

DOMESTIC WORKERS ORGANIZE AGAINST VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT

TRAINING PACK



Unit 4

PROTECTING OURSELVES FROM VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT

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Overview

This unit discusses the effects of violence & harassment on our health and well-being, and our coping strategies.

We identify how to recover and heal from trauma, and take care of ourselves.

We try out how to handle power struggles.

We find out what to do when we encounter sexual violence & harassment and have to deal with gender stereotypes that harm violence survivors.

We exercise our breathing and our bodies to strengthen ourselves and explore ways of empowering ourselves and our sisters.



UNIT SUMMARY

	TITLE	AIMS	TIME (MINS)
4.1	Coping with violence & harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To become aware of the effects of violence & harassment ■ To learn about trauma, our survival instinct and coping strategies ■ To experience a loving-kindness meditation 	90
4.2	Healing from trauma and self care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To explore how we can heal from violence & harassment and take care of ourselves. ■ To try out 2 different types of meditations to focus and recharge ourselves 	90
4.3	How to handle power struggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To know how to stand strong and 'ground' ourselves. ■ To understand and try out power dynamics between people ■ To have fun, feel strong, and use our body to support each other 	120
4.4	What to do against sexual violence & harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To learn about the 'double trouble' of sexual violence & harassment ■ To know what to do against sexual violence & harassment ■ To experience the power of our voice 	120
4.5	We empower!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To experience: I am in charge! ■ To develop: We empower! ■ To create and become strong together 	90

TOTAL TIME : 8.30 HOURS – 510 MINUTES



KEY MESSAGES

Violence & harassment hurt us. It takes time and a lot of hard work to recover. Self care and support from others help us heal and become violence survivors. As women and domestic workers, we are often blamed for the violence & harassment against us. This has to stop: The blame is on the perpetrators. We empower ourselves, to help our sisters, and create a world that is more equal and just.

- When we encounter violence & harassment our **survival instinct** tells us to **fight, flee or freeze**. Violence & harassment harms us and leads to trauma.
- We need to find ways to **reset ourselves**, get rid of the negative and painful energy, find new energy and become happy, healthy and strong again.
- Using our body, heart and mind, we **practice self care** to recover and heal.
- We stand stronger when we ground ourselves. We need to **stand up for our rights**, and learn how to deal with power dynamics because employers can easily abuse us.
- We are **often blamed** for sexual and other violence & harassment. **It is NOT our fault**. The perpetrators of violence are guilty.
- **Speak up and say NO** to sexual advances you don't like, always and as soon as possible.
- We want to **stop rape culture**, which justifies sexual violence and exploitation against us and our sisters and brothers. We want a culture based on mutual respect and dignity.
- We are in charge, we direct our lives and we empower ourselves as individuals and as a group so we can fight for a better life and a better job in a better world.



Training Organization

- This unit is for domestic workers who have experienced violence & harassment, and those who want to support them. It is recommended to do all 5 training activities with violence victims and survivors, for example in 4 half-day activities on off-days:
 - **Unit 4.1** Coping with violence & harassment and **Unit 4.2** Self care and healing from trauma (3 hours)
 - **Unit 4.3** How to handle power struggles (2 hours)
 - **Unit 4.4** What to do against sexual violence & harassment (2 hours)
 - **Unit 4.5** We empower! (1.5 hours)
- If you want to train DWO leaders or members to become trainers in a residential workshop, you need 1.5 days for this unit.
- If you want to do only one activity on protecting ourselves from violence & harassment select one of the following options:
 - **Unit 4.1** and **Unit 4.2** (3 hours) to discuss trauma, coping and healing
 - **Unit 4.3** (2 hours) so domestic workers can practice the handling of conflicts with their employer
 - **Unit 4.4** (2 hours) to support domestic workers to prevent sexual violence & harassment or help victims of sexual violence & harassment
 - **Unit 4.5** We empower! (1.5 hours) is useful for all domestic workers at any time and place



4.1 : Coping with violence & harassment

90 minutes

	Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To become aware of the effects of violence & harassment • To learn about trauma, our survival instinct and coping strategies • To experience a loving-kindness meditation
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic worker leaders • Domestic workers who have experienced violence & harassment • Domestic workers who help handling violence & harassment cases
	Room Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1: Big group stands in a circle • Other steps: Seating in small groups and in the big group
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipcharts or computer and projector for slide presentation
	Training Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slide show: Coping with violence & harassment • Handout 1: Case story of Maria • Handout 2: Loving-kindness meditation for domestic workers, for the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care1 • Info note: Coping with violence & harassment



Tip for Trainers

Two short videos (in English) explaining trauma and its effects are:

▼ [Trauma and the brain: Understanding abuse survivors' responses](#) (8.44 minutes)

▼ [Understanding trauma: the learning brain and the survival brain](#) (5 minutes)

Have a look at these video's to prepare for the training, and give the weblinks to participants who want to know more. You can also use them in step 4. Allow extra time for showing and discussing each video.



Session Plan Steps

1.	Energizer	Group massage	10 minutes
2.	Effects of violence & harassment	Small group work	25 minutes
3.	Effects of violence & harassment	Reporting in big group	25 minutes
4.	Coping with violence and trauma	Q&A	15 minutes
5.	Loving-kindness exercise	Conclusion and meditation	15 minutes



Preparation

- Read and discuss the Info note with others so that you fully understand it.
- For step 1:
 - When the group has both women and men, or participants come from many different backgrounds, check in advance whether the proposed massage strokes (for the shoulders, shoulder blades, neck and spine) are suitable for everybody and do not involve body parts that should not be touched by others. Find other massage strokes, if necessary.
 - Before the session, practice the group massage a few times, massaging somebody and guiding the group to do the massage: Speak slowly, loud and clear, moving from one type of body stroke to another and encouraging participants along the way. Time the massage practice so you can stick to the timing in step 1.
- For step 2: Prepare photocopies of the handout 'The Case story of Maria', one for each small working group.
- For step 5: For the clip of the Loving-Kindness meditation, click: bit.ly/GBV_care1.

SESSION PLAN

STEP 1	ENERGIZER	GROUP MASSAGE	10 MINUTES
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- Welcome everyone to the training. Ask the group to stand up and form a big circle. Do a few big stretches with the group, for example, ask everyone to take a deep breath in and raise their arms up beyond their head, then take a deep breath out and swing their arms down. Do this a few times.
- Say: In this session we will discuss the effects of violence on domestic workers and how we can start coping with that. It is important for us to be kind to ourselves and to others. So we will start this session with a group massage. Turn to the right, and start massaging the shoulders of your neighbour, first both shoulders up to the neck. Then massage the right shoulder and shoulder blade, followed by the left shoulder and shoulder blade. Then start to lightly tap the neck and the spine, up and down (2x). Close off with broad strokes from the neck over the shoulders, the shoulder blades and down the spine.
- Tell the group to do the massage in a gentle and loving way and to also enjoy the massage that they receive. Say: I will guide you. Follow me. Start the group massage guiding the group through the movements.
- Finish when the time is up. Ask: How do you feel after giving and receiving a massage? After a few responses, end with an applause to thank everybody for the massage. Invite everyone to their seats.

STEP 2	EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT	SMALL GROUP WORK	25 MINUTES
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- Link this session to the previous session and say: **We are now going to discuss the effects of violence & harassment on domestic workers.** In small working groups we will read and discuss the real life story of Maria, a migrant domestic worker.
- Divide the participants in small working groups, distribute handout 1 and give them time to read and discuss the story. Walk around and answer any questions which may come up in the groups. After 20 minutes, tell the groups they have 5 minutes to conclude their discussion for sharing with the other groups. When the time is up, invite everybody back to the big group.

STEP 3	EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT	REPORTING IN BIG GROUP	25 MINUTES
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- Discuss the case of Maria by inviting volunteers from the small groups to answer the guide questions. Write key words from their answers on a flipchart or board.
 - Ask: **What violent acts did Maria have to endure?** [*Lying, cheating, intimidation, threats, humiliation, drinking contaminated tea and detergent, beating, burning, shaving and hurting her head, not paying her wages in full.*]
 - Ask: **What effects did the violence have on Maria?** [*Constant feeling of fear and pain, lack of concentration to do her job well, despair and deep hurt, passively accepting the violence, asking for help only when she felt she was dying, covering up the violence due to fear of her employer, continuing to feel sick and traumatized upon return home.*]
 - Ask volunteers to share **other experiences of violence & harassment against domestic workers and the effects these abuses had on them.** Write key points on the board. [*Experiences: Other examples of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. Discuss the physical, psychosomatic, psycho-social and behavioral effects of violence & harassment, as well as deep trauma and psychiatric disorders.*] Try to stick to the time but spend some more time if needed.
 - Conclude: **Violence & harassment have very harmful effects,** especially if we have no means of defending ourselves and getting out of the situation. Violence & harassment lead to trauma, stress and sickness. Constant violence and threats of violence can lead to thoughts and feelings of utter despair and hopelessness, and illnesses.

STEP 4	COPING WITH VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA	Q&A	15 MINUTES
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- Explain that we are now going to look at how victims of violence try to cope with the abuse that they encounter. Using the briefing note and the slide show, discuss the following terms with the group:
 - Ask: **What is trauma and what are its effects on violence victims?** After some responses, explain briefly. [*Trauma is the normal human response of the brain to an abnormal event, such as violence and abuse. It is a physical and psychological response to an event and experience that is so deeply distressing that it is too much to handle for our body, mind and heart. As a result we are unable to be happy, to feel good and to relax. We feel stressed all the time, and are not able to cope with the mental or emotional pressure, caused by violence & harassment.*]
 - Say: When we experience violence, danger and trauma, our **survival instinct** kicks in: **We fight, we flee or we freeze.** Explain these 3 reactions to danger and say: These responses can help, but may also stand in the way of solving the problem. Ask participants: **What were Maria's responses?** [*Maria was so scared that she passively allowed her employer's abuses, she froze and escaped into herself. When she was offered a way out, she still wanted to stay with her abuser. This is a common coping strategy of violence victims. They don't want to leave their abuser out of sight, and often try to appease them. She was still traumatized in her home country.*]
 - Say: The fight-flight-freeze or appease coping strategies are generally not enough to get rid of the trauma and become healthy and happy again. So we need to find other ways to cope with it. **Can you give examples of coping strategies and skills?** After some responses, summarize the discussion. [*Coping is about checking what we feel and think, and then deciding what we want to do (or not do). It is about using our body, heart and mind to go through what happened, and to act and deal with the problem by reaching out and seeking help, reducing the pain and the stress, and taking care of ourselves.*]
 - Say: Coping is about **getting rid of what is stuck.** [*We need to get rid of the negative energy that has been stored in us because of the negative effects violence has on us. We have to find ways to reset our body, mind and heart: Like doing the laundry to rid our body, mind and heart from dirt, so that the dirty laundry no longer piles up.*]
- For each of the above points, invite participants to ask questions, add or comment along the way. Answer and address their concerns. Conclude by saying that we will discuss this further in the next sessions.

STEP 5	LOVING-KINDNESS EXERCISE	CONCLUSION AND MEDITATION	15 MINUTES
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- Ask everybody to get their chair and sit down in a big circle. Conclude with the key messages:
 - **Violence & harassment harm our health and well-being.** It takes time and hard work to recover.
 - **If violence happens, our survival instinct** tells us **to fight, flee or freeze**. Escape and flight means that we lose our job and income. So we may try to cope by submitting to the violence & harassment, and trying to prevent violence from happening by working more and harder. Or we fight back. Or we become numb from misery.
 - **Experiencing violence exhausts our energy and harms our health.** When we become traumatized, it becomes more difficult for us to survive.
 - **We need to find ways to reset ourselves**, get rid of the negative and painful energy and find new energy to become happy, healthy and strong.
- Say: There are **many ways to reset our body, mind and heart to cope with stress and trauma**. We need to find what ways work for each of us, because people are different, and different things can help at different times. Talking and contact with other people is one important way. Physical exercises, working with the body and meditations to regain our life energy are other ways. Some of you may be familiar with some of these methods, for others they may be new. In this session we talked about the effects of violence & harassment, the hurt, pain and anger that we feel. We will, therefore, do a meditation to send love and kindness to ourselves, to everybody here in the group and to all the domestic workers, like Maria, who have suffered or are suffering from violence & harassment.
- Guide the group in doing the meditation using handout 2 or the clip at: bit.ly/GBV_care1.



HANDOUT 1

Case story of Maria

Read the real story of Maria in your group, taking turns: One group member reads the first para, a second member reads para 2, a third person reads para 3, and so on.

The story¹

Maria (not her real name), a migrant domestic worker from the Philippines, started working in another country in November 2017. She was 32 years old. She worked for a family of three – a husband and wife, and their 13 year old daughter. During the job interview, the female employer showed Maria a fake policewoman's badge pretending that she was a policewoman.

The abuse of Maria started after the employers discovered a picture of their daughter in Maria's wallet. They accused her of committing sexual offenses against her. The female employer forced Maria to express her sexual desire for their daughter in front of a video camera. She told Maria that if she misbehaved, the video would be submitted to the police and she would be hanged. Maria was scared. She didn't dare to disobey her employer as she thought she was a policewoman.

The next day, in distress, she forgot to rinse away the detergent in the teapot before making tea. She was accused of attempted murder by her female employer and forced to drink the contaminated tea from the teapot as well as a bottle of detergent. Since then, Maria was intimidated, locked up, beaten up daily and was not paid her wages in full. She was assaulted by her employer with an iron, scissors, a glue gun, knives, and sticks on a daily basis. Her employer also cut her hair forcibly, injured the skin of her head, and then poured vinegar onto her wounds.

One day, her employer beat her up so severely that Maria felt she was dying. At that moment she decided to seek help by posting a video on Facebook using the tablet of the employers' daughter. The post caught the attention of the Domestic Workers Association (DWA) in the country, and they requested the Philippines Embassy to help. When the Embassy sent a representative to visit Maria's workplace, the employer denied the abuse. Maria was very fearful and did not want to leave the abusive household.

¹ See IDWF: [Gender-based violence & harassment against domestic workers: Case stories from Asia](#), Hong Kong, 2020

Shortly thereafter, the Embassy lodged a complaint with the police for Maria to be taken away to the police station for investigation. At the police station, Maria remained silent the whole time. Ann, a DWA leader, who had come to meet her at the station discovered that all her bruises were underneath her scarf and clothes. Maria did not use her arms to protect herself when she was beaten. Ann requested the Embassy to allow her to speak to Maria in private. Only then did Maria share her fear about the video clip. A lawyer assured her that the employer could not use the video clip against her. On the contrary, the video clip could be used as evidence to bring the employer to court.

Maria left the house of employers and stayed at a shelter, but she continued to be very afraid and did not dare to file a complaint against her employer. After a month of discussions with the DWA and support staff, Maria agreed to file a complaint with the police. She also authorized a lawyer from the Philippines Embassy to represent her in the judicial procedures so she could return to her home country.

Maria went back home and did not hear anything anymore about the complaint. She still suffers psychologically from the abuse – she is traumatized and she vomits a lot whenever she smells detergent.

After reading the story, discuss it with the following questions:

1. **What violent acts did Maria have to endure?**
2. **What effects did the violence have on Maria?**
3. **Share other violence & harassment experiences of domestic workers and the effects these abuses had on them.**



HANDOUT 2

Loving-kindness meditation for domestic workers²

■ Click the clip at: bit.ly/GBV_care1 or guide the group in doing the meditation by saying: We will do a meditation to send love and kindness to ourselves, to everyone here in the group and to all the domestic workers, like Maria, who have suffered or are suffering from violence & harassment.

Close your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, just relax and gently follow my voice.

Take a deep breath in. And a long breath out.

