Migrant Domestic Workers: From Burma to Thailand

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Foreword

Undocumented migration flows involve millions throughout Asia with an increasing number of women and girls moving into unregulated work without rights. The Institute for Population and Social research (IPSR) at Mahidol University, Thailand has been a leader in researching the many complex and inter-related issues of cross-border and international migration. IPSR has worked with a range of policy makers and officials from various international agencies, particularly the Thai Ministry of Labour, Office of the National Security Council, International Labour Organization and International Organization for Migration. As the Thai government seeks to register undocumented migrant workers, IPSR research has provided an invaluable contribution to policy development and implementation.

This report presents the findings of research proposed and implemented by members of the Shan Women's Action Network and the Karen Women's Organization regarding girls and women who have migrated from Burma into domestic work in Thailand. The study focuses on two sites in Thailand - Chiangmai and Mae Sot - and highlights the extreme conditions and often-abusive environments in which domestic workers from Burma have been employed. Though this study cannot assume to describe the broader migrant population, it does detail the realities faced by domestic workers from Burma in Thailand and highlights the need to ensure their basic rights as citizens in Burma, as migrants and as domestic workers.

The majority of participants in this study came from ethnic minority communities in Burma and described leaving abusive political and economical conditions at home. This report focuses on the harsh conditions in which foreign domestic workers are employed and their inability to defend their most basic rights. Foreign domestic workers interviewed in this study described being expected to work on demand, without agreed upon responsibilities or a written contract delineating working hours, days off, accommodations, salaries, sick leave, care or pay. It is our hope that after reading this report, the importance of recognizing domestic work as labor will become apparent as well as the need to provide protection for both foreign and Thai domestic workers under national labor laws.

Over the past decade, IPSR has documented Burma's political problems and the consequences of mass migration of its citizens into neighboring countries. It is through the collaboration with local community leaders and researchers that IPSR has been able to provide in-depth documentation of the realities of migrant populations and actively engage the Thai government and international community on the critical issues that have emerged.

Emeritus Professor Dr. Pornchai Matangkasombut
President of Mahidol University

Preface

This research project was identified, proposed and implemented by Shan and Karen researchers who realized the lack of knowledge and even recognition of the growing number of domestic workers from Burma in Thailand. In stating their interests, the local researchers were given a small grant to develop their proposal and research methodology from the Rockefeller Foundation based in Bangkok. The research project was developed in collaboration with Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR), Mahidol University. The actual research project on "The Lives of Domestic Workers from Burma in Thailand" was then funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nation's Inter-Agency Project on Trafficking of Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-region.

This collaboration between international donors, national institutions and local community leaders has proven to be a successful model for addressing sensitive and complex issues among vulnerable populations. The local researchers were able to make direct contact with domestic workers regardless of their legal (or illegal) status, develop trust and gather deep insight into their life experiences. IPSR oversaw the research providing technical support in the research and data analysis as well as project administration and report translation and publication. The international donors remained amazingly flexible with the many obstacles and limitations the project faced during its nearly two years of implementation, analysis and publication of findings.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the support from others in the migrant community and the migrant domestic workers themselves. Many girls and women who participated in this study gave their limited and cherished free time for interviews and took calculated risks to speak to outsiders. It was the willingness and determination of many domestic workers from Burma in Thailand to speak about their lives in hopes of bringing about an improved livelihood for themselves and others.

It is the hope of all who were involved and supported this research that the findings will raise awareness about the often harsh realities of domestic workers from Burma working in Thailand, and lead to action towards ensuring their basic human rights.

Associate Professor Dr. Bencha Yoddumnern-Attig
Director
Institute for Population and Social Research
Mahidol University

Acknowledgments

This research was possible only because of the determination, flexibility and sensitivity of the research team who unfalteringly pursued efforts to contact and meet with migrant domestic workers in order to document their life experiences. This required a constant awareness of the workers' situations and an endless amount of patience in visiting them over and over again until the environment offered a safe and comfortable place and time to talk. The research team in Chiangmai included three Shan Field Researchers: Ms. Nang Kham Aung, Ms. Nang Ae Kham and Ms. Nang Kham Yard as well as Documenter Mr. Sai Harn Fha. The Mae Sot team had three Karen Field Researchers: Ms. Ma Cho Cho Aung, Ms. Nan Wha Wha Soe Thein and Ms. Nan Paw Gay, with Mr. Saw Thu Thay Cot as Documenter.

The Research team worked in partnership with the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidhol University with technical support from Dr. Kritaya Archavanitkul, Ms. Saowapak Suksinchai, Ms. Wanee Huthaphet and Ms. Thanalak Theptepa. Their guidance assured the quality of the research, analysis and recommendations as well as facilitated the translation and dissemination of the findings. Support from Ms. Aurapan Hangchangsith, Ms. Jutakarn Atithananun and Ms. Charuwan Charupum were very helpful for the project administration. Sincere thanks to Ms. Srisuman Sartsara and Dr. Simon Baker for their assistance in editing and proof reading. Dr. Bencha Yoddumner-Attig, the IPSR Director, provided her unfailing support to this project amidst all the implementing challenges.

The report was written with the patient diligence of Dr. Lisa S. Keary who worked endlessly to revise and edit the many drafts. Two Research Assistants from the University of Washington, Ms. Miriam Bensky and Mr. Colin Baynes, also made significant contributions to the data analysis and report writing (Chapter 5 and Chapter 1, respectively). In addition, Ms. Miriam Bensky worked with the research team in Thailand to review the preliminary findings and gather input for the final report.

The cooperation provided by the Shan Women's Action Network and Karen Women's Organization gave much needed input throughout the project, as well as accommodated the team's office at each site. A special thanks to Ms. Sasitorn Konjieang from SWAN's Women Crisis Support Centre Program for her support. Many others made significant contributions to the research process. Ms. Pho Htet provided not only language translation, but also much needed computer assistance and encouragement. The support from Dr. Cynthia Maung from the Mae Tao Clinic was also much appreciated. Ms. Nang Hseng Noung Lintner of the Burma Relief Centre (BRC) and Pim Koetsawang also gave much needed input and advice throughout the project.

A special thanks to the Migrant Action Programme (MAP) and the participants of the 38th Women's Exchange held on October 25, 2003 for allowing us to share our preliminary findings and giving input to the report's analysis and recommendations.

Most importantly a special thanks to the girls and women who participated in the study for offering their very precious free time and taking the risk to open up to others about their life experiences and challenges. It is our sincere hope that through their testimony there is the possibility to advocate for honoring and protecting their basic rights at home, in the work place and as they move in the world.

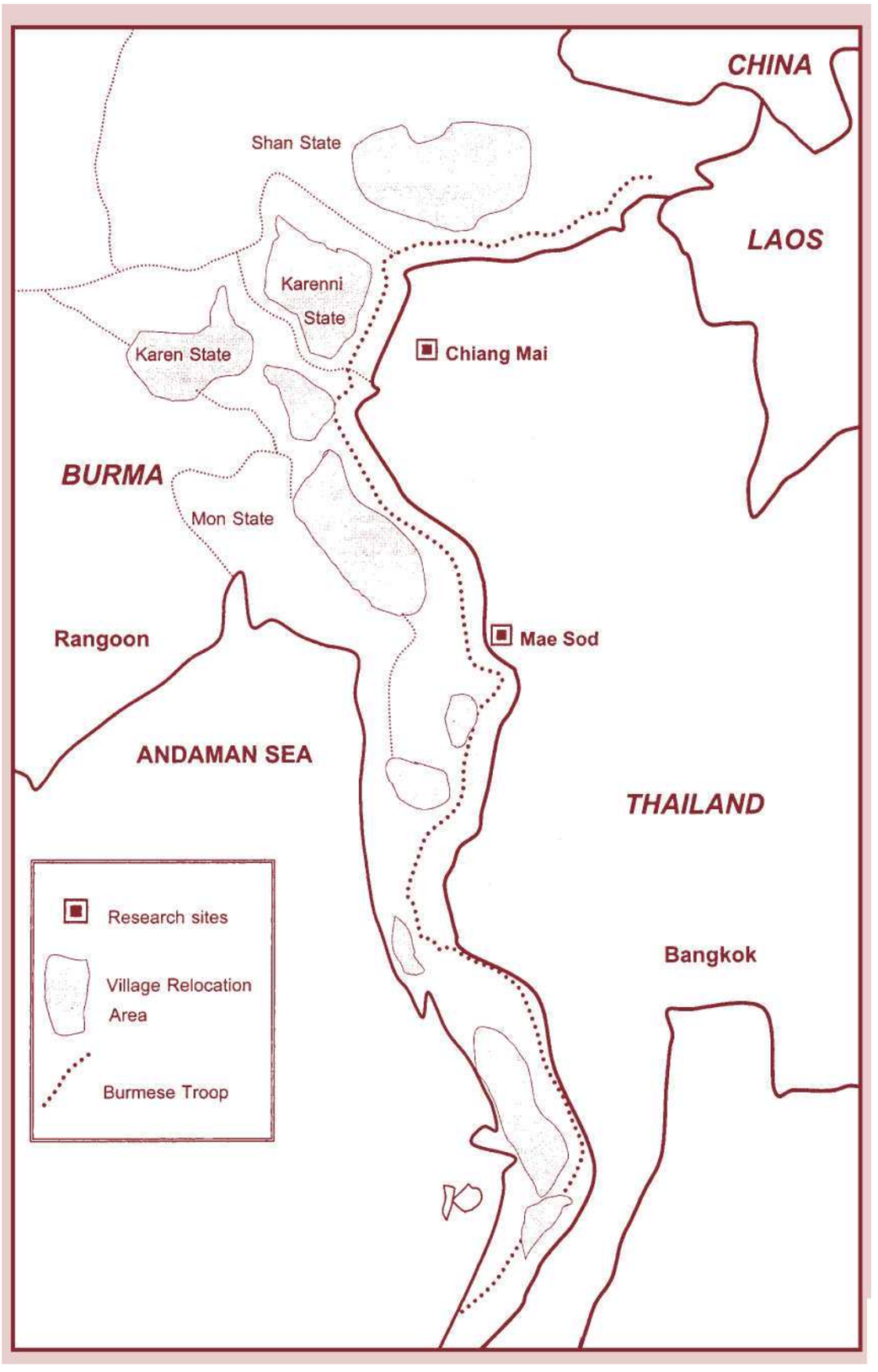
Finally, this project would not have been possible without the funding, support, flexibility and encouragement of Dr. Rosalia Sciortino, Dr. Kate Bond and others at the Rockefeller Foundation in Bangkok and Mr. Phil Marshall of the United Nations Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP).

Research team

ACRONYMS

ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRC	Burma Relief Centre
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CD	Compact Disk
GOs	Government Organizations
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPSR	Institute for Population and Social Research
KNU	Karen National Union
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
MAP	Migrant Action Programme
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NGOs	Non-Government organizations
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RCs	Research Coordinators
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SLORC	the State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council of Burma
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SSA	Shan State Army
SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIAP	United Nations Inter Agency Project
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WHO	World Health Organization

LOCATION OF RESEARCH SITES



Executive Summary

Millions of people from Burma[1] have migrated into neighboring countries over the past decade. Most have left their country in search of security and safety as a direct result of internal conflict and militarization, severe economic hardship and minority persecution. This exodus represents one of the largest migration flows in Southeast Asia. The minority people of Burma make up the majority of those dislocated as a result of Burma's State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC's) renewed commitment to eliminate ethnic militias and any support for them in minority areas through forced labor and portering, as well as forced relocation and arbitrary taxation, all of which leave the country's population, particularly the minorities, extremely vulnerable.

Fearing persecution, the vast majority of those migrating from Burma find themselves desperate to survive, obtaining work in underground and, often, illegal labor markets. The majority of those fleeing Burma migrate to neighboring Thailand, where an estimated two million people from Burma work in "3-D jobs" (dangerous, dirty and difficult), for pay well below minimum wage. While clearly in need of assistance and protection, migrants from Burma have a particularly difficult time exercising their rights in Thailand due to the Thai government's policy of denying the majority of them refugee status. Living in perpetual fear of deportation, migrants from Burma face abhorrent labor practices as a result of their illegal status, as well as the lack of standardized working conditions and protection mechanisms.

It is estimated that well over one hundred thousand females from Burma are employed as domestic workers in Thailand, though little information is available on the realities faced by these women and girls. Although there is a growing awareness of their isolation and vulnerability to labor exploitation and violence, there is little data available documenting their realities. This results in the alienation of domestic workers and perpetuates the disregard for their labor and basic rights. Consequently, neither migrants nor domestic workers (including Thai citizens) have any official means of reporting or seeking redress to the grievances or abuses they encounter in their jobs.

In September and October 2001, the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare permitted domestic workers, for the first time since 1996, to register for temporary work permits. Over 82,000 domestic workers were issued permits, with the vast majority of recipients having migrated from Burma. The Thai government's recognition of the demand for domestic labor highlights the need to advocate for regularizing such employment with standards and protection covered by both Thai and international labor laws.

The 2001 work permit registration provided an opportunity for the project team to legitimately contact this previously hidden and illegal population, of which so little is known. From November 2001 through January 2002, the migrant research team developed a proposal to examine the registration process, working conditions and experiences of

[1] The authors recognize that the official name for Burma is Myanmar, as changed by the ruling government in 1989. However, the migrants interviewed in this study referred to their country as "Burma," which the authors have acknowledged by using that reference throughout this report.

migrants from Burma employed as domestic workers in Thailand. In partnership with the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) of Mahidol University, the research team undertook an in-depth research study (including both qualitative and quantitative data tools), the findings of which are presented in this report. Funding for this project was generously provided by the Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations' Inter-Agency Project to Combat Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

It was determined that the ultimate goal of the project would be to provide information to policy makers and service providers to be used in developing appropriate interventions for migrant domestic workers in Thailand, and to offer a resource for advocating and protecting the rights of these women and girls. The research data for this study was collected through direct and participatory observations, as well as 133 in-depth interviews and a survey conducted with 528 migrant domestic workers from Burma in Mae Sot and Chiangmai, Thailand. The research team made a commitment to publish the findings in a report in an effort to give voice to the realities of domestic workers participating in the study. It was further determined that the report would be published in English, Thai and Bamar, with an executive summary of the report translated into two of the minority languages spoken by the majority of study participants - Shan and Karen.

Conditions in Burma and Along the Migration Journey

Most of the domestic workers interviewed in this study explained that they left Burma largely as a consequence of war and government policies that fueled a crisis in both the economy and their families. They described a life struggling to meet their most basic needs as a result of the near-half century of military conflict and SPDC economic policies and practices including forced labor, portering and relocation, fixed pricing, imposed compulsory crops and arbitrary taxes. The women and girls in this study spoke at length of how the political and economic conditions in Burma led to the breakdown of their families, leaving many in foster care or to survive on their own.

Given these conditions, Thailand seemed to provide an opportunity to seek refuge and improve working conditions. In weighing their options, the domestic workers in this study believed that migrating to Thailand was worth the risk of possible harassment and/or of being trafficked.

However, study participants stressed how little or no control they had of their fate once they began their migration journey to Thailand. They described the constantly changing political and military situation that impacted the ease of travel, the number of checkpoints encountered, border control policies, crackdowns and other realities that largely dictated the route, means and cost of their journey. Many spoke of the need to use clandestine efforts, often organized by brokers or "carriers"[2] who accompanied them to or across the border. For those that lived far from the border and were fleeing as refugees, travel was often diverted to avoid harassment and military conflict, resulting in extended and indirect routes. Consequently,

[2] "Carrier" is the term used by study participants to describe the individual(s) who helped to transport them to Thailand and, in some cases, from the Thai border to jobs further towards the interior of the country.

many of the participants suffered from lack of food, illness and harsh conditions throughout their journey.

Large sums of money were required and either paid in advance or incurred as debt to the "carriers," although rarely were the participants informed in advance of what the total travel costs would be. Additionally, authorities in both Burma and Thailand imposed a range of, often arbitrary, fees and fines all along the migration route. At times, the demand for various fees and fines was accompanied by threats or actual confiscation of identification documents, physical searches, arrest, confinement and deportation back home.

Most participants found employment as domestic workers through a "carrier," either one who brought them from Burma or one they met in Thailand. However, only rarely did they know ahead of time the type of work they would be given, where or with whom they would be working, or the terms of their employment. Other participants, rather than using "carriers" to find employment, went to particular areas where employers were known to come to look for migrant labor. Women and girls waiting to be approached for work became particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. In this context, migrants were hired by employers on the spot and immediately taken to the employer's household to work.

Employment Conditions

None of the women or girls in this study had any understanding of what their working conditions would be until they had arrived at their employer's house. There were no contracts or clear descriptions of their working hours, benefits or job responsibilities. Employers arbitrarily set the conditions and terms of employment regarding such matters as salaries, meals, accommodations, access to outside contacts, sick leave and vacation time. In addition to receiving below-minimum wages, 97.9 percent of the surveyed respondents were expected to work more than eight hours a day, with 79.8 percent working 12 hours or more a day. Many of these women and girls worked seven days a week, with no regular days off. Among those surveyed, 72.8 percent received no overtime pay or compensation by their employer regardless of the hours they worked.

Slightly over 80 percent of the domestic workers were provided accommodations, though only 29.7 percent were given their own private room. Almost a third shared a room with a family member or members they were responsible to care for, or with other employees, while 19.2 percent were made to sleep in open areas with no privacy. Given the arbitrary and unregulated nature of employment conditions for domestic workers in Thailand, it is not possible to calculate the value of room and board provided to most of the study participants. For some, these benefits when added to the below-minimum-wage salary they received might equal or possibly exceed national minimum wage standards. Nevertheless, the "benefit" of room and board tended to contribute to exceedingly long working hours and exploitative working conditions with no overtime pay or compensation.

As a result of being a "live-in" worker, job responsibilities, more often than not, consisted of a wide range of duties beyond housework. Over two-thirds of the domestic workers in this study (64.4%) reported having to care for children, the elderly or the infirm. Often employers expected that those domestic workers caring for young children be

available to work at all times, with many expected to be on call throughout the night should the children need any attention. Thirty-one percent of those surveyed were expected to help with their employer's business in addition to handling the household chores, and be available to meet their employer's arbitrary demands, such as giving massages to members of the household (31.1%).

Incidents of withholding or non-payment of wages were frequently reported by the study participants, while others explained that without constant remainders and requests, they would not receive their salary from their employer. By not receiving their wages on a timely basis or having their wages randomly withheld or deducted by their employers, the women and girls in this study noted that they felt vulnerable and violated because of the lack of recourse to confront their employers' fraudulent actions.

Confinement within the household and limited access to outside contact with friends and family was often imposed by the employer, either through threats or through the lack of free time. Less than fifty percent of those surveyed reported that their employers permitted them to leave the house to meet others (43.2%) or allowed visitors into the house (41.5%). Many others led restricted and isolated lives as a result of their fear of arrest as an undocumented worker.

Language barriers further aggravated the interactions between the domestic workers and their employers as well as the employers' family members. While almost 57 percent of the women and girls surveyed in this study were able to speak some Thai, 26 percent could not speak Thai at all. Language proficiency was often a key determinant in the salary provided and treatment of domestic workers by their employers. Those who were unable to speak Thai reported difficulty in finding good jobs as well as conducting and negotiating the jobs they did secure. The women and girls interviewed in this study also recounted occasions in which their inability to speak Thai elicited verbal and physical abuse from their employer.

These realities often left the domestic workers extremely vulnerable and frightened. Verbal abuse was the most common violation experienced by the domestic workers in this study, with 75.9 percent reporting having been yelled at and 50.9 percent threatened by their employer. Nearly one in ten of the women and girls surveyed for this study reported being subjected to physical abuse. The women and girls who were interviewed in-depth described incidents of being slapped and, in some cases, severely beaten. These women and girls highlighted their extreme vulnerability in trying to cope with and escape the violence. Incidents of sexual harassment were also reported. Almost 20 percent of the women and girls in this study were touched when they did not want it, 8.3 percent had sexual advances made at them and 1.3 percent were victims of rape. It is widely known that domestic abuses are under-reported by girls and women throughout the world and what was disclosed to the researchers in this study is most likely a reflection of a more wide-spread reality.

Fear of their employers' threats and the inability to seek recourse has kept these girls and women's abuses hidden from the outside world. Their isolation inside private households has also effectively barricaded migrant domestic workers from the vigilance of the human rights community, NGOs and government agencies. Wider public awareness and scrutiny into the private households where thousands of domestic workers are employed is urgently needed to help address the abuses faced by these women and girls.

Legal Status and Work Permit Registration Process

Possession of legal identification documents was a major concern to almost every domestic worker interviewed. A quarter of the survey respondents had no documentation proving their citizenship in Burma. This leaves a significant population without any legal identity documents, resulting in a life of fear as well as a risk of statelessness for themselves and their children. The women and girls interviewed described the ongoing harassment they experience because of their lack of legal documentation and the risk of arrest and detention they face both in Thailand and Burma.

Thailand's initiative to register and provide work permits to migrant laborers, including domestic workers, was welcomed by the majority of those interviewed in this study. Concerns were raised, however, that the registration process was not well explained, was too short, denied permits to workers under 18 years of age and imposed health tests without procedural clarity. In examining the work permit registration process, the study found that registering for a work permit and keeping it valid typically requires the employer's cooperation, which in many instances was withheld. Almost 40 percent of the 528 domestic workers surveyed for this study did not hold a work permit.[3] During in-depth interviews, study participants revealed that certain employers refused to allow them to register or placed unduly restrictive and unfair conditions on obtaining a work permit. For instance, some employers insisted that the domestic worker remain employed for a set period of time before registering for the work permit. Often this meant that the registration period would be over by the time the domestic worker had fulfilled her employer's conditions.

Those unable to obtain work permits remain particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Of the two-fifths of the survey respondents (43%) who had encounters with Thai authorities, nearly half (48.9%) reported that the authorities (usually Thai police) demanded money from them and nearly thirty percent (28.6%) reported receiving threats of deportation. Another 34.8 percent were detained temporarily, with 25.6 percent placed in jail over night. Without work permits, these women and girls live a life of extreme isolation and fear, with many never leaving the confines of their employer's household. Even with work permits migrant domestic workers are unable to claim labor rights and, as elsewhere in the world, are seen as 'partial citizens' who are neither fully eligible under home or host country labor laws.

As a result, migrant domestic workers are caught in a dependence upon their employer, which in this case was reinforced by the efforts of the Thai government to register migrants from Burma. Those who registered with a specific employer were given permits valid for only one year and only with that one employer, after which if their employment with that employer ended, so did their legal status in the country. Furthermore, employers often kept the work permit, giving the worker only a photocopy, if any documents at all. Without such

[3] The research team, however, believes that the number of persons with work permits in this study is not representative of all domestic workers. Rather, this study's population sample is biased towards those who hold work permits as they were more accessible and willing to speak with the researchers. It is therefore likely that nearly half or more of all migrant domestic workers in Thailand do not have work permits.

documentation, even registered migrant workers found themselves threatened by deportation, harassment and arrest as a result of their inability to prove their legal status.

The domestic workers in this study expressed grievances regarding the Thai government regulation that prohibits them from changing employers, forcing them to succumb to the demands of that particular employer or lose their legal status in Thailand. It is also worth noting that many families were separated as a result of the work permit registration. Children under the age of 18 were not allowed to register and, given the high cost of registering for work permits most families did not register all adult members for fear of incurring large debts to cover the registration costs.

Nearly all of the domestic workers surveyed for this study (91.2%) reported having to pay by themselves all of or some portion of the work permit registration fees. A significant proportion (45.8%) received no financial contribution towards these costs from their employer. Given the below minimum wages these women and girls earned plus the expense of the registration fees that in many instances equalled several months' wages for the domestic workers, the majority of them were forced to take an advance from their employer against their salary to cover the fees. A number of the domestic workers reported incidences of their employer charging them more than the actual cost of the work permit and/or its renewal, and others reported that their employer withheld their work permit until the costs were repaid in full. Rarely, if ever, were the terms of repayment clearly set out for the domestic workers. Consequently, debts to their employer were incurred that, in most cases, occurred without a clear understanding as to the terms of repayment.

Maintaining the work permit entailed another set of negative consequences, particularly in connection with the mandatory health check-up that was implemented in March 2002. The medical exam itself was problematic for many of the domestic workers because of the lack of translation services for migrants at most health clinics and hospitals. Of greater concern, however, was the gross violation to their privacy in the handling of the health test results. Most women and girls in this study reported that it was their employer who directly received the health test results and decided to what extent (or not) to share the findings.

While HIV was not one of the seven communicable diseases mandated by the Thai government to be tested for during the health exams, many of the study participants believed they were tested for HIV/AIDS when their blood was drawn for the health exam. Three of the women interviewed in-depth for this study were caring for people living with AIDS and expressed their fears, concerns and lack of knowledge regarding transmission. Most of the study respondents reported a general lack of basic health knowledge, and their desire for more written materials in their own language, particularly regarding reproductive health issues such as birth control, abortion, pre- and post-natal care.

Health Issues

The lack of basic health care knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS and reproductive health left many of the domestic workers in this study fearful and concerned about their health and that of their families. This was compounded by the lack of access these workers had to public

health information. Many of the women and girls in this study reported that their employers refused to let them attend community lectures on health care issues, forbidding them to leave the house. Lack of written materials in their own language was a further hindrance to obtaining information.

Limited access to basic health care was yet another formidable obstacle for the women and girls in this study. Over three-quarters of the employers (78.6%) refused to cover their workers' health care costs. Covering their own health care expenses was a major hardship for the women and girls, particularly since many employers also deducted wages for any sick days taken. Furthermore, study participants noted that without a work permit it was extremely difficult to receive health care in public clinics and local hospitals.

Addiction and Domestic Violence

Although none of the domestic workers themselves reported using or being addicted to any drugs, drug addiction (and in some cases addiction to alcohol and gambling) among family members as well as within households where the domestic workers were employed profoundly impacted the lives of the women and girls in this study. Addiction was not explored in the study's survey; however, during the in-depth interviews it emerged as an important issue impacting the lives of the domestic workers. Over two thirds (69.1%) of the women and girls interviewed reported incidents of domestic violence that was in almost all cases a result of their partners' addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling.

Future Aspirations

When envisioning their future aspirations, the overwhelming majority of girls and women in this study spoke of their wishes to save their earnings so that they could send money home to their families. Many hoped that they could work in Thailand for a specific period of time and then return to Burma with sufficient capital to help provide a decent livelihood for their parents and, of those married, for their own families as well. Yet, they faced enormous difficulties in the simple act of trying to transfer funds home. Some did not know anyone they could trust to carry the money to Burma. Others did not know how to get back home. Among those who tried to return to Burma carrying their savings on them, many had their money and valuables confiscated by Thai authorities prior to crossing the border.

Most of the girls and women expressed a strong feeling of obligation and responsibility towards providing financial support to their parents and siblings. A number of study participants spoke about the hope of providing a better life and education for their children. Others interviewed discussed their aspirations for finding safer working environments or better paying jobs. Several domestic workers interviewed described wanting to further their studies. Some of the women and girls could not imagine their future and expressed how dejected they felt with their life, not being able to see themselves ever overcoming the obstacles they face. Living in Thailand was far more difficult than most had envisioned. Yet, for many, returning home was not an option.

Conclusion

Active steps must be taken at the international, national and local levels to recognize and protect the basic human rights of migrant domestic workers in the workplace and in society as a whole. The international community should put pressure on the SPDC and Thai government to ratify and implement the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in order to provide basic human rights to those crossing borders. The International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN agencies should coordinate and work together to recognize and strengthen the protection of foreign migrant domestic workers. Regional bodies, such as ASEAN, should address issues related to migrant workers in all labor sectors and take special notice of the complicated situation of migrants from Burma.

At the national level, Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) should address the causes of mass migration to Thailand (and elsewhere), including domestic policies that result in extensive unemployment, inflation of basic commodities and forced relocation. SPDC should discontinue projects that conscript forced labor and cease its practices of fixed pricing, imposed compulsory crops, forced relocation and arbitrary taxation. The SPDC should also recognize that in order to solve the fundamental problems in Burma, a national reconciliation process must take place and political reforms must be promoted. If people from Burma want to seek employment in neighboring countries, the SPDC should permit them to do so legally, take responsibility to ensure their protection abroad and allow them to return home without harassment. SPDC must also strive to incorporate and enforce labor laws and rights for all people.

Similarly, the Thai government should acknowledge domestic work as labor protected by Thai labor laws and ensure that domestic workers' rights are upheld, including the right to a written contract that defines work expectations, guarantees a minimum wage, fixed working hours with optional overtime, holidays and health protection and benefits. In honoring and protecting domestic workers' rights, the Thai government should include efforts to educate employers about the rights of domestic workers, establish channels for reporting complaints, prosecute abusive employers and provide protection to those reporting abuses. In this last respect, the Thai government should provide translators to facilitate reporting of complaints by migrant workers as well as provide referrals to legal assistance and protection.

Health information, particularly on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, should also be made available in the languages of migrants, and the Thai government should consider facilitating radio and television programs on health issues for illiterate migrant workers.

The Thai government should also provide educational opportunities for migrant workers, such as Thai language classes and other special adult education programs that could be held on the weekends or evenings. Thai education law provides equal education opportunities for all and efforts should be enhanced to see that migrants are included.

Of particular concern to the migrants interviewed for this study was the work permit registration process, specifically the lack of public information and procedural clarity, the short duration of the registration period, the costs associated with obtaining and renewing work

permits and the violation of privacy in obtaining medical exam results. In addition, employers often ignored or abused the registration policy, often refusing to permit workers from registering or withholding the original work permit, providing only a photocopy to the domestic workers. The Thai government must ensure that migrant workers have the right to possession of their original work permits and employers who refuse to relinquish the work permits should be fined. Any future registration of migrant workers should be publicly disseminated in the predominant languages of the migrant community and the period for registration should be extended. Mechanisms should also be put in place to identify employers unwilling to comply with Thai government labor policies and to provide protection for those reporting non-compliance.

In addition to remedying fraudulent actions by employers, both SPDC and the Thai government must take action against Burmese and Thai authorities, particularly police officials and personnel, who extort a range of arbitrary fees and fines from migrants moving across borders. It is also alarming to find that the Burmese authorities have been confiscating identification documents from its citizens that could render many stateless. SPDC must see to it that these actions are stopped immediately and a process is established for reporting and replacing abducted documents.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) play a critical role as intermediaries working closely with communicating migrants' concerns and needs and advocating their rights to government officials and the international community. They must continually strive to work with local community networks to make contact with migrant domestic workers, raise awareness of their hidden and isolated realities, identify their critical issues and recommend action strategies.

Finally, the inclusion of the migrant community in developing policies, practices and responses should be considered to help establish appropriate interventions to reduce the abuse, exploitation and trafficking of migrant domestic workers.

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Chapter One :

Historical Overview

1.1 Introduction

Millions of people from Burma[1] have left their country in search of security and safety due to nearly a half-century of conflict, militarization, economic hardship, ethnic uprising and minority persecution.[2] Over the past fifteen years the number of people leaving Burma has grown to one of largest migration flows in Southeast Asia. The minority peoples of Burma make up the majority of those dislocated as a result of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)'s renewed commitment to eliminate ethnic militias and any support for them in minority areas through forced labor, relocation, excessive taxation and appalling physical treatment.[3]

As a direct result of the grave political, economic and cultural conflict in Burma, over five million people have crossed Burma's borders into neighboring countries without documentation. Fearing persecution, and often without recognition of their rights to receive refugee status and international protection,[4] the vast majority of those migrating from Burma find themselves desperate to survive, obtaining work in underground and, often, illegal labor markets.

The majority of migrants from Burma who flee their country end up in neighboring Thailand, where an estimated two million people from Burma have taken up squalid residence

[1] Generally, the phrase "people from Burma" is used in this report rather than "Burmese" since the latter term, in addition to referring to people from Burma is also used to identify a specific minority group in Burma.

[2] Smith, M. (2002). *Burma (Myanmar): A Time for Change.* London: Minority Rights Group International.

[3] Amnesty International. (July 17, 2002). *Myanmar: Lack of Security in Counter-Insurgency Areas.* London: Author.

[4] Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H.H. (2000). *Sexuality, Reproductive Health and Violence: Experiences of Migrants from Burma in Thailand.* Nakhonpathom: Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University.

working "3-D jobs" (dangerous, dirty and difficult), for pay well below minimum wage.[5] While the reality is that the majority of migrants from Burma are fleeing persecution and are in need of assistance and protection, migrants from Burma have usually found themselves extremely hard pressed to exercise their rights due to the Royal Thai Government's (RTG's) denial of their refugee status.[6] Thus, while migrants from Burma in Thailand live in perpetual fear of deportation, they face abhorrent labor practices that deny them their most basic human rights.

There are over one hundred thousand female domestic workers from Burma in Thailand,[7] though many estimate the numbers to be much higher.[8] There is little information available on the realities faced by these domestic workers, yet a growing awareness exists of their isolation and vulnerability to labor exploitation and violence.[9]

This report presents an in-depth research study undertaken during 2002, to document the life experiences of female migrants from Burma employed as domestic workers in Thailand in the hopes of heightening public awareness and response to the need for protecting their most basic human rights.

This introduction examines the complex circumstances that impact the lives of the migrants, including their reasons for migration from Burma into Thailand, the constantly changing relations between the two countries, the RTG's migrant registration and deportation efforts and the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers. A deeper understanding of the context surrounding migration from Burma into Thailand sets the stage for comprehending why this study was undertaken at this time.

[5] Broadmoor, T. (August-September 2001). "Labor Pains: The Thai Government's Latest Resolve to Control the Growing Migrant Worker Population Lacks Resolve." *The Irrawaddy. Vol.* 9, No. 7.

[6] Human Rights Watch. (1998). *Burma/Thailand: Unwanted and Unprotected: Burmese Refugees in Thailand.* New York: Author.

[7] Over 82,000 female migrants registered as domestic workers with the RTG in 2001, of which over 80 percent were from Burma. Only one third of the estimated migrants in Thailand registered and, therefore, the estimate of over one hundred thousand migrant domestic workers is a conservative estimation.

[8] The actual number of female migrants workers in Thailand and internationally is not known, though it is documented to be increasing rapidly. The largest sector of employment for female migrants is in domestic work. See for example:

1) Archavanitkul, K. (2003). *Understanding the Situation of Migrant Workers in Thailand.* Nakhonpathom: Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University.

2) Paitoonpong, S., Plywej, J. & Sirikul, W. (2002). *Thailand: Improving Migration Policy Management with Special Focus on Irregular Labour Migration: Case study of Housemaids.* Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI).

3) Ehrenreich, B. & Hochschild, A.R. (2002). *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

[9] 1) CAR AM Asia. (2001). *Consultation on Thai and Migrant Domestic Workers.* Bangkok: Author.

2) United Nations. (2002). *National Tripartite Seminar on the Future of Migration Policy Management in Thailand.* Bangkok: Author.

1.2 A Country Warring with Itself: Contemporary Burmese History and Causes for Mass Flight

At independence in 1962, Burma, a country of abundant natural resources and human potential, was deemed to have the brightest future of any of its neighbors. Forty years later, and following roughly a quarter century of General Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism," this nation was designated by the United Nations as one of the world's "least developed countries" in 1987.[10] These dire economic conditions, on top of years of oppression, sparked a massive and peaceful "people power" movement in 1988 that demanded an end to the dictatorship. After months of protest, a new junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (renamed State Peace and Development Council - SPDC - in 1997), seized power through military violence. SLORC's deadly crackdown and its disregard for the 1990 election in which it won only 6 percent of the vote, began a new, but repetitive chapter of Burmese history marked by inordinate suffering under one of the world's most brutal and repressive regimes.[11]

A principal factor in Burma's troubled history of conflict and oppression are ethnic minority issues, which, ever since General Ne Win's policy to "Burmanize" the country's ethnic populations, continue to stand as the central challenge. Not only do ethnic minorities make up more than one-third of the population, but they also reside in areas of the most acute political and humanitarian crises in Burma.[12] Furthermore, ethnic minority groups have been the junta's greatest obstacle to domination and national unity. Over the past decade, the minority insurgency groups have been pressured into ceasefire agreements with the SPDC. To date, only the Shan, Karen and Karenni factions continue to fiercely confront the Burmese authorities.[13]

The SPDC has intensified its mission to eradicate the threat of ethnic minority groups, particularly the Shan and Karen. In spite of a law passed in 2000 banning forced labor,[14] SPDC continues to force villagers (primarily in the ethnic minority areas) to work on infrastructural and agricultural projects and as porters for the army.[15] Children as young as seven have been used as forced labor on similar projects and estimates as high as 70,000 of the SPDC's 350,000 military personnel are children.[16] Forced relocations of minority villages, especially in areas

[10] Zo T. Hmung. (October 25, 2000). *Ethnic Political Crisis in the Union of Burma.* New Haven: Council for South-east Asia Studies at Yale University.

[11] 1) Htay, Sein. (October 2001). *Economic Report on Burma.* Bangkok: Economic and Research Department of Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (FTUB).

2) Federation of American Scientists, Military Analysis Network. (January 24, 2000). *Burma Insurgency.*

3) Washington D.C.: Author. Retrieved August 11, 2003 from: http://www.fas.org/man/dod-01/ops/war/burma.htm.

[12] Smith, M. (2002).

[13] BBC Reporter. (July 17, 2002). "Burma 'Terrorising' Ethnic Minorities," *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).* Retrieved August 11, 2003 from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2132986.stm.

[14] International Labour Organization News. (2000). *ILO Takes Historic Steps to Compel Myanmar to End Forced Labor.* Washington, D.C.: International Labour Organization. Retrieved July 7,2003 from: http://us.ilo.org/news/focus/0012/FOCUS-1 .html.

[15] Human Rights Watch. (2003). *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002: Asia: Asia Overview.* New York: Author.

[16] Human Rights Watch. (October 2002). *My Gun Was As Tall As Me: Child Soldiers in Burma.* New York: Author.

where ethnic opposition groups are active, have become increasingly common. Consequently, there are over one million internally displaced persons within the country.[17] In 2002, reports revealed an even more disturbing trend in the Burmese government's campaign to demoralize its own people, uncovering evidence of SPDC troops' systematic use of rape against women and girls in Shan State, some of whom were kept in sexual slavery.[18] Many of the worst violations of human rights carried out in recent years, however, have taken place in rural villages in which the Burmese army has executed and tortured innocent civilians suspected of sympathizing with rebels.[19] Individual townships, especially in the Shan and Karen States, have reported forced relocations, forced labor, torture, rape and extrajudicial killings, causing massive refugee flows into neighboring Thailand.[20]

In addition to these atrocities, excessive and arbitrary forms of taxation and agricultural policies by SPDC have made daily life unbearable. In attempts to sum up the state of the economy objectively, The World Bank in 1999 pointed out:

> Myanmar[21] is trapped in abject poverty despite its rich resource base... the economy has grown moderately in recent years, but the benefits of this growth have not accrued to the poor. Most poverty and human development indicators have lagged, placing Myanmar behind its neighbors and most developing countries. These outcomes are due to flawed policies that inflict a twin blow: policy distortions retard the ability of farms and firms to create income earning opportunities, and poor public finances prevent adequate response to the needs of the diverse population... If present policies are maintained, the people of Myanmar are unlikely to benefit substantially from a resumption of growth in the region... Continuing lackluster economic performance... could have devastating consequences for poverty, human development and social cohesion in Myanmar.[22]

[17] 1) The Shan Human Rights Foundation. (April 1998). *Dispossessed: Forced Relocation and Extrajudicial Killings in Shan State.* Chiang Mai: Author.

2) Burma Ethnic Research Group. (April 1998). *Forgotten Victims of a Hidden War: Internally Displaced Karen in Burma.* Chiang Mai: Author and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

[18] 1) Shan Women's Action Network. (2002). *Licence to Rape: The Burmese Military Regime's Use of Sexual Violence in the Ongoing War in Shan State.* Chiang Mai: Author.

2) The Shan Human Rights Foundation. (April 1998).

[19] The Shan Human Rights Foundation, (1998); and Amnesty International, (2002).

[20] 1) Human Rights Watch. (2003).

2) Bangkok Post Reporter. (July 16, 2003). "Foreign Press, NGOs Barred from Border." *The Bangkok Post.*

3) Freedom House. (June 24, 2002). *Freedom in the World, Political Rights and Civil Liberties: Burma.*

4) Washington D.C.: Author. Retrieved August 11, 2003 from: http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2002/countryratings/burma2.htm.

5) Amnesty International. (2001). *Amnesty International Report 2001: Myanmar.* London: Author. Retrieved August 11, 2003 from: http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001 .nsf/webasacountries MYANMAR?OpenDocument.

[21] Following the 1988 uprising, Burma's military regime established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) renaming the same entity in 1997 to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

[22] The World Bank. (1999). "Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unity, East Asia and Pacific Region." *Myanmar: An Economic and Social Assessment.* Washington, D.C.: Author.

The continuous and dramatic inflation rates in Burma, ranging from 24 percent in 1989 to 38 percent at the beginning of 2000,[23] have led to escalated commodity prices of basic necessities, which, even according to the Burmese authorities, increase by over 20 percent per year.[24] The price of rice, the staple for people across the country, hit 50 cents a kilogram during January 2003, four times the official rate.[25] Moreover, while throughout the years the Burmese kyat has been pegged consistently at roughly 6.17 kyat to one US dollar, market rates have been far less generous rendering the real market value exchange at an estimated 400 kyat to the dollar.[26]

Jobless and financially crippled by the escalating commodity prices, people in Burma find themselves in debt for daily life expenses and forced to comply with unpredictable taxes imposed by the authorities.[27] In this context, limited employment opportunities cannot be used to lift individuals out of poverty and ultimately the individual becomes caught in a cycle of debt that continuously pressures those from Burma to look beyond to solutions outside this environment.

1.3 Thai-Burmese Relations and Thai Policy Towards Migrants from Burma

For decades following Burma's independence, Thailand allowed ethnic minority groups opposing the Burmese regime to amass along the border to "protect Thailand from an invasion of Communism and/or an invasion from nearby countries which covertly and/or overtly support Communism."[28] During this same time, Ne Win focused on his "Burmese Way to Socialism" policy and tried to eliminate opposition groups, primarily found among ethnic minority populations. Throughout these decades minority peoples from Burma fled into neighboring countries or amassed along the border areas in territory controlled by the resistance groups.

In 1989, SLORC introduced a freer market under "The Open Door Economic Policy," a sweeping policy of liberalization that for the first time opened up Burma to foreign investment.[29] In response, Thailand changed the direction of its security policy and began to actively promote "Constructive Engagement" with its neighbor in its efforts to win SLORC's trust and secure investment opportunities. As the Thais and other foreign powers moved in to exploit Burma's natural resources, Rangoon quickly capitalized on the new inflow of cash to develop its military capacity and to further suppress the ethnic minority and other opposition

[23] Ibid.

[24] Thien, Win. (February 1999). "New 1,000-Notes a Sign of High Inflation." *The Irrawaddy.* Vol. 7, No. 2.

[25] Irrawaddy Reporter. (January- February 2003). "Rumor Mill Working Overtime." *The Irrawaddy,Vol.* 11, No. 1. Kondo, T. (April 15, 2001). "How to Normalize Myanmar's Foreign Exchange Rate." *The Japan Economic Review.*

[27] Soe Soe. (July 15, 2002). *Migration Report: Burma: Identifying the Issues and Needs of Migration from Burma into Thailand.* Chiang Mai: Joint Research Project of the Federation of Trade Unions Burma and Asian Migrant Center.

[28] Sawadirak, S. (1997). *Thai-Burma-Karen Relationships.* Bangkok: Foundation for Text in Social Sciences and Thailand Research Fund.

[29] The World Bank. (1999).

groups. At this time, the Thai economy was flourishing, creating an enormous demand for cheap, unskilled labor in the private sector. This confluence of events supported an even larger-scale migration of people from Burma further into the interior of Thailand in an effort to both distance themselves from the escalating conflicts and secure employment.[30]

Beginning in 1992, Thai leaders introduced initiatives to limit or curtail support for minority opposition forces amongst the refugee population residing in Thailand, and limit accommodation of political asylum seekers from Burma.[31] In the years that followed, the RTG tightened its security policy more than ever before. Convinced that the plentiful movement of Burmese asylum seekers into Thai territory posed a security risk, while breeding mistrust and resentment from SLORC, the Thai government began negotiating with SLORC on strategies for addressing the opposition movement based on Thai soil.

As of 2002, estimates of up to two million migrants from Burma were residing in Thailand. This growth reflects the overriding dilemma facing the Thai government to recognize its need for migrants as a plentiful source of cheap, unskilled labor and its earlier declared priority to appease SLORC by denying refuge to Burmese migrants in order to maintain access to investment opportunities in Burma.

Since the early 1990's, the Thai government has faced the immense task of bringing order to the massive influx of undocumented migrant populations throughout the country. The RTG addressed the problem by classifying the undocumented population in order to properly integrate them into the worker registration system or temporarily displaced persons camps. This process of classification separated those from Burma into six groups: displaced persons, undocumented migrants, refugees from threats of war, students/intellectuals, visitors who overstayed their Thai visas and illegal migrant workers.[32] By defining where and how these people fit (or not) into society helped Thai lawmakers form policies that juggled both the government's relationship with SPDC and the presence of two million potential workers from Burma so critical to the Thai economy.

Since Thailand has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the RTG is not obliged to recognize anyone from Burma as refugees. Thus, the RTG has granted "temporarily displaced persons" status to a select few, in spite of the obvious human rights violations from which so many have fled. Although the "temporarily displaced" category does not offer protection nor guarantee asylum, the Thai government has, in special cases, exercised its authority, vested under Article 17 of the Thai Immigration Act, to grant refugee status.[33] This act, invoked mostly during the mid-1990s, has enabled the Thai government to offer some people from Burma shelter in camps along the border (presently over 138,000 persons)[34] and third-country resettlement to

[30] Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H. (2000).

[31] Sawadirak, S. (1997).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H. (2000).

[34] Archavanitkul, K. (1998). *Labor Migration from Burma to Thailand.* Nakhonpathom: Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University.

select individuals. The glaring disparity between the number classified as refugees (or even temporarily displaced persons) and the total residing and working in Thailand pointedly indicates the government's strict approach to granting asylum and lax policy for regulating migrant labor.

The Asian economic crisis of 1997 dramatically changed Thai attitudes and response to migrants who were subsequently perceived as taking jobs away from unemployed Thais and posing a threat to national security.[35] As a consequence, Thai resentment towards migrant workers escalated, as it became known that the government was spending 50 million baht annually on migrant workers.[36] At the same time (1997), the Burmese regime was seeking entrance into ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Driven by the pursuit of investment opportunities and abundant natural resources, the Thai government committed itself to "constructive engagement" with the Burmese regime.[37] This culminated in an obvious shift in bilateral relations between the two countries focused on Burma's abundance of untapped resources and cheap investment climate, as well as a crackdown on the people from Burma in Thailand. Consequently, Thailand drastically cut back on the number of Burmese migrants offered refugee status,[38] and deported over 500,000 migrant workers, regardless of whether they held valid documentation or not.[39]

Following the onset of the Asian economic crisis, Thai-Burmese cooperation fluctuated with SPDC's ongoing war against ethnic minorities along the Thai border, raising issues of sovereignty, asylum and trade. Thailand's response was to apply pressure on the minority opposition groups, limiting their sanctuary on Thai soil and persuading them into ceasefire agreements with the SPDC. At the same time, SPDC stepped up its campaign to eradicate armed ethnic groups with increased fighting, primarily between SPDC forces and the Shan State Army (SSA) and the Karen National Union (KNU) along the Thai border. As a result, the Burmese military made incursions into Thailand that included shelling of border towns and attacks on temporarily displaced persons camps.[40] The Burmese justified their intrusion on the grounds that the camps had become breeding grounds for anti-SPDC sentiments contributing to support for ethnic minority forces. Thailand thenceforth found that its relations with Burma had reverted back to mutual antagonism, providing a catalyst for future tumult and tensions. The turbulence peaked in October 1999 when Burma closed all border checkpoints and banned Thai-Burmese commercial activities due to Thailand's acquiescence to the demands of Burmese dissidents who had seized and created a hostage situation in their embassy in Bangkok.[41] Deprived of lucrative border trade, abundant resources and investment

35 Coakley, V. (March 25, 2002). *The Situation Facing Refugees and Migrant Workers in Thailand.* Burma: UN Service Office of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma.

36 Editorial. (November 5, 1999). 'Foreign Labor Deserves Better.' *The Bangkok Post.*

37 World News Story Page. (April 22, 1997). "U.S. Bans New Investment in Burma." *CNN Interaction.* Retrieved July 9, 2003 from: http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9704/22/burma/.

38 Bangkok Post Reporter. (February 6, 2002). "Military Businesses Help Fund Road Project in Burma." *The Bangkok Post.*

39 Coakley. V. (2002).

40 Irrawaddy Reporter. (April 1998). "Refugees Caught in Crossfire." *The Irrawaddy. Vol.* 6, No. 2.

41 Irrawaddy Reporter. (October 8, 1999). "Embassy Siege in Bangkok." *The Irrawaddy.* Vol. 7, No. 8.

opportunities, while also struggling to gain control over its own labor field, the Thai government sought to resolve these tensions by deporting 70,835 migrants to Burma.[42]

1.4 Political Climate at the Time of this Study

Thai relations with Burma continued to roller coaster as fighting spilt over onto Thai soil, borders closed and negotiations intensified to resolve the conflicts and reestablish trading opportunities. In February 2001, fighting between SPDC and Shan forces crossed into Thai territory yet again,[43] compelling Thailand to concentrate its forces along its border with Burma.[44] However, efforts to resolve the conflict and resume trade were soon initiated, including the introduction of the new worker registration process in September/October 2001 and later with the Sixth Joint Cooperation Meeting between Thai and Burmese representatives in January of 2002. The RTG called on all migrant workers in Thailand to register and obtain work permits valid for one year, pending a six-month health check-up by March 2002. Upon completion of the health testing, work permits were renewed for 409,339 migrants (of the original 568,249 registered in 2001), including 63,317 domestic workers (from the original 82,389 domestic workers registered).[45] Migrants from Burma made up 83% (340,029) of all those re-registered. Among those from Burma who applied for extensions, 5,305 migrants were denied either because they did not show up for the test, failed to have proper records or were found with at least one of seven communicable diseases,[46] and were deported back to Burma.[47] This essentially illegalized the contraction of communicable diseases, depriving thousands of sufferers of these illnesses of needed medical attention. During the Sixth Joint Cooperation Meeting held in January 2002, both parties agreed that SPDC would open holding centers on its side of the border to receive all returnees and facilitate the repatriation of some 100,000 illegal Burmese workers from Thailand.[48]

Throughout February and March of 2002, the Burmese and Thai regimes both teetered on the brink of military standoff while simultaneously cooperating in efforts to return unwanted migrants from Thailand. Just as Thai troops risked conflict, standing poised to physically prevent both SPDC forces and/or the SSA from stepping foot on Thai soil, the diplomatic side

42 Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H. (2000).

