



A Qualitative Exploration of the Adaptation of Labour Migration among Nepali Migrant Workers in Middle East Countries.

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Abstract

The migration of skilled labourers has been a persistent global occurrence for centuries, perpetuated by factors such as conflict, natural disasters, poverty, and unemployment. Nepal has experienced a significant surge in migration in recent years. This research focuses on the obstacles, adjustment process, and experiences of migrants in Middle Eastern nations. The researcher interviewed seven individuals after obtaining their verbal consent. A set of twenty questions was devised for the qualitative research interviews. Migrants face difficulties adjusting to the living conditions and socio-cultural differences in Gulf countries. The impediments to attaining employment, healthcare, and socio-economic stability in the Middle East present formidable challenges for migrants, demanding a period of adjustment to the environment, society, and professional sphere. Migrants eventually become accustomed to the language and learn about the traditions and customs of the area.

Keywords: Migration, Natural calamities, War, Poverty, Unemployment, Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is one of the poorest Asian countries in the world with an expected population of 30 million people. Nepal's per capita income is ranked 207th out of 229 countries.⁶ A large number of people are employed in foreign countries due to unemployment. The unemployment problem is significant. The GDP growth and unemployment rate of Nepal are -2.088% and 4.44% respectively.⁵ The main occupation in the country is agriculture. Lack of job opportunities, low wages, poor economic growth, political instability, natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, and social inequality encourage people to leave the country. People are looking for higher wages overseas, upgraded living conditions, and the opportunity to acquire new skills. They are optimistic that their remittances will enable them to sustain their family and community.

Purpose/Aim: The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges and socio-economic constraints encountered by migrants in Middle Eastern countries. Additionally, it seeks to examine the process of adaptation for migrant labourers working overseas. The research also concentrates on their socio-economic constraints while abroad.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley. We carried out a preliminary survey of the migrants from Middle Eastern countries to gain insights into the challenges they face there, as well as the processes of integration and adaptation. In addition, interviews were conducted with seven migrants to assess their initiative to go abroad and how they adapt and manage work, culture, basic needs, monetary benefits, living conditions, cultural differences, and socio-economic challenges in the new environment. The present study had limited generalization with a small sample size. The interview was conducted in person, ensuring a physical presence, and was formulated using the local common dialects of the Nepali language with verbal consent obtained beforehand. The participants of the interview were from diverse educational qualifications, age groups, ethnicities, and professional fields.

Data collection and selection process

The researcher interviewed seven individuals with a prepared questionnaire of 20 questions. The participants were male members belonging to different ethnicities. The researcher selected participants who were employed in Middle Eastern countries, which also included migrant workers. The researcher gave oral consent that their identity would not be disclosed due to ethical reasons. As part of the literature search,

30 journal articles published up until June 2023 were examined in the current study. The journal articles from health literature, social science, etc. are cited. The study was done with a small sample size and convenience sampling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Migration thus gives an optimistic livelihood strategy for migrant workers and their families, contributes to the economic growth of the destination state/country, while the origin state/country benefits from the remittances and the skills acquired during their migration.”²

According to the report of the International Organization for Migration in Nepal, “Over the last two decades, Malaysia and the countries in the Middle East have become large receivers of Nepalese migrants. The top 20 largest receivers of Nepalese temporary labour migrants belong to Malaysia and the countries in the Middle East”.⁸

According to Cho et al., (BMC Public Health) migrant workers’ monthly income and socioeconomic status affected their health-related quality of life.

According to etui (vol28(2) 285-289,2022) employers glorify the work ethics of migrant laborers because of their commitment dedication high work ethics and flexibility. At the same time Based on the desktop research, the anger caused by unequal treatment in the workplace undermined motivation and commitment, even though in many cases migrant labor was necessary to keep production going. It was found that migrant workers make trade-offs playing a crucial role in their decisions to stay or leave (Cremers and Houwerzijl, 2018).³

“Migration is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. However, the increased demand and preference for highly skilled workers will not diminish the need for less skilled workers. In the more developed economies, certain jobs have become identified as migrants' jobs, typically "3-D" (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs. It will require more than just a hefty pay to entice more educated nationals to accept jobs in these sections Governments are playing the nationalism card, in hopes of persuading their nationals to take up jobs in the lower-skilled sectors to reduce their dependence on foreigners (e.g., in Malaysia and Singapore). Thus far, the experience of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the receiving countries of Asia seem to show that this is a tough idea to sell.”¹

FINDING OF THE STUDY: The seven male migrants who participated in the interview were of varying ethnic backgrounds, with an age range of 28 to 36 years.