Keeping your eyes closed, think of a person close to you who loves you very much. It could be someone from the past or the present. Someone still alive or who has passed away. It could be a teacher or a guide. Imagine that person standing on your right side, showering you with love and best wishes for your safety, well-being and happiness. Feel the warm wishes and love coming from that person towards you.

Now bring to mind the same person or another person who cherishes you deeply. Imagine that person standing on your left side, sending you wishes for your wellness, for your health and happiness. Feel the kindness and warmth coming to you from that person.

Now imagine that you are surrounded on all sides by all the people who love you and have loved you. Picture all of your friends and loved ones surrounding you. They are sending you wishes for your happiness, well-being, and health. Enjoy the warm wishes and love coming from all sides. You are filled, and overflowing with warmth and love.

[Sending loving-kindness to your neighbours]

Now bring your awareness to your neighbour on your right. Begin to send the love that you feel in you to that person. You and your neighbour are similar. Just like you, s/he wants to be happy. Send all your love and warm wishes to her/him. Repeat the following phrases, silently:

- May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.
- May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.
- May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.

Now focus your awareness on your neighbour on your left. Begin to send the love within you to that person. Send all your love and warmth to that person. Your neighbour and you are alike. Just like you, that person wishes to have a good life. Repeat the following phrases, silently:

- May you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.
- May you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.
- May you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.

[Sending loving-kindness to domestic workers who are hurt.]

² Adapted from: University of California, Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, in collaboration with HopeLab, Greater Good in Action: [Loving kindness meditation](#)

Now picture Maria from the story, who has pain. Maria, like you, wishes to have a happy life. Send warm wishes to her. Repeat the following phrases to Maria, silently:

- May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.
- May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.
- May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.

Now think of another domestic worker who has pain. You and s/he are alike in your wish to be happy. Send all your wishes for well-being to that person with pain, repeating the following phrases, silently:

- May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.
- May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.
- May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.

[Sending Loving-kindness to all domestic workers]

Now picture domestic workers all over the world in front of you as a big ball. Send warm wishes to all domestic workers, who, like you, want to be happy:

- May you live with ease, happiness, and good health.
- May you live with ease, happiness, and good health.
- May you live with ease, happiness, and good health.

Take a deep breath in. And breathe out. And another deep breath in and let it go. What do you think? What do you feel?

When you're ready, open your eyes and stretch out with your arms wide.



Info note: Coping with violence & harassment³

'After someone hurts you, you are not the same anymore.'

Effects of violence & harassment

Many of us know about violence & harassment from our own experience. To some of us it happened when we were very young. Some of us have been abused by one or more of our employers. Or, we have been in an abusive partner relationship. Many of us carry the injuries and scars with us. We fight to protect ourselves and our loved ones from harm. We try to prevent the violence from happening, and we find ways to cope

with it, one way or the other. Some of us get weak, sick and die. Many of us endure violence until we can no longer stand it. Then, we flee and fight, and manage to escape from it. We are wounded but we have overcome the pain and are now violence survivors.



Violence against domestic workers is **not about individual, isolated acts** by one employer towards a domestic worker, or one partner or family member towards somebody close to them. Violence & harassment is generally part of a **systematic pattern of power abuse** in societies that causes physical, sexual, psychological and/or economic harm. Experiencing violence leads to strong feelings of fear, anger, helplessness and powerlessness (impotence) and despair.

Common effects of violence are:

- **Physical effects:** Trauma and stress lead to many physical symptoms such as loss of appetite and nausea, headaches, neck, back or stomach pains and anxiety. Physical and sexual assault can lead to: bruises, injuries (burns, cuts, bite marks, head wounds), missing teeth, fractures (ribs, nose, other bones), dislocations (particularly jaw and shoulder), hearing and seeing problems, genital problems, skull injury.
- **Psychosomatic effects:**
 - Symptoms of fear and anger like heart palpitations, hyperventilation, trembling, sweating, dizziness, stomach pains, pains in the heart, shortness of breath, insomnia.
 - Symptoms of powerlessness like weakness, depression, dejection, being tired.
 - Symptoms of tension and anger like headaches, sleeping disorders, stomach pains, menstrual disorders.
- **Psycho-social effects:** lack of concentration and productivity, making mistakes, feelings of anger, guilt, shame, watchfulness, negative self-image, social isolation, relational problems, problems with sexuality, suppressed emotions, conflicting emotions.

³ Adapted from: WAVE, *WAVE training programme on violence against women*, Vienna, 2008 (2nd Edition); ILO, *Action against sexual harassment at work in Asia and the Pacific*, ILO, Bangkok, 2001; Rutgers-van Wijlen, K. & Haspels, P., *Training materials on coping* (in Dutch), Putten, 2010; Rutgers-van Wijlen, K.: *Training materials on intimate partner violence* (in Dutch), Utrecht, 2006; Psychology today, *Somatic experiencing: How trauma can be overcome*, 2015; Healthline, *Fight, flight or freeze: How we respond to threats*, 2020

- **Behavioral effects:** numb and/or submissive behavior, being nervous all the time, frequent cancelling or missing of appointments, not wanting to seek help, wanting to stay close to the abuser, and frequent use of phrases like: "my employer, husband will ... or won't let me..."
- **Deep trauma and mental disorders:** Some victims are driven to attempt and commit suicide, express other self-destructive behavior like cutting, or may become mentally ill and suffer from psychiatric problems.

What's going on in our body, heart and mind?

When we, human beings, are subjected to violence, we experience stress and trauma. **Trauma** is the normal human response of the brain to an abnormal event, such as violence and abuse. It is a **physical and psychological response** to an event and experience that is so deeply distressing and disturbing, that it is too much to handle for our body, heart and mind. As a result we are unable to be happy, to feel good and to relax. We feel stressed all the time and are not able to cope anymore with the physical, mental and emotional demands of our day-to-day life and work.

When we are experiencing lots of stress and trauma, the **survival instinct** in our brains that our ancestors developed ages ago kicks in. The **fight-flight-freeze** response is our body's natural reaction to danger and the will to survive. It is not a conscious decision. It happens automatically. This response helps us to act immediately so we can protect ourselves. In the fight-flight-freeze modes our body gets a lot of energy so that we can deal with the danger. Our heart rate goes faster. This increases the oxygen flow to our muscles. Our perception of pain drops. And we can hear and see better, so we can act rapidly:

- The first impulse is usually to **flee**, to try to get away and escape. If that is not possible or very difficult, then we fight or freeze.
- When we **fight** but have less power than the abuser, we may get hurt. So we decide not to fight because we know that it will not work or increase the violence. Then we often freeze to limit the damage.
- When we **freeze**, our body stays completely still and passive, we are 'playing dead'. The body and mind are shutting down to some degree so that we don't feel the pain and suffer.

If the violence & harassment are very severe and/or continue over time, the fight-flight-freeze response becomes overactive. The signs of trauma are a decreased ability to feel good, happy and relaxed. In the case of trauma, we see danger everywhere. We are unable to think and act to escape danger. Even if we manage to escape and the danger is gone, we may continue to feel threatened.

How do we cope with violence & harassment?

As domestic workers we generally wait before **fleeing**. We think twice before quitting our job or our abusive partner or family because this also threatens our and our loved ones' livelihood. We depend on our salary and can not afford to lose our job, or be dependant on the income of others. **Fighting** is also often difficult, as the abuser has power over us. We try to hold on and solve the problem in other ways. **Freezing** often happens in the case of rape, other abusive physical and sexual assault, or when we are constantly exposed to violent acts and the threat of violence.

When we feel we can not escape from the violence and abuse, we may also develop a fourth type of coping strategy: **'appeasing the abuser'**: We will try to prevent the violence from happening by making ourselves very small, avoiding being seen or heard and trying to fulfill the abuser's wishes in advance. This is very harmful to our health, because instead of focusing our attention on finding ways to defend ourselves, we spend our energy on pacifying the abuser.

A **successful coping strategy** is to **seek help and discuss** the violence and trauma it brings us with people we trust. Talking about the problem and seeking help are very important in coping with violence and finding ways to escape. But, some of us may feel too shy or too shamed to do so, as though the violence is our fault. Contacting others may not always be possible, and/or doing so may not stop the violence. Then, we may try to hide, and find diversions (excessive use of tv, medicines, alcohol, eating a lot, gambling or gaming). Or we freeze not only at the moment of violence but for a long time after. This means we have withdrawn into ourselves and have become passive and depressed. Worst, we start thinking we are to blame and take out the negative feelings on ourselves. If this happens we become a danger to ourselves and we **MUST** flee the abusive situation and escape immediately.

All of us, women and men, have developed different coping styles, or ways of dealing with the challenges and problems we face, based on our upbringing, character and experiences. Our overall coping style may serve and suit us well in our daily lives, but if violence & harassment come our way, our body, mind and heart experience a big shock. In response to trauma, we may start to behave in different, unexpected ways, like crying or being angry, suspicious, sad or sick most of the time. Then, we need to do other things to get rid of all the negative effects of the violence on us.

Coping strategies and skills that work for many people are about **checking what we feel and think**, and then **deciding what we want** to do (or not do). In dealing with violence, stress and trauma, we need to learn how to use our body, heart (feelings) and mind (thoughts) to take action and get to grips with the violence, stress and trauma this causes. **Coping** is about **using our body, heart and mind**, to go through and process what happened, and to act and deal with the problem by reaching out and seeking help, reducing the pain and the stress, and taking care of ourselves.

Trauma release: Getting rid of what is stuck

After reacting to a threat, we need to **recover and get rid of the extra energy** we got to cope with the violence and its effects. When we are well, our mind and body go through a smooth daily cycle from alertness and action to rest and relaxation. When this cycle is interrupted, the charge of energy we got at the time of danger and violence, can get 'stuck' in our bodies. We can then find it difficult to get back to our usual daily life cycle.

The energy stuck in our system will likely be triggered when we encounter events, people or things that remind us of the earlier traumatic experience. Triggers that may ring the alarm bell in us can also be **a color, a smell, a sound or a sensation**. In that way, our present lives can be colored by our past, often in a negative way.

What we need to do is to **recharge our energy and reset our body, heart and mind**, so we can become happy again. We must do a thorough cleaning up to rid our body, mind and heart of all the dirt of the trauma. Over time, people everywhere have discovered many ways of 'resetting the body, heart and mind', 'blowing off steam', or 'recharging our life energy' to restore their balance: Walking or jogging, working-out, doing yoga or tai-chi, keeping a diary, talking about it with a trusted person, praying or meditating.

In summary, when deciding how to resist violence & harassment, many thoughts and feelings will come up. It helps to make space for these and to learn how we can express our justified anger without harming ourselves or others. Doing so will enable us to find the space to care for ourselves and others with love and respect.





4.2 : Healing from trauma and self care



90 minutes

	Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore how we can heal from violence & harassment and take care of ourselves To try out 2 different types of meditations to focus and recharge ourselves
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic worker leaders Domestic workers who have experienced violence & harassment Domestic workers who help handling violence & harassment cases
	Room Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steps 1 and 3: Seating in big or small groups Step 2: One flipchart stand and space for discussion by small groups in 3 corners of the training room. Step 4: Space for the big group to stand in a circle and move around.
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step 2: Three flipchart stands, papers and markers in 3 corners of the room.
	Training Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide show: Healing from trauma and self care Handout 1: The 5 senses exercise, for the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care2. Handout 2: Points for discussion on coping, healing and self care Handout 3: Life energy exercises to heal trauma, for the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care3. Info note: Healing from trauma and self care



Session Plan Steps

1.	The five-senses exercise	Intro and meditation	10 minutes
2.	Coping, healing and self care	Small group work	40 minutes
3.	Coping, healing and self care	Sharing and conclusion	20 minutes
4.	Life energy exercises	Intro and meditation	20 minutes



Preparation

- Read the training aids and the Infonote.
- For steps 1 and 4, click the clips with the mind-body exercises and/or practice them with someone else so you can guide the group.
- For step 2: Prepare 3 flipcharts, one with the heading: 1. Coping, another one with the heading: 2. Healing and the last one with the heading: 3. Self care. Put one flipchart each on the flipchart stands in 3 corners of the room.

SESSION PLAN

STEP 1	THE 5 SENSES EXERCISE	INTRO AND MEDITATION	10 MINUTES
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- Link the session to the previous session and say: We are starting this session with a short meditation to **focus our attention on the 'here and now'** by using our 5 senses.
- Guide the group to do the meditation using handout 1, or click bit.ly/GBV_care2.
- Ask the group how they feel after the exercise and after a few responses move to the next step.

STEP 2	COPING, HEALING AND SELF CARE	SMALL GROUP WORK	40 MINUTES
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- Introduce the group work in the big group by saying: We are now going to **discuss how we can cope with violence & harassment** and start to **heal from the harmful effects** that violence & harassment have on us. Can some of you explain **what are the main coping strategies** that people have when they face violence & harassment? [*Fight, flight, freeze and appease responses, depression, self-harm, addiction or suicide. Successful coping strategies are seeking help and discussing the problem with people we trust, going through what happened, reducing the pain and taking care of ourselves, as discussed in previous **Unit 4.1** Coping with violence & harassment.*]
- Then ask: Can some of you explain **what healing is**? After a few responses, agree with the group: Healing is the process of **becoming healthy, well and happy** again.
- Distribute handout 2: Points for discussion on coping, healing and self care to the group. Ask for volunteers to each read out one of the points for discussion. Check if the topics [*coping, healing and self care*] and the points for discussion are clear. Clarify as needed.
- Say: We will work in 3 small working groups in 3 rounds. Divide the participants into the 3 groups, and give each group a name or number. Say:
 - In the first round, each small group will discuss and report their key points on 1 of the 3 questions in one corner in 15 minutes.
 - In the second round, every group will move clockwise to the next corner, read the keypoints of the first group, share your own ideas and add your key points on the flipchart in 10 minutes.
 - In the third round, every group will move to the last question, read, discuss and report it on the flipchart also in 10 minutes.
- Assign each group to one of the corners, and ask them to start. Walk around. In the first round, remind the groups after 10 minutes to write points on the flipchart. After 15 minutes start the second round, again reminding groups to write their points down. After 10 minutes start the third round, making sure the groups write key points down. After 10 minutes, ring a bell or clap your hands to stop the small group work and have a quick look at the points on the flipcharts.



