



Ministry of Manpower
Migrant Domestic Worker and
Migrant Domestic Worker Employer Study
2021

Report on Findings

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1 Introduction

1.1 Objective and Scope of Study

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) commissioned a study on Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs) and MDW employers in 2021 as part of MOM's continued efforts to gain insights on the experience of MDWs and their employers in Singapore. This is the third run of the study, following the previous studies conducted in 2015-2016¹ and 2010².

The scope of the study covers:

- The overall satisfaction and employment experience of MDWs and MDW employers.
- The awareness of MDWs and MDW employers on their rights and responsibilities.

1.2 Sampling Methodology

Fieldwork for the survey was conducted from August to November 2021. A total of 1,208 MDWs and 802 MDW employers provided valid responses to the survey. The respondents were selected randomly and the sampling frame was designed to be generally representative of the profiles of MDWs and MDW employers in Singapore.

1.3 Data Collection Methodology

The survey was administered by an independent company appointed by MOM.

The survey for MDWs was administered through face-to-face interviews, via a combination of door-to-door visits and street intercepts. The survey was conducted in English or the MDW's native language.

The survey for the employers of MDWs was administered through a combination of door-to-door visits and self-completion web surveys, and was conducted in the four official languages.

All respondents were assured that their responses will be kept strictly confidential and only aggregated results would be reported.

¹ The previous surveys for MDWs and MDW employers were conducted in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The 2015 report for MDW can be accessed via the link (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/statistics-publications/fdw-study-2015.pdf>). The 2016 report for MDW employer can be accessed via the link (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/statistics-publications/fdw-employer-study-2016.pdf>).

² The 2010 report can be accessed via the link (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2011/most-fdws-and-fdw-employers-are-generally-satisfied-according-to-2010-mom-study>).

2 Summary of Findings

The study found that the vast majority of MDWs and MDW employers surveyed were highly satisfied with their employment experience. The overall satisfaction levels continued to improve from the previous study in 2015/2016.

Almost all MDWs would recommend their family or friends to work in Singapore. The majority also intended to continue working in Singapore. In terms of their well-being, MDWs reported that they were satisfied with their living accommodation, received timely salary payment, and had sufficient food and emotional support. More than 9 in 10 MDWs had at least one rest day a month, although this was a slight decline compared to the findings in 2015.

For MDW employers, the large majority were satisfied with their current MDWs and intended to renew their MDWs' contracts upon expiry. Most of them hired their MDWs through employment agencies to do general household chores. The selection of MDWs and quality of services were among the top few factors employers considered in their choice of employment agency. MDW employers surveyed indicated they would like employment agencies to offer better replacement and refund policies, better training of MDWs and a shorter hiring duration.

Overall, the level of awareness by MDWs and MDW employers of their employment rights and responsibilities remained high. MOM will continue our efforts to raise awareness in these areas and support MDWs and MDW employers in their employment relationships.

Findings for Migrant Domestic Workers

3 MDW's overall satisfaction levels, future intentions and factors influencing selecting Singapore as a place to work

3.1 Satisfaction levels of MDWs

Generally, MDWs expressed high levels of satisfaction with working in Singapore. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being “extremely satisfied” with working in Singapore, 99.2% of MDWs gave ratings of 5 and above, indicating a high level of satisfaction. This was an increase from 97.2% in 2015³.

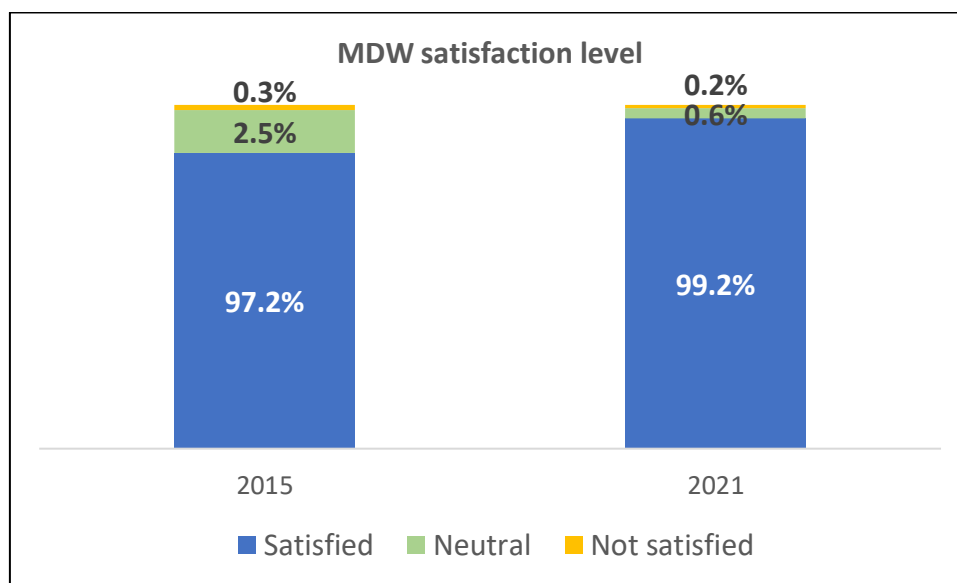


Figure 3.1

³ The survey in 2021 utilised a 6-point scale. The scale of 1 to 3, 4 and 5 to 6 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively. The survey in 2015 utilised a 10-point scale. For comparison, in 2015, the scale of 1 to 4, 5 to 6, and 7 to 10 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively.

3.2 Future intentions of MDWs

80.6% of the MDWs intended to continue working in Singapore, an increase from 77.5% in 2015.

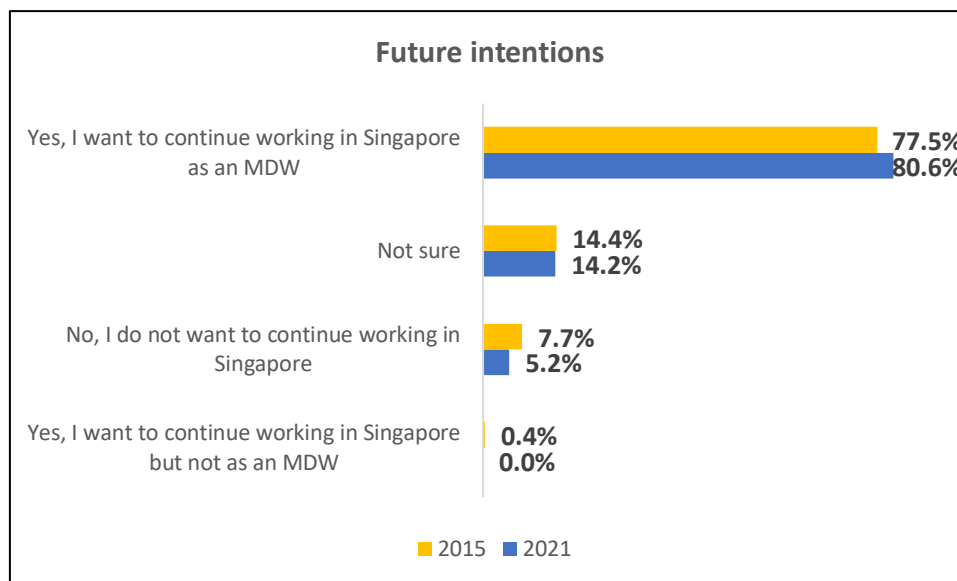


Figure 3.2a

Among those who intended to continue working in Singapore as MDW, 93.8% wished to continue working for the same employer when their current contract expires, an increase from 83.7% in 2015.

