related to social desirability bias, this study applied multiple strategies: first, each interview was conducted in a place preferred by the woman. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview and the study at any time, and they were not required to answer questions unless they wished to do so. These measures were taken to increase participant comfort. Second, in order to build trust with the participants, women were informed that all data collected would be kept confidential. Third, in order to maintain the privacy of participants interviews were conducted without the presence of other adults. Fourth, there was a follow-up session that allowed all participants to get further information on points that were not clearly explained during the initial interview. However, while all of these strategies were applied, they do not guarantee that all participants were honest in their answers, especially when asked about ‘taboo topics’, such as instances of abuse and violations of rights.

Another limitation of this study concerns the length of the interview process. To complete the interview, participants had to take time off time from work or from other responsibilities and this is a challenge for people with hourly-wage jobs or with limited means of support. Generally, the interview process took about one and a half hours for each participant. During this time
frame, most women finished all questions, although they did not answer every question in detail, especially questions related to experiences of sexual abuse.

One final limitation of note is the sample. A convenience sample was used for this study. The location of Bondan village was selected because it is home to a significant flow of migrant domestic workers. However, the flow of migration also affected participants’ availability to attend a follow-up session (two of the participants had left the village to return to work overseas).

**Directions for future research.** The major focus of this study is exploring the transnational domestic work from the perspective of women in Bondan and the six stages of transnational domestic work. Since this research focuses on Bondan, its findings may not be applicable to other populations. Nevertheless, these findings are useful as a basis for future studies.

This study used qualitative methods to explore the experiences of migrant domestic workers from Bondan. It utilized a small convenience sample and the flow of workers leaving the village could have affected who was able to participate in the study. Future studies might utilize quantitative methods and consider using more representative samples to further the process of data collection. Future studies might also involve more former migrant domestic workers who worked in other countries such as Korea, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.

In addition, future studies might pursue a more in-depth understanding of former migrant domestic workers’ experiences of abuse. It is important to expose and inform the public about all the ways domestic workers experience physical violence and sexual abuse. Future studies might use participatory action research for a more extensive time period to prepare, engage with, and listen to women’s stories. Participatory action research could both help to better understand the
relevant issues and bring women together to work towards common goals such as establishing labor unions and organizing community efforts to fundamentally reform the transnational domestic work industry.

Finally, future studies should explore factors affecting transnational domestic workers by researching other cultures and ethnicities. Participants in this study were from the Sundanese ethnic group and were predominantly Muslim. Religious concerns among the participants influenced their decisions in choosing the destination country of work. Future studies should involve other religious groups in Indonesia, and explore how other religions affect women’s choice of destination countries and work experiences.

**Implications of the study for social welfare policies and practices.** The findings of this study have implications for social welfare policies and social work practices. The main implications are for Indonesian communities, particularly the population of transnational domestic workers in the Indramayu district of the Province of West Java. While specifically focused on Indonesian communities, the implications may also be relevant to other countries. A variety of social welfare policy and practice implications are outlined below.

The first implication concerns improving international legal protections for migrant workers by involving multiple actors linked to the transnational domestic work, including governments, institutions and organizations, the private sector, and the workers. Irianto (2008) explains that the Indonesian government currently has little control over the practice of sponsors or brokerage. The government seems to realize that brokerage creates employment for many unemployed citizens and therefore make no serious endeavor to fight the practice.

At the international level, the United Nations and the ILO have responded with conventions and recommendations that aim to protect the rights of migrant workers, particularly
domestic workers (Heyzer et al., 2006; ILO, 2013). These include the UN “International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.” However, such legal efforts will only be effective when both sending and receiving countries sign or ratify the relevant treaties and work to effectively enforce them. According to Varia (2007), receiving countries have been particularly slow in ratifying these conventions and have used their bargaining power to negotiate bilateral labor agreements that mostly avoid granting human rights protections.

Therefore, it is necessary for both sending and receiving countries to follow the ILO’s guidelines and the UN conventions. They must formulate and implement national laws and policies focused on the protection of migrant workers (Heyzer et al., 2006; ILO, 2009). The ratification of conventions requires commitment from both countries in order to implement the provisions, systems, and mechanisms that effectively protect and empower foreign domestic workers and their families.

