13 Nails And 5 Needles Later, Maid Recovering From Surger

(AP) Doctors removed 13 nails and five needles from a Sri Lankan maid who says the couple she worked for in Saudi Arabia hammered them into her body. L.G. Ariyawathi, who was hospitalized with severe pain after returning from Saudi Arabia, has said the family she worked for punished her by heating the nails and needles before sticking them into her. X-rays showed that she had 24 nails and needles in her body.

The nails ranged in length from one to two inches, while the needles were about one inch long. They were removed from her legs and forehead. Her doctor stated that the surgery was successful and that she is recovering following the three-hour procedure. He said six more needles in her hands could not be removed because the operation might damage her nerves and arteries, but that they would not be harmful to her.

Since being hospitalized, Ariyawathi, 49, has described the abuse meted out by her employers. “They did not allow me even to rest. The woman at the house had heated the nails and then the man inserted them into my body,” Ariyawathi was quoted as saying by the Lakbima newspaper. She told the newspaper that she went to Saudi Arabia in March but was paid only two months' salary, with her employer withholding the rest to buy an air ticket to send her home.

About 1.5 million Sri Lankans work abroad, many as maids or drivers, to earn more than they can in their own impoverished country. Nearly 400,000 work in Saudi Arabia alone. Sri Lanka's Foreign Employment Bureau said Ariyawathi had been too afraid to complain about the abuse to Saudi authorities, fearing that her employers might not let her return home.

Deputy Minister of Economic Development Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena said the government would report the matter to the Saudi government and provide her compensation. Saudi officials did not respond to requests for comment.

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