43 1) Irrawaddy Reporter. (January 2001). "Thaksin's Hopes Strained by Border Clash." *The Irrawaddy.* Vol. 9, No. 1.

2) BBC Reporter. (February 21, 2001). "Fresh Fighting on Thai-Burma Border." *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).*

44 Khuenkaew, S. (February 6, 2002). "Burma Moves in on Shan Bases." *The Bangkok Post.*

45 Royal Thai Government. (2002). *Result of Registration of Alien Workers Following the Cabinet's Resolution in 2001 and 2002.* Bangkok: Author.

46 The seven communicable diseases are tuberculosis, leprosy, elephantiasis, syphilis, drug addiction, alcoholism and unsound mind or mental retardation.

47 1) Associated Press. (July 26, 2002). "Thailand Faces Rising Number of Diseases from Foreign Laborers." New York: Author.

2) Caouette, T. & Pack, M. (December 2002). *Pushing Past the Definitions: Migration from Burma to Thailand.* Washington D.C.: Refugees International and the Burma Project.

48 Ashayagachat, A. (January 8, 2002). "Junta Agrees to Take Back Illegal Workers." *The Bangkok Post.*

of Thai-Burmese relations continued its cooperation and implementation of the systematic deportation of over 35,000 migrants directly to the holding centers run by the SPDC.[49]

By April 2002, tensions between the two countries began to flare through exchanges of protests and accusations. SPDC contended that the Thai government had helped the SSA launch attacks on Burmese targets from Thai territory, while the Thais insisted that SPDC had purposively enlisted an allied ethnic group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), to strike Thai targets during an intrusion on March 25, 2002.[50] Further agitating the Thai-Burmese relationship was the UWSA's (one of the world's largest producers of heroin and methamphetamines) lucrative habit of trafficking drugs across the border.[51] Nevertheless, through April and into May, the Thai government continued to grudgingly overlook cross border violence and drug trade, in order to pursue its "higher goals" involving its massive migrant repatriation scheme, and its lucrative trade development with Burma.[52]

However by early May 2002, tensions reached new heights as the SPDC rejected a peace offering from the SSA, and heavy units of Thai troops began to line a 2,400 km. strip of the border in order to prevent any encroachment by Burmese military or minority forces.[53] As the junta heightened its siege of the border areas in both the Shan and Karen States, between 500 to 1,000 villagers in those areas fled into Thailand. The Thais coincidentally heightened their efforts to refoul these persons back over the border.[54] Finally, the simmering tensions between the Thai and Burmese reached a boiling point. Towards the end of May, SPDC responded to an embarrassing attack from the SSA by launching mortar shells into Thai villages and lashing out against the Thai military and government, accusing it of assisting the rebels and allowing them advantageous positions on Thai soil. Equally agitated by Burma's seemingly disregard of border security, drug trafficking and quelling border violence to curb rampant refugee flows, Thailand retaliated with accusations of SPDC's involvement in the drug trade and attacks on Thai territory.[55] With the animosity between the two countries having reached irreconcilable levels, SPDC closed all checkpoints on the Thai-Burmese border, closed

[49] 1) Bangkok Post Reporter. (March 27, 2002). "Troops Poised to Attack Wa Army." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Coakley. V. (2002).

[50] Bangkok Post Reporters. (March 29, 2002). "Wa Attack an Outrage, the Junta Told." *The Bangkok Post.*

[51] Pathan, D. (February-March 2002). "Thais Tired of Paying for Burmese 'Peace'." *The Irrawaddy.* Vol. 10, No. 2.

[52] 1) Ashayagachat, A. (April 19, 2002). "Illegal Workers: Repatriation Next Month." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Aung Zaw. (April 11, 2002). "Chavalit Looking Forward to Return to the Past." *The Irrawaddy On-line Edition Commentary Archive.*
3) Bangkok Post Reporter. (April 30, 2002). "PM Wants to be More Lenient." *The Bangkok Post.*

[53] 1) Nanuam, W. (April 19, 2002). "Junta Spurns Peace Offering from Shan." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Nanuam, W. (April 28, 2002). "Troops Fan Out Ahead of Demarcation Move." *The Bangkok Post.*

[54] 1) Cheewin, S. (May 11, 2002). "Hundreds More Seek Refuge." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Bangkok Post Reporter. (May 6, 2002). "Repatriation of Workers Reaches 2,282." *The Bangkok Post.*

[55] 1) Bangkok Post Reporter. (May 22, 2002). "Junta Claims Thaksin Had Knowledge of Artillery Shellings." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Cheewin, S. (May 22, 2002). "Stray Burmese Shells Cause Evacuation of 1,500 Villagers." *The Bangkok Post.*

the door to diplomatic activity between the two governments, terminated cross border economic activity and resumed its fierce attack on opposition forces.[56]

The events that followed May 2002 proved to further exacerbate the situation between Thailand and Burma, and heighten the flow of people to and across the border. While Thailand resumed its complaints about the junta's support of destabilizing border incursions and support for drug trafficking, Burma responded in kind by denying Thai diplomats permission to enter the country, expelling Thai workers from Thai casinos and coal mines (on the Burmese side of the border) and sending its troops into Thailand during major offensives against minority forces that saw the shelling of Thai villages and forced thousands of Thais to evacuate.[57] Furthermore, as the SPDC continued accusing Thailand of supporting the ethnic rebels, it intensified its attacks on minority populations perceived as sympathetic to the opposition. By early June, approximately two thousand refugees had fled into Thailand.[58] Attempting to allay SPDC suspicions of Thai sympathy with minority forces, the Thais not only steadfastly refused to establish permanent camps for refugees from Burma, but also closed workshops organized by activists from Burma, raided their offices and arrested those known to hold anti-SPDC sentiments.[59]

The RTG's imminent refoulement of 600 newly arrived Shan refugees in July 2002 was particularly troublesome. The resuming war taking place between the SSA and SPDC compelled many of these refugees to express fears that they would be tortured or killed following repatriation. This called into question not only the morality, but the legality of Thailand's violation of international humanitarian law by repatriating the Shan into life threatening circumstances.[60] It also drew attention to the fact that the RTG had officially deported to the Burmese authorities 19,000 migrants (from January 2002 until the border closed in May 2002), without any process for screening genuine refugees fearing persecution upon their return.[61]

Also warranting criticism was the mandatory HIV tests by the SPDC authorities of all those officially deported to SPDC reception centers. This mandatory testing is a blunt violation of the United Nation's HIV Principles and Guidelines, and further stigmatizes those infected, with no system for monitoring or protecting them against discrimination.[62]

By late July 2002, the RTG reported trade losses from the border closure of roughly 5 billion baht,[63] as well as rampant unemployment in the Thai agricultural sector that was

[56] Tha Lay. (January 2003). "When You're Not Welcome." *Burma Issues.* Vol. 13, No. 1.

[57] 1) Wu Nontharit. (June 1, 2002). "Senate Panel Refused Entry into Burma." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) Bangkok Post Reporters. (June 2, 2002). "Burma Kicks Out 500 Thai Workers." *The Bangkok Post.*
3) Bangkok Post Reporters. (June 5, 2002). "1,000 Evacuated Due to Fighting." *The Bangkok Post.*

[58] 1) Amelia-Collins, N. (June 3,2002). "700 Ethnic Karen Flee Burma, Seek Refuge in Thailand." *VOANews.com.*
2) Post Reporters. (June 5, 2002). "Burmese Wa Allies Suffer Heavy Losses." *The Bangkok Post.*

[59] Irrawaddy Reporter. (June 5, 2002). "Don't Scapegoat the Dissidents." *The Irrawaddy,* Vol. 10, No. 5.

[60] 1) Bangkok Post Reporters. (June 28, 2002). "Shan Face Forced Repatriation." *The Bangkok Post.*
2) The Nation Reporter. (July 4, 2002). "Sending Refugees Back 'A Violation'." *The Nation.*

[61] Caouette T. & Pack, M. (December 2002).

[62] Ibid.

[63] Five billion baht is the equivalent of approximately US$122 million at 41 baht = US$1.

dependent on cross border commerce.[64] Due to the grave economic losses accruing daily, the Thai government increased its efforts to negotiate with SPDC and allay its fears of Thai complicity with the minority cause. One of the most blatant steps taken by the RTG was instructing the immigration police to routinely monitor Thai and foreign volunteers and prohibit the presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign reporters in the border areas where SPDC and SSA were positioned. This was carried out for the dual purpose of denying support to the ethnic rebels and also to stop coverage of refoulement of newly arrived refugees, of voiced opposition and international pressure.[65] Throughout August 2002, the Thai government continued its clamp down on human rights and pro-democracy groups through increased raids, and rounds of intimidation and arrests in efforts to bring the SPDC to the table.[66] Finally, the Burmese and Thai authorities announced efforts to bring relations "back to normal" and organized bilateral negotiations that would deal with reopening the border and other critical issues, such as drug trafficking, migrant repatriation and trade in the coming months.[67] At this time, the RTG also sought to develop a new worker registration policy in an effort to analyze labor needs, budget the costs of migrant worker and refugee programs, and create more efficient mechanisms for both migrant integration in and deportation from the Thai labor field.[68]

September and October 2002 oversaw the most constructive period of Thai-Burmese relations of the entire year, though fraught with diplomatic scuffle between Rangoon and Bangkok and ongoing reports of SPDC abuses, human trafficking and harassment of any opposition (especially on Thai soil).[69] This was marked by the reopening to the borders on October 15, 2002, which during five months of closure cost the Burmese $7 million in revenue and the Thais by now well over 5 billion baht (approximately $122 million).[70] The beginning of a new phase in Thai-Burmese relations revitalized Thailand's efforts to repatriate people from Burma. Disappointed by the fact that so few migrants from Burma were actually registered, the RTG was eager to cleanse its workforce of illegal labor. The RTG urged the SPDC to open up more holding centers on the borders through which official repatriation could resume.[71] While seeking to increase cooperation in returning migrants home, the RTG also continued its

[64] Bangkok Post Reporters. (July 22, 2002). "Loss from Closed Border Tops B5bn." *The Bangkok Post.*

[65] Bangkok Post Reporter. (July 16, 2002). "Foreign Press, NGOs Barred from Border." *The Bangkok Post.*

1) Ko Thet. (August 24, 2002). "Democracy Activists Arrested: Su Kyi Speaks Out." *The Irrawaddy News Alert Archives.*

2) Burma Issues. (January 2003).

[67] Yuwadee Tunyasiri. (August 22, 2002). "Talks to Focus on Resolving Disputes Fast." *The Bangkok Post.*
Commission on Irregular Immigrant Workers. (August 2002). *Cabinet Resolution on Illegal Migrants.* Bangkok: Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

[69] 1) Nanuam, W. (September 15, 2002). "Junta is Uneasy, Likely to Maintain Tension." *The Bangkok Post.*

2) Kwa Zaw Moe. (September 27, 2002). "Crackdown on Activists as NLD Celebrates Anniversary." *The Irrawaddy. Vol.* 10, No. 7.

[70] 1) Manibhandu, A., Marukatat, S. & Nanuam, W. (October 15, 2002). "Gateways to Burma Creak Open." *The Bangkok Post.*

2) Irrawaddy Reporter. (October 2002). "Counting the Cost of Closure." *The Irrawaddy.* Vol. 10, No. 8.

[71] Burma Related News. (December 4, 2002). "Thailand Raps Myanmar Over Repatriation of Illegal Workers." *Associated Foreign Press (AFP).*

harassment of anti-SPDC activists, NGOs and human rights advocates working with people from Burma. This campaign, lasting through the end of 2002, resulted in arrests and deportations with this strong message: "Thailand would not welcome migrants from Burma anymore."[72]

Finishing off a year of immense tumult and conflict, Thailand and Burma entered 2003 showing signs of continuing strain. The Thais this time seemed poised to satisfy Burmese demands to increase border control, silence activists from Burma and fight ethnic minorities' opposition, while the Burmese appeared willing to cooperate with Thailand's campaign to repatriate excess, illegal migrant laborers and reengage Burma in a lucrative commercial relationship.[73] Fraught with chaos and controversy, both Thailand and Burma proceeded into 2003 to make amends, threatening to deport thousands of migrants back to Burma for "higher goals," and the Burmese junta poised to receive them and set up systems for monitoring their return.

1.5 Thai Migrant Worker Policy and Problems

Thailand has initiated several migrant worker registration policies since the early 1990s. The first attempt to come to grips with the massive, migrant labor flow into Thailand took place in 1992. This attempt, however, failed due to the extremely high "bail" it imposed on employers who were to register their workers.[74] Four years later, Thailand's migrant labor problems had expanded throughout the country with large numbers of migrant workers, mostly from Burma, moving toward Thailand's inner provinces. Unable to determine needs and adequately assess the impact on the different labor sectors of its economy, the RTG aimed to gain control and learn from its previous mistakes. In June 1996, the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare implemented a registration policy open to eight industries that required a much lower registration fee. As workers without proof of registration faced deportation, this resolution compelled larger numbers of migrants to register.[75]

Following the economic crisis of 1997, the Thai government was faced with the urgent task of restructuring its labor field to make room for the masses of newly unemployed Thai nationals. While this resulted in the deportation of nearly 250,000 illegal migrants in 1998, the RTG was unable to find Thais willing to replace workers in "3-D jobs." Consequently, by April and May 1998, the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare found it necessary to reassess the labor force's employment needs and initiate a new registration phase. Although Thai officials calculated that roughly 231,000 jobs needed to be filled, only 99,974 migrants had registered by December of 1999.[76] The void required the RTG to readjust its labor policy to facilitate a more effective registration of undocumented migrant workers (from Burma, Cambodia and Laos) from September to October of 2001. This initiative resulted in the

[72] Burma Issues. (January 2003).

[73] Au Su Chin. (January 14, 2003). "Rapprochement Continues." *The Irrawaddy, News Alert Archives.*

[74] Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H. (2000).

[75] The 1996 migrant worker registration provided 303,088 work permits, of which 87 percent were granted to people from Burma.

[76] Ibid.

registration of persons from ten labor sectors, not including seasonal workers, workers in the service industry or child workers.[77] During this registration period, 568,249 migrants received work permits of which 451,255 were from Burma.[78] However, this figure, while large in comparison to those registered in earlier years, is still strikingly low when held against the estimated two million undocumented migrants from Burma.[79]

This great disparity between migrants registered and the total number actually residing in Thailand led to many extensive discussions among RTG officials, NGOs and migrant leaders. Two of the main reasons given for why migrants did not register were the lack of information about the process and the inability to travel and register when employers refused to participate.[80] However for the majority of migrants, factors deterring them from registration were far more complicated. First of all, the efforts by the Thai government to register migrants from Burma reinforced workers' dependence on their employers. Those who registered with a specific employer were given permits valid for only one year and only with that one employer, after which if their employment with that employer ended, so did their legal status in the country.[81] Furthermore, employers typically kept the work permit, giving the worker a photocopy, if any documents at all. Without such documentation, even registered migrant workers found themselves threatened by deportation, harassment and arrest as a result of their inability to prove their legal status.[82] Workers also expressed grievances regarding the regulation that prohibits them from changing employment for a period of one year, as this prevented workers whose contracts were terminated from finding a new job.[83] It is also worth noting that many families have been separated as a result of registration. Children under the age of 18 were not allowed to register and, given the high cost of registration, most families did not register all adult members for fear of incurring large debts.[84]

Another negative consequence of maintaining the work permit was the mandatory health check-up that was implemented in March 2002. The health tests checked for seven health "risks," with individuals proving positive for any one faced with immediate deportation. In addition, efforts were made by the RTG to include testing positive for pregnancy as a means for revoking one's work permit and initiating deportation proceedings. The threat of such punishment not only deterred hundreds of female migrants from registering, but also sparked a widespread rise in illegal abortions.[85] After much opposition, the RTG officially withdrew pregnancy testing, though many employers still found reason to terminate female employees

[77] Caouette, T. & Pack, M. (December 2002).

[78] Royal Thai Government. (December 6, 2001). *The Result of Registration of Alien Workers.* Bangkok: Author.

[79] Broadmoor, T. *The Irrawaddy.* (August-September 2001).

[80] Document for Discussion distributed at the NGO Forum on *Migrant Worker Policy on Transnational Worker Protection Mechanism* held at Chulalongkorn University on February 21, 2003.

[81] Caouette, T. & Pack, M. (December 2002).

[82] Ibid.

[83] Onnucha, H. (January 30, 2002). "Paperless Foreign Workers Facing Police Harassment." *The Bangkok Post.*

[84] Federation of Trade Unions/Burma. (2001). *Situation Report: Migrant Workers from Burma in Thailand.* Bangkok: Author.

Strait Times Reporter. (January 18, 2002). "Thai Pregnancy Ban on Foreign Workers Sparks Abortion Rears." *The Strait Times.*

and to report them to immigration for deportation. Meanwhile, migrants who were found to have any of the seven communicable diseases were to be immediately arrested and sent back to Burma without even the most meager health treatment or counseling.[86]

Although HIV status was not one of the seven diseases being tested in Thailand's health check-ups, the Burmese authorities undertook forced HIV testing on all migrants officially deported. The SPDC initially exerted pressure for the RTG to conduct HIV testing prior to deportation, but when the RTG refused the SPDC announced everyone returning from Thailand would be tested for HIV upon arrival at the repatriation centers. The RTG continued with official deportations knowing that all the returnees were forcibly tested, despite reports of those positively tested for HIV being separated from others and sent to Rangoon.[87] This systematic and forcible testing for HIV/AIDS lacked any mechanisms for monitoring or reporting, contrary to UN and other international guidelines for HIV monitoring, counseling, testing and care of those found to be positive.[88]

1.6 Vulnerability of Migrant Domestic Workers

There is a growing international awareness of the vulnerability faced by domestic workers worldwide as labor laws fail to recognize their jobs with the protection of regulated employment.[89] Only recently have some countries made efforts to regularize and protect domestic workers through national policies and labor laws. Thailand's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare first included "domestic workers" in its mandate when registering migrant workers in 1996,[90] prior to that Thai labor laws never mentioned domestic work as a category for immigrant work (including Thai domestic labor overseas). In subsequent registrations, domestic work was excluded and only reinstated in the 2001 registration when 568,249

[86] Network Media Group. (February 10,2002). "More Than 200 Burmese Illegal Workers Sent Back to Myawaddy." Chiang Mai: Author.

[87] Migrant Action Programme. (July 7, 2002). *Deportation of Burmese Migrants and HIV Testing.* Chiang Mai: Author.

[88] 1) Third International Consultation for HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. (July 2002). *HIV/AIDS and Human Rights: International Guidelines.* Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Joint Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

2) Fernandez, I. (2000). *HIV Vulnerability of Migrant Workers: The Realities.* Paper presented at the Regional Summit on Pre-Departure, Post-Arrival and Reintegration Programs for Migrant Workers. Malaysia: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Canadian Human Rights Foundation, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNAIDS.

[89] 1) Human Rights Watch. (2001). *Hidden in the Home: Abuse of Domestic Workers with Special Visas in the United States.* New York: Author.

2) Rockefeller Foundation. (2002). *Women at Work: A New Framework for Women in a Globalizing World.* New York: Author.

3) Parrenas, R.S. (2001). *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[90] In 1996, 34,000 migrant domestic workers had registered for work permits in Thailand according to:
CARAM Asia. (2001). Presentation by Supmol Tawarnraru of the Overseas Employment Administration Office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. "Domestic Workers in Thailand and Abroad." Published in *Consultation on Thai and Domestic Workers.* Bangkok: Author.

migrants received work permits, with over82,000[91] registered as domestic workers.[92] Although domestic workers received work permits, the labor laws did not protect their work. The only protection provided is the Thai 1998 Labour Protection Law, which covers those who worked in households involved in other economic activities.[93] Therefore, though migrant domestic work was recognized by the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in 1996 and again in the 2001 registration, there are no rights or protections ensured to this labor sector for Thais or migrants.

Although migrant domestic workers have been allowed to register to work in Thailand, their ability to do so and keep valid their permit depends entirely on their employer. For those unable to obtain work permits, they remain particularly vulnerable to exploitation.[94] Even with work permits migrant domestic workers are unable to claim labor rights and as elsewhere in the world they are seen as 'partial citizens' who are neither fully eligible under home or host country labor laws.[95] As a result, migrant domestic workers around the world are caught in a dependence upon their employer and their fears of reprisal, arrest and possible deportation.[96]

Since 1996, the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare instituted a policy on the export of Thai domestic workers overseas. Countries requesting Thai domestic workers had to ensure skill development, reasonable salaries, protection from exploitation and quality of life and living standards (for both physical and mental health care). During 2000 and 2001, over 10,000 Thai women took jobs overseas as domestic workers through the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.[97] However, the same policies for protecting Thai domestic workers overseas are not applied to the 82,000 migrants registered with the Thai government to work as domestic workers in Thailand. Furthermore, these policies are not laws, but recommendations and, therefore, not enforceable.

Neither migrants nor domestic workers (including Thai citizens) have any means of reporting or seeking redress to the grievances or abuses they encounter in their jobs. There is a universal social contempt for domestic work that permeates Thai society, as elsewhere. This only adds to the alienation of domestic workers and perpetuates the disregard for their labor and basic rights.[98]

[91] Domestic workers accounted for 30 percent of the total number of registered female migrant workers, representing the highest proportion of work engaged by female migrant workers according to Paitoonpong, S., Plywej, J. & Sirikul, W. (2002).

[92] Ibid.

[93] CARAM Asia. (2001). Presentation by Charut Neesit of the Lawyers Society. "Protection of Employees in Work Related to Housework." Published in *Consultation on Thai and Domestic Workers.* Bangkok: Author.

[94] United Nations. (2002). Presentation by Srawooth Paitoonpong from the Thai Development and Research Institute. Published in *Case Studies of Industries Dependent on Migrant Workers.* Bangkok: United Nations.

[95] Parrenas, R.S. (2001).

1) Migrant Action Programme. (2001). *Migrant Domestic Workers from Burma in Thai Homes.* Chiang Mai: Author.

2) Human Rights Watch. (2001).

[97] CARAM Asia. (2001). Presentation by Supmol Tawarnraru.

[98] CARAM Asia. (2001). Presentation by Parat Na Nakorn of the Arom Pongpangnan Foundation. "Methods of Bringing Workers in Households Together." Published in *Consultation on Thai and Domestic Workers.* Bangkok: Author.

Only child domestic workers have come to receive attention as an internationally widespread problem where children are hidden, isolated and inaccessible in the homes of their employers.[99] Among the largest group of child workers are those working as domestics, of which the majority is female.[100] A number of children in domestic labor have indirectly benefited from interventions that tackle the situation of child labor in general. However, the nature of child domestic labor as a particularly hidden form of the larger problem of child labor means that the impact of the broader, policy level interventions that are not specifically geared to child domestic workers, is slow, and, in most places, minimal.[101]

Laws protecting child domestic workers have been established in Thailand, but these have not been applied to non-Thai migrants. In addition, non-Thai migrant children (under the age of 18)are not allowed to register for work permits. Consequently, migrant child domestic workers in Thailand are exceptionally vulnerable, as they are 'illegal' on two counts: 1) being undocumented and 2) being underage, which employers often use to their advantage.[102]

1.7 Researching the Situation of Domestic Workers from Burma in Thailand

This study set out to investigate the situation of female domestic workers from Burma in Thailand at an opportune time given the RTG registration of 82,000 migrant domestic workers, the enforcement of the Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and the growing awareness of trafficking that goes beyond the sex industry. The study aims to disseminate personal accounts and analysis of the lives of female domestic workers from Burma in Thailand and to build a community awareness and response that advocates for laws that formalize their work and protect their basic rights.

The Thai government's September/October 2001 initiative to register undocumented migrant domestic workers provided an opportunity to legally contact and communicate with this population. In addition, the Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's recognition of the need for domestic labor highlights the need to advocate for regularizing such employment with standards and protection covered by both Thai and international labor laws.

The 1990 Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families came into force in 2002. This offers another opportunity to highlight the abuses encountered by migrant workers and the significance of ratifying and incorporating the rights of migrants into national law. The Convention on the Rights of Migrants and their Families was introduced in April 1997, with the United Nation's Human Rights Commission urging all states to guarantee the protection of all migrant workers by ratifying the Convention as a matter of priority, expressing its "deep concern at the growing manifestations of racism, xenophobia and

[99] Black, M. (2002). *A Handbook on Advocacy: Child Domestic Workers Finding a Voice.* London: Anti-Slavery International.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Bharati, P. (2002). *An Overview of Child Domestic Workers in Asia.* Bangkok: International Labour Organisation.

[102] International Labour Organisation (ILO). (2002). *Country Paper: Thailand.* Presented at the ILO/Japan/Korea Asian Meeting On Action to Combat Domestic Child Labour. Bangkok: Author.

other forms of discrimination and inhuman and degrading treatment against migrant workers in different parts of the world."[103] Of all the aforementioned migrating peoples of the world to which the authors of that resolution were alluding, perhaps those who endure the most inordinate share of suffering and abuse are the migrant peoples of Burma.

There is an emerging awareness that laws, policies, public information and media accounts must be strengthened to quell the predominant stereotype that the majority of those trafficked into Thailand are brought into the sex industry. On the contrary, the majority of female migrant workers in Thailand are employed in domestic realms and factories, but due to this popular misconception and their isolation, the abuses they face are rarely exposed. The isolation inside private households has barricaded migrant females from the vigilance of the human rights community, NGOs and government agencies.

1.8 Conclusion

As readers delve into the forthcoming chapters, it is hoped that they will seek to widen public scrutiny into the private households where thousands are employed as domestic workers and become a voice advocating the recognition of domestic work in labor laws with standardized working conditions and protection mechanisms that include redress against abusive employers.

[103] United Nations Commission on Human Rights. (April 13, 1997). Resolution 1997/14 on the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 37th Meeting. Geneva: Author.

Chapter Two :

Research Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Thai labor laws do not provide protection to domestic workers regardless of their Thai or foreign nationality.[1] In September and October 2001, the Thai Ministry of Labour allowed migrant domestic workers to register for temporary work permits, thereby providing a quasi-legal framework for their employment. Over 82,000 domestic workers received work permits of which the vast majority came from Burma. Registering and issuing work permits to domestic workers provided an opportunity to legitimately contact this previously hidden and illegal population.

In November 2001, a Shan and Karen Research Team developed a research proposal to examine the life experiences of migrant women and girls from Burma employed as domestic workers in Thailand and the human rights abuses they encounter. Working in partnership with the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University in Thailand, a research team of eight migrants from Burma, was put together and met in to develop the design and research methodology of this study.

2.2 Research Goal and Objectives

The study's research goal and objectives were developed by the entire research team. They are as follows:

Goal: To provide information to policy makers and service providers in considering appropriate interventions for assisting female migrants from Burma employed as domestic

[1] Thai laws for this labor sector only cover Thai employees who work in small businesses of their employer in addition to their employment as domestic help.

workers in Thailand, and to offer a resource for advocating and protecting the rights of these women and girls.[2]

Objectives:

• Examine the life experiences, perceptions and decision-making considerations of migrant girls and young women from Burma working as domestics in Tak and Chiang Mai Provinces.

• Identify the vulnerabilities of these girls and young women to exploitation, abuse and/or trafficking.

• Explore opportunities for recommended interventions that provide protection, support and alternatives to those girls and young women who have encountered exploitation, abuse and/or have been trafficked.

• Develop a knowledge base regarding this informal labor sector, which is not currently available, and translate the findings into the Thai and Bamar languages so as to inform various stakeholders in the countries of origin and destination.

• Publish a report in English for wide dissemination among the international community directly involved with migrant populations and/or overlapping issues (such as trafficking, health and HIV/AIDS).

2.3 Research Design

The research design for this study was implemented in the following five (5) phases:

Phase One

Phase One of the research design was undertaken from November 2001 to January 2002 to develop the research proposal. Funding for this initial phase was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. During this time the Research Coordinators (RCs) gathered relevant background information, met with key organizations and individuals, attended relevant workshops,[3] and identified partners and research team members.

In January 2002, the research team met in Chiang Mai for a *Team Workshop and Training* session to develop the research proposal, as well as guidelines and principles for data collection. Technical training was also provided on research tools focusing on qualitative

[2] The original project goal was to also include female factory workers from Burma in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai. However, it was discovered in the first weeks of implementing this project that the scope was too broad as the research tools and strategy for implementation would be very different in reaching the two different populations. Therefore, it was agreed upon by the project team members to focus specifically on female domestic workers.

[3] *Mapping Migration Needs, Issues and Strategies in the Greater Mekong Region* organized by Asian Migrant Centre, held in Bangkok from November 1-3, 2001; and *Consultative Meeting on Domestic Workers* organized by MAP and CARAM-Asia, held in Bangkok from November 14-15, 2001.

methods for Phase Two, including direct and participatory observations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The research team also reviewed ethical considerations for the implementation of this study. Resources on ethical considerations were used to explore research considerations related to domestic violence,[4] child domestic workers[5] and vulnerable communities.[6]

Phase Two

Phase Two of the research design focused on qualitative data collection conducted from March to August 2002. This phase began with translating the research guidelines for Phase Two into the Shan and Bamar languages, field testing the research tools in each site and revising and harmonizing these tools as needed. Separate guidelines were developed for the direct and participatory observations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.[7]

During Phase Two, observations were made of each area in which in-depth interviews or focus group discussions would take place. The final study consisted of 133 in-depth interviews; 68 conducted in Chiang Mai and 65 in Mae Sot. Several attempts to hold focus group discussions were made by each team, but were unsuccessful due to the diversity of languages among the participants and limitations of time and mobility of the participants. At the same time, the security situation became increasingly tense during Phase Two. Therefore, it was decided not to continue efforts to hold focus group discussions that might potentially result in arrests or harassment of the participants.

Qualitative data was translated from Shan and Bamar into English and entered into Word on the computer. In some instances, when the interview or group discussion took place in another minority language, it was first translated into either Shan or Bamar and then into English.

During the last month of Phase Two, a Team Workshop was held at each site[8] to review Phase Two data and based on the findings to develop the questionnaire, consent form and strategy for implementation of Phase Three.

Following the workshop, the questionnaire and consent form were reviewed and improved in consultation with IPSR at Mahidol University.

[4] 1) Ellsberg, M., Heise, L. Pena, R., Agurto, S. & Winkvist, A. (2001). "Researching Domestic Violence Against Women: Methodological and Ethical Considerations." *Studies on Family Planning.* Volume 32, Number 1.
2) World Health Organization. (2002). *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women.* Geneva: Author.

[5] Black, M. (1997). *Child Domestic Workers: A Handbook for Research and Action.* London: Anti-Slavery International.

[6] Yoddumnern-Attig, B., et.al. (1993). *Qualitative Methods for Population and Health Research.* Nakhonpathom: Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University.

[7] See Appendix One: In-Depth Interview Guidelines.

[8] Due to the security situation in July 2002 wherein authorities in both Thailand and Burma were tightening controls in the border areas, it was difficult and potentially dangerous for many of the team members to travel and, thus, it was not possible for the entire project team to meet. Smaller teams, therefore, met at each site, with the Research Coordinators and the Advisor participating in workshops at both sites.

Phase Three

Phase Three of the research design included gathering quantitative data through a survey conducted from August 2002 to January 2003. This Phase began with the translation of the questionnaire and consent form into the Shan and Bamar languages. The questionnaire and consent form were then field tested in each site, revised, harmonized between sites and back translated into English. The final questionnaire[9] and consent form[10] were reviewed by the entire team and IPSR.

The team surveyed 544 domestic workers, 253 in Chiang Mai and 291 in Mae Sot. Nearly 70 percent of the questionnaires were completed by the Field Researchers in face-to-face sessions with the respondents and 14 percent of the questionnaires were filled out by the respondent on her own time and returned directly to the respective Field Researcher at each site. In an effort to reach domestic workers whose employers would not allow them to contact the Field Researchers, another 16 percent were given to domestic workers to fill out via their friends (also domestic workers who were surveyed).

A training for team members in SPSS data entry was given by IPSR in November 2002. The team developed a key for the questionnaire and entered the data into the SPSS program.

A workshop was held at the end of Phase Three to review the data and experiences to date and plan for Phase Four. The workshop was held from January 8-10, 2003 with all team members present and a visit from staff of the Rockefeller Foundation on the final day. Each team presented its data and experiences of the research process and methodology. The entire team then reviewed the preliminary findings and began the process of qualitative (coding data) and quantitative data analysis (preparing dummy tables). The team outlined the final report, reviewed the contents of each section and developed a strategy for developing recommendations and disseminating the report.

Phase Four

Phase Four of the research design was undertaken from February to August 2003 to complete the data entry and analysis, report writing and draft review.

During July 2003, a team meeting was held in Chiang Mai together with representatives of community-based organizations working with migrant women from Burma. The meeting reviewed the findings and draft report and developed recommendations. The meeting also identified a strategy and work plan for receiving input to the findings and recommendations from key organizations and individuals. Based on the feedback from governmental and non-governmental sectors, the English-language research report was finalized.

Phase Five

Phase Five of the research design was the final phase of the study, implemented from September to January 2004 to translate, edit, layout, publish and disseminate the final report

[9] See Appendix Two: Questionnaire.

[10] See Appendix Three: Consent Form.

in English, Thai and Bamar. An Executive Summary of the final report was also translated into the Shan and Karen languages.

This phase began with translating the English version of the report into Thai and Bamar, followed by the final editing, design and layout of all manuscripts prior to delivery to the publisher. The Executive Summaries in the Shan and Karen languages were also reviewed, revised, edited and published.

Finally, the reports were disseminated widely to governmental departments, organizations, institutions and key individuals to advocate for the rights of migrants from Burma in Thailand, especially those isolated in domestic employment.

Security Issues

Each of Phases Two through Five were delayed due to the security concerns that arose during July 2002, as discussed in Chapter One, which resulted in data analysis taking longer than anticipated. In addition, an unrelated staff injury deferred report writing during Phase Four. Consequently, Research Assistants were brought into the project to assist with both the data analysis and the write up of the findings.

It was originally envisioned that the entire research team would meet together during each phase of the study. The security situation in July 2002, however, precluded the two teams from meeting together during Phase Two of the study (the Research Advisor and Research Coordinators met with each team separately at their own sites). Nevertheless, the two teams were able to meet together during the other phases as planned.

2.4 Research Team

The study was implemented by two research teams, one in Chiang Mai City of Chiang Mai Province and the other in Mae Sot town of Tak Province. All of the researchers were members of the Burmese migrant community in Thailand. Each team had a Research Coordinator, two Field Researchers and a Documenter/Translator. In addition, the study was supported by a Research Advisor who worked with teams throughout the entire research process.

The Chiang Mai team worked in collaboration with community-based organizations working directly with female migrants from Burma in Thailand.

The Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University was the project grantee and oversaw project management, Thai translation, publication of the reports and distribution. In addition, IPSR provided training to the entire team on using SPSS for quantitative data analysis and also oversaw the SPSS data entry and analysis.

Research Coordinators

The primary responsibilities of the Research Coordinators were to oversee all the activities of the research team and to communicate between the sites with the Research Advisor, Mahidol University, donors and partner organizations. In addition, the Research Coordinators were responsible for writing the proposal for the Phase One grant, developing

the project proposal, as well as overseeing the data collection process, translation, finances, reporting to donors, and organizing the workshops. The RCs also oversaw the data analysis process and the writing up of the findings. Both Research Coordinators had previous research experience and extensive knowledge of the research sites. They established temporary offices at each site as a base for research planning, training and analysis as well as providing a secure place to lock and ensure confidentiality of all documentation.

Field Researchers

Field Researchers conducted observations, in-depth interviews and a survey in their respective sites. They were responsible for making all the necessary contacts and follow-ups with participants and key informants. Field Researchers also kept a journal of their work, personal thoughts and experiences. They received training with the entire team prior to each phase and also ongoing support and feedback from the Research Coordinators.

Documenters

The Documenters were involved throughout the research process and worked full time with the team to review, translate and give feedback on the documentation process. All qualitative data was entered into Microsoft Word (English version), saved with a password and backed-up on CD. The Documenters participated in all team meetings and trainings, and were responsible for giving input to all aspects of the documentation process.

Research Advisor

The Research Advisor worked with the Research Coordinators from the conception of this study, supporting the development of the project proposal. The Research Advisor was a consultant to the team throughout the entire research process providing input, technical support and training. The Research Advisor participated in each workshop and held periodic meetings with the Research Coordinators during each phase of the study.

The Research Advisor also reviewed all project documentation, reports and agendas to provide input to the Research Coordinators. In addition, the Research Advisor took responsibility for the qualitative data analysis (based on the categories and outline prepared by the teams) and wrote the final report in English.

2.5 Data Collection Tools, Strategy and Documentation

The research team reviewed the various research tools and selected those best for communicating with the participants. Guidelines were developed by the team, translated, field tested and revised for each data collection tool. The research team also established a strategy for implementation and documentation for each tool. A number of key resources were used throughout the project as a guide for developing the various research components.[11]

[11] See Bibliography.

A. Data Collection Tools

Observations

The research teams conducted direct observations by drawing maps of the migrant workers' communities and noting observations of the conditions and situations found in each site.

The Field Researchers also conducted participatory observations in which they spoke with community members, while conducting their observations, to assess the dynamics of the environment and interactions. Notes were taken after the exchange was completed so as not to raise suspicion or cause safety concerns (to those spoken to as well as to the Field Researchers themselves).

Based on these observations, potential participants were identified and strategies for approaching them considered. Observations were conducted throughout the entire research project as new participants were considered and new situations emerged.

Interviews

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview guidelines[12] were developed by the entire research team with input from the Research Advisor, Mahidol University, donors and partner organizations working with migrant populations in Thailand. The guidelines covered various aspects of the participants' background, life in Burma, the migration journey, living and working conditions, health, legal status, family life and future aspirations.

The guidelines were semi-structured to provide a degree of flexibility to probe and explore unexpected and often undocumented issues, while maintaining consistency between the two sites. Finally, the Field Researchers added their own comments separately at the end of each interview to provide their insight into the nonverbal communication and environs of the participants.

Survey

During Phase Three a *questionnaire*[13] was used to expand the number of study participants and thereby provide a larger population sample for analysis. Data collected from Phase Two was incorporated into the development of the questionnaire, which included both open- and close-ended questions.

The questionnaire was developed together by the entire research team, reviewed by the Research Advisor, Mahidol University and partner organizations working with migrant populations in Thailand. The questionnaire was then translated into the Shan and Bamar languages, field-tested, revised and back translated into English. Questionnaires were adapted to accommodate the grammatical preferences and cultural context of the participants while care was taken to ensure the same meaning between all three languages.

[12] See Appendix One: In-Depth Interview Guidelines.

[13] See Appendix Two: Questionnaire.

B. Data Collection Strategy

Initially, the Field Researchers randomly met domestic workers in the markets or temples and others were introduced to the Field Researchers through various community-based organizations. After the initial introductions, the Field Researchers relied on snowball sampling with referrals from domestic workers themselves.

The Field Researchers never tried to interview on the first meeting. The initial meeting was to introduce themselves and the project, request their consent to participate, observe the environment and discuss the best way of meeting again.

The in-depth interviews were undertaken over extended periods of time, often necessitating five to six visits over a three-month period. The majority of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, however, in some instances, part, or all, of the interview was conducted over the telephone.

The implementation of the survey often required more than one visit to complete the questionnaire. The majority of the questionnaires were conducted face-to-face with the Field Researcher. However, in attempts to reach domestic workers who were not allowed out of the house or to communicate via phone (and, therefore, were not included in the qualitative phase of this study), efforts were made to deliver the questionnaires to domestic workers (either directly by the Field Researchers or through friends), requesting that they fill the survey out themselves. This however, was only effective for those who were literate in the Shan, Karen or Bamar languages.

The Field Researchers also had informed consent forms explaining the rights of the participants and requesting either written or verbal agreement for involvement in the project. Brochures and cards informing domestic workers of social services operating for migrant women in their area were also made available to participants throughout the project.

C. Documentation and Translation

Documentation

The Field Researchers kept two notebooks: one for the data collected from participants and the other to document the research process. The notes for data collected from study participants were divided with a narrow right hand column for the Field Researchers' comments and insights (to keep them clearly separated from the words of the participants). The second notebook, documenting the research process was used to record the research completed, the methods used and the Field Researchers' individual experiences and observations.

As mentioned earlier, the Field Researchers routinely conducted direct and/or participatory observations before approaching any participant for an interview. Given the unknown environment in which the domestic worker was employed, observations were crucial in helping the Field Researchers decide how and when to best approach the domestic worker.

Many participants requested that the Field Researchers not take notes or use a tape recorder, fearing it would raise suspicions with their employers. In such cases, the Field

Researchers talked to the participants and afterwards immediately found a private space to write down the data collected. In efforts to reach domestic workers whose employers did not allow any outside contact, a tape recorder was left with the participant and she was asked to talk about her situation, as she felt comfortable.

Translation

There are dozens of ethnic minority languages and dialects in Burma and thus among the migrant population. The research team spoke Bamar, Shan, Karen and Pa-O. In some cases, however, language barriers resulted in an inability to conduct the interview or survey. On several occasions, the Field Researcher sought a translator to accompany her. However, given that the exact time for meeting the participants could not be determined in advance and often necessitated numerous meetings with one participant, the use of translators was not as successful as anticipated.

Though the Field Researchers could speak three or more languages each, they were not literate in all. Therefore, in some instances, the Field Researchers had to conduct the interviews in one language and take notes in another. The Field Researchers made every effort to review their notes afterwards to ensure accuracy. However, data clearly loses some content with each translation.

As mentioned earlier, all data was translated from the Bamar and Shan languages into English by full time Documenters at each site. The Documenters worked closely with the Field Researchers clarifying and giving feedback to the data collected. Each interview was kept on a separate Word file with a password. The data was backed up on a CD with a password and not kept on the computer hard drive. The Documenters were involved in the entire research process in order to strengthen their understanding of the entire project and their role and responsibilities. This facilitated greater accuracy in translation, respect for confidentiality and ability to monitor the data collected in relation to the guidelines developed and training received.

The Documenters also helped translate, test, revise and finalize the questionnaire for the survey undertaken in Phase Three. In addition, they worked to translate the analysis done by each team for the final report and the executive summaries in the Shan and Karen languages.

2.6 Data Analysis

As noted earlier, the qualitative data was collected during Phase Two of the project and the quantitative data compiled in Phase Three. The two sets of data were analyzed separately and then combined to provide a comprehensive portrait of migrants from Burma employed as domestic workers in Thailand.

Qualitative

Qualitative data was collected through observations and in-depth interviews. Specific socio-demographic variables were collected for each participant during the in-depth interviews.

These variables were identified in advance from the background section of the interview guidelines and were entered onto a spreadsheet format using the Excel Program. This provided a background profile of each of the in-depth interview participants.

Ethnograph (Version 5) was the computer program used to analyze the qualitative data. This program requires that categories be defined based on the objectives of the study, interview guidelines and issues identified during the study. The English translation of each interview was entered into Ethnograph and converted into a text with numbered lines. The data was then coded by hand identifying the various categories according to the line numbers and re-entered into the Ethnograph program. Ethnograph then compiled the data under each category noting what interview was being quoted and if this data was included in any of the other categories (to avoid duplication when presenting the data).

Quantitative

The quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire and was analyzed using the computer program SPSS (Version 10). The data from each site was entered into SPSS separately to facilitate comparative analysis. The data was then cleaned of inconsistencies or errors in data entry. Afterward, SPSS provided data frequencies and cross-tabulations for different variables available in the data. Based on the analysis of over 100 tables and charts significant correlations were identified.

2.7 Research Sites and Participants

This study was conducted in the cities and surrounding urban areas of Mae Sot and Chiang Mai. The research sites and the background of participants reached through in-depth interviews and the survey differed, as discussed below.

A. Research Sites

The cities of Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, their location, ethnic composition and surrounding environment each have unique characteristics.

Mae Sot

Mae Sot is located on the Thai side of the Burma border demarcated by the Moei River with the town of Myawaddy on the Burmese side of the "Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge." Thai local authorities estimate that 500 persons enter Thailand at Mae Sot each day with the majority of them young people seeking work opportunities in the area or other parts of Thailand. Mae Sot has a population of 104,300 and is located in Tak Province at the beginning of the Asian highway link between India, Burma and Thailand.

Local government authorities claim there are well over 100,000 migrant workers from Burma in Mae Sot town alone with only 47,489 registered in all of Tak Province.[14] Migrants

[14] Office of Foreign Workers Administration, Department of Employment. (December 6, 2001). *The Result of Registration's Alien Workers Sorted by Region/Province and Nationality.* Bangkok: Author.

from Burma are the primary work force in factories, restaurants, shops, agriculture, construction and domestic service. There is a great demand for migrants from Burma as they are in abundance, and willing to work longer hours at considerably less pay than Thai workers.

For the past forty years, this area of the border has been an area of armed conflict between the Burmese military and the Karen National Union (KNU). Refugee camps inside Thailand have been maintained for nearly 20 years with the population steadily growing to over 120,000 people from Burma, primarily of Karen ethnicity, as of early 2003. Though over the past decade the fighting has diminished as the KNU has lost significant strongholds, the tension remains and sporadic skirmishing still occurs. This has resulted in a highly unstable environment with attacks on villagers and refugee camps, sporadic opening and closing of border checkpoints, round-ups, arrests and/or deportations of undocumented migrants and refugees.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai Province borders the Eastern Shan State of Burma and is the largest province in northern Thailand. The city of Chiang Mai has a population of 171,594 and is located 163 kilometers from the Burma border. Agriculture is the primary economic resource in Chiang Mai Province, whereas Chiang Mai city relies on tourism and the jobs it creates in construction, small-scale production and the service industry. Consequently, many migrants from Burma (especially young people) travel from the border area to Chiang Mai city where employment opportunities are greater and more diverse. There are no known estimates of the number of undocumented migrants from Burma in Chiang Mai Province though it is assumed to be several hundred thousand, with only 28,926 receiving work permits in the 2001 registration.[15]

The majority of migrants in Chiang Mai Province are ethnic Shan from Shan State in Burma, though many smaller ethnic peoples are also present. The Shan people have a language and culture that is similar to the northern Thai. As a result, it has been easier for Shan migrants to adapt and assimilate than other ethnic groups from Burma.

The Burma-Thai border of Chiang Mai Province has also experienced decades of conflict between numerous ethnic groups and the Burmese military. Though many of the ethnic opposition groups have entered cease-fire agreements with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), factions of the Shan State Army have resisted and intermittent fighting still occurs. This has led to increased displacement of entire villages inside Shan State, refugee flows into Thailand and tentative situations along the border, with fighting spilling into Thailand, increased military presence and checkpoints, and fluctuating responses of protection and forced deportation that perpetuate instability and fear among the entire border population.

[15] Ibid.

B. Study Population

The study's population sample primarily included females under the age of 30 who were born in Burma and were currently employed as domestic workers in Tak or Chiang Mai Provinces in Thailand. However, the research teams also agreed to involve women over 30 years old who expressed an interest in participating in the research study.

Most of the participants were between the ages of 15 and 24, were single without children, of Shan or Karen ethnicity and spoke their native language and at least one other language. The majority was born in the Shan, Karen or Mon States (bordering Thailand). Most participants in Chiang Mai could speak some Thai whereas the majority in Mae Sot could not. Approximately one sixth of all the participants had no formal education (with those in Chiang Mai having a slightly higher educational attainment rate). One third of the participants had attended primary school, another third had attended secondary school and the remaining one sixth had passed their 10th standard exam. The majority of the participants came to Thailand between 1996 and 2000, with approximately half having registered for work permits.

The tables below provide a detailed breakdown of the participants' social characteristics. The tables present the background data of those involved in the in-depth interviews during Phase Two and the survey implemented during Phase Three. The tables describing the in-depth interview participants provide only the absolute numbers, as the sample size is not large enough to substantiate percentages. However, the survey data is large enough to present both the percentage distribution and absolute numbers of responses.

Age Range

The largest age group among the study participants was those between the ages of 19 and 24. This was true for those involved in the in-depth interviews as well as those that completed the survey. Nearly one fifth (19.4%) of the survey participants (102) and interviewees (27) were 18 years of age or younger (Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Table 2.1 Number of in-depth interview participants by age and research site

Age	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
13-18	12	15	27
19-24	24	28	52
25-30	17	21	38
Over 30	15	0	15
No. of respondents	**68**	**64**	**132**

Table 2.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by age and research site

Age	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
13-18	11.6% (28)	25.9 % (74)	19.4% (102)
19-24	42.5% (103)	40.6% (116)	41.4% (219)
25-30	31.4 % (76)	33.2 % (95)	32.4% (171)
Over 30	14.5% (35)	0.3 %(1)	6.8 % (36)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Marital Status

More than half of participants involved in both the in-depth interviews and the survey were single (Tables 2.3 and 2.4) while nearly 35 percent were married, and more than 13 percent were widowed, divorced or separated (Table 2.4).

Table 2.3 Number of in-depth interview participants by marital status and research site

Marital Status	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Single	39	39	78
Married	28	26	54
Widowed	1	-	1
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.4 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by marital status and research site

Marital Status	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Unmarried	46.7% (113)	56.6% (162)	52.1% (275)
Married	39.7% (96)	30.1% (86)	34.5% (182)
Divorced/separated	7.9% (19)	8.7% (25)	8.3% (44)
Widowed	5.4% (13)	4.5% (13)	4.9% (26)
No response	0.4% (1)	-	0.2% (1)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Number of Children

The majority of the study participants in both the in-depth interviews and the survey did not have children (Tables 2.5 and 2.6). Those who did have children numbered approximately 32 percent (Table 2.6).