The second implication concerns increasing enforcement of legal protections for Indonesian migrant domestic workers through implementation of Law No. 39 of 2004, which introduces protections for workers’ rights and regulates the placement of migrant domestic workers. The law also aims to improve the implementation of existing laws. Local governments must be more proactive and responsive to the full range of issues related to transnational domestic work, particularly issues related to illegal recruitment practices. This is where the macro and micro levels must be united. District governments and village leaders are among the key actors that directly interact with prospective and former migrant domestic workers and their families.
Partnerships and coordination with these key actors are critical for the effectiveness of policies, programs, and services. Prior social work research on women involved in transnational domestic work describes a large network of people involved in the industry and shows the possible abuse of power at every level, including in relations with beneficiaries, workers, and other practitioners (Head, 2008). Because women involved in transnational domestic work have an understanding of the entire system, they are best positioned to make recommendations about which aspects of the system are most in need of reform, and how to effectively implement such reforms (McDonald, 2003). Once reforms are implemented, ongoing social research should document whether these reforms have improved the industry as a whole, and what new recommendations should be made in light of the changed situation. Human social networks are continually changing, sometimes in ways that undermine natural capacities and sometimes in ways that enhance them. Human beings must continually be engaged in creating and reforming their individual lives and their collective life. Wealthy and powerful actors who want to bring about change should consult social workers with relevant expertise in evolving human social networks.

Furthermore, applying the perspective of feminist social work suggests that any efforts made in the form of polices, programs, and services should support the domestic workers so that they can gain control over managing their lives, challenge patriarchal arrangements, and evaluate state interventions (Dominelli, 2002; Howe 2009). The formation of unions organized and run by former domestic workers would empower them to recognize what needs to be changed and to develop strategies for bringing about these changes. Such activities require the use of higher-order capabilities. Women will recognize that they have such capabilities when they exercise them. This, in turn, will give them greater awareness of political and economic centers of power.
and may motivate them to start businesses or run for public office, beginning at the local level (Nussbaum, 2000). Women from Bondan wanted the Indonesian Embassy or Consulate to get involved in these issues. They now know about government institutions that exist to protect them, but they have not yet found a way to present their grievances to the government and hold officials accountable.

Furthermore, the implementation of laws should engage persons and institutions from receiving countries. Since these are wealthy nations, they have a responsibility to provide education. They should be required by law to educate their migrant workers about their rights, to improve workers’ knowledge and skills, and to assist them in all processes related to transnational work. For instance, the Embassy of the Philippines in the United Arab Emirates is considered the most active in improving the life of its domestic workers by working with recruiting agencies, the immigration office, and the workers themselves (Sabban, 2004).

Although there are many complaints surrounding financial and administrative limitations (Heyzer et al., 2006), representatives from the sending countries should continue to keep improving their cooperation and coordination with the receiving countries. It is always important to keep in mind that an engaged community at the local level is essential for pursuing reform. This is because such a community can gather the data necessary for discovering problems and formulating recommendations. The power relationship between governments, agents, employers, and domestic workers should be collaborative in nature (Howe, 2009) and should specifically emphasize the empowerment of workers.

The third implication concerns social welfare practices, focusing on issues raised by women from Bondan. Programs and services need to be improved to help domestic workers in all aspects of the enterprise. The women themselves should be able to tell their stories or discuss
what needs to be done so that those in power have a good idea of what is happening now and how that should and can change in the future. Once they have the data, social workers can be advocates for citizens by working with professionals in business and government. The following suggestions are gleaned from the interviews with women from Bondan. The suggestions are organized to enhance and expand thinking on the complexities of relevant issues, and they also highlight specific opportunities for social workers in the field.

The ‘cabutan’ system (taking money from the domestic workers’ monthly salaries) should be eliminated. This could be done by ensuring that the main stakeholders (i.e., workers, agents, employers) all fully understand the work contract. Social workers can play an integral role in this process by providing education within institutions and organizations (in both sending and receiving countries) that have the capacity to address the ‘cabutan’ system. Social workers could assist women so that they have a full understanding of their rights as articulated in the work contract. Social workers could also demand that agents better explain, or even discontinue, the ‘cabutan’ system.