Tip for Trainers

- ▼ *If the participants are new to each other, shy or silent, and/or many of them are violence survivors, it may be better if they can share personal experiences on the 3 topics trauma, healing and self care in small working groups. In small groups people feel encouraged to speak, they become close to another, and can understand and comfort each other. If you decide to do the exercise in small working groups ask the groups to discuss the 3 topics in step 2, and discuss the outcome of the group work in the big group in step 3.*
- ▼ *If many participants have difficulty reading, make sure there is one literate person in each small group to help report their main findings.*

STEP 3	COPING, HEALING AND SELF CARE	SHARING AND CONCLUSION	20 MINUTES
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- Ask the groups to walk around to read the points of the other groups for around 5 minutes. Get the big group together, and ask them to sit down. Put the 3 flipcharts upfront and discuss the main points listed on each of the topics with the group. Ask people to clarify any points and discuss the main things participants agree or do not agree on. Main points to discuss for each topic are:
 - **Coping.** [We can **learn how to cope** with stress and trauma and fight the harmful effects of violence & harassment on our health and well-being **with our body, heart and mind**. Coping strategies and skills are about checking what we feel and think, and then decide what we want to do or not do. We need to **go through** and **process** what happened, and **to act and deal with the problem** by reaching out and seeking help, reducing the pain and the stress, and taking care of ourselves. Doing mindfulness exercises helps us to heal from trauma and restore our life energy, because they help us to focus on the **'here and now'**, and **let go** of negative thoughts and feelings that upset us.]
 - **Healing.** [After experiencing trauma, we need to find ways to heal ourselves. Healing from violence & harassment is not always quick and easy. Healing takes **time and energy**. It needs **patience, persistence** and a **commitment to change**. People often go through several **stages during the healing process**: denial, grief and anger; downplaying the violence and the trauma; bargaining and negotiating with yourself or fate; now knowing what to do; experimenting with new ways of coping; and acceptance and moving on. Sometimes we get into self-sabotaging practices that prevent us from healing. Not everyone heals, especially if they do not get help, and can't change the situation that they are in. Tips to help you heal are: Don't blame yourself. Be kind to yourself. Accept what happened. Connect and get help. Join a DWO group and take action against violence. Get to know yourself better. Take time for yourself. Do body-mind exercises.]
 - **Self care.** [Any activity that we do to take care of ourselves, so we become healthy and happy. It is about being active to protect one's own well-being and happiness. If we do self care activities we remind ourselves that we are important and need to look after our needs. Self care helps us to maintain a healthy relationship with ourselves as it produces positive feelings and boosts our confidence and self-esteem. We take care of ourselves through physical exercises, social relations and support, arts, hobbies and games, rest and recreation.]
- When the main points are clear, conclude with the key messages:
 - We can learn to cope with violence and trauma with our body, heart and mind: Reaching out, seeking help, going through what happened, reducing pain and stress, and taking care of ourselves.
 - Healing takes time and energy. It needs patience, persistence and commitment to change to recover from trauma and become healthy and happy.
 - We need to take care of ourselves. It produces positive feelings and boosts our self-confidence.

STEP 4	LIFE ENERGY EXERCISES	INTRO AND MEDITATION	20 MINUTES
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- Say: **Trauma depletes our life energy.** We can get rid of negative energy, recharge our life energy and heal in many ways. All of us need to find the ways that work for us. Exercises that use our body as the starting point can release tension and trauma and make us feel better. We are going **to try out** some of these **life energy exercises** now so you can experience and experiment how your body, heart and mind feel.
 - Click the clip at: bit.ly/GBV_care3 and/or guide the group in doing the life energy exercises.
 - When ready, ask the group to take 1 minute to experience how they feel.
 - Ask volunteers to share how they experienced the exercises. After some responses, thank everyone for their inputs with a big group applause.
 - Say: You can do these life energy exercises by yourself in your own place in your own time. Share the clip or distribute handout 3 to participants as they wish.



HANDOUT 1

The 5 senses exercise⁴

In this exercise, we show you how to focus in a quick and easy way. It brings your awareness to the 'here and now' and helps you to practice mindfulness in any situation. All you need to do is **to focus** on something you are experiencing with each of the 5 senses, one after the other.

Let's begin. Without straining or concentrating, just begin by noticing your posture. Your weight in your chair. Notice the air around you, your skin and your breath within.

Close your eyes and sit comfortably. Take a deep breath in. And breathe out. Another breath in. And another breath out. Start to relax and gently follow my voice.

- Slowly, open your eyes. With a soft gaze, notice 5 things that you can see. Look around you and bring your attention to 5 things that you can see. Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.
- Now, notice 4 things that you can **feel**. Bring awareness to 4 things that you are currently feeling, like the material of your clothes, the feeling of the breeze on your skin, or the smooth surface of your nails.
- Now, notice 3 things you can **hear**. Take a moment to listen, and note 3 things that you hear in the background. This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator or an aircon, or the faint sounds of traffic outside.
- Now, notice 2 things you can **smell**. Bring your awareness to 2 smells that you usually filter out, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying a whiff of trees if you're outside, or the smell of a fast-food restaurant across the street.
- Now, notice 1 thing you can **taste**. Focus on 1 thing that you can taste right now, at this moment. You can take a sip of water, taste and chew a piece of gum, notice the current taste in your mouth, or even open your mouth to search the air for a taste.

Now open your eyes, stretch your body with your arms wide and yawn with your mouth wide open, saying Aaaaah...

You can do this exercise at anytime and any place. In only 2 minutes, it can calm you when you are angry. It can give you energy and can help you to make better decisions.

⁴ Adapted from: PositivePsychology, *22 Mindfulness exercises, techniques and activities for adults, Five senses exercise*



HANDOUT 2

Points for discussion on coping, healing and self care

Share your experience and discuss the following points in your group.

Corner 1: Topic 1

Coping: What do domestic workers do to cope with the trauma and harmful effects of violence & harassment on their health and well-being? What are advantages and/or disadvantages of each of these ways of coping with the trauma?

Corner 2: Topic 2

Healing: What tips for healing can you share with domestic workers who want to heal from the trauma of violence & harassment? What are do's and don'ts for healing?

Corner 3: Topic 3

Self care: What is self care? How do domestic workers and women practice self care?

Discuss each topic, using the questions as a guide. Feel free to add and discuss important points to each topic as you see fit.

You do not have to agree within your group or between groups. Disagreements help develop critical thinking.



HANDOUT 3

Life energy exercises to heal trauma⁵

4 Steps to become aware of the life energy

Say: Body exercises help us to release tension and trauma and make us feel better. We are now going to try out 4 sets of life energy exercises so you can experience and experiment how your body, heart and mind feel when and after doing them.

Stand up and form a big circle. Take a moment to notice how you feel, how your breathing is, and where your attention and energy are. Notice anything that's there, and if you can't notice anything, that's fine too.

We start with **set 1: Grounding ourselves**

Heel drops. Begin by standing, and letting your eyes defocus, so you're not really looking at anything. Now, raise slowly up onto your toes, and then let yourself drop back down to your heels. Keep doing this at a slow rhythm, imagining that your entire weight drops down all at once through your heels. Let it make a loud thud! Bring your attention to the effect it has on your hips and lower back; maybe it feels as though the jolt loosens them. Try to let them relax. Do this for 1 minute.

Shaking. After a short pause, set yourself back in your standing position, and use your knees to create a gentle bouncing in your legs. Let your knees slightly bend, and then push backwards again into being straight, creating a soft shaking in your legs. Imagine this shaking can gently rock through your whole body, through your hips, up to your shoulders, and even your neck. Try to relax around your jaw, and your lower back and tail bone, as if the base of your spine is really heavy. Do this for 1 minute.

Wave breathing. Stand still again, and let your hands come to rest on the front of your thighs. Start noticing your breath. Now, as you inhale slowly, reach your chin forwards, glide your hips backwards, and lean your upper body forwards, creating an arch through your back. Pause for a moment, and then as you breathe out slowly, let your head relax downwards, bring your tailbone gently under and forwards, and round your back, coming gradually back into an upright position. Do this for around 8 breaths. This is a lovely way to extend and mobilize your spine. As you move, pay attention to the movement in your spine, and to how you feel your weight through your heels.

Bamboo swaying. After these 3 movements, come back to standing, and allow yourself to sway gently back and forth like bamboo in the wind for a minute. This rocking movement helps to discharge built-up tension. You might also notice little tremors or shudders in your body, which might feel a bit unusual at first, but allow them to travel through you. It's a way for the body to release tension.

Checking in. Finally, stand still for a minute, and pay attention to any internal sensations that you might be able to notice in your body now. Is there any difference in how tense or relaxed you are? Do you notice any difference in your legs and feet? Perhaps you can feel them as a bit more alive or with a kind of energy flow, or perhaps you feel connected to the ground differently than before.

⁵ Davis, Soph Sam, *Four sets of somatic mindfulness exercises for people who have experienced trauma*, in PsychCentral, 8 Oct 2018

In set 2 we experience **Quieting and Flow**

Grab and let go. Begin by standing and letting your eyes defocus. Now, slowly step 1 leg forward, and plant first your heel and then your whole foot on the ground. Let your weight move forwards onto that front foot, even though your back foot doesn't actually leave the ground. At the same time as you step forward, reach forwards with the arm on that same side, fingers outstretched. As your foot lands, close your hand into a fist, as though you're grabbing something. As you're doing this forwards, active motion, you breathe in. Then pause for a moment, and step back again, bringing your foot back next to the other one, and release and open your hand, bringing your arm back to your side. As you do this releasing, backwards motion, breathe out.

Do this movement with just one side for 1 or 2 minutes, and then switch to the other side for 1 or 2 minutes. Try to keep your attention in the 3 parts of this movement: your breath, your hand/arm, and your foot/leg.

Checking in. Stand still for a minute. You may notice the swaying from the last set begins all on its own. If it does, follow this for a little bit, and then start checking in with your internal sensations. Pay attention to your body now, and notice if there are any different sensations to before. Focus especially on where there is a sense of flow, aliveness, or tingling. Maybe the flow feels like going down your body, like slowly moving water. Pay attention to the feeling of wanting these sensations of aliveness to have more space, to be allowed to be there.

In set 3 we put energy in our **Breath of life**

Active breathing. Begin by standing, and starting to focus on your breath. Take a deep breath in, and as you exhale, use your mouth to make the sound shhhh, as if you're telling people to be quiet. Make a loud sound! Pay attention to how it feels in the area between your chest and your stomach. Do it until your breath runs out, and then do it again, for around 8 breaths. The sound shhhh is useful for opening the diaphragm, which is often stuck or tight in states of internalized fear, limiting our breathing. Opening it helps us shift from a frozen state into becoming more activated.

Calming breathing. Now take another deep breath in, and make the sound mmmm as you breathe out. Press your lips together quite gently, and try to find the level of pressure between them that creates the most vibration through your whole head from the sound. Make the sound as long as you can, and then breathe in again. Do this for around 8 breaths, paying attention to the vibration feeling in your head. A humming sound is particularly effective in stimulating the vagus nerve, which helps an over-aroused nervous system to reset, allowing us to relax.

Checking in. As before, stand for a minute to check in with any body sensations that you might be able to feel now. If there are any tremors, or swaying, or the need to stretch, just let that happen. Can you notice any difference in your breathing now, or any difference in the sense of space inside? Can you give any images or words to describe the sensation or experience?

Finally in set 4, we take control

Tense and relax your body parts. In a standing position, you're going to tense up various area of your body as you breathe in and count slowly to 8, holding the tension quite strongly. Then let go of the tension as you exhale slowly, counting to 8. To make sure the relaxation part has enough time, inhale again to the count of 8, imagining that this body area is expanding or taking up more space, as if all of the cells are glowing. Then exhale to the count of 8, imagining that the area is relaxing, melting like butter. Do this tensing and relaxing **twice** for each area. It can be helpful to close your eyes while doing this, but if you're more comfortable with them open, that's fine too.

Our bodies tend to get stuck in certain patterns of areas that are overly tense (hypertonic muscles) or areas that seem absent (hypotonic muscles). In order to shift these states, we must first become aware of them, and a good way to do that is to intentionally create and release tension. This exercise brings some attention to what your nerves are usually doing unconsciously, and lets those patterns start to shift:

- Start by tensing your **neck and throat**. Many of us hold a lot of control in our necks, keeping rigid there as if it keeps us in control of situations. It is a great place to gain back some flexibility, in many senses. After doing this twice, rest a moment.
- Second, tense your **shoulders, arms and hands**, a bit like being ready to fight. Notice your muscles, and any sensations of strength in your own body now. Feeling your arms can give us a sense of how much space you can take up.
- Third, tense your **belly**. Many people feel a tense knot in their upper bellies connected to anxiety, while others feel an emptiness or lack there. Sensing your belly can start restoring a sense of depth of experience and quietness at just being.
- Finally, tense your **legs and feet**. Many of us feel quite separated from our legs, which can be a source of feeling our strength, standing our ground, or feeling the power to run away if we need to.

Swinging. After all of this tensing and relaxing, do an extra movement to make sure you discharge any excess tension. Stand and turn your upper body side to side, as if you're looking over first your right shoulder and then your left, gently rotating your whole upper body along the way. Let your arms be floppy, and follow the movement, so that they swing out in front of you and then knock gently at your sides at each end of the twist. You can relax your knees a little, and let your hips join the turning movement a bit. Feel the gentle twist of your spine as you move. Do this for around 1 minute.

Checking in. As before, stand still and check in with any body sensations that you may feel now. How light or heavy do you feel? How are your arms hanging beside you now? What kind of energy do you feel now?

Say: After doing the life energy sets, give yourself some time before talking to others and going on with your daily activities. Take a couple of minutes to be with your experience. Put some words to it for yourself: Are there any different feelings that you notice about yourself now? Then open your eyes and look around the room for a minute, just noticing how it is to be there now, and if anything looks different. It's important to have this time after the exercises for you to integrate your new body-heart-mind state before going back to your daily activities and talking to other people.



Info note: Healing from trauma and self care⁶

**“Being human is not exhausting, violence and oppression is.
Rage, pain, sadness, it is all justified.
It is important to give voice to my rage and let it breathe
so that it can become positive energy instead of self-destruction.”**

(Black Lives Matter, anonymous)

**“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation.
And that is an act of political welfare.”**

(Audre Lorde)

Recovering from trauma

Trauma tends to leave a lasting, **negative influence on the way our body, heart and mind works**. When we are traumatized, we tend to disconnect from our body (it feels numb), using our mind too much or too little, and feeling unhappy and sick all the time. This happens because the extra energy that we got to help us escape from danger (the flight, fight or freeze responses), often does not go away by itself. We remain in **‘danger mode’**: we feel anxious, angry, or very down. The **extra energy and emotions** cannot get away and **stay locked up in our nervous system**. We feel defensive, tense and alert, or break and collapse, reliving the trauma time and again. This keeps us from being present in our bodies in the ‘here and now’.

Violence & harassment bring pain, sadness and anger. When we use these feelings to decide what we do not want in our lives, we are using our past to guide our future. But, **pain and trauma have a way of making us feel stuck in our past**. Some of us struggle with letting go of past hurt and pain, we can feel trapped and unable to move forward in our lives.

Trauma **messes up our sense of time and memory**. Painful events replay in our mind in never ending circles. We often think these bad memories and emotions will never go away. Or we forget them for a while, and then suddenly remember and get overwhelmed by them again. However, **time can and does heal**. Painful memories and feelings do go away and fade with time if we can and want to let them go.

Coping with trauma with our body, heart and mind

We can learn how to cope with stress and trauma and **fight the harmful effects of violence & harassment on our health and well-being with our body, heart and mind**:

- **Coping strategies and skills** are **about checking what we feel and think, and then deciding what we want to do or not do**.
- We need to go through and **process what happened**, and **to act and deal with the problem** by reaching out and seeking help, reducing the pain and the stress, and taking care of ourselves.
- Doing **mindfulness exercises** with our body, heart and mind can help us heal and build habits that are **useful to recover from trauma**: Being in the **‘here and now’**, and being able to **let go** of negative thoughts and feelings that upset us.

Our body is a **powerful tool** to help restore our life energy. Paying attention to body sensations is part and parcel of all mindfulness, but it is especially important to work with the body when we want to start healing from trauma. This helps us to balance and regulate ourselves and our nervous system. We become more present and connected, and start the process of recovering from the shock state that we’ve been unconsciously held in.

Addressing the **physical experience of an emotion** is a powerful way to work ‘bottom-up’ to change the negative associations we have with something due to violence & harassment. The past few decades of **neuroscience research** has revealed how the brain behaves after fear and trauma, how this affects our bodily sensations and our emotions and how the brain is, in turn, influenced by these bodily sensations.

⁶ Adapted from: Davis, Soph Sam, *Four sets of somatic mindfulness exercises for people who have experienced trauma*, in PsychCentral, 8 Oct 2018; Tanasugarn, A., *Healing from the past and living in your present*, April, 2020; van der Kolk, B., various video’s, e.g. *Yoga for trauma release*; Rutgers-van Wijlen, K., *Selected training materials on coping strategies and trauma release* (in Dutch), 2010-2020, Putten.