Participant One: Obtaining an employment VISA is a challenge. According to the participant's preference, if he gets an employment visa, he is happy to pursue work abroad. Many Nepali people travel to the Middle East without an employment visa and encounter numerous problems. Adapting to a new environment is a challenge for them. Food and accommodation pose additional difficulties.

Participant Two: Misery in his personal and family life prompted him to leave the country and seek employment as security staff in Qatar. He took a loan from his neighbour and paid a huge sum to the manpower agency, bypassing any interviews. To his shock and dismay, after reaching the workplace, he did not receive the agreed remuneration. He later relocated to Dubai after paying a hefty amount to another manpower agency.

Participant Three: Invested several years labouring at an interior cattle farm in Saudi Arabia, alongside a multitude of Nepali and nationals from other countries. A private company had hired him for 1020 riyals a month. He stayed there to continue providing for his family’s basic needs. He believes that there is no gain without pain. He was required to perform a wide range of tasks at the cow farm, including cleaning, mopping, feeding, and more.

Participant Four: It was a tough time to survive in Nepal. He struggled to find a job that could sustain his family. His family lived in a small village, and opportunities were scarce. He was the sole breadwinner, responsible for his parents and younger siblings. Money was always tight, and he felt constant pressure to provide more. There was no other way for him than to leave the country and get a job to support his family.

Participant Five: Life back home was a constant struggle for him. Finding a decent-paying job was nearly impossible, and his family was facing financial hardships. He decided to explore opportunities in the Gulf to secure a better future for his loved ones. It was like stepping into a whole new world for him. The job he got was different from what was promised, and the living conditions were challenging. It was all the more challenging because of the language barrier, and at times he felt alone.

Participant Six: “Back in Nepal, jobs were scarce, and my family was struggling financially. The responsibility to provide for them fell on me after my marriage,” he said, and therefore, the participant decided to explore opportunities in the Gulf, hoping for better prospects.

Participant Seven: Life in Nepal was a constant struggle. "I felt this overwhelming responsibility as the eldest, and that is when I decided to explore opportunities abroad," the participant said, referring to the high rate of unemployment and difficulty finding work that would support their family. The participant envisioned a chance for a better life.

Table One

Name	Gender	Age	Educational attainment	Ethnicity	Job
Participant One	M	36	Higher secondary	Tamang	Cow Farm
Participant Two	M	35	High School	Newar	Security
Participant Three	M	32	Lower secondary	Tharu	construction
Participant Four	M	28	Secondary	Janajati	Factory
Participant Five	M	34	High School	Janajati	Factory
Participant Six	M	33	Lower secondary	Rai	Poultry
Participant Seven	M	29	Lower secondary	Chettri	Cleaner

Economic Challenges of Migrants in Nepal

The dearth of work opportunities in the country and the desperate need to lift the family out of poverty pushed the participants to consider going abroad. All the participants went abroad due to financial difficulties at home. These migrants take huge loans to pay the manpower organization and to bear their expenses of going abroad and working there. Many migrants experience extreme hardships but return jobless. Most of the time, they lose all of their resources, including borrowed money. Some need to change their workplace due to poor pay and a lack of facilities. They do not get the promised salary in reality. Receiving unexpected and unsatisfied economic benefits motivates employees to change their work in Gulf countries. In an effort to make more money, these migrant workers also look for overtime work, disregarding their mental and physical well-being.

Social and cultural challenges: It is often difficult for Nepali migrants to effectively communicate with others due to their limited understanding of the local dialect (Arabi) and international language (English), hindering proper communication with relevant authorities abroad. It is equally challenging for them to make good friends of other nationalities at work and outside. The living conditions are cramped, and social and cultural barriers make it difficult to work abroad. Personal well-being is important for any Nepali worker abroad. Ensuring occupational safety, social stability, and healthcare security pose challenges for these migrants in Gulf countries. As a migrant, it is difficult to find occupational safety, social, and health security in Gulf countries. Also, adhering to a rigid work schedule is a requirement.