There should be a rating system for recruiting agencies. Those who want a higher rating must show government officials what they do at every stage. This includes their contracts, their methods of explaining the contracts, their pre-departure classes, their methods for overseeing placement, arrival, return, and all other issues. Agencies would be obliged to document what they do at every stage, and they should be regularly monitored/inspected. Agencies should know that meeting these demands can be streamlined so as not to take a long time and that the long-term benefits will far outweigh the costs. As an agency grows and becomes more accountable, acquiring and preserving a reputation for fairness and professionalism is likely to rapidly increase interest and inquiries, ultimately leading to a larger market share. The rating system
should include feedback from workers. Workers know exactly how they are treated. If businesses are required to have workers describe their experiences, and what the agency did or did not do to make their experiences positive, a business with a good reputation will likely gain a significant competitive advantage in the market over time.

Social workers could provide crisis response services to women in emergency situations, such as when they experience some form of abuse by employers. In addition, legal assistance or advocacy is urgently needed, especially for domestic workers who are accused of criminal acts. Difficult conditions are further exacerbated when women are forced to go to court in the receiving country without assistance from lawyers or without the ability to notify the government of the sending country. At this point, social workers in receiving countries should work with all related parties to provide legal assistance to women and thereby help them secure their rights as workers. Those in the business should be fully informed about all potential areas for abuse. There are incentives for employers to accuse employees of crimes even when none have been committed, and conversely for employees to make accusations against their employers. In conditions of intimacy, it is hard to find witnesses (especially objective witnesses), but those in the business should persist in creating a positive experience for their workers. The best businesses will earn the best reputations over time.

Domestic workers too often tend to live in isolation and are not allowed to socialize with others. Families who are considering hiring a worker should be told that they must provide leisure time for their workers and the opportunities to socialize. This must include membership in a union branch, where they should be taken for meetings. This is the only way to ensure some sort of accountability. Honest families will embrace this aspect of the system and might even set up a union or an unofficial group of workers who will function as a union. They should want to
listen to collective grievances and address them. If women are granted anonymity when reporting to the group, families can get feedback about all the women in the group, talk to other employers, and make necessary changes. Social workers can serve as facilitators for such activities. Social workers can work with representatives from both governments (sending and receiving countries) and other stakeholders in transnational domestic work to change policies and improve the programs and services available to domestic workers. For instance, using their international connections, social workers can bring governmental attention to issues facing transnational domestic workers. This can be accomplished through strategic campaigns that invite public attention to specific issues, thus affecting policy implementation and improvement in both countries.

How the families of transnational domestic workers fare in their absence is another area of concern for social workers. Providing alternative options for obtaining individual and family income could reduce both women’s pressure to work and their families’ financial challenges when they are actively working overseas. The major reason domestic workers leave and work overseas is to financially support their families. This study found that most women from Bondan mentioned the need for programs and services in their village to empower themselves and assist them in improving the economic condition of their families. Some of their suggestions included various forms of training for capacity building and micro-credit programs involving the women as the main actors. A micro-credit program could be provided to women in need so they will not have to borrow money from a loan shark (tengkulak), or a person who lends money with excessive interest rates. Social workers and other service providers could help provide programs for improving women’s knowledge and skills to assist them in opening a new business or home-based industry, as this was a goal suggested by most participants.
Programs to develop women’s leadership skills and teamwork building are also important in furthering the economic empowerment of women. They could work individually or in a team to run a business. Once women are economically able to support their families while remaining in their home country, they may reconsider how many times they are willing to work overseas, particularly when working overseas comes with a lack of protection and increased risks.

Social workers employed by NGOs can engage in advocacy campaigns for the implementation of policies related to transnational domestic work, consciousness raising programs, and also help migrant workers cope with abusive and exploitative work places (Anggreini, 2005; Hugo, 2000; Yazid, 2008). TNGO input is critical as these organizations work directly with domestic workers by providing assistance and other types of services, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Another powerful voice for change is the media. The media can bring attention to issues of concern by covering public hearings at the national or local level, by examining government reports, and by publicizing reports from other groups (O’Connor & Netting, 2011). The media has a significant role in inviting both the public and the government to focus attention on the issue of transnational domestic work. In Indonesia, the media could raise public awareness regarding domestic workers who experience physical abuse when working abroad. Social workers could cooperate with the media to raise people’s awareness. To be successful, all stakeholders (e.g. governments, community leaders, families) should be involved in learning about women’s perspectives on implementing laws and policies. Valuing female domestic workers’ participation and channeling their voices can improve the effectiveness of policies, programs, and services, as these women are the main actors in transnational domestic work.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of female migrant domestic workers from Bondan village has found that the transnational domestic work business needs to change, starting from the first stage of the recruitment process to the last stage wherein women return home. To bring about effective change, those involved must have a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the business.