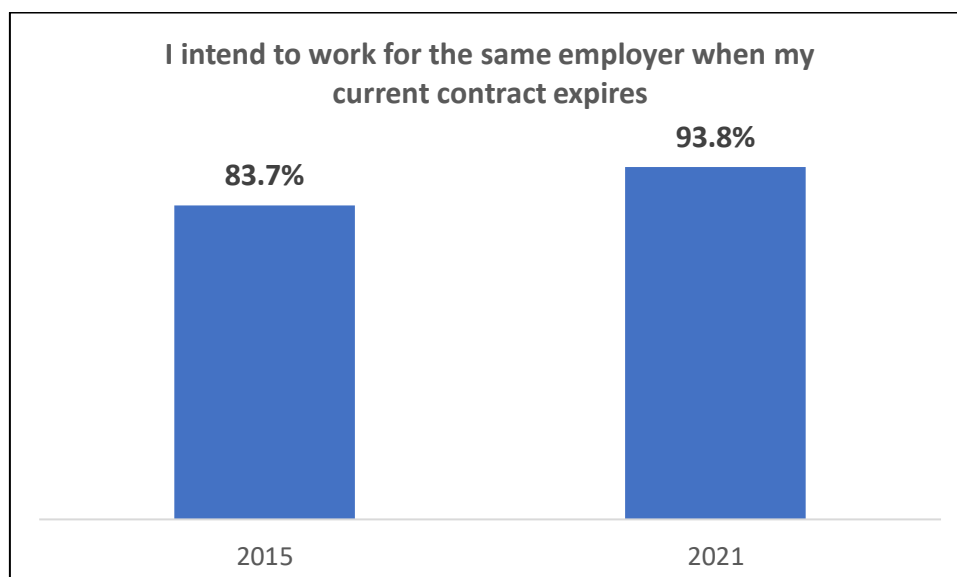


Figure 3.2b

3.3 Factors influencing selecting Singapore as a place to work

99.0% of MDWs would recommend their family or friends to work in Singapore as an MDW, an increase from 78.6% in 2015. Good pay, safety and proximity to home countries were the top factors that influenced MDWs' decision to work in Singapore.

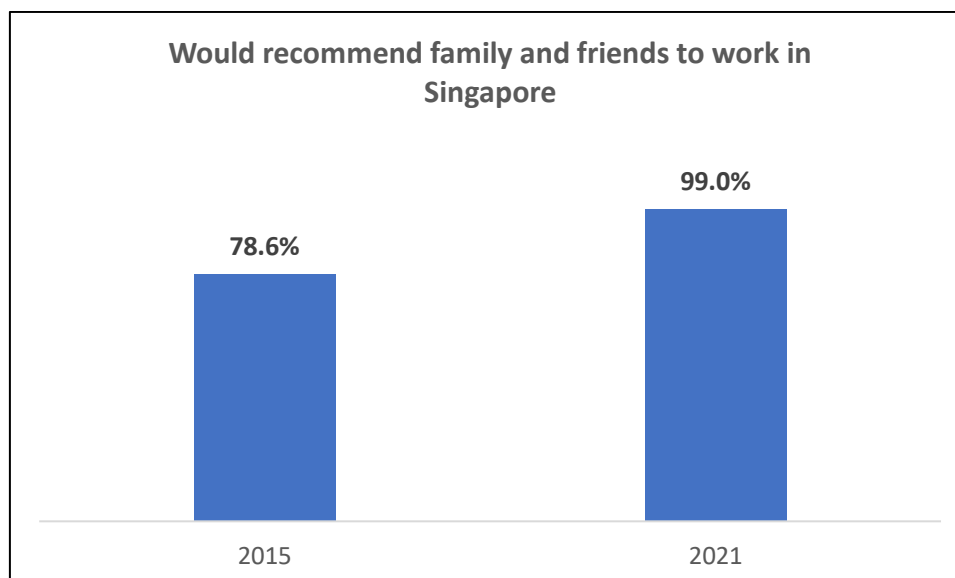


Figure 3.3a

Top factors influencing MDW's decision to work in Singapore		% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2015) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2015)</i>
1	Pay is good	76.1%	51.7% (1)
2	Singapore is a safe country	64.4%	N.A. ⁴
3	Near to home country	27.3%	20.6% (4)
4	My employment rights as an MDW are protected	12.6%	11.9% (-) ⁵
5	My friends and relatives are in Singapore	10.8%	22.8% (3)

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 3.3b

⁴ This option is not available in 2015.

⁵ Not among the top 5 factors in 2015.

4 MDW’s working conditions and experiences during employment

4.1 Workload

98.0% of the MDWs found their workload to be either just right for them or they could handle more. This is higher than the results in 2015 (96.9%).

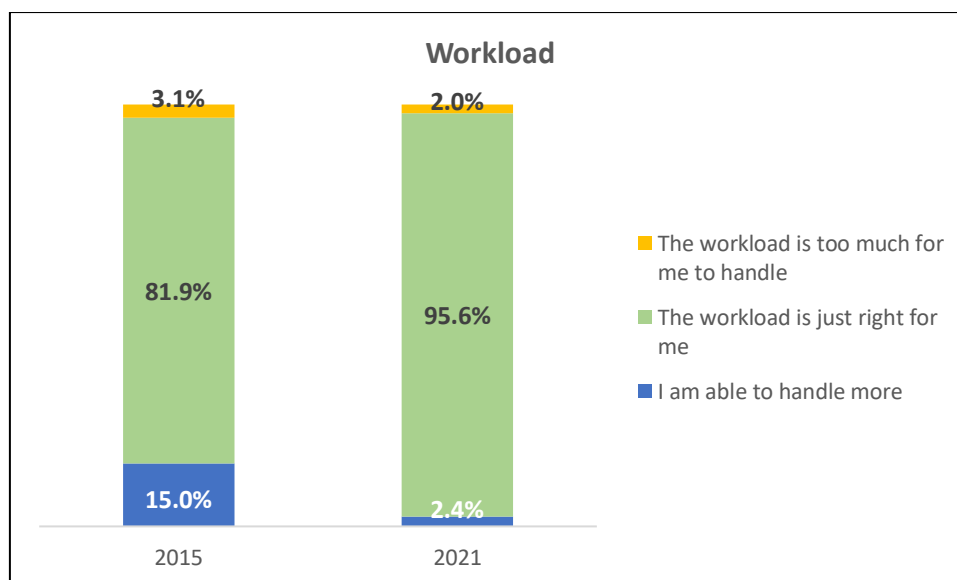


Figure 4.1

4.2 Payment of salary

99.1% of the MDWs indicated that they had received their salaries on time, an improvement compared to 97.2% in 2015. 94.2% of MDWs said they were compensated if they did not take the rest day, as compared to 63.0% in 2015.