Table 2.5 Number of in-depth interview participants by number of children and research site

Number of children	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
No children	46	50	96
1-3	20	14	34
4 or more	2	1	3
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.6 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of children and research site

Number of children	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
No children	63.2% (153)	71.7% (205)	67.8% (358)
1-3	36.0% (87)	26.6% (76)	30.9% (163)
4 or more	0.8% (2)	1.7% (5)	1.3% (7)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Ethnicity

In Chiang Mai all but a few participants were of Shan ethnicity (Tables 2.7 and 2.8). However, in Mae Sot there was more ethnic diversity with Karen representing nearly half the total number of participants, Burman one-third and the remainder being of Mon, Pa-O or other ethnicity (Table 2.8).

Table 2.7 Number of in-depth interview participants by ethnicity and research site

	Ethnicity						
	Shan	Karen	Burman	Mon	Pa-O	Other	Total
Chiang Mai	62	1	-	-	1	4	68
Mae Sot	1	30	15	9	4	6	65
Total	**63**	**31**	**15**	**9**	**5**	**10**	**133**

Table 2.8 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by ethnicity and research site

Ethnicity	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Shan	98.3% (238)	0.7% (2)	45.5% (240)
Karen	0.4% (1)	43.7% (125)	23.9% (126)
Burman	-	33.2% (95)	18.0% (95)
Mon	-	11.2% (32)	6.1% (32)
Pa-O	0.4% (1)	9.4% (27)	5.3% (28)
Other	0.8% (2)	1.7% (5)	1.3% (7)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Education Level

Over one-third of the study population received some primary education (Tables 2.9 and 2.10). About one-third having attended secondary school (7 to 9 years of study) and the remaining one-sixth having studied ten years or more with almost an equal number having never received any formal education (Table 2.10).

Table 2.9 Number of in-depth interview participants by level of formal education attained and research site

Level of formal education	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
No education	7	3	10
Primary	22	34	56
Secondary	17	7	24
High School	7	12	19
University or higher	1	2	3
No response	14	7	21
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.10 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by level of formal education attained and research site

Level of formal education	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
No education	20.2 % (49)	10.8% (31)	15.2% (80)
Primary	26.0 % (63)	37.4% (107)	32.2% (170)
Secondary	34.7 % (84)	35.0% (100)	34.8% (184)
High School	16.5% (40)	15.7% (45)	16.1 %(85)
University or higher	2.5 % (6)	1.0 % (3)	1.7 % (9)
No. of respondents	242	286	528

Language skills

More than half of the study population could speak three or more languages (Tables 2.11 and 2.12). Table 2.11 shows the number of languages spoken by the portion of the study population that participated in the in-depth interviews.

Table 2.11 Number of in-depth interview participants by number of languages spoken and research site

Number of languages spoken	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
One	1	19	20
Two	30	16	46
Three or more	37	30	67
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.12 shows the number of languages spoken by all the survey respondents (Chiang Mai and Mae Sot combined) as correlated with the level of formal education received. It is worth pointing out that fluency in spoken languages was not strongly associated with educational attainment rates.

Table 2.12 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of languages spoken and level of formal education

Number of languages spoken	Years of Education					Total
	No School	Primary	Secondary	High School	University or Higher	
1	8.8 % (7)	12.4% (21)	9.8% (18)	9.4 % (8)	-	10.2% (54)
2	45.0 % (36)	32.4 % (55)	23.9 % (44)	24.7% (21)	33.3 % (3)	30.1% (159)
3	42.5 % (34)	48.2 % (82)	59.0% (103)	41.0% (35)	33.3 % (3)	48.7 % (257)
4	3.8 % (3)	7.1% (12)	9.8% (18)	22.4% (19)	33.3 % (3)	10.4% (55)
5		-	0.5% (1)	2.4 % (2)	-	0.6 % (3)
No. of respondents	**80**	**170**	**184**	**85**	**9**	**528**

First Time Migrating to Thailand

Table 2.13 shows when the in-depth interview participants first migrated to Thailand. More than half of the study participants entered Thailand for the first time between 1996 and 2000, with almost a third arriving between 2001 and 2003, and the remainder having first come prior to 1995 (Table 2.14).

Tables 2.14 and 2.15 show the same data for the survey respondents in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot, respectively, and also include the age of the respondents at the time this study was conducted. These tables highlight the young ages at which the majority of the study population first migrated. The older respondents in this study first entered Thailand when they were much younger, with the younger respondents having come more recently.

Table 2.13 Number of in-depth interview participants by first year migrating to Thailand and research site

First time migrating to Thailand	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
1981 -1990	2	3	5
1991-1995	2	10	12
1996-2000	23	40	63
2001 - 2002	9	12	21
No response	32	-	32
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.14 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents in Chiang Mai by first year migrating to Thailand and their respective ages at the time this study was conducted

First time migrating to Thailand	Age Group				Total
	13-18	19-24	25-30	31 +	
Before 1980	-	-	2.6% (2)	2.9% (1)	1.3% (3)
1981-1990	3.8% (1)	1.0% (1)	2.6% (2)	11.8% (4)	3.4% (8)
1991-1995	3.8% (1)	6.9% (7)	7.9% (6)	26.5% (9)	9.7% (23)
1996-2000	42.3% (11)	61.4% (62)	61.8% (47)	50.0% (17)	57.8% (137)
2001-2003	50.0% (13)	30.7% (31)	25.0% (19)	8.8% (3)	27.8% (66)
No. of respondents	**26**	**101**	**76**	**34**	**237**

* **Note:** 5 respondents did not answer the first time migrating to Thailand.

Table 2.15 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents in Mae Sot by first year migrating to Thailand and their respective ages at the time this study was conducted

First time migrating to Thailand	Age Group				Total
	13-18	19-24	25-30	31 +	
Before 1980	-	-	-	-	-
1981-1990	1.4% (1)	0.9% (1)	12.6% (12)	-	4.9% (14)
1991-1995	2.7% (2)	5.2% (6)	10.5% (10)	-	6.3% (18)
1996-2000	51.4% (38)	77.6% (90)	61.1% (58)	100% (1)	65.4% (187)
2001-2003	44.6% (33)	16.4% (19)	15.8% (15)	-	23.4% (67)
No. of respondents	**74**	**116**	**95**	**1**	**286**

Type of Documentation

More than half of the migrant domestic workers in this study held work permits at the time this study was conducted (Tables 2.16 and 2.17). It is important to note that this reflects the easier access researchers had to those with work permits and does not represent the proportion of migrant domestic workers registered to work legally in Thailand. In addition, the number of migrant domestic workers registered for work permits with the Thai government is less than half of the estimated migrant population (see Chapter One, Section 1.5).

Table 2.16 Number of in-depth interview participants holding a work permit by research site

Hold a work permit	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	32	38	70
No	20	27	47
Other Thai documents	15	-	15
No response	1	-	1
No. of respondents	**68**	**65**	**133**

Table 2.17 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents holding a work permit by research site

Hold a work permit	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	62.3% (151)	52.8% (151)	57.2 (302)
No	29.4% (71)	22.4% (64)	25.6% (135)
No response	8.3% (20)	24.8(71)	17.2% (91)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

In addition to the domestic workers who participated in this study, key informants in the community were also interviewed in order to corroborate information and provide their perspectives on the life experiences of women and girls from Burma employed as domestic workers in Thailand. These key informants also helped to develop project guidelines, but they are not included in the sample population or directly quoted anywhere in this report.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The research team identified a number of ethical considerations that needed to be taken into account when conducting field research while developing the project proposal during Phase One. However, reviewing ethical considerations was an ongoing process throughout this study and the research team often adapted and revised such considerations according to the ever-changing situation. The following represent the ethical considerations that emerged during the implementation stages of this study.

- Constantly changing political and local contexts meant no participant was contacted without conducting an observation exercise to assess the surrounding environment and associations.
- Employers typically distrusted the researchers and it was difficult to gain their permission to meet with the domestic workers. However, even when the employer

agreed to the meeting, in several instances, they later disapproved and moved the worker as a result. In addition, even if the employer and the participant consented to the interview, some had family members who did not approve of talking with strangers. Lacking the employer's cooperation, each of the Field Researchers had to go to great lengths to plan and remain flexible to meetings with participants to ensure no repercussions.

- In some homes, there were three to four domestic workers and a hierarchy among them that was important to take into consideration (even in simply agreeing to participate in the study) in order to ensure consent, confidentiality and security.
- One major challenge was to get the girls and young women to understand why this research was being undertaken. Another difficulty was obtaining their consent to be interviewed with a full understanding of their rights to refuse any questions or to stop the exchange. Many did not trust the researchers and suspected hidden agendas.
- Finding a safe and confidential place to hold interviews and focus group discussions was another difficult challenge. This often required numerous visits as the situation changed and opportunities to secure a safe and confidential environment were lost. In addition to being sensitive to the surroundings and circumstances, the Field Researchers terminated their research when participants showed any sign of discomfort or insecurity.
- Many domestic workers had problems with their employers and wanted the research team to help. Building partnerships with other community groups and non-governmental organizations to be used as referrals to participants was instrumental in facilitating successful interventions. In Chiang Mai it was difficult to address health concerns, as there were no low-cost health services available to migrants.
- Researchers gave their time to listen to participants who wanted to share their stories, even though these stories were often not directly related to the study. It was important, however, to listen to these stories while remaining open and non-judgmental in interactions with the participants, and without offering direct advice.
- Most participants did not seem comfortable to disclose their personal experiences with drugs or HIV/AIDS status. However, they were willing to talk about their fears and of the experiences of those around them.
- Though efforts were made to keep data confidential, the team realized that absolute confidentiality would never be possible given the ever-changing security situation in the border areas where the project was being conducted. Therefore, no identifying personal information was asked or noted of the participants, such as their names or addresses or those of their employers.
- Keeping data secured and confidential was an ongoing consideration, given the fighting along the border and the tense relations between the Thai and Burmese governments during 2002. Documentation was locked, taken off site, stored and transferred with passwords on CD and then deleted from hard drives to ensure that no one outside of the project could access the data. In addition, a system was developed to code all observations, interviews and survey responses.

- Providing small gifts of thanks to those that provided their time for lengthy interviews and to youth research volunteers was important. Criteria were set for these gifts to assure that they were given consistently and did not involve cash exchanges.
- Considerations for the safety of the research team as well as the participants were also a constant concern. Given that the domestic workers were mostly free during the evenings or even later at night, researchers had to take this into consideration and often limit their work to ensure their own security.

2.9 Obstacles and Limitations

Many of the obstacles and limitations of this study were anticipated when the project was first proposed. However, it is very informative and insightful to note the constraints this project encountered during its implementation stages. This is valuable not only in understanding the findings of this study, but also for consideration when conducting further interventions with similar vulnerable populations and sensitive environments. The obstacles and limitations below are not presented in any particular order or prioritization.

- Researchers found it difficult to approach or meet domestic workers because most domestic workers lived isolated in homes with little outside contact. In addition, many of the homes and compounds where they lived and worked were guarded by aggressive dogs.
- Domestic workers have extremely limited and unpredictable free time. This made it extremely difficult to schedule times to meet for in-depth interviews and impossible to hold focus group discussions, as no one could provide in advance a specific time they would be available. Therefore, researchers had to return on numerous occasions to complete one interview. At times, researchers attempted to reach participants by phone and in some cases found it easier to interview the migrant through this approach, relying on the participants' cues as to what they chose to talk about and when to change or end an exchange.
- Language was a limitation. Although all of the researchers spoke at least three languages, they were still unable to communicate in many of the minority languages and also were unable to arrange for a translator given the unknown availability of the participants. In addition, many of the researchers were limited or unable to speak with the employers in Thai, making it difficult to explain the project and develop understanding.
- Employers often had a low opinion of those from Burma and acted in a discriminatory manner to both the domestic worker and the researcher. In some cases, when the researcher could speak fluent Thai, the employer complained about the migrants and then felt awkward upon realizing that the researcher was from the same migrant community.
- Many participants did not agree to note taking or tape recording during the interviews. Therefore, researchers had to take time immediately following each

interview to record the data collected and return frequently to double check and complete the interview or survey.

- Migrant workers moved frequently and, in several instances, they were lost before the interview or survey could be completed.
- Many migrants' employers did not extend their clients' work permit during March or September 2002. Consequently, more and more migrants went into hiding for fear they would be arrested. Even temples, which have traditionally been a meeting place, were frequently raided and no longer an easily accessible venue to meet new participants or conduct interviews or surveys.
- There was an influx of new migrants from Burma into Thailand in 2002 that increased the competition for jobs. Workers were afraid of being easily replaced and, therefore, wanted to avoid problems with their employers, including not wanting to complain about their situation.
- Holidays and seasonal events were a factor throughout the year with various New Year celebrations and religious celebrations, heavy rains and flooding determining access. In many instances, such events limited the team's ability to meet participants, though holidays celebrated by migrants offered opportunities to meet new potential participants and key informants.
- Political events during 2002 were extremely tumultuous. Due to the fighting and tensions along the Burma-Thai border in 2002, many NGOs working with migrants were asked to close their offices in July and again in December 2002. Consequently, this project was stopped during this time as offices were closed and contact with undocumented migrants could easily have placed them at risk for arrest or harassment.
- There were large-scale crackdowns on undocumented migrants during 2002. Even migrants with work permits or other documentation granting temporary residence in Thailand faced arrest, extortion or intimidation. This included members of the research team who were also concerned that their documents would not be honored by the Thai authorities. This limited the extent to which the team could move and work at different times throughout the year.
- A Field Researcher from each team left after Phase One for educational opportunities that arose. Two new Field Researchers had to be orientated and trained for Phase Three of this project by the Research Coordinators.
- Although great care was taken to capture the exact phrases and slang of the participants, meaning was lost with each translation. Given the many languages involved in this study, accuracy of translation was a significant challenge and constraint.
- It was difficult to ask participants about their life in Burma, as there was a strong fear that the information would get back to the Burmese authorities resulting in repercussions to themselves or their family.

- Participants had difficulties answering questions regarding their future plans and aspirations. It would have been better to ask about how they were dealing with their present situation. This would have been more immediate and tangible and, therefore, easier for the participants to answer.
- Domestic workers often did not realize how much they worked, the abuses they encountered or what rights they could claim. They often looked down on themselves as housemaids and saw a lot of the problems they encountered as their own fault. This was especially true with sensitive issues such as sexual harassment or privacy rights violations, as those interviewed did not see the subtle ways that their safety and security were jeopardized.

2.10 Effective Lessons Learned

While the project faced a number of obstacles and constraints, it also provided insight into effective approaches to conducting research with domestic workers, vulnerable migrant populations and in sensitive environments.

- Given that extensive research had not been undertaken with migrant domestic workers in Thailand previously, the three-month grant to plan the research and write the project proposal was invaluable. This grant also provided time to obtain other organizations' input and support for the project. All of the research team members participated in the initial development of the project proposal, which facilitated their involvement in decision making and problem solving throughout the study.
- Involving all the team members throughout the entire research process also facilitated identifying problems and developing responses that emerged during the project's implementation.
- Team trainings and workshops conducted during each phase provided guidance and skills to the research team. It also gave time for the research team members to come together and share their experiences and knowledge. The team workshops facilitated the development of guidelines and tools for data collection that were clear to all (given the team's involvement in their formation).
- Researchers were from the migrant community and most often could speak several of the ethnic languages as well as Bamar. These factors facilitated trust and communication with the study participants.
- The Documenters were involved in all phases, training and team meetings. This helped to clarify the role of documentation in the context of the project's objectives, ethics, methodology and obstacles. The full time role of the Documenters also provided the opportunity for feedback to the researchers for improving the quality of the data.
- The coordination between teams and ongoing technical support from the Research Coordinators, Research Advisor and Mahidol University provided a solid foundation for the implementation of this project. In addition, the technical support in data

analysis and report writing provided by the Research Advisor and Mahidol University was invaluable, given the limited resources and written language skills of the research team. The team also had volunteers who made invaluable contributions to the project with extra computers, translating assistance and technical support.

- The Field Researchers were extremely patient and sensitive in the process of data collection, and in waiting for opportunities to interview and survey participants that were safe and confidential. This consistently meant canceling or terminating meetings according to ever-changing situations and making repeated visits to complete the data collection.
- Conducting observations before approaching any possible participant in the study was essential in learning the situation and assessing the security and safety concerns. Taking time to explain the project not only to the domestic workers, but also when possible to the employers, family members and Thai officials offered additional protection to both the participants and the research team.
- The research facilitated links between the domestic workers and the larger migrant network, which many of the domestic workers, in their isolation, were unaware of or unable to access. These connections as well as the informal network that emerged during the implementation of this project offer potential for future action.
- Once funding was secured the accounting and distribution of funds was regular and reliable. The research project was well funded and, therefore, easy to implement according to the proposed budget.
- Interview participants received small gifts such as toothbrushes, hair clips, make-up, lotion, magazines from Burma, face towels, shampoo, fruit, snacks and drinks. Survey participants received snacks and drinks according to the situation. Though the gifts were a token, they acknowledged an appreciation for participants' time and efforts. Snacks and drinks especially helped to lighten the atmosphere of the exchange.
- Triangulation of the research tools provided extensive and informative data that allowed for the cross-checking of findings.
- Given the events of 2002, the flexibility and support from the project donors was invaluable for exploring this new area of research among migrant domestic workers.

2.11 Conclusion

Despite some delays and both anticipated and unexpected obstacles, the research strategy for this study largely followed its original design. The main reason for this success was the integral participation of all team members during every phase of the project, including the development of the initial research proposal submitted to the donor community. Team meetings during each of the five phases of this study also contributed significantly to the relatively smooth implementation of the project (despite the heightened security situation that occurred in 2002 as a result of rising tensions and conflict between the Thai and Burmese

governments). Finally, the participation of Burmese migrants as key researchers conducting the study's interviews and survey was instrumental.

Although a number of participants initially exhibited mistrust and wariness toward the researchers and the research project itself, mutual trust and confidence was developed and arose in a much shorter time span that would have occurred otherwise because of the shared history and experiences between the respondents and the researchers. In working with vulnerable communities, it is essential to remain sensitive to cultural norms and practices as well as the historical context from which vulnerable populations emerge.

The next chapter provides a deeper understanding of that context as it relates to this study as voiced directly by the participants themselves.

Chapter Three :

Life in Burma

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of participants' own discussion of their lives in Burma and the reasons behind their decision to migrate to Thailand. Most of the domestic workers interviewed in this study explained that they left their country largely as a consequence of war and SPDC policies that fueled a crisis in both the economy and their families. In the following pages, these women and young girls describe their vulnerability at the death or illness of family members, in having to leave their homes and, in some cases, in working as child laborers, all of which trapped them in debt and abusive environments. Given these conditions, Thailand seemed to provide an opportunity to seek refuge, resolve debt and improve working conditions. In weighing their options, the domestic workers in this study believed that migrating to Thailand was worth the risk of possible harassment and/or of being trafficked.

3.2 Ongoing Civil War

The civil war in Burma began soon after independence in 1962. Fifty years of war and persecution has left the country and its people devastated. Those who spoke directly of the impact of war were mostly the Shan from Shan State. There also has been considerable fighting in Karen State (where many of the study participants are also from), but Thailand has allowed "temporarily displaced persons" camps for Karen and Karenni populations as well as the provision of basic needs. This has not been granted to the Shan and, therefore, they have few other options but to migrate to Thailand for their survival.

> *My life disappeared with the sound of bullets and bombs. My family, relatives and everything in the village was destroyed, never to be returned. We lost everything - our relatives, house, land, clothes and food. I lost my future and everything that I had hoped for. Even my hopes to study have been lost along with everything else....*

I fled from the war to Thailand. For over a year we hid in the jungle and didn't dare return to our village. However, at night, we would sneak into nearby villages to ask for food. Then, we would go through the jungle until we came to another village and could ask for food and a place to stay for the night. Sometimes, we went for two or three days without coming upon any village. At these times, we ate jungle fruit and thrashed the branches of the banana trees for sap to drink. We were always hungry and cold. It rained very heavily. We didn't have shelter to avoid the rain. We didn't even know where we were going or what would happen to us. Finally, we decided to go to Thailand. It took over three months to get here because we had to flee the fighting. Along the way, we learned that our house had been seized by the Burmese military. They took everything, even our clothes. We have nothing left.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I didn't have any trouble at all when I grew up because my family had a tea plantation. We could pick and sell tea throughout the year. In our village, food and everything was abundant. It was easy to earn a living. We didn't need to buy vegetables or fruit. I bought only salt and cooking oil. But, when the Burmese army occupied our village everything changed. They stole all the vegetables in the garden and didn't leave anything for the owners at all. Whatever we had, they took freely for themselves. They cut all the trees in the village to sell until there was nothing left. The village became dry and we couldn't cultivate anything. In addition, living in the village was not safe any more. We had to hide all the time. Moreover, the young men couldn't stay at all since they were frequently taken to be porters. The two older children in our family came to work in Thailand first and then afterwards I followed with my two younger children. I am a widow and I must take care of my children. Now my life is so difficult.

A 36-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The Burmese military not only ruined the trees, vegetable gardens and plantations, but they also raped the girls. The men were taken away as porters. The old people were not useful for them and many were killed. They also burned the houses down, occupied the land and took what property we had. Their behavior was worse than thieves or fire. They would search our bodies too. Some girls were even forced to take off their clothes for the searching. They (the Burmese military) were from hell. If the country is not at peace, I won't go back to my hometown. I came to Thailand when I was eleven years old. We fled when our village was attacked by the Burmese army. We ran into the jungle and stayed there for a year before coming to Thailand. I fled from the war. Actually, no one wanted to leave our hometown. We don't know anyone here and don't even speak other languages. I don't know what will happen to us in the future.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Before, we had enough to eat but later there was fighting. We were beaten and our land was seized. We could not find enough to eat, so we had to move our family to a safe place where we could survive. My father died and there was only my mother to work the rice field and onion gardens. We cultivated only enough to eat. We could not support the family.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

In addition to the fighting, many villagers talked about the impossibility of their life in the "grey areas" caught between various armed groups. Among the survey respondents, 77.7 percent reported having had encounters with Burmese authorities (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of encounters with Burmese authorities and research site

Number of encounters with Burmese authorities	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
None	12.8% (31)	30.4% (87)	22.3% (118)
1	7.4% (18)	16.1% (46)	12.1% (64)
2	11.2% (27)	25.0% (71)	18.6% (98)
3	18.6% (45)	15.7% (45)	17.0% (90)
4	16.1% (39)	8.7% (25)	12.1% (64)
5	12.4% (30)	3.1% (9)	7.5% (39)
6	9.1% (22)	1.0% (3)	4.7% (25)
7	8.7% (21)	-	4.0% (21)
8	3.7% (9)	-	1.7% (9)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Survey and interview participants frequently noted being stopped, threatened, detained and/or searched by Burmese authorities. They were asked to describe all the different types of encounters they had with Burmese authorities.

Table 3.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by type of encounters with Burmese authorities and research site*

Type of encounters with Burmese authorities	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Travel stopped and/or not allowed to continue	65.9% (139)	64.8% (129)	65.4% (268)
Threatened	61.6% (130)	40.2% (80)	51.2% (210)
Detained	27.0% (57)	9.0% (18)	18.3% (75)
Searched	37.9% (80)	45.2% (90)	41.5% (170)
No. of respondents	**211**	**199**	**410**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

During the in-depth interviews, study participants described in detail some of the abuses encountered in the "grey areas."

In our village there were both Burmese and Shan soldiers. I stayed in between them, telling each side different lies all the time. Otherwise, I would be bullied by one side or the other. It was especially difficult because I was a woman without a husband. I had so many problems. It became impossible to remain safe in the village, so I came to Thailand.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My family was very poor. Since I was born there has been war all the time. Sometimes, the Burmese army forces us to pay taxes and fees, while other times the armed opposition groups do. We could never live peacefully. Since my older sister was a wife of a Shan leader, the Burmese army found fault with our father all the time. The Burmese army killed my father when I was seven years old. I saw this with my own eyes and it will be with me all my life. Since then our family has had a lot of troubles.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years age currently working in Chiang Mai.

My life was good because my father was a village headman and I was the only child. My parents had lots of fields and farms. We did not lack anything. My parents sent me to attend school in Rangoon, where I stayed until I finished my 10th standard. Then, I continued to study nursing. During that time, I fell in love with a doctor who was going to graduate and join the Shan State Army. I eloped with him. My father was very sad and he cut off any relationship with me. I stayed in the jungle and was a nurse fora group of soldiers. We could never remain in any one place peacefully. Finally, our camp was ambushed and we ran to the Thai border. We had three children.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My village was close to the border. Fighting broke out often. When the troops came we had to pay a lot of taxes. We could not refuse to pay. When the clashes broke out between the government and the Karen troops, the government always blamed the villagers. As time went on, no one dared to stay in the village and everyone moved to other places. When the villagers were away, the abandoned village was easily destroyed.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.3 Forced Relocations

The Burmese military's strategy for dealing with the "grey areas" has been to relocate villagers to areas under total control of the regime. Forced relocations have been systematically undertaken throughout the country and have been particularly intense in Shan State since 1997.

We always had enough to eat until the Burmese military came and burned our house down and there was nothing left at all. They burned our farm too and forced all the people to move to the town. My whole family moved including me, but we didn't want to stay there because there was no work to do. Our money was used up and my parents didn't know what to do either. So I said I would come to Thailand to find work and to send money to my parents. People said that the Burmese military seized all the land and cultivated poppy farm and plantation. If anyone tried to return they would be killed right away.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The Burmese army forced us to move to near the town. We had to abandon all our farms and fields. Now, it is very hard to earn a living. The Burmese army forced us to move. All of the households in the village had to move to the new place. After moving, some people didn't have mosquito nets and many people died, particularly men. Among the villagers now, there are so many widows. We didn't have enough to survive because we had to give tax to both the Burmese army and the others (opposition groups). There was nothing left for us. Whatever we did, it was all for others. Whatever we had we had to give, such as cows, buffalo, chicken, paddy, rice and money for taxes and leave ourselves to work as porters or laborers. It was frightening in our country. I couldn't do anything to make a living, so I came to Thailand and am working as a housekeeper.

A 33-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My mother told us the family had enough to eat and lived happily until the Burmese military came and burned our house down. They not only took away all our things, but also killed my grandfather. We escaped with our lives. I ran away with my mother and my two sisters to the border. Our house was burned down and we don't have a farm or rice field anymore, so we had no way to earn a living.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The army expelled us to the Burmese border in order to control us more easily. They feared the villagers would supply the armed group staying in the jungle. We had to move many times, without any money for our land. When the situation was quiet, we secretly returned to our village. When the Burmese military realized this, they came and expelled us again. We had to hide and take turns guarding the village to warn when the Burmese military was approaching, so we could run away.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years age currently working in Chiang Mai.

I came to Thailand in 2000 after we had already been forced to move three different times by the Burmese military. The Burmese military announced that if any of the villagers, who had been forced to move from their old place, came back again they would be caught. Some of the villagers went to their houses to take some of their personal belongings and were caught by the Burmese military. Then, the Burmese military asked the villagers to pay them ransom. Nowadays, some people stay at their own hut in the field only. People can work on their farms and fields, but they have to get permission with every other single matter. Though we have rice fields, it is like we don % because we have to sell the rice to the government very cheaply and then buy rice to eat at a high price. The Burmese military said that if the people didn't sell the rice

to them they would have to leave. Some villagers thought that something was better than nothing. So they sold all the rice to the Burmese military. Still people were harassed and one day after selling rice, the Burmese military came and forced them to the temple. Then the Burmese military demolished their huts and took everything away. If any of the houses were locked, the Burmese military would smash the door and go inside to take the household belongings. If the roof of any house was covered with corrugated iron, they would take that away too and sell it. Finally, I had to leave with my parents and come to work in Thailand.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

After we were forced to leave our village and move to the town, my family had to buy new land and build a new house. But, we didn't have our usual income and our family became poor little by little. One year later, my parents began complaining about my expensive school fees. Our life became difficult and I wanted to eat and wear clothes like other people. So I left for Thailand with others in December 2001. My parents didn't know because I was afraid my mother wouldn't allow me to come.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

In 1997, we had to move from our village of many generations to the town with all the others. Until now, we have not been able to go back to our homes. My mother died in 1998 when we had to move to the town for nine months. Now, I have my father, older sister and three younger siblings. Because we couldn't move our farm and garden with us, we had no way to earn a living, except working as day laborers. Nobody was responsible for us, so we were employed to plant rice for others and received just enough to eat for that day only. So I asked my father to let me go to work in Thailand with others and my older sister stayed to take care of our younger siblings. After my father agreed, I sold my mother's gold and came with the others.

A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My father went throughout the countryside to cure patients. He was good at his work and our family's living was comfortable. During the past three or four years, many of the villages where he worked were forced to move. Some of the villagers who moved to the nearby town still came to see him, but it was only a few and they didn't have money as before. Sometimes when they were cured, they didn't even have any money to pay for the treatment. Because of this, my parents could not pay the school fees. My sister could not help the family either because she had a child. So, I made up my mind to make money for my parents and came to Thailand with my aunt.

A 17-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

3.4 Forced Labor

Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents (205 of 528 respondents) said they were made to do "voluntary work" for the government or other kinds of "hire for us" work. These are terms the participants used to describe forced labor practices. Of these 205 respondents, eighty-five percent were of Shan ethnicity (Table 33

Table 3.3 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents forced to work for Burmese authorities by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Forced to work by Burmese authorities
Shan	85.8% (176)
Karen	6.3% (13)
Bamar	4.4% (9)
Mon	2% (4)
Other	1.5% (3)
No. of respondents	**205**

I was constantly forced to work for the government. If I didn't go, no one could go. It was not easy to hire someone for us, so I had to go. Later, I quit school because I was always absent and couldn't catch up with the other students. I was forced to work for five days or a week, each time digging roads or building the railway. I would just be back a couple of weeks and it would be our turn to go again, so I couldn't do anything. We also had to pay tax to the government when they asked and also donate and support other villagers for funerals or wedding ceremonies. We were getting more and more in debt, so I came to Thailand with my mother.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I was in Burma I was forced to go to work on building the railway. The Burmese army forced me to work very hard. I was in the sun all day. They didn't give me food. At that time, I was only thirteen years old. I had to use my own money for food and transportation. If we couldn't work for them, we had to pay them. One day, the rice bags belonging to the Burmese army fell into the river. The military accused the workers of not helping them to look after the rice, even though we were far away and couldn't see it. But, as a result they made us creep like a dog for one mile. If the workers didn't finish the mile within one hour, they were severely beaten whether they were young, adult or older people. They really beat the workers violently. In addition, they didn't let the beautiful girls work. They asked them to stay at their place and to serve them instead. When I got too sick to work, my mother took me back home after selling one pig and paying them to release me.

A 22-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Besides the tax, we were forced to work for the Burmese authorities. I had to hire somebody to go for me because my children were still very young. Sometimes, when I didn't have any money to hire someone to go, I would ask my oldest daughter to miss school to go. But usually I could hire other people to go forme because it took only one day and it was quite good. In 1996, the government forced people to construct the railway working for as long as one week at a time. My turn came very quickly because there weren't so many households in our village. At that time, I couldn't hire other people to go for me because it was for too many days and too expensive. If I went, who would come and look after the children and make money for me? The people who came to Thailand and went back told me that making money in Thailand was easier than in our

country. Finally, I left my youngest child with my sister and took the oldest with me to make money in Thailand for a year. I sold everything of value, like the oxcart and the gold that my parents gave me. And, I gave some money to my children. Then, I came with a man who had been to Thailand before.

A 30-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

We had to do voluntary work very often. We had to carry gravel to construct a road. If we didn't go, we had to pay 1,000 kyat as a fine. If we hired someone we had to pay 600 kyat a day. We had no time to work for our own livelihood, so I left.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After the Burmese authorities beat me, I had to work for them digging holes for them to hide from the Shan soldiers when there was fighting. I had to carry their water, collect their firewood and grow vegetables and flowers for them too. I was not raped, but other women were. If a woman was pretty, they would take her to be their wife.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

At 8. 00 in the morning, we had to go and gather ourselves at the village headman's house, one person from each house. At 9.00, we had to go to the site where they were constructing a road. We also met people from other villages going to the construction site. We took with us our own food and had to work until 5. 00 in the afternoon. We were often demanded to do voluntary work. If we didn't go, we had to give money and we couldn't afford that. One year our rice harvest was flooded and we did not get paddy enough for our family. We had to borrow from others and became increasingly in debt, so I decided I would help the family by finding work in Thailand.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.5 Forced Portering

Of the survey respondents that had contact with Burmese authorities about six percent of the women and girls were made to work as a porter for the Burmese military, the majority of whom were of Shan ethnicity (Table 3.

Table 3.4 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents forced to work as a porter by Burmese authorities by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Forced you to work as a porter
Shan	93.6% (29)
Karen	-
Bamar	3.2%(1)
Mon	-
Other	3.2%(1)
No. of respondents	**3**

During the in-depth interviews, participants spoke about their own experiences and that of family members forced to porter for the Burmese military.

> *My elder brother was killed by the Burmese military after being taken away as a porter.*
> ***A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *If we had a husband, he had to go and porter for the military for several weeks. We had to grow sesame for the Burmese military. But, the sesame didn't grow and we were the ones to lose our money. In addition, the villagers had to take turns carrying the water for two nearby military bases and any other tasks they demanded.*
> ***A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *We came to Thailand by car. Along the way, we were stopped by the Burmese military and all the men in the car were taken away to be porters. The whole night I went out to hire someone to be a porter instead of my husband. Finally, the next day I could hire a man to replace him as a porter.*
> ***A 30-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *Although my father is old, he was still forced to be a porter. So my mother had to give money to ransom him. In my village, all kinds of people, whether men or women, old or young were all forced to work as porters. The only way to get out of being a porter was if someone paid a ransom for you or paid another to replace you. Also, there was a steady demand for voluntary work for the military. There was no time to do our own work. Finally, we had to sell our land. As we are farmers and as we had no more land, we had no way to earn our living. So, we went with everyone else to work in Thailand.*
> ***An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

3.6 Arbitrary Taxes

The Burmese regime has a long history of imposing arbitrary taxes throughout the country, particularly in ethnic minority areas where there has been conflict. The survey found that nearly 58 percent of those surveyed reported having to pay money, usually in the form of taxes, to the Burmese authorities.

Table 3.5 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents required to pay money to Burmese authorities by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Required to pay money to Burmese authorities
Shan	57.5% (177)
Karen	19.8% (61)
Bamar	13.0% (40)
Mon	4.2% (13)
Other	5.5% (17)
No. of respondents	**308**

Arbitrary taxes were frequently discussed during the in-depth interviews as a major reason for migrating to Thailand.

My government salary was never enough. My job was to buy rice from the Shan villagers. If the villagers didn't have rice to sell to the government they had to go and buy it at a higher price. Because I was just a government employee, I couldn't do anything for them even though I was also Shan. Some household members would cry and apologize, but nobody cared. They still had to find rice to sell to the government. Having worked like this for several years, I didn't want to work for the government anymore. I didn't feel very happy. I didn't want to bully the villagers. I saw their situation with my own eyes and really took pity on them.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Working on the farm and garden from year to year produced just enough to eat and pay taxes to the authorities. I sold the rice to get money for growing the garden and sold the plants to get money for growing the rice year after year. It was a never-ending cycle.

A 29-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The living standard of my family decreased little by little. Even though we got money from farming, we just had enough to buy salt and cooking oil. These things were becoming increasingly expensive. Moreover, we had to pay taxes. There were many kinds of taxes that the municipality collected from the people, like the tax for bicycles, water, oxcarts and many other things.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

We had lots of difficulties because we rented other people's fields. We not only had to pay the rent, but also taxes to the Burmese government. No matter how much we worked there was not enough to eat. If the profits of our work were our own, we would certainly have had enough to eat. We couldn't stay like this, so I came to Thailand.

A 22-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The Burmese army forced people to work for them without pay. They asked for people, cars, horses and cows to be given to them for free. The most terrible thing was that they even asked for the pretty household things like tables, tablecloths and vases. When they left the village, they might give it back or take it away. If they asked for things we didn't have, we would have to pay in cash. Those who didn't have the money were in a terrible situation. Finally, we couldn't stand living like this and moved to Thailand with many others from our village.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

We went into debt working. There were a lot of taxes and fees to pay. In one month we had to pay at least 1,000 kyat. If we could not pay when they came to collect, they would mark our names and the amount of our debt. The money we got from daily wages and making mats would all go to paying taxes and fees. Finally, we moved to Thailand so we can keep what we earn.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The people in my village are farmers and we have to pay many kinds of taxes. We have to work the whole year without rest, but the money we earn is just enough for a family to eat. Those who come to work in Thailand can save some money. I wanted to work and to look after my mother, so I came to Thailand. There were no more young people in my village. They all went to work in Thailand. Only older people remain in the village.

A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Whatever we did, it would be squeezed from us. Sometimes, the Burmese military collected taxes. Sometimes, the Shan army collected it or the Wa army or Pa-O armed group. I don't even remember to whom I gave every year. The minority groups collected only once a year, but the Burmese military took as much as they wanted, whenever they wanted it. They didn't ask for it. They would take it all away, whatever much we had.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

There were lots of fees demanded of us for voluntary work, porter fees, runner fees, service personnel fees and many others. If you could not go for voluntary work, you had to hire somebody. I felt pity on my parents, I wanted to help them. I could not work as a farmer. Even if I worked on the farm, it was not enough for us to eat.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.7 Agricultural Policies

The agricultural policies of the Burmese government have ended up putting most farmers into debt due to fixed pricing, forced marketing to the regime and imposed compulsory crops.

The Burmese military determined the price of the products we produced. It depended on them how much they would pay. They never paid what the product was worth. So, I came to work in Thailand to send money to my parents.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Besides the expenses of school for my daughters, we had to pay tax to the authorities very often. We were also forced to work for the government or hire someone to replace us. There were so many other things that we had to pay for. Even if we worked hard, we would never have money left. Then in 1999, the government forced us to grow soybeans. They knew very well that we couldn't grow soybeans in the rice field. But, we had to do as they ordered. Finally, we lost a lot and went into debt.

A 29-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I stayed in Shan State, I worked a soybean garden and rice field. We had a lot of troubles because both the Burmese and Shan military asked for things and we had to give them whatever they wanted. Even when we didn't have anything to give them, we had to borrow it and go into debt. The Burmese army asked for a lot, such as horses, money, firewood, rice and oxcarts. In addition, they made us plant the vegetable seeds they gave us. We had to do as they said. Even though it was our garden, it was as if it

was theirs. Then, they relocated people from other villages and forced them to stay in our garden. For all this we got nothing.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

As rice farmers we had to hire people to plant and harvest the paddy. We grew many acres of rice but the yield was low. To hire people to do the daily work it cost us 10,000 kyat for one year. The yield of paddy was only 50 baskets. The price we got for the paddy did not equal to what we spent. Every year we lost money, so we did not continue the rice farming and came to Thailand.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Before, farmers in Burma were well-to-do persons, but now they don't have enough to eat. Our whole family no longer can depend on farm work alone. We had to find other jobs. There are many people my age who don't have work. So, I found a good contact to take me to Thailand.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.8 Economic Hardships

The military conflict and policies imposed by the Burmese regime have resulted in a severe economic crisis throughout the country. Many of the participants described a life struggling to meet their most basic needs.

We did not have enough food, clothing and shelter. In Burma, my father had a government job but the pay was not sufficient for our whole family. In addition, we had to move often. As a government employee he had to shift from place to place. Sometimes my father did not get a house for our family to live in and it was not possible for my mother to follow and stay with him. Therefore, our family was poor.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was a primary school teacher I received only 750 kyat a month. Not only was the pay very little, but teachers were given teaching jobs far from their homes. I taught nearly three days' journey from my home and it was expensive. After four years, I quit as a teacher and came back to work in the village co-operative shop as a clerk. I got 1 ,000 kyat per month. I cannot save with this money. I wanted to set up a small shop of my own, so I decided to go work in Thailand to get some capital.

A 30-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

We are farmers and make just enough to eat each day. We have no extra income. If we get sick, we have no money for treatment. When others returned from Thailand, they told us you could save money there. I saw that they could eat and wear new clothes. I wanted to earn money too, so I came to Thailand.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have to split bamboo into thin sheets to weave into mats. For one small piece of mat I get 25 kyat and for a big mat 80 kyat. I can get just enough food not to starve. There is no extra money to spend for other things. My family doesn't have money to get treatment when we get sick.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Our family was in big trouble. We didn't have enough to eat. We no longer had our own land. I was not the only one starving because I am the oldest of six brothers and sisters. One day my father asked me to go work in Thailand with other people.

A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Inflation in Burma continues to soar while income has remained constant, such that many families are no longer able to survive on their current income.

Everything has gotten so expensive. I sell things and I borrow money to survive. I have to pay an interest on my debt of 20 kyat for every 100 kyat each day. So, whatever I earn I have to use to pay back and I don't have enough to eat.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In Rangoon, the prices of goods are rising. Although we did not starve, I could not continue my studies. Even if you get a job, prices are so high you still do not have enough to eat. Also, there is a lot of corruption. Those who are rich are getting richer. Those who are poor are becoming poorer. In addition, everyone has to do "voluntary labor" for the government. The only way to support our parents is for the children to go to work in Thailand.

A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.9 Vulnerabilities

Many of the women and girls in this study spoke of how the socio-economic conditions in Burma led to the breakdown of their families and left many in foster care or eventually totally alone to survive on their own. They spoke of their vulnerabilities in the broader context of life in Burma and how the stresses of daily life were often compounded by illness and/or death, relocation and having to work as young children.

The data from in-depth interviews highlights the impact of illness and early death in the family as one of the major life events that impacted respondents' decisions to migrate to Thailand.

My father passed away when I was young. Now my mother is blind because she took the wrong medication. She lives with my elder sister and they depend on me to send money for her treatment.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I was seriously beaten by the Burmese soldiers while carrying my child on my back. Since I was beaten, I have pains in my bones, sinuses, head and stomach. I can't sleep well and think about things a lot. Because of my bad health I have a lot of debt that I am

afraid I can't repay. The doctor says I need an operation or the pain will not go away. However, I don't have any money for them to operate. I don't know who to talk to or how to deal with these physical and mental problems.

A 24-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When my elder brother was still at home he climbed the palm tree to get syrup and my father made palm sugar from it. Later, my brother went to Bangkok and died there. We don't know why my brother passed away. Later, my second oldest brother went to Thailand. He has been gone about ten years and we have heard nothing from him since he left. My mother's health is not good. When she coughs, she spits out blood. She cannot eat much. We have no money to cure her. Even though I want to live with my parents, I must work in Thailand. I am worried for my mother and I would like her to go get treatment. My father collects firewood to sell, but it is not enough. Because it is so difficult to find money in my village I decided to come to Thailand.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My mother passed away in 1999 from an abortion. Afterwards my father could not travel long distances to trade as he used to. Our family became poor very quickly. We had to sell our land and move to other places to find work. We moved three times. I am the oldest of five children. I had to quit school and come to work in Thailand to help my family.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I was married for four years and had one child when my husband died. I came back to live with my family, but my father's income was not enough to support us. I had to take responsibility for my child, so I came to Thailand with other people.

A 32-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My mother passed away when I was very young. Then, when I was nineteen years old my father passed away the same year as my elder brother. So I decided to come to Thailand to do any job that was available.

A 29-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My mother died one year after she gave birth to my younger sister leaving my father with five children. I was twelve years old and quit school to help my father with the rice paddy and cattle. We had just enough food to eat. All of my brothers and sisters worked, but we didn't have any extra money.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My father passed away when I was nine. I am the second of four siblings. My mother could not afford my schooling so I quit and took whatever job was available. As the price of goods in Burma continued to rise, our whole family could not find enough to eat with the income of one person. Therefore, all of the family members had to work. The others were still young, so they could not help much. When I was about fifteen or sixteen years old I also came to Thailand. I plan to make money to send home so my family can eat a lot.

A 23-year-old married Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Both of my parents passed away when I was in the 8th standard. My aunt asked me to stay with her. I helped her and she supported me in school. Two years later, my aunt passed away. I couldn't continue my schooling and had to find a way to support myself, so I came to Thailand.

A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My father died when I was eight months old. When I was over eight years old, my mother died. Now, I don't have a father or mother.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Uprooting from one's home and community clearly left individuals vulnerable, with few options but to keep moving as returning home was either impossible or too difficult.

We didn't have enough to eat. All our work in the fields was given to the Burmese, Shan and other armed groups. We cultivated vegetables and the Burmese army took whatever they wanted. So, my parents left us with our grandmother and came to do construction work in Thailand. My father died there and my mother asked us to come to work with her in Thailand.

A 19-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My father went to work in Thailand and died there two years later. Our mother told me he was seriously ill before he died. But, we don't know exactly what happened because we were in Burma. Afterwards, my mother went to work in Thailand. Then, my mother told us to come and help her work.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My parents came to work in Mae Sot for nearly seven years. My brothers were all with my parents in Thailand. After I passed my 5th standard, my parents told me to come join them in Mae Sot.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Now, more and more young people go to work in Thailand. It is hard to make a living in their village. There are few jobs and no income.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I worked in Rangoon, I heard people say that it was more convenient to go and work in Thailand. I was interested and asked many people about the situation there. Then, I returned to my village and found that many people from my village had already left for Thailand. I didn't find any of my peers in the village. Nearly all came to work in Thailand. There were those who did well and those who didn't. I also didn't want to stay in my village and I didn't want to go back to Rangoon, so I took the risk to come to Thailand.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the participants interviewed described how they migrated to urban areas of Burma to work as domestic workers at a young age. Lacking other skills, most continued to search for domestic work with better pay and working conditions.

My father died in 1988 when I was very young. My mother did any kind of job that she could. When I was six years old, I started working as a domestic worker. I looked after some children and I did what people asked me to do. My first job was in Rangoon. When the employers went out they locked me in their house. As I was too young and stayed alone, they said that they worried about me. They left some snacks for me to eat. I left when I could. Then, I helped sell merchandise in a shop but I did not get paid. They only gave me some food to eat. A neighbor said she would bring me to Mae Sot where I could get better pay. So, I came with her.

A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I was a domestic worker in Burma. I had to take care of young children and I had to wash clothes with my hands. It was hard work for me. I received only 1,500 kyat. But, I was not cheated. In Thailand I get more money, but if someone cheats me I just have to suffer.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Before I came to Thailand, I was a domestic worker in Rangoon. It was hard work for me and I received only 1,000 kyat a month. I started when I was still very young. I could not do housework properly, so I was often scolded.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have worked in other people's houses in Burma since I was ten years old. I worked and ate together with them.

A 17-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

At the age of twelve, I went with a broker to Rangoon and did domestic work. I worked there for three years for 1,000 kyat a month. The house owners were Bamar and they abused me very much. When they didn't appreciate what I did, they didn't let me eat. If the floor was not clean enough, they pinched and twisted my belly. I was afraid and often lied to them. When I was caught, they hit me on my head. I tried to be patient and keep working, but I was hoping I could find another job.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.10 Family Life

As daily life in Burma became more stressful, families struggled with limited or no safety nets to help them cope. Nearly seventy percent of the survey respondents (69.1%) reported at least one type of family problem. Family troubles often revolved around divorce and remarriages, foster care, physical abuse (or fear of) and family pressures and responsibilities (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of family problems reported and research site

Number of family problems	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
None	32.6% (79)	29.4% (84)	30.9% (163)
1	16.9% (41)	18.5% (53)	17.8% (94)
2	19.8% (48)	18.2% (52)	18.9% (100)
3	14.9% (36)	15.7% (45)	15.3% (81)
4	7.4% (18)	8.0% (23)	7.8% (41)
5	4.5% (11)	5.6% (16)	5.1% (27)
6	1.7% (4)	2.8% (8)	2.3% (12)
7	0.8% (2)	-	0.4% (2)
8	0.4% (1)	0.3% (1)	0.4% (2)
9	0.4% (1)	1.0% (3)	0.8% (4)
10	0.4% (1)	0.3% (1)	0.4% (2)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Survey participants noted frequent family tensions where members yelled, swore, slapped or hit them. In addition, others stated they had objects thrown at them, were threatened, or physically abused by members of their family. Although only a few respondents reported sexual touch or rape, the findings did show a significant problem. (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by types of family abuse and research site*

Types of family abuse	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yelled at you	55.8% (91)	94.6% (191)	77.3% (282)
Swore at you	67.5% (110)	42.1% (85)	53.4% (195)
Slapped or hit you	29.4% (48)	48.5% (98)	40.0% (146)
Thrown things at you	17.8% (29)	18.3% (37)	18.1% (66)
Threatened	33.7% (55)	10.4% (21)	20.8% (76)
Pinched you	19.0% (31)	31.2% (63)	25.8% (94)
Pushed	8.6% (14)	16.8% (34)	13.2% (48)
Locked up/confined	3.1% (5)	1.0% (2)	1.9% (7)
Cheated/kept your money	2.5% (4)	3.0% (6)	2.7% (10)
Tricked you with a lie	8.0% (13)	2.0% (4)	4.7% (17)
Touched you don't want	9.2% (15)	1.5% (3)	5.0% (18)
Sexually touched you	3.1% (5)	2.5% (5)	2.7% (10)
Raped you	2.5% (4)	1.5% (3)	1.9% (7)
Punished you	2.4% (4)	2.5% (5)	2.5% (9)
Other	5.5% (9)	-	2.5% (9)
No. of respondents	**163**	**202**	**365**

Note: Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Many of the participants interviewed noted that migrating to Thailand provided a means of coping with family problems. A number of them described how broken homes, through either divorce or migration, left them as foster children in extended families or left to care for themselves at a young age.