Speaking with women directly and asking them about their opinions is the best way of letting them know that they are not pawns in the games elite actors play, and that their experiences count and can lead to change. These women deserve to be protected from abuse and treated humanely. Businesses and governments are responsible for enforcing the laws. The women must be supported in their efforts to speak out and organize. The theoretical frameworks of the capabilities approach, intersectionality, empowerment, and feminist social work aid in analysis of the relevant problems and suggest ways of changing policies, and improving programs and services.

Qualitative methods were used to gather detailed data about how transnational domestic work affects individual women’s lives. It was also a way for women to raise their voices and share their thoughts about the issues they experience while doing this work. The study offered an analysis of the push, pull, stay, and network factors which shape women’s decisions to migrate and work abroad. These factors are intertwined with social, economic, educational, and political aspects of life in the sending country, which push women to participate in transnational domestic work.

The study provided a comprehensive analysis of the sequence of events associated with transnational domestic work, including those which take place before departure, while working abroad, and after returning home. As noted above, these events can be divided into six key
stages: (1) recruitment and placement (2) pre-departure training (3) signing the employment contract and the migration process (4) working overseas (5) finishing the contract and travelling back home, and (6) reunification with families and the community. Challenges for workers begin at the first stage of the recruitment process. By involving sponsors that have close relationships with women, their families, and their communities, it is possible to bring about more accountability and positive change.

From the perspective of women from Bondan, the work contracts they had with agencies from the sending and receiving countries reveal a contradiction between promises and realities. At the first stage of transnational domestic work, recruiters may easily take advantage of people and make profits from exploitation. Governmental and private agencies often lack the resources necessary to develop systems with effective laws, which utilize adequate enforcement measures and severe punishments.

The pre-departure training program is the second stage. Women’s living conditions at the training center were not very different from what they would experience in their overseas workplaces. At the center, facilities and services, such as food and sleeping accommodations are insufficient. Many women stated that the knowledge and skills they received during training were not adequate to prepare them for what they were expected to do when they arrived. Once abroad, they were isolated and therefore vulnerable to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse.

After getting calls from overseas agents about the availability of prospective employers and finishing all immigration documents, women were ready to leave to go abroad. While overseas, all documents were kept by employers in order to prevent workers from leaving or running away. This situation forced the women to stay, even though they often experienced violations and abuse. The main way women tried to overcome these issues was to pray and to use
other self-coping strategies. If the women could no longer work, they usually escaped with the help of their friends or ran to the Indonesian Embassy or Consulate.

When their employment contracts finished, women prepared to return back to their home country with the support of their employers. At this stage, women were also exploited and abused. Employers took their money at will. Women from Bondon had many recommendations for change based on their experiences. By coming together and sharing their stories, they realized that the problems were not due to their personal inadequacies, but stem from the situation. They wanted the situation changed.

This study has emphasized the need for social work interventions at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. Individual migrant domestic workers, with support from advocates and social workers, should take the lead in initiating the first interventions. Women participating in transnational domestic work are the main actors in this enterprise. As is true for all business enterprises, their capabilities should be developed and their rights should be protected so that they can live and work in healthy and safe environments.

Recommendations proposed by the workers should be integrated into future efforts to change and improve available programs and services. Individuals and communities should be aware that they need to work together to protect their families, friends and neighbors. With assistance from social workers and others, these individuals can realize that they have the power to improve the quality of their own lives and the lives of their communities. Communities also need to recognize that they have power as members of the supply side of the business exchange to influence the way business is conducted. Leaders and community members should work together to make real changes to the system, because such efforts can make a significant
difference. Women and their communities must know that the future can be much better for them. They have power in this growing industry, with its high demand for domestic workers.