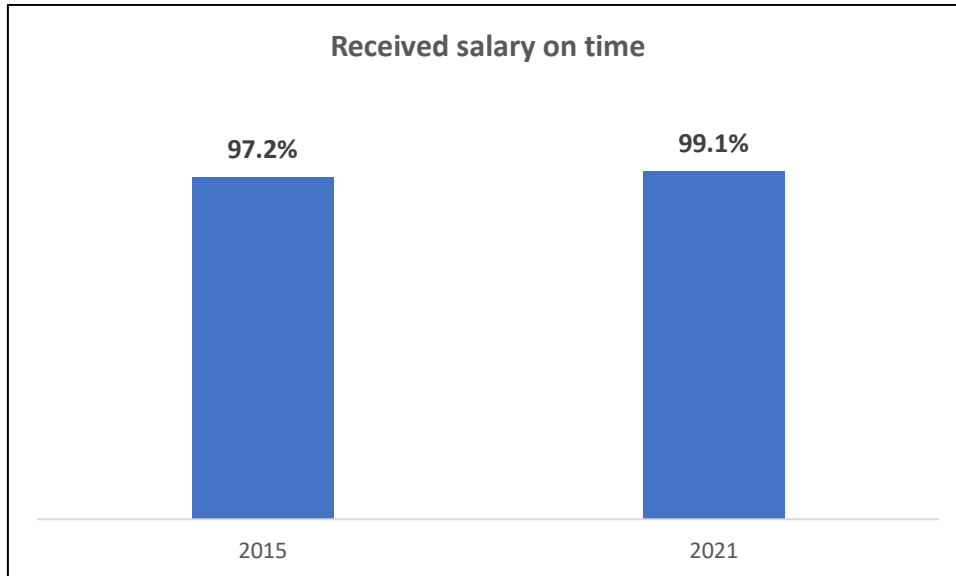


Figure 4.2a

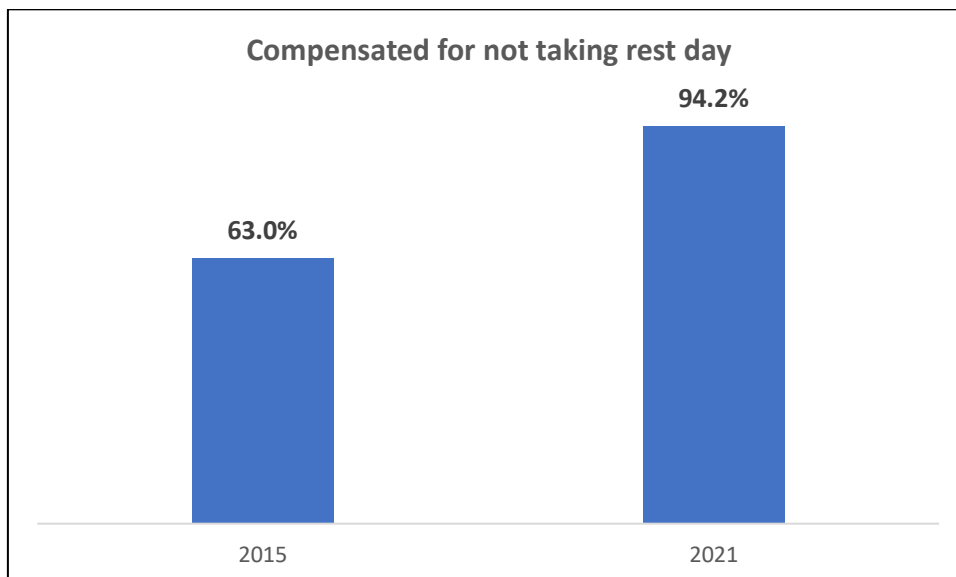


Figure 4.2b

4.3 Food

Almost all of the MDWs (99.8%) surveyed indicated that they had sufficient food every day, as compared to 97.4% in 2015.

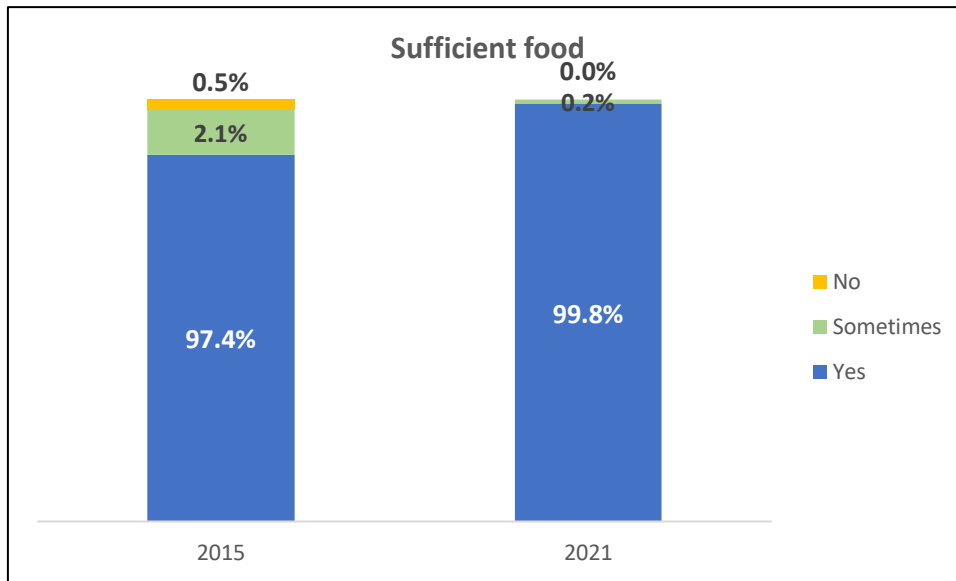


Figure 4.3

4.4 Accommodation

99.2% of MDWs were satisfied with their living accommodation, an improvement from 94.2% in 2015⁶.

