

[HOME](#)

Namibia
ECONOMIST

Namibia: Domestic Workers Still Face Many Challenges

Clemencia Jacobs

29 July 2011

The dismissal of domestic workers on the basis of their HIV/AIDS status is unlawful, however, they can be dismissed on the grounds of incapacity caused by the illness.

Speaking at a public lecture on 'Domestic workers in the context of HIV/AIDS: implications of the ILO Convention' on Wednesday, Amon Ngavetene, coordinator of the AIDS Law Unit at the Legal Assistance Centre, said it is now required of employers to provide their workers with information on HIV.

Ngavetene said domestic workers are vulnerable to the disease as it mostly affects those who are marginalised and vulnerable in society.

He said their ability to deal with HIV/AIDS are undermined and that they are not empowered enough to respond and mitigate the impact of the disease.

Ngavetene added that there is a huge link between HIV/AIDS and domestic work.

"It is important that employers start talking about HIV/AIDS within the workplace. It doesn't have to be formal or structured and if employers really care about their workers, they can organise themselves in a group and go to NANASO for example and undergo training on how to handle the disease. The employers can also pick up information/pamphlets from these organisations and give it to their workers," he said.

There are no reliable figures on how many people are domestic workers as they are regarded as part of the informal sectors in some countries, however between 50 million and 100 million people are thought to do domestic work world wide. According to the 2008 Labour Force Survey, there are almost 36 000 domestic workers in Namibia, of which 28 000 are women.

According to research done by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) in 2008, most employers do not provide their workers with employment contracts once appointed; the workers are fired and hired without notice and they often face verbal and physical abuse.

The research findings also suggested that domestic workers work long hours without proper rest, have no job description, are sometimes sexually exploited and are not paid overtime.

Also speaking at the public lecture, Hilma Shindondola-Mote, director of LaRRI, said both domestic workers and their employers should be sensitized about the law.

She said although a 1997 Presidential Commission into domestic workers' conditions has recommended that a minimum wage for such workers be introduced, nothing has been done thus far.

"There is not much discussion on domestic workers and HIV. Employers often only suspect that their workers are sick. They then decide to take these workers to a doctor to get tested for HIV. The doctors reveal the workers status to the employers/third parties. Employers expect workers to reveal their status but would not reveal their own. After this meeting, I hope the Legal Assistance Centre will receive complaints about this unfair practices," Shindondola-Mote said.

She said 16 June will probably go down in history as the day that domestic workers worldwide made some stride against discrimination in the workplace, as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recognised domestic workers as workers.

The ILO adopted conditions of employment for domestic workers, which include the recognition of the right of domestic workers to collective bargaining, elimination of forced or compulsory labour, abolition of child labour and discrimination in respect of employment and occupation as well as freedom of association for such workers.

The public lecture on HIV/AIDS and domestic workers is the first of three lectures to be hosted by the Legal Assistance Centre. The centre will also host a lecture on HIV/AIDS and the army and police forces in August. A public lecture on farmworkers and HIV/AIDS will also be held in mid September.