Individuals will be motivated to take charge of their communities for the well-being of their families, friends, and fellow citizens. It is not overly difficult or overly idealistic to explain to them that they would derive a great benefit from gaining control over the process by which women in their communities are recruited and employed. Changes at the community level could also improve relationships between nations, leading to less animosity and more cooperation.

All efforts to improve the condition of migrant domestic workers should be systematically coordinated at the local, national, and international levels. The laws of each nation should be brought in harmony with international laws. Countries should come up with recommendations for better protections, services, empowerment programs, systems, and forms of cooperation. These efforts should involve local institutions, NGOs, and other actors linked to the transnational domestic work business. These actors should be encouraged to commit themselves to creating a better life for migrant domestic workers and their families. Anyone committed to “helping” female domestic workers must strive both to better protect their rights and better develop their capabilities. Through these efforts women can be put in a position to achieve their individual goals and dreams within a safe and healthy environment of their choosing.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questionnaires for female migrant domestic workers

1. Demographic Questionnaire

In the following questions, you are asked to write an answer or check one of the choices.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Where do you originally come from? ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Your age: .........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is your religion affiliation?: ................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is your relationship status?:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other .........................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What is your highest level of completed education?:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Junior High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Senior high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>At what age did you begin domestic work in someone else’s home?:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>..................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What was your last country of work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Abu Dhabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How much was your monthly salary?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Rp.1.000.000 - Rp.2.000.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Rp.2.100.000 - Rp.3.000.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Rp.3.100.000 – Rp.4.000.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Rp.4.100.000 – Rp.5.000.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other ………………………..</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. How long (in years) have you been working as a foreign domestic worker?:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>………………….</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. How many country/ies have you worked overseas?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…………………………………………………………………………………</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are they? …………………………………………………………………………………</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. In-depth questions

Introduction

The goal of this interview is to explore the narrative life of female migrant domestic workers living in Indramayu Regency of West Java, Indonesia. The main objective is to investigate the perspective of the women and other stakeholders of transnational domestic work. The results will be used to improve the welfare system of transnational domestic workers through policy and practice changes. You are invited to participate in a ninety minute to two-hour face-to-face interview. With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped. Your opinion will contribute invaluable information in addressing many of the issues of transitional domestic work. Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You can choose to stop at any time. Your responses will be confidential and no individual besides me will have access to your identity. If you have questions during the interview process, please feel free to ask. I appreciate your participation in answering the questions.

Factors affecting decision to work overseas

- Who recruited you to be a migrant domestic worker?
- Why did you decide to work domestically overseas?
- Does this reason/s still remain the main consideration for you to work overseas?
  - If not, how and why is it changed?
- Was the decision to work domestically overseas your own decision?
  - If not, who decided (or helped you decide)? and why?
- How long have you been working as a migrant domestic worker?
- Do you still want to continue working domestically overseas, why or why not?
- If yes, how many years more?

• How has working as a domestic worker helped you to pursue aspirations for you and your family’s future?

- If no, how has it hinder aspiration for you and your family’s future?

Personal strengths, coping strategies, and support systems

• Did you confront problems before, during, and after working overseas?

- If yes, what are your common problems?

• What did you do to address these problems? Were you successful?

• Did you need other supports and resources? Explain.

• Did you have special needs to address your specific problems?

• What did you do to address these needs? Were you successful?

• Did you need other supports and resources? Explain.

The impact of being foreign domestic workers

• In your opinion, what is/are the advantage(s) of being a migrant domestic worker?

• And what is/are disadvantages of being a migrant domestic worker?

• Tell me about the people for whom you are financially responsible:
  o Children and/or grandchildren
  o Wife or husband
  o Parents and grandparents
  o Other

• How do you use the money gained from your work?
• Did you contribute to your family life?

  If **yes**, did your contribution to your family affect your position in the family? For example, in making household decisions?

  If **no**, why does it happen?

• Did you have another ambition instead of being a migrant domestic worker?

  - If **yes**, could you please tell me about it?

  - If **no**, what has made it hard to fulfill this ambition?