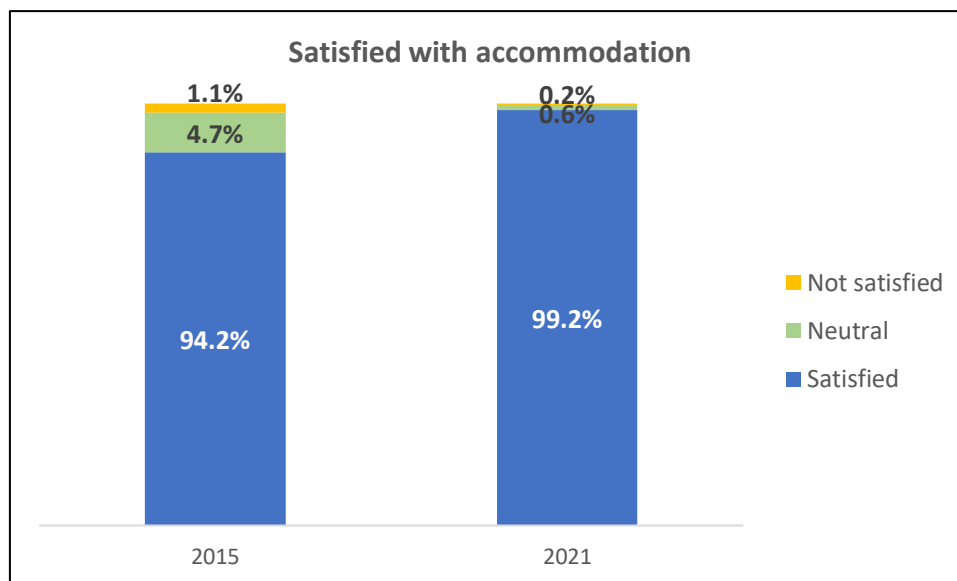


Figure 4.4

⁶ The survey in 2021 utilised a 6-point scale. The scale of 1 to 3, 4, and 5 to 6 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively. The survey in 2015 utilised a 10-point scale. For comparison, in 2015, the scale of 1 to 4, 5 to 6, and 7 to 10 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively.

4.5 Safety

98.4% of MDWs indicated their employers had taught them how to operate electrical appliances in a safe manner, compared to 93.0% in 2015.

99.0% of MDWs indicated their employment agency had explained the window cleaning safety agreement⁷, compared to 80.8% in 2015.

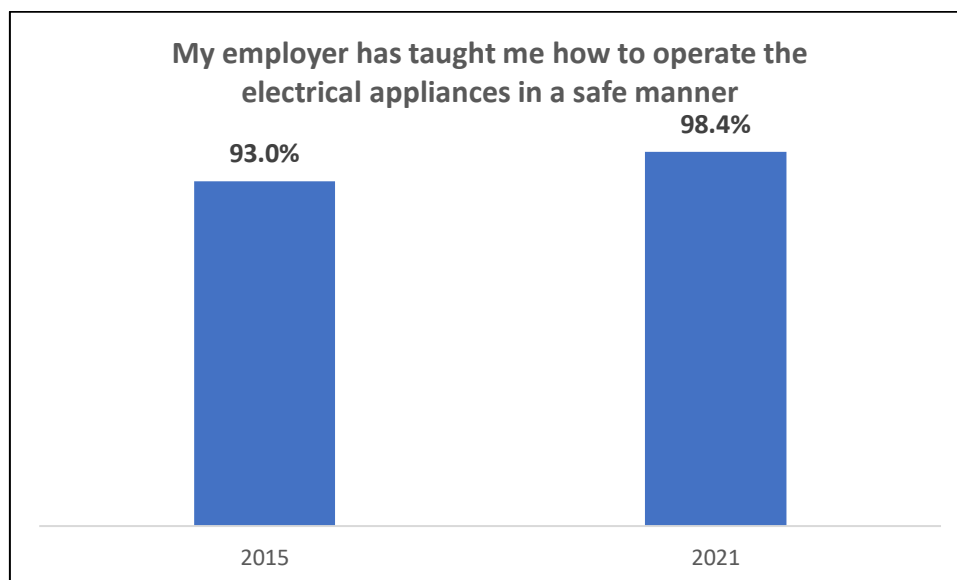


Figure 4.5a

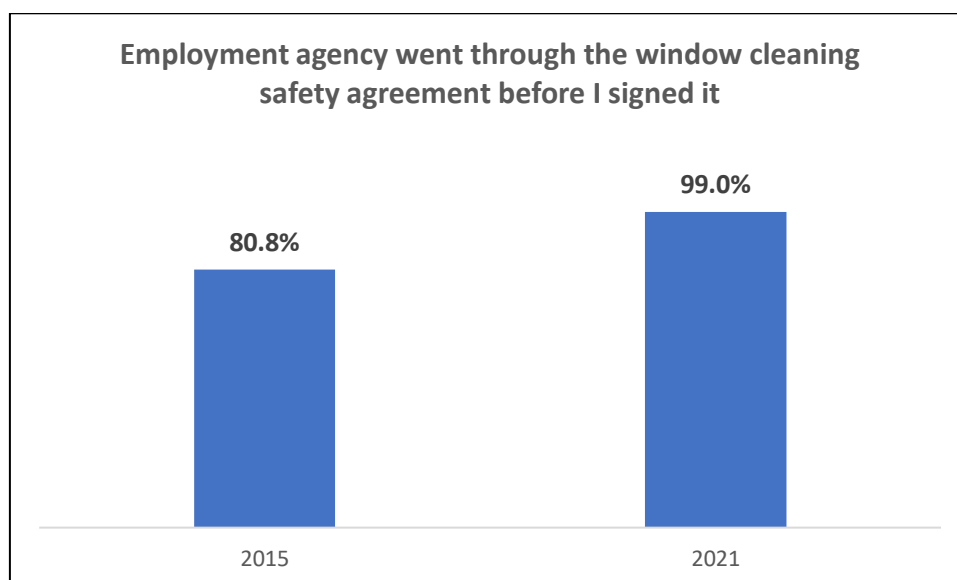


Figure 4.5b

⁷ This agreement was implemented to help both employers and MDWs understand MOM's guidelines in cleaning windows safely, so as to ensure the safety of MDWs performing this task.

4.6 Rest days

93.4% of MDWs had at least one rest day a month, this was slightly lower compared to 97.5% in 2015.