> *My father passed away and my mother remarried two more times. I have one younger brother with my second father and twins with the third. When I was only fourteen years old, my mother sent me to work in Thailand with a woman she knew.*
>
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

My mother's new husband is a playboy. The neighbors often said that soon he would get another young woman (they meant me). Their words made me very afraid. My mother was also concerned and never let me stay at home alone. I didn't want to stay there anymore.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

After my father left our family, I couldn't continue my schooling. There was no one to support me. Later, my mother got remarried. I did not want to stay with my stepfather, so I came to Thailand to work.

A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After I had two children my husband took another wife, so I separated from him. I went back and stayed with my parents. As my parents were getting old I knew I had to depend on myself. So, I came to work in Thailand.

A 29-year-old separated Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After my father died, my mother remarried another man as his minor wife. The man seemed to just want my parents' property. Our mother didn't care about us and so her children just went different ways.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have been alone since I was young. Although I have a mother, she stayed with her husband. I stayed with my relatives. I did whatever they asked me to do and I ate whatever they gave me to eat. I had friends but their parents sent them to school. I did not go to school. I only did the work others didn't want to do. I only wore used clothes that others gave me. When I was sixteen, an old lady who was a broker brought me to Thailand. I had no money for travelling, so she paid for me.

A 19-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

It was very difficult for my family to earn a living, so my parents gave me to another family so that I would have enough to eat. At that time, I was only eight years old. I worked for that family and didn't go to school. I had to do domestic work and farm work too. When I was thirteen years old, my foster mother died and then I had to work very hard. Though my foster father loved me, his children were very mean to me. Finally, I left to find a better job in Thailand.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My parents died while I was still very young. Before my father died he gave away my youngest sister for adoption. Not so long after my father passed away my elder sister gave me away to a Thai Muslim family. I have had to work in Bangkok since I was about five years old. I had to sell tissue paper on the road. Each day if I could not sell at least 500 baht, I was beaten.

A 21-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Some of those interviewed discussed family problems resulting from gambling, alcohol and/or drugs. These issues are discussed at greater length in Chapter Eight, but it is worth noting here as one factor contributing to the decision to migrate to Thailand.

My mother asked me to work in order to send her some money. My father never worked. He was a gambler. When he lost at gambling, he always quarreled with my mother. He thought of selling us to other people many times. But, my mother didn't agree with him. The first time he wanted to sell us to a Burmese man, but my mother didn't agree. The second time he was going to sell us to a Chinese woman. He even beat my mother when she refused. My father drinks, gambles and is addicted to drugs. When he loses he beats my mother and threatens to sell us. The Burmese military owns the gambling house in our village and many people play there. There is nothing the villagers can do about the situation.

A 14-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Our mother gambled a lot. She just thought of herself only. She didn't take care of the children at all. Finally, I decided to come to Thailand. My mother didn't care when I said goodbye to her. She said I could go wherever I wanted and she wouldn't have to waste her rice on me.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I was young my life was very difficult. My mother made local distillation liquor and sold it. My father drank the first distilled liquor, which was very concentrated. He got a liver disorder and finally he died. Before he passed away a lot of money was spent on his treatment and our family incurred a big debt. My mother told all of us that it was not useful to stay at home. She encouraged us to go to work and made arrangements to find jobs for us. Then, my mother remarried a man who was also a drunk so we didn't want to live at our home anymore. My mother remains dependent on her children. Since we were children, we did not have the opportunity to study, only to work. This is all the consequences of alcohol.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Though domestic violence was not a major topic explored in the survey, it was discussed at length during the in-depth interviews, as participants were asked to explain their life in Burma and reasons for migrating.

I tried to run away from my husband many times. He was like a leech. I couldn't go far from his sight. My employer took pity on me and helped me run away by telling my husband a lie. Then, I secretly ran away to Chiang Mai. After that I could save some money, so I went back home to see my children. I didn't dare to tell anyone. I was afraid that my husband would find me and I couldn't get away from him. He found me though and locked me in a room. When it was time to eat, he would give me food. Finally, I had to agree to stay with him again. Then one day, some people hired him to go for portering and I ran to Thailand with my two daughters.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I separated from my husband because he beat me without compassion ever since our business failed. I sold all our household belongings, including the land. There was only the house left. Once my husband pulled my hair and strangled me with a string. I almost died. Fortunately, my oldest daughter came just in time and helped. He didn't give up and almost beat her too. But, she threatened that if he did she would scream to the entire village. He let us go and soon after we went to Thailand to get away from him.

A 36-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I was in our country I had lots of responsibilities. I had a family, but I couldn't rely on my husband at all. When he was drunk or on drugs he always hit and bullied me. So, I left two of my sons with their grandmother and came to Thailand to find a means of supporting them on my own.

A 25-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

3.11 Family Pressures

A few of the participants interviewed explained that the reason they migrated to Thailand was the result of family pressure to marry.

My parents passed away when I was very young. I stayed with my grandparents and we fled to a refugee camp in Thailand. I grew up in the refugee camp and when I was fifteen years old, my grandparents wanted me to get married before they died and so they put me into an arranged marriage. Soon afterwards both of my grandparents passed away. I had one child with my husband and when my child was two years old my husband left me. I don't know where he went. So I have to struggle for myself and my child. I left the camp and found a job as a domestic worker in a nearby Thai village.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After I arrived in Thailand, my mother ordered me to be a janitor at the school. I was really hurt because I had finished the 10th standard. Then, she accused me of going with a man all day long and forced me to get married to him. He didn't love me and his mother beat me several times. After three years and having two children, my husband started gambling and became addicted to drugs. I didn't have a good life at all. So finally, I decided to come to Thailand to earn money and try to support my children.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My mother planned for me to marry a soldier who was ten years older than me. My mother knew that the elder brother of my friend loved me and she didn't approve. So I fled to my friend's house and through a contact of hers I came to find a job in Thailand.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The majority of the domestic workers in this study explained that they migrated to Thailand to save money to support their family. They saw this as their responsibility as daughters, wives and mothers.

By going to Thailand, I could support my parents and repay my indebtedness to them. People in my village admired the people who could send the most money home. I also wanted their respect by sending money home, so I came to Thailand.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My family didn't have enough to eat. My younger brothers and sister were still attending school. No one could help our parents work and make money. I am the oldest, so I asked my parents' permission to come and make money in Thailand. If I have extra money, I plan to send it home to support my family and allow my siblings to continue studying.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I was sixteen years old, I eloped with a Shan soldier and went with him to the Burma- Thai border. I only knew him for three days. After we had stayed together for two years, I had a child. It was hard to find enough to eat and it became even more difficult with a child. I asked my husband's permission to go to Thailand. Finally, he agreed with me by asking me to come with a broker he knew.

A 22-year-old married Pa-O female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Our family did not have enough to eat, to buy clothes or anything else. As I was the eldest, I felt sympathy for my younger brothers and sisters. I wanted to help my parents, so I came to work in Thailand.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

We had enough to eat, but nothing extra to cover costs such as health care, the ordination for my younger brother into Buddhism or repairing our house. My parents are old and I must take responsibility, so I came to Thailand to work.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I could not support my daughters' schooling. Though I worked hard, I didn't have money left for the children and me. They grew up day by day, so I had to make money for their future. If I just stayed at home and did the same work, I knew I could not support them very well. Their father was not interested in them at all. As a result, I made up my mind to make money in Thailand.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

3.12 Weighing the Options

In deciding whether or not to migrate to Thailand, most of those interviewed felt they had few options available to them in Burma and saw Thailand as providing an opportunity for employment, improving one's life skills and/or supporting their family.

There was someone looking for a housekeeper. At that time, I was out of work. I only thought that I would do whatever job they wanted me to do because I had to raise my children.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Although I finished my studies it was useless. There was nothing for me to do. If we didn't have any work to do, we would starve. So, I came to work in Thailand like other people.

A 30-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

School was so expensive that I quit after 7th standards. I wanted my younger brothers to continue studying, so I went with a woman who came to our village to find people to go to work in Thailand. My mother sold her gold from our grandmother to pay for me to travel with that woman.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I stayed home I didn't have friends because they all went to Thailand. Though I was a dressmaker, I didn't make much money. When my friends came back from Thailand they had brought new clothes and had enough money to repair their houses. I wanted to come and make money in Thailand so that I wouldn't feel small.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

After I passed the 6th standard, I still would have liked to stay in school but my mother said: "Your aunt who passed the 10th standard and continued to study for four years until she graduated did not even get a government job. "Anyway, government jobs pay very little. After thinking about it, I decided to quit school though I still have my eagerness to study. My neighbor said to me: "If you want to come and work with me, you can come. "So, I went with her to Thailand.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While I was in school, my older sister went to work in Thailand. With the money she sent we were able to build a new house. Even if we worked in our country for many years, we couldn't afford this. So I decided to also go to work in Thailand like other people. I ran away to Thailand with my three friends.

A 30-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

At that time, most of the people from my village went to work in Rangoon. When I was more than seventeen years old I telephoned my sister who lived in Thailand and told her that I would like to go to find work there and she encouraged me. I saw that people at my age went to Thailand and sent money back to their parents. When they returned they looked beautiful and their skin was so white. If I just stayed in my village, my skin would be dark and I would have no income. So, I went to Thailand.

A 19-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Not long ago, there were over 200 unmarried persons living in my village. Now I have no companions except maybe three or four other persons my age. Most of them have gone to Thailand to find jobs in order to solve their parents' problems.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The company I worked for in Burma went bankrupt and I lost my job. There were no jobs anywhere even for those with a university degree. I heard in Thailand you can get a better income than in Burma, so I came.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I am a second-year university student. I wanted to get money to continue my education, so I went to Mae Sot to work as a domestic worker. I don't like to work as a domestic worker. I really want to further my education and I need money to study. So, I decided to come to Thailand.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When my friends returned from Thailand they were wearing fine clothes with beautiful skin. My parents also wanted me to go to work in Thailand. But, once I came here I was merely a domestic worker though no one from my village actually knew what I did. When I went back home, I wore fine clothes and make-up. I also was able to do alms giving. Before I came here, I could not do these things. There was just enough for our family to eat.

A 27-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twelve years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My village friends went to Thailand to work so that they could send money home. I saw this and I was encouraged. Yes, I was afraid because I had heard about children and young girls being sold. But, there are also many people who go to Thailand to work and find good conditions. I wanted to find money like them.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Many of the girls and women interviewed in this study realized that there were risks in migrating to Thailand, as they had heard stories of being cheated, extorted, trafficked and physically abused.

I have seen some carriers [brokers]. There were people who were taken to Thailand by the carriers. Some of them came back with success. Some have not returned. I don't know why.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

At home, I always heard about people taking children or women to Thailand to sell. Even now, I still hear news of this. I used to see the orphans too. Moreover, I also saw parents sell their own children. In my village, I even saw a woman sell her three-year-old child to a Chinese woman in the market.

A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have heard about children or young women being cheated and sold. I saw with my own eyes parents selling their own child because they sold their child to my aunt. A married couple got sick from malaria and was not able to look after their child, so they sold the child for 2,000 baht. They said when they recovered they would come and ransom their child back. My aunt bought him because she wanted a son very much. Now, he is grown up. His mother never came back.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I heard that some young girls near my village were brought by the carriers [brokers] and then sold. I dared not come with those carriers. I also heard that they were sent to Bangkok and the carrier took their wages.

A 20-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was in Burma I heard people buy a snack and give it to the child. They also give money to be friendly. Later they would take the child and sell him/her to people in other places. They use the children as beggars. For some girls, they said that they would find a job for her and later they sold her to a bad place [a brothel]. I heard about these problems.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Many of the participants said they reviewed their options and concluded that migrating to Thailand was worth the risks. They described a number of strategies for securing their safety, most of which revolved around Buddhist practices of doing good deeds and accepting one's destiny.

Both my parents died. Now I have to struggle for my own family. My husband went to work in a factory in Thailand. As a married person if he is away from his family for long, he could have a mistress and I was worried about that. As life was not getting any better in Burma, I decided to take my children and struggle for our living in Thailand.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In my village, there are no more young people. Almost people go to Thailand, I don't feel afraid of anything. If something happened to me alone it would be my fate. I work to look after my mother and also do offerings to the temple. I try to do good things, so I don't think that I will get into bad trouble.

A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If one family member comes and works in Thailand and does well she can even support her whole family in Burma. But, it also depends on her fortune. Every person who comes to Thailand does not do well. There are also those who get into trouble. When I lived in my village I heard about many people being sold, cheated and abused in Thailand. I have never faced these situations but I have heard about others who have. I believe if you always devote yourself to the five precepts of Buddhism you cannot get into trouble. I always pray that I will happen to meet good people. My parents taught me this way.

A 23-year-old married Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

3.13 Conclusion

In discussing their lives in Burma, the women and girls in this study most frequently sited political conflict, minority persecution and severe economic hardship as the primary reason for migrating to Thailand. Many participants described a life struggling to meet their most basic needs as a result of the near-half century of military conflict and policies and practices imposed by the Burmese regime, including forced labor and portering, arbitrary taxes, fixed pricing, forced marketing, imposed compulsory crops and forced relocations.

Participants spoke at length of how the political and economic conditions in Burma led to the breakdown of their families, leaving many in foster care or eventually alone to survive on their own. The stresses of daily life left them vulnerable with few options other than to migrate to Thailand. Several participants described how they first migrated to urban areas of Burma to earn income as domestic workers at a very young age (in one case at the age of six) and then later continued to search for domestic work with better pay and working conditions. Family problems resulting from gambling, alcohol and/or drugs as well as family pressure to marry were also cited as reasons for migrating to Thailand.

In the next chapter participants describe the difficulties and problems faced on their migration journey out of Burma.

Chapter Four :

The Migration Journey

4.1 Introduction

The women and girls in this study stressed how little or no control they had of their fate once they began their migration journey to Thailand. Regardless of what route they used to leave their homes, who accompanied them on the journey, how they secured employment or the amount of money they had to pay or borrow to finance their journey, there was no predictability in what they encountered. Study participants also described the constantly changing political and military situation that impacted the ease of travel, the number of checkpoints encountered, border control policies, crackdowns and other realities that largely dictated the route, means and cost of their journey.

Among the women and girls interviewed in-depth for this study, the majority first came to Thailand prior to the age of eighteen. However, among the survey respondents the majority reported first migrating to Thailand between the ages of 18 and 29 (Table 4.1). This discrepancy may possibly be attributed to the fear of reporting under-age employment since the Thai government's policy is to issue work permits only to those eighteen years or older. While the cause of this discrepancy cannot be confirmed, the researchers did note that this was a sensitive issue for the in-depth interview participants, 32 of a total of 133 chose not to reveal when they first arrived in Thailand.

As noted in the last chapter, many factors contributed to pushing the women and girls to leave their homes, but there were also a number of pulls to Thailand driven by the market's demand for young female migrant laborers across a wide spectrum of employment fields, especially the service sector.

Table 4.1 Percent distribution and number of survey respondents by first year migrating to Thailand and their current age

Current age	Year first migrating to Thailand					Total
	Prior to 1990	1991-1996	1997-1998	1999-2000	2001-2003	
10-13	-	-	-	0.6% (1)	3.0% (4)	1.0% (5)
14-17	8.0% (2)	2.9% (2)	2.3% (3)	13.3% (22)	24.8% (33)	11.9% (62)
18-21	4.0% (1)	18.8% (13)	24.6% (32)	40.4% (67)	27.1% (36)	28.5% (149)
22-25	8.0% (2)	21.7% (15)	35.4% (46)	28.9% (48)	21.1% (28)	26.6% (139)
26-30	36.0% (9)	29.1% (20)	21.5% (28)	10.8% (18)	16.5% (22)	18.5% (97)
Over 30 years old	44.0% (11)	27.5% (19)	16.2% (21)	6.0% (10)	7.5% (10)	13.6% (71)
No. of respondents	**25**	**69**	**130**	**166**	**133**	**523**

***Note:** 5 respondents did not answer year first migrating to Thailand.

In discussing their migration journey, study participants used the term "carriers," to describe the individuals who helped to transport them to Thailand and, in some cases, from the Thai border to jobs further towards the interior of the country. The carriers were sometimes known to the participants and might even be friends or relatives. Other carriers were referred to the participants by word of mouth or were people they met along the way. It should be noted that the relationship to the carrier rarely determined the consequences that transpired during the journey, the cash advance involved, the job received or the abuses encountered. A few of the participants attempted to travel to Thailand on their own, but often were unsuccessful or incurred high costs and abuses along the way.

While only some of the women and girls recognized or understood that they had been trafficked into Thailand, almost all of them encountered unforeseeable situations. Upon realizing what was unfolding many tried to escape in the hopes of finding a better solution, only to land in even more precarious situations. In addition to facing conditions that left them vulnerable to being trafficked, participants also described abuses by authorities. These abuses were often specifically directed at young females from Burma who had been banned from traveling abroad by the SPDC in response to escalating reports of trafficking. The women and girls in this study also described endless encounters where fees and fines were demanded of them, accompanied by threats of confiscating identification documents, physical searches, arrest, confinement and deportation back home, which often occurred when money was not forthcoming. As a means of coping with these risks, a number of single young women married during their journey as a strategy for protecting themselves.

4.2 Leaving Home

The reasons for leaving home dictated largely how participants traveled to Thailand and the ease of their journey. As noted in Chapters One and Three, the majority of participants from Shan State fled to Thailand in response to military conflict and persecution by the Burmese regime. Others left as a means of coping with political and economic realities that made day-to-day survival in Burma extremely difficult. These participants traveled in a more organized manner, often through carriers. A few also left as a result of family problems, meeting up with carriers or others along the way whom they hoped would assist them. Finally, several participants (often those who lived near the Thai-Burma border) noted their ability to travel back and forth between Thailand and home, although this was not without risk of harassment and abuse.

4.3 Fleeing as Refugees

Of those study participants fleeing from Shan State, not only was their journey not well planned but it often resulted in long, drawn-out travels on foot through jungles prior to arriving at the Thai border.

> *We came to Thailand with the Shan army who were stationed along the Thai-Burma border. We were about 200 or 300 people, mostly women and children. All of our homes had been burned down by the Burmese army and we were no longer allowed to live in our village.*
>
> ***A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *One night very late, there was a fire in our village and we ran away in all directions. We fled to Thailand by hiring a man to guide us. We spent fifteen months traveling through villages and hiding in the jungle to avoid the Burmese military.*
>
> ***A 27-year-old married Shan female with one child, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I used to move to many places too. The Burmese army forced us to move so many times. One place I stayed only seven days and the Burmese army told us again we had to move. We could not survive moving so many times, so we came to Thailand in 1997 with many other people.*
>
> ***A 27-year-old married Shan female with three children, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

For many, the travel across the border into Thailand involved clandestine efforts organized by carriers and often costing large sums of money either paid in advance or incurred as debt.

> *I came with three Shan people from my village. None of us had ever been to Thailand before. We went with a carrier and each of us paid over 30,000 kyat. I sold the gold my mother gave me to come.*
>
> ***A 25-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

I came with my friend. She and I traveled to the border by boat because at that time the border was closed. The boat's owner said that we couldn't go in the afternoon. He was afraid that people would see us, so we had to go secretly at night. We went to stay at his house where we met five more Burmese women.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Several study participants left home without their parents' consent, or knowledge of who they went with or where they were traveling.

I knew that my parents would not let me come so I came secretly. In the evening, I prepared myself with my baggage and went to sleep with my neighbor. In the morning I left with her. My parents knew only later in the morning and I heard that my father even cried.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I was only twelve years old when I secretly went to Thailand with my sister and my aunt. My parents didn't know. At first my sister and my aunt also didn't know that I came. They only found out when we were very far from our village, so they couldn't send me back.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I came to Thailand with my friends without my parents knowing. I came by road. No one paid for me as I had been planning to go and had saved my money. Also, just before I left my house I stole over 20,000 kyat from my parents.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several participants whose homes were near the Thai-Burma border were able to travel back and forth between the two countries, though each time with uncertainty of what the journey would entail.

I have been home many times. I often go back to see my mother because she is old and stays alone now. For the travel expenses the first time, I spent 2,500 baht. After that it depended on the necessity of each time. It was not the same. I always remember the first time I left because it made me feel very important. If I made a mistake, I definitely wouldn't survive. So I always remember this circumstance.

A 35-year-old married Shan female with two children who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The problem of traveling back and forth is that at the border the Thai police strictly check everyone. If we don't have legal documents, we have to hire a car from an army or police officer to take us. It costs about 2,000 baht for each person.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I live near the Thai border and have gone to Thailand ever year for the past five years. In the summertime, I go back and help my parents do pottery work. In the rainy season and winter, I return to work in Thailand.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I got pregnant in Thailand. When it was near for me to deliver, I came back to give birth to my child. After my child was born, I came back to work in Thailand.

A 27-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I go back once a year and bring money to my parents. It costs 10,000 kyat to travel back to my village. Along the entire motorway we saw very young soldiers guarding the road. Whenever the bus came to their position (a checkpoint), the bus crew dropped snacks and cigarettes to them. In some places, the families of the soldiers sold soft drinks and snacks at a high price.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

4.4 The Migration Route

The route participants took to get to Thailand depended on how close their home was to the border and whether or not their family knew they were leaving. For those that lived far from the border and fled as refugees, their travel was often diverted to avoid harassment and military conflict, resulting in extended and indirect routes. Consequently, many suffered from lack of food, illness and harsh conditions throughout their journey.

It *took us six weeks to get to Thailand because we had to hide from the Burmese soldiers. When there was fighting we had to hide deep in the jungle since there were so many children and women in the Shan forces. When the Burmese soldiers heard us, they chased after us. Sometimes we could eat and sometimes we starved. We didn't rest in the villages because we didn't want to make trouble for the villagers since the Burmese armies announced they would burn the houses and occupy the land of anyone who helped us. We would keep on going all day and night without stopping until we were deep enough in the jungle to cook where no one could see the smoke.*

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When we came, it was rainy season. It was very difficult. We could not take a rest until we arrived at the destination the soldiers had planned. We had to travel by day and night. Sometimes our supplies ran out and we had to boil banana trunk or eat jungle mushrooms. Some soldiers didn't know and ate the poisoned mushrooms. They got severe diarrhea and died. Typically, the children who were boys joined the army and the girls who were old enough agreed to be a soldier's wife. This way they could have food and have someone to protect them from the enemy. We traveled for over three years to get to Thailand, the heavenly place everyone dreamed of being so beautiful. But, the truth was contrary.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Traveling to Thailand was full of troubles since we had to avoid the fighting all the time. I had three children and all of them were still young. It was very difficult to travel at night. We had to travel through the rainy season because it was the best way to avoid the Burmese army and the fighting. We spent a month traveling and many people got sick. Moreover, the medicine was used up. We were nurses only by name then. On the way, the soldiers ran out of supplies and went to pick mushrooms to eat, they got poisoned a lot. I felt so much mental anguish to see them die before my eyes without being able to

help. Many of the soldiers also got malaria. We could only sit and wait to see the sick people die one by one. There was nothing we could do. We traveled to the border with difficulty. Many people died and many got wounded. I was mentally and physically exhausted.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

It took four nights to get to Thailand. There were many people going to Thailand and we didn't have to ask so many questions, people just told us what to expect. When we arrived at the border there were people who had come to find workers. One of my friends went with someone there and another friend and I hired a car to go to Chiang Mai hoping to find work there.

A 25-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

We secretly came to Thailand at night and were told to lie down in the long boat on top of one another. We were eight people altogether. After lying down, the owner covered us with blankets. We arrived at the Ranong province shore at 9. 00 in the morning. The trip took a long time and it really felt like the boat was carrying pigs to sell on the Thai side. When I got to Thailand, I had only 30 kyat left. As soon as I arrived, I couldn't work because I was sick with malaria for three months. I couldn't do anything. Fortunately, I had my aunt there and I could stay with her first.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

We couldn't take a car to the border but rode horses along the slope of the mountains. A man led by hand the horse that I rode, but the horses that the elder people rode didn't have anyone leading them. After some time we took a car that had no roof. We were in the sun all day.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When we came, the road to the border was closed, so we had to walk over the mountains. It took us seven days and seven nights to walk. As I was only 12 years old it was very hard and I cried a lot. As I was a child I wanted to go where others went. I didn't realize it would be so difficult.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There were 60 people who came to Thailand with me and ten were from my village. We first took a truck and then walked on foot through the jungle. We had to walk at night with one flashlight for every two of us. We also had to climb up and down the mountains. It was raining lightly and the slopes were slippery. I was afraid I would slip and fall. While walking I fell down and became unconscious. My friends gave me some local natural medicine and used hand fans to cool me with air. They encouraged me not to feel dejected. It was so difficult and I missed my parents very much.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

For those living closer to the border or with time to plan their journey, the trip was more direct and often was completed in one to three days. However, the participants who traveled this way often faced more military checkpoints and harassment by officials.

We came to Thailand very late at night so no one could see us. We couldn't take many clothes with us. We were in the back of two trucks lying on top of one another like banana trees. We didn't know who was on top of whom.

A 30-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I came with a friend of mine who had never been to Thailand either. We were lucky because we met some people along the way who agreed to take us to Chiang Mai. When I came it was in October and still raining. The most difficult part of the trip was the narrow roads in Shan State. Each van carried so many passengers. We rode in it like we were in a can. When we arrived at each checkpoint we had to get out and negotiate with the authorities.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In Myawaddy, they checked you when you were going to cross into Thailand. They would ask you whether you would come back in the evening. If you said you would not come back, they would not let you go. If you said you would come back they took your identity card. So we crossed to Mae Sot and in the evening we went back to Myawaddy to get back our identity cards and came back again to Mae Sot illegally.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

From Rangoon to Pa-an there was no problem. From Pa-an to Myawaddy there were many checkpoints. The bus had to stop at every checkpoint. I had to show my identity card. The bus driver had to give money at each checkpoint. More than twelve buses were lined up at the checkpoints and sometimes it took two hours to get through. We heard that fighting broke out on the way, so the buses were stopped because of that. We were also told that young people would not be allowed to go to Mae Sot.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

It was very hard and tiresome to get to Thailand. It took four days and three nights. Once at the border, we made contact with the Thai police and went to Bangkok in their car.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the route, means and cost of the migration journey often depended on the political and military situation in Thailand and Burma. Many participants described having to go to great lengths to avoid authorities or circumvent official border crossings during different times and at different places along the border.

I came by the "thief way" because the border was closed. I felt a little anxious because I never traveled in an illegal way before. But, I was told that if I could pay the Burmese army 7,000 kyat, they would send us to this side by their own boat. I could pay so I felt a little less anxious.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My father hired someone to take my younger brother and I to Thailand. Two men took us from our village in the evening and guided us through the jungle to Thailand. It took eighteen days to get to the border. My father paid them 6,000 baht for both of us. On the

way, we were very careful not to walk on the road used for cars. We were afraid there would be fighting with the Burmese military, so we had to go by an indirect route and spend a lot of time in the jungle. I was only 12 years old then.

A 27-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

A carrier brought me and my friends together with eight other persons we didn't know. We were all the same age. At some checkpoints, the carrier told us to go on foot because the authorities would not allow us to pass. We did not know the way to go, so there were soldiers who were sent to show us the way. We had to give them some money for guiding us. These soldiers were not like the soldiers that stay at the checkpoints. We had to go a long way and walk over mountains to avoid the checkpoints. The broker paid the cost for us. She also took responsibility for our problems so we didn't have to worry.

A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Coming to Thailand was very difficult. When I came it was raining so hard that it was causing landslides, which were blocking the road. We had to stay two nights in the jungle and it rained the entire time. The driver built a small hut for everyone to stay in and organized everything for us. The other men who came together were very polite and helped too. It was such a hard trip and I missed home so much.

A 30-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Getting to the Thai border was only half the journey for many of the participants, whether they were brought into the country with a carrier who was arranging employment for them or whether they sought work themselves. For those traveling towards the larger cities in the interior of Thailand, the trip from the border was expensive and often involved covert travel involving large sums of money and more sophisticated connections, frequently involving Thai authorities.

There were hundreds of people who came together to Thailand. I don't know where they all went when we arrived at the border. Some found work there and others went further into Thailand and even to Bangkok.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The other people who came to Thailand with me hired a car to Chiang Mai. They said it would cost 2,500 baht per person. My sister and I didn't have this kind of money so we stayed and worked at the border first. We worked on a farm and the owner fed us meals and paid us each 40 baht a day. After seven months, we had enough money to go to Chiang Mai.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I came from the Thai border into the country, I hid in a truck covered in cabbages and the driver asked me to take medicine to make me sleep. Then he put wood on top of me, then cabbages and then wood again. There was only a little air for me to breathe. I fell unconscious and slept. When I felt conscious again, I was already in Chiang Mai. The driver was trying to wake me up. The other people with me were the same as I was. They slept soundly because of the powerful medicine. When I think about it now, it is

very frightening. There were fifteen people including four people from my family. If anything happened, we could have all died.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

After crossing the Thai-Burmese border, on the Thai side I went to the house of the Thai carrier. Altogether, we were ten people. He did not dare to keep us in his house, but sent us to stay at his minor wife's house. After a few days, he sent us all to Bangkok. We had to get on a six-wheel truck that had no roof. There were thirty of us now and we were told to all lie down on the floor. Then he covered us with a waterproof canvas and over it he put empty baskets. Around the outside he placed rows of Chinese cabbage and then straw on top. Inside it was hollow and he had electric fans set up. We heard that many people sent this way were killed by sharp iron rods the police used to check for smugglers. But, we were lucky.

The second trip I made to Bangkok was not so comfortable. It was a ten-wheel truck with over 60 people. It was a combination of carriers that put all those people together in one truck. It was so crowded we couldn't even move. On top of us, they put 4 x 2 wooden boards and over the wooden boards they put carrots. The truck was enclosed on three sides. The weight of the truck was very heavy and the wooden boards sounded like they were breaking. We feared these boards would break and the carrots would fall in and kill us. As the weight was very heavy, the truck had to move slowly. It was difficult to breath and totally dark. Some people got dizzy and began vomiting. Some people couldn't control their stool and it came out under their sarong. It smelled very bad. We could not tolerate it any longer and beat the side of the truck asking the driver to stop the truck. The driver just kept telling us we are almost there and to hang on. Finally, we arrived. We heard that some people sent by this way suffocated and died. We were lucky that nobody died, but it was really unbearable. My second trip was very dangerous.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In Burma, my friend and I contacted a carrier who was to bring us to Thailand and also find a job for us. My friend stayed to work in Mae Sot, but I said I would like to work in Bangkok. So, the broker kept me at her house for two nights and gathered other people also going to Bangkok, including another girl my age. We were all sent in a big truck filled full of people. Our vehicle was so full of people they could be seen from the outside. In order to avoid arrest, we had to drive at night both on and off the road. In the daytime, we had to sleep and rest the whole day. We rode in the truck like this for three nights and at one point we had to walk. There were also three Thai people who guided us. On the bus there was only one driver and another person who had a Thai identity card and they waited for us at the fixed place until we arrived. There was one woman 40 years old, six girls my age and the rest were all men. For this trip, each person had to pay 5,000 baht. If you couldn't pay, the carrier would advance the money, as she did for me. Once we got near the city the guides made phone calls and people came to find people to work for them. When we were called off the truck we were told to jump into the employer's car as quickly as possible. I did it fast and then found myself alone in a car with this employer that I didn't know. He was over 60 years old and though he seemed kind, my heart was pounding wildly. When I arrived at his house I was surprised how big it was. When I went into the four-story house I met three other girls from Burma. Only when I saw them and talked to them did my fears subside. The oldest one was 25years

old. She had worked there for seven years and could speak Thai. The other two were my age and could not speak Thai like me.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There were five of us who came with the same carrier, but we did not go to Bangkok together. In Mae Sot, I got into a car and started my journey. The driver knew all the police. When I arrived at a certain place they told me to move to another car. They told me to dress like a Thai and put me onto a bus. The carrier was on the same bus, but she sat apart from me.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

4.5 The "Carriers"

The vast majority of participants in this study first went to Thailand with someone who could lead the way, help negotiate with authorities and, in some instances, locate an employer. This person, in most cases, was referred to as a "carrier," and was either introduced by someone back home or was known to the participant. Study participants described many types of carriers. Some carriers brought the participants from their homes all the way to employers in Thailand, while others connected up with several different carriers along the way until they were able to secure a job.

There are many kinds of carriers. Some bring people from Burma to the Thai border or to other places in Thailand where there are jobs and some even find you a job. I have seen Thai and Burmese carriers. You have to be careful of the Thai carriers because they are usually working closely with the police, are wealthy and very powerful. But, they can find many kinds of jobs for Burmese people, taking half of their salary from the employer for one year. The employers want the workers so they agree to the terms of the carriers.... There are also carriers from Burma. If you are arrested and locked up, they will most likely come and bail you out. If you want to go home, they will send you home. You have to give them a lot of money, but this is their job and how they earn their living.

A 24-year-old married Burman-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Very few participants actually knew in advance how much the travel costs would be and what they would owe the carrier once they arrived in Thailand.

In my village, there were carriers who found people for those who wanted to come and work in Thailand. They promised to send people directly to an employer. My mother found a carrier from my village who she trusted and told me to go along with that person. The carrier made all the arrangements and I got a job as soon as I arrived to Thailand. The carrier who brought me here was a good person. She got money from this job. It is convenient for those who want to work and do not have contacts.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My aunt and relatives sent me by a carrier. I didn't even know her name. While I was very young my mother used to be an actress in a local drama troupe. The carrier said that she knew my mother since that time. I didn't know how much she would charge me

for the trip. She and her friends demanded money from me many times. When my parents were away, the carrier persuaded me to go.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

At the border, we stayed at a Chinese house for two nights. We met about thirty people waiting to go further into Thailand like us. On the third night, a car came to take us to Chiang Mai. The carrier said that we had to go without our belongings and that they would come later. But later, he said that the police seized our possessions on the way because they couldn't find the owners. We were angry but there was nothing we could do. We paid 3,200 baht each. The people who had money just paid the money for the transport to get to Chiang Mai, but those who didn't have any money agreed to work around that area first to pay the costs.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I knew one woman in our village who went to Thailand often and she seemed to have enough money. So, I asked to come to Thailand with her. I went to Thailand with her even though I had no money. I promised her that when I reached Thailand I would pay her back. Since I was so young, I didn't have to pay for the car's fare or food. I don't know how much I spent. On the way I had to help her carry her things, which were very heavy and even bigger than me. It took six days and many different types of transport to get to the Thai border.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I came with an old lady who finds jobs for people. She said that she also helps send money home for those working in Thailand. I came to Thailand by bus and it cost 5,000 kyat. This was not only for my travel costs, but also for the carrier who took responsibility for me so I would not face any problems.

A 17-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Some of the study participants described coming to Thailand with their friends or relatives, most of whom also worked as carriers. Though several participants who traveled with friends or relatives said they didn't have to pay, most said that despite their close relationship with these people they still had to give them large sums of money for bringing them to Thailand.

Everyone in my village is somehow related to my father or mother. Many of them have come to work in Thailand. So, I came with my cousin and other cousins helped find me a job. I got a job as soon as I arrived in Thailand. Nobody took my money in advance. I just paid for my travel.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I saw many people come to work in Thailand and, finally, I met a friend of my uncle coming to Thailand. He introduced me to another guy who was coming to Thailand. I spent over 8,000 baht for the journey to the Thai-Burma border. After getting to Chiang Mai from the border, I spent another 2,500 baht. I had money from my parents and luckily didn't borrow from anybody.

A 34-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I came with my uncle. I didn't know how much it would cost because he paid for everything. After I started working I paid him 5,000 baht.

A 22-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I came to Thailand I was only 12 years old and so small they thought I was a child. They just thought I was the daughter of my aunt so they didn't question me. My aunt arranged the travel and brought me to the employer. The house owner said that I was too young so they didn't want me, but finally they let me stay with them and paid my aunt. I don't know how much. I tried to do my best to please the house owner. Now they even want me not to go back.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There was a girl from my village who brought me along with her. We paid a carrier 4,000 kyat and stayed with her the first night. The girl from my village paid for all my travel expenses. She told me I could pay her later. I needed to pay her, but didn't. I don't know how much she paid for me.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The majority of study participants who tried to come to Thailand on their own without the help of carriers, friends or relatives faced many difficulties and often were arrested and deported back to Burma.

The first time I came with a broker I had no problem. But the second time, I went on my own. I was arrested on the way. However, one of the police who arrested me said that he needed a housekeeper. He said if I wanted this job he would not put me in jail and deport me, so I went to work in his house.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I tried to find someone who could bring me to Thailand but I had no contacts, so I came by myself. When I left my house I had only 1,000 kyat with me. I had to try to find the cheapest way to come. When I got on the bus, I tried to make friends with some older women and asked them to help me. Some of these women looked down on me and when I spoke to them they ignored me, so I tried to manage myself. When I arrived in Myawaddy, I didn't have one kyat left and nothing to eat. I sat at the Myawaddy bus stop in the dark. I was so hungry and could do nothing but cry. Then, a woman who was going to Thailand took pity on me and in the morning she brought me to Thailand. I went to work on a construction site with her and her son. I am so grateful to them and I regard them as my parents. I don't know what would have happened to me if they didn't help me.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Out of the 133 respondents that participated in the in-depth interviews for this study only two could afford to pay the fares to Thailand by themselves and did not encounter any problems along the way.

Three of us paid 2,500 baht each to come to Chiang Mai. When we arrived at the border we called our relatives. They came and picked us up that evening. We didn't have to

stay at the border. When we came it was very late at night and raining heavily. No one checked us along the way and we passed easily.

A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I spent over 20,000 kyat for the plane ticket to the city nearest the Thai border in Shan State. There I hired a car to Chiang Mai with two other people. The cost of the car and food for that part of the trip was nearly 50,000 kyat. When I arrived, I contacted my older sister and helped her at the place where she was working until I could find a job.

A 28-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

4.6 Costs, Fees and Debts

The majority of participants spoke of having to endure experiences of arbitrary fees, debts and abuses that were components of trying to find employment. Most were unaware of their rights and described their circumstances as simple bad luck. None of the participants knew when they left home exactly how much the trip to Thailand would cost, and no patterns of travel costs emerged from the research data, regardless of where the participants were traveling from or what month or year they came to Thailand.

We were not really sold, but people like me who did not have money had the carrier take their wages in advance. Some carriers took large amounts, but those who were kind took only the travel costs.

A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I came the first time I spent over 50,000 kyat and the second time it was almost 100,000 kyat. Both times I came with many people from Shan State heading to work in Thailand.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I first came to Thailand, I spent 40,000 kyat and arrived with only eight baht left. The second time I came with a friend and we each spent nearly 100,000 kyat.

A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The cost for hiring a car was 8,000 kyat a person and we had to pay another 4,000 kyat for keeping our clothes. We spent another 10,000 kyat for food and the horses we rode in the mountains.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I came to Thailand, the border gate was closed and we could not cross the bridge. It cost me a lot when I came. The bus drivers asked for more money and the SPDC immigration officials would only let those pass who could pay them 15,000 kyat. Then we had to pay another 3,000 kyat at the ferry gate. That does not include transportation costs for the bus or the boat. In the end it cost me more than I had and I had to borrow money.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the study participants in Chiang Mai and several of those in Mae Sot contacted carriers once in Thailand to take them further into the interior to find jobs. Though most of the carriers in Thailand had a fixed rate they charged, they provided no information about other costs that would be incurred, about the specific place participants would be taken, who they would work for, their salary, the terms of their employment or the debt that would be owed.

> *At first the carrier said if I went to Bangkok I would earn 1,500 baht each month. The carrier also told me I didn't have to worry about the travel costs from the border because the employer would pay for it without cutting my salary. But when I arrived, it was the opposite of everything I was told. The carrier took one full year salary from me. After one year, I wanted to go home. I returned to the border from Bangkok by a carrier. I had to pay the carrier 3,000 baht. Those who could not pay the carrier in advance had to accept that the carriers would take their pay. If you use your own money for the travel costs it runs you 5,500 baht.*
>
> ***A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *The first time I went to Bangkok the carrier told me that I would get 2,500 baht a month for working in a recycling company, but every month the carrier forced me to pay him 1,000 baht. Later, that carrier disappeared and I even lost contact with my parents. Most of the carriers cheat you. Most of them take your money in advance.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

The majority of participants borrowed money (either from their family or others) in order to travel to Thailand. Almost one-third of participants sold thing, or used their personal saving in order to travel to Thailand (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by method of obtaining money for travel costs to Thailand and research site*

Method of obtaining money for travel costs	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Sold things	42.1% (102)	17.2% (49)	28.7% (151)
Borrowed money from family	26.9% (65)	25.6% (73)	26.2% (138)
Borrowed from others	19.4% (47)	21.4% (61)	20.5% (108)
In debt to employer	2.1% (5)	2.8% (8)	2.5% (13)
In debt to broker	10.7% (26)	16.1% (46)	13.7% (72)
Personal saving	45.9% **(111)**	12.6% (36)	27.9% (147)
Other	11.2% (27)	4.6% (13)	7.6% (40)
No. of respondents	**242**	**285**	**527**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Many of the participants went into debt at home or used all their family's savings to pay for their migration journey to Thailand. Consequently, they were then desperate to send money home to pay off their debts or to support their family.

> *My mother gave me 30,000 kyat and said it was all her savings. I didn't use it all and still had 5,000 kyat left. When I got my job, I included the money remaining with my first month's salary and sent it to my mother. I sent it with the aunt who brought me here.*
> ***A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *My mother pawned our field to get money for me to come to Thailand, but it was still not enough to pay for the trip. So, my mother also sold her gold.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I came, I brought 20,000 kyat with me. This money came from my sewing and selling the gold necklace and ring my parents had given me.*
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I borrowed money from other people and my father pawned our house to pay for my trip to Thailand. My father asked me to send money as soon as I got work. It took me two weeks to get to Thailand. Then I was sent to Chiang Mai and some people came and picked us to work as housekeepers. I was very glad to have work to do so that I could have money to send home. They said that each of us would receive 2,000 baht per month. I didn't have to cut my salary because I had money before I left and my debts are back with my family.*
> ***A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

4.7 Abuses Encountered By Authorities

Almost sixty percent of the survey respondents reported at least one abuse by authorities. The types of abuses ranged from being threatened, yelled at or cheated to detention and rape, as noted in the table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by types of abuses encountered by authorities and research site*

Type of abuse	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Threatened	48.8% (118)	31.1% (89)	39.2% (207)
Yelled	38.0% (92)	21.3% (61)	29.0% (153)
Cheated or kept your money	43.0% (104)	9.8% (28)	25.0% (132)
Swore	32.2% (78)	7.3% (21)	18.8% (99)
Locked-up or confined	16.5% (40)	2.8% (8)	9.0% (48)
Tricked you with a lie	10.3% (25)	0.7% (2)	5.1% (27)
Punished	7.9% (19)	2.8% (8)	5.1% (27)
Touch you didn't want	5.8% (14)	2.8% (8)	4.2% (22)
Threw objects at you	6.2% (15)	-	2.8% (15)
Sexually Touched	2.9% (7)	2.4% (7)	2.7% (14)
Insulted	5.4% (13)	-	2.5% (13)
Raped	3.7% (9)	-	1.7% (9)
Slapped or hit	3.3% (8)	-	1.6% (8)
Pushed	2.0% (5)	1.0% (3)	1.6% (8)
Pinched	0.4% (1)	0.3% (1)	0.4% (3)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Note: Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

The women and girls described their vulnerability to abuse by authorities that occurred primarily during the migration journey. This section describes the abuses encountered by Burmese authorities, while Chapter Six addresses the abuses encountered by Thai authorities.

During the mid-1990s, the SPDC sought to prohibit females under the age of 25 from travel outside of the country in an attempt to halt trafficking from Burma. Yet, the crackdown on young female travelers actually placed them at greater risk not only with carriers and employers, but also with the authorities.

When I came there were so many checkpoints, as females under 25 years old were not allowed to come to Thailand. But, if we gave them some money the Burmese authorities would let you pass.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When we came near the border, the Burmese authorities forced us all to get out of the bus. They didn't allow young girls to come. I came with my friend who was older than me, she explained we were going to a wedding ceremony and they allowed me to go. But for some couples, their husbands were allowed to continue to Thailand while their wives had to go back home. Sometimes the authorities just grabbed the girl's hand and took them off the bus. It was very scary. Some could pay money and were released to continue their journey.

A 20-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I came to Thailand, the Burmese authorities called off the bus all those who were under 20 years old. Five girls my age hid with me in the rear of the bus. When we came to this checkpoint we were quiet and couldn't see anything. Only when we got beyond the checkpoint did we dare to come out from hiding.

A 19-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I came to Thailand the Burmese authorities took all the girls off the bus including me and didn't allow us to continue our travels. I couldn't do anything. I said that I was going to visit my relatives, but they didn't accept it. Luckily, I saw the wife of the mayor and asked her to guarantee me to travel. She agreed and I could go. I don't know what happen to the other girls.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

As I was still young they brought me to Mae Sot by a carrier. I don't know how much it cost. I could not come directly by bus because if the authorities saw young girls, they took them off the bus. Before we came to the checkpoints the carrier walked us through the rural areas, though in some places we were sent by motorcycles. I don't know so much. It was difficult for me to come to Thailand because I was so young.

A 13-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Participants also described an endless number of fees they were expected to pay to military authorities they encountered in their travels.

If I didn't give them any money, I couldn't have come. At each of the checkpoints, the driver paid 700 kyat for each person. By paying this the authorities did not take away our Burmese identity card.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The Burmese authorities checked the cars and trucks carefully. If we gave them some money, they let us come too. We paid 700 kyat for each passenger to pass. If we didn't have any money, they would have taken away our Burmese identity card.

A 22-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

On the way to Thailand, the Burmese authorities checked us along the way. If we gave them some money, we could continue our travel. If we didn't have any money, we couldn't go further. When we came, we paid money at every gate. They also checked my identity card, but they didn't take it away. However, some people in my car had their identity cards taken away because they didn't have enough money to pay them.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The authorities stopped our bus and told us to get down. They did not allow three boys and two girls to get back on. Then, the bus driver left them there and said that he paid the authorities to release them later.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I first came to Thailand I was only 19 years old. As I didnt have a plastic cover on my ID, the photograph on my identity card was damaged. They told me that I was too young to travel, but when I gave them 200 kyat they let me come to Myawaddy.

A 27-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The bus to Thailand only cost me 1,200 kyat. But at that time, the army feared that there might be an uprising on 9-9-99 [the ten-year anniversary of the 1989 pro-democracy protests] and closed the Myawaddy bridge that crosses into Thailand. So, we had to get down from the bus and walk through the jungle. We had to pay money at each military checkpoint and by the time we got to Thailand I had spent nearly 20,000 kyat.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In addition to the endless fees described by participants, confiscation of identification documents by Burmese authorities was rampant. This left a number of participants without any proof of identity as a citizen of Burma.

I came with my uncle and he told everyone that I was his daughter and insisted that he wasn't taking me to Thailand. At the last checkpoint, the Burmese authorities took away my Burmese identity card. They didn't check my uncle because he was a man.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The Burmese identity card was taken away by the Burmese authorities because I didn't have enough money to pay them. They told me that when I have money I can come back and get it. The others who could afford to paid 2,500 kyat to keep their identity card. Now, I don't have any Burmese identification.

A 19-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Fortunately, I have my Burmese identity card. On the way mine was not taken away, but some had theirs taken away and were even taken off the bus for questioning. The Burmese authorities were more suspicious of those whose identity cards were not issued in Karen State.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When we came it was after the Water Festival and there was a lot of checking and questioning by the authorities along the way. The young unmarried girls were questioned the most. They were asked where they were going, what they were going to do, who they were going with, where they live and many other things. Some of the authorities were from the army, some were in police uniforms and others were without uniforms but had guns in their hands. We were all very afraid. They checked my Burmese identity and it cost me more than 3,000 kyat to be able to keep my identity card and continue my journey.

A 22-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My Burmese identity card was taken away at one checkpoint and I had to return the next day and beg for it back. I agreed to pay 2,000 kyat to get it back.

A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

While coming to Thailand the Burmese authorities took my Burmese identity card. Now my life is very difficult without any identification.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Other types of abuses were also described by the women and girls in this study, including frequent incidents of verbal abuse and random confinement.

Although I had a Burmese identity card and enough money to pay, the Burmese authorities yelled and threatened travelers a lot. At the checkpoints, if they know that you are afraid, they threaten you even more. Many different Burmese officials checked us along the way, the army, police, immigration, customs, etc. They were not polite when they checked us often yelling, threatening and using very rude words.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Atone checkpoint, the Burmese officer searched my bag and found an Indian coin that my friend gave me. I had this coin for many years. The officer wanted to fine me 1,200 kyat. I tried to explain how I got it, but they said I was arguing with them and pointed their guns at me telling me to get out of the car. Later my family went to the place where they kept me and paid the Burmese officer so I could be released.

A 20-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

4.8 Finding Employment

The majority of study participants interviewed found employment as domestic workers through a carrier, either the one who brought them from Burma or one they met in Thailand.

When I was 14 years old, my mother sent me to work in Chiang Mai with a woman she knew. The woman got me a job as a housekeeper. I never understood the arrangement, but did not get paid for a long time.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The carrier came to my village and invited us to work in Thailand. Ten of us came with that carrier. Another girl and I could not afford to pay for our travel costs so the carrier

paid for us. The others paid themselves. I think each of them paid about 6,000 or 7,000 kyat. They also paid for their own food. When we first arrived in Thailand the broker kept the two of us in a certain place for some time and sent others to work first. As we could not pay for our travel costs, she sent us last to a house where we would work. Our employer paid the carrier for our travel costs. Later, I learned that the carrier took six months of our salary in advance.

A 19-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I first came I worked at the orange plantation for 1,500 baht a month. I stayed in a row house the owner built for the workers. One day someone came and asked if anyone wanted to work as housekeeper for 1 ,500 baht a month with room and board, so I decided to go. I didn't pay money in advance, but I realize now that I am paid a lot less than everyone I know doing this work.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In my village, I have an aunt who was a trader and she had an acquaintance that is a truck owner. A Thai lady asked her to find people who would like to go to Bangkok and she would give her 1,500 baht for each person. She came back to our village to find people, so I came with my aunt and the truck driver.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several participants explained that they arrived in Thailand without a job and went to particular areas where employers were known to come to look for migrant workers.

