

# Identifying Domestic Servitude in Health Settings



## What is domestic servitude?

Domestic servitude is a form of modern slavery where someone is exploited in a private setting and forced to carry out work like cooking, cleaning or childcare. It is often hidden in private households. Victims may be isolated and unable to leave due to control, threats, or withheld documents. Domestic servitude can happen in formal employment, familial or intimate relationships, or informal arrangements.

## Who is affected?

- Domestic workers can be from any country or background, but locally we see a significant number of Filipino women experiencing domestic servitude
- Men can also experience domestic servitude, including in jobs like chauffeuring
- Domestic servitude can also be a feature of forced marriage or abusive intimate relationships
- A domestic worker might not be your patient in a health setting, they could be working for your patient

## The Overseas Domestic Worker Visa

Domestic workers may be brought to the UK by their employers on an Overseas Domestic Worker (ODW) visa. The ODW visa lasts for six months and cannot be renewed. Anyone on the ODW visa is legally entitled to minimum wage and workers' rights protection in the UK.

Although domestic workers can change employer if they are on the ODW visa, they can only work as a domestic worker whilst in the UK on the ODW visa. Practically, domestic workers often find it challenging to change employer, or they do not know they have this right.

The ODW visa is complex, and often domestic workers require specialist legal advice to decide on their next steps. Please contact the organisations below for further information.

## Someone in domestic servitude may...

### General signs:

- Have come to the UK on an Overseas Domestic Worker visa
- Have no contract of employment
- Not have been paid in the UK
- Be unable to leave their house/hotel alone, with movements monitored by employers
- Not interact with the family they work for
- Report verbal or physical abuse from their employer
- Not have access to their passport or documents
- Chaperoned by someone who isn't a friend or family member and discouraged or prevented from interacting with professionals
- Be working excessive hours, have no days off, or other workers' rights violations
- Not have their basic needs met like access to medical care, private space, or adequate food and rest
- Be sleeping on the floor or in a communal space i.e. living room

### Health specific signs:

- Be experiencing exhaustion due to lack of rest
- Appear malnourished and have associated health concerns
- Discharge themselves from medical care prematurely, which may be influenced by others
- Have their ability to access healthcare monitored and controlled
- Have burns from irons/hot hair tools caused by employers
- Have injuries like rashes from cleaning chemicals
- Require treatment for Repetitive Strain Injuries or back problems
- Experience sexual assault, harassment or rape
- Feel low, experiencing depression or feelings of helplessness



**modern slavery & exploitation helpline**  
**08000 121 700**

## Reporting and Specialist Support

**Contact your safeguarding team for further advice. A victim of modern slavery may require a referral to the [National Referral Mechanism](#).**

**Kalayaan** offers education and support as well as legal advice to domestic workers, specialising in the ODW. Contact them via their website [www.kalayaan.org.uk](http://www.kalayaan.org.uk) or call 020 7243 2942.

**The Voice of Domestic Workers** offer education and support. Contact them through email [info@thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com](mailto:info@thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com), website [www.thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com](http://www.thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com) or on social media (including Facebook).

Domestic servitude is a type of modern slavery, which is a crime, therefore victims can contact the police. Often domestic workers are fearful of authorities, and may want to only work with non-governmental organisations. However, if there is risk of serious harm or threat to life, contact police on 999.

If you are concerned a vulnerable adult is being exploited contact the relevant local authority. If a child is experiencing domestic servitude, this must be responded to as a child safeguarding issue.

**Westminster City Council Adult Social Care:**  
0207 641 2500 / [adultsocialcare@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:adultsocialcare@westminster.gov.uk)

**Hammersmith & Fulham Adult Social Care:**  
[safeguardingadults@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingadults@lbhf.gov.uk)

**Kensington and Chelsea Adult Social Care:**  
020 7361 3013 / [socialservices@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:socialservices@rbkc.gov.uk)