**The challenges existing in the sixth stages of working overseas**

Before delivering the following questions, I will explain you briefly of what the sixth stages mean. They are the first and the second stages refer to the process before you worked abroad, the third and the fourth are your experiences of working overseas, and the fourth and the first stages explaining your experience after finishing and reuniting with your family and community.

1. **Recruitment, placement, and signing contract**

• Did an official agency or sponsor recruit you to work overseas?

  - How did you know about the agency or sponsor?

• How many times did you apply for working overseas?

  - Did you go to the same agency/sponsor, and why?

• Could you explain the procedures you followed to make a new or extension of work contract?

• Did you pay to be recruited?

  - If **yes**, how much was it?

• What documents did you need to submit to support your application?
- Did you need to re-new it during your work overseas?

- Please explain the renewal process.

• Could you explain the points included in your work contract?
  
  - If *yes*, what are the points on it?
  
  - If *no*, how did you know about the points included in your contract?
    
    Did the agency/ sponsor help you explain the points clearly?

• Does it mention your responsibilities and rights?
  
  - Do you know what are your responsibilities and rights as a worker? What are they?
  
  - Do you think the points of the contract protect your rights as a worker?
    
    - If *yes*, why do you think so?
      
      - If *no*, what should the contract include to protect your rights as a worker?

• Did you choose your destination country for work? If so, why did you choose the country?

2. *Pre-departure program*

• Did you have pre-departure preparation training?

• If so, how long did the program take?

• Tell me about what you learned from this program?
  
  - Did the program provide you sufficient knowledge and skills?

• What suggestions do you have to improve the program?

• Is there any information that you want to add?
3. Working overseas

In this first part, you are asked to provide information of your experience on health and safety in workplace when working domestically overseas. Feel free to choose either to answer the following questions orally or complete them in writing. You may choose two ways to respond questions: first, to submit the questionnaire by writing your answers maximally in three days and I will pick up the sheets; and second I will read questions for you and you answer them directly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>Health working condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Wage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  • Did your employer/s pay you on time?  
  • Is your wage the same amount as mentioned in your contract?  
    If not, how much should it be?  |
| b. Work hours |  
  • How many hours did you work overall?  
  • Did you work within your work hours?  
  • If no, how many extra hours did you usually work?  
  • Did you have sufficient time to take a rest or be relaxed?  |
| c. Time off |  
  • Did you employer give you time off for socializing or visiting your friends?,  
    and how often in a week?  |
| d. Facilities |  
  • Did your employers provide you with a proper bedroom?  
  • Did they support your daily-basic needs (meal, drink, and clothes)?  |
e. Incentives

- Did you go traveling with your employer?, and how is often in year? ............
- Did you get incentive for your extra and/or excellent work?, and how much is it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Safety working condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Verbal abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Did you understand the language used by your employer/s? .........................
- Did your employer/s ever verbally abuse you? ......................

If ‘No’ you can end this section and move to section B.

If yes, did your employer/s often talk loudly to you? .............................................
When did it happen? ........................................................................................................

- Did your employer/s communicate with you in behaviorally respectful way?

What are the main issues that often drive a conflict between you and your employer/s?

- How did you handle this conflict? .............................................................................

- Did he and/or she listen to you? ..............................................................................

b. Physical abuse

- Did your employer/s ever physically abuse you? .....................................................

If ‘No’ you can end this section and move to section C.

If yes, how often did he and/or she abuse you? ..............................................................

- What type/s of physical abuse/s did you experience?.............................................
- Did they use a tool when physically abusing you? .................................................
- What did you do when your employer beat you? ....................................................
- Did you try to contact your agency/sponsor?

If yes, how did they respond to your complaint? .........................................................
c. Sexual abuse

- Did you ever experience sexual abuse? .................................................................

- **If ‘No’ you can end this section and move to section D.**
  
  If yes, how often? .................................................................................................

- Who was/were sexually abused you?
  ..................................................................................................................................

- How did you usually do if it happens? ..............................................................

- Did you consult to your agency after it happened? ............................................

- Did the agency do anything to deal with the issue? ............................................

- What did the agency/sponsor provide to help you?
  ..................................................................................................................................