After we arrived in Chiang Mai we finally got a job. We were staying at a temple for ten days when a man came to find some workers for a construction site. We took the job and didn't have to pay any money in advance.

A 19-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I arrived in Thailand I didn't get a job right away. I had stayed at the temple for more than a week before someone came looking for an employee.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The majority of the participants did not know the type of work they would be given, where or with whom they would be working, or the terms of their employment.

This woman gave my mother 2,000 kyat in advance and brought me from the border to Chiang Mai. I didn't know anything about my job or how I would pay the money for the transportation.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I didn't have the fare for the travel and I was too young to travel legally. I had only 840 kyat when I left. I had to depend on those who came with me. At first, the employer wouldn't receive me because I was too young to work. But after begging, the lady employer received me. I didn't know how much I would earn or have to pay for coming here and getting this job.

A 14-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I arrived in the employer's house, the employer gave 7,000 baht to the carrier for my travel costs. After they gave that sum of money for my travel costs, they gave me 1,000 baht per month and said I had to work for them for two years at that rate. There was nothing I could do.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't know how much it cost me to come. Even though I came with my relatives, they demanded money many times. When I worked in Rangoon, I saved some money and bought one gold chain. My relatives took that gold chain and gave me 10,000 kyat for my travel expenses. My gold chain was worth a lot more than that. I worked in Mae Sot for two months and I got nothing. Now, the relatives come to collect my wages many times.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I arrived at the border there was a Thai checkpoint. They asked for 500 baht per person for the older people and 300 baht for each child. The carrier paid everything for me. She said I could give it back to her when I got the job. When I heard of her talking about the money, I was afraid and wondered if I could ever go back home or not. My mother had already taken 2,000 baht from the carrier and this did not include any of the transportation costs, food, fees and other things that the carrier was paying for. I didn't know how much it was all totaling. I couldn't figure it out and didn't even dare to figure it out. I felt so afraid. In thinking about it, when I stayed at home [in Burma] I spent only (the equivalent of) 10 baht a week. Now the money is in the thousands. Perhaps I may never get back home. I tried not to eat because I didn't know how much the carrier would add to my costs. I wanted to cry all the time, but I didn't dare to let the carrier see me cry. I was afraid she would go home and tell my mother. So, I stole away to cry when she didn't see me or at night. I cried all night and in the morning I forgot to wake up. When the carrier woke me up she yelled at me saying: "If you are so lazy like this how can you pay back the money you owe. Your mother lied about how useful you are. "I felt so sad to hear her say this, but I couldn't say a word.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

4.9 Trafficking and Being Sold into Slavery

As mentioned above, there are several particular areas in Thailand where employers are known to come to look for migrant workers. It is in this context when migrants are waiting to be approached for work that they become particularly vulnerable to being trafficked, losing control of their situation soon after crossing the border. A number of the study participants not only realized that they were trafficked but were also able to articulate how they were sold into slavery.

I heard that many children were trafficked or sold when they came to Thailand. Many carriers trafficked young girls. If she is beautiful they send her to a brothel. I myself feel like I was trafficked. Some of the carriers are Thais and some are Burmese. The majority of the carriers are not good. They just want to get money from others and they ill-treat the workers. When I first arrived I was sent to a house where I had to work for free.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

First, an aunt who had sympathy for our family introduced me to a carrier to bring me to work in Thailand. That carrier sold me from place to place in Bangkok. The first time three of us were sold together to the same house. The word "sold" means the carrier took half of our salary in advance for one year. We stayed at the first house for one year. I received only 9,000 baht and then wanted to go home, but the carrier said I could not go yet. She took away all 9,000 baht and sent me to another house. . . . The next house where I worked the employer gave me 2,000 baht per month but the carrier took 800 baht a month for one year, so I received only 1 ,200 baht per month. But, this employer helped me send money home and did not want to give the 800 baht per month to the carrier. However, they feared the carrier might take me away so they had to give that carrier that rate every month for more than one year. After three years, I intended to go home and had only saved 6,000 baht. But, the carrier found me and again took all of my money and said I have to continue to work....

Then the carrier sent me to southern Thailand near the Malaysian border. Yala is far away from Bangkok and I had to take one night riding on a train to get there. The children of that family were very cruel and I could not stand it, so I requested the lady employer to send me back. She sent me back to the carrier by plane....

When I came back to the carrier she blamed and scolded me. Then she sent me to look after an old man who was paralyzed and to cook for the family and factory workers. After I was there for one month, five factory workers escaped and invited me to follow them if I wished. All six of us fled and we went to work in a restaurant. When the restaurant closed I contacted another carrier to help me find a job. I worked for one month there and when I went to collect my pay the house owner told me I had been sold and if I complained they would send me to the police. I called the owner of the restaurant and she tried to help me escape, but on the way I ran into the police and was arrested. The police sent me to the immigration detention center and I saw many people from Burma there. We were all deported to Burma. To return home I had to borrow money with interest. Now I am in debt and there is no way to pay off this money working in my village. So, I will have to return to find work in Thailand. I had to work for many households before I found a good employer

A 24-year-old married Burman-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

That woman who brought me from my village brought me to sleep at her house. She said that her husband's character was not good and told me to sleep in the front of the house. The next day she left me at her house and found other people. Then the carrier returned saying I was going to Bangkok. I told her I wanted to stay in Mae Sot, but she didn't allow me. There was a big argument and then I realized she was going to sell me. There were others who saw this and when the carrier was away they helped me escape.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

We arrived at the carrier's house and there I saw a girl who looked like she was trafficked. In the house we saw a woman about thirty years old with bright red lipstick who everyone called "big mother. "She seemed to be in charge of everyone. I saw this girl sitting in the corner looking so frightened and in distress. When we told her we were going to run away she didn't say anything. I didn't dare to talk to her a lot. Now, I wish I had and maybe we could have helped her. Instead, my friend and I just tried to get out of there.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I saw many people in my village come to Thailand and I wanted to go too. When I came I brought 70,000 kyat with me. I came to the border with my relative. When I arrived in Thailand, I exchanged the Burmese currency and got over 1,000 baht. My relative left me with another woman who would find a job for me. This woman contacted another woman whose husband worked with Immigration. I didn't know that they were taking me to their house. Then, they told me I had to go work at their house and they would pay me 1,500 baht per month. I didn't have any choice and had no idea what the arrangement was. I had to agree to everything.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

We stayed for fifteen days after we had arrived at Pieng Loung and then the carrier I came with sold one of the girls for 2,000 baht. I could see they were very evil-minded. I think they were planning to sell me too. They probably thought of definitely selling me even though the carrier was a friend of our family. Fortunately, I found someone to take me to Bangkok. Later I heard it cost 5,000 baht per person, but the carrier didn't take any money from me, maybe because I was so young. I paid him back after I started working.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Since I was still very young when I arrived I had to sell tissue paper to people passing by on the street. I just took one or two packages of tissues in my hands and tried to act in a pitiful way. The tissue paper was worth two or three baht, but people felt pity for me and gave me 10 to 20 baht. When the tissue paper was sold, I had to give all the money to the employer who was watching me from a distance. We were altogether five children. There were others who worked with other employers. We could only get food to eat and if we tried to buy some snack to eat, the employer would beat us. As I was afraid, I always gave all the money I got to the employer. One day when I was 15 years old, the police saw the son of the employer beat me. The police arrested all of us. I was sent back to the border and the employer and his son were imprisoned. That is how I got free from that life.

A 21-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

4.10 Marrying to Secure Protection

Many study participants pointed out the increased vulnerability of single young females and several decided to marry during their journey in an effort to secure protection.

The entire village fled as refugees. There were sixteen young women from my village who left with me. We lived in the jungle for three years and by the time we arrived at the border, there were only three young women left. The other women all agreed to take husbands to protect them while traveling. It was very difficult for them if they did not have family there to look after them.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I got married for my security and safety. I needed someone to depend on, as it was too dangerous to be a single woman alone.

A 24-year-old married Burman-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I got married as soon as I arrived in Thailand. I saw him as I arrived. There were lots of people from Burma. They had organized themselves into a gang and bullied each other. As a newly arrived stranger and a single young woman, I was in trouble. The gang pushed me with one man and I tried to stay with him and agreed to marry him to stay safe.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the difficulties and abuses encountered by the women and girls in this study during their migration to Thailand. Many spoke of the need to use clandestine efforts, often organized by "carriers" who accompanied them to or across the border, due to the shifting political and military situation in Burma. For those that lived far from the border and were fleeing as refugees, travel was often diverted to avoid harassment and military conflict, resulting in extended and indirect routes. Consequently, many of the participants suffered from lack of food, illness and harsh conditions throughout their journey.

Large sums of money were required and either paid in advance or incurred as debt to the carriers, although rarely were the participants informed in advance of what the total travel costs would be. Additionally, authorities in both Burma and Thailand imposed a range of, often arbitrary, fees and fines all along the migration route. At times, the demand for various fees and fines was accompanied by threats of confiscating identification documents, physical searches, arrest, confinement and deportation back home.

Most participants found employment as domestic workers through a carrier, either one who brought them from Burma or one they met in Thailand.

However, only rarely did they know ahead of time the type of work they would be given, where or with whom they would be working, or the terms of their employment. Other participants, rather than using carriers to find employment, went to particular areas where employers were known to come to look for migrant labor. It was in this context when the women and girls were waiting to be approached for work that they became particularly vulnerable to exploitation and to being trafficked and sold into slavery.

The various working conditions of their employment as domestic workers are described in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Five :

Working Conditions

5.1 Introduction

None of the women or girls in this study had any understanding of what their working conditions would be until they had arrived at their employer's house. There were no contracts or clear descriptions of their working hours, benefits or job responsibilities. Employers arbitrarily set the conditions and terms of employment regarding such matters as salaries, meals, accommodations and access to outside contacts. The arbitrary nature of employers' decisions on these matters, in part, is a result of the lack of labor laws and/or governmental standards in this labor sector as applicable to migrant workers, as noted in Chapter One, Section 1.6. Consequently, domestic workers (and migrants in general) have no recourse for the abuses they face.

The migrant workers from Burma in this study reported an array of abuses related to withholding or non-payment of wages, long working hours, lack of pay for sick or vacation days, unduly burdensome job responsibilities (in addition to household chores) and confinement within the house with little or no opportunity to contact family or friends. The average working day was reported to be between 14 and 18 hours a day, with few receiving consistent days off. Language barriers further aggravated the interactions between the domestic workers and their employers as well as the employers' family members. These realities often left the domestic workers extremely vulnerable to mental, physical and sexual abuse.

5.2 Salaries and Wages

While most of the women and girls in this study reported that they were informed by their employer of what their salary would be upon arriving at their employer's household, they were not informed of the terms of how their salary would be paid or what deductions would be withheld, what benefits, if any, they would receive (such as sick days, holidays, personal days, etc.) or what their job responsibilities would entail.

I am always looked down upon by my employer. Many others face the same problems as me. It would be best if before we go into a house and work that we have some agreement with the employer about our monthly wages, including benefits and deductions as well as what jobs they expect us to do. But, this never happens and so there are many problems.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The majority of study participants at both research sites earned less than half of the Thai minimum wage.[1] National minimum wage standards in Thailand vary according to geographic location, with urban areas providing higher salaries because of the increased cost of living. The Thai Ministry of Labour issues different minimum wage requirements for each of the country's seventy-six provinces based upon the cost of living in each area. The daily minimum wage between Chiang Mai and Mae Sot differs by only twenty baht a day. However, among the domestic workers interviewed for this study salary differentials were far greater, with those in Chiang Mai receiving substantially higher salaries (Table 5.1). This most likely is due to the equal-distance of the two study sites from the Burmese border. Travel to Chiang Mai is more difficult and expensive and, therefore, the supply of migrant workers not as readily available, so that the pay scale here is higher. Mae Sot's close proximity to the border means that migrants are able to easily enter the city, so there is a greater pool of potential workers.

Table 5.1 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by monthly salary and research site

Monthly salary in baht	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Less than 1,000	2.9% (7)	57.1% (163)	32.2% (170)
1,001-2,000	18.2 % (44)	40.1 % (115)	30.1 % (159)
2,001-3,000	45.5 % (110)	2.8% (8)	22.3% (118)
Over 3,000	33.4 % (81)	-	15.4 % (81)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Approximately half of the domestic workers interviewed reported that once they paid off their debts for traveling to Thailand and for securing employment, they felt fortunate to have their job, despite receiving a salary well below minimum wage.

[1] Even the arbitrary nature of employment conditions for domestic workers in Thailand, it is not possible to calculate the value of employee benefits, such as room and board, provided to most of the study participants. For some, these benefits when added to the below-minimum-wage salary they received might equal or possibly exceed national wage standards. Nevertheless, as this chapter will illustrate, the "benefit"of room and board tended to contribute to exceedingly long working hours and unfair working conditions.

Now, I feel more comfortable. I get paid twice a month and on time. I get the exact salary agreed on.

A 27-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I can send money home every two or three months. It helps my family a lot and their condition has improved. They have extended their fields and are growing more crops. If they are successful I can say that I am satisfied with my job here.

A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

For many, their job satisfaction was based on whether they were able to obtain the minimum food, shelter and clothes necessary for themselves and their children to survive and/ or whether they were able to save enough money to send home to Burma.

My employer gives me food to eat and 50 baht per day. If I deduct 200 baht for house rent I still have 800 baht. I don't buy food I want to eat and I don't buy things I want. I have good health and use my money economically. But, if I bought what I wanted to eat and wear, this income would not be enough. I always think about my parents who are in the village, and so I have to be economical and try to save money to send home to them.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Now I work as a housekeeper and the salary is 3,100 baht. I get it every month too. Some of it was given back for the car's fare when I came. With the rest, I bought some clothes because people in this country don't wear the same clothes as in our country. I save my money and buy one piece of clothing each month. It is enough forme to use, but there is nothing left to save.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My job covers the cost of our house rent. We have to eat with my husband's income. Because we have children, we spend all that we get and can't save any money even if we are very careful with our spending.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The other half of the women and girls interviewed, however, explained that their salaries were insufficient to cover their living expenses or to save enough money to send home.

I do not get enough money to save anything. I spend it all on basic necessities. If I don't work for a day, the employer cuts my salary right away. The income is just enough to survive from day to day only.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The problem I have is that there is so much work to do and the salary is so little. The house I clean is very big and I have to take care of it alone. If I don't do it, nobody does it. I hardly take a rest and still I cannot save any money because my salary is so low.

A 23-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Since I came to work here I have never been able to send money home. My income is not enough for my daughter and myself, even though she also works. I even had to ask my parents in Burma to send me some money. They had to sell a piece of their land to do so. I came here to earn money and here I am asking for money from home.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the domestic workers interviewed reported incidences of irregular or no payment from their employer. Many employers were late in paying salaries, paid irregularly or paid less than the amount originally agreed upon. Several domestic workers also explained that they had to always remind their employer to pay them, otherwise they would not receive their salary.

When I arrived in Bangkok they told me I would be paid 2,500 baht per month. But, I have received only 7,000 baht for seven months of work. Actually, I should have been paid nearly twenty thousand baht by now. I guess I have to say that I am lucky to get a good salary, but unlucky because they didn't pay what they owed me.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I earned 1,000 baht a month, but after my employer got a work permit for me he did not pay me anymore. I waited for two months and still I received nothing. I heard that one of my children was sick back in Burma and I asked for my pay, but the employer said he would only give me one month's pay. He said that he will give me my entire salary after I work for six months.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My salary is 4,000 baht a month. Sometimes I get paid on time, but usually they say they are short on money and will pay me sometime later. There is nothing I can do.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The domestic workers interviewed also reported employers arbitrarily deducting their wages, often withholding more than the actual costs of various items.

While I was staying with the employer, they cut my salary for their purchases. When they bought a rice pot, they cut my salary and when they bought a TV for their family, they also cut my salary. They said this was because I ate and watched TV with them. They were always cutting things from my salary.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer opened a grocery shop and I was told to get things there that I wanted to eat. He always wrote down what I took. Then, I found out he was deducting it all from my salary and the first month I only got paid 800 baht. I was very surprised to learn that he charged me for everything at the full price and I had to buy from his shop if I wanted to eat.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My employer often suspects that I have stolen things even though it has just been misplaced. When I find it for her she says it is not the same one as the original and buys a new one deducting it from my salary.

A 29-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several domestic workers explained that their employers refused to pay them on a monthly basis.

The employer told me I have to work for one year and then they will pay me my salary. They said if I do not work for one year, they cannot give me my money. When my mother was ill I wanted to send money home to her, but they only gave me 1,500 baht to send home even though I have earned much more. When I wanted to go back they gave me only 3,000 baht even though I had worked for nine months.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I tried to ask for my salary every month, but the employer said she would keep it with her. Some months I really need it and argue with her until she gives it to me. Other months I don't need it and don't argue too much. But, this way it is difficult to keep track of my money.

A 25-year-old single Karen female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Mae Sot.

I came to Thailand when I was 11 years old and got a job taking care of children in Bangkok for 500 baht a month. When I asked for my salary, the employer told me that he was sending my earnings home each year to my family. After four years when I returned home I learned that my family never received anything. I was so disappointed.

A 21-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

In addition to not receiving their wages on a timely basis or having their wages randomly withheld or deducted by their employers, the women and girls in this study described feeling vulnerable and violated because of the lack of recourse to confront their employers' actions and, in some cases, accompanying threats.

I asked for my salary over and over again, but my employer never paid me my salary. My employer came to get me directly from the carrier when I first arrived in Chiang Mai. The employer often reminded me that he could send me back easily by just asking the police to take me to the border. I often thought that I should just let them send me to the police if they weren't going to pay me. But, on the other hand I didn't have any money and I was afraid I couldn't pay the police for my deportation and would be stuck at the border with no money. Finally, I decided to escape. I had to accept that I would never be paid and would just have to lose the salary the employer owed me.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My employer would only advance me large amounts of money, 10,000 to 20,000 baht. Then, I would have to pay back my debt to her. I have worked for her for three years and I don't exactly know how much I owe her.

A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.3 Working Hours

Almost all of the domestic workers in this study reported having no set working hours or benefits. They explained that everything depended on their employer's decisions on a day-to-day basis. The vast majority of study participants explained that they worked consistently long hours, with no regular days off and no overtime pay.

Table 5.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of working hours per day and research site

No. of working hours per day	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
1-8	2.9 % (7)	1.4 % (4)	2.1 %(11)
9-12	30.0 % (72)	8.1 % (23)	18.1 %(95)
13-14	19.6% (47)	18.7 % (53)	19.1 %(100)
15-16	22.9 % (55)	34.8 % (99)	29.4% (154)
17-18	20.8 % (50)	33.8 % (96)	27.9% (146)
19-20	3.8 % (9)	2.8% (8)	3.2% (17)
21-24	-	0.4 % (1)	0.2 % (1)
No. of respondents	**240**	**284**	**524**

The majority (60.7%) reported that they were expected to work over 14 hours a day. Only a handful of domestic workers reported working less than ten hours a day. In fact, only two percent of the study participants reported working a standard eight-hour day (Table 5.2).

***Note:** 4 respondents did not answer of working hours per day.

Many of the domestic workers interviewed for this study noted that their employers expected them to be available to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Moreover, the majority of them noted they had little or no rest incorporated into their workday.

> *The domestic worker has a lot of jobs and if the work is not done, we have to stay up late to finish it no matter what time it is. Even though we are several staff, sometimes we have to work until3.00 or 4.00 in the morning. Especially on the weekends, the employer likes ordering us to do many things.*
>
> ***A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I have no time to rest. I have to look after my employer's children and take them with me wherever I go. Moreover, I am responsible for an old paralyzed woman and cannot abandon her.*
>
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

The husband always comes back late. I cannot go to sleep until he comes back. I have to wait and open the door for him. I feel tired working the whole day and I want to sleep very much. If it was before ten in the evening, this would not be a problem for me, but sometimes he comes back long after midnight and I don't get any sleep at all, waiting the whole time to open the door for him. I feel like I am working like a slave for others and I cry so many times.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

During in-depth interviews, some of the study participants explained how they were able to find time to rest during the day when children were asleep or their employer was not home or watching. Several explained that though they had time to rest, they chose not to despite the long hours they put in), because they were worried their employer would reprimand them.

If the employer was not at home, I felt a little better and often could take a rest. But, when he was home, whether there was no work or not, I didn't dare to sit at all.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

As my job is just working in the house, there are no special holidays or rest times like people who work in a factory. But, sometimes, the house is quiet and I have time to rest.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the daytime, I don't have very much work to do. Some days, I even have time to nap, but I don't. I fear that the employer may get angry with me.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A few interviewees reported having one to two hours of rest during their workday.

I get time to rest after the employers go to their jobs. I usually rest from 9.00 to 10.00 in the morning. That is my regular time to rest. About 9.00 in the evening, I usually finish doing all my work. Then, I goto my room, have my shower, eat dinner and retire for the day.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

During the day the employer tells me when I can rest. She usually lets me sleep for two hours. She says that only if we have enough sleep will we have energy to work.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My job begins at five in the morning, but in the afternoon, we can rest. After I have finished washing clothes and cleaning the employer's house, I can rest.

A 22-year-old married Pa-O female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In addition to not having any standard times for breaks or rests, 62 percent of the domestic workers surveyed for this study reported they had no regular days off and the days off they did receive were randomly decided by their employer (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by number of days permitted off and research site

Number of days permitted off	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
None	54.1% (131)	68.8% (196)	61.9% (327)
Weekly	10.7% (26)	4.6% (13)	7.4% (39)
Monthly	18.6% (45)	10.9% (31)	14.4% (76)
Annually	16.6% (40)	15.7% (45)	16.2% (85)
No response	-	0.3% (1)	0.2% (1)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

The women and girls in this study who did not receive days off explained that this was because their employer needed them to work at all times.

> *As a domestic worker, I have to work from early in the morning until dark without rest. At night I still have to iron the clothes. I have worked here for two years and I remember only two days I was free to go out.*
>
> ***A 27-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twelve years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Whenever there was a special event at the temple, I didn't go. When the Shan New Year took place, I used to ask to go, but the employer said that, ùIf you go, you will get nothing. If you want to go, obviously you don't need any money. 7 did not want to lose my job, so I never went anywhere.*
>
> ***A 32-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *The factories are closed on Sundays, but for domestic workers there is no day to rest. I cannot stop work to go out or to visit my friend.*
>
> ***A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I never get a holiday or chance to go to any activity or special event. I can't go anywhere.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I really want to go to night school but the employer always makes me work. Though I work overtime, I never receive any extra money. My work is never done and so I cannot go anywhere.*
>
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

The domestic workers who did receive days off explained that they never knew in advance when they would get time off.

Sometimes I don't have to work on Sunday, but it is not every week. It depends on the feeling of the employer on that day.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Every year at this time I return to my village for a visit. But, this year my employer didn't let me go home because she said she feared I would not come back.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Sometimes if the employer had some emergency or urgent task, she would close the shop and I could have a rest after the housework was completed. But, this is very rare and usually the family would go out, so I would have to stay home to watch the house.

A 26-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There is one holiday a month. I don't know exactly what day my holiday is though. It depends when it is convenient for the employer.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Since there was no formal or informal agreement with their employers regarding vacation and personal days, most of the domestic workers explained that they had to approach their employer for permission each time they wanted time off, even for national holidays. Permission was granted solely on the basis of the individual employer's decision on a case-by-case basis.

Working as a domestic worker, there are no holidays. I don't have any holidays, but I can usually convince the employer to let me stop working once a year for the Water Festival only.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't have any problem with this employer. If there is a special event, like the beginning or the end of Buddhist lent, she lets me go. Sometimes, when my friend comes to see me, if there is not a lot of work, I can visit and she won't say anything.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

There are no guaranteed holidays where I work, but if it is a ceremony or festival, they often allow me to stop working. Usually, they don't work on those days either.

A 23-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Until now, I was only able to have days off when the employer was ill. But, I still had to do all the housework when I returned.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My employer only allows me five days off to go home for a visit each year. I told her that five days was not enough time to see all of my friends and pay homage to our Buddhist temple. I would not get enough time to relax at home. I asked her to give me ten days to visit my home, but she did not allow it. So, I kept staying like this. Sometimes, I feel quite depressed. I dare not tell her that I think of going back without returning because

then she would not let me go home at all. Maybe I will tell her that I plan to go back for a short visit and when I come back to Thailand I will look for another house to work in.

A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My current employer allowed me to go home for one month and when I came back she gave me salary for that month. I am very lucky.

A 19-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Among those interviewed who were granted days off, many explained that their salary was deducted or they faced other consequences for their time away from work.

I never had any days off, but my employer allowed me to go home to Shan State several years ago. I went back for about two weeks. When I returned, the employer didn't say anything though she cut my salary for the days I was away.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My mother wrote that she was not so well. I had worked for this employer for more than eight months with no days off, but when I asked my employer permission to go home for a visit, she refused. She said if I left she would find a new person to replace me. I didn't know what to do.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When my mother was sick, I asked my employer for permission to go back to my village. It took me fifteen days to go and come back. But, when I returned the employer found a new worker and no longer needed me.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Nearly 73 percent of the domestic workers surveyed for this study received no overtime pay or compensation by their employer regardless of the hours they worked or the number of holidays they were granted (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by amount of overtime pay or compensation and research site

Overtime pay or compensation (in baht)	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Nothing	63.3% (152)	80.8% (231)	72.8% (383)
Less than 1,000	20.4% (49)	13.3% (38)	16.5% (87)
1,001-2,000	10.0% (24)	5.9% (17)	7.8% (41)
2,001-4,000	2.1% (5)	-	1.0% (5)
4,000+	4.2% (10)	-	1.9% (10)
No. of respondents	**240**	**286**	**526**

* **Note:** 2 respondents did not answer of overtime pay or compensation.

As noted earlier, the majority of women and girls in this study worked over 14 hours a day with a set monthly salary. Of those who did receive compensation from their employer for working overtime, most reported that the amount and occurrence was random, entirely at the sole discretion of their employer.

> *I received 1,500 baht a month. Sometimes, the employers would give extra every month without letting other people see it. They would give me 500, 700 or 1, 000 baht from time to time. They would give it saying to give it to my mother immediately.*
> ***A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *My employers are kind. Sometimes they give me 100 or 200 baht in addition to my salary if they are in a good mood. Sometimes their daughter asks me to buy her something and then gives me the left over change of 10 or 20 baht.*
> ***A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *Some months when there is a lot of work or many festivals, the employer gives me extra money because it is so hard.*
> ***A 19-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When it is Chinese New Year I get something extra, but what it is depends on the employer. The first year it was an expensive gold necklace. Since then it has been less, but still something.*
> ***A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Just over a fifth of the domestic workers surveyed (21.4%) noted that their employer covered health care expenses. However, the majority (78.6%) reported that they did not receive any health benefits. The domestic workers that participated in the in-depth interviews reported not only a lack of employer-supported health care benefits but also that they were not allowed to take sick days, or they were afraid or anxious to take them.[2]

> *The problem is that I never finish working. Sometimes, I really want to take a rest, but if the work is not done I cannot. Sometimes, I get bad headaches, but I don't dare to tell them. I just keep working, though I don't feel happy.*
> ***A 27-year-old married Shan female with three children, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I didn't feel well, I told my employer I would like to rest. Her face turned into a scowl and I knew that I made her angry. I would try to keep working even though I felt so tired and exhausted that my knees would tremble and I could not eat or sleep well.*
> ***A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *If I am sick and get permission to take a day off, there is a big problem. To ask them to pay for my health care is impossible. If there is something wrong, I have to manage it alone. The employer doesn't care and says it is not his business.*
> ***A 32-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I start working everyday at 5.00 in the morning. By the time the family wakes up, I have to be finished with all my work. During the day, I don't sleep because I fear it might become a habit. After I worked like this for three days, I became giddy and vomited. I also got a stomachache. So, the employer gave me some medication and asked me to get up at 6.00 in the morning. She also told me to eat at regular times. Since then I have not had any health problems.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Whenever I am sick, I cannot take days off. If I am able to work, I must continue working. They would never consider paying for any health care expenses either.*
> ***A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

5.4 Work Expectations

The expectations and responsibilities of the domestic workers in this study were not clearly defined and were often elusive with new and different expectations unfolding over time. Study participants noted a wide range of duties, including cleaning the house, washing and ironing clothes, cooking, caring for children, the elderly or others, tending animals, washing cars, working or cleaning in the employer's business, massaging and gardening (Table 5.5).

[2] This data is presented in more detail in Chapter Seven on health issues.

Table 5.5 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by household responsibility and research site*

Household responsibility	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
House cleaning	97.1% (235)	97.2% (278)	97.2% (513)
Washing and ironing clothes	79.3% (192)	88.1% (252)	84.1% (444)
Cooking	66.9% (162)	66.1% (187)	66.5% (351)
Taking care of children, elderly or sick	60.3% (146)	67.4% (194)	64.4% (371)
Washing cars/bikes	56.6% (137)	38.5% (110)	46.8% (247)
Taking care of animals	41.7% (101)	35.7% (102)	38.4% (203)
Cleaning employer's store	43.8% (106)	27.3% (78)	34.8% (184)
Helping employer in his/her business	45.0% (109)	20.6% (59)	31.8% (168)
Massage	28.5% (69)	33.2% (95)	31.1% (164)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Note: Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Since employers often did not discuss or clearly outline specific job responsibilities or what was expected, the domestic workers interviewed described feeling obliged to be working at all times.

> *I have to work the whole day. I don't have any time to rest. When they ask me to do something, I have to stop whatever I am doing at the moment and do what they ask as quickly as possible. There is no regular fixed time to work.*
>
> ***A 13-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *The daughter of the employer is spoiled and can do whatever she wants. I have to pick up after her all day long. I even have to turn the water off after her shower and flush the toilet for her. She is a teenager and it is very demeaning to be treated like her slave.*
>
> ***A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Thirty-one percent of the domestic workers surveyed were expected to help with their employer's business in addition to handling the household chores. Several of the women and girls interviewed discussed the additional burden this placed on them.

The employer has a restaurant, so in addition to all the household chores, I had to work there, sweeping and scrubbing the floors, cleaning the tables and kitchen, pealing and cutting the vegetables, washing dishes, serving water and food to the customers and closing the restaurant day after day.

A 17-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer sells sticky rice and chicken satayin the market. I have to cook the sticky rice, wash the dishes and pound the spices and vegetables. All this has to be done in the early morning before the employer comes back from the market. When that is done I have to clean the house and wash the clothes. Then, I have to help the employer prepare the chicken. When everything is ready, I put make up on my face, change my clothes and go to sell with her at the market. Then, when I come home I have to cook dinner and iron the clothes.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Everyday, I help the employer sew doll clothes that she makes for export. I also clean the house and bathrooms, wash and iron the clothes, and clean the factory where the employers have twenty-three workers. I also have to cook rice and care for five dogs and twenty chickens three times a day.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have to help the employer open her shop. When the truck arrives, I have to help carry in all the chicken eggs to sell in the shop. Sometimes I have to help pack the eggs at night and go with the truck to distribute the eggs for the customers. This is in addition to all the housework, laundry and cooking for the family.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If there isn't any housework to do, they call me to go and work at their construction site. But, they don't give me extra money.

A 24-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Several of the domestic workers explained how their job responsibilities expanded over time or how they were sent to work for other employers as well.

The employer is building a very big house and bringing his parents to live with him. There will be so many new responsibilities. I think they need to get more help and increase my pay.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The carrier sent me to work at a house for two years, but after seven months the employer shifted me to work at another house. I have to go wherever they send me until I pay back my debt.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There were so many people who came to live in this house it was impossible forme to do all the work. They have never raised my salary even though my job has expanded. They only complain when I can't finish all the work.

A 30-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My employer took in her niece and nephew to live with her and now I have to take all the responsibility for them in addition to the work I am already doing.

A 23-year-old single Tavoyan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Often employers expected that those domestic workers caring for young children be available to work at all times, with many expected to be on call throughout the night should the children need any attention.

I had to do the housework and look after a child. The child has polio and can do nothing but just lie on the bed. I have to do everything for the child 24 hours a day. I am so exhausted and have gotten very thin.

A 23-year-old married Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My daily routine is to clean the house and do the shopping, but mostly I have to take care of the five-year old. I have to take care of this child whenever he needs me all day and night.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer has two young sons. The parents are very busy with their jobs and have no time to look after their children. The children are very rough and hard to discipline. For example, I told them not to play with the lighter but they wouldn't listen to me. I worry a lot about my responsibilities. Onetime when I was in my own room, they turned on the gas stove. The employer thought that I turned it on and shouted at me. I told her that I did not do it. Perhaps now, she realizes a bit more about her mischievous children. When school opens, it will be a little easier. But then, the employer expects me to help her in her shop.

A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Here, I have to clean the house, keep the employer's child company as well as the grandmother. I have also to feed, bathe and clean the cages for all the dogs and birds. Now the child is getting older and I have to take him out and around the neighborhood. When he goes to see friends, I have to go and follow him. I also have to give him a bath both in the morning and evening.

A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

A number of domestic workers were also required to care for elderly or sick relatives. Again, many were expected to sleep in their rooms and to be available to help them through the night. In some cases, they were also expected to provide massages, and to bathe, dress and accompany them to the bathroom.

I have to clean the house, cook and take care of the old man who is over 70 years old and paralyzed below the waist. The difficult part is that I have to hold him to go to the bathroom three or more times a day, and after excreting I have to clean him too. I cannot rest because even when my work is done, I have to keep the elderly man company.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have to take care of an old sick woman. She spends her whole day in the house and I have to do everything for her. Help her move, defecate and urinate, feed and bathe her, and get her dressed morning and night.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

It is hard because the elderly woman I care for can't remember anything. When she has already eaten, she says she hasn't eaten yet. When she just had a bath, then she wants another one. When it is morning she thinks it is evening. It is hard to be with her all day and the most terrible thing is that I have to sleep in the same room with her in order to take care of her when she wakes. She sleeps only fora short while, then wakes up and often starts crying, shouting and walking around. I have to get up and follow her all night. She gets up at least three or four times each night, so I can never get a full night's rest. Sometimes she sneaks out and when I realize she is gone I have to race around trying to find her.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Tending pets and animals was another responsibility many of the domestic workers were expected to take on.

I get up at six in the morning. I have to cook for the family and the five dogs. After that I wash and iron clothes, sweep the rooms and clean the house, I also have to clean everything for the dogs too.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Each day I have to clean the house, cook for the family and feed the dogs, chickens, cats, ducks and birds; give the dogs a bath and comb them. It takes the whole day to give a bath to the dogs because the owner raises them to sell. I have to give them a bath twice a week. Altogether there are fifteen dogs, seven cats, six birds, eleven ducks and ten chickens. These animals eat a lot of food each time. But the dogs are the most difficult. There are not so many chickens and ducks because the dogs eat them and then I get in trouble.

A 22-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

A number of women and girls in this study were also expected to do strenuous physical work.

In addition to my work, I also have to massage the female employer. When I first arrived, I was not accustomed to all the washing and cleaning and my hands swelled, making it very painful to massage the employer for the two to three hours she requested. Lately, she has been too busy and doesn't request a massage very often.

A 26-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the evening I have to prepare food for the employer's family dinner. After all the house members arrive home in the evening, I have to wash their three cars. When they come back too late to wash the car in the evening, I have to wash and clean the cars early in the morning. It is hard work.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I wake up at 4. 00 in the morning in order to go to the market and get all the housework done. Then, I goto work in the employer's shop until 7.00 in the evening. After the shop is closed the employer and I go to work on the lychee farm digging holes and planting lychee until about nine at night. On Sundays, we work on the lychee farm the entire day watering all the plants. I get so tired from lifting and carrying the long water hose, which I can hardly manage. Then, when I get back to the employer's house I have to do the housework. I never can get to into bed before 11.30 at night. Everyday is like this and I am always so tired.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer insults me and forces me to do a lot of work, like looking after her children, selling food at her shop and lifting heavy things. It is too much for me.

A 27-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Eighty-four percent of the survey respondents were responsible for the household laundry. Many of the domestic workers interviewed explained that their employers made them do laundry by hand even when there was a washing machine available. They described this as a very demanding and time-consuming task. The women and girls reported that their employers insisted that the machine would ruin the clothes and/or not get them clean enough.

In addition to cleaning the house, washing and ironing clothes and cooking for the family, I also am expected to cook for the thirty workers at the employer's factory. The clothes take the most time and it is the hardest job. I have to wash the clothes with my hands and if it is the rainy season, the clothes don't dry easily. I have to take them in and hang them out several times a day. Sometimes, the clothes do not get dry for the whole day. So, I have to iron the wet clothes and keep them dry again.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After the children go to school I have to wash the clothes for the whole house. I also have to wash the clothes of their guests. I have to wash at least three baskets of clothes per day. I have to wash all these clothes with my hands. Though they have a washing machine, they don't let me use it because they say it spoils their clothes. It's a lot of hard work.

A 30-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Finally, the domestic workers interviewed described expectations that they were to serve everyone in the house, including each time the employer's family grew or had visitors.

The relatives of my employer brought over their children forme to look after also. They were always telling me to do things for them. I had not even finished my last task and they would ask me to do something else. They all asked me to do things for them. My mind feels so troubled.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Sometimes if many guests come I have to do too much work. I have to cook, wash and iron clothes for everyone. If I work only for the house owners, I can do my job well. But, when there are guests continuously, it is so difficult for me. Sometimes, I feel dejected and don't want to do anything. With more guests there are more clothes to wash and iron, more rubbish and dirt, and I have to constantly clean the house.

A 24-year-old married Burman-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

She (the employer) called her relatives to stay with her. I am like a machine doing what everybody wants. They all feel because they are related to the employer they can order me around. There is always a lot of work. When they come, I can never finish my work. They will do whatever they want and I have to clean it up.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

A few of the women and girls interviewed described positive experiences with regards to their working conditions noting that their employer gave them time to rest, gave them a limited amount of household duties and/or time to socialize with others.

After breakfast, I had to wash andiron the clothes. After I finished ironing the clothes it was already 3.00 in the afternoon. I could rest from 3.00 to 5.00. In the late afternoons, the domestic workers and baby sitters in the compound gathered themselves while looking after the children and talked to each other.

A 26-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I do not have to cook and I can use the washing machine. What I have to do is sweep the dirt, clean the house and be home when no one is there. I only have to iron the clothes every three or four days. As there are few people in the house there is no need to wash or clean so much. The employer does not leave her child with me. During the long school holidays, she usually takes her child with her when she goes out.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the morning, I clean, sweep, wash dishes, cook and cut vegetables. It is like the housework that we do at our house. It is not more than I can handle.

A 34-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.5 Accommodations

Slightly over eighty percent (81.7%) of the domestic workers surveyed lived with their employer who provided accommodations in the house in private, shared or open rooms (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by type of accommodation and research site

Type of accommodation	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Shared room	28.1% (68)	37.1% (106)	32.8% (174)
Private room	40.9% (99)	20.3% (58)	29.7% (157)
Open room	14.0% (34)	23.8% (68)	19.2% (102)
No room provided	2.5% (6)	15.0% (43)	9.1% (49)
No response	14.5% (35)	3.8% (11)	9.2% (46)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Accommodations provided by the employer were not discussed with the domestic workers prior to the start of their employment. The women and girls in this study explained they had to wait until they arrived at their employer's household to see what type of accommodation they would be provided, with little means of negotiating their privacy.

Almost one third (32.8%) shared a room either with another family member they were responsible to care for, such as children or the elderly. In some instances, they shared a room with other employees.

> *I was expected to sleep with the employer's children. Some nights the children went to sleep with their mother, only then I had some time to rest and sleep.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Both of the employer's children sleep with me. When one of the children cries in his sleep or when he feels hungry I have to always get up and take care of him. I have to give him the feeding bottle to drink milk and lull him to sleep again.*
> ***A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *At night he [the employer's son] sleeps with me. Then, he cannot be separated from me and cries to see me until his parents let him sleep with me. He really loves me, but it is so tiring.*
> ***A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I stay in a room in the employer's house. I share a room and eat together with the others working there.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Approximately 30 percent of the domestic workers in this study were provided their own private rooms.

I stay in the employer's house and am at home like in my own house. I have my own room and they furnish it with everything, even a TV.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have a room about five feet by six feet with a mattress on the floor. It is just enough room to sleep and keep my clothes.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Approximately 20 percent of the study participants reported sleeping in open areas with no privacy.

I was not given a special room to sleep or keep my belongings. At night when the employer's restaurant is closed I have to move the tables and chairs to make a space for my mat and mosquito net. This is where I sleep.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer has me staying in the chicken's coop.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I was not given a special room to stay. Sometimes while waiting for the husband to come home late at night, I fall asleep on the sofa in the living room. But, the employer complained that I will ruin the sofa and it is so expensive. It seems she wants me to sleep on the floor. But, I feel uncomfortable making a bed and sleeping in the room where everyone passes through. In the house, there is a room for the elderly couple, the children, an uncle, and the employer and also a room for the dog. So, if I want to sleep in a separate room the only thing for me to do is go to sleep with their dog.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Nine percent of the study participants did not stay with their employer either because their employer did not provide accommodations or because they had families of their own. Based on the study's findings, there did not appear to be any pay differential for those whose accommodations were not provided. Those living outside of their employer's homes usually only worked on a part-time basis, however, and found it more difficult to find jobs as domestic workers.

My second time to Thailand I had a child, so I couldn't stay at the employer's house like before. If you cannot live-in at the employer's house, it is very difficult to find a job as a domestic worker.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have to go back and sleep in the room I rent. The distance is not too far to walk, but it is expensive.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have a husband and small children so I cannot live with the employer. However, the salary I receive is the same as if I was a live-in employee. This makes it very difficult to survive.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Due to their lack of secure accommodations (and/or illegal status), many of the domestic workers had no safe place to keep their valuables. Consequently, approximately 57 percent of the domestic workers surveyed kept their valuables on them; with only about 10 percent reporting access to secure, locked places for their money and valuables (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by method for safe-keeping their valuables and research site*

Method for safekeeping valuables	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
On your body	77.7% **(188)**	39.3% **(112)**	56.9% (300)
Relatives	**16.1% (39)**	12.3% **(35)**	**14.0% (74)**
Locked Place	15.7% **(38)**	**6.0% (17)**	**10.4% (55)**
Employer	12.8% **(31)**	**7.0% (20)**	**9.7% (51)**
Friends	**2.1% (5)**	**1.4% (4)**	**1.7% (9)**
Other	**17.8% (43)**	**4.9% (14)**	**10.8% (57)**
No valuables to keep	**0.4% (1)**	31.6% **(91)**	**17.3% (92)**
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

*** Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

As noted throughout this chapter, most of the domestic workers were saving their money as much as possible to send back to their family. Almost ten percent of those surveyed (9.7%) reported that their employer held on to their salary. Of the women and girls interviewed, several described problems with this arrangement.

My money is with my employer. When I need money to send home, I ask for it from the employer. I worked for that employer for one year, but when I want to go home I have to return secretly because the employer doesn't want me to go. So, I lost 3,000 baht of my salary that was being held by employer.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I got paid as the employer said, but I keep it all with her (the employer). If I keep it with me, I am afraid it won't be safe. Since I do not have a Thai identity card I can't open a bank account. So, it is better she holds on to my earnings.

A 34-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I get my money only when my mother comes to visit me. Then, I ask my employer for the money she is keeping for me. If I need it, I can ask for it anytime.

A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My employer kept all my earnings with him. He said he would not cheat us, but feared that others might cheat or steal our money. He told us to stay with him for a long time and we would have plenty of money to send home to our families.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My employer said he would keep my salary for me. Otherwise, he said if I kept it, it would get lost. I have worked for him for two years, but when I quit he said I only had 16,000 baht left. I don't know why he deducted so much from my salary. I don't understand at all. I only asked to withdraw money one time to send 20,000 baht home to my family. I know the carrier who got me the job took 5,000 baht from my salary when I started, and I didn't take any again. The employer said he also deducted from my salary the cost of applying for the work permit and the cost for my health care. I don't know what else he cut. I can't believe there was only 16,000 baht left.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.6 Meals

Seventy-six percent of the domestic workers surveyed were provided meals by their employer, with some also receiving clothes and/or a few other items (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by items provided by their employer and research site*

Employer provided items	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Food	60.5%(147)	.9%(257)	76.4%(404)
Clothes	21.0 %(51)	36.7%(105)	29.5%(156)
Personal	7.4%(18)	9*28	*7%(46)*
Other	8.6%(21)	*1.0%(3)*	4.5%(24)
Provided nothing	14.8%(35)	3.8%(11)	8.9%(47)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

The quality and amount of food provided at each meal was primarily determined by the employer. The majority of domestic workers interviewed reported being allowed to eat what was available in the house, with some also noting that they had the opportunity to suggest what they wanted to eat.

> *The employer buys food for everyone each day. There is a lot of food left over for us after her children eat. Whenever she buys food for her children, she always buys it for us too.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I am allowed to eat everything I desire. Whenever the employer goes out shopping, she asks me what I would like to eat. If I say that I would like to eat something, she always buys it for me. When I don't like the food prepared, I can cook my own food as I wish to eat.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Yes, I can eat. There is sufficient rice and curry that is cooked. Sometimes, she (the employer) also buys snacks for us to eat. I can tell the employer what I like to eat and she will buy it.*
> ***A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I can usually eat anything in the house, but I must ask permission from the employer first.*
> ***A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Yet, a number of the domestic workers interviewed explained that while they were provided food by their employer they were forbidden to bring in or cook any food of their own choosing. They were only permitted to eat food that was given to them.

> *We were not allowed whatever we wanted to eat. We could eat only what they bought. But, their food was very sweet and had a lot of coconut milk and we didn't like it. But, the employer didn't like the smell of fish paste in our food. They didn't even want a small whiff of it. We could not cook our own curry the way we like to eat it.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *For the food, it depends what the employer gives me. I can't eat whatever I want. I can only eat whatever is in the house.*
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I don't have a chance to eat according to my wishes. Sometimes, the lady employer buys some vegetables and puts them into the refrigerator. But some days there is nothing, so I have to eat rice with fishpaste. The employer's family usually goes out to eat at the restaurant. They do not remember to see if I have anything to eat.*
> ***A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae sot.***

In some cases, study participants had to subsidize their meals with their own money.

> *The employer only gives me rice. I have to buy everything else to eat with it.*
> ***A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

For the food at the house, there are noodles, rice with pork, and rice with chicken only. If I want, I can eat this too. But if I want to eat something else, I have to go out and buy it by myself.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer bought us the same meat she gave the dogs. Therefore, we must buy our own food.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Approximately 25 percent of the women and girls surveyed were not provided food by their employer. Those who were interviewed noted the hardship this entailed.

The employer and their family often ate out and didn't buy food for us. We had nothing to cook with and couldn't go out. That is why I have to leave this house to find another job.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Even though I worked in the employer's shop, I couldn't eat any of the things he sold without paying for it. I was only given one meal a day.

A 21-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer gave us a house to live in and one meal a day. We often had to buy food on credit and pay them whenever the employer got around to paying us our salary. Later, as the employer had a better income, we were paid more regularly and could pay for our food.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several of the domestic workers interviewed reported employer abuses associated with food.

For the food, I am only allowed to eat what is leftover. The rice the employer gives me is the same rice she makes me cook for the dogs. She doesn't allow me to eat the same rice she does. For the curry, I cannot eat until all of her children have already eaten. If I am extremely hungry, she asks me to eat rice with fish sauce and when the dog's food is extra she makes me eat that too.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I can't eat whatever I want to eat or cook my own food. When the employer's children are finished I must eat what is left. The employer's wife won't allow anything to be thrown away. She says if the food is left too long it gives off a bad odor in their house. Sometimes, I sneak to cook when they are away. It is very difficult for me.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The domestic workers have to eat the leftover curry the employer brings back from the factory in the evening and puts in the refrigerator. In the morning, we have to warm it up and eat it. We often get stomachaches from this curry.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I dared not touch their food because I fear they will scold me. Those who formerly worked in their house said the same thing. They give me food only when it has turned stale and they won't eat it. I ate nothing in their house and tried to get things from outside with my own money.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the domestic workers described how their employers controlled their eating schedules and/or allowed them very little time to eat.

I only ate twice a day and I could only eat my meals after the employers had eaten theirs. I couldn't eat breakfast until the afternoon when the employer went out to work. In the morning, I would watch them drinking tea or coffee with some cake, but they never offered any to me. In the evening after they ate dinner, I could eat what was leftover.

A 17-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I am not allowed to eat whatever I want. I have to wait for the employer to bring food back to us each evening. Sometimes, she gets back very late and no matter how hungry I am I can do nothing but wait for her.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

As for food, I can only eat what is leftover. If there is not much leftover there is nothing I can do, but wait for the next meal.

A 25-year-old single Karen female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.7 Access to Outside Contacts

Many of the women and girls interviewed described leading restricted and isolated lives as domestic workers. Their isolation was often imposed either directly by the employer or indirectly by the lack of free time they had or their own fears.

Table 5.9 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by type of contact employer allowed and research site*

Type of Contact Employer Allowed	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Receive mail	**41.3%** (100)	76.6% (219)	60.4% (319)
Send mail	37.6% **(91)**	79.4% (227)	60.2% (318)
Receive a phone call	67.3% (163)	37.1% (106)	50.9% (269)
Go out to meet others	**41.3%** (100)	44.7% (128)	43.2% (228)
Allow visitors in	43.4% (105)	39.9% (114)	**41.5% (219)**
Telephone to someone	28.1% **(68)**	15.7% (45)	**21.4%** (113)
Other	**6.2% (16)**	-	**3.0% (16)**
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

*** Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Less than half of the women and girls surveyed reported that their employers allowed them to go out to meet others (43.2%) or allowed others to visit (41.5%) (Table 5.9).