Therefore, it makes sense to work both **'bottom-up'** with bodily experience, as well as **'top-down'** with the heart and mind first noticing and then letting go of our fixed, often negative beliefs about ourselves and others, like our self-hatred, self-rejections and judgments.

Healing

Healing from past pain and trauma means we become healthy and happy again. Everybody wants to heal when they are hurt, but healing from violence & harassment is not always quick and easy. **Healing requires time, patience, persistence and a commitment to change.** Humans are wired for wanting to feel good and to minimize feeling bad. But when we constantly live in a 'fight, flight or freeze' mode, we expect more pain the whole time, and we sometimes get into self-sabotaging behaviors to avoid that pain.

Self-sabotaging behaviors are practices that prevent us from healing. They start out as a way to reduce or avoid painful thoughts and feelings. We try to push these away, for example, by taking pills, over-eating, drinking too much, binge-watching, excessive gaming or gambling, and/or by isolating ourselves from others. This can lead to depression, further self-isolation, unhealthy relationships and a toxic spiral down of feeling worse and worse. If this happens, we need to change something, in ourselves and/or in our environment.

After experiencing trauma, **we need to find ways to heal ourselves.** These ways may be different for different people, and everybody can experiment with what works for them. A good place to start is to work with the body and the breath:

- We learn to notice what happens, and allow the body to sense its capacity to protect itself, so that we can experience the reality that the danger is over.
- We are able to give the painful experiences a place in our memory and settle them there, so they do not keep haunting us in the present.
- We do this little by little, coming to know what is safe, and what is not safe, and we are able to stay present in our bodies.
- We start to be curious again to explore sensations, new feelings and challenges.
- We are not afraid, do not avoid certain things, and are not judging ourselves, everything and everybody in harsh ways. We become strong again, and begin to trust that we can find our way again.
- In this way we heal, our symptoms disappear, and we are free to be happy and healthy again in our day-to-day lives.

We go through **several stages** to heal from trauma from the moment we have escaped from violence & harassment to becoming survivors who are healed. The stages are:

- Denial, grief and anger
- Downplaying the violence & harassment
- Bargaining and negotiating (with yourself, with fate, or the divine)
- Not sure what to do (passive, depressed, waiting for the problem to solve by itself)
- Experimenting with new ways of coping
- Acceptance of what happened, integrate it in our life and move on to a better future.

The road to recovery is different for different people. Not everyone goes through all the stages, or people may experience several stages at the same time. It is also common for anger and grief to keep popping up every once in a while on the road to recovery. One cannot say how long it takes to heal and get rid of a trauma completely. It differs from one person to another, and the depth of the trauma. We also need to realize that not everybody heals. For some people the trauma is too deep, they can't get over it, they remain traumatized and sick. This happens especially if they do not get help, and can't change the situation that they are in.

Tips for helping us heal are:

- **Take time for yourself.** Balance is key when working on self-improvement. Being with others is vital for well-being but you don't need to be with friends, or on social media, or busy with organizing all the time. When you are alone, you can get to know yourself and give yourself attention and love. You need to love yourself before you can love others.
- **Don't blame yourself.** The person to blame for the violence & harassment that has happened is the perpetrator. It is NOT YOUR FAULT. Whatever blame or shame is projected on you in your community or workplace, remember that the blame for violence lies with the abuser and not the victim. However, many violence victims keep blaming themselves for what happened. They direct their anger towards themselves rather than the perpetrator, and so it becomes bigger rather than smaller.

- **Be kind to yourself. You are a good person:** Your hurt, pain, bad or sad mood, thoughts or feelings exist because of the violence done by somebody else, and it is this negative energy that we need to get rid off. We are all humans who are sometimes perfect and sometimes imperfect. You do not have to be perfect all the time. New skills need time to develop and bloom. Be kind to yourself if you slip up, find yourself reliving trauma or reverting back to old behavior patterns that are not good for you.
- **Get to know yourself better.** Think what you like and don't like in your life and work, and **what is important to you and what is not.** Find out what are your boundaries and limits and in what areas you want to grow. Decide what you want to change. This will be different for everyone but the main point is to give yourself time to heal and move ahead at your own pace. For many, setting boundaries is about making choices carefully. Find out:
 - What you can give and what you cannot give and to whom. Sometimes people ask too much of you and they try to exploit you.
 - With whom you want to be friends, and whom you do not want to have in your life.
 - With whom and where do you want to work? Sometimes you may need to find another job.
- **Accept what has happened.** We can only heal if we are aware and know that we are hurt and in a crisis because of the violence, and if we want to do something about it. The past is a done deal. We can't change it. But being stuck because of trauma hurts us in the present. Accepting that the past is over, allows us to grieve and to release the pain that we are carrying with us.
- **Connect and get help.** Reaching out and seeking the help of friends and co-workers is often the only way to be able to escape violence & harassment. Violence victims need material and emotional help. Sharing experiences with violence survivors, other domestic workers and Domestic Workers Organizations (DWOs) is a life-line for domestic workers who are survivors of violence & harassment.
- **Join a DWO group and take action** against violence & harassment. Taking practical action against violence & harassment by joining a DWO or a women's organization or any other organization and campaigning against it, helps you heal, makes you stronger and helps to prevent harm to other domestic workers. Violence survivors are strong advocates against it. They can help their peers heal, and become powerful sisters and rolemodels.
- **Start to do body-heart-mind practices** everyday. These are tools and techniques to calm down, relax, focus and heal. They teach us to stay in the present and to calm our mind when we experience emotional triggers (sounds, smells, sensations) that bring back the pain and the hurt. They help us to take our mind to a safe place and from there decide where to go or not to go. Examples are:
 - Deep belly breathing
 - Visualizing peaceful images, singing or focusing on calming words (mantras)
 - Meditation, prayer
 - Yoga, Tai-chi, Qi Gong
 - Trauma healing practices. Recent methods, such as bio-energetics, mindfulness, somatic experiencing or generative somatics, or healing rituals as practised by indigenous peoples, and religious or other groups.

Self care

Caring for ourselves helps us to stay healthy and happy. Self care is about being active to protect our own well-being and happiness. If we do self care we remind ourselves that we are important and need to look after our needs. Self care activities help us to maintain a healthy relationship with ourselves as it produces positive feelings and boosts our confidence and self-esteem.

There are many ways to care for ourselves. Some are the same for everybody, like physical exercise, and social relations and support. Others are a matter of choice. Main types are:

- We need **to look after ourselves:** Drink a lot of water, eat healthy food, have a good sleep, contact friends, move our body and exercise, do things that give us joy and be able to rest and relax after our work.
- **Physical activity.** Regular exercises reduces stress responses by:
 - Decreasing stress hormones
 - Increasing well-being hormones
 - Improving calmness
 - Promoting better sleep.

These benefits increase our mood and sense of relaxation, so that we can cope better with stressful events. Doing physical activities, like walking, hiking, dancing, singing, fitness, yoga, body-mind-heart exercises or other sports with friends can be fun and makes us healthy and happy.

- **Social relations and support.** Relations with other people whom you trust provide a sense of safety and protection. Your social support may be different people, like: friends, co-workers, family members, teachers or any other person who is important to you. Doing things together and caring for each other nurture our body, heart and mind. Social interactions and support minimize our worries and fears of real or imaginary dangers.
- **Arts, hobbies and games.** All people are creative, but many people forget to be so when they grow older. What do you like to do to relax? What did you like to do as a child? What are you interested in? What do you want to try out and learn to do? For example, hiking, knitting, gardening and planting, drawing, painting, writing, singing, playing music, dancing, going to the movies. All of these activities open your mind and heart, are fun to do alone and with others, and release your creativity.
- **Rest and recreation.** We need time to rest and do fun and relaxing activities. We can meet old and new friends, learn many things, see new and old places, play games and give and receive joy. Give not only others but also yourself a present at least once a year. Enjoy and avoid getting into unhealthy habits on social media or in real life. Be careful because sometimes you can end up losing time and money. Commercial advertizing in malls and on the internet can play tricks with your body, heart and mind. If you buy something, get a 'like' on our phone, or win when gaming or gambling, the pleasure centre in your brain gets aroused, so you want to do it again and again.

When to see a professional?

If you remain in a constant flight-fight-freeze response, and feel unhappy, irritated or depressed, consider to ask for further help. You should seek further assistance if you experience the following:

- Always feeling 'on edge', persistent worries, nervousness, or fear
- Stress that interferes with your daily activities, and inability to relax
- Fear of non-threatening situations.

Check out the Survivor manual

For more online help to recover and heal from violence, harassment and trauma see the '[Survivor manual](#), a non-competitive site for trauma survivors, non-profit organizations, advocates, speakers, healers, artists, authors, and trauma informed care workers to inspire and empower abuse survivors and their loved ones to heal'.

The manual chapters are as follows:

1. Music as mantras, finding healing through songs
2. Cycle of healing
3. How to overcome negative self-talk
4. What you are saying in your head can change your life!
5. Treating trauma from a MIND/BODY perspective
6. Facing shame and self-blame after trauma
7. Self care: Taking care of our self
8. Understanding trauma
9. If she can do it - so can I
10. 7 Things you can do right now to start feeling better
11. Self-defense for survivors
12. Dealing with triggers
13. Loving yourself
14. What is self injury
15. How do you break the lifelong pattern of being a victim
16. Telling your story
17. Helping others helps your heal
18. Affirmation



4.3 : How to handle power struggles



120 minutes

	Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To know how to stand strong and ‘ground’ ourselves. To understand and try out power dynamics between people. To have fun, feel strong, and use our body to support each other.
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic worker leaders Domestic workers who have experienced violence & harassment Domestic workers who help handling violence & harassment cases
	Room Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big open space for the group to stand, walk around and sit on the floor
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer and projector, flipcharts Steps 3 and 4: Flipcharts, markers, sheets of paper, flipchart stands, big black board or wall space Step 3: Container to collect roleplay scenario’s
	Training Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide show: How to handle power struggles Handout 1: Grounding exercise: We are strong, for the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care4. Handout 2: Strong together with our butt and spine, for the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care5. Info note: How to handle power struggles



Session Plan Steps

1.	We are strong	Grounding exercise	15 minutes
2.	The power triangle	Reflection and Q&A	15 minutes
3.	Power triangle dynamics	Walk-around exercise	20 minutes
4.	Dealing with power struggles	Pairs and roleplays	45 minutes
5.	Key messages	Conclusion	5 minutes
6.	Playing with our butt and spine	Game	20 minutes



Preparation

- Read the handouts and the Info note and discuss it with others so you fully understand and can guide the group.
- Step 1: This exercise is one of the beginners’ exercises in many yoga, Qi Gong, Tai Chi and therapy courses. People experience the difference between their normal body position and a basic strong body position. Ask around and check for the right translation of ‘to ground one’s self’ in the training languages.
- For step 3: Prepare 3 flipchart papers: Using the full paper, write in big letters: ‘All powerfull’ on one paper, ‘Powerless’ on the second and ‘Power struggle’ on the third paper.

SESSION PLAN

STEP 1	WE ARE STRONG	GROUNDING EXERCISE	15 MINUTES
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- Link the session to the previous session and say: We start with an exercise to ‘**ground ourselves**’ so you can **experience the difference between our usual body position and our strong body position**.
- Do the grounding exercise using Handout 1. We are strong, or click the clip: bit.ly/GBV_care4.
- Ask the group to share their experiences and conclude by pointing out the **benefits** of grounding to **recover** from violence & harassment: Grounding is about making contact with the ground under your feet. It helps us to be in the ‘**here and now**’: the present moment and time. It helps us to **feel good** so we can let go of unwanted flashbacks, memories, thoughts and feelings. Health benefits are better sleep and mood, and less stress, anxiety and pain.

STEP 2	THE POWER TRIANGLE ⁷	REFLECTION AND Q&A	15 MINUTES
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- Ask the participants to come to their seat and say in your own words: [*In **Unit 3.1** Power and domestic workers, we talked about the different types of power: power over, power within, power to and power with.*] In this session we are going to **learn about and try out power relations between people**. As domestic workers and as women, we need to know about this as we are at risk of violence & harassment from our employers (and/or partners) due to the unequal power relations that exist between them and us. It is useful for us to know more about the power dynamics between people.
- Show slide 1 of the power triangle on the computer or on a flipchart and explain it, using the Info note. Power dynamics. There are three positions:
 - **All powerful:** I am almighty and superior.
 - **Powerless:** I am a victim and inferior.
 - **Power struggle:** I fight and never give up.
- Show a slide or flipchart with the questions and ask everyone to reflect individually for a few minutes:
 - **What positions do you recognize?**
 - **Which one is your favourite position and why?**
 - **What are the advantages and disadvantages of each position?**
- After 5 minutes, ask volunteers to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Invite answers to the questions and jot these down on a flipchart:
 - In the **all-powerful** position: [*You make yourself bigger than you are. You are in charge and you are always right. You have good qualities and strengths, and no weaknesses. You don't need anybody. You are untouchable, proud, stubborn. You are innocent of any wrongdoing and perfect. You also deceive yourself, because nobody is perfect.*]
 - In the **powerless** position: [*You make yourself smaller. You suffer and you don't resist. You drown in negative feelings. You are bad, it is your fault. You have no value and no good qualities. You are not up to it and you are afraid. You avoid problems and you manipulate. You may also get stuck and despair, because there is no way out for you.*]
 - In the **power struggle** position: [*You have courage. You resist. You want to be in control. You fight to win. You divide people as worthy winners and useless losers. You fight to get your way and gain respect. You train your willpower. You may not care much about others and improving relations. You may get tired and want to give up.*]

⁷ Adapted from: Berg, J. van den & Tjoelker, A.: *Violence against women in relations* (in Dutch), RIMA and FIOM, Alkmaar, 1997.

STEP 3	POWER TRIANGLE DYNAMICS	WALK-AROUND EXERCISE	20 MINUTES
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- Say: Take a few minutes to think about power conflicts you have been in, and ask:
 - **In conflicts with your employer, what position do you take? What position does your employer take?**
 - **In conflicts with your family, what position do you take? And what position do they take?**
- Give the group a few minutes to think it over. While they do so, put the 3 flipcharts (each with one of the power positions) in 3 corners on the floor in such a way that they form a big triangle in the room and that all participants can easily walk around or stand by the flipcharts.
- After 2 minutes, invite the participants to stand-up and walk to the position that they usually take or would like to take in a conflict with their employer. [*They can also stand in between 2 corners if they want to choose 2 power positions.*] When all are standing around their chosen flipchart, ask the group in one corner to express their feelings through a sound or a gesture. Tell them they can exaggerate these, if they so wish. Repeat with the other 2 groups. Then ask a few people at each of the 3 corners: Why did they choose to stand there, and which corner would their employer likely choose?
- Ask the group to move to the position they usually take or would want to take in family conflicts. When all are standing in or around their chosen flipchart, again ask the group in one corner to express their feelings through a sound or a gesture. Repeat with the other 2 groups. Then ask a few people at each of the 3 corners: Why did they choose to stand there, and which corner would their family likely choose?
- Ask people to sit down and briefly discuss the walk-around exercise:
 - **Where do you think many domestic workers and women stand in the triangle?** [*Usually, they are more familiar with the powerless and power struggle positions. In conflicts with their family, they may also know about the all-powerful position.*]
 - **Where do your employers and partners/parents stand in conflicts with you?** [*Many employers and partners/parents often feel all-powerful and expect their domestic workers/wives and children to unconditionally obey them.*]
 - **Why are so many employers/partners/parents in the all-powerful position?** [*Employers are generally richer than the domestic workers, and they often feel superior because of their status, class, caste. Many family men and parents also want to be the boss in the relationship.*] Say: This situation is very unjust and unfair but it is the reality for many of us.
- Continue and say: If you look at the triangle, **what is the best position for you and why?** Note and discuss the responses [*Some will point to one of the corners, but the answer is: in the centre.*] Show slide 2 of the power triangle on the computer or on a flipchart and explain:
 - Each position has its advantages and disadvantages. If you and your employer/family have only one way of dealing with power conflicts, both parties tend to go in circles and easily get into a spiral of violence.
 - If you learn to center and stand in the middle of the power triangle, you have not 1 but 3 ways of handling the conflict. This is important: **As domestic workers and as women we tend to be given less power, so we need to increase our power ourselves.** Many employers think they are always right so we need to find ways of convincing them this is not true!

