



EXPOSURE: BRITAIN'S SECRET SLAVES

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Factual

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"It was like a hell. She treat me as a slave. Not like a human being, I was treated like an animal. It was hard. But I stayed for my son." - **Elizabeth, domestic worker**

Exposure delves into the world of modern slavery - and finds it alive and well in some of London's most exclusive streets.

Featuring testimony from women who are forced to work up to 18 hours a day, seven days a week for as little as 50 pence an hour, this programme provides a close insight into the conditions of domestic workers brought into the country by their wealthy foreign employers.

Reporter Julie Etchingham finds that many of the women report physical and psychological abuse, despite the fact they are meant to be protected by British law while working here.

Because of recent changes in visa laws, the women have no legal status if they leave the families who employ them. The programme discovers how those who escape from abusive employers are exploited by criminals who draw them into a murky underworld of fake passports, false visas, and illegal employment.

One case study the team found during its 12-month investigation, 'Ira', says she was brought to the UK under the new system, to care for her employers' child at a London hospital. Back in Saudi Arabia she worked up to 20 hours a day and had to ask permission to brush her teeth and go to the toilet. In the UK she explains this got worse.

She says: "They treat me as like a prisoner. They never ever give me even a single pound to buy my own food, even my personal things. Especially one time I have monthly period here I [had to] use only the nappy of a boy."

The UK has legal obligations to protect domestic workers from abuse. The Government says it does this by ensuring women are given information by British officials about their rights in the UK. Another woman, 'Davina', says she was given no information and once in the UK lived in fear of her employer.

She says: "He says, 'I can kill you.' I was scared maybe he will do something, he will really kill me. I cannot sleep thinking about maybe one day I will die here."

The programme discovers it is not just women working for private households who are suffering abuse. 'Sarah' says she was locked inside her employer's apartment, forced to work 18 hours a day for a diplomat who withheld her wages.

She says: "I'm scared because he's a diplomat, that's what I'm scared of. He can do whatever he want to do, as he has immunity under the law. It's really a slavery, the thing that my employer did to me."

In April 2012, in an effort to cut immigration numbers, the Government changed the visa system so women were tied to the employers who brought them in. If they run away, they now find themselves at risk of deportation - and critics have compared this process to the 'kafala' system used by many Middle Eastern and Gulf countries, which essentially makes domestic workers the property of their employers.

Kate Roberts, a Community Advocate at Kalayaan, a charity that supports overseas domestic workers, says: *"To put vulnerable women in a position where they are enslaved in the UK is completely disproportionate to the Government's aims of controlling immigration. It's completely contradictory to have removed a visa system which was shown to work well and replace it with one that, that has been condemned by human rights groups as a model tying these workers to their employers."*

One woman, too terrified to go on camera, recorded a secret diary for the programme. It reveals that she was brought here two years ago by a wealthy family from the United Arab Emirates who stopped paying her, and she fled with only the clothes she was wearing. She discovered she had no legal right to change employers and had to go on to the black market to find a job illegally.

She writes: "I am tired but I want job. I want money for my family. Only me work. I have three brother. Have three sisters. Small sister married and husband not work. She is always sick also. Another big sister. Her husband die. I am so tired but I can't do anything. Because everybody ask for papers."

The Home Secretary, Theresa May, has said that abolishing modern slavery in Britain is a personal priority. Marissa Begonia, who helps runaways as chair of the Justice 4 Domestic Workers group, says the system needs to change urgently.

She says: "What kind of system do we have that the victims are the ones being criminalised? And licensing the perpetrators to abuse more, to exploit more workers. Where is the justice there?"

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