> *Where I work, Iam not allowed to go anywhere at all. They lock the door and unplug the phone and ask me to work inside the house only. After eight months, I tried to go out on my own when the employer was away from the home, but I was not brave enough and didn't know where to go. So, I just keep living like this seeing no one but the employer.*
> ***A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *The employer does not like me to have contact with any outsiders. She does not like my friends to come and visit or for me to use the phone. She scolds me when I give her phone number to others. When someone comes to visit me, I have to talk to them through the fence. That person is not allowed to come in and I am not allowed to go out.*
> ***A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *The employers would chase my friends away whenever they tried to visit me. At the same time, they would not allow me to go out. So, I am not allowed to see anyone. The employers are very unkind and I am worried that if I stay here too long I will lose my friends.*
> ***A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I am allowed to visit friends once and awhile. But, the employers won't allow my friends to come and visit me. They fear that their possessions may get lost. The person who worked here before me said the employer checked her friends to see if they stole anything from the house.*
> ***A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Even when my mother came to visit the employer didn't like it and made many problems. I always had to arrange for my mother to stay somewhere else and sneak out to meet her.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Many others did not leave their workplace even though the employer allowed them to. The domestic workers interviewed explained they were too busy, feared arrest as an undocumented worker, were unfamiliar with the city and/or lacked friends or relatives to visit.

After finishing my work, I stay home and watch TV. I have just come to Thailand and I don't dare to go anywhere. If the employer doesn't take me out, I don't dare to go on my own. I am afraid I won't be able to find my way back.

A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't go out very often. I have a lot of work and I don't know anybody to visit anyway.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer doesn't really like for me to go out. When I come back she quickly finds something to complain about my work. So, I don't go out so much.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I dared not go out even though the employer permitted me to. I sometimes went out for a short while and then came back. I don't know where to go and also I don't have much time. In two years I have only gone out two times.

A 27-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twelve years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Since I have to look after the child all day and night, I don't have the chance to go out. Since I came here I have only been to the market once.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Even though the employer allows me to go out she is not happy when I do so. I can only talk to someone through the gate and if they call me and she answers, she is very irritated. She often travels so those are the times I have more freedom.

A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Approximately seventy-eight percent of the domestic workers surveyed explained that their employer did not allow them to use the house phone. Despite this, several of the domestic workers interviewed described calling locally for short periods when the employer was not in the house or finding a nearby phone booth.

When my relatives call, the employer tells them I am not here and that he has no migrant from Burma working here. He never lets me use the phone. When I go to the employer's shop to work, sometimes I sneak to call my younger sister or other relatives. It was only then that I learned that they had called me and the employer had told them there was no such name staying at the house.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I can't use the phone at the house. If I need to call my friend, I go out and call at the phone booth on the street. If my friend calls me, sometimes the employer lets me talk, but I don't dare to speak too long.

A 23-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Although the employer unplugged the phone I stole to use it. When they suspected I was using it then they installed a lock on the phone. Now, I have to wait till they forget to lock it and go out.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

As noted in Table 5.9above, the type of outside contact employers were most likely to allow domestic workers was sending and receiving mail. More than half of the domestic workers surveyed (approximately 60%)reported using mail as their primary means of communicating with family and friends. However, this did not come up during the in-depth interviews. Instead, the primary conduit to the outside world among the domestic workers interviewed was often television, radio, newspapers and other reading materials.

I listen to the Shan radio broadcast in Thailand.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I want to read books and novels, but it is far to go to borrow them. So, I don't have anything to read.

A 20-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Mostly, I watch TV or read the newspaper to find out what is going on. I like to read the books that the employer's children find for me. But, those are all in Thai. I would really like to read books in the Shan language, but I don't know where to get them.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

If the TV is on when I am working in that room, the employer goes in and switches it off because she thinks that I may watch it instead of doing my work. Anyway, I am not fond of TV, but I am bothered that she does this to me.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Of all live-in domestic workers who participated in the in-depth interviews for this study, only one reported that her employer allowed her to leave the house on a regular basis.

I changed workplaces many times until I found an employer who would allow me to go to school in the evening. Here I can go out to school in the evenings.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.8 Communication and Language Barriers

While almost 57 percent of the women and girls surveyed in this study were able to speak some Thai, approximately 86 percent was unable to read or write and 26 percent could not speak Thai at all. Language proficiency was often a key determinant in the salary provided and treatment of domestic workers by their employers (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by Thai language proficiency and research site*

Thai language proficiency	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Speak fluently	14.9% (36)	18.9% (54)	17.0% (90)
Read and Write fluently	3.3% (8)	-	1.5% (8)
Speak some	79.8% (193)	34.4% (107)	56.8% (300)
Read and Write some	22.7% (55)	3.1% (9)	12.1% (64)
Cannot speak	5.4% (13)	43.7% (125)	26.1% (138)
Cannot read or write	74.0% (179)	96.9% (277)	86.4% (456)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

The domestic workers who participated in the in-depth interviews explained how their limited Thai language skills added increased frustrations at the work place and with their employers.

> *My employers never beat me, but they scolded me often. As I didn't understand their language, it was easy to make mistakes in my work. For example, when they asked me to get the feeding bottle, I got the child's clothes by mistake. When they asked me to wash the clothes, I thought they asked me to clean the house. What I did was not according to their wish so they yelled or scolded me. I felt a lot of trouble in my mind.*
> ***A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I face a lot of problems because I can't speak Thai. If they ask me to go shopping, they have to give me a sample of what they want me to buy. If they don't find a sample forme I am sure to bring back the wrong thing from the market.*
> ***A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My first employer wanted me to sell clothes as well as do domestic work. But I couldn't speak Thai, so how could I do this work? There were so many problems I had to quit.*
> ***A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

This study found a significant correlation between participants' ability to speak Thai and their salary levels. The participants who can speak some Thai were more likely to get higher salary than those who can not speak Thai language (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by salary level and ability to speak some Thai

Salary Level (in baht)	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Less than 1,000	21.6% (84)	62.3% (86)	32.2% (170)
1,001-2,000	29.7% (116)	31.2% (43)	30.1% (159)
2,001-3,000	29.0% (113)	3.6% (5)	22.3% (118)
3,001-6,000	19.8% (77)	2.9% (4)	15.4% (81)
No. of respondents	**390**	**138**	**528**

Those who were unable to speak Thai reported difficulty in finding good jobs as well as conducting and negotiating the jobs they did secure.

> *The other domestic worker can speak Thai so her salary is more than mine.*
> ***A 30-year-old married Bamar female who first migrated to Thailand less than a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *There were so many kinds of problems that I experienced because I don't speak Thai. I cannot ask permission or express what I think. When I first came, I was cheated out of three months salary. I was unable to communicate with the employer and understand why he wasn't paying me what I had earned.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Kachin female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

The women and girls interviewed in this study also recounted occasions in which their inability to speak Thai elicited abuse from their employer.

> *As I can't speak Thai, I have to use body language to speak to the employer. When I don't understand what they have said and don't know what to do, the employer laughs at me. In this situation, the employer refuses to talk to me and turns her back on me.*
> ***A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I stay alone and I cannot communicate with others in the house. Although I can understand some Thai I cannot respond in their language. I feel so frustrated. Sometimes they tease me and I cannot say anything. It makes me feel so depressed.*
> ***A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *As I don't understand their language, I often don't know what they are asking me to do. So, the employer becomes short tempered and scolds me again and again. When she feels very angry, she beats me.*
> ***A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I had lots of troubles because I could not speak Thai nor understand it very well. When I made mistakes in my work, the employers frowned on me and often scolded me. But I didn't know why they were scolding me, because I didn't understand what they were*

saying. The employer's children also bullied me. They like to point at my face and say many things I don't understand.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In addition to language problems, many of the domestic workers interviewed talked of the discrimination they faced by their employers and other family members, friends or employees.

I could not speak Thai and didn't know anyone. When I worked they insulted me very much because I was from Burma. They didn't call me by my name, but just called me Burmese.

A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer discriminated between the Thai and Burmese workers. For example, I get 1,000 baht and the Thai worker who does the same job gets 6,000 baht.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employers treat the Shan who work for them like slaves and a lower class than them. Their relatives and friends do the same. They laugh at us and say we are the people from the jungle. They claim they use their minds and that we have to use physical labor because we have no education. They insult us and force us to do many things to serve them.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

5.9 Verbal, Physical and Sexual Abuse

In addition to the abuses described above, the women and girls in this study reported a wide range of verbal, physical and/or sexual abuses by their employers. It is widely known that domestic abuses are under-reported by women throughout the world and what was disclosed to the researchers in this study is most likely a reflection of a more wide-spread reality.

Table 5.12 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents that reported employer abuses by research site*

Type of employer abuse	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yelled at you	40.0% (96)	65.4% (187)	53.6% (283)
Swore at you	38.8% (94)	36.0% (103)	37.3% (197)
Threatened	45.0% (109)	28.3% (81)	36.0% (190)
Tricked you with a lie	17.4% (42)	7.3% (21)	11.9% (63)
Touched you don't want	14.5% (35)	13.6% (39)	14.0% (74)
Locked up/confined	9.1% (22)	4.5% (13)	6.6% (35)
Cheated/kept your money	7.4% (18)	14.0% (40)	11.0% (58)
Thrown things at you	6.6% (16)	6.6% (19)	6.6% (35)
Punished you	4.1% (10)	0.3% **(1)**	2.1% **(11)**
Sexually touched you	4.1% (10)	7.3% (21)	5.9% (31)
Slapped or hit you	2.5% (6)	10.1% (29)	6.6% (35)
Pinched you	1.7% (4)	8.0% (23)	5.1% (27)
Pushed	2.1% (5)	10.8% (31)	6.8% (36)
Raped you	0.8% (2)	1.5 % (3)	1.0% (5)
Other	19.0% (46)	1.5 % (3)	9.3% (49)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Verbal abuse was the most common violation experienced by the domestic workers in this study, with 53.6 percent reporting having been yelled at, 37.3 percent cursed at and 36.0 percent threatened (Table 5.12).

> *The employer loves her child very much. When the child cries I have to soothe her at once, if she does not stop crying the mother blames and yells at me every time.*
>
> ***A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When the employer is in a good mood she is very nice. But, when she is in a bad mood, she has such a bad temper and screams at me calling me all sorts of things as though I am her slave or buffalo.*
>
> ***A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

If I *don't get all my work done the employer gets very angry and yells at me. If there is something she doesn't like she throws, kicks and scatters things all around. She never hurts me, because I look after her children. Still I don't feel happy to live like this.*

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer is very kind. Only one time she got very angry with me when I asked permission to see my friends. I went anyway and came back late. She did not stop yelling at me and called me names, accusing me of being a sex worker, asking to be raped and so on.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I asked to contact my relatives the employer threatened me that he would call the police to arrest me if I tried. She also tells me that if I don't work as she wishes she will cut my salary. I never dare to take a rest and so far she has never cut my salary, but I am afraid.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Nearly one in ten of the women and girls surveyed for this study reported being subjected to physical abuse. The women and girls who were interviewed in depth described incidents of being slapped and, in some cases, severely beaten. These women highlighted their extreme vulnerability in trying to cope with and escape the violence.

The house owner didn't let me go out at all. I was promised 2,500 baht a month, but after I worked in that house for more than one year I was never paid. So, I started going out to try to find another job and when the employer found out or suspected she slapped me across my face, she told me not to go out.

A 21-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer locked me in the house and I didn't get paid month after month. When I would ask to go home she would not allow me and beat me instead. The employer beat me until my tooth fell out and my body was black and blue. They didn't let me go anywhere. They also threatened they would sell me. One time when they beat me, my head bled and my back was full of scars. I was badly beaten three times when I worked for that employer. The other employees were also beaten. I was even locked up in a room by myself for four or five days at a time.

A 14-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Sometimes the employer beat me. She would slap and hit me on the head yelling at me. I don't understand her language and I am afraid if I try to say something she will beat me even more. I fear that she could kill me and no one will know. Eventually she will stop and just leave me there crying. Now even the two children (seven and nine years old) hit me like their mother. I try to stop them, but their mother does nothing.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The soap powder irritated my hands so much they were bleeding and it looked like my fingers were rotting. When I put gloves on it was even worse because they didn't let in the air. The doctor said if I didn't stop, my hands would have to be cut off. But, the employer said if I stopped I wouldn't have a job.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Incidents of sexual harassment were also reported. Fourteen percent of the women and girls in this study were touched when they did not want it, 5.9 percent had sexual advances made at them and 1.3 percent were victims of rape.

When the lady employer was away, her husband always kissed me. After I had worked there for eight months, I found enough courage to tell the lady employer. The lady employer said, 'Do not leave, I will drive him away from my house.' Her husband left, but twelve days later he called and I happened to answer the phone, he said words of love to me. So, when her husband comes back, I know I am in danger.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer was always trying to be very sexy even though he was old already. Early in the morning when I was getting up, he came into the room where I slept and asked me to massage his back. First, I thought he was honest and I massaged him. Later, he asked me to hold his penis and pushed my hand there. The boy who looked after the goats there realized what was happening and told me that the former employee was also from Burma and this old man molested her. When that girl wanted to quit, he didn't let her go. She had to sneak out and escape secretly. I told my husband the story and he gave me a hundred baht to wear in the waist of my sarong to keep me safe. Finally, I had to use the 100 baht to run away from that house.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer returned home after sending his wife and children to school. He told me he needed to go do some errands and asked me to go with him. He took me to the hotel and I started to feel afraid, but I didn't know how to get home. After we were there he started to hold my hand, kiss me and touch my body. I just ran out and jumped in a taxi and told them to take me to the temple.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer has a son who is over 30 years old and is already married. But, he and his wife always quarrel with each other because he is involved with other women. When his wife was not around, this guy bought me food and didn't speak to me as he does with others. I was very afraid of him. He was always touching me and trying to be close to me. But, if his wife was around, he didn't speak to me much. When he didn't speak to me, I was very happy. It was good when his wife was around, but she didn't like me. His wife looked dissatisfied with me. I don't trust this man even though he has a wife and two children.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My employer sent me to work at another place with a man she said was her business partner. I believed her and went in his car. He drove around for a long time and then he took me to a house and showed me the room I would be staying. When I was in the room I heard him talking to another man about me. I realized I had been tricked by my employer and they were going to do bad things to me. Then the other man came into my room with some clothes he wanted me to wear and I pushed him down and ran out of the house. I was running on the street until someone found me and helped me get away.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

During the in-depth interviews, several women and girls in this study described extreme circumstances in which they or their friends were severely coerced and/or abused in the workplace.

> *There were several migrants working at the house where I worked. There was also one from Burma who had become pregnant with her boyfriend. The employer called the carrier who then tried to force her to have an abortion, but the woman wanted to have the child. Then, while she was seven or eight months pregnant, the employer (both husband and wife) tortured her until she was forced to deliver her child. They sent her to the hospital but said the child was dead. However, the woman said she heard her child cry during the birth. Afterwards, that woman wanted to get out of this job, but until now she could not get away.*
>
> *A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.*

> *When my employers found out I was pregnant they told me to give birth and they would take my child. But, I didn't want to give away my child and I didn't want to stay there anymore. So, finally they agreed to give me only 4,000 baht of my salary. Then I was arrested the same day and all my money was taken away.*
>
> *A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.*

> *I worked in the employer's house and their shop. The shop sold amphetamines. I think the police were also involved in their business because there has never been a crack down on this shop, even though the police were around. When the customers came to buy the amphetamines, I was the main sales person to sell the drug.*
>
> *A 19-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.*

The domestic workers interviewed explained how their experiences were hidden from the outside world because of their fear of what their employers could do if they did not agree with their demands and their inability to seek recourse.

> *Our employer was Thai and looked down on people from Burma. Whatever he said, I didn't have the right to argue because I was from Burma. I was afraid that he would find fault with me and notify the police, because I didn't have any legal documents.*
>
> *A 32-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.*

> *The best way to deal with an abusive employer is to quit the job. I try to quit before I am abused. This is the only way to avoid it. I have had to quit many jobs already. It is easier to quit if you are married because your husband can help when you are between jobs. That is how I could deal with the abusive environment in Thailand.*
>
> *A 23-year-old married Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.*

> *The employer didn't want to pay me my salary, so I decided to quit. I worked for five months but I got only 2,500 baht. There is nothing I could do so I just had to accept that I lost my earnings.*
>
> **A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.**

At present I still see my former employer who cheated me, but I have to try to have a good relation with him because my work permit is in his name and I am afraid he will call the police.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

5.10 Conclusion

The working conditions for the majority of the domestic workers in this study consisted of innumerable abuses for which they had little or no recourse. By arbitrarily setting the conditions and terms of employment regarding salaries, benefits, working hours, accommodations and access to outside contacts (without informing or negotiating such terms with the domestic workers), the employers maintained complete control over the lives of these women and girls.

In addition to receiving sub-minimum wages, nearly 98percent of the surveyed respondents were expected to work more than eight hours a day, with the majority of them working seven days a week, with no regular days off. Nearly 73 percent of those surveyed received no overtime pay or compensation by their employer regardless of the hours they worked.

Many reported incidents of withholding or non-payment of wages, while others explained that without constant remainders and requests, they would not receive their salary from their employer. In addition, 78.6 percent reported that their employer did not provide any assistance in covering health care expenses.

Job responsibilities, more often than not, included a wide range of duties beyond housework, such as caring for children, the elderly or the infirm; tending animals; gardening; and, in quite a few cases, helping with the employer's business.

Slightly over 6 percent of the domestic workers were provided accommodations, though less than 30 percent were given their own private room. Almost a third shared a room with a family member or members they were responsible to care for, or with other employees, while 13? percent were made to sleep in open areas with no privacy.

Confinement within the household and limited access to outside contact with friends and family was often imposed by the employer, in many cases, either through threats or through the lack of free time. Less than fifty percent of those surveyed reported that their employers permitted them to leave the house to meet others (43.2%)or allowed visitors into the house (41.5%

Language barriers further aggravated the interactions between the domestic workers and their employers, often resulting in verbal and physical abuse. Sexual abuse was also reported by several of the study participants.

Many of the domestic workers in this study led restricted and isolated lives as a result of their fear of arrest as an undocumented worker.

The next chapter discusses more fully the issue of the legal status of these women and girls.

Chapter Six :

Legal Status

6.1 Introduction

Possession of legal identification documents was a major concern to almost every domestic worker interviewed. A quarter of the survey respondents had no documentation proving their citizenship in Burma. This leaves a significant population without any legal identity documents, resulting in a life of fear as well as a risk of statelessness for themselves and their children. The women and girls interviewed described the ongoing harassment they experience because of their lack of legal documentation and the risk of arrest and detention they face both in Thailand and Burma.

Thailand's initiative to register and provide work permits to migrant laborers, including domestic workers, was welcomed by the majority of those interviewed in this study. Concerns were raised, however, that the registration process was not well explained, was too short, denied permits to workers under 18 years of age and imposed health tests without clarity of the process. The domestic workers were specifically concerned with the lack of privacy in obtaining health test results (more often than not it was their employer who received and transmitted test results) as well as a lack of translation services for Burmese migrants.

Another major concern voiced by these women and girls was that the Thai work permit policy fortified their employer's control over them and diminished their rights and options to address abuses. Only a few of those interviewed understood they could register for a work permit independent of their employer, while still fewer could afford the cost of obtaining and renewing a work permit themselves. Consequently, many domestic workers were in debt to their employers for obtaining and/or paying for their work permit. In addition, many employers kept the actual work permit and gave the employee only a copy or provided the original document on a temporary basis for specific outings only.

For those without work permits, other identification documents can sometimes provide some legal protection. The local Thai government authorities have issued to certain minority

communities living along the Thai-Burma border various types of temporary residency cards, although this has been carried out in a somewhat arbitrary manner. Moreover, these documents are only valid for specific areas and their validity is often in question or denied. With little or no notice or explanation, the Thai government has issued or revoked these documents at various times leaving many in extremely tentative situations.

6.2 Lack of National Identity Documents

One quarter of the survey respondents did not possess a Burmese national identity card, while an additional 17.2 percent chose not to reveal whether they possessed an identity card or not (Table 6.1). Researchers found that many of the respondents feared exposing their illegal status and chose not to discuss this topic.

Table 6.1 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who possess Burmese identity cards by research site

Possession of Burmese identity card	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	65.3% (158)	51.1% (146)	57.6% (304)
No	26.4% (64)	24.1% (69)	25.2% (133)
No response	8.3% (20)	24.8% (71)	17.2% (91)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

During the in-depth interviews, domestic workers without Burmese identity cards reported that they lacked these official identification documents either because they were never issued, were confiscated during their travels or lost over time.

> *When I was in Burma, I didn't have a Burmese identity card. (They didn't issue them to the people in the village, but only for those who could go to the town to get it). Because I didn't have a Burmese identity card, I often had to give money to the Burmese officials. I can't speak Burmese, so it was even more difficult for me. Now, though I stay in Thailand, it is not so different from Burma. When I was in Shan State, I was afraid of the Burmese soldiers. Since coming to Thailand, I am afraid of the police. I don't remember any time in my life when I was not afraid.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I came to Thailand, the authorities at the border took my Burmese identity card away. Now, I don't have any identity card and I don't know how I can go home without it.*
>
> ***A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Those lacking official identity and/or legal status (from not possessing a Thai work permit) described a life of fear and hiding.

> *Where I work, I think it doesn't matter to me whether I have any documentation or not. If I meet with the police, I don't think the employers would help buy me out. They are*

very stingy. When I came to Chiang Mai, I was not checked along the way because I have a belief that if we are reminded of the good spirits we'll be safe when traveling. But in Burma, I was not so lucky. When I was stopped at the checkpoint, the authorities found that my Burmese identity card was expired. I was fined 500 baht and my card was taken away. Now I don't have any identity card. I am afraid the Thai authorities will arrest and deport me. Because I can't go and stay at home anymore, I am very afraid of the Burmese soldiers. If I have an identity card, I don't have to be so afraid of the authorities.

A 24-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

None of us in my family have any official documents. Since arriving here, the police have often come to arrest us. When I was out of work and stayed with my mother, we always had to stay in a place where we could hide secretly. Everything forme is limited. My life is like that of pigs in a cage or dogs on a leash. But I have to be patient because my family can't go back to Burma any longer. The Burmese authorities would arrest us right away.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My husband and I have no documents. We don't go out unless there is a very important reason. If we have to go out we try to find a time when the police are not arresting people. Living like this causes great problems eating and sleeping.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Living without any documents means I have to be very scared of the authorities all the time. Not only are we afraid of the Thai authorities, but the Burmese authorities as well. Also, wherever we work, other people will take advantage of us because no one is responsible for what happens to us.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The girls and women interviewed that did not possess national identity cards were aware of the long-term implications for their children, who would not be granted official citizenship in either Burma or Thailand. In addition, a number of these women reported giving birth to their children at home when they were in Burma and not registering their births with the government.

All of my three children were born in my village. But none of them were registered at birth or have any official documents. Although I gave birth to my children in my village, I didn't deliver my children by the help of a midwife because it would cost me too much money. So none of my children have any form of birth registration and therefore cannot apply for Burmese identity cards.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

None of my children have official documents. All three of my children were born at home in Burma and their births were not registered in Burma. I worry they will have no chance to study in Burma or Thailand.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In Thailand, children born of undocumented migrant workers are not permitted by law to have their births registered.

> *Both my children were born in Mae Sot by a local midwife and they do not have any birth registration. They are not legal in Burma or Thailand.*
> ***A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My children do not have birth registration cards. They were born in Thailand and it is not our country so no one will register them for us.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *As my children were born in Thailand, we cannot get a birth registration for them in Burma. They also don't have a birth registration in Thailand, because we are not citizens.*
> ***A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Two domestic workers described their strategies for seeking citizenship documentation for their children.

> *My two younger children were born at the Mae Tao clinic, but I sent them back to Burma hoping they can at least get a Burmese identity card. It will not be easy to do, but for their sake I hope it is possible.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My son was born at a hospital in Chiang Mai and he got a birth certificate because my sister and brother-in-law adopted him as their own son. He is not a Thai citizen though. My sister has a blue card with a red border (i. e., a temporary residency card) that was issued by the Thai government allowing them to reside only temporarily in Thailand.*
> ***A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

6.3 Harassment, Arrest, Detention and Deportation

Over two-fifths of the survey respondents (43%) reported having some contact with Thai authorities (Table 6.2). As will be described in greater detail below, these encounters often involved having to pay the officers, being detained, threatened, searched, deported and/ or returned to the broker. Those who did not have identity or employment documentation on them were particularly vulnerable.

Table 6.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who had contact with Thai authorities by research site

Contact with Thai authorities	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	36.8% (89)	48.3% (138)	43.0% (227)
No	63.2% (153)	51.7% (148)	57.0% (301)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

The survey respondents who had contact with Thai authorities noted the following types of encounters.

Table 6.3 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who had contact with Thai authorities by type of encounter and research site*

Type of encounter with Thai authorities	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
1-8	2.9 % (7)	1.4% (4)	2.1 % (11)
Made you pay them	64.0% (57)	39.1% (54)	48.9% (111)
Detained you temporarily	38.2% (34)	32.6% (45)	34.8% (79)
Threatened you	29.2% (26)	28.3% (39)	28.6% (65)
Searched you	23.6% (21)	27.5% (38)	26.0% (59)
Put you in jail overnight	50.1% (45)	.4% (13)	25.6% (58)
Deported you to Burmese authorities	14.6% (13)	26.8% (37)	22.0% (50)
Deported you to broker	9.0% (8)	2.9% (4)	5.3% (12)
Other	14.6% (13)	2.9% (4)	7.5% (17)
No. of respondents	89	**138**	**227**

*** Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Among those who reported encounters with Thai authorities, nearly half reported that the authorities demanded money from them (48.9%) and nearly thirty percent (28.6%) reported receiving threats of deportation (Table 6.3). The domestic workers that were interviewed in-depth described some of these encounters and the accompanying fear such encounters elicited.

> *Because I don't have any identity card, I have to stay secretly. If I don't have any card, it is very hard to find a job and when I do the employers don't allow me to go anywhere. One time I went to the New Year ceremony at the temple and the Thai police stopped me. I had to give them 150 baht, which was all the money I had at the time. Luckily, they didn't arrest me.*
>
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *After working for two years I had bought a gold necklace and saved 9,000 baht. However, I was caught by the police on my way home and they took my gold and 8,000 baht. But, they released me.*
>
> ***An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

The police came to check the house where I first worked. The employer tried to negotiate forme, but the police said to the employer, 'We cannot allow Burmese people here, so she must go back. I will come back and check another time and if she is still here, I will take action.' So, the employer dared not let me continue to work there anymore and sent me to the bus station to return to Mae Sot.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently living in Mae Sot.

Once the shopkeeper next to my employer's shop called the police to arrest me. She did this because she didn't get along with my employer. But my employer realized what she had done and sent me back home before the police came, so they didn't find me. I was so afraid they would arrest and deport me.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently living in Chiang Mai.

Over one third (34.8%)of the survey respondents who had encounters with Thai authorities were detained temporarily. A quarter of these respondents reported being searched (26%)and put in jail overnight (25.*6%).*Twenty-two percent were deported back to Burma, with a significant number (5.3%)being deported back to the "carrier", or broker, who had brought them to Thailand and/or who had found them their job (Table 6.3). These encounters were discussed in greater detail by those domestic workers who participated in the in-depth interviews.

The Thai authorities arrested me and when I arrived at the detention center I saw many people from Burma. There were many people being deported. We were put into three full trucks. My truck was sent to Mae Sot and I don't know where the other two trucks went. The truck was very full. Once we were deported, only five actually returned to Burma, the rest came back to Thailand. In our truck there were persons who were often arrested and knew what to do. There were a lot of carriers waiting for our truck to arrive. The deportees who had money with them could pay 300 baht not to be returned to the Burmese side of the border. Those who couldn't pay arranged for the carrier to pay and then repaid them 500 baht or let them arrange jobs and repaid them even more. I had no money or friends to help, so I agreed for the carrier to find me a job. I came to this house and paid the carrier from my salary.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After I had been arrested in Bangkok, I had to sleep one night in the "lockup" and then the next day the employer paid 7,000 baht for my release. I was arrested because I do not have any documentation.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My employer called the police to arrest me when I was seven months pregnant. The police were not going to arrest me, just my husband but I did not want to be separated from him, so I went with the police as well. We were detained for forty-five days then we were deported to Burma. We were sent back in a 10-wheel truck with more than 400 of us, so we had to stand the whole way and it was very uncomfortable especially because I was about to deliver. There were only four women and the rest were all men. After dropping us at the border we walked back to Burma. By the time I got home I didn't have one baht with me. After I gave birth and gathered my strength I came back to Thailand to find work again. Then I was arrested in Bangkok a second time when my

employer called the police because he did not want to give me my money. This time I was sent back to the border on a bus. There were two buses and three persons in each seat, but I don't know how many people in all. This time there were more women than men. At Mae Sot, we were put in detention at the immigration office. I asked for help from the police to call my friend. He came and paid the police 300 baht for my release. If a person could not pay 300 baht, he was sent back to Burma.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I was arrested three times. The first time the officers took me to the immigration office where I had to stay for one night and the next morning they deported me to Burma. The second time I went out shopping and was arrested when returning home. The last time they came to my employer's shop and arrested me.

A 25-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand ten years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was deported, there were employers waiting to offer us jobs after we got off the trucks. They said they would pay for our transportation first and we could pay them back after we started working. There was nothing we could do but go with them, as we had no money to go anywhere. I knew they could sell us and do whatever they wanted to us. I was scared, but I had no choice.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

6.4 Work Permit Registration

Nearly sixty percent of the survey respondents (58%)held work permits (Table 6.4). The research team, however, believes that the number of persons with work permits in this study is not representative of all domestic workers. Rather, this study's population sample is biased towards those who hold work permits, as they were more accessible and willing to speak with the researchers. Also, it should be noted that 17.2 percent of the survey respondents chose not to answer whether or not they were in possession of a work permit. This is the same percentage that did not respond to the researchers' question about possessing national identity cards. Again, possibly indicating the wish not to reveal their illegal status, the fear of doing so, or the desire to maintain their privacy with regards to their status as migrants.

Table 6.4 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents holding Thai work permits by research site

Possession of Thai work permit	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Original work permit	50.0%(121)	21.3%(61)	34.5%(182)
Copy of work permit	11.6%(28)	32.9%(94)	23.1%(122)
No work permit	38.4%(93)	45.8%(131)	42.4%(224)
No. of respondents	242	286	528

The majority of domestic workers interviewed who did not have work permits indicated wanting one. As noted earlier, the women and girls without work permits in this study reported fear of harassment, arrest and deportation by the authorities.

> *I don't have a work permit or any official documents, so it is hard for me to get a job. If I don't have any documents, the employer doesn't want to accept me. If I do get a job, I have to suffer because the employer can do whatever she wants regardless of her promises to me. I haven't even received the wages yet that I have earned.*
>
> ***A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I don't have a work permit or identity card and it is difficult to find a job. The employers do not want people like me. And if they do give me a job, the employer can suppress me by not giving me my pay and I can do nothing. The Thai authorities also can arrest me. They can also take action on me. In Thailand even those who have documents or a work permit still live in fear. As I don't have any documentation, it is even worse.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I don't have a work permit so I can only stay in the house. I can't go anywhere even though I would like to go. I fear that I may be arrested. I was arrested once when I returned from Bangkok to Mae Sot. The Thai authorities arrested me and deported me back to Myawaddy.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

While those domestic workers who held work permits generally described positively the Thai government's policy to issue work permits to migrant workers, specifically the inclusion of domestic workers in the that policy, there remained a number of frustrations and concerns regarding how the work permits were issued. These concerns are discussed more fully below. During the in-depth interviews, many of the domestic workers described what their lives were like before they obtained work permits.

> *For over six years I lived in Thailand without any documentation. Just recently I registered and received a work permit. In the past, I could never stay calm. I was always watching for the police and running away because the employer couldn't help me. If I was arrested, the money that I earned would not be enough to pay the police. It was regarded that I was good at running because I was never arrested. Sometimes when the police came I did not have enough time to run so I hid behind the house, or in a cupboard, or one time I hid in a box. They arrested people almost every day. Employers had to "ransom" their employees regularly. When the police make an arrest, there are no exceptions, even for old or pregnant women. They arrest everyone they find. There was one 70-year-old woman who stayed with her children and couldn't run. She was arrested every time the police came and her children didn't even have enough money to get her out. Since I have a work permit, I try to help negotiate with the police. Once, when I saw the police coming, the old woman was confused so I hurried and pulled her to sit near me and then I covered her with a blanket. The police came and asked and I tried to talk to them and explain the situation.*
>
> ***A 23-year-old single Tavoyan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

The employer paid for work permits for everyone who works in his house and didn't cut our salary. Having work permits allows us to do our work well. Wherever we go, we don't need to be concerned about ourselves. I never thought I would meet such a very good employer. Because he is kind to us, we want to work hard for him. My life is so much more comfortable since I have a work permit.

A 22-year-old married Pa-O female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In September 2002, my work permit expires. Before I got my work permit I did not dare to go out even when there was no work to do. I felt afraid to ask for permission from the employer to go out. Although I could speak Thai, I feared that I might be checked and questioned. I feared that I would be arrested and sent back to the border. When I see a policeman, automatically I feel scared. Since I have my work permit I now dare to go out without fear. I have my work permit and I can also speak Thai, so I am not so afraid. I can go around without fear in my mind. If I get a work permit I can work in Thailand within the period they fix. The police cannot arrest me. They also cannot deport me to Burma. If I get sick I can also go to the hospital for treatment. I was told that it would cost only 30 baht.

A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer paid half of the cost for my work permit and she deducted 500 baht a month from my salary for my half. She gave the original work permit to me. Because I have the original work permit, I am not afraid of the authorities arresting me. I would like to thank the Thai government for allowing workers from Burma to work legally.

A 26-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the domestic workers noted certain frustrations they encountered with their work permits. These women and girls felt there were still many restrictions placed on them, and also noted that regardless of their legal status or whether or not they possessed a work permit they still faced an array of problems.

Although I have my work permit, I still don't dare to go too far, because I only have a copy of the card. So, even though I have a work permit it makes no difference. It is like spending money without using the work permit.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have no work permit. The employer didn't do it for me. Even if I had it, I could never go out because I work all the time. So, it seems a work permit is not necessary for me.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Staying in Thailand without any documents leaves me constantly afraid of the authorities. I have more trouble because I can't speak their language. In Thailand, we are not only afraid of the authorities, but also fear other people who take advantage of us. Workers from Burma are taken advantage of and paid very little, if at all, regardless if they have a work permit or not.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

6.5 Work Permits Fortify Employer's Control

A major concern regarding work permits described during the in-depth interviews was the absolute control the registration process and work permit arrangements gave to the employer. Many noted that their employers refused to register them for work permits, which led the women and girls in this study to rarely leave their place of employment because of fear of arrest by the authorities. Others noted that unduly restrictive and unfair conditions were placed on obtaining a work permit by their employer.

> *I don't have a work permit because the employer wouldn't do it for me. She says it is not her responsibility to solve our problems. The employer said that if a problem arises she would not solve if for me. If it happens, I have to suffer. The employer told me that I have to watch the situation and if the police or immigration officers come, then run away.*
>
> ***A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I don't have a work permit. My employer said that she would register me if I agreed to work for her for two years. I don't want to stay in Thailand that long. If I can save some money, I want to go back home. I did not want to promise to stay with her for two more years. Therefore, I don't have any work permit. I just never go outside. The employer tells me not to go anywhere, as she is also afraid I will have a problem. I don't need to go anywhere, but sometimes I would like to go and make a phone call to my friends. Because I don't have a work permit, the employer says my salary can never be increased. I still get only 1 ,500 baht a month.*
>
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I don't have a work permit ID. The time when the work permit was provided, the man of the house was being sexy with me and I didn't want to ask him for any favors. His wife said I didn't have to go out and just told me to work inside the house and then there would be no need to get a work permit. I worked there for eight months and finally I found another job. But, by the time I got a new job the registration time was over and I could no longer get a work permit.*
>
> ***A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *The employer didn't register me fora work permit, because he didn't have time. So, I can't go anywhere. I really want to have a work permit, because without it I don't dare go anywhere.*
>
> ***A 13-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When there was the work permit registration, I had a job at a restaurant washing dishes. The employer of the restaurant said he would provide food, accommodation and a salary of 2,000 baht per month. After working there one month, there was news of registering migrants for work permits. I really wanted to have a work permit, but this employer refused. After asking around I found out that I could register for a work permit without having an employer. So, I told the employer that I wanted to register on my own, but the employer still wouldn't agree with me. So, I told the employer that I would like to leave this job and asked for my salary. But he didn't agree to give it to me. What could I do? All I could do was accept my losses and leave the employer. I just asked for my travel expenses to return to Burma. He gave me only 500 baht. When the other*

migrants saw this they felt pity for me. One young man gave me 140 baht and another 100 baht. I said I wouldn't take it, but they insisted. Another young woman in the restaurant gave me some oranges. I didn't know what to say, I just cried because the employer was so unfair and the others were so kind.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

A number of domestic workers explained that their employer saw no advantage in registering them for work permits.

I don't have a work permit and so my employer said she will not give me a full salary, but will deduct 2,000 baht. She always tells me how lucky I am she is willing to accept an illegal worker to stay with her. She said that if I want a higher salary than this I have to find another place to work. I think there is no chance she will help me to get a work permit.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The owner of the house where I work is a police officer. Therefore, I don't need a work permit and don't have to spend my money for it. The only problem is that it is not easy to go out. Maybe the employer doesn't want to let me go out, so he didn't get a work permit for me. He didn't decrease my pay, but he didn't increase it either. Since I arrived here three years ago I still get only 1,000 baht a month.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't have any work permit. The employer wouldn't do it for me, but the employers said if I work with them for another year, they would do it for me. But now, it is too late to get a work permit as the registration period is over.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I felt disappointed when the employer would not get a work permit for me. But many of my friends' employers wouldn't get the work permit for them either. The employers just tell us that if you stay in the house and don't go out, a work permit is not necessary. They say the work permit costs money so don't waste your money, just don't go out and there will be no problem.

A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A few of the domestic workers interviewed said they did not want a work permit. This was primarily because of the burdens associated with its cost and renewal.

Although I don't have a work permit, my salary has not changed. I still get 2,000 baht whether I have a work permit or not. The work permit is very expensive and if I don't go anywhere except the workplace, I really don't need it. The employer insists that the work permit is valuable, but I don't see much difference in having one or not.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

*Even though I have a work permit, I have never used it or gone anywhere. I would have to pay to extend it myself. It doesn't make any difference to me whether I have a work permit or not, because I don't have anywhere to go. I still get the same salary of **1,000***

baht, but now I would have to pay over 4,000 baht of my earnings to renew it. My employer says that I cannot leave because her name is on my work permit. It makes a lot of trouble for me. Before, if an employer was not good, I could go and work somewhere else. But, now, if the former employer doesn't give me permission to work elsewhere, the other employer won't receive me.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

A small number of domestic workers interviewed had enough money or had the opportunity to borrow from family members to pay for the total work permit registration fees up front.

I have got a work permit. The employer took me to do it when there was a registration in August 2001.I had to pay for its cost alone. When it was extended in March, I also paid for these expenses. I have had to spend most of my savings, but I am happy to live without fear.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have got a work permit. The employer did it for me, but I paid by myself. So far I have spent over 6,000 baht for the initial registration and health check-up to extend the work permit.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Now, I have work permit. I had to pay for it myself, but my employer took me to register for it. She said that if I continued to stay with her, she would pay for the extension. Even though I have a work permit, I still don't go anywhere. The employer told me that if I didn't get a work permit, she would not allow me to work for her. She said she was afraid that the authorities would punish her. But, now, with a work permit she said if there is a problem with the authorities, she would solve it for me.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The remainder of the domestic workers interviewed explained that although they wanted to register for a work permit, they did not have enough savings and had no one from whom they could borrow money.

I don't have a work permit, because the employer wouldn't do it for me. I wanted to do it myself but I didn't have any money. When I asked the employer for help to get a work permit, he just told me that if I didn't have anything going on with a man, there was no problem.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't want a work permit because it is too expensive and I don't want to waste my money. I have never seen the police because I never leave the house. I can't go anywhere and have no time anyway.

A 32-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't have a work permit and I just try to avoid getting arrested day to day. When there was the registration for the work permit, I asked the employer to help me get one but she said that I have got a salary and so I can spend by my own money. She wouldn't help pay forme or advance me the money. Then my younger sister said she would give me the money to get it, but the employer argued with me and refused to do it even if I had the money. So, I just have to keep living like this in hiding, afraid of being arrested.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

As noted in the table 6.5, only a small percentage (10.9%)of the employers covered the full costs of the work permit. Almost forty percent of the employers contributed to half the cost of the work permit, with half of the employers expecting the domestic worker herself to cover all the costs of registration and renewal.

Table 6.5 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents whose employer paid for half or all of the work permit costs by research site

Amount employer paid towards work permit	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Half the cost	17.4%(26)	60.0%(93)	39.1%(119)
Full cost	8.1%(12)	13.5%(21)	10.9%(33)
Contributed nothing	74.5%(1 11)	26.5%(41)	50.0%(152)
No. of respondents	**149**	**155**	**304**

Since only a few domestic workers interviewed could pay the costs for the work permit registration and renewal, most of the remainder of those who wanted a work permit had to borrow money. This often required that the domestic workers obtain an advance from their employers to cover the registration and/or renewal costs. Consequently, debts to their employer were incurred that, in most cases, occurred without a clear understanding as to the terms of repayment. Several of the women and girls interviewed also reported incidences of their employer charging them more than the actual cost of the work permit and/or its renewal.

The employer first paid the cost of my work permit and then deducted the cost from my salary every month. I want to get out of my job but the employer said that I couldn't leave until I paid for my work permit. She said I cannot quit until I work for her for one year. The employer keeps the original work permit and gives me only a copy of it.

A 13-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When the work permits were issued, my employer asked me if I was going to work here for a long time. If I was, then she would get a work permit for me and they would not cut my salary for the costs. If you work for six more months your debts would be over. I said please give me my pay regularly, if I get my pay regularly I will work more than six months. This employer paid me 1,000 baht a month and gave me food to eat, but it was not enough to pay for the work permit. Finally, the employer said she would pay for the work permit and got it for me. But, actually she did not pay me my salary and never

showed me the work permit. Finally, I quit that job because they would not pay me and I did not get a work permit either.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Regarding the work permit, the employer did it for me and my mother, father and two elder brothers, altogether five persons. Everyone in my family, except me, works elsewhere, but my employer took responsibility and got the work permits for all of us. But, we have to pay the costs. Now, we owe the employer a lot of money.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I spent a lot of money to get a work permit. It cost me 3,250 baht. The employer paid for it first and then said they would cut the salary little by little afterwards. But, the employer has not starting deducting the cost yet. When I asked them to cut it, they told me to keep it first and said it doesn't matter. I tell them often I don't want to owe them money, but they just say not to worry about it and that I can pay them back later.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I arrived in Bangkok, the employer applied for the work permit for me saying he would pay the costs. But, when I quit the job, he cut all my salary. I didn't really understand. He even seized my work permit. He didn't give it to me. There was nothing I could do and now I have to be aware of or hide from the police or any people I feel suspicious of. My life is very difficult now because of the work permit.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

First, the employer said she would pay half of the work permit costs. But later, she said the cost of the work permit is 4,500 baht and that she will deduct 300 baht a month until the entire amount is repaid. When I asked her about the difference she said she doesn't have the money to pay half.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer keeps the work permit that she did for us. When we got it, she paid its cost for us first and then deducted our salaries 500 baht per month. We can't get the actual work permit until we pay all our debt to her. Now, just as we are about to pay back the entire debt, it will be time to extend it again. We don't know when we can actually get the work permit and no longer owe her money.

A 29-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Even for those whose employers paid half or all of the registration and renewal costs for the work permit there were no clear terms of the arrangement or precise figures in how much the domestic workers were in debt to their employers.

I have a work permit. The current employer did it for me. He told me he had spent over 3,000 baht. He wouldn't cut my salary if I behaved. So far, he has not cut my salary and has even given me a little extra. But, it makes me nervous each month to know if he will take deductions or not.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have a work permit. The employer did it for me. They told me I had to pay half of the cost, but I don't know how much that is.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have a work permit card. The employer did it for me. I have to pay for half and she helped with the other half. I have to pay the employer 3,200 baht, but I heard the registration only costs 4,500 baht.

A 30-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer got a work permit for me. The employer paid half of the cost and the remaining half I have to pay. She cut my salary every month to cover the amount I owe for the work permit.

A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have my work permit. The employer did it for me since I worked on a daily wage job. The employer paid half of the cost and I have to pay half of it from my salary. I would like to get a new job, but I don't know how much I have to pay to this employer first before I can leave.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Of the domestic workers surveyed for this study, 40.5 percent were given only a copy of their work permit. The original document was kept by the employer (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6 Percentage distribution and number of those survey respondents with work permits according to whether they held the original or a copy of the permit by research site

Domestic workers with work permits	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Original work permit	80.1%(121)	39.3%(61)	59.5%(182)
Copy of work permit	19.9%(30)	30.7%(94)	40.5%(124)
No. of respondents	**151**	**155**	**306**

It is interesting to note that in comparing Tables 6.5 and 6.6 above, employers in Mae Sot were more likely to contribute to the costs of the work permit (73.5% compared to only 25.5% Chiang Mai). They were also, however, more likely to keep the original documents, providing the domestic workers with only a copy (30.7% compared to 80.1 % Chiang Mai). A number of the domestic workers interviewed expressed fear and anxiety for their safety and security as a result of being denied access to their original work permit.

I have a work permit. The employers did it for me and paid all the costs. They didn't cut my pay but the employer keeps my documents with him.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Although I have a work permit, the employer keeps it. I am still afraid of the authorities and don't dare to go out. Because I don't have the actual card there can still be trouble.
A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer keeps my work permit. She said that if someone comes and asks about me she has to talk to them anyway because I do not speak Thai. She won't even give it to me when I go out. She said that if I meet any problems to tell them where I stay and ask them to come to get her. I suppose it has to be like this because I can't speak Thai very well.
A 30-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

If there is a card, it is not necessary to be afraid. But, I can't keep my work permit with me. The employer keeps saying he is afraid that I will run away. So, now I am still afraid even with a work permit.
A 19-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer did a work permit for me and paid the cost. But they won't give me the work permit, only a copy of it. They said they will give me the original one later and until then if any problems arise they will take responsibility and solve it for me.
A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The domestic workers who were able to hold on to their original work permit themselves expressed much greater confidence towards their safety and mobility.

The employer registered me fora work permit. He also lets me keep it, so I do not have to hide or be afraid. Now I don't have so many problems like before.
A 28-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer allows us to keep the original copy of our work permit with us. The house owner told us that if we go outside it is safer to keep the original ones in our hands.
An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I go out I take my work permit with me. On the way if the police check me I show them my card. Before I got my work permit I could only go where the employer took me. After I got my work permit I could go farther beyond the place I work. I keep my work permit in my hands. If I didn't have the work permit, I would be very afraid and would never leave the house.
A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My employer got a work permit for me. My employer paid all the costs for my work permit and didn't cut from my salary. She also gave me the original work permit to keep. I am very lucky compared to my friends.
A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

However, it should be noted that the work permits issued during the time of this study were only valid for those employed by the person who registered them and whose name was on the work permit. Work permits are typically not transferable and the inability to change employers once again puts the power into the hands of the employer, as the women and girls in this study explain.

> *Now that I have a work permit I have more problems. The employer will not allow me to leave this job because her name is on the work permit. She says I have to work for her now. Before, if I didn't want to continue working with an employer, I could go and work some place else. But now, if my current employer doesn't give me permission, I cannot get another job easily.*
>
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *Some workers paid back all the costs for their work permits, but the employer still didn't give them the original one. Like me, they only receive a copy of the work permit and the employer keeps the original. The employer fears that the workers will go to work in other places. My employer even told me that if I go to work in another place, he would inform the police to arrest me. If I want to move to another job I have to go secretly and accept that I will lose my work permit even though I paid the whole cost myself.*
>
> ***A 38-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When I applied for it, I hired someone to be my employer (to assure me) and gave him 1,000 baht. When it needed to be extended, I hired him to extend it for me for 500 baht. Because I have a work permit, I don't feel afraid anymore. But, if they check it carefully I could be in trouble because I don't work for the employer on my work permit.*
>
> ***A 29-year-old married Kachin female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I had a work permit when I was working with my old employer. But, when I left that job the employer took my work permit back. Now I don't have any documents and it is not possible to register with the new employer.*
>
> ***A 19-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

6.6 Other Concerns Regarding the Work Permit Registration and Renewal Process

The majority of the domestic workers interviewed did not understand the work permit registration policy. What they knew they heard from word of mouth either from their employer or others around them. No one was clear on the exact conditions and costs of the work permit registration or renewal.

> *I have stayed in this house for eleven months and I only went out two times with the employer. The house owners never told me about the possibility of registering for a work permit. I don't know anything about it, but I would like to work legally and not be so afraid.*
>
> ***A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

I needed a work permit, but this employer would not do it for me. When I asked others what to do, I learned I could register without having an employer. I was lucky to have an older brother to help me and I was able to register for a work permit on my own. This means I can work for who ever I want and don't have to stay with this employer. Most of my friends don't know about this and didn't believe me when I told them. They were afraid if they went to register on their own they would be arrested.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The employer got a work permit from me. They said if they didn't do it they were also afraid of problems with the police. When they did the work permit for me I didn't understand anything about it. The employer didn't explain anything, but they also didn't cut my pay. I haven't done my blood test yet to extend my work permit. The employer said they will do it for me. They told me not to worry about it. I am worried though because I want to work legally with a work permit.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't know anything about the work permits or my rights in this country. The employer has told me nothing. She only said that if I have a work permit it is safe for both the worker and the employer. If the house owner does not do a work permit for his worker, I was told that the house owner can also be arrested. The house owner never told me any details about this. I just have to ask others what they have heard.

A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Young domestic workers, under the age of eighteen, were not allowed to register for work permits.

I could not get a work permit because I am still too young.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't have a work permit. When the registration took place, my employers said that I was too young.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

None of the workers my age were allowed to register for a work permit.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Since we don't have the work permit, our employers don't allow us to go beyond the end of their road. I get only 1,200 baht a month and so I cannot go very far anyway without spending money. I have never been bothered because I don't have a work permit, but no one is sure about the future. The employers say that we are still too young to register and if we don't go outside very often, there will be no problem.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

As explained in Chapter One, the Thai government issued work permits for six months with a renewal for an additional six months conditional on passing a health examination for seven communicable diseases.[1] The domestic workers interviewed described not understanding the health exam or why their employer was the one to receive their test results.

