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Paid Domestic Work and Labour Rights in Fiji:
A Case Study

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Philosophy

in

Development Studies

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2006
Abstract

This research explores the experiences of paid domestic workers and their expatriate employers in Fiji to enable further understanding of employment conditions in the informal work sector, a sector characterised by the absence of labour laws and employment regulation. The study investigates the perspectives of both domestic workers and employers on the employment relationship, conditions of work and the economic opportunity provided by this type of wage work.

Responses obtained from individual interviews with domestic workers and expatriate employers were analysed to develop themes relating to the employment of domestic workers. These themes centre on the working terms and conditions of paid domestic workers, the nature of the employment relationship, and perceptions of employment law and labour rights for domestic workers.

The results of the research show that employment laws that specify worker entitlements and employer obligations are not always necessary to ensure decent working conditions. This contrasts with conclusions reached in other studies on paid domestic work, which have found that the private, isolated nature of the employment arrangement and the absence of formal labour protection have contributed to a particularly exploitative employment environment.

Paid domestic workers were provided with better working conditions than they had experienced in the formal sector and generally enjoyed a positive relationship with their employer. The experience of expatriate employers of employment conditions in their home countries played a significant role in this outcome. However, it is clear that wage workers in the informal sector are reliant on employer goodwill and integrity in determining working conditions. This finding points to a need for some form of regulation of working conditions in the informal sector and further research to determine how regulation might be achieved without disrupting the viability of economic opportunities within the sector.
Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their assistance in completing this research. First, thank you to my supervisor, Dr Donovan Storey, for his helpful guidance throughout and for providing feedback on drafts of the paper. I am also indebted to Richard and Peggy for their editing skills. This would have been a lesser piece of work without your input.

Thank you to the people in Fiji, especially those in Suva, who provided much needed assistance during the time of my fieldwork there. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Helen Leslie for her support and assistance, and Seona Smiles for providing me with a home away from home. Thank you also to Abdul Khan, Father Kevin Barr, Pamela Manning and the women at the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement.

I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by NZAID, New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency, through their New Zealand Postgraduate Field Scholarship and Massey University through the School of People, Environment and Planning Graduate Research Fund, that made this research possible.

Thank you to my family. Your love and support is always appreciated.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to express my great appreciation to the women in Suva who gave generously of their time to talk to me about their experiences of being either a domestic worker or an expatriate employer. Without your participation, this research would not have been possible.

The Massey University human ethics committee approved this research.
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List of Abbreviations

BLV Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs)
CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DAWN Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
ILO International Labour Organisation
FNPF Fiji National Provident Fund
GDP Gross Domestic Product
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women
YWCA Young Women’s Christian Association