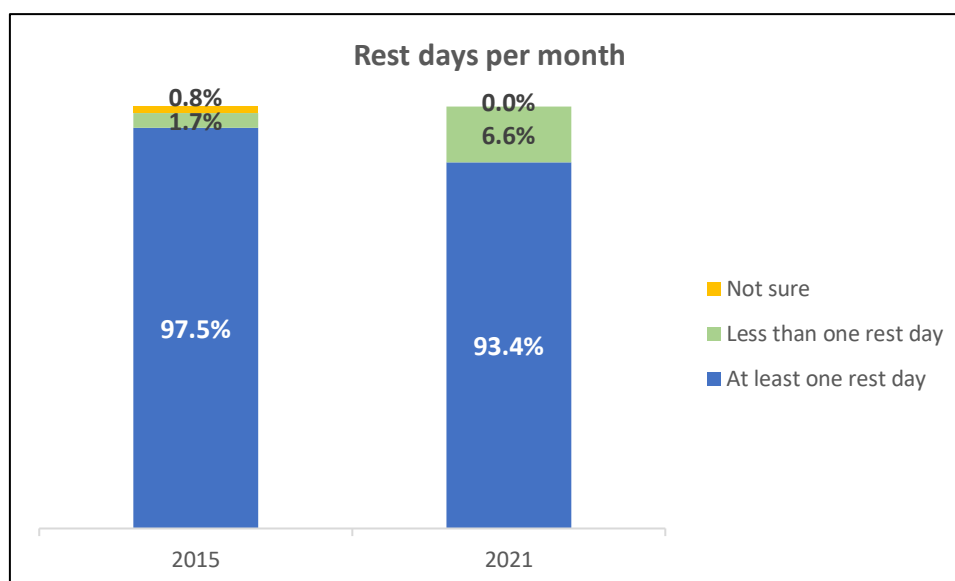


Figure 4.6a

On their rest days, MDWs typically frequented shopping malls (80.0%), stayed at home (54.0%), or frequented outdoor parks (44.8%).

Top places frequented on rest days		% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2015) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2015)</i>
1	Shopping mall	80.0%	75.6% (1)
2	Stay home	54.0%	1.6% (-) ⁸
3	Outdoor parks	44.8%	67.2% (2)
4	Friend's house	36.4%	5.4% (4)
5	Religious organisations	32.9%	22.2% (3)

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 4.6b

⁸ Not among the top 5 places in 2015.

5 MDW's access to communication, awareness levels, channels of support and assistance

5.1 Access to communications

Almost all MDWs owned a mobile phone, compared to 98.2% in 2015. 99.6% of MDWs were able to keep in touch with their friends and family members, compared to 96.6% in 2015.

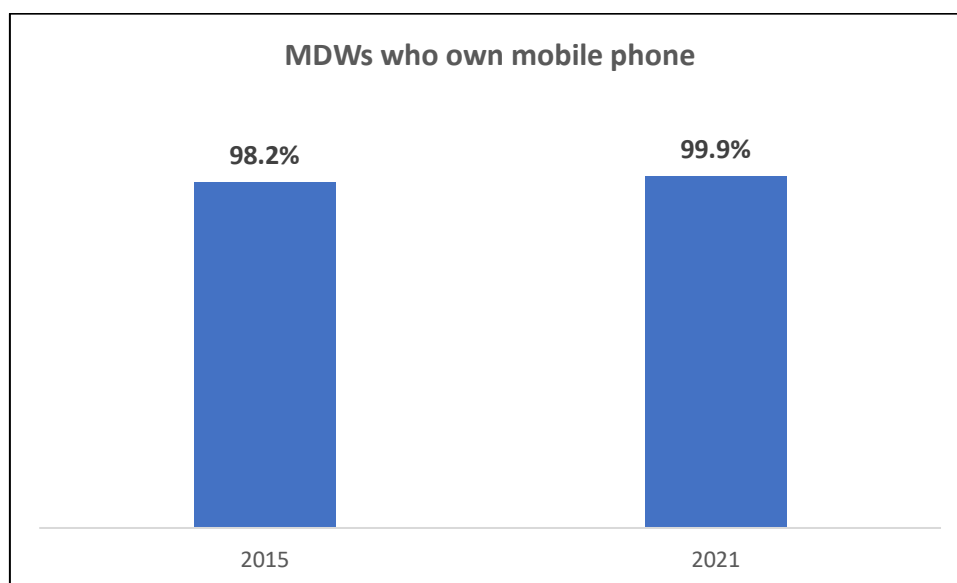


Figure 5.1a

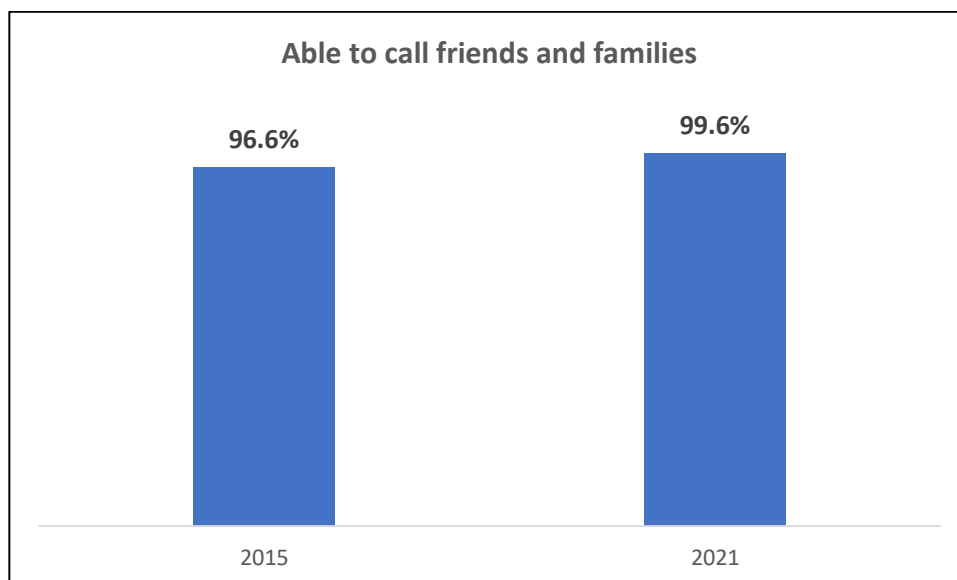


Figure 5.1b

5.2 Awareness levels

Similar to 2015, the large majority of MDWs were aware of their rights, employer responsibilities and believed in MOM being able to render assistance should they encounter problems.