STEP 4	DEALING WITH POWER STRUGGLES	PAIRS AND ROLEPLAYS	45 MINUTES
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- Say: It is useful to analyze power conflicts and experiment with the use of the power triangle in this group. Here we feel safe and can try out situations. This can help us in real life.
- Ask everybody to stand up. Move the 3 flipcharts closer to each other on the floor and ask the group to sit in a big circle around them. Divide the group in pairs. Ask each pair to discuss and think of a **power conflict situation** between a domestic worker and an employer or an employment agent, that they would like to roleplay, using the power triangle. Give some examples, if needed. *[Examples: Employer wants to control and limit my free time. Afraid to say NO if employer insists I have to do dangerous tasks. I have to clean things that are already clean if s/he is angry with me. If I try to reason with my employer, s/he gets furious and threatens to fire me. I am silent when my employer scolds me, s/he cannot stand this, and shouts even more.]*
- Give the pairs 5-8 minutes, then give each pair a sheet of paper and pen and say to the group: Write down the conflict situation, and any questions or points you want to show in your roleplay. Fold your paper and put it in in the container in the middle.
- Invite a volunteer to shuffle the papers in the container, select 1 and read it out. Say: **Is this a common problem?** If yes, let us roleplay it. Who wants to play? In what role? *[Make sure not to appoint anyone but ask for volunteers. If participants are shy to volunteer, encourage them. If participants do not want to play the employer role, one of the trainers can take this on.]*
- Say: **Where does the domestic worker stand in the triangle? Where does the employer stand?** Ask the two players to take their position and roleplay their interaction. Tell the players they can change position and move somewhere else during the play. Ask the others to help the domestic worker to solve the conflict with the employer. After a few minutes, stop the play, applaud both players for their courage and briefly discuss how the players felt doing the play and what happened.
- If there is time, repeat and do 1 or 2 brief roleplays in the same way. Make sure to applaud each roleplay, and briefly discuss it.
- Ask participants how they decide if their employer's behaviour and demands are reasonable or not. After a few responses, say: If we want to **TEST** our employers' behavior towards us, ask and answer the following 3 questions:
 - **Does it serve the interests of everyone in the home?**
 - **Does it help me to do my work better?**
 - **Does my employer stick to her/his words?** (In other words: Play by the rule or 'walk the talk'?)
- Say: If the answers are mostly 'NO' there is something wrong with your employer's behavior towards you, and you may want to find a better employer.
- After doing and discussing the roleplays, conclude them with the following points:
 - **Who has what role in the employment relation?** The employment relation between an employer and a worker means both parties have responsibilities and duties towards one another, but the relation is often (very) unequal. When employers are unreasonable, do not treat domestic workers fairly, and abuse their power, we need to make clear that they have to respect the employment contract and our labor rights. *[This can be difficult to do because many employers feel superior and do not want to change the situation. Common tactics of abusive employers are: Control, abuse of economic power, isolation, intimidation, manipulation, exhaustion, denigration, or psychological and emotional desorientation.]*
 - **I can react in different ways.** The power triangle can help us to find out what our usual reaction in a conflict with our employer is, and what their usual reaction is. When we know this, we can try to use alternative ways: If we are always silent, try to speak up. If we always fight back, try to reason in a calm manner. If we tend to disregard our employers' wishes, try to listen and talk to them. Look them in the eyes and use your body language.

- **Get help from others like your friends and your DWO**, if there is no end to the conflict and it escalates (becomes bigger). If employers or employment agents are not reasonable and do not want to listen to you, you need to seek outside help, and talk to other domestic workers, or DWOs, unions, women’s or other organizations. They can help in approaching, speaking and negotiating with your employer. When employers do not treat us as fellow human beings but act as if they were the masters and we the slaves, they may easily harass or use violence against us. In such cases, we may need to file a complaint with help of our DWO, and/or find another job.

STEP 5	KEY MESSAGES	CONCLUSION	5 MINUTES
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- Conclude with the following points:
 - We stand stronger when we ground ourselves. Being in the ‘here and now’ makes us feel good. We let go of unwanted thoughts and feelings. We are happier, sleep better, and have less stress, anxiety and pain.
 - The relation between domestic workers and their employers is very unequal and employers can easily abuse us. We need to learn how to be strong and stand up for our rights.
 - When we think our employers are unreasonable towards us, TEST them: Are her/his requests and conduct towards me reasonable or not? Is s/he playing by the rules? If problems, harassment and violence continue we need to seek help and/or find another job.

STEP 6	PLAYING WITH OUR BUTT AND SPINE	GAME	20 MINUTES
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- Guide the group in doing the game using handout 2, or click: bit.ly/GBV_care5. Ask: **What was it like playing this game?** Briefly discuss the responses.
- Ask everybody to stand in a big circle and join hands. Say: Today we became stronger. Let us celebrate! We raise our hands together and shout: ‘We are strong! We fight violence! We do this together! We are stronger every day!’



HANDOUT 1

Grounding exercise: We are strong⁸

In this exercise we are going to experience the power of belly breathing and 'grounding' our body to the earth. We will learn how to stand strong and 'ground' ourselves.

- Walk around and form pairs of 2 by selecting someone with similar body length and weight. Take off your shoes. Invite the pairs to form 2 circles with one of each pair standing in the inner circle and the other in the outer circle.
- Say: We are now going to use our strength, one by one. Stand opposite one another at arms' length. When I give the START sign, you try to push each other away as follows: Everyone in the inner circle puts one hand flat against the breast (or the shoulders) of her partner in the outer circle and tries to push her away. Use all your strength, but stay in the same position, do not step forward closer to your partner. The person who is pushed tries to withstand it, but bends or steps backwards if the push is too strong. START.
- Now, switch roles and do the same. START.
- After some pushing, ask: **Was it easy or difficult to push one another around?** [*Usually it is easy to push people around, when they do not pay attention on how to stand firmly.*]
- Say: We are now going to '**ground ourselves**' to the earth and develop a basic, strong body position. In this position we stand firm and strong. Our feet connect to the ground and we pay attention to breathing and strengthening our belly button.
- Say:
 - Place your feet slightly apart under your shoulders, parallel to each other and with your toes pointing forward. Hang and relax your arms. Take a breath in, and sigh it out. Breathe in and out, relaxed and steady at your own pace.
 - Bend your knees a bit and feel your feet steady on the floor. Put your hands where you feel your breath (on your breast, midriff or stomach). On the next breath put your hands a bit lower and breath out lower to where your hands are. Do the same with each breath, until we are all breathing deep into our belly button.
- Say: Keep breathing low and steady. We are now going to repeat the pushing exercise. When I give the START sign, those of you in the outer cycle will put one hand against the breast of your partner and try to push her away. START. Then switch places: START.
- Ask the pairs to share their experiences on doing the exercise, and ask them how they feel.
- Conclude by saying:
 - Usually it is quite easy to push and be pushed around if we are not prepared for it. But we become strong, when we center our attention in the 'here and now' by breathing from the belly button, one of our power centers, and by connecting to the earth with our feet.
 - This exercise is an example of a grounding exercise where we build up our own energy and connect to the energy of the earth. Grounding is good for our health. It can help us pull away from painful memories of violence by focusing on what is happening in the present moment. This makes us feel more balanced and aware.

⁸ Adapted from: Jacobs, J. and Verheggen, A., *Free your body: Bio-energetics by women* (in Dutch), Utrecht, 1991.



HANDOUT 2

Strong together with our butt and spine⁹

We are going to do some body exercises to have fun, feel strong, and use our bodies to support each other. Stand in a big circle.

- Stand in the basic grounding position with your feet under your hips or a bit wider, and your arms hanging down your sides. Bring your breath to your belly button. Breathe deeply, in and out.
- After a few deep breaths, bend your knees slightly. Rest with your hands on your knees. Move your upper body forward and stick your butt (buttocks, behind, bottom) backwards. Move your butt from one side to the other and back. Your weight remains on both feet. Sway softly back and forth.
- Find a partner who is more or less the same length and weight as you are. Form 2 circles: One of the pair stands in the inner circle and the other one stands in the outer circle.
- Stand with your butt against each other. With your butt in contact, bend your knees, rest your hands on your knees, move your upperbody forward and your bum backwards. When you are both standing comfortably, play around with your butt, pushing each other away a bit to and fro, swaying lightly together. Both of you must keep standing on your own feet. Don't stretch your legs because then you lose your power and balance.

Say: **What was it like to use your butt to remain in contact with each other? How did it feel?**

Discuss:

- Usually we don't use our butt to contact one another. As women, **we often feel that our butt is not our own**. Sometimes it is forcibly taken away from us. Men squeeze our butt, and beat or kick it without our consent. Our butt is often violated.
- Tell the group that, if they often have a cold butt, they can send attention and feelings to it, and massage it. In that way their butt will become warmer and belong to them again.

Tell people to go back to their partner and stand in the 2 circles. Say:

- Stand back-to-back in the basic grounding position. The idea is to rest against one another while standing, and support each other at the same time. Make sure both of you stand comfortably. If one or both of you don't feel good, correct your posture together silently by sliding or pushing your back against one another.
- Say: **How does your back feel? Can you feel your partner supporting you and you supporting your partner?**
- Now hook your arms together, and slowly descend together as far as you both can, in a comfortable way. Some of you may want to stop early. Some of you may want to stop when you are both in sitting position. Or when you are crouching. Some of may go down all the way, until both of you sit back-to-back. Sit like that for a few moments. Then get up together, keeping your arms hooked. You can only manage to do that if you both use the same amount of power and offer each other back support. Keep breathing, you can make some noise, keep your feet on the ground.

Ask: **What did you experience?** Say: Women often experience that they either have the role of always supporting others, or always the role of being totally dependant on the support of others. The **balance between giving and taking is often missing**. In this exercise we learn to feel our spine, and to receive support from each other without leaning on one another and giving up our independence.

⁹ Adapted from Jacobs, J. and Verheggen, A., *Free your body, Bio-energetics by women* (in Dutch), Utrecht, 1991.

Info Note: How to handle power struggles¹⁰

Power is present always and everywhere. Domestic workers are generally at a great disadvantage because they have to cope with unequal power relations, as women in domestic work and in their family. In **Unit 3.1 Power and domestic workers**, we already discussed how domestic workers can grow their power over, power within, power to and power with. Here we show how knowledge and use of power dynamics may help us to become stronger and act against violence & harassment from our employers, partners or others.

The power triangle

In the power triangle there are 3 power survival positions:

- **All-powerful:** I am superior and almighty. In this position you make yourself bigger than you are. You are in charge and you are always right. You have good qualities and strengths, and no weaknesses. You don't need anybody. You are untouchable, proud, stubborn. You are innocent of any wrongdoing and perfect.
- **Powerless:** I am a victim and inferior. In this position, you make yourself smaller. You suffer and you don't resist. You drown in negative emotions. Both you and others are bad, it is your or their fault. People can not be trusted and you yourself have no value and no good qualities. You are not up to it and you are afraid. You avoid problems and you try to manipulate others.
- **Power struggle:** I fight and never give up: In this position, you resist and want to be in control. You divide the world in winners who are worthy and losers who are worthless. You fight to become bigger and gain respect. You train your willpower, you fight to win and you do not care about improving relationships.

In daily life, the power triangle often comes into play when there is a problem between people. From birth, we experience the different positions in the power triangle. We start with being totally dependent on others to survive to slowly becoming independent, and developing relations with others. Because of our experiences during our childhood, adolescence and in adulthood we tend to choose 1 of the 3 positions to survive when confronted with a power conflict. This position is your favorite. It is what you are good at and what has helped you the most so far. Knowing what your favorite position is gives you information about who you are and why you do what you are doing.

But it is also useful to gain experiences with the other two positions in the power triangle too. Gaining experience to act in all three positions helps you to grow: You step out of your comfort zone and stand in the middle of the triangle. You gain inner power (power within), take responsibility and grow your 'true self'.

Common changes when moving from one corner to the middle are:

- **For the all-powerful:** You may experience pain and anger at first. But you will become a human with good and bad qualities and people will start to like you.
- **For the powerless:** At first, it is difficult to act and take responsibility for your actions. But it will make you feel good and you start to value yourself.
- **For the fighters:** You may not know what to do and feel vulnerable at first. But it will be a relief to stop struggling all the time and you are free to do other things.

Unhealthy power dynamics between employers and workers

Employers and workers have an employment relationship. Both parties have duties and responsibilities towards one another. They need to agree on the work to be performed and the employment and working conditions, like payment and hours of work. The employer has a right to supervise and control the **work done by the worker**, but does not have the right to control **the worker as a person**.¹¹

Usually the relationship between employers and domestic workers does not start with severe violent acts by employers but gradually, they may become violent and abusive towards their workers. Generally an employment relationship starts with building trust and encouraging behavior that is 'right' from both sides. However, when there is an emphasis on demanding compliance, and a focus on 'what is wrong' there is a risk of the employment relationship turning into an abusive one.

¹⁰ Adapted from: Servellen van, A., *Birth pangs of power, Self-management for women* (in Dutch), Amersfoort, 1992; Berg, J. van den & Tjoelker, A., *Violence against women in relations* (in Dutch), RIMA and FIOM, Alkmaar, 1997.

¹¹ Hough, X., *5 Signs you're in an abusive employment relationship (and what to do about it)*, 2018

Often, the process goes as follows:

- The employer may start to exert some **control** over the domestic worker. It may not be noticeable at first. If your employer starts to reduce your autonomy, micromanages your work, tightly controls your movements, puts in place control mechanisms that restrict your freedom or decision-making power with little logic or justifiable reasons, it is likely that the employment relationship has started to be abusive.
- The employment relation is **abusive**, when employers **misuse their power**. This happens when they delay salary payments, or when they deduct money for (imaginary) mistakes or faults by the domestic workers; when they add more and more work and larger responsibilities; or when they ask domestic workers to do dangerous work or additional duties without extra adequate payment and without asking domestic workers whether they agree. Sometimes employers may also try to **isolate** their workers by controlling their access to 'the outside world', and restricting their victim's social support network by preventing them from seeing family and friends.

Other common tactics of abusive employers are:

- **Intimidation and manipulation** of their victims to submit them into total obedience by showing-off their absolute power through trickery, blackmail and deceit.
- **Exhaustion** wears down the victims' physical, psychological and emotional strengths, and weakens their resistance. Examples are preventing victims from eating and sleeping well, or piling too much work onto them.
- **Denigration**. Systematic insults and putting a person down destroy victims' self-esteem and self-confidence. The victims are often not aware of this strategy and put the blame on themselves.
- **Psychological and emotional disorientation**. Frequent acts of abuse produce feelings of helplessness, fear and despair. This undermines the victims' sense of identity and self-esteem. The threat of violence and the memory of past acts of violence can lead to a constant state of fear where the victim believes that the perpetrator is all-powerful and that resistance is futile and impossible.

Abusive employers think that they are special and superior, and that they have high standards which are not being met by their workers. They wear perfectionism as a badge of honor when it is merely a weapon. 'Good' is never good enough. And it is always the workers' fault. Abusive employers do not consider themselves as responsible for the deterioration of the employment relationship. In this way, many abusive employers work their way through a series of domestic workers whom they see as dispensable rather than acknowledging and addressing their own poor leadership skills.