**d. If you answer NO to one or two or all of questions’ part A, B and C above, please answer the following questions:**

- What is/are factor/s that makes you never experience verbal abuse and/or physical abuse and/or sexual abuse? ..................................................................................................................
  ..................................................................................................................................

- How did you maintain your good relationship with your employer/s? ..........
  ..................................................................................................................................

b. In this second part, you also can choose to answer orally to the following questions or I will give you a written list of questions to be answered on your own:

- What is your opinion about the agency/sponsor?

- Are you satisfied with the services they provide?
  
  - If **yes**, could you tell me the reason?
  
  - If **not**, could you tell me the reason?
• Did you have other people or a support system that helped you face problems during your working overseas? If yes, please explain.

• What suggestions do you have for the agency/sponsor to create a more health and safe workplace?

4. Finishing contract

• What did you have to do after finishing your contract? In relation to immigration and others?

• Was the process of finishing the contract easy to accomplish? Why?

• Did the agency/sponsor help you to accomplish the process?
  - If yes, in what ways did they help you?
  - If no, what could they have done to help you?

• What suggestions do you have for the agency/sponsor so that they will provide better services in the future?

5. Returning home

• How did you get information about the returning home process?

• What did you need to do before going back home?

• Who arranged your transportation to reach your home?
  - How did you pay for it?

• Did you encounter problems on your way home?
  - How were the problems solved?

• What suggestions do you have for the agency/sponsor so that they will provide better services in the future?
6. Reunification with family and community

- Tell me about the process of reunification with your family?
- What worried you most when you just arrived home?
- What unexpected challenges did you face when you returned home?
- How did you solve unexpected challenges?
- Did you have someone help you during this transition time?
  - In what ways?
- What suggestions do you have for the agency/sponsor so that they will provide better services in the future?

Closing

Thank you for your time and the invaluable information you gave me for and for my study.
Appendix 2

Informed Consent

I am Rosita Tandos, a fifth year doctoral student at State University of New York (SUNY) in Albany, School of Social Welfare. I am conducting this research to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers. The main objective is to investigate the perspective of the women. The results will be used to improve the welfare system of transnational domestic work, policy and practice, and research of social welfare at national (Indonesia) and international levels. Your information is invaluable to improving the lives of transitional domestic workers and communities.

You are invited to participate in filling out questionnaires and a face-to-face interview. If you choose to participate, you will be asked some questions about your demographic data, personal knowledge and experiences as a domestic migrant worker. Your responses will be confidential and no individual besides me will access your identity. You do not have answer any questions you do not want to answer, and you can stop at any time. To thank you for your participation, I will give you with a small package of basic daily needs (sembako). I appreciate your participation.

Participant: I acknowledge that the research procedures have been clearly explained to me and I understand the purpose of the study. Any answers that I provide are based on my knowledge and/or experience, and are given voluntarily. I know that I may ask questions about the research procedures now and in the future. I have been assured that information about me will be kept confidential and that no information that discloses my personal identity will be released or published.
I agree that my individual interview interactions will be audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of the study. I understand that my participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation from the research at anytime without fear of consequences. I am aware that I have the right to speak confidentially, access the record, and have part or all of a recorded interview erased. I have been given a copy if this consent form.

I agree to be tape-recorded during the interview: ______ YES ______ NO

I have read the information, and agree to participate in this study: _____ YES _____ NO

**Researcher:** I have clearly explained the purpose and the procedures of the research. To the best of my knowledge, I certify that the participants understand the benefits and risks involved with participating in this research.

Signature of researcher: __________________________ Date __________________________

Name of researcher: **Rosita Tandos** (Student, State University of New York at Albany, School of Social Welfare).

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Phone: (0231) 481264  Mobile phone: +6281242413477

Chair of Doctoral Committee: **Dr. Loretta Pyles** (Associate Professor, State University of New York at Albany, School of Social Welfare)

Phone: +1 518-442-5152  E-mail:lpyles@albany.edu
Appendix 3

Picture of Female Migrant Domestic Workers’ home

*Photos by author.*

*Having a nice home is a symbol of success of a female migrant domestic worker. It will force her to leave and work in overseas many times till the home is finished. Currently, style of the homes in Bondan village is followed the design of traditional Javaness’ home and modern minimalized one.*