> *When I had my blood tested at the hospital, I felt scared. I didn't know what disease they were checking for and I saw they took a large amount of blood. I was afraid. But, the employer said the results showed that I had no disease and that I am in good health. I don't have to worry anymore. The employer paid the cost for my medical check up and I didn't spend anything.*
>
> ***A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When I went to get my blood tested, there were many people. I felt happy to see others, but no one knew what was going to happen and we all felt scared. That day I realized there were a great number of people from Burma who came to work in Thailand.*
>
> ***An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When they extended the work permits, I was pregnant and I lost my job, so nobody could help me. I couldn't do it myself, so there was nothing I could do. Now I have to live in fear of arrest and hide myself all the time.*
>
> ***A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Another frustration expressed by the domestic workers was the short time frame in which the work permit registration process occurred. Many of those interviewed explained that they did not learn about the registration in time, or that their employer missed the opportunity, or that they came to Thailand after the registration period had ended.

> *If possible I would like to have a work permit, but the employer must take responsibility for this. At present, I don't have money to do a work permit. The cost of a work permit is equal to five months of my salary. If the employer can pay the cost for me, it will be good. But, my employer says nothing about it, so I don't know how to ask her and explain how important it is for me.*
>
> ***A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I don't have any card. The work permit registration took place when I went home. So, I didn't have a chance to do it. There have been no opportunities to apply for a work permit since 2001 , so I cannot get one.*
>
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I don't have any card at all. I did not have a job when the work permit registration was taking place. My husband said he would do it for me, but I didn't have any employer to assure me. So, now I don't have any card. Wherever I go, I have to be careful and cautious not to get arrested. My employers now say it is not important to have a work permit and even if the government allows us to register again I don't think my employer*

[1] The seven communicable diseases are tuberculosis, leprosy, elephantiasis, syphilis, drug addiction, alcoholism and unsound mind or mental retardation.

will do it for me. It is very difficult to ask them to do a work permit for me. I have no card at all, so my life is very difficult.

A 19-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I came to Thailand after the work permits were issued. There has been no opportunity to register since 2001, so I can't get a work permit.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

6.7 Other Documents

Of the total number of domestic workers surveyed for this study, 13.3 percent were able to obtain Thai temporary residency identity cards (Table 6.7). Local authorities distribute these cards in various formats, each offering varying degrees of legal status that are frequently contested or revised by Thai authorities.

Table 6.7 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who possess Thai temporary residency cards by research site

Possession of Thai temporary residency identity card	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	24.0% (58)	4.2% (12)	13.3% (70)
No	67.7% (164)	71.0% (203)	69.5% (367)
No response	8.3%(20)	24.8% (71)	17.2% (91)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

In Chiang Mai, 24 percent of the survey respondents had temporary residency cards issued by local Thai authorities, which migrants refer to by their various colors. These temporary residency cards allow migrants to reside in a certain area, but forbid them to travel beyond. In Mae Sot, a much smaller percentage of the survey respondents (4.2%)held temporary residency cards, as they were expected by the government to be accommodated in the nearby "displaced persons" camps on the Thai side of the border (not available to the Shan) (Table 6.7).

I have a pink card that I can use to live temporarily in one area at the border. If I want to travel outside the village, I must ask permission and get a blue or orange card from the authorities. Later I will pay for a pink card for residence in another border area.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have a green card with a red border, the same as my parents. The local authorities issued them at the border. There are five people in my family, so we spent 500 baht for the cards. But, when we got these cards our life is the same. We still can't go anywhere. We just stay in the village. I think we were cheated just to get our money.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I received a blue card by registering with my husband's family at the border. Though I have a blue card, I can only use it to stay in the border village. Still it is something to show the authorities if I am stopped.

A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't have a work permit. I only have my refugee card. I travel with this card. If I am arrested, they will release me to the refugee camp later. I can speak a little Thai, so even though I didn't have a work permit, nothing really happens to me. I was once arrested and I was released later to the camp.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Now, I have a green card with a red border. For this card, I gave 10,000 baht to the man who contacted me. Before, I only had a green card, so I was also afraid of being deported back to Burma because our country is not at peace yet.

A 33-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

6.8 Conclusion

Thailand's policy of issuing work permits and temporary residency cards to migrants from Burma was welcomed by the majority of domestic workers interviewed for this study. However, many of these women and girls expressed concerns regarding the lack of public information and clarity about the work permit registration process, as well as the short duration of the registration period and the manner in which mandatory health exams for work permit renewals were carried out. Domestic workers specifically noted a lack of privacy in obtaining health test results. In most cases, it was the employer who received and transmitted test results.

Equally troubling for the domestic workers was the way in which employers often manipulated the work permit policy to fortify their control over them and diminish their rights and options to address abuses. For example, a number of employers refused to register or assist in registering the domestic workers for work permits, thereby heightening the vulnerability of these women and girls to arrest and deportation. Others placed unduly restrictive conditions upon the domestic workers such as demanding that they agree to work for a set period of one or two years before permitting them to register for a work permit. Some employers threatened to report the undocumented worker to the police if she refused their demands.

The costs associated with registering and renewing work permits were another major concern that often entailed further exploitation of the domestic workers by their employers. Even the expense of the registration fees (that in many instances equaled several months of wages for the domestic workers), the majority of women and girls in this study were forced to take an advance from their employer against their salary to cover these costs. A number of the domestic workers reported that their employer overcharged them for the costs of the work permit, and others reported that their employer withheld their work permit until the costs were repaid in full. Rarely, if ever, were the terms of repayment clearly set out for the domestic workers.

Moreover, many of the women and girls in this study reported that their employer refused to hand over their original work permit, providing them only a photocopy, if at all. This was seen by the study participants as yet another means of fortifying the employer's control over them by denying them rightful ownership of documentation proving their legal status, without which they were at risk of harassment, arrest, detention and/or deportation.

The next chapter describes some of the obstacles migrant domestic workers face in obtaining health care services, particularly if they do not hold work permits.

Chapter Seven :

Health Issues

7.1 Introduction

The domestic workers in this study discussed a broad spectrum of health-related concerns, including how to respond to and treat illnesses, access to health care, medical costs, obtaining public information, reproductive health issues and HIV/AIDS. The most common illness reported by the women and girls in this study was severe fatigue, with some respondents reporting contraction of malaria and dengue fever as well as injuries from accidents related to their employment. Most of the domestic workers were either provided medicine by their employer or treated themselves. Approximately three-quarters of the survey respondents did not access health professionals. Those who did often required permission from their employer to do so. Citing the expense of medical costs and the fact that few employers ever provided any assistance with health care coverage, the majority of women and girls in this study described self-treatment as the preferred option for treating illnesses.

Almost all of the women and girls in this study noted their lack of basic health care knowledge and the desire for more written materials in their own language. Their primary health concerns focused on reproductive health issues such as birth control, abortion, pre- and post-natal care. During the in-depth interviews, participants also described their limited knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Most participants were only aware of the disease through word of mouth, with only a few having obtained knowledge of it through written materials or exposure to those dying of the illness. Three of the domestic workers were caring for people living with AIDS and expressed their fears and lack of knowledge regarding care giving. Finally, many of the study participants believed they were tested for HIV during the health exam required for extending their work permits, even though this was not one of the seven communicable diseases officially mandated by the Thai government to be tested for. Of greater concern to these women and girls was the violation to their privacy regarding the health exam results, which were almost always transmitted to them by their employer.

7.2 Illnesses

Most of the women and girls in this study did not report any major illnesses. Their primary health concern was fatigue from long working hours and inability to rest.

> *I don't have enough sleep or enough time to rest. I feel exhausted all the time. When my period comes I have terrible cramps. I would like to rest, but the employer does not allow me to. I can hardly wait for her husband to come home and open the door for him as my whole body aches. I ask the employer for some medicine and take it. I would like to sleep early. I suffer a lot from not enough rest.*
>
> ***A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Previously, when I was sick they accused me of being lazy and they did not let me stop working. They just gave me two aspirins and expected me to continue working and taking care of their children. Only when I was so sick that I could not stand up, did they allow me to rest and gave me some stronger medicine.*
>
> ***A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I tried not to be sick because if I did not work my child would have nothing to eat. Moreover, here, I don't have any relatives to take care of my child. I can only pray that I am never seriously sick. So far, I have only had a headache and a little fever. I just bought some medicine to take. I never went to see the doctor because it costs too much money. But when my child is sick, I have to take her to see the doctor urgently because she is still young.*
>
> ***A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

In addition to citing fatigue as a major health concern, study participants spoke of their fears and concerns regarding malaria and dengue fever.

> *I have been fine since I came to Thailand. In Burma I often had malaria and depended on my parents. If I have malaria now, I don't know what I will do.*
>
> ***A 13-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I often had malaria in Burma. I am afraid of having malaria again, especially here as I have no one who will help me.*
>
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I got severe dengue fever once. It thought I was going to die. My employer sent me to the clinic, which referred me to the hospital. I stayed in the hospital for five days. When I went to the hospital my employer paid the cost for me but I have to pay back half of the cost from my salary.*
>
> ***A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

The domestic workers in this study also cited work place injuries as another health concern.

I got hurt at work when three of us were moving a large teak cabinet and the leg fell on my toe. It hurt so much, but the employer did not send me to a clinic. My fellow worker finally sent me to the hospital. The doctor removed my nail and dressed the wound. I looked at my leg and as it was very painful, I felt sad. The employer didn't pay any cost for my treatment and she deducted 80 baht a day until I could return to work.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I got sores on my hand from making tofu in the employer's business. There were sores all over my hands, but the employer would not let me use gloves. Now, I can't even wash clothes or take a shower. Others had to only drain the beans, so their hands were not as bad as mine. The employer got some ointment for my hands, but then complained because I used up too much ointment and still my sores did not disappear. She yelled at me because others didn't get these sores, only me.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Family health problems were another major concern that greatly impacted the domestic workers' own health and ability to work.

Both of my children are not in good health and my employer just fired me because I had to take so much time off to care for them. My elder daughter is seven years old and has trachoma in her eye. My younger child is just twenty months old and has a gland tumor on her neck. They are both often ill. My husband has tuberculosis and has to take medicine all the time. So, he had to stop working as a carpenter and a mason and take an easier job as a vendor. For me, I have an eye problem and tears come out of my eyes all the time. For all these problems we can do very little, because we have no money. Only my husband can get treatment because his medicine is free.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My family has many health problems. My husband was electrocuted at his workplace. He almost died, but fortunately someone helped take him to the hospital. Afterwards, he could not use one of his hands and is not strong enough. He has become very thin. Now, we have a lot of debts and I am afraid that I can't repay them all. I still have a lot of problems with my back and neck from when I was beaten by the Burmese soldiers. The doctor said if they don't operate on my neck, the pain will not go away. On the other hand, I don't have any money for the operation and I dare not take time off from work.

A 24-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

7.3 Access to Health Care

In treating their illnesses, the majority of study participants either took medicine given to them by their employer (53.8%) or bought medicine themselves (49.6%). Approximately, a quarter of the participants sought professional health care at a clinic either going by themselves (25.4%), with their employer (20.4%) or with a friend (16%) (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents by type of health care accessed when ill and research site*

Type of health care accessed when ill	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Employer provides medicine	52.9% (128)	54.5% (156)	53.8% (284)
Buy medicine yourself	50.0% (121)	49.3% (141)	49.6% (262)
Go to clinic with employer	30.6% (74)	11.9% (34)	20.4% (108)
Go to clinic yourself	26.4% (64)	24.5% (70)	25.4% (134)
Go to clinic with a friend	23.1% (56)	11.2% (32)	16.6% (88)
Do nothing	3.7% (9)	7.4% (21)	5.7% (30)
Other	2.5% (6)	1.1% (3)	1.6% (8)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

* **Note:** Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

The domestic workers in this study explained that their ability to access health care was often dependent upon their employer, who, in many cases, was also the one to determine the severity of their illness and how to treat it.

> *When I was sick, my employer bought some medicine for me. Yesterday and today I have a cough, so she bought me some medicine and didn't ask me to pay for it. But, I often get sick so I wonder if there is something more seriously wrong.*
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *My employer takes care of all my health care and never has cut my salary. When I first arrived I had malaria and he paid for all the treatment. When the workers are sick, he gave them some medicine. If they do not get better he takes them to the hospital. But, if they are seriously ill for a long time, he asks their relatives to take care of them.*
> ***A 23-year-old single Tavoyan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I am sick, the employer buys some medicine forme. I have to keep working. Only one time did the employer take me to the clinic when I did not recover for many days.*
> ***A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *As my employer is a nurse, when I get a little sick she gives me medicine and doesn't deduct it from my pay. But now I have a work permit and so if I get seriously sick I don't have to worry about it. She said that I could go to the hospital and get treatment.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When I was sick, the employers took me to a doctor right away and paid for the treatment. They were afraid I would infect their daughter and probably also that there*

would be nobody to look after her. Also, when I first came to work they asked whether I had any disease. I said no, but they didn't believe me. They took me to have a physical check up first before hiring me to work for them.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Many of the domestic workers further explained that if their employer did not assist them in accessing health care then they were forced to rely on their own resources. For illnesses the domestic workers considered not too serious, this often entailed buying medicine themselves or asking others to obtain medicine for them without the counsel of a medical professional.

If I ask permission to take a day off there is a big problem. There is no way I could ask the employer to pay for my treatment. If there is something wrong, we have to manage to get some medicine on our own. The employer says it is not their business.

A 32-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I get sick I consult with my sister, buy medicine and take it. I have never been seriously ill. Since I worked in Thailand, I have never been to a clinic or hospital. I have never been absent from my work.

A 27-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I get a stomachache the employer asks me to take a little rest after taking some medication. When I get better, I continue my work. They don't cut my salary.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I am not well and I want to go to the drug store. I talked about it with my husband, but as we have to pay for it ourselves we decided it was best to try to treat ourselves.

A 20-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I am sick and I cannot sleep. The employer gave me some medication once, but it did not give me relief. She will not send me to the clinic and won't give me anymore medicine. I feel so sick and there is nothing I can do about it.

A 17-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have never been sick since I arrived here. But, when I get sick I don't know what I will do if the house owners do not take care of my health. I cannot read or go anywhere. When I think of this I miss my home and I feel sad and alone.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

For serious health care needs, approximately 25 percent of the study participants sought out professional health care providers in local clinics and hospitals. A number of the women and girls in Mae Sot went to the Mae Tao clinic noting that it was the most accessible and had translation services available, as well as a referral system to a support network for helping patients adjust to the outcomes of their health problems. However, not all the domestic workers in Mae Sot knew of the Mae Tao clinic.

At present, when I get sick I only go to the Mae Tao clinic. Before I just bought medicine with my own money without really knowing what I was doing. However, it is better to get proper medical treatment. Now if I see someone I know, I tell them to go to that clinic because a lot of people don't know about it.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My husband went to Bangkok and four months later I learned that he died of malaria. I didn't believe the news, so I went to Bangkok. I met his employer and she told me herself. The employer saw that I was pregnant and suggested I give birth to my baby there and let them take the child. But, I didn't want to give away my child, so I decided to go back home. The employer gave me 4,000 baht saying that was the remaining wages of my husband. On the way back to the border from Bangkok, I was arrested and all my money was taken away by the police. Afterwards, the police then put me back on a bus to Mae Sot. When I arrived at Mae Sot, I met my friends who said I could stay with them. I couldn't go home to Burma now because it was near my time to deliver, and I also didn't have the money to return home. So, my friends took me to Mae Tao clinic to ask for help. I gave birth to my baby at the clinic and received help from a local women's organization.

A 25-year-old widowed Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Once when my child got sick, I went to take him to the clinic and was arrested. My son and I were put into a cell all day without anything to eat. I was told if I paid 300 baht we could be released. But, I had only 100 baht in my hands so I could not be released. Later, the police said if I could give 200 baht, I would be released. But, as I didn't have it I couldn't get out. We had to sleep in detention for one night and in the morning they took our photographs and sent us along with all the others to the river in big trucks. We crossed the river to the other side by boat that cost ten baht. After that my son and I were so hungry we had to buy something to eat which cost 20 baht. Then on the Burma side the soldiers demanded 200 kyat and as I didn't have Burmese currency, I had to give 20 baht instead. So, I had only 50 baht left with me. Then I had to use that to get back to our place in Thailand. After all that I had no money to take my son to the doctor. Finally, someone suggested I take him to Mae Tao clinic where I could get help even if I couldn't pay.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In Chiang Mai, accessing professional health care providers was more problematic, according to the study participants because of the higher cost of medical services at local clinics and hospitals. In addition, some of the women and girls in this study noted the difficulty of accessing professional medical services without having official Thai documentation.

The woman I work with fell from a high place and became unconscious. I got her to the hospital right away but she was still unconscious. When she finally woke up, she couldn't remember anything. The doctor asked for her work permit so I called the employer because he keeps it. But, the employer didn't come. So, the nurse and doctor said they couldn't do anything. We just waited in the hospital and when she could walk we went home. This is the problem when workers can't keep their own work permits.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I had a large ulcer from an infection that wouldn't go away. The doctor said he would have to operate and that it would cost 13,000 baht. I talked with my elder sister and husband and we all borrowed money from everyone we knew. I had the operation, but now we owe a lot of money to so many people.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

7.4 Health Care Costs

The expense of health care costs prevented a number of the domestic workers in this study from accessing professional health care providers.

Others noted that when health care costs went beyond their current means, they often would take an advance from their employer, who subsequently deducted it from their salaries over a course of several pay periods until the amount was repaid.

My employer will not pay for my treatment when I am ill, but he will send me to the hospital. He pays and then deducts the amount from my salary. He also will not pay me for the days I do not work. But, at least I don't have to give interest like in Burma.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My sister who works with me in the same house often has high blood pressure. When she has to go to the hospital, she has to pay from her own money and if it is not enough the employer pays and deducts it from her salary.

A 29-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I had malaria so the other employee took me to the hospital. At that time, I didn't have a work permit and I had to pay over 2,000 baht. I also had to pay for the cost of the medicine. I asked the employer to cut my salary 500 baht each month until I paid off the costs. He also deducted 100 baht each day I was sick.

A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Over three quarters of the survey respondents, 78%, reported having to pay for their own health care expenses, with just over a fifth (21.4%) noting that their employer covered their health care costs (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents whose employer paid health care expenses by research site

Employer ever pay health care expenses	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	37.6% (91)	7.7% (22)	21.4% (113)
No	62.4% (151)	92.3% (264)	78.6% (415)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

Of the one fifth of the domestic workers whose employers paid for their health care expenses, the majority was from Chiang Mai. This was true of both the survey respondents and the in-depth interview participants. The reason for this may be that in Mae Sot, as noted earlier, there exists a very good public health clinic that is geared to assisting migrants from Burma. No such specialized clinic exists in Chiang Mai.

> *When I was sick, the employer took me to a clinic. There was no problem. When I am feeling just a little sick, the employer's mother worries about me and asks her daughter to take me to the doctor right away. She loves me as her daughter or niece. The employer pays all the costs.*
> ***A 34-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I am sick I tell the employer, otherwise she would make me keep working. When I was sick the first time, they took me to the hospital. When I went to the hospital, the employer paid all the expenses. I was sick for two days and my salary was not cut either. When I was sick I only did the house cleaning, but not the cooking.*
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

However, the majority of domestic workers tried not to take days off from work to go to a clinic, with over half (52.7%) of the survey respondents reporting that they never took a day off because they were sick. Many of the women and girls that participated in the in-depth interviews explained that they did not know what would happen if they became ill and were afraid of losing their job as a consequence of missing several days work from an illness.

> *Now that I am sick I will only tell my friends. I don't really want to go to the hospital. Even though I am sick, I don't dare to stop working. I am afraid that the employer will cut my salary if I am absent from work.*
> ***A 25-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *My last employer paid when I took two days off to rest. But, my current employer says she will not. It depends on the employer.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My friend who works with me at the same house gets dizzy often and has to go outside. She refuses to tell the employer because she is afraid of losing her job.*
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Among the survey respondents who had ever taken a sick day (47.5% or 251 of 528 respondents), nearly thirty percent had their wages docked for the days they were unable to work as a result of their illness (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who ever took a sick day with or without pay by research site

Ever stopped working when sick	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
With pay	64.9% (98)	80.0% (80)	70.9% (178)
Without pay	35.1% (53)	20.0% (20)	29.1% (73)
No. of respondents	**151**	**100**	**251**

The domestic workers whose wages were deducted for taking sick days explained that this occurred most often when they were sick for several days at a time.

> *If I couldn't work for many days, they cut my salary too. They would cut 100 baht a day.*
> ***A 21-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *When I get sick I can rest. But, if I rest for too long, the employer will cut my salary for those days.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *If I am sick, I just buy some medicine and don't tell anyone. Once I was seriously sick for several days so I had to tell the employer. She gave me some medicine, but I had to pay for it. She also cut my pay for the four days I didn't work.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

7.5 Health Information

The women and girls in this study noted that they lacked knowledge of a wide range of health care issues. They also described the limitations they faced in accessing health information, particularly through informal channels of communication with local community members and/or public health workers - the method most frequently used when they were in Burma.

> *When the employers are away, it may be possible to go out. But, at present it is not possible to go anywhere to learn anything.*
> ***A 26-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I never went and joined any health training or lecture. If my employer doesn't take me, I can't go anywhere. I think she won't let me attend any health training. She doesn't like anything that will interfere with my work. She doesn't like anyone she doesn't know to have contact with me.*
> ***A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I cannot talk to public health workers. My friend can't even come to see me. My employer will complain that I am wasting my time and am not interested in earning a living.*
> ***A 27-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand sixteen years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

I have heard about AIDS, but I don't want to show any interest in it, because it is best to just focus on my work so there are not problems. I don't think the employer will let anyone come and talk about it and even if he agrees, I don't have time to listen.

A 35-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The domestic workers that participated in the in-depth interviews explained that it would be helpful for them to get health-related information through written materials in their own language.

If we can get some books or leaflets regarding health, it will be possible for us to learn more. But, I don't think the employer will allow someone to come and talk to me.

A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I never participated in health discussions in Thailand. But, last year books concerning health were delivered to the Shan temple and I got one. I often read it. Sometimes, my friend takes it to read. It is written about the people who came to work in Thailand and talks about AIDS too. The house where I work doesn't like strangers coming around, so it is easy to read this book.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I am afraid no one can come and talk about health issues at this house. Anyway, in this place there is only me. It is not worth anyone's time to come to talk about it. If there is a book about health that would be good, but it must be written in Shan.

A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

However, written materials would not be of use for the women and girls who are illiterate.

In my village when people get sick they just treat themselves with herbal or traditional medicine. If they are really sick and have money, they go to town for treatment. I know nothing about health. When I arrived here, no one told me anything about health. As I am illiterate, I can't read anything either.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the clinic they hand out leaflets, but it is difficult for me to read them. However, I remember some of what the medics told me. If you have sex with others you have to use a condom so that you won't get any disease. But, I forgot what else they said. I listened to what the medics said while I was waiting to immunize my child.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I heard that before you get married to a person you need to get a blood test to prevent infections. That was what we were told at the clinic. When you don't have a blood test and if your spouse has a disease, then you and your children can also get the disease. I just heard about this. I cannot read, so I don't know exactly what is written about these things.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Regarding health problems, I just watch TV or listen to Shan radio. There is a Shan broadcast in Thailand and I try to listen to it often.

A 26-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

7.6 Reproductive Health

Most of the domestic workers interviewed were concerned about birth control and lacked detailed information about the various methods and side effects.

The employer told me not to get pregnant and she asked me to use birth control pills. My husband doesn't like me using the drug. He said, 'You don't know what medicine it is so don't take it.' So, I didn't take it and if I have children I will have to think how to manage.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Before I didn't understand that I could prevent pregnancies. After I had two children, the clinic offered to sterilize me. It is not so convenient for me to work, if I have many children. If I did not get sterilized I would already be pregnant again because my youngest is nearly three years old.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While I was in my village I put a loop in my uterus to stop from getting pregnant. I still had the loop in when I came to work in Mae Sot. The loop was in my uterus for a long time now and when I had my monthly period, my blood smelled very badly. Even though I changed my underwear four to five times each day, it still smelled so bad. I didn't know what to do for the longest time, until I learned of the Mae Tao clinic and went there to ask for help.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After I got married and started using birth control pills, I had terrible headaches and felt dizzy. I don't know if it has anything to do with the pills I bought.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My husband uses condoms, but I got pregnant. Maybe we don't know how to use it the right way or the condom was broken or expired. We don't know.

A 25-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand ten years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several of the domestic workers interviewed for this study sought to abort their pregnancies for a variety of different reasons. All them first chose to use a traditional Burmese or Thai mid-wife and, in almost all the cases, medical complications resulted from the procedures used by these midwives or "birth attendants" as the respondents referred to them.

At present I can't do anything because I just had an abortion and my son is still too young. It is also not easy for me to work. We cannot depend only on my husband's income alone. When my child is so young it is hard to work and then when I found out I was pregnant again I couldn't imagine how we would cope. Therefore, I had to have my

abortion. There is an old Karen woman who will do them and she gave me hot medicine to drink and then massaged my abdomen. Though I had the abortion over a month ago, I still do not feel well. This is my first time I have had an abortion. Some of my friends have had four or five abortions already. When I went for mine there were three other women there also for an abortion. Some women were not married and had had sex with someone and others were like me, married but didn't want more children.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

After I got married, I had an abortion in Burma. The cost depends on how pregnant you are and if the person doing the abortion is an ordinary traditional birth attendant without training or a traditional birth attendant with training. I had a second abortion in Thailand that cost even more, but I went to a trained birth attendant from Burma. It was more expensive but it didn't matter because she was certified and I trusted her. She wrapped some gauze on two long sticks about the size of my index finger and put them into my uterus. The next day those two sticks came out. After the sticks came out drops of blood came down. White mucus also came down. After six days I could not eat any more and my eyes and my lips started to turn black. I couldn't work any more because I felt so tired. I went back to see her and she gave me a kind of hot medicine. After I took that medicine, I vomited blood from my mouth. The woman then told me these symptoms have nothing to do with the abortion and told me I may have tuberculosis or blood cancer, and that I'd better go and have a medical check up at the clinic. She said that if I didn't have my abortion after that she would do it again forme. I went to the clinic and had my blood tested and there was no disease. They tested my urine and said I was still pregnant. Afterwards, I decided not to continue my abortion any more, but others suggested I continue because I had already taken the hot medicine. So, I went back to the woman who did my abortion and she put sticks in my uterus again. The next day the sticks came out like before. So I went to a drug store and told them about what I wanted and what had happened to me. The drug store told me to take some medicine. But, I didn't know what the medicine was. I had to spend 200 baht for six tablets. Only when I took this medicine did my blood come down and I felt better. Now I can return to my work again, but I still don't have much of an appetite.

A 25-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand ten years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was three months pregnant, my mother-in-law made me have an abortion. First, she said that she wanted to feel my pregnancy and massaged my stomach very strongly. After she did like this I had an ache in my womb and I realized that she had performed an abortion. As she massaged, clots of blood came down but the placenta didn't come down. I nearly died it was so painful. When my mother arrived, she found a midwife who could complete the abortion and I felt much better. After the abortion my monthly period was not regular like before. Sometimes I feel cold and I also have anemia.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I didn't want my pregnancy. I did many things to have an abortion. I tried to do hard work. When I was three months pregnant, I fastened five bundles of rice seedling on my waist while I worked and I still didn't have an abortion. I tried to get an abortion in town, but I didn't have any money. Now, my pregnancy is advanced so I had to quit my job and go to stay with my uncle. My uncle likes me and took me as his wife because his wife does not have any children and is old already. As I am pregnant, maybe he wants

my child. He takes care of me, but his wife does not like me. So, I went to stay with my friend in Mae Sot. She has been in Thailand a long time and works as a prostitute. I don't ask her anything. I just know that when someone calls she goes to them. She told me that after I give birth I could go and stay with her. But I am not interested in this kind of job. I am also afraid that I may get a disease. And, I also don't want to get money, eat and depend on her. I have no place to stay and the time is near to deliver my baby. I have no job or money. Even though now I want my baby, I fear that I cannot feed him. After I give birth if there is anyone who wants to adopt my child I will have to give him away.

A 19-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently living in Mae Sot.

The few domestic workers in this study who had given birth in Thailand did so through a traditional mid-wife from Burma, rather than using private or public health care professionals in Thailand.

I gave birth to my child by a traditional mid-wife who is from Burma, but works now in Thailand.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I delivered my children in Thailand using a local midwife. But, now I go to the Mae Tao Clinic to vaccinate and treat my children when they are sick.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

As noted earlier, the women and girls interviewed in Mae Sot explained how useful it was that the Mae Tao clinic provided services in their own language. They also noted that the clinic was extremely helpful in providing reproductive health information.

I didn't know that if I don't want a child, I could use birth control. Before I came to the Mae Tao clinic I did not know anything about these things.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was pregnant and went to enroll myself at the clinic, the nurse asked me whether I ever used birth control or had an abortion. The nurses said that if I want to use birth control I should go and consult them first and they would do it for me. My two older children were born in Rangoon and the two younger ones were born in the Mae Tao clinic. I have never had an abortion and also have never used birth control pills. But, I already have four children and it is hard to manage so I don't want any more.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

One day I told the other domestic worker about my problem with the loop in my uterus and she suggested that I go to the Mae Tao clinic. I didn't know how to get there, so I had to ask the employer to take me in his car. I had to stay overnight at the clinic and have a sterilization. We already have three children and that is more than enough for me. My husband and I wanted to do the sterilization procedure back in Burma but it cost at least 30,000 to 40,000 kyat and we could not afford it. The Mae Tao clinic was able to do it for free, so I agreed. My wound took time to heal and the employer didn't want me to rest, so I decided to quit.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I was at the Mae Tao clinic, I heard about HIV/AIDS in some lectures and reading materials. They told us that there is no medicine to cure this disease and they advised people to have a blood test before they get married.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

7.7 HIV/AIDS

Even the isolation of domestic workers and their limited Thai language skills many of the women and girls interviewed for this study explained that they knew little or nothing about HIV and AIDS.

People say that if you go to Thailand you can get this disease. But, I really don't know how.

A 26-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I've heard about AIDS, but I don't really understand it. If a child is skinny, people say he may have AIDS.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I know nothing about HIV/AIDS, I never heard of it.

A 13-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I heard people talk about the AIDS problem, but I don't know about it actually.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have heard about HIV/AIDS. I think it has nothing to do with me, because I am not a prostitute. I work as a housekeeper, so it doesn't concern me.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Those interviewed who knew something about HIV/AIDS had primarily obtained information of it by word of mouth from those around them.

My employer showed me videos about HIV/AIDS. She said that bad women and men who use drugs get that disease. I don't remember all of the video because it was in Thai. The people I saw looked very terrible. I am afraid of that disease.

A 29-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Yes, my employer told me about AIDS. They spoke in Thai so I didn't understand it all. But, I knew that they were talking about the disease. I also saw it on TV. The employer said there are patients dying from this disease. But, when I was in my village I never heard about people dying from this disease. One of my friends told me that in her village people were dying from AIDS.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't worry about health problems, but I am afraid about AIDS. AIDS is a terrible disease. I heard that if we go and sit in a place where a person who has AIDS sat, we

could get AIDS. That was what some people told me.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer asked us many questions. Did you stay very close to boys? Do you know what a condom is? And, many other questions. She told us that if boys and girls just live together, the disease could not spread to each other. Only if you have sex can the disease spread. The disease cannot be transmitted by mosquitoes. If the blood touches, the disease can spread. That was what she told us.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I heard from a son of my employer about severe diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis. He read about AIDS in newspapers forme. He also explained how to prevent ourselves from this disease. In the same way, he asked me if anyone in my family has such a disease. I said no. We never heard about it except a bit from TV or other people. I don't understand it all and I was not interested in it before, but when he explained it to me the disease is scarier than I thought.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I never heard about the AIDS disease when I was in Burma. I have just heard about it in Thailand, but everyone says something different. So, I don't even really know what it is.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The women and girls in this study who had received four or more years of formal education in Burma had learned about HIV/AIDS in the classroom.

When I was in school they did lectures about HIV/AIDS. I learned about all the details of the disease. Then, in my village there was a couple and they returned from working in Thailand. Later, both of them died of that disease. My aunts told me that in Burma now there are lots of people dying with this disease. Some people got this disease while working here. Some got this disease after returning to their village.

A 20-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I learned about HIV/AIDS when I was in Burma and when I came to Thailand I saw it on TV. My employer says that there are some patients in the hospital dying of AIDS, but I have never seen anyone with the disease.

A 30-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When we were in our fourth year of studies, we were shown a health video about AIDS. We didn't understand it very well, but it made us really very afraid of AIDS. If anyone came from Thailand and looked thin, people didn't dare to speak with them for fear he could be contagious with the disease. People said that we could be infected easily and die because there is no treatment.

A 13-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Other participants interviewed had read about HIV/AIDS when they were in Burma.

I am afraid of HIV/AIDS. I just read about it in books and magazines, but it sounds terrible.

A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I already knew about HIV/AIDS when I was in Burma. I saw it in magazines and movies. But, it wasn't until I came to Thailand that I actually saw people with the disease. There was one girl who was sent out from the brothel near my employer's shop because she was so sick. Everyone said she had AIDS and tried to help her by giving her some food or clothes. Then finally she disappeared. No one knows what happen to her.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Nobody told me about HIV/AIDS. When I was in Burma at a checkpoint along the highway someone distributed some leaflets on HIV/AIDS. As I read the leaflet, it said there is no cure and I became very afraid of this disease.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Finally, several of the women and girls in this study explained that they knew about HIV/AIDS from exposure to those dying of the illness.

My employer was always concerned about my health. Because I stayed far from my boyfriend, the employer was worried he would be unfaithful to me and get AIDS. I was afraid of it too, because I saw people from my village come to work in Thailand and return with AIDS. One man and his wife died just before I left. Everyone in the village was afraid and nobody even dared attend their funerals. As soon as someone dies of AIDS, they are buried right away on the same day and there is no merit making.

A 19-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My friend's husband became addicted to drugs while working on a boat in southern Thailand for one year. He got AIDS and died. A year after he died, my friend died. Their eleven-year-old son is left and everyone is afraid he has the disease too. His grandmother hasn't agreed to take him to the hospital to have his blood checked. But, to this day he is still alive.

A 23-year-old single Tavoyan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have seen many kinds of contagious diseases like tuberculosis and AIDS. My relative died of AIDS. Everyone detested him and didn't dare to go near him. He was asked to live in a small hut way out in the field far from everyone. Nobody looked after him. Even the doctor didn't agree to go and see him. We didn't let anyone else in the village know he was out there and cut off news about him until he died. Twice I went to bring him food and he looked so thin and withered. He was ashamed for his friends and relatives. When I went to see him, his body looked thin and withered. It was very scary. He didn't survive even a year since nobody took care of him.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Along the border there are many people who have AIDS and have already died. I have seen this with my own eyes and I knew many of them. Many are women and the most

recent was my friend. She found out she had AIDS from her husband and went to her mother and asked her to care for her four-year-old child. Her mother agreed to take care of her child, then helped her daughter commit suicide because to die slowly from AIDS would bring so much shame to the family. She died the next morning.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My friend who taught with me in Burma and worked together with me in Thailand didn't want to do the low class work or heavy work and began doing sex work instead. She has a lot of partners and gets a lot of money, but spends it fast too. Now she is very sick and everyone says she has AIDS, but she doesn't care and continues her work without any concern for herself or others. For nearly two years she has also been bringing new girls from Shan State who don't know anything and getting them to work for her in Thailand. The people who know her are afraid of her.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have seen people sick with AIDS or tuberculosis. In my village in Burma, there was a woman who went to work in Bangkok and got the disease. People in the village said that she had many men and it was suitable for her to die. She hid herself in the jungle and didn't come out very often. When she died, there was no news or ceremony.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I know about HIV/AIDS because back in Burma there was a man from the village next to mine who returned from working in Thailand for more than ten years. When he returned home he said his Thai wife and 15-month-old daughter had died of AIDS and that he was HIV positive. He was only 27 years old and a hard worker. He also spoke Thai fluently and everyone liked him. He sent all his money to his parents so we could say that he was a good and obedient person. After that he felt very depressed and went back to Mae Sot. Soon after, we heard that he drank a chemical pesticide and committed suicide. This story was strange for many of us and all of us who came to work in Thailand were warned to be cautious and not to have sexual pleasure with others.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I used to see people with AIDS in our village in Burma. My friend's husband came to work in Thailand and returned with the disease and then gave it to her. She didn't even know that she and her baby had it. She tried to cure her husband every possible way. She sold their land, field and house until there was nothing left. But, he still couldn't be cured. Finally, he died. Then she had only her child left without a place to live or anything to eat. When she went to see a doctor and realized that she and her child had AIDS too, she drank insecticide together with her child and died. But, her child did not die and her relatives must care for him. None of her relatives wanted to take care of this child at all. They are afraid. They built a small hut for the child to stay alone in the garden behind the house. In the night he was afraid and I heard the child cry for his parents, but everyone just left him alone. The child was such a pitiful sight. When he finally died, no one dared to approach the corpse and just burned the child in the hut.

A 36-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Study participants reported having their blood tested during the health exams for their work permit renewal and upon deportation back to Burma. Those interviewed in this study assumed that their blood was being drawn to check their HIV status.

> *To renew my work permit, I had to have a blood test for everything. I am glad to know I passed and don't have AIDS.*
> ***A 20-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I was nervous to get my blood tested, as I know AIDS is becoming so common. I had to have a medical check up to extend my work permit. My employer took me. Afterwards, he told me that I am clean.*
> ***An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I only went to the hospital once and that is when my employer took me there to have the physical check-up necessary for continuing my work permit. I passed and though I was very nervous I am happy to know I don't have any disease.*
> ***A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I was arrested by the Thai police and deported back to Burma. When I got to Burma, the Burmese Red Cross tested everyone's blood, questioned us and gave us booklets about HIV/AIDS to read. I don't know what they do with those they find positive, so I was very afraid.*
> ***A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Those that were tested for HIV (often because their employer demanded it as a prerequisite for hiring them) and those that undertook health check-ups to extend their work permits noted that it was their employer who received and notified them of their test results. It is not clear whether HIV testing was actually conducted during the government-mandated health exam, though most of the study participants assumed it was.

> *We had our blood tested for HIV/AIDS. Everyone spoke in Thai so I didn't understand anything. Later my employer said I have no health problems.*
> ***A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand fourteen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Before the employer would accept me to work in his house I had to have a medical checkup. The employer said that he would not accept anyone with a disease to work for him. The employer said I didn't have any disease, so he gave me a job.*
> ***A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My employer got the results of the health tests and said I am healthy. I am never sick, but I had to do the test to extend my work permit.*
> ***A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *While I was working in Bangkok, my employer asked me to have a blood test. I did and he said I am fine.*
> ***A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

Three domestic workers interviewed for this study were caring for persons dying of AIDS. They expressed their fears and their lack of knowledge in how to protect themselves from contracting the disease.

> *My job was to take care of an elderly man. Five months after I started working, he died of AIDS. I didn't know what to do and was very afraid he would infect me.*
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *My employer often tells me her son has AIDS. I see that he uses drugs a lot and is very skinny. I don't know if he already has AIDS or not and what I should do to protect myself.*
> ***A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *Some of my friends died of AIDS. When they died, they were very skinny. Even my employer's child also had it and just recently died. He often cooked beef and called me to eat with him. In my heart, I was very afraid of being in contact with him. Though I didn't dare to eat with him, I had to eat. But, I ate with fear. He also made me clean his bathroom and wash his clothes, which smelled really bad. Sometimes, there was some blood on his clothing because his body had a lot of boils. I am so afraid of getting his disease. I have never learned much about AIDS, just what I hear from people talking.*
> ***A 33-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

7.8 Conclusion

The lack of basic health care knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS and reproductive health left many of the domestic workers in this study fearful and concerned about their health and that of their families. This was compounded by the lack of access these workers had to public health information. Many of the women and girls in this study reported that their employers refused to let them attend community lectures on health care issues, forbidding them to leave the house. Lack of written materials in their own language was a further hindrance to obtaining information.

Access to basic health care was another formidable obstacle for the domestic workers. Over three-quarters of the employers (78.6%) refused to cover the health care costs of their workers. Given the below minimum wages these women and girls earned, covering their own health costs was a major hardship. Furthermore, many employers deducted wages for any sick days taken. The domestic workers in this study also noted that without a work permit it was extremely difficult to receive health care in public clinics and local hospitals.

The next chapter discusses the problems with drugs, alcohol and gambling among family members that the domestic workers struggled to address within this limited health care environment, including domestic violence.

Chapter Eight :

Addiction and Domestic Violence

8.1 Introduction

Although none of the domestic workers themselves reported using or being addicted to any drugs, they frequently spoke of the impact of drug addiction in their lives and on their families. Addiction was not explored in the survey conducted for this study, however, during the in-depth interviews it emerged as an issue impacting the lives of domestic workers, who described the easy availability, frequent use and selling of drugs both in Burma and Thailand. Amphetamines were the most common drug used in Thailand, according to the study participants. Many of those interviewed explained that migrants working in factories or construction sites often began using the drug to work harder and longer hours. In some instances, the employer provided the drug. Finally, the women and girls in this study described the impact on their own lives of drug use among family members.

Spouse abuse and abandonment was experienced by many domestic workers interviewed in this study. While the research survey explored family abuses (as discussed in Chapter Three), it did not distinguish who in the family were the perpetrators or where the abuse took place. This chapter presents data revealed during the in-depth interviews on domestic violence by spouses of the domestic workers living in Thailand and its affect on these women and girls.

8.2 Drugs

The availability of opium and heroine in Burma was reported as common by the study participants.

> *I know a lot about drugs because many people smoked opium in my village. Most of the drug addicts were the young men. After the Burmese soldiers forced all the villagers to move to town, I heard that many people went back to cultivate it.*
> ***A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

I heard about drugs very often. In Burma, some people were even employed to work the opium fields, including me. I was employed to collect opium for 500 kyat a day.
A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

It is not surprising then to note the extent of drug addiction frequently discussed in interviews with the women and girls from Burma.

There were so many people smoking opium in Burma. Some people were still young men who had already become drug addicts. Some people had to sell their rice field to buy it. I often saw both women and men smoke it, but I tried never to look while they did it.
A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I saw the old man around my house lie down and have one lamp and a tobacco pipe. He lied down and smoked it happily. I asked my mother and she told me that he smoked heroine. Around our villages, the old people liked smoking it.
A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I know a lot about drug addiction. When I stayed at home in Shan State, my husband was a drug addict. That is why I had to run away to Thailand. Now, I stay in Thailand and I often hear about young people addicted to drugs here also.
A 25-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Almost all the villagers were addicted to opium where I grew up. My elder brother and his wife were also addicted, as were their children. They have all died. Almost a whole generation was addicted to opium.
A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

There were so many drug addicts in my country. I just tried not to get involved. After arriving in Thailand, I often heard about 'yaba' (amphetamines). But, I don't know what it looks like or how people take it.
A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

In Thailand, domestic workers reported easy access and addiction to amphetamines, referred to as yaba in Thai (translated from Thai as the "crazy drug").

Since I came to the Thai border I see so many people addicted to 'yaba'. There are drugs everywhere if you want them.
A 23-year-old widowed Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In Shan State, many people are addicted to opium. In Thailand, it is 'yaba' that is so common. The people who are addicted to drugs are mostly young people and heads of households. The people who are addicted are both rich and poor.
A 20-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have known many drug addicts in Thailand. Most are men over 30 years old and young teenagers. Most teenagers, they put 'yaba' in a cigarette and smoke it.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The drug that is most common now is 'yaba'. The young people and even school children each pitch in a few baht to buy one pill that only costs about 15 or 20 baht. It is sold everywhere and easy to buy.

A 14-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

In Burma, many people I saw were addicted to opium. But here in Thailand, most of the young are addicted to 'yaba'. They say that when they take 'yaba' they don't feel tired to work. Some addicts are only 14 or15years old.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The women and girls interviewed spoke not only of the easy availability of drugs, but also the ease and openness with which drugs were distributed.

I have seen all kinds of drug addicts. Those that smoke opium, inject heroine and smoke 'yaba'. I have seen everything with my eyes. The drug traders never hide, but sell it right in front of my house and on the street for whoever wants it.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My husband drank alcohol, gambled and ate 'yaba'. It was easy to do all these things because no one cares. Even 'yaba' is sold openly. Nobody can do anything against them, because the police are working with them.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

In our country, there were so many drug traffickers. If they only traded and didn't eat it they could make money from it. But, if they ate the drug they would be poor for sure.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The drug traders sell openly. If the police capture them, they are released soon afterwards. They have an agreement with the police. Therefore, those who sell drugs are not afraid of anyone.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Two of the domestic workers interviewed in this study explained that their employers sold amphetamines and it was their job to handle the transactions or to conceal the drug.

The house owners are relatives of the Thai police. My employer's shop also sells 'yaba'. I think the police are also involved because there has never been a crackdown on this shop and it seems everyone knows about it. When the customers come, I am the main sales person to sell the drug. I sold three tablets of 'yaba' for 100 baht. I worked there for six months and got only 500 baht a month even though I sold thousands of baht worth of 'yaba' each month.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I was still very young and first worked as a domestic worker, the employer sold drugs. When the authorities were coming to check, they gave it to me to hold on to. As I was still a child, they didn't check me.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

8.3 Work Place-Related Addictions

In Thailand, **many** of those addicted to amphetamines began taking it, so that they could work harder and longer hours.

I saw many of the construction workers take 'yaba' so they could work long hours. Some workers mixed a pill in their drinking water each day. Some workers got addicted and went crazy. It was really scary. But when they worked, they worked very hard and could carry the cement easily as if it was not heavy at all. Some women ate it too. Mostly, the women were not addicted because they were careful to only take it when they were very tired.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Those who transport goods from Bangkok and distribute to other places and those who do heavy jobs use this drug. In the end, the money that they work so hard for is not even enough to pay for their drugs and their life is only about getting drugs.

A 28-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Several domestic workers interviewed noted how employers in factories and construction sites distributed amphetamines to their workers for the same purpose as mentioned above - to make them work faster and for longer periods of time.

I saw many people using drugs, mostly men between 20 and 40 years old. Most of them first got the drugs from their employers in order to work harder. Later, they were addicted and had to buy the drug themselves. In the end, the employers had two sources of income, but for the workers their lives and their families had so many problems.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I worked in a factory in Mae Sot, the employer put a little drug in the drinking water. She told the workers she put a little drug in the drinking water so you will not feel sleepy and can finish more work. She also warned those who have heart disease not to drink it. The workers who drank the water could work throughout the whole day and the whole night without resting or sleeping. But, I didn't drink the water. I worked only what I could and tried to find a different job.

A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Domestic workers in this study also reported problems with drug addiction within the household families where they worked as well as being exposed to the buying and selling of drugs.

The boy who lives in this house is using drugs. He does not speak to me and I try to stay away from him.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer's son uses drugs. He just stays in his room. I never go to his room. My lady employer also does not make me go to his room. He also does not want any body to go into his room. I just try to ignore him.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While I was doing the cleaning in the factory, near the dormitory I found a packet often 'yaba' tablets. I was afraid and put it into a bag and cast them out into the garbage bin as fast as possible. I feared that I may become a person who was involved. I know that several factory workers use drugs and I don't want to have anything to do with it.

A 26-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

8.4 Addiction in the Domestic Workers' Own Families

As noted in Chapter Three, a number of the survey respondents reported family problems in Burma that were the result of drug addiction. The women and girls that participated in the in-depth interviews described these problems in greater detail.

The most terrible thing is since my grandfather has been addicted to drugs, there has been no happiness in our family. When he had money, he would buy drugs. When he didn't have money, he stole things in the house and even sold my grandmother's new clothes. He even sold the Buddha image and the valuable things kept in the cupboard. Then he started buying things on credit at the shops and sold it cheaply elsewhere. The shopkeepers came and asked our family for the payments. It made a lot of trouble. The children became very embarrassed and went out of the village to work in other provinces. The villagers said that if they could arrest him, they would kill him. We probably have to let him face his fate.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My brother is a drug addict. He and his friends used drugs for a long time before my father knew about it. By the time my father realized, by brother had already become addicted. Now, my sister-in-law and their children suffer a lot, as do my parents. There were so many drug addicts in our country.

A 13-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight ago years currently working in Chiang Mai.

My younger brother went to work in the jade mine in Kachin State and became addicted to drugs there. He was only 19 years old. It has ruined our family and made my mother's life so difficult until she died.

A 29-year-old married Kachin female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My uncle taught my brother how to use 'yaba'. These drugs are produced at the Thai border and they can get it easily (in Burma).

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When my brother came to Thailand he started using drugs at the factory. Then, he lost his job and started wandering around looking for drugs. Now, my brother is lost and we don't know if he is still alive or has died.

A 25-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand ten years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Several of the domestic workers interviewed described their husbands' addiction to drugs and the impact it has had on their lives.

My husband became a drug addict when he was only 29 years old. I left him to come work here and don't go anywhere or see anyone. It is good to be away from the drug addicts.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I got married to a Shan man when I was 18 years old and we had two children. He was also a farmer. We were married for nine years and just divorced last year. Actually, I didn't want to divorce, but my children and I were slaves to my husband's drug addiction. We cannot live like this, so now I am working to support my children so they can go to school.

A 27-year-old divorced Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

My first husband did a lot of drugs and gambled. He stole from me and would do anything for his habits. When he had drugs he was in a good mood, but when he didn't have it he wanted to kill. It was so horrible.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My husband is addicted to 'yaba'. No matter how much money I earn he uses it up. In addition, he has a lot of debt, which I have to repay for him. When he uses drugs he beats our child. I have had to quit my job to take care of our child. I have tried to separate from him, but then he tries to stop taking drugs and become a good person. Then it starts all over again.