If we want to find out whether our employers' behavior towards us is reasonable or not, do a **TEST** by asking ourselves the following 3 questions:

- **Does it serve the interests of everyone in the home?**
- **Does it help me to do my work better?**
- **Does my employer stick to her/his word?** (In other words: Play by the rule or 'walk the talk?')

If the employment relationship is not constructive anymore, we need to try to find another job. This can be difficult, especially for child and migrant domestic workers. Many employment relationships deteriorate gradually, but, because domestic workers don't have the power to change it and lack alternatives, many of them stay in abusive employment relationships for much too long. This damages their health and well-being. Seeking help and companionship from other domestic workers and joining DWOs, in person and online, are key to escaping from abusive employment relationships.



4.4 : What to do against sexual violence & harassment



120 minutes

	Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn about the 'double trouble' of sexual violence & harassment To know what to do against sexual harassment and assault To experience the power of our voice
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic worker leaders Domestic workers
	Room Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steps 1 and 4: Big open space to stand and move around Circle seating in big group and small groups
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flipchart papers and markers
	Training Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide show: What to do against sexual violence & harassment Video: Las Tesis, A rapist on your path, 2019, Chile, Handout: Small group work on dealing with sexual harassment & assault Info Note: What to do against sexual violence & harassment



Session Plan Steps

1.	Body talk	Energizer	10 minutes
2.	Sexual harassment & assault	Intro and small group work	45 minutes
3.	Sexual harassment & assault	Reporting and discussion	40 minutes
4.	Experiencing the power of our voice	Game	20 minutes
5.	Key messages	Conclusion	5 minutes



Preparation

- If there are both women and men in the training, do this exercise first separately with women facilitators for the women and men facilitators for the men. Then bring the groups together to share the main findings and key messages.
- Prepare for the training by reading the Info note. Update yourself about the laws and practices on sexual assault, rape and harassment, and victim's rights in the training country/area, and make a list of contacts where domestic workers can seek help. Discuss it with legal and gender experts, and practitioners working in women's crisis centres.
- For step 1: Write each of the below 4 statements on a piece of paper for 4 small groups. Each of the groups receives one of the statements below:
 1. You have just fallen **in love** and have butterflies in your stomach
 2. You have just made a big mistake, and you feel **ashamed**
 3. You have been blamed for something you did not do and you feel **indignant**
 4. You very much **admire** the others in the big group.
- For step 2: Prepare the questions for group work on a slide, or on a flipchart.

SESSION PLAN

STEP 1	BODY TALK	ENERGIZER	10 MINUTES
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- Ask everybody to stand in a big circle and say: We are going to do a game using our body language. First we divide in 4 small groups, by counting 1, 2, 3, 4 in the big group. After doing the round of counting in the big group, ask the people with the same number to stand together. Explain the game:
 - Ask: **What is body language?** [*posture, facial expressions, hand gestures.*]
 - Every group will get one statement with a feeling. Each group has to express and show this feeling to the other groups. You can not talk or use your voice. You can use all other parts of your body.
 - When people from the other groups guess what the feeling is, they call it out.
 - The winner is the group which performed best.
- Give each of the groups a statement, and one minute to prepare. Then each group performs, stopping when the other groups have guessed their emotion. Give an applause to the winning group.
- Briefly discuss in the big group: **How do you use body language in your day-to-day life?** How? What is the advantage? Do you notice the body language of others? [*Understanding the body language of others can help us pick up unspoken issues, problems or feelings people may have. We can also use it ourselves to add strength to what we say and share feelings with others.*]

STEP 2	SEXUAL HARASSMENT & ASSAULT	INTRO AND SMALL GROUP WORK	45 MINUTES
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- Link the session to the previous session and introduce the aims of the exercise. Say: **We are now going to discuss what is sexual harassment and assault, and what to do if it happens to us.**
- Say: **What is sexual assault and rape?** (Or, who remembers from **Unit 3.4** Sexual violence & harassment and gender stereotyping?) [*Use the Info note of Unit 3.4 Sexual violence & harassment and gender stereotyping as needed. If Unit 3.4 was not done earlier more time will be needed.*] Get some responses and say:
 - **Unwanted sexual contact:** Any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit agreement of the recipient **by use of force, threat or abuse of authority.**
 - It is called **rape** when it involves forced sexual intercourse or the penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth of the victim, however slight.
- Ask: **What is sexual harassment?** Get some responses and say: **Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature**, affecting the dignity of a person that is **unwelcome, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient.** The two main types in an employment situation are:
 - **Quid pro quo (this for that) harassment or sextortion:** This abuse of power forces the recipient to choose between giving in to sexual demands or losing job benefits, and may involve rape and other sexual assaults.
 - Creation of a **hostile** or intimidating **working environment.**
- Introduce the points of discussion for the small group work:
 1. **Are we at risk of sexual harassment and assault in our workplaces and families? Why? Are all domestic workers aware of this?**
 2. **What are the effects on the victims? Are they silent about it? Why?**
 3. **What are the reactions of the people around them (family, employers, community, the police)? Why? Is this just and fair?**
 4. **What will you do if sexual harassment and assault happen to you? From whom will you seek help and support?**
- Ask if the questions are clear. Divide the participants in 4 small groups, give them the handout with the points of discussion.

- Give the groups time to discuss and prepare a report of the summary of their discussion. Remind them to make their report 5 minutes before stopping the group work.
- When the groups are ready, get everybody together in the big group for the next step, and ask the groups to display their reports for all to see.

STEP 3	SEXUAL HARASSMENT & ASSAULT	REPORTING AND DISCUSSION	40 MINUTES
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- Ask the groups to report as follows:
 - Ask a group to report on point 1: **Are we at risk of sexual harassment and assault in our workplaces and families ? Why? Are domestic workers aware of this?** Invite the other groups to list other points that were not brought up by the first group reporter. [Yes, we are at **high risk of sexual violence**: *It can happen in our own home or in our workplaces, where we may (have to) live in the house of our employer. **Sexual services are not part of our work**, but, we are less powerful than our employer and are sometimes forced to provide sexual services against our will. Many but not all of us, are aware that employers are not allowed to touch us, but some of us feel forced to do so, because we don't know or fear to lose our job, if we don't obey.*] Ask: **Is this a problem for many domestic workers who you know?** And further discuss the experiences of participants with this problem and how they have dealt with it, using the Info note, as relevant. Make sure to agree with the group that:
 - **Sexual services are not part of our job description**
 - Requesting **sexual services from minors is a crime**
 - **Adults** should be **free to decide for themselves**
 - If our choice is **not respected**, we experience sexual violence
 - **Break the taboo & create a safe space** in DWOs to discuss sexual matters and help each other.
 - Ask another group to report on point 2: **What are the effects on the victims? Are they silent about it? Why?** [*Low-self-esteem, guilt, trauma and harm to mind, body and soul, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancy, search for safe, legal and affordable abortion, unwanted child, suicide, job loss and difficulty in finding another job. Victims often keep silent as they know they will be shamed and blamed, because of gender inequalities and stereotypes in the societies and communities where they work and live. Victims often suffer from the double trouble of experiencing sexual violence & harassment and having to cope with victim blaming by their environment.*]
 - Ask another group to report on point 3: **What are the reactions of the people around them (family, employers, community, the police)? Why? Is this just and fair?** [*Victims often experience **double trouble**: Employers, family, the community, the police and society often **blame the victims**, rather than the perpetrators, for sexual violence & harassment because gender inequalities and other power imbalances between the victims and their abusers. In many countries, the police is known to often take complaints of violence victims lightly, and to belittle the victims. This double trouble harms the victims even more. **Rape culture** exists in communities and societies where sexual violence is normalized and seen as a natural part of daily work and life: Abusers think they are entitled to do it and victims do not dare to question it. All of this is very unfair.*] Discuss and agree with the group that we should **break the culture of silence** around sexual violence and harassment and **stop rape culture**.
 - Ask the last group to report on point 4: **What will you do if sexual harassment and assault happen to you? From whom will you seek help and support?** [*Realize that it is NOT your fault. Your looks, dress or behavior are not the cause of the violence, and trying to prevent sexual violence & harassment by wearing many clothes, no make-up etc. is usually not an effective strategy against it. **The abuser is the problem, NOT you**. Always **say 'NO' to sexual advances that you do not want**, otherwise the harassment will get bigger. Discuss the sexual harassment with friends, write down or record what happened and file a complaint with help of your DWO, if possible. In case of sexual assault, try to defend yourself by shouting and running away if you can. Sexual predators look for victims who are easy, scared and silent. They will get discouraged if you **yell, shout and struggle**. If it is too dangerous and you can not run and escape, you will have to endure it. Then, try to get away silently as soon as you can. Do not wash yourself and keep torn and dirty clothes because*

you need proof of the sexual assault. **Report the violence and file a complaint** but **seek help first**, from friends, a DWO, or other persons you trust who can come with you to a health centre and the police.]

- Conclude: We and our DWOs need to fight sexual violence & harassment. We need to help violence victims and encourage them to report sexual assault and harassment, and help them to press charges and access justice, first with the police and then the courts. We need to speak out to change attitudes, laws and practices to prevent these abuses from happening. Give a big applause with the group



Tip for Trainer

In case of Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops or courses for domestic worker leaders, trainers and organizers, briefly discuss the difficulties that victims of sexual violence experience in accessing justice, and DWO priority actions to root out the problem of sexual violence against domestic workers.

- ▼ Say: The right to live a life free from sexual assault and harassment is universal and enshrined in many national and international laws. Women have started to speak up in many places when the Me Too movement encouraged women worldwide to break the silence. Progress has been made but gender discrimination, patriarchal attitudes and institutional discrimination continue to make it difficult to implement the law. Therefore: Victims keep silent. Sexual offenders act with impunity and get away with it. The police, judiciary and even medical personnel don't do their job properly, and sometimes may make things worse.
- ▼ Say: **Not reporting the crime and not having access to justice usually increase the chance that a victim will remain a victim** for the rest of her life, because it becomes more difficult to heal and become a survivor.
- ▼ Ask: **What are DWO priority actions against sexual violence and harassment?** Brainstorm with the group, writing their answers on a flipchart or board and adding priority actions from the info note, as needed.
- ▼ Continue with a shorter version of step 4.

STEP 4	EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF OUR VOICE¹²	GAME	20 MINUTES
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- Invite everybody to get up and stand in a circle in a space where everyone can walk around easily. Divide the group in 2, by asking everyone to call out number 1 or 2, one after the other.
- Ask everybody to remember their number and say: We are going to **use the power of our voice** in 3 rounds. Start the game, taking around 5 minutes for each round. Encourage the participants along with the instructions asking them to be as lively and enthusiastic as possible:
 - In round 1, say: We are going to walk around in this space. Whenever you meet somebody, every number 1 says: YES, and every number 2 says: NO. Then you walk to the next person and do the same. Speak softly first but make your voice louder as you go along. After a minute, I will ask you to speak as loud as possible, and a minute later, I will ask you to scream and also stamp your feet.
 - In round 2, say: In this round we will swap. We will do the same but the number 1's will say NO, and the number 2's say YES.
 - In round 3, say: Walk around, meet others by making eye-contact and say 'I am (your name): First shyly and softly, then confidently with a clear and friendly voice, and finally with a very loud and friendly voice and big arm movements.
- Stand in the big circle and discuss the game with the following questions:
 - **How was it to use your voice in this way? How did it feel in your body?** [Many women feel shy to speak up, and some may find it really difficult to use a loud voice. Others find it easy to speak out and tell others what they think.]

12 Adapted from: Berg, J. van den & Tjoelker, A., *Violence against women in relations* (in Dutch), RIMA and FIOM, Alkmaar, 1997.

- **Was there a difference in saying YES and NO? How did you notice that?** [For most people it is easier to say YES (positive message), than to say NO (negative message).]
- **Do you recognize any of this in your daily life?** [Women domestic workers tend to find it difficult to say NO to others and always say YES, as it is part of our job to care for others. If this becomes our automatic response in everything we do day and night, we may go over our own boundaries, and overstretch ourselves. We need to be able to make our wishes clear and say NO to our employers when needed.]
- **Did you use eye-contact in the first 2 rounds? How was it to add eye-contact in the third round?** How did it feel to say your name in a confident and loud manner.
- Close the game with an applause for all.

STEP 5	KEY MESSAGES	CONCLUSION	5 MINUTES
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- Conclude the exercise with the key points, for example:
 - It is not our fault. We are not guilty. The perpetrators are guilty and must be punished.
 - Speak up and say NO to sexual advances you do not like, always and as soon as possible.
 - After a sexual assault, get help from friends and go to the hospital and the police to file a complaint. Keep the proof: Do not wash yourself and keep all your clothes.
 - We and our DWOs need to break the taboo around sexual violence, talk about it and speak out against it.
 - We need to stop rape culture. We want a culture based on mutual respect and dignity.
- End with showing and singing along with a song against sexual violence & harassment, for example, ‘[A rapist on your path](#)’ from feminist arts group Las Tesis, 2019, Chile.



HANDOUT

Small group work on dealing with sexual harassment & assault

Discuss the following points in your group:

1. **Are we at risk of sexual harassment and assault in our workplaces? Why? Are all domestic workers aware of this?**
2. **What are the effects on the victims? Are they silent about it? Why?**
3. **What are the reactions of the people around them (family, employers, community, the police)? Why? Is this just and fair?**
4. **What will you do if sexual harassment and assault happen to you? From whom will you seek help and support?**

Summarize the main points of your discussion on a flipchart to report to the big group.

Info Note : Sexual violence & harassment: Double trouble & what to do about it¹³

‘Every human being has a right to live and work without sexual violence.

It is not your fault. YOU ARE NOT GUILTY, the abuser is guilty.’

Sexual violence in law and in practice

In the feudal, patriarchal past, it was common for powerholders to demand sexual services from their slaves, serfs, servants and subordinates. This type of behavior has been outlawed almost everywhere in the world. Sexual assault is a crime in the laws of almost all countries with justice to be pursued through the police and the criminal courts. In 2018, over two-thirds of countries prohibited sexual harassment in workplaces in various laws (criminal; labour; non-discrimination; occupational safety and health, or other laws).¹⁴ See **Unit 7** Laws, policies and practices against violence & harassment, for more information.

But **sexual violence is still common** in areas **where patriarchal, sexist, racist and slavery-type practices** persist, and where there are strong class and caste differences. Even now, powerful men everywhere all too often continue to force women, children or other men to provide them with sexual services. Sexual assault and rape are also used to **punish women and those who do not conform to gender norms**, and are used as **weapons of war** and in conflict and refugee situations. Institutional gender discrimination continues to exist in law enforcement agencies, where patriarchal, authoritarian and militaristic ideologies, norms and systems are still deeply embedded.

Talking openly about experiencing **sexual assault, rape and harassment** is **taboo** in many groups and societies. Therefore, it is important to speak out loudly and forcefully against sexual violence & harassment: Public and private opinions need to change to put a stop to these crimes. **Violence victims are NOT the ones who did something wrong.** The **blame is on the perpetrators** and on the societies, public institutions and the general public that condone a rape culture: A culture where sexual violence & harassment is considered a normal part of daily work and life. In a rape culture, abusers take it for granted that their behavior is permitted and victims do not dare to question it.

But things are changing because **women have started to speak up.** In the early 2000s, sexual violence survivors and activists started the **Me Too movement** against sexual abuse when women published allegations of sex crimes against powerful and prominent men on the internet. The aim of ‘Me Too’ is to break the silence and empower women through empathy, solidarity and strength in numbers. The movement began to spread on the internet in 2017, when millions of women started to use the hashtag #MeToo on social media to visibly demonstrate how they survived sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. The #Me Too movement has spread to women and men of all colors, classes, occupational groups and gender identities in many countries.