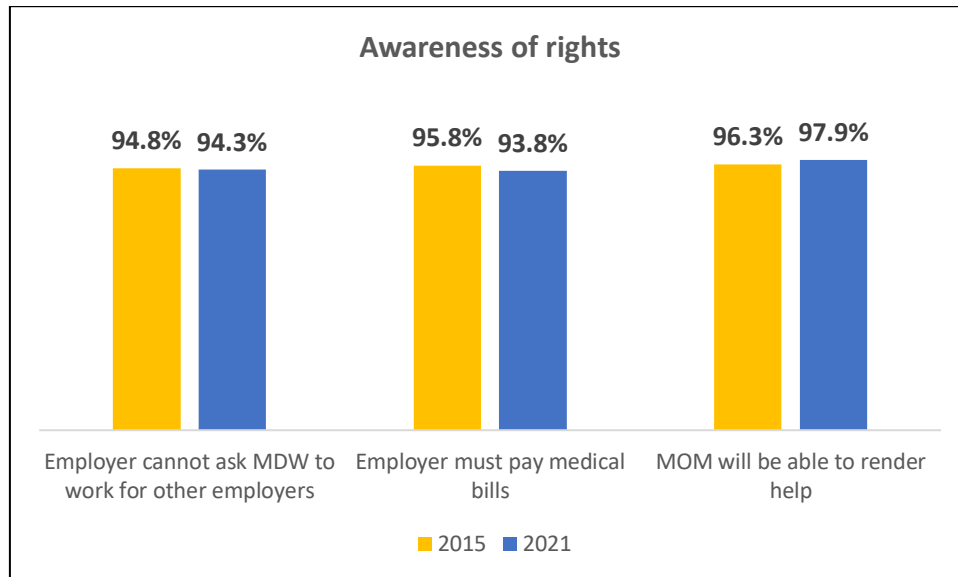


Figure 5.2

5.3 Channels of support and assistance

98.9% of MDWs had sufficient emotional and social support while working in Singapore, compared to 93.2% in 2015.

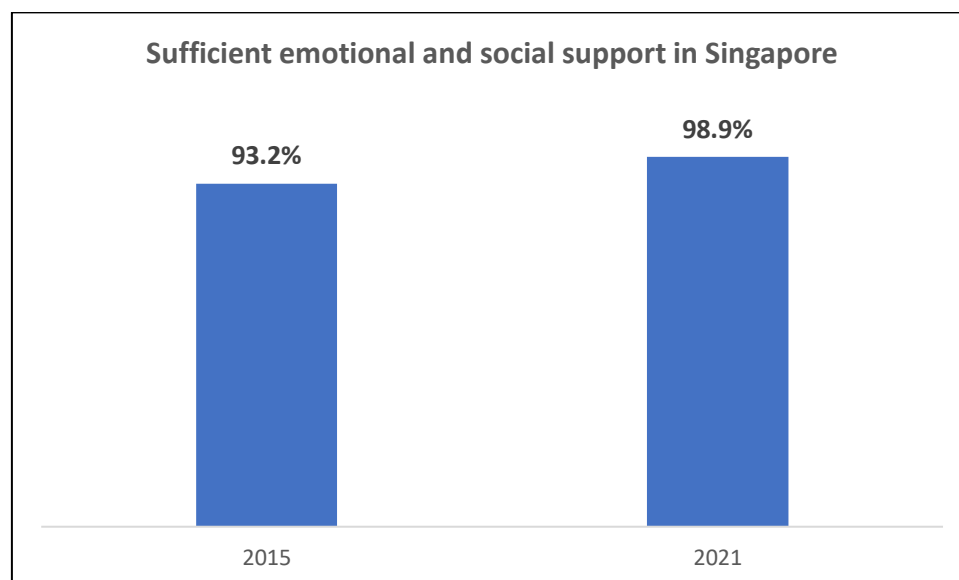


Figure 5.3a

The top 3 channels of assistance that MDWs would turn to if they faced any problems were their friends and relatives in Singapore (93.3%), employer or employer's family members (69.5%) and religious organisations (23.8%).

	Top people/organisations to approach for help	% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2015) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2015)</i>
1	Friends/relatives in Singapore	93.3%	55.8% (1)
2	Employer/employer's family members	69.5%	45.4% (3)
3	Religious organisations	23.8%	0.7% (-) ⁹
4	My embassy	6.1%	13.0% (5)
5	Approach MOM	2.6%	53.8% (2)

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 5.3b

⁹ Not among top 5 people/organisations in 2015.

Findings for Employers of Migrant Domestic Workers

6 Overall satisfaction levels and future intentions

6.1 Satisfaction of employers with their current MDWs

Generally, employers indicated high levels of satisfaction with their current MDWs. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being “extremely satisfied” with their MDW, 85.2% of employers gave ratings of 5 and above, indicating a high level of satisfaction. This was an increase from 74.6% in 2016¹⁰.

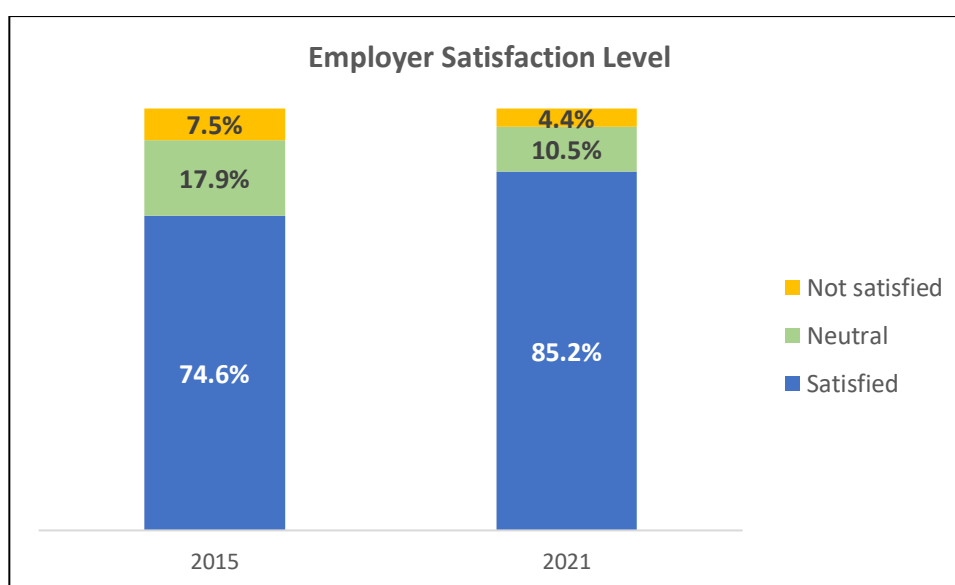


Figure 6.1a

¹⁰ The survey in 2021 utilised a 6-point scale. The scale of 1 to 3, 4, and 5 to 6 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively. The survey in 2016 utilised a 10-point scale. To allow comparison, in 2016, the scale of 1 to 4, 5 to 6, and 7 to 10 was mapped to “Not satisfied”, “Neutral”, and “Satisfied”, respectively.

70.1% of employers intended to renew their MDWs' employment contracts when they expired, an increase from 66.0% in 2016.