A 22-year-old married Pa-O female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

A few of those interviewed reported that their husbands were addicted to alcohol or gambling. However, according to the frequency of responses in this study these addictions seemed to be less common than drug-related problems.

My husband loves to gamble and when there was a funeral in the village he would disappear for days at a time. We didn't even see his shadow.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Although we don't have children, we cannot save our money because my husband drinks it all. He says he feels exhausted working and so he drinks. Even though I work hard and am very tired I never think of drinking. I try hard not to get in debt. I have never asked for money from my mother, but at the same time I am notable to send money to my parents either.

A 30-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

8.5 Domestic Violence

Over two thirds (69.1%) of the women and girls interviewed in this study reported incidents of domestic violence. During the in-depth interviews, many participants described the violence within the context of their partners' addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling.

After working in the shop that sold 'yaba' for more than one year one of the customers abducted me to be his wife. Although the employer knew, he said nothing. So I had to get married at that time. It was a terrible life. When I did things, which were against his desire he always beat me. He always raped me also. As I could not tolerate it I would try to get help from the employer but my husband always pulled me back. The employer did not dare to accept me because of him. Moreover, he was also a regular customer for 'yaba', so the employer may have feared losing him as a customer. After taking the drug, his eyes seemed like a crazy person. I was so scared of him I didn't even dare to run away. Finally, he died and I was free.

A 19-year-old widowed Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My husband drinks and gambles. He gave me no money except 500 baht for the house rent only. I have to earn everything for the survival of our family. And, what is worse is when he is drunk he also beats me and the children. I am afraid of him when he drinks, but when he doesn't he is very kind, especially to the children.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My father is a drug addict. He also drinks and gambles. When he loses, he beats my mother and often tries to sell us to work for others.

A 14-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My husband gambles and so I have to struggle alone for my family. Sometimes on the day he gets paid he goes to drink with his friends, then he comes home and finds fault with me. He suspects me of being with other men and it makes him crazy.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My husband drank, used drugs and gambled. Moreover, he also ate sex medicine. I was patient and stayed with him until my son was one year old. But, he would always beat me when he ran out of money. He would often take our son to threaten me. Finally, I ran away from him and stayed with my sister. Now I leave my son at my sister's and ask her to look after him, because I have to work and can't look after him by myself. I am afraid my husband will find me or my son and make trouble again.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I am staying with my sister and her husband, who drinks and gambles. When he wins, there is no problem but when he loses problems arise in the house. Moreover my sister is a minor wife and her husband bullies her. Since there is no harmony in the house, I also don't feel happy.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Many domestic workers interviewed described how they and their children were abandoned by their spouses. Although this reality was not described in the context of addiction, it gives insight into the vulnerability of women in marriage and the difficulties they face in trying to confront family problems.

When I had my first child and my husband left me, people looked down on me. Other boys tried to come and sleep with me. I had so many troubles and cried all the time. But as I thought about my child's future, I tried to get control of myself. Finally, I married again to avoid so much criticism. But my second husband was so narrow-minded and caused me even more trouble. It is as though I cannot escape. I am looked down upon and harassed if I don't have a husband and with him I face other kinds of troubles. There is no future for me, but to try to survive like this.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Two weeks after I delivered my child, my husband left me and never came back. Now I have a small baby and no one to support me. I cannot go back to work with my employer because she will not accept me to work in her house with a small baby. I am ashamed to go back to my family with a child and no husband. I would like to give my child to someone else to raise because I cannot raise the child by myself.

A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When we first got married, I took birth control medicines. But, then my husband had another girlfriend and I thought that if I had a child he wouldn't abandon me. Now my child is one year old and my life is even more difficult than before. I have to depend on my husband because I cannot work, but he doesn't want our family any more.

A 21-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

While I went out to the market, I was arrested and deported back to Burma. At that time I was two months pregnant. I was sent back to Burma and lost contact with my husband. So, I returned home pregnant without a husband. My family was ashamed of me. So, I returned to Thailand. Now, I am about to deliver and I cannot work. I have to sleep in the corridor of the clinic waiting to deliver.

A 21-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I became pregnant, the father of the child left me and now I have no money and am about to deliver. A Thai woman offered to adopt my child and give me 3,000 baht. I just found out that I am HIV positive and cannot feed my own milk to the baby, so I will have to buy powdered milk. But, I don't even have money to buy enough to eat now. I will never be able to afford to buy powdered milk, but this Thai woman has money so she can afford to raise my child. The nurses at the Mae Tao clinic said that if I want to keep the child, I can stay at their center until I am ready to return to work. But, how can I work if I have a child? I don't have a future and the father is not going to help, I will just try to do what is best for the child.

A 21-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand seventeen years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

8.6 Conclusion

Drug addiction (and in some cases addiction to alcohol and gambling) among family members as well as within households where the domestic workers were employed profoundly impacted the lives of the women and girls in this study. Significantly, a large number of study participants reported incidents of domestic abuse, largely resultant of their spouses' addiction. The prevalent availability and distribution of drugs, particularly of amphetamines in Thailand, was of major concern to the study participants, who also noted employer and police complicity in the drug trade.

The next chapter discusses the plans and hopes these women and girls have for their future.

Chapter Nine :
Future Aspirations

9.1 Introduction

In discussing their future aspirations, the overwhelming focus among the domestic workers in this study was on saving money to support their families. Quite a number of the women and girls explained that they also wanted to save money to obtain sufficient investment capital for establishing a small business back in Burma. Most of the study participants sought to send money home and tried not to keep a lot of their savings with them. Many of the girls and women expressed a strong feeling of obligation and responsibility towards providing financial support to their parents and siblings. A number of study participants also spoke about the hope of providing a better life and education for their children.

A number of the domestic workers expressed plans for their future that entailed returning home permanently to Burma, while others explained they only wanted to visit temporarily. A significant number noted that they would not return until the political and military conflicts in Burma are resolved. Those considering returning home discussed the physical difficulties in getting back home safely as well as the problems associated with confronting the strong judgments made of those who have been to Thailand, especially of those returning without savings or with a fatherless child.

Others interviewed discussed their aspirations for finding safer working environments or better paying jobs. Several domestic workers interviewed described wanting to further their studies and their unwillingness to marry in their present circumstances, if at all. Some of the women and girls could not imagine their future and expressed how dejected they felt with their life, not being able to see themselves ever overcoming the obstacles they face.

9.2 Saving Money

The majority of domestic workers interviewed explained that their focus was on saving money in an attempt to secure their future.

> *I will work for five years in Mae Sot. By that time, I can save enough money to go home to dress and eat like others.*
>
> ***A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I will go back and stay with my parents only after I have saved some money. I am not comfortable staying in this country and I don't want to work as another's employee either. If I can save some money, I will go back and stay at home.*
>
> ***An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *I will continue working in Thailand until I can save money to send home. I don't know how long I have to work in this country. I hope it is not long. When I can afford a house and land to farm, I would like to go back and stay in Burma. I want to stay and work together with my parents.*
>
> ***A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *I can't say how long I will stay in Thailand. Now, I already have farmland and a house (back in Burma). I worked in Thailand for four years and it is a long time. But, some people in my village have worked here for more than ten years. When I go home I want to bring money with me. My parents bought rice fields for me with the money I sent. They also use it. When I deduct some for what I will use each month I can save 1,500 baht. It is a good income, so I shouldn't quit this job too soon.*
>
> ***A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.***

> *When I came to Thailand, I thought I would stay for two years only. If I could save some money, I would definitely go back. But, it has been six years already and I don't have any money because now I have a family. The longer my life is the more trouble I have. When I look ahead, it looks even more terrible. If everything is not better, I will probably take my son to go back and stay with my parents. Even if we don't have enough to eat for some meals, at least we are in our own home.*
>
> ***A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.***

> *Now, I don't want to go back yet, because I have no money to bring with me. At least I have to have enough money to cover the traveling costs and the gold that I had sold to come to Thailand. My parents are getting older, so I want to go within this year too. If I can save some money and go back this time, I won't come back to Thailand again.*
>
> ***A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.***

Quite a few of the domestic workers interviewed aspired to save money as capital to invest in a business of their own back in Burma.

> *When I send money home, I don't send it all. I keep some in my hands. I will take it home when I go back and open a shop. If my relatives don't look after me it is no problem. Although I have supported them so much, I don't expect them to look after me.*

My mother worries that since I did not get married, after she passes away I might get into trouble. But, if I have money I am not worried, although I have not saved much money yet. I won't go back and stay permanently in my village until I have a way to make a living there.

A 30-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have learned some new skills here and I would like to have enough money to invest in a small business. I learned how to make tofu, bean milk and dough sticks. If I go back to Burma to do these things I think it will be a good business. But, I need three kinds of machines to split, grind and drain the soybeans. When I have enough money to invest, I will go back and live from my business.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I want to open a bookshop. The money I send back to my parents now they use for their health care and save the rest. When I have enough savings I will go back and open my bookshop and also read more.

A 22-year-old single Mon female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If I can get enough money, I want to learn sewing and open a tailoring shop somewhere in Rangoon. But, in Rangoon to get a shop and buy cloth and fabric is very expensive. I will have to try and save a lot of money to make this possible, but that is my intention.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I would like to have a small restaurant of my own. If I have some amount of money, I want to go back and open a restaurant. I like to cook and sell food. But, I need to save my money for this dream.

A 19-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

The job I want to do is to collect vegetables from farmers and deliver it to the vendors. But, I need to save some money to start this business and for now I cannot even get enough to eat and care for my children when they are sick. Now, I am in debt and I cannot get a permanent job, as I have nowhere to send the children while I work. So, I just do part time and temporary work which is just enough for each day and doesn't allow me to save anything for emergencies or the future.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In addition to saving money for their future, many of the women and girls interviewed described feelings of responsibility towards supporting their parents and siblings.

I send home money once e very two or three months. The money does not stay in my hands long. I have to worry about my parents and my younger brothers who remain in Burma. It is hard for them to find money there. My parents and my four younger brothers are working on the farm. If they can invest the money we send and expand the farm, then I can go home and live comfortably with them.

A 20-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Now I can send money home to cure my blind mother. My family depends on my support. It is very difficult to find money in Burma, but I can earn money here and send it home so my sisters can take care of my mother.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Since I came to Thailand, I have paid off all my debts. I will continue to earn money for myself and my family. As I haven't received my salary as yet, I can't send money home. But, I hope this job will work out since I don't want to move to another employer.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

This year I paid for my younger brother's ceremony for becoming a monk. My mother was able to make her offerings as she wished. I have already done what I have planned to do this year. But, there will be different family responsibilities every year.

A 23-year-old single Shan-Burman female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

A number of the domestic workers described their future in terms of a better life and education for their children.

I plan to stay in Thailand for three years. I want to save enough money to return home and stay with my children. If I can save some money, I will go back and work in my country. But, I must be confident that my children will have enough to eat.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

When my children's health is better, I will send them back to my parents in Burma. I can't work very much now because they are often sick. If your children are in Burma and you don't have money you can't get any health care. I want to go back and stay with my parents. I will try hard to save some money and when my children's health is better I will go home.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I want to support my two daughters in school until they pass their fourth year of school. If they pass they will be able to read and write and I will be satisfied. Then, others can't cheat them easily. But, then there is my son who hasn't even started school yet.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't know what I am going to do in the future. I just want to stay with my children. I want them to eat good food and to study. That is why I must continue to work and be apart from them.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

9.3 Sending Money Home

As has been noted throughout this report, the majority of domestic workers migrated to Thailand in order to earn money to send home to their families and relatives in Burma. Among the survey respondents, 76.7percent (405 of 528 respondents) reported sending part of their earnings back home (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents that sent money home by research site

Sent money home	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Yes	69.4% (168)	82.9% (237)	76.7% (405)
No	28.1% (68)	17.1% (49)	22.2% (117)
No response	2.5% (6)	-	1.1% (6)
No. of respondents	**242**	**286**	**528**

The women and girls in this study used a number of different means to send money home. The majority of survey respondents (60.7%) sent money through a friend or relative returning to their village in Burma, while another 31.4 percent sent the money themselves (often by meeting a relative at the border and handing the cash over directly). Approximately 28 percent reported sending money home via a broker, while 15.2 percent chose to use a money transfer outlet to transmit money to Burma, with 9.1 percent using a bank to transfer their funds (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2 Percentage distribution and number of survey respondents who sent money home by method of transferring funds and research site*

Method of sending money home	Research Site		Total
	Chiang Mai	Mae Sot	
Send with a friend	72.4% (123)	52.3% (124)	60.7% (247)
Send yourself	39.4% (67)	25.7% (61)	31.4% (128)
Send through a broker	2.9% (5)	46.8% **(111)**	28.5% (116)
Send through a shop	24.7% (42)	8.4% (20)	15.2% (62)
Send through a bank	10.6% (18)	8.0% (19)	9.1% (37)
Other	1.2% (2)	5.5% (13)	3.7% (15)
No. of respondents	**168**	**237**	**405**

Note: Respondents were allowed more than one response so the percentage distribution is equal to the number of participants who reported each answer based on the total number of respondents. Therefore, the total percentages do not add up to 100 percent and the numbers in parentheses when combined are greater than the total number of respondents.

Many of the women and girls interviewed described problems finding a safe way to send money home.

I kept my money and didn't have a chance to send any home. I want to send money to my mother and also buy some gold for her. I intend to send it back to her, but others tell

me not to trust anyone to bring it to her. Therefore, I have had no chance to send her anything. My best friend is going home soon and I may send money for my mother with her.

A 16-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

My mother comes to the border every month or two to collect the money I have saved. Now, my mother bought a house and is planning to start a business.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I contact the man I came to Thailand with, because he goes back often and knows where my family lives. I am afraid the money will get lost, but I don't know any other way to send it home. The travel costs from my village to Thailand are very high so it is not possible to go or ask my family to come here.

A 34-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

The carrier who brought me to work in Bangkok cheated me by telling me my family needed 10,000 baht. My friends told me not to believe her, but I trusted her and asked for an advance from my employer. I sent her the money and have no contact with my family to know if they ever received the money. I think in the end she actually tricked me, as I have never heard from her again. Also, when I left for Thailand I didn't tell my family so they don't actually know where I am.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

9.4 Returning Home

A broad spectrum of responses emerged during the in-depth interviews when the domestic workers were asked about their aspirations of returning home. The study's survey did not address future aspirations but during the in-depth interviews participants discussed a wide range of perspectives and plans regarding their future. The responses ranged from hoping to go back permanently to Burma to wishing to visit temporarily, to expecting never to return.

Of those who envisioned returning home permanently to Burma, many had children that they left behind there when migrating to Thailand.

I don't want to stay in Thailand any more and intend to go to see my children this year. I will check out the situation and if I can work there, I will stay with them in Shan State. If the situation is still so bad, then I will come back and work in Thailand because I already have a work permit. If it is possible, I want to stay with my children and support them to study as best I can.

A 29-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

During the Water Festival time, I intend to go home and not come back to Thailand. I have to save money and only have three more months to work. During the Water Festival, I will go back and help my father. After that I have decided to find a job in Rangoon.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I think I will go back with someone I know next month. I really miss my parents and siblings. I have bought some gold to give them because it is too difficult to travel with money. I don't want to return to work in Thailand. The salary is so little and after working here for three years, they have never increased it even though I work without any holidays and never left the house.

A 31-year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I worked for three years in Thailand and saved enough money. I will go back to my village for the Water Festival and I do not intend to come back. I have to take care of my mother until she gets better. Now, my home in Burma is quite well equipped. While taking care of my mother I will help my brothers and sisters do the farm work. I don't want to open a shop and sell things, because in my village there are too many shops. We don't have electricity in my village but if my brothers want to buy a generator and open a video theatre, I will support them.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Other women and girls interviewed hoped to return home for a temporary visit and spoke of the conditions that determined their ability to do so.

It will soon be the Water Festival and I want to go back home and present gifts in respect and gratitude to my parents and the elderly people in my village. The round trip to go and come back again will cost me a lot. As I could not save so much money, I have to control my desire not to go back. So, although I would like to go back to visit, I cannot go.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I cannot decide when to go back to my country. When I was single, I could go back anytime I wanted. But, now I am married and have to consult with my husband. I intend to request from the employer to let us go home and pay homage to our parents. But, we haven't decided to go back permanently. When we go back to our village we have to do the farm work, but my husband doesn't want to do farm work anymore.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Others interviewed explained that if they could go home for a visit, they would return to work in Thailand after a short period of time.

I will go back to Burma for the Water Festival. I may return, I cannot say yet because I don't know the situation at home. But, if I am away from here for a long time my employer will find a new person. My employer is very kind and it will not be easy to find another as good as this one.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have contact with my parents and children in Burma through friends and acquaintances who go back and forth. During the Water Festival, I intend to bring money home myself and see my children. However, I cannot stay as I get regular income from this job and need to save money for my children's future.

A 30-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand eleven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

This coming summer we will go back to our village for a while. My husband's father died so we will go back and make offerings to him. As long as the employer accepts me to work I will continue working here. We don't have a house, farm or garden of our own yet. At present, with all our earnings we can only live with enough to eat, so I think I have to stay working in Thailand for a long time.

A 28-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I will go back and stay with my mother for a while. I will ask my mother to send my youngest brother to the nearby town to study. Then, I will take my younger sister with me to work in Thailand. Together with me, we can send much more money home.

A 31 -year-old single Karenni female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My present employer allows me to go back for a short visit to my village. I feel they understand my situation and going back for a short visit is good for now.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Unless the situation in Burma is better, I will continue to work here. As I am not fully educated, I have to do this kind of work for others. If I can save what I get and send it to my parents that is quite enough.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the future, I would like to go home to visit my relatives. But, I will come back and stay in Thailand. I don't think of staying in Burma, because it is very difficult to earn a living. When our country is not so difficult, I will go back and certainly stay.

A 22-year-old married Pa-O female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Many of the women and girls interviewed indicated that they would not go back to Burma due to the abuses they suffered and the ongoing political and military conflict. As no in Chapter Three, the majority of the individuals that fled military conflict and abusive practices by Burmese authorities were from Shan State.

I don't know where I would go back to because all my relatives were forced to move by the Burmese military. I don't have a house any longer. If I could go home I would go immediately. Thailand is not my home and I have to hide myself all the time because the Thai government doesn't accept us. If our country was peaceful like before, I would go back now.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

When I came, I had to decide whether it would be better to be a Burmese dog or another country's dog. I really think like that. The Burmese made all the families move from place to place. We could not survive. At least in Thailand, we can stay a bit more stable and our people do not have to fear being wiped out. So, I will stay in Thailand.

A 34-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

If I can work on my family's farm and survive without having to pay all the taxes, I will go back. Working on the farm makes me happy and everyone is considerate of others' feelings.

A 22-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I have to find a way to survive in Thailand only, because I don't have anywhere else to go. My family and relatives were all scattered when the Burmese army relocated our village. I don't want to be a slave for others, but I don't see any other option.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

I won't go back to Burma again until it is a democratic country. Only then will I go back. I will not let my parents, brothers and sisters go back. I fear they also could face a lot of danger.

A 22-year-old single Tavoyan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I don't know why I would go back or who I would visit because all my relatives were forced to move. I don't have my house any longer. The Burmese army has occupied it. So, where can I go back to?

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

As was noted in Chapter Three, a few of the study participants left Burma to flee family problems and consequently do not envision themselves returning.

If I have money, I will send it to my mother. But I think I won't go back and stay with her anymore. She has another husband and likes to gamble. I feel shy of other people and don't feel like going back.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

My family is scattered and I have not had contact with them for many years. It seems to me that Burma does not belong to me. I have no village to go back to and stay, so I will manage to live and make the best of my life here.

A 22-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand twenty-one years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

9.5 The Journey Home

The decision to return home was considered the first, easy step for most of the study participants. Yet, many described various problems and fears associated with making the actual journey back home.

In some cases, the girls and women interviewed simply did not know how to get back to their village or town.

The carrier brought me to this job four months ago and has never come again. I also haven't had contact with my cousins who are in Thailand. I have no idea how to go home. I just wait for my cousins to come and call me to go home.

A 13-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand less than a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If the man who brought me to Thailand doesn't send me back, I cannot go home. I have no idea how to get home and don't dare to try to go by myself. So, I don't know how long I will stay and work here. I have no news of my family and don't know if they are okay or not. They also do not know what happen to me. Sometimes, I want to go back to my village very much. Even though my parents have nothing, I would like to stay together with them. I would also like to tell them what I am suffering and feeling. But, I also don't want to return home without any money. It will not be good, so I must try my best.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I can only go back when my father does. I would like to go back and stay in my own country where I was born. Here, we have to live in fear all the time. We are illegal and cannot speak their language. Recently, when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released my father even mentioned that we would go home. I thought that I will have a chance to go home so I felt very happy. But, he has said nothing more. For me I would like to go back, but I don't know how to go back by myself.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In other cases, the journey home entailed stressful encounters with the authorities. A number of the women and girls in this study reported that the Thai police arrested and deported them as they tried to make their way home. Others reported being arrested, having their savings and valuables confiscated and then being released.

As I was trying to get home the police caught me without any documentation. The police took away all my savings and then released me. Then they arrested me again at the next checkpoint. The police took all of us from the bus that had no documents and put us on a truck. We were sent to the border where there was an open field. They took us down from the bus and inspected our baggage and then returned us to Burma by a jungle path and I didn't know what places I passed through. Only when I arrived to Burma, I met two women who offered to find me a job back in Thailand. I went with them because I had no money to continue my journey home. After two years of savings I had nothing and had to start all over again.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I worked in Bangkok for two years and when I tried to return home, I was arrested. The police officer said he needed someone to do the housework in his home. He said if I agreed to work in his house, he would not keep me in a "lock-up, "so I agreed, though I was afraid.

A 25-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The employer sent me back to Burma by bus. There was another person from Burma on the same bus. On the way the police asked whether we were Burmese and when we said yes they took us off the bus. They said we had to pay them 500 baht each. I said we didn't have it. Then they asked to see our wallets. I had heard these searches happened before I came back so I had folded my 1,000 and 500 baht bank notes into small pieces and put them into my jean pockets. In my wallet I only put in 100, 20 and 10 baht notes. So, when he saw my wallet he just took three 100 baht notes. Then, they stopped a car and told us to get in saying they would take us to the bus station. That car dropped us off somewhere but it wasn't the bus station. Then we talked to one Chinese

man who said he would take us to the next town. There we found a three wheeler motorcycle and he said he would take us to the border. He started going off the road through the bushes so we were very frightened, but later we arrived at a girl's dormitory and a school. We spent the night there and in the morning the teacher made contact with the Thai authorities who sent us back to Mae Sot. But, we didn't have any idea how to get back home, so we each found a job there. I still have not been able to return home.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I tried to return home, I was stopped at a checkpoint and arrested. The police said that if I could not pay 5,000 baht, which I couldn't, I would have to join the others and be sent to the immigration office at Mae Tao. They took photographs and video pictures. There were more than 200 people from Burma there who had also been arrested. We were all deported across the Mae Sot-Myawaddy Bridge where an elderly woman asked me whether I had any acquaintance in Myawaddy. I said no. She said that if you don't, there would be lots of questions. So, she told me to follow her. I had to pay her 3,000 kyat and she took me to the town nearest my village. By that time, I had only 2,000 kyat left from all I had saved.

A 22-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Many described how important it was for them to return home with savings, especially for those who came to Thailand without their family's permission.

I have to save some money. If I have money, I want to go back next year. I don't want to go back yet as I ran away from home. If I go now with no money, people will say it serves me right for leaving.

A 13-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

If I go back, I am afraid my parents won't forgive me for running away to Thailand. I don't want to keep living here, but I cannot go back empty handed either.

A 17-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Now, I really want to go home, because I ran away to come to Thailand and my mother even cried. Also, if I go back, I don't have any friends. But, if I stay in Thailand I have to work hard and feel small. If I am sick, nobody will take care of me. If I have more money, I will go back home. In reality, I just want to stay with my mother. I don't want to be in this country.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Once back home, a number of the women and girls described the difficulties of returning to and reintegrating into their family and village.

When we return to our village from Thailand, we have to stay simple so no one will say anything. But, if we go back wearing pants and skirts and live different than others, people will be critical of us. If you return without any money, people will also look down on you. But, if you bring back too much money they believe you got the money

dishonestly, so you have to be wise in how you return. But, I have saved nothing, so how can I return?

A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

Even teachers and other government employees come to work in Thailand. There are only a few people left in my village or the neighboring villages. If you can send back money people will have high regard for you and more people will follow you to Thailand.

A 30-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

There are some people who talk bad about those who go to Thailand. But I don't care. People often criticize those who are poor and are jealous of those with money. If you have money, people will respect you. I think it is important to be a good person. So, whatever people say I don't care. I try to be a good person, work hard and support my mother. Among those who come and work in Thailand, there are good people as well as bad. Those who want to criticize me can.

A 16-year-old single Tamel female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While describing the attitudes projected on them when returning home, many al described similar stereotypes of others that had gone to Thailand to work.

In my village there is at least one person from every house working in Thailand. Some brought their entire family. Only the elderly remain in the village. Why should they have alow opinion of us? Recently, a woman from Rangoon came begging for money in front of our shop here in Thailand. We were told that this woman was trafficked to a bad place. She escaped from that place and since then she has had no money to return to Burma, so she was begging for her traveling costs. These kinds of people usually believe easily what they are told and desire money too much. They don't want to do the job where they get less money. But, some are too young to be aware of this danger. If you know what can happen to you and avoid it, there is no danger.

A 20-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In my village, there are many people who work in Thailand. I always see people from my village in Thailand. People know who is doing what and how they live. People in my village constantly get information about those who come and are working in Thailand. They know who is doing what and they disapprove of those doing bad things.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If women from my village come to Thailand they are often criticized. If they bring back a lot of money people say that they got the money by doing bad things. Some were said to have had sex with their boy friends and didn't get married, but came back with a child. These kinds of people were looked down upon. You cannot trust every male or female who comes and works here. Most of them will not be a true virgin or bachelor, especially among those who work in the factories. There are many kinds of people; some are good and others bad.

A 17-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

People in my village will judge others according to the work they are doing. For those who come to Thailand, it is important to take control of oneself. If you only want to get more money and to get into a life of prostitution, it is not acceptable. Before when I was young, people criticized all girls who came to work in Thailand. But, these women have returned from working in appropriate places and there are no longer many words of judgment against them. Those who brought back a lot of money were held in high regard. But, whoever came back without money was looked down on. Anyway, everyone is working in Thailand to better their future, so we don't have time to think about others.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

9.6 Improving Their Situation in Thailand

A number of the domestic workers interviewed talked of future plans to improve their current situation. For several, this revolved around finding safer working environments. For others, it included finding employment with higher wages and better working conditions.

I want to go and work in a factory. I think I will have lots of friends and if something happens everyone will know. I will also be able to rest more.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I only want to do housework because I think it is safer than most jobs. But, I would like to get better pay than my current job.

A 15-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand a year ago currently working in Mae Sot.

In the future, if I can save some money, I would like to sell sauces like my older sister. I would like to have my own job so I can take a rest or stop working and all the profits are my own.

A 16-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Since I left home, I made up my mind to make money. So, I want to move to another job, which pays better. Now I earn only 800 baht per month and they have never increased it for me. I want to go and work in town so that I can make more money, but I don't know if the lady employer will let me go. I want to make as much money as I can so that I don't have to stay in Thailand very long.

A 17-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

For many, better pay meant not only changing jobs, but moving to Bangkok where salaries were known to be higher.

I intend to go to Bangkok, but at present it is not easy. I want to go to a place where I can earn more money. I can get more money in Bangkok.

A 23-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I would like to go to Bangkok. Domestic workers are better paid there.

An 18-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I think I will move and find another job probably in Bangkok near my husband. If I can work in a factory or on a construction site it will be better and I won't have to put up with being treated so badly and feeling so alone.

A 27-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I want to work in Bangkok, but it is difficult to get home. I know many friends who worked in Bangkok for a long time and when they returned home with all their savings they were arrested. They had to pay all of their savings and returned home with nothing. They worked for many years in vain. I feared that I might face the same fate like them.

A 24-year-old married Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

However, others, while expressing wishes to move to Bangkok, questioned if it was worth the risk.

If I have a good contact I would like to go and work in Bangkok. There, people get better pay. I have also heard that some people who tried to go to work in Bangkok were killed. I am afraid of that and also that it will be difficult to return home.

A 29-year-old married Mon female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

If possible, I would like to go to Bangkok. I have seen some people return from Bangkok in a better condition. I also would like to get a lot of money like them. But, we must have contact with a person whom we can trust. If I get into trouble it won't be worth going.

A 19-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't dare go to work in Bangkok, even though the pay is better. If you are not lucky you can get into a worse position instead of getting a better income.

A 19-year-old single Pa-O female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

9.7 Education

Several of the domestic workers interviewed described their desire to further their education.

For me, I am working to earn money and have to accept that I cannot continue my education. My younger brother and sister are still in school, so I will give priority to them and support their studies. Someday, I would like to continue my education and attend university. But, the universities in Burma are not open regularly and so I think it is better to focus on earning money for my family right now.

A 21-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While working I have to find ways to develop myself. I didn't go to school while I was in Rangoon, but I listened to children being tutored and tried to learn to read and write. This is the only way I can educate myself.

A 14-year-old single Shan-Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I cannot imagine my future because I don't have an education and so I feel like a blind person.

A 24-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I would like to attend school and get some kind of education, but I don't have a chance to stay in school. Now, I try to study Thai language and want to be fluent. I would also like to go to places that I have never been.

A 19-year-old single Karen-Chinese female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't know yet what to do, because I am still young. If I have a chance, I want to go take an evening course. I once asked the employer, but she said her children can teach me and it is not necessary. I want to work a job that allows me to take evening classes. But, it is just a dream.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Among several of the women and girls interviewed, their job satisfaction was tied to their ability to further their education as well as their ability to earn an income.

Now I am going to school in the evening while working during the day. Previously, I didn't have many Shan friends. Now, at school I have many friends and I am happier.

A 21-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand nine years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Finally, my employer allowed me to attend the nurse-training course in Mae Sot. I would like to learn about being a nurse so when I go back home I can treat the sick people in our country.

A 27-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I want to take evening courses and be literate like others. I used to ask the employer and he said that he would let me go to study the next time the course is offered. I think if I had some education, I would be more comfortable than this. Then, I think I could get a better job with more time to take a rest.

A 15-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand eight years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

9.8 Marriage

In discussing their future, marriage came up in many of the interviews with the women and girls. Among those still single, quite a few did not envision themselves getting married at all or at least not while in their current circumstances.

I don't have a boyfriend. I am getting older and I don't want to get married because family life is so difficult. I have no identity card and no country. I just survive from day to day. I hardly have enough food for one person and it is not easy to take care of a husband and children. I hardly survive. So, getting married is impossible.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

I would like to get married, but it is hard to get married because we have no chance to know each other well. Therefore, I fear getting married.

A 26-year-old single Burman female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

While working there, I got pregnant and I had to quit my job, rent a house and do whatever jobs I could. My husband disappeared two weeks after the child was born. I have no idea what happened. Now, I warn others to be cautious and tell them what happened to me. I do not know my husband's family or where in Burma he is from. I have no way to find him. It is so difficult to marry and have a family while in Thailand.

A 29-year-old married Burman female who first migrated to Thailand three years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

When I stayed in Thailand I lived with a Thai man. Though we didn't get married, I thought I could rely on him. But later he only came when he wanted to and I did not know where he was from or how to contact him. I see now that he just took advantage of my situation.

A 25-year-old single Shan female who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

9.9 Doubts and Fears about the Future

A number of the women and girls in this study spoke of their inability to plan for their future as well as the fears they held when trying to envision what lie ahead.

I cannot plan for my future. I have already worked in many jobs, but could not save anything. I have been here for three years already and have not saved any money to send home. When I did save some money, the police stopped me and took away the little I had. I guess that is my fate. I just try to do the best I can and hope I am lucky. There is no way to plan.

An 18-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand four years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have no ideas for my future. At present I have lost my ambition. It is not easy to find a job. Even when I have a job, I don't get paid and now I am so discouraged.

A married Burman female (age not disclosed) who first migrated to Thailand five years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I don't dare to think about the future. I think it is enough to stay with my husband and children and have enough to eat.

A 19-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

For my life, I don't dare to think about the future at all. I just wish it would be good. But, I have to accept whatever comes my way.

A 39-year-old married Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

Several of those interviewed spoke of feelings of disappointment and dejection, and were identified by the researchers as appearing depressed and downtrodden by their life experiences.

I feel inferior working in another country. I don't have freedom in my mind at anytime. I would like to know if others also feel as dejected as me. I pray that they do not. I feel so isolated in my troubles and I know no one can help me.

A 15-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand two years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

I have never faced this kind of trouble in my life. Now our clothes are in rags and we don't look like human beings any more. I have to eat what is available. Some times I would not like to eat certain foods, but I cannot keep starving. I would like not to live like this day after day.

A 24-year-old single Karen female who first migrated to Thailand seven years ago currently working in Mae Sot.

The future is blocked. I don't know what I should think sometimes. I try to think of ways to plan a future, but I feel like I am going crazy because I can't find a way out of my situation.

A 32-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

For the future, I don't dare to think about it. I am afraid of myself setting too high hopes. I will try to live simply. I try not to get feeling too desperate, but just accept that I have a salary, place to stay and food.

An 18-year-old single Shan female, whose first time migrating to Thailand was not disclosed, currently working in Chiang Mai.

A few of domestic workers interviewed asked the research team to tell others of the problems and difficulties they faced in Thailand, and to caution them to take this into consideration when making their decisions to migrate.

I would like to tell my friends how hard it is in Thailand and not to think of it as a heaven. Don't have too much hope and you won't be too disappointed.

A 34-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

Please tell other people in our country that coming to Thailand is much more difficult than they can imagine. It is another kind of hell. So, be prepared to face many troubles when you too come to Thailand.

A 28-year-old married Shan female who first migrated to Thailand six years ago currently working in Chiang Mai.

9.10 Conclusion

For many of the women and girls in this study, the dreams and hopes of securing a better future for their families and themselves by leaving Burma were quashed by the hard realties they encountered during their stay in Thailand. When envisioning their future aspirations, the overwhelming majority of girls and women in this study spoke of their wishes to save their earnings so that they could send money home to their families. Many hoped that they could work in Thailand for a specific period of time and then return to Burma with sufficient capital to help provide a decent livelihood for their parents and, of those married, for their own families as well. Yet, they faced enormous difficulties in the simple act of trying to transfer funds home. Some did not know anyone they could trust to carry the money to Burma. Others

did not know how to get back home. Among those who tried to return to Burma carrying their savings on them, many had their money and valuables confiscated by Thai authorities prior to crossing the border.

Several of the study participants expressed their desire to further their education as a means of creating a better future for themselves and their families. Others spoke of wanting to earn enough money to support their children's education and to provide them with a better life.

Living in Thailand was far more difficult than most had envisioned. Yet, for many, returning home was not an option. As one woman poignantly explained: "My future depends on the political situation in my country."

Chapter Ten :

Recommendations

Recommendations

To address the problems faced by migrant workers from Burma in Thailand effectively, organizations and institutions at the international, national and local levels must be engaged. The international community should put pressure on Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the Thai government to ratify and implement the Convention on Trafficking and the 1990 U.N. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in order to provide basic human rights to those crossing borders. In addition, the international community must strive to support the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) recommendations on the rights of domestic workers, recognizing domestic work as labor with safeguards and protection of basic labor rights. Meetings of regional bodies, such as ASEAN, should address issues related to migrant workers in all labor sectors and take special notice of the complicated situation of migrants from Burma.

The ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations (UN) agencies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNIFEM, United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, UNAIDS and World Health Organization (WHO), should coordinate and work together to recognize and strengthen the protection of foreign migrant domestic workers. Anti-trafficking efforts must acknowledge the vulnerability of undocumented migrants into a wide range of labor sectors, including domestic work and strive to address their vulnerabilities.

For Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

This study found that the primary reasons that women and girls from Burma migrate to Thailand were political conflict, minority persecution and desperate economic conditions. Women in this study expressed how their life struggling to meet their most basic needs reflected the

near-half century of internal military conflict and SPDC economic policies and practices that result in extensive unemployment, inflation of basic commodities and forced relocation. It is recommended that the SPDC should discontinue projects that conscript forced labor and cease its practices of forced relocation, fixed pricing, imposed compulsory crops and arbitrary taxes. It is strongly recommended that to solve the fundamental problems in Burma, a national reconciliation process must take place and political reform must be promoted.

Moreover, if people from Burma want to seek employment in neighboring countries, the SPDC should allow them to do so legally and take responsibility to ensure their protection abroad and allow them to return home without harassment.

For the Royal Thai Government (RTG)

A recent study on the demand for foreign workers in Thailand found that in the next three years, Thailand is expected to need approximately 82,742 domestic workers in 2004 and 83,640 in 2005-2006 in order to accommodate the economy as it is currently growing (Asian Study Institute, et al., forthcoming 2004). The Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has conducted research on Thai domestic workers recommending the need to recognize their labor and protection by national labor laws. While, the Thai government has begun this process by including foreign domestic workers in the migrant labor registration process, additional efforts must be made to ensure that migrants' rights are honored and protected while they are working. This study suggests that such efforts should include educating employers about the rights of domestic workers, establishing channels for reporting and prosecuting abusive employers and providing protection to those reporting abuses.

The majority of the domestic workers in this study faced innumerable abuses that included employers arbitrarily setting the conditions and terms of employment, such as salaries, benefits, working hours, accommodations and communication. It is therefore recommended that the Thai government include migrant domestic work as labor protected by Thai laws. The Thai government should also ensure that both migrant and national domestic workers' rights are upheld, including the right to a written contract that defines work expectations, guarantees a minimum wage, fixed working hours with optional overtime, holidays and health protection and benefits.

This study also found that language barriers tended to aggravate the interactions between the domestic workers and their employers, often resulting in verbal and physical abuse. A wide range of verbal, physical and/or sexual abuses by employers were also reported in this study that were not resultant of language barriers, particularly considering the extent of under-reporting of violence by women throughout the world. Nearly one in ten women and girls in this study were victims of physical abuse. They described incidents of being slapped and, in some cases, severely beaten. Incidents of sexual harassment were also reported, with 20 percent of the study participants being touched when they did not want it, others subjected to sexual advances, and several victims of rape. This suggests that the Thai government should set up a mechanism to facilitate the reporting of complaints by migrant workers and should provide translators and referrals for legal assistance and protection. The Thai government should also take action to arrest and prosecute those employers found to be abusive and/or criminal in breaking Thai laws.

Many women and girls in this study noted that their employers refused to let them attend community lectures on health care issues. Lack of written materials in their own language was a hindrance to obtaining public health information. The Thai government should facilitate a radio or television program for migrant workers on health information in order to reach those who are illiterate. Also, publications in Thai, Burmese and minority languages should continue to be developed and strategies for circulation should be improved.

The women and girls in this study spoke of their dreams and hopes for securing a better future for their families and themselves. Furthering their education was often expressed as a means of creating a better future. The Thai government should provide educational opportunities for domestic workers, such as Thai language classes and other special adult education programs (on such topics as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and, particularly, migrant workers' rights and Thai laws) that could be held on the weekends or in the evenings. Such classes could be set up by the Thai government in conjunction with local educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). Thai education law provides equal education opportunities for all and efforts to implement these rights should be enhanced to see that migrants are included.

Many of the women and girls welcomed the Thai government's efforts to provide work permits and temporary residency cards to migrants from Burma. However, they also expressed concerns about the lack of public information and lack of procedural clarity on the work permit registration process, the short duration of the registration period, the lack of privacy in obtaining health test results, and the costs related to registering and renewing work permits. Any future registration of migrant workers should be publicly disseminated in the languages of the migrant community and the period for registration should be extended to allow for dissemination of the information. In addition, mechanisms should be put in place to identify employers unwilling to comply with Thai government labor policies and to provide protection for those reporting non-compliance.

Study participants also expressed concern about how the registration policy and implementation actually gave more power to the employers, thereby further limiting workers' rights and ability to seek recourse for abuse. For example, a number of employers refused to register or assist in registering the domestic workers for work permits, and even threatened to report the undocumented worker to the police if she refused their demands. Some employers demanded that the domestic workers remain employed for one or two years before permitting them to register for a work permit. And, approximately 40 percent of the employers who registered their employees kept the original work permit and provided only a photocopy to the domestic workers. Therefore, it is recommended that the Thai government ensure that migrant workers have the right to possess their original work permits and employers who refuse to relinquish the work permits should be fined.

If the Thai government insists on requiring migrants to receive health exams in order to renew their work permits, translators should be made available to the migrants to clearly explain the procedures, acquire consent and report results. Privacy of medical records must be ensured and employers should not have access to them. Health exams should not include HIV or pregnancy testing and migrants must have a means of reporting employers who test and/or terminate employment for positive results.

In addition to remedying fraudulent actions by employers, both SPDC and the Thai government must take action against Burmese and Thai authorities, particularly police officials and personnel, who extort a range of arbitrary fees and fines from migrants moving across borders. Those who corruptly abet the human trafficking from Burma should be identified and receive disciplinary sanctions. It is also alarming to find that the Burmese authorities have been confiscating identification documents from its citizens that could render many stateless. SPDC must see to it that these actions are stopped immediately and a process is established for reporting and replacing abducted documents.

Registered migrants in all labor sectors should be allowed to organize themselves to form a union and the Thai government should respect the International Convention for Migrant Workers and Their Families. In addition, the Thai government should also establish a mechanism to support non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in efforts to reach out to migrant workers.

For Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organizations

NGOs and CBOs must strive to recognize domestic work as labor and advocate for domestic workers' rights under national labor laws. In addition, it is critical to address the hidden isolation of foreign (often undocumented) domestic workers and strive to reach them in the programs and activities supported by NGOs and CBOs.

NGOs and CBOs play a critical role in reaching out to and communicating with migrants. They must continually strive to work with local community networks to make contact with migrant domestic workers, raise awareness of their hidden and isolated realities, identify their critical issues and recommend action strategies. NGOs and CBOs can also play an important function as intermediaries communicating migrants' concerns and needs to government and the international community.

Finally and most importantly, all organizations and government institutions should seek the inclusion of the migrant community in developing policies, practices and responses to help establish appropriate interventions to reduce the abuse, exploitation and trafficking of migrant domestic workers.

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APPENDIX I: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Code
Interview date
Interview place
Male/female
Type of job

I. Life in Burma
- What was your life like in Burma?
- Why did you decide to come to Thailand?
- Tell me about your family

II. Migration & Trafficking
- How did you come to Thailand and what problems and experiences did you have along the way?
- Who did you contact to find this job?
- If you have children, are your children with you?

III. Life in Thailand
- Since you came to Thailand what work have you done?
- Why did you move to work at this job?
- What are the differences between this job and others you have had?
- What kind of problems in your job did you have in Thailand?
- Are you satisfied with the present work? Or do you want to change your job?
- How is your family situation in Thailand?

IV. Documentation (legal status)
- How did you get the ID card?
- How can you use the ID card?
- When will your ID card expire?
- What is the difference before and after obtaining a work permit?
- Who keeps the work permit? If not with you, how do you feel? When you meet the police do you have a problem?
- How do you feel about the health check-up to renew your work permit?
- Who paid for the health check-up?
- What problems do you have with the health test.
- Do you understand the policy of the work permit and your rights?
- If the employer doesn't do the work permit for you, how do you feel?
- If you have children, are your children registered in Thailand or Burma?

V. Health
- What health problems have you had in Thailand?
- Are there any strong chemicals that you use when you work? Do you use any protection?

- Do you have to do any heavy lifting as part of your work?
- Does the employer ever wake you up to work in the night?
- Have you had any accidents while working?
- If you're sick, can you stop working?
- Do you know about family planning? (ask all women)
- (ask married women) Do you use birth control?
- If you have children, where did you deliver them?
- Did you ever have a pregnancy you didn't want?
  - If so, why didn't want it?
  - What did you do?

VI. Violence
- Have you ever seen mental or physical abuse of migrants in Thailand?
- Has anyone ever been mentally or physically abusive to you?
- If yes, please explain what happened.
- If no, are you afraid of this happening to you?
- How do you try to protect yourself from this?
- Is there any effect of drug use in your life?
- Is there any effect of alcohol use or abuse in your life?
- Is there any effect of gambling in your life?

VII. Future
- Since you've arrived here, have you been able to save money?
- How many people in your family do you financially support?
- Do you want to continue with this job or would you like to find a new one?
- If you want to change your job, what job would you like to have? Why?

VIII. Other
- Do you think you would benefit if we had a group house for domestic workers?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?
- Why are the situations in Thailand and Burma so different?

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE

Initial information:
Code:
Place of interview:
Date:
Male/female:
Current job:

1. Age_____

2. State in Burma where you were born?
   • Karen • Mon • Shan • Other_

3. Ethnicity (can check more than one)
   • Karen • Mon • Shan • Pa-O • Bamar
   • Other_____

4. Languages: (can check more than one)

Language	Speak		Read & write	
	Some	Fluent	Some	Fluent
Karen				
Shan				
Bamar				
Mon				
Thai				
Chinese				
English				
Other specify ( )				

5. Are you married?
   • Yes • No
   Are you? • Divorced/ Separated or • Widowed

6. How many children do you have?_____

7. Education level?_____

8. What is your are salary?
   _____Baht per day
   _____Baht per month

   8.1. Do you receive yearly bonuses or any extra money? Baht

9. When was the first time you come to Thailand?

10. How did you get the money to come to Thailand this time? (can check more than one)
- Sold things
- Borrowed money from family
- Borrowed from others
- In debt to employer
- In debt to broker (nai na)
- Personal savings
- Other_____

11. What time do you start_____and finish_____work?

12. How many days off do you get? (Check only one)
Each week_____
Each month_____
Each year_____
None_____

13. Do you get paid for your days off?
- Yes
- No

14. What does the employer help pay for? (can check more than one)
- Clothes
- Food
- Open room
- Shared room
- Private room
- 1/2 money for work permit
- Pay for all of work permit
- Health expenses
- ID card
- Personal items
- Nothing
- Other_____

15. What responsibilities do you have? (can check more than one)
- House cleaning
- Shop cleaning
- Take care of old people
- Take care of sick people
- Take care of children
- Take care of animals
- Cooking
- Washing cars/bikes
- Washing and ironing clothes
- Business of the employer (specify what kind_____)
- Gardening
- Massage
- Other_____

16. How do you keep your valuable possessions? (can check more than one)
- On your body
- Friends
- Employer
- Locked place
- Relatives
- Other_____
- None

17. Do your employer allow you to contact others through the following types?

Type of Contact	Employer Allows		Even Use	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Telephone to someone				
Receive a phone call				
Send mail				
Receive mail				
Go out to meet others				
Allow visitors in				
Others:				

18. Do you have any ID card? (can check more than one)
- Original work permit
- Copy of work permit
- Blue (hill tribe card)
- Pink (temporary permit from fleeing Burma)
- Green with red border (temp. permission to stay in one area)
- Orange (refugee)
- Burmese ID card
- Other_____
- No

19. If you have any kind of sickness, what can you do? (can check more than one)
- Stop working with pay
- Stop working without pay
- Buy (delete the) medicine yourself
- The employer gives you medicine
- Go to clinic yourself
- Go to clinic with friends or relative
- Go to clinic with employer
- Nothing
- Other_____

20. Has anyone in your family ever? (can check more than one)
- Yelled at you
- Swore at you
- Slapped or hit you
- Thrown things at you
- Threatened
- Pinched you
- Pushed
- Locked up/confinined
- Cheated/kept your money
- Tricked you with a lie
- Touched you don't want
- Sexually touched you
- Raped you
- Punished you
- Other_
- None

21. Has your employer ever? (can check more than one)
- Yelled at you
- Swore at you
- Slapped or hit you
- Thrown things at you
- Threatened
- Pinched you
- Pushed
- Locked up/confinined
- Cheated/kept your money
- Tricked you with a lie
- Touched you don't want
- Sexually touched you
- Raped you
- Punished you
- Other_____

22. Have any government officials (police, military) ever? (can check more than one)

- Yelled at you
- Swore at you
- Slapped or hit you
- Thrown things at you
- Threatened
- Pinched you
- Pushed
- Locked up/confinined
- Cheated/kept your money
- Tricked you with a lie
- Touched you don't want
- Sexually touched you
- Raped you
- Punished you
- Other_____
- None

23. Have you ever had contact with Thai authority?

- No
- Yes

If yes, have they done any of the following? (can check more than one)

- Threatened
- Made you pay them
- Detained you
- Searched you
- Put you in jail
- Deported to the broker
- Deported to the Burmese authority?
- Others_
- No

24. Have you ever met the Burmese authority?

- No
- Yes

If yes, have they done any of the following? (can check more than one)

- Stopped you- cannot go
- Threatened you
- Made you pay them
- Detained you
- Searched you
- Made you work
- Made you work as a porter
- No
- Other_____

25. Do you send any money to your family? (can check more than one)

- Send with a friend/relative
- Send through the bank
- Send through the broker
- Send through a shop (loy ngun)
- Send yourself
- No
- Other___

APPENDIX III: CONSENT FORM

INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is_____. I work for Mahidol University. We are conducting a survey to learn about the life experiences of girls and women from Burma working as domestic workers in Thailand.

Your participation is completely voluntary but your experiences could be very helpful to other girls and women from Burma in Thailand.

I want to assure you that all of your answers will be kept strictly secret. I will not keep a record of your name or address. You have the right to stop the interview at any time, or to skip any questions that you don't want to answer. There are no right or wrong answers. Some of the topics may be difficult to discuss, but many women have found it useful to have the opportunity to talk.

Do you have any questions?

The interview takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, do you agree to be interviewed?

NOTE WHETHER RESPONDENT AGREES TO INTERVIEW OR NOT

[ ] DOES NOT AGREE TO BE INTERVIEWED———>• THANK PARTICIPANT FOR HER TIME AND END

[ ] AGREES TO BE INTERVIEWED

Is now a good time to talk? Is this a good place to hold the interview, or is there somewhere else that you would like to go?

TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERVIEWER

I certify that I have read the above consent procedure to the participant.

Signed:.

Date.....

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