

Students working part-time being exploited, verbally abused by their bosses: New Zealand Asians bravely speak out about their own experiences of exploitation.

Every person who chooses to leave their home for New Zealand shores comes in pursuit of the same dream, a dream of a better life.

Migrants arrive in a foreign environment that has a different language and culture, knowing that pursuing this dream inevitably involves many challenges. They work hard, study diligently and persevere, hoping that they will receive fair treatment for their contribution and efforts.

How difficult can the journey be?

Asian Family Services (AFS) was established in 1998 to provide services to people of Asian background who are affected by gambling harm, addiction, and mental health issues. AFS also offers gambling prevention and harm minimisation services under a Ministry of Health contract and operates a national telephone service (Asian Helpline) for Asian individuals and families. Our services are offered in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch by qualified counsellors, social workers, and public health practitioners who speak English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Hindi, and Thai.

Throughout the years, AFS has fostered strong relationships with various stakeholders and communities and has gained the trust of the Asian and migrant communities. The organisation has witnessed a significant increase in demand for support services from the Asian migrant population. Notably, the number of calls received by the Asian Helpline has tripled, with a remarkable surge in inquiries from migrant workers seeking assistance due to unfair workplace treatment. In response to this growing trend, AFS has directed the team to conduct an investigation into the experiences of migrant employees, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and needs.

Four interviewees of Asian descent have bravely shared their stories, describing the hardships they encountered in pursuit of their dreams.

Students exploited and paid less than the minimum wage while working part-time

Interviewee A: “When I was studying, I worked part-time in a restaurant. My boss told me the hourly rate was \$12 cash after tax. At the time I had just arrived in New Zealand and didn’t know anything, so I worked there for a while. It wasn’t until later that I discovered that was not true.”

Constantly working overtime without compensation

Interviewee C: “In my first official job after graduation, although the boss paid me the minimum wage and legally taxed me, I was made to work overtime non-stop. The longest I ever overworked was one time when I was supposed to finish at 5 in the afternoon but didn’t leave the office until 11 at night. When I asked my boss how we calculated pay for overtime he very confidently told me that there wasn’t any.”

“I’m a designer, but felt like I was hired to do odd jobs”

Interviewee D: “The position I applied for was that of a designer, but the boss asked me to do everything, including working reception at the front desk and driving and delivering goods. After delivering some goods, I applied to the boss for a reimbursement of gas expenses. The

boss said I was “way too lacking in team spirit” for making such a fuss about a little bit of money, and said that if I asked again, I would be fired.”



Demoralised and verbally abused by the boss

Interviewee D: “Shortly after I started working in the company, the boss told me that with my work ability and poor English no western company would want me. He would try to brainwash me and my colleagues like this almost every day. I had good grades when I graduated, but after working in that company where my self-confidence was beaten down by the boss every day, I felt worthless.”

Conned into doing illegal work

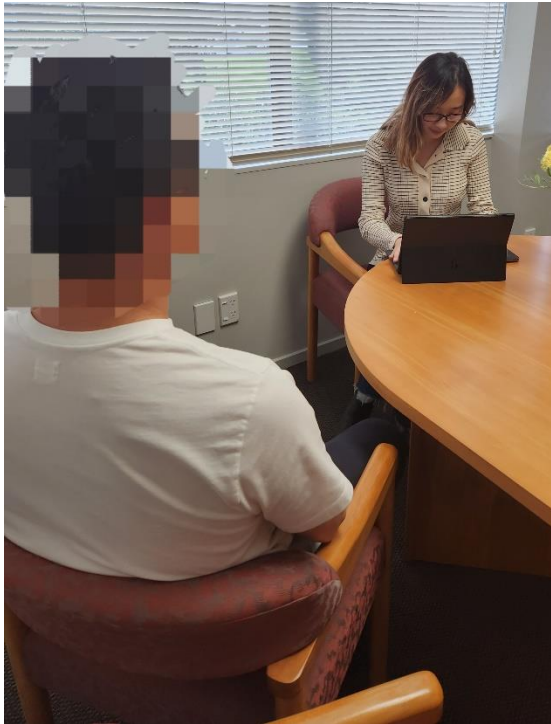
Interviewee C: “I came to New Zealand from the Philippines to study in 2013. At that time, I was introduced to a company for work. There was no interview, no contract, and no salary negotiation which I found very strange.

“Later, I was taken to the place of work by my boss - a parking lot. The boss told me to ask the people who parked there if they had filed a tax refund. If they were interested, I could give them the company flyers, they would give us some money and we could help them. But the boss told me, “If you see the security guards coming, run away.”

“The whole rest of that afternoon, the boss left me there alone to familiarise myself with the work. I was only 20 at the time so this was terrifying to me, and I felt like the boss was trying to get me to do something illegal.

“Later that day, I went back to my rental and shared the experience with my Kiwi flatmate who was living with me. He told me not to have anything to do with them anymore and said that it sounded really dangerous.

“The next day I went back to school and found the person who introduced me to the job to let them know I was quitting. He told me “You should really tell the boss and resign formally because you’ve only just come to New Zealand and no good will come from offending the boss.” I didn’t listen to him and cut all communication with the “boss”. When I look back now, I’m glad I did.”



Reflecting on their own experiences during the interviews, all the interviewees expressed that having been fully informed regarding the Employments rights and laws prior to entering New Zealand would have prevented people from being treated unfairly. The experience of unfair treatment at work doesn't stop with the financial health of the person, this also affects the physical and mental well-being of the person, therefore, it is also helpful for the New Migrants to receive prior knowledge of different health services that they can access in a timely manner.

Asian Family Services are here to assist you if you are if you or someone you know has experienced migrant exploitation and needs emotional or psychological support, call our Asian Helpline on 0800 862 342 for help. We can provide professional and confidential psychological support. Our helpline is available in Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, Hindi, Vietnamese, Thai, and English, and is open Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm.

Everyone working in New Zealand deserves to be treated fairly, irrespective of their identity, ethnicity, age, or gender. The rights and support the New Zealand government provides are accessible to all, ensuring equity for everyone. To ensure fair treatment, the first step is to **know your rights and be informed of the available support the New Zealand government offers all workers.** This information can be easily accessed at www.employment.govt.nz, where comprehensive resources are available to promote equity and ensure that all workers receive the fair treatment they deserve.

If you think you are being exploited you can make a complaint by contacting **Employment New Zealand on 0800 200 088 where they can provide language assistance, they are open Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:30pm, or access their website and complete the online complaint form, www.reportmigrantexploitation.employment.govt.nz/**



Migrant Exploitation

**Break the chains: Promote
Fairness and end inequities**

Know more about your rights
www.employment.govt.nz



For emotional and social services support
0800 862 342