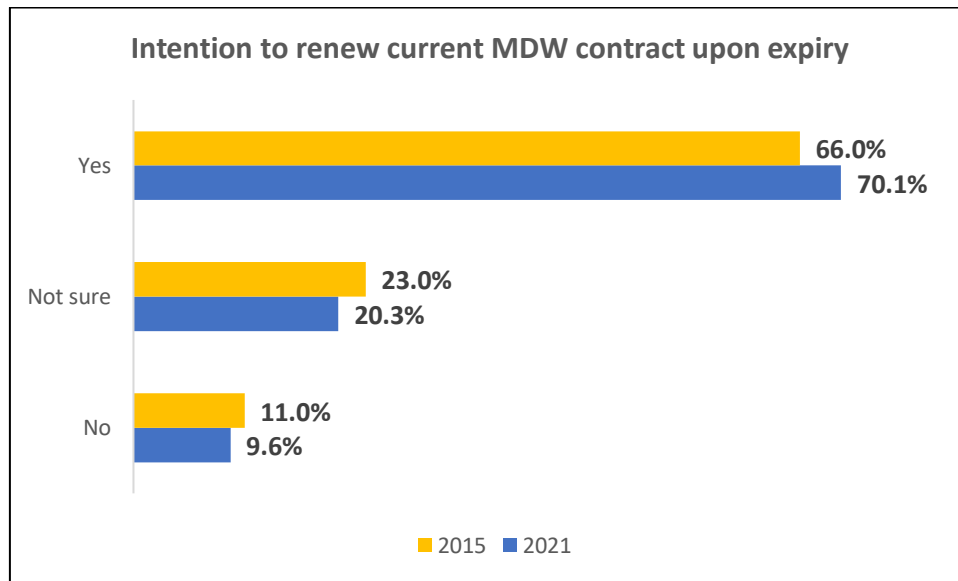


Figure 6.1b

7 Pre-employment experiences

7.1 Reasons for engaging MDW

Employers generally expected their MDWs to perform multiple tasks. When asked for their main reasons for engaging a MDW, the most common reasons employers selected were for general household cleaning (81.7%), cooking meals (58.7%), and care for children (53.0%). This finding is similar to 2016.

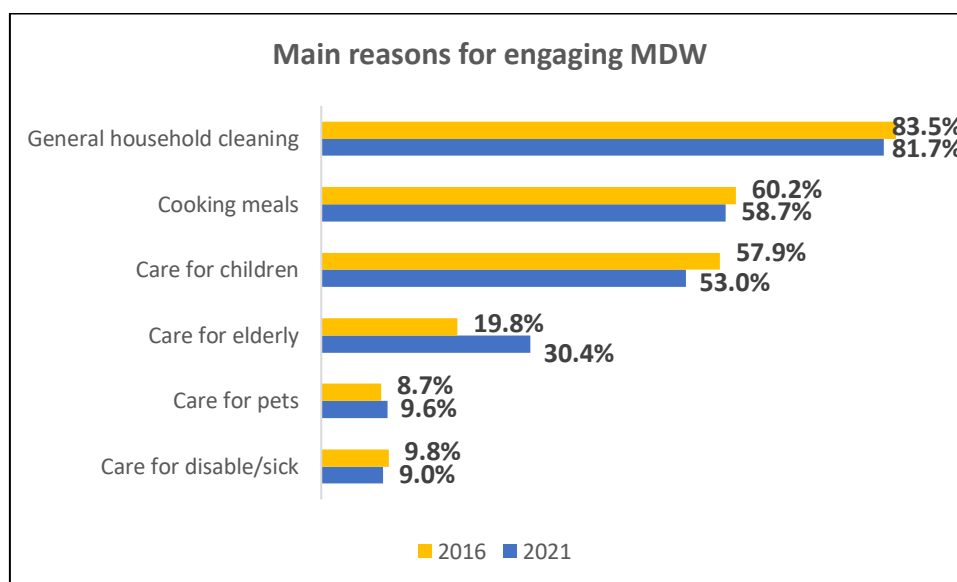


Figure 7.1

7.2 Considerations for selecting current MDW

66.5% of the employers ranked the MDW's attitude as the top factor in selecting their current MDW. The other common factors were the readiness of the MDWs to be deployed to the household (38.8%) and language proficiency (38.7%).

	Top factors considered in selecting current MDW	% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2016) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2016)</i>
1	Assessment of attitude	66.5%	25.1% (1)
2	How quickly she could be deployed to my household	38.8%	N.A. ¹¹
3	Proficiency in language used in my household	38.7%	7.7% (4)
4	Previous experience working as MDW	34.8%	14.3% (3)
5	Salary that she is willing to accept	28.2%	N.A. ¹²

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 7.2

¹¹ This option is not available in 2016.

¹² This option is not available in 2016.

7.3 Recruitment process and experiences with employment agencies

Most employers (>80%) got to know their MDWs through an employment agency.

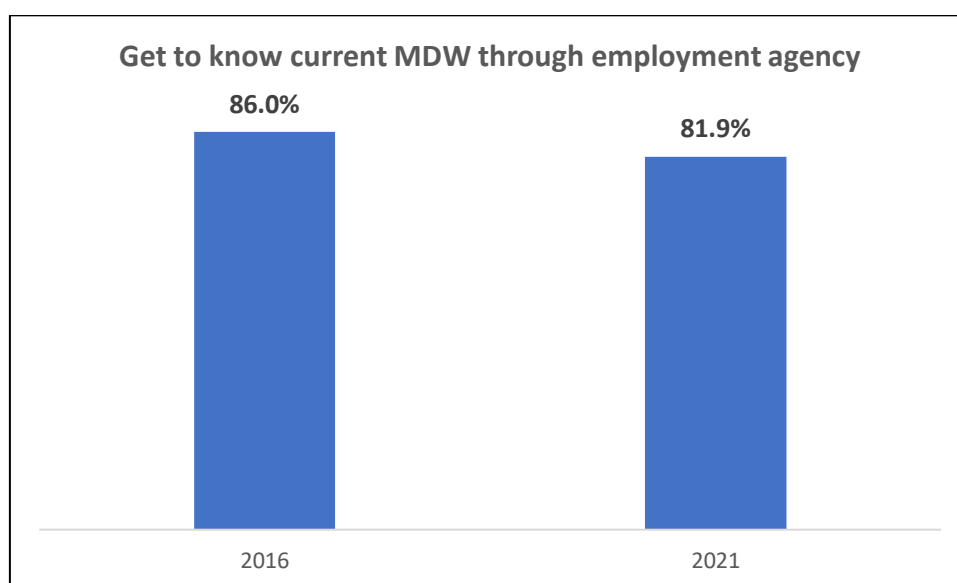


Figure 7.3a

50.7% of the employers ranked the selection of MDWs as the top factor of consideration in selecting an employment agency. The other most common factors were quality of services (46.9%) and recommendation by friends or relatives (44.2%).

	Top factors considered when selecting employment agency	% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2016) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2016)</i>
1	Good selection of MDWs	50.7%	18.4% (-) ¹³
2	Good services	46.9%	29.2% (2)
3	Recommended by relatives/friends	44.2%	31.9% (1)
4	Reasonable service fees	43.9%	18.6% (5)
5	Contractual terms	35.8%	N.A. ¹⁴

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 7.3b

¹³ Not among top 5 factors in 2016.