Sexual services and domestic work

Sexual violence happens between strangers and in public places but it happens much more often between people who know each other, like in a marriage, in families, households and at work. **Domestic workers** are, therefore, **at special risk:** They work in private households and provide care services to employers and other members in the household.

Some employers are respectful but others feel that they can do anything they want in their own household, including sexually harassing their domestic workers, demanding sexual services from them, or trying to seduce them by offering extra money. Some domestic workers **do let their employers know** that they are not allowed to touch their bodies, in particular their private parts. But others just **accept this behavior** for fear of losing their job, because they need the money or because they think they have to do everything that their employers ask them to do, whether they like it or not.

¹³ ILO, Brief No. 2: *Sexual harassment in the world of work*, ILO Geneva, 2020; ILO, *Action against sexual harassment at work in Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok, 2001, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--asia/--ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_159_en.pdf;

¹⁴ 2018 World Bank data, cited in UN Women and ILO, *Handbook: Addressing violence & harassment against women in the world of work*, New York and Geneva, 2019

Employers often want to **regulate the way we look and dress**. It is not uncommon for (female) employers to insist on a conservative dress code for their domestic workers to ensure they look chaste and unattractive, and will not 'seduce' their husbands, fathers or sons. Many domestic workers resort to covering themselves with layers of clothing to shield their bodies from roving eyes and hands. This usually doesn't work, because the problem has nothing to do with domestic workers' dress or looks, but everything to do with the intent of the perpetrators.

Provision of **sexual services is not part of the job description** of domestic workers. Soliciting **sexual services from children and young workers under 18 years is a crime** almost everywhere. As **adults**, we should **be free to decide for ourselves** and say NO to sexual advances that are not welcome. We should not have to cope with working and living in an environment where sexual violence against us is considered a normal, natural and 'unquestioned' part of our work and life. There should be no coercion whatsoever on the part of our employer, family or friends and our **choices must be respected**.

If we don't want to provide sexual services to someone in the employer household and this person insists, we experience **sexual violence**. It is advisable to find another job and escape as soon as possible as providing sexual services against our will is harmful to our health and well-being.

Engaging in a sexual relationship with someone from the employer household is risky because of the **unequal power relations** between our employers and us: They have **control over our livelihood**. If we consent to sexual services to them, they may want to take control over our body as well, for example by refusing safe sex practices. If the relationship turns sour and we wish to end it, or if they want to get rid of us, they have the upper hand. They can easily fire us and ruin our reputation by spreading lies.

Talking about sexual matters is often taboo so many domestic workers don't discuss these types of problems, even with their best friends, when they encounter it in their job, because they are afraid of being blamed or looked down upon. This means they don't get help and advice when they need it. This may **make an already difficult problem even worse**. It is important that we create a **safe space in our DWOs** where we can openly discuss the problems we face, and all of us need to respect the life and job choices that other sisters make.

Double trouble and rape culture

Dealing with all types of violence is difficult but surviving sexual assault and harassment is especially difficult for many of us, because of the double trouble that many victims have to deal with in families, workplaces, communities or societies with a rape culture, where sexual violence is considered a normal part of life:

- Firstly, it **harms our sexual feelings, organs and sexuality**. Feelings of humiliation, anxiety, anger, powerlessness, depression and lack of motivation and energy are common. Victims lose their self-worth and self-esteem, and confidence in their abilities. Sexual assault can also result in physical injuries to our sexual organs, in sexually transmitted diseases or HIV, in an unplanned pregnancy, an unwanted child or difficulties in gaining access to a safe and legal abortion.
- Secondly, victims of sexual violence **suffer further pain and harm because they are blamed, humiliated and looked down upon**, as though they were responsible for the crime. Gender norms and stereotypes about women's and men's sexuality allow and encourage sexual freedom for men, restrict sexual freedom of women and put the blame on women victims for sexual violence against them: Women are accused of having 'asked for it', because of their beauty, sexy dress or 'loose' behavior. They are considered tainted, dirty and unclean. Male victims face prejudices around homosexuality, and are shamed because of their 'unmanly' behavior.

Due to such societal attitudes many victims keep **quiet if** they have suffered from sexual abuse. Even their family may put pressure on them to stay silent and keep the family honor intact. For example, in Cambodia, a proverb says: 'A ripped skirt should not be further torn', or, when the damage is done, it is not useful to cause more harm by letting other people know about it. Employers of domestic workers also tend to blame the domestic worker rather than the perpetrator for the violence.

The lack of support and the shame of having to live with the **prejudice and stigma** cause victims of sexual violence to want to take their own life and commit suicide. Others may be thrown out of their family, their workplace and their community. Domestic workers who are victims of sexual violence may have to migrate to survive. Some will find work again as domestic workers, others may start to earn money as sex workers.

We have to **break the culture of silence** around sexual violence and harassment and **stop rape culture**. Not talking about sexual violence perpetuates a cycle of continued violence as perpetrators know they can get away with it time and again. People who blame victims, protect perpetrators, and all those who silently stand by and just let it happen, contribute to harming victims. They help create and maintain a rape culture where sexual violence against girls and women is common and normalized in their family, workplace, community and society.

What to do if sexual harassment and assault happen to you¹⁵

Sexual harassment often starts small with a suggestive touch, remark, compliment, email, photo or other message, or an invitation. An employer or person whom a domestic worker cares for may ask the domestic worker to touch their sexual organs when they have to be helped with going to the toilet, washing or changing clothes. Or, a domestic worker is being asked to give intimate massages, or watch pornography. **If you don't say NO** and submit to the demand, however unwillingly, the **harassment will continue and become worse**.

If a sexual advance is unwelcome to you and you do not want it, it is generally wise to **do the following**:

- First of all, realize that it is **not your fault**, however you dress or look and no matter how you behave. You can try to avoid the harasser, wear more clothes, do not wear make-up, etc. Often, doing so will not stop the harassment. You are harassed not because of your looks, dress or behavior, but because harassers look for victims who are easy to get and scared and will be silent.
- It is best to tell the abuser to stop the behaviour right away. **Clearly say 'NO'** to any sexual advances that you do not want right away. Be specific and firm about what you do not want. This will discourage many harassers.
- **Speak to others** about the harassment. Discuss it with other domestic workers. Discuss it with your employer if s/he is not the harasser, if possible, and ask him/her to protect you from the harasser and stop the wrongdoing.
- **Write down and record** what has happened (date, time and place, who did what, what was said, names of any witnesses). Keep and save these reports and any other relevant messages or photo's in a safe place.
- In many countries sexual harassment at the workplace is prohibited, so you can **file a complaint**. Check with your DWO, they can help you to find out what options you have and to decide on a course of action.

When an attempt of **sexual assault and rape** takes place in or outside a house, the perpetrator will try to grab the victim and quickly move her to a place where the crime can not be seen and heard. If this happens it is generally wise **to show clear resistance**:

- Sexual predators get discouraged if you **yell, shout and struggle**. You may think that if you make them angry, they will hurt you more, but mostly they want an easy, quiet victim who will not cause them trouble. For example, they will not assault women with an umbrella or something else in their hands that can be used as a weapon.
- If someone is coming towards you, **yell out loudly 'Stop' or Stay back'**. If you carry an object that you can use as a weapon, hold it out. Show that you are not afraid to fight back and you are not an 'easy target'.
- As a **self-defense mechanism**, if someone is following you into a room, elevator, or staircase, turn around, **look him in the face and ask him a question**. By doing so, you lose appeal as a target, because you become a subject rather than an object. Also, now you have seen his face, and can identify him at the police station when the police line up suspects.

Of course, **resistance is not recommended** if you are threatened with a knife or other weapon or if you are clearly outnumbered by two or more aggressors. In such cases you do not have much choice as you do not want to die. Resistance, especially in group situations can lead to more violence. Begging for mercy is also not likely to help in such cases. Try to be docile and passive, and try to keep your body limp to avoid harm to your sexual and other organs. Try to get away as soon and as silently as you can.

What to do after sexual assault

Sexual assault, including rape, is a **crime everywhere**. Still, many victims of sexual assault and rape do not seek medical treatment and do not report the crime to the police or other authorities. They are ashamed and afraid that they will be blamed for the crime and may suffer from more prejudice and unfair treatment from the authorities and in the community.

This is a real danger for many victims but one that needs to be overcome. It is often difficult but **very important to report sexual assault** and seek justice. If sexual assault and rape crimes are not reported, the perpetrator will continue to find, molest and rape other victims without fear of punishment. **Not reporting sexual assault is like saying that it is normal and allowed in society**.

¹⁵ Adapted from: ILO, *Action against sexual harassment at work in Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok, 2001; ILO and Gender and Development for Cambodia (GAD/C), *Women workers' rights and gender equality: Easy steps for workers in Cambodia*, Bangkok, 2004

Sexual assault, including rape is a crime that is punishable under criminal law in almost all countries. In criminal law, the burden of proof is higher than in other types of law. It is, therefore, important that you can prove the rape:

- **Do not wash yourself or the clothes you were wearing** before going to a health centre or hospital and the police. If you do so, you will wash away the evidence. Take anything else that is proof of the crime such as his clothes or his messages on your phone.
- The best thing is to go to the police as soon as possible. But first: **Contact people you trust**, like other domestic workers, friends or family and ask them to come with you to the hospital and the police. This is safer and will give you the power and strength to tell your story. BUT, if you cannot reach people you trust, go to a health centre and/or the police and ask them for help in contacting a womens' crisis centre, a hotline, or another group or organization you trust.
- Go to a hospital a clinic or **health post** and say that you have been sexually assaulted. Ask the medical staff to examine you and make a medical report. Ask them to check your organs, and take samples of semen and DNA as evidence and record, and store it safely. Ask for a **copy of the medical report** to take with you to the police.
- Then go to the **police** to report the assault and **make a complaint**. Take all evidence, like torn and dirty clothes, with you, and give a copy of the medical report to the police. Ask for a police report and say you want to **press charges** against the perpetrator. This step is often forgotten and it may be difficult to do it later. If it does not happen criminal charges against the perpetrator(s) can not be made. Always ask for a **copy of the police report**.

Domestic Workers Organizations (DWOs) and their allies need to encourage domestic workers to report sexual assault and harassment, and help them to press charges and access justice, first with the police and then the courts. Some victims may need time and may not be ready to report violence and harassment. In such cases, their choice must be respected.

Difficulties in access to justice

It is difficult for victims in general to report sexual assault and harassment, even if the right to live a life free from sexual assault and harassment is universal and enshrined in many national and international laws. **Not reporting the crime and not having access to justice usually increase the chance that a victim will remain a victim** for the rest of her life, because it becomes more difficult to heal and become a survivor.

Due to gender discrimination in societies, and patriarchal attitudes, prejudices and institutional discrimination in law enforcement agencies, there are a number of problems with the implementation of the laws against sexual assault and harassment:

- **Victims do not want to come forward and press charges** against perpetrators due to the social stigma of being a sexual harassment or rape victim. They may also be encouraged and pressured by their families or the perpetrators' families to keep quiet, because of shame, prejudice and pride around family honor. Sometimes, victims and/or their families agree to accept money in compensation for the crime.
- Taking advantage of their power, their higher social status, income and ability to subvert justice, **sexual offenders** often choose their victims carefully, they **take advantage** of their power and higher social status, and think they can attack them with impunity. Often they are right, because sexual predators have been tolerated in most societies for centuries.
- The **police and the judiciary** often do **not treat sexual assault and harassment seriously**. Women may be belittled, ridiculed or threatened with further sexual offenses. Some women have even been sexually assaulted by law enforcement agencies when making a complaint. Officials also may try to compromise and settle cases quickly with little or no compensation, lose evidence and documentation, or delay the process. They may be subject to bribes and threats themselves if they pursue cases in an honest way.
- **Medical evidence is important** to win the case but the medical authorities are also not always cooperative. They can also be subject to bribes and threats, may lose evidence or refuse to be a witness in the courts.

Progress, continuing challenges and priority actions for the future

Times are changing. We want a culture based on mutual respect and dignity. We want to **stop rape culture**, and **bring about universal condemnation of violence & harassment** in families, workplaces, communities and societies. Many DWOs fight sexual violence together with other women's, workers and human rights organizations and movements.

Priority actions include:

- **Advocacy for stronger laws** against sexual violence & harassment of all women workers and **effective mechanisms** to implement these laws in practice.
- Awareness-raising **campaigns to change public opinions** on sexual violence against women. This remains important because public opinions in communities and societies change slower than the rule of law.
- **Support to victims in pursuing a complaint** to ensure that they are able to report and pursue a complaint without fear of continued harm by others (known as victimization). Legal and financial support is crucial to help domestic workers pursue cases.
- Systematic **awareness-raising and training programmes** on sexual violence against women for **domestic workers and public service agencies** like the police, the judiciary, health providers and labor inspectorates, and employing more women leaders and staff in these agencies.
- **Setting-up of women's crisis centres and hotlines** to help victims of sexual violence. In some countries such services are available to men too.
- **Training and counselling victims of sexual violence** to recover and help them to become survivors.



4.5 : We empower!



90 minutes (+ 30 for the photo-shoot during a break)

	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To experience: I am in charge! ● To develop: We empower! ● To create and become strong together
	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Domestic worker leaders ● Domestic workers who have experienced violence & harassment ● Domestic workers who help handling violence & harassment cases
	Room Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Step 1: Big open space for the group to sit down or lie down comfortably ● Seating in big and small groups
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Markers, flipchart paper and a roll of masking tape ● A big black board for the body builder photo shoot – see step 5 ● Creative materials (flipcharts, markers in many colors, clay, musical instruments)
	Training Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slide show: We empower! ¹⁶ ● Handout: Power exercise: I am in charge! For the clip, click: bit.ly/GBV_care6. ● Info note: We empower!



Session Plan Steps

1.	I am in charge!	Power exercise	20 minutes
2.	We empower	Q&A in big group	15 minutes
3.	We empower	Group work and exhibition	50 minutes
4.	Key messages	Conclusion	5 minutes
5.	I am powerful	Photo shoot	30 minutes (during a break)



Preparation

- Read the handout and the Info note. If you guide the group in the power exercise in handout 1 yourself, practice it before you guide the group.
- Step 1: Clean the floor so the group can lie down comfortably, if possible, or arrange for comfortable seating.
- For step 5, see the slide of the woman with body builder arms drawn on black board and arrange for a similar set-up, time and place to make a body builder photo of each participant.

¹⁶ Flanagan, C., *E is for empowerment, How to be empowered, if you feel powerless*, 2020. E-mail: caroline@babyproofyourlife.com

SESSION PLAN

STEP 1	I AM IN CHARGE!	POWER EXERCISE	20 MINUTES
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- Ask everyone to lie down or sit comfortably on the floor (If it's not clean or smells, ask the group to sit comfortably on their chairs). Say: We will now discuss how we can empower ourselves and give direction to our work and life. **We start with a power exercise on how to direct ourselves.**
- **Introduce the meditation** by asking participants: Are you sometimes overwhelmed by sad or depressive feelings, moods or thoughts? Or do you sometimes feel that you are almost bursting from joy, flaring up in anger or swimming in tears? Ask some volunteers to share.
- After some responses, explain that it is healthy to have such feelings when there are important events in our life or when we have shocking experiences. However, sometimes such feelings, moods or thoughts can overwhelm us. We may feel we lose control over ourselves and what is happening to us. For such situations, we are going to do a meditation exercise to help us to reset and recharge ourselves.
- Guide the group in the meditation, or click the clip: bit.ly/GBV_care6.
- Ask what people think of the exercise. After some responses, say: This is a good exercise to do a few times per week for several weeks, until you memorize it. Then, you can use it any time to come back to yourself if you get overpowered by unwanted memories, emotions, thoughts, or anything else that burdens you. It will help you to drop such weights, become light and clear and find the most effective way of going forward. Provide the handout and share the link bit.ly/GBV_care6 with those who want it. .