Perception of Migrant Workers: Nepali society is acquainted with anecdotes of people finding lucrative jobs in the Gulf region. Consequently, many migrant workers perceive it as a great opportunity for a vastly promising future. There is a huge expectation from family and friends when a person goes abroad for work, and this intensifies upon their return from a foreign country. The perception is that they earn well and sufficient for their lifetime. Family, friends, and neighbours envy those who venture abroad, compelling people to embark on this challenging journey.

Social Network and Support System: The migrants who are working and living abroad rely on the social network with some limitations. Local contact and socialization often tend to be quite restricted for them. However, Nepalese have strong friendships and relationships with fellow compatriots living in the same place. Many migrants find solace in communicating with fellow Nepali workers. Migrants believe that by pooling their resources, finding ways to stretch their income, and providing emotional support, they can overcome challenges together. It is through this camaraderie that they manage to navigate through the initial difficulties. By forming a support system, migrants share not only their struggles but also strategies to cope.

Positive changes: Learning to accept and adapt to the situation is a grace. The migrants gradually pick up the language, understand the culture, learn the rhythm of the work, make more friends, and gather strength to bear the challenges. With time, these individuals learn the local customs and work expectations. The migrants pick up the language, which facilitates communication. Despite the difficulties, many migrants realized that adapting was essential for their survival and to benefit from the opportunities at hand. The friendships and forging with other Nepali workers played a crucial role in helping them navigate through the challenges. The sense of community among Nepali workers played a crucial role in this adaptation process. Over time, they find a sense of resilience that helps them adapt to the new environment. Though they face difficulties as they get a job abroad, they strive to prove their capabilities and competence to potential employers.

DISCUSSION

This study is an exploration of the adaptation of labour migration of Nepalese in the Middle East. To the best of our knowledge, there are studies done on related topics in different countries. These studies sum up that there are a lot of challenges and socio-economic constraints faced by Nepali migrants abroad. Some have satisfying experiences, while others endure an unpleasant life abroad. All the migrants whom we interviewed, men and women, went abroad with the help of manpower agencies. Migrant's monthly income and socio-economic status improved after working abroad. An increasing trend in the number of migrant workers was observed in the past compared to the present in Korea. The employment of migrant workers has become essential in the labour force, which has gradually increased in Korea.³ The same trend is seen in the case of Nepali migrant workers working abroad.

In Nepal, international migration has become a crucial livelihood strategy as employment opportunities are limited. Many men are working in Gulf countries with low semi-skilled jobs. Migrant women are less protected from the loss of jobs and the economic recession. Women who are subjected to violence in their workplace encounter both sexual harassment and limited social safeguards. In some cases, they are at the bottom rung of the earning ladder, especially if they are domestic workers.

According to "The Himalayan" daily newspaper, "the Department of Foreign Employment of Nepal has shown that over 176,000 Nepali women have been granted labour permits to work abroad since 2008, travelling mainly to the UAE, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, and Jordan. Since 2016, Nepali authorities outlawed labor permits for domestic work in the Gulf amidst reports of abuse of Nepali migrants working as maids in the region".⁷

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended to have a formal contract between the migrant employee and the employer abroad with an employment VISA for job security and the safety of the migrant.
2. It is also necessary to have strict rules and regulations to support the migrants from the manpower agencies involved in visa processing and arranging work abroad.
3. Nepali people who go abroad need orientation about the work, culture, life, process and procedure of going to Middle Eastern countries.
4. It is important to build a network with fellow countrymen after reaching the destination for work and build a support system for the adaptation process to manage life smoothly.

CONCLUSION

Nepali migrants in the Middle East face remarkable challenges to accept and adapt to their new lives. They struggle to find a good job, accommodation, and food. They also face communication barriers in both personal and professional settings. Furthermore, they encounter challenges such as a lack of social inclusion, insufficient legal recognition, prejudice, and payment delays. Diplomatic support is required from the government for the Nepali labourers. The migrant who reaches abroad needs to get sufficient information regarding their job security, safety, legal processes and procedures regarding employment, and employment-related issues.

LIMITATION: An ethnic mix of rural and urban migrants hails from all over Nepal. However, the research study is done only in Kathmandu Valley. The study specifies only males aged 28 to 36 among the diverse workforce consisting of young, adult, and elderly men and women in the Gulf regions.

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