¹⁴ This option is not available in 2016.

32.2% of employers indicated that employment agencies could offer better replacement and refund policies. The other two common areas that employers felt employment agencies could improve on were better training of MDW (30.0%) and shorter hiring duration (27.3%).

Areas of improvement in employment agencies		% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2016) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2016)</i>
1	Offer better replacement/ refund policies	32.2%	34.8% (3)
2	Better training of MDW	30.0%	37.1% (2)
3	Shorter hiring duration	27.3%	N.A. ¹⁵
4	Quality of MDWs	26.3%	40.4% (1)
5	Better matching with MDWs	26.3%	33.8% (4)

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 7.3c

¹⁵ This option is not available in 2016.

8 Awareness of employment responsibilities

8.1 Employment obligations

Majority of the employers continued to be aware of their employment obligations on medical insurance, provision of meals for their MDWs and not to ask their MDW to help out at workplaces¹⁶.

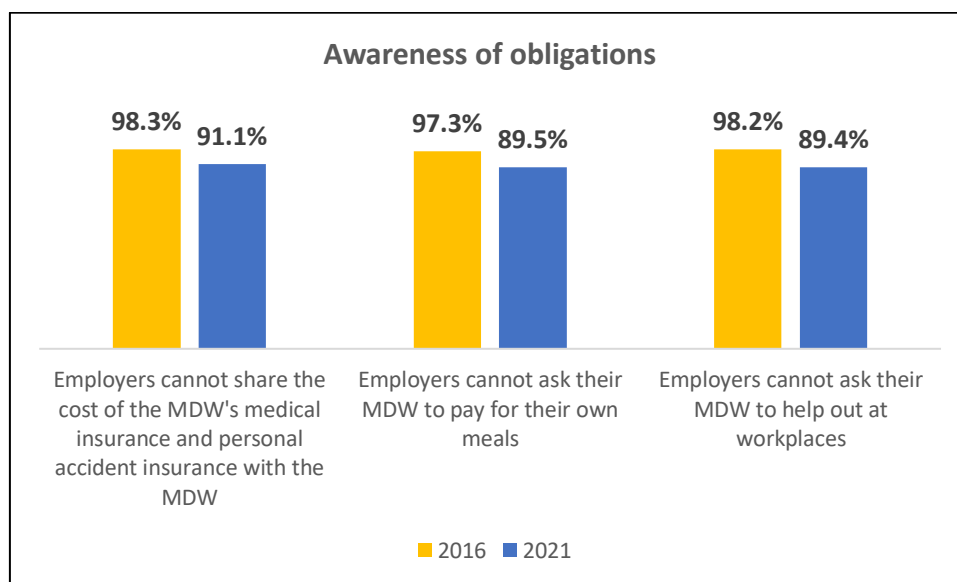


Figure 8.1

¹⁶ In 2016, the question was “employers cannot ask their MDW to work at a residential address other than that stated in the work permit”.

8.2 Rest days

The top 3 reasons for employers not granting their MDWs with a rest day in a month were that the MDWs did not want to take their rest day (49.0%), the employer needed the MDW for caregiving needs (28.4%), and daily household chores (23.5%).

Reasons MDW does not have rest day		% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2016) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2016)</i>
1	My MDW does not want to take any rest days	49.0%	70.4% (1)
2	My family has caregiving needs and I need her to be around all the time	28.4%	30.6% (3)
3	She has many chores to take care of on a daily basis	23.5%	5.1% (5)
4	I am afraid that she would get involved with the wrong company	18.6%	32.7% (2)
5	My friends and relatives advised me against giving my MDW rest days	2.9%	2.0% (-) ¹⁷

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 8.2

¹⁷ Not among top 5 reasons in 2016.

9 Getting by without an MDW

9.1 Ability to get by without an MDW

37.0% of employers were not able to get by without an MDW, which was a decrease from 57.9% in 2016. However, more employers were unsure if they could cope without an MDW (48.0% vs 25.3% in 2016). The proportion of employers who indicated they would be able to cope without an MDW remained low.

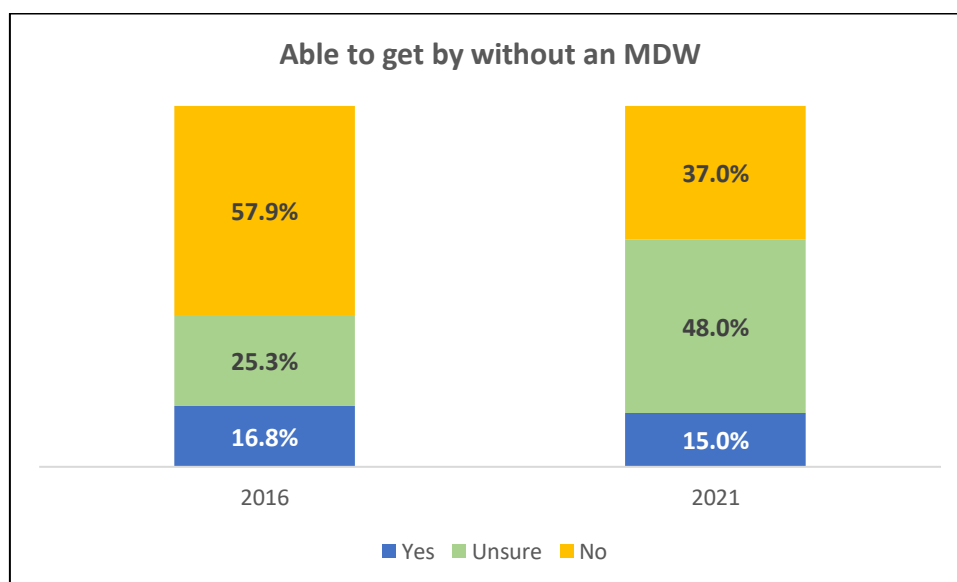


Figure 9.1

9.2 Alternatives to MDW

When asked how employers would cope if they were not able to hire an MDW, 66.0% of employers said they would rely on themselves or their family members to provide caregiving or perform household chores. 49.1% of employers would employ a part-time worker to provide caregiving or perform household chores.

How employers would cope if they were not able to hire an MDW		% of responses (2021)	% of responses (2016) <i>(Number in bracket denote placing in 2016)</i>
1	Depend on myself or family members to provide care giving/perform household tasks	66.0%	34.8% (3)
2	Employ a part-time worker to provide care giving/ perform household tasks	49.1%	57.1% (1)
3	Send dependants to a care-giving institution	36.5%	36.9% (2)
4	Review my decision to have a child/ another child	10.2%	16.6% (5)

Note: The responses do not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question.

Figure 9.2