STEP 2	WE EMPOWER	Q&A IN BIG GROUP	15 MINUTES
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- Link the session to the previous session and say, we are now going to **discuss ways of empowering ourselves**. Ask: **What is empowerment?** [*Becoming stronger, having self-worth, self-respect and self-confidence. Gaining the freedom and power to do what you want and control what happens to you.*] Ask: **Why do we need it?** [*We need to be able to make changes in our families, workplaces and societies, so that we can have decent work with a living wage and a live a happy and healthy life free of violence & harassment.*]
- Say: Empowerment is both a goal and a process. Ask: **Who knows what that means?** Write responses on a flipchart or board and explain:
 - The goal of empowerment is to **take control over our own lives**, take our own decisions and set our own goals, increase our autonomy and agency.
 - Becoming empowered is a process: No one can empower another. Everyone needs to do it. You are the only one who can empower yourself. **No one can empower us. We have to do it ourselves.**
- Remind the group of the discussion in **Unit 3.1** Power and domestic workers (as relevant) and say: In the empowerment process we gain:
 - Power within – Personal power
 - Power to – Creative power
 - Power over – Caring power
 - Power with – Shared power
- Remind the group of the discussions in **Unit 2.1** Sex, gender and gender equality and/or in **Unit 2.4** Equality and discrimination in our work and life (as relevant) and say: Increasing the power of women does not mean domination of women over men but changing men's unfair domination over women and achieving equal power between women and men, resulting in benefits for all. Likewise, empowering workers and increasing their rights is not about doing away with employers. It is about changing employers' unfair power over workers so that workers can provide their labor, earn a decent income and work & live in a safe environment free of violence.

- Say: Empowerment of domestic workers, women and other discriminated groups means we need **structural changes** in the ways economies, laws, social and cultural rules and practices and public opinions are organized and operate **so our societies become more equal, fair and just**.
- Say: Structural changes in societies require collective actions. This is why it is important for domestic workers to empower themselves as individuals and to empower themselves as a group. We will discuss how to do this in **Unit 5** Collective actions against violence & harassment, and **Unit 7** Laws, policies and practices against violence & harassment. In this session, we are developing more ideas on the actions we can take ourselves for our own empowerment.
- Say: Many of us know about ways to empower ourselves, so let us discuss how to do it. **What tips can you share?** Write the tips from participants on the board [*Self care, collective action, being proud of ourselves, being kind to ourselves, being conscious of our own power to change, starting to take action NOW to use and increase our power ourselves.*] Make sure the 2 points 'Be conscious of how your power directs your life' and 'Act to empower yourself' are discussed using the Info note, but keep it brief.

STEP 3	WE EMPOWER	GROUP WORK AND EXHIBITION	50 MINUTES
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- Say: We are now going to be **creative in working groups**. Every group will make a poster or another artwork, or do an activity (body-paint, clay, drawing materials and papers, textile paint and textiles, song, dance) to express your group's empowerment. Let's brainstorm on creative ideas. Write all the ideas of participants on a flipchart or board, and check with them which ones can be done now in this session. Cross out the ones that cannot be done now.
- Ask participants to select an activity that they want to do and ask them to put their names for that activity on the flipchart or board. If a group gets too big, divide it in 2, maximum 5 to 6 people per group so everyone can participate actively.
- Tell the groups to start making what they want to make. Tell them they have 20 to 25 minutes, and ask them to finish their work 5 minutes before the time is up.
- When the groups are ready, invite everybody to the big group and ask each group to showcase their product in the big group. Give a big applause for each artwork or song.

STEP 4	KEY MESSAGES	CONCLUSION	5 MINUTES
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- Say: Let us conclude with the key messages:
 - I am in charge of myself: I don't let myself be ruled by only one part of me, be it my body, my emotions, my thoughts, my desires or my roles.
 - I empower myself when I become stronger and self-confident, and gain the freedom and power to do what I want and to control what happens to me.
 - Empowerment is about everyone, women and men of all colors, classes and ages, making informed choices and deciding about their own life and work in their family, community and society by themselves.
 - We need to take action to empower ourselves as individuals and as a group. We need to organize and take collective actions to make structural changes so that our societies become more equal, fair and just.

STEP 5	I AM POWERFUL	PHOTO SHOOT	30 MINUTES
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- Say: Let us remember this training by doing a photo shoot of ourselves as a **bodybuilder**, one by one. Show the body builder slide, and tell participants to line up for the photoshoot in the break. Make sure every participant gets their bodybuilder photo on their phone by the end of the day, and keep a set for the workshop report.



HANDOUT

Power exercise: I am in charge!¹⁷

Say: We are going to do an exercise to experience: I am in charge! It helps us realize that each of us, as a person, is more than the sum of our many parts: Our body, heart and mind, our past and the roles we play in our work and life. **All of these are parts of us and together they make up our identity as a person.**

When we have been hurt by violence & harassment, we may lose ourselves and drown, and become obsessed with only one or a few of these parts: Examples: We punish our body by eating too little or too much. We are stiff with anger. We feel sorry for ourselves. We worry a lot all the time. We live in the past or are afraid of the future. When this happens, we are no longer in control of ourselves: One or more parts start to rule over us, rather than that we rule and look at ourselves, **as a whole person who is in charge of herself.**

Ask everyone to sit or lie down in a comfortable and relaxed position. Slowly take a few deep breaths from your belly. Close your eyes, or if you do not want to close your eyes, focus them on something else. We will go on a journey. Relax. Try to imagine, in your own way, what you are hearing.

1. Let us become aware of our **body**. How it lies or sits on the floor. Feel how your body lies (or sits) on the ground. How your clothes touch your skin. Let's realize: I have a body. My body is sometimes relaxed, and sometimes it is stressed. It can be hot, or cold, or hungry. Sometimes, my body feels fine and sometimes, it does not. Sometimes it is rested, sometimes it is tired, I value my body. It is precious as it helps me experience and act in my everyday life. But, I know my body is not the total me. It is my valuable tool. I want to look after it well and keep it strong and in good health. But it is not my whole self. **I have a body, but I am not my body.**
2. Let us become aware of our **feelings**. What do you feel right now? What feelings do you often experience in your life? Look at the positive ones, look at the negative ones. Do not judge whether they are good or bad. Let's realize: I have my feelings, but I am not my feelings. My feelings vary, they change and sometimes they contradict each other. They may swing from love to hatred, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow. Yet my essence, my true nature, does not change. 'I' remain. Though a wave of anger, jealousy or excitement may wash over me, I know that it will pass in time, I am not this feeling. I can observe and understand my feelings. I can learn to direct and integrate them in my life. But they are not my self. **I have feelings but I am not my feelings.**
3. Let us become aware of our **thoughts**. Let us look at our thoughts. What are you thinking right now? Let the thoughts come and go. If you think you have no thoughts, be aware that this is also a thought. Let's realize: I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts. I have a mind but I am not my mind. My mind is a valuable tool to discover things and express myself, but it is not the essence of my being. My thoughts are constantly changing as I get new ideas, knowledge and experience. Often, my mind refuses to obey me! So, it is clear that it is not myself. **I have a mind, it is important to me, but I am not my mind.**
4. Let us become aware of our **past**. Let us look at our past. What do you feel and think about your past right now? Let the feelings and thoughts come and go. Let's realize: I have a past, but I am not my past. Many things happened in my life, when I was growing up, as a child, as a teenager, as an adult. I have experienced a lot. My memories are important, they are part of me, both the good ones and the bad ones. But I am more than my memories and my past. I can see myself, I have done some good things and some bad things. People did good things and bad things to me. These experiences and memories are part of me. But they are not my self. **I have a past but I am not my memories.**

¹⁷ Adapted from: Assagioli, R., *Self-identification exercise*, in Sorensen, K., *Disidentification*, 2018 and Ferrucci, P., *Disidentification*, in Rutgers-van Wijlen, K., *Selected training materials on psychosynthesis* (in Dutch), 2015-2020, Putten.

5. Let us become aware of our **desires**. What were your main desires when you were a child? What are your main desires in your life now? Sometimes our desires become so strong that they dominate us. Let's realize: I have desires, but I am not my desires. Sometimes my desires become too strong. I am homesick and want to go back, I want to gamble, I want to see my bad lover, I want to drink, I want to smoke, I want to take pills. My desires change and can contradict one another, like I want to eat a lot and be slim at the same time. These desires are part of me. But they are not my self. **I have desires but I am not my desires.**
6. Let us become aware of our **roles**. Let us look at our roles: What we do. We all do many things and play many roles in our life and in our work. Let's realize: I play my roles as a woman and as a domestic worker as best as I can. I do my best to be a good wife, mother, lover, daughter, domestic worker, carer, friend, activist and leader. But I am more than a woman, a worker and all these other roles. These are all the roles, that I am playing. I can watch and observe myself playing each role. But, I can not be reduced to only one of these roles. **I am not only the actor in all these roles, but I am also the director of the acting.**
7. **Who is the one who is aware of these things?** Who has looked at my body, my feelings, my thoughts, my past and my roles just now. Let us together realize: **It is Me**, myself. **I am the one** who looked at all these parts of me. All these parts together form my identity, my self, my essence and my will. Say to yourself: **I am in charge over myself**, capable of observing and using my body, heart and mind and directing and playing the roles I have in my life. I am the magician keeping all my balls in the air. I conduct the music I make. I am the creator of the art I make in my life.
8. Say: In summary, **to know who we are, relax ... and repeat silently with me so we always remember:**
 - I have a body, but I am not my body
 - I have feelings, but I am not my feelings
 - I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts
 - I have a past, but I am not my past
 - I have desires, but I am not my desires
 - I have roles, but I am not my roles
 - **I am more. I am the sum of these parts. Together they form my real and true self.**
9. End by saying: Try to hold on to this awareness for some moments with your eyes closed.

After some moments of silence, ask everybody to come back, open their eyes, stretch a few times and yawn loudly: Aaah.



Info note: We empower!¹⁸

What is empowerment and why do we need it?

Empowerment is about **becoming strong and self-confident, and gaining the freedom and power to do what you want and to control what happens to you**. Over the many years of struggle, the worldwide women's movement has identified women's empowerment as an essential strategy for achieving gender equality. Today, many different groups and organizations are using the empowerment strategy to fight for equality for discriminated people and groups.

Empowerment is both a goal and a process:

- **Goal:** Empowerment is about people – women and men – taking control over their lives: **We need to take our own decisions and setting our own goals**, gaining skills and self-confidence, solving problems, seizing opportunities and realizing our potential through individual and collective actions.
- **Process:** No one can empower another. Everyone needs to do it. **You are the only one who can empower yourself and we are the only ones who can empower ourselves**. Other people and institutions can support processes that can nurture and advance the self-empowerment of individuals and groups.

Empowerment aims at increasing people's **'agency' and 'autonomy'**: Our capacity to be in control of our own lives, to make our own choices, to act on our own behalf, to defend our own interests, and to have self-worth, self-respect and self-confidence. Empowerment is about enabling women and men of all colors, classes and ages to make informed choices and decide by themselves about their own life and work in their families, communities and society by themselves.

In the empowerment process people gain:

- Personal power – Power within
- Creative power – Power to
- Caring power – Power over
- Shared power – Power with

For more info, see **Unit 3.1** Power and domestic workers.

We need to empower ourselves as women and as workers. Keep in mind:

- Women's movements have long emphasized the importance of achieving gender equality by increasing women's power. But, the goal of gender equality is not domination of women over men but about ending men's unfair domination over women. The goal is equal power, opportunities, incomes, and treatment for both women and men resulting in benefits for all.
- Similarly, empowering workers and increasing their rights is not about doing away with employers or domination of workers over employers. It is about ending employers' undue and unfair power over workers so that workers can provide their labor and earn a decent income in a safe working environment.

The empowerment of women, workers and other discriminated groups has both a **human rights and a political-economic dimension**: It is about realizing the rights of people as a goal in its own right and about realizing structural changes to create more equal, fair and just economies and societies. It is about achieving equality and decent work for domestic workers, women and all other groups that are oppressed and face discrimination, violence & harassment in families, workplaces, communities and societies.

Both **individual and collective actions** are needed to progress towards societies with equal participation and decision-making for all. As domestic workers, we need to:

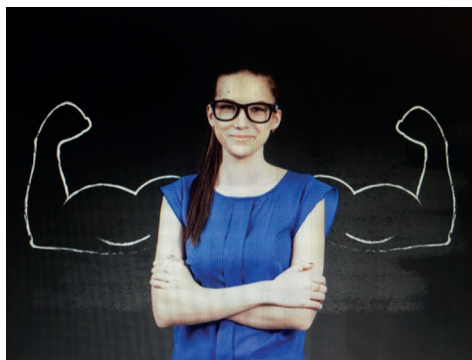
- Take actions to empower ourselves as individuals and as a group.
- Engage in collective action to fight for structural changes so that our societies become more equal, fair and just.

¹⁸ Adapted from ILO: *Gender Equality in labour migration , policy and management, GEM toolkit*, Bangkok, 2016; Flanagan, C.: *E is for empowerment, How to be empowered, if you feel powerless*, 2020
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Tips for empowering ourselves: Act!

Below are some ideas on how to start the road to self-empowerment:

- **Be conscious of how your power directs your life.** Life isn't just 'happening' to you, even though it may sometimes feel that way. Think of the hundreds of small decisions you take every day. Together, these reflect your values and shape not only your day, but your life. This will develop your sense and feeling of control over your own circumstances.
- **Act to empower yourself.** Find the power to influence outcomes in your own life. Find power in yourself to deal with situations where you feel powerless. Do not wait for others to give you the solutions to a problem, or for a broken, unfair system to be fixed by someone else. You have two choices – you can dwell on all the things you can't do, all the obstacles in your path and the unjustness of it all, OR you can focus on what you can do, on what you can control, and influence the direction of your life that way. There are things you can do to take charge of your circumstances and direct your own future.
- **Be empowered by others and empower them.** Join a community and be part of a group, like a Domestic Workers Organization. There is safety in numbers, and there's power too. Being part of a group where the members are all passionate about a common cause and driven towards a similar goal is massively empowering. In such groups each member is interested, focused, and sustains, encourages and inspires the others to achieve so much more than they could alone. We humans are social beings, the support and energy of others around us is the most empowering of all.
- **Find role models.** Look for people who embody the values you admire. Use their qualities and successes as inspiration for your own life and work and look at the circumstances they have overcome. If they can do it, you can do it too.
- **Be proud and reflect on your successes.** Think back to a time when you surprised yourself when you achieved something you feared you couldn't do. Reflect on how you felt before and after you had achieved your goal. Harness that positive feeling to give you the power to try again when you feel afraid. Keep a record of your successes – awards, praise, testimonies – and regularly review them to sustain your confidence and power.
- **Say NO!** It can be hard to say no to things or to people, especially if you are someone who likes to please, or you are afraid of seeming uncommitted. But if you never say no, you'll never be empowered. Your life will be dictated by other people's needs and expectations of you and not by what is best for you and what you want your life to be. Saying no seems difficult at first, but it's one of the most empowering things you can do.
- **Practice self care.** Make yourself a priority. Your well-being is the key to making a success of yourself. You can't be empowered if you are physically and mentally depleted. Eat healthy food, get regular exercise and develop a good sleep routine. Allow yourself some time-out every day to reflect and check in with yourself – how are things going and do you need to make any changes? If you take steps to stay healthy and strong, you will have the energy and power to take control of your life.



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