



Learning Model How Stakeholders Could Improve the Quality of Life of Cambodian Migrant Workers Working and Living in Thailand

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Abstract

This paper aimed to study the current situation of Cambodian migrant workers working and living in Thailand and to propose a Learning Model to improve the quality of their lives. The data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively from the survey and in-depth interview. The sample for the survey was 100 Cambodian migrant workers who were purposively selected from four areas namely (1) Bangkok (2) Pathumthani (3) Chonburi and (4) Samut Prakarn. In addition, the informants for the interview were nine stakeholders consisting of two government officials, one representative of civil society, one local community authority, one representative of worker recruiting companies and four Cambodian migrant workers. Data obtained from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistic while that obtained from the in-depth interview was analyzed using thematic content analysis. The results indicated that most of the Cambodian migrant workers lived in difficult situation. However, their living condition varied mainly depending on legal status and the types of employment. To upgrade their living standards, the learning model was proposed in which stakeholders, including local community, employers, civil societies and recruiting agencies collaboratively contribute to the Cambodian migrant workers in terms of the improvement of language, technology, attitude, networking, social integration in order to improve their health care, well-being and access to the information.

Keywords: Learning Model, Cambodian Migrant Workers, Quality of Life, Stakeholders

Introduction

Located at the center of the greater Mekong Sub-region, Thailand was an attractive destination for migrants from neighboring countries and the broader Asia-Pacific region, particularly, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam began during the 1990s. Warakiti and Chaiwong (2018) reported that there is transmigration of many immigrants to Thailand to work because of their poverty, unemployment, taking-advantage; and natural disaster's problem.

Based on the study of Bylander and Reid (2017), since the 1960s Thailand has become a key destination for Cambodian migrant workers. While steady infrastructure improvements and economic development boomed in the 1980s, Thailand shifted to an export-driven economy and, created a huge demand for migrant workers.

In particular to Cambodian migrant workers, it found that Cambodian people migrated to Thailand due to several significant reasons. First, during the 1990s, most of Cambodian people moved to Thailand in order to escape from poverty and political conflict, which resulted in many young Cambodian workers were seeking to work in Thailand (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In this circumstance, most of them needed to cross the border to find a job opportunity in name of foreign migrant workers in Thailand hoping for their family's economic growth and better quality of life. Second, many Cambodians influx into Thailand because the policy of Thailand government under the leadership of General Chatchai Choonhawan, a Prime Minister of Thailand from 1988 to 1991, adopted a policy in which it aimed to change the war zone to trade zone. With this condition, many foreign workers from neighboring countries came to find works in Thailand. Likewise, some Cambodian refugees that were living in the camps along the border decided to move to Thailand in some reasons that they were not willing to go back to capital or the places where the Royal Government of Cambodia had arranged (Phasuk, 1996). Third, some of them wanted to experience of working abroad and also seeking more skills from their future jobs (ILO, 2020). Based on the statistics of Department of Employment of Thailand (July, 2022), Thailand had a total of 2,099,227 foreign migrant workers among which, Cambodian migrant workers accounted for 409,014 (19%) ranked second as compared to Myanmar, Laos and Viet Nam. Cambodian migrant workers were mostly found working in four areas namely Bangkok, Samut Prakan, Chonburi and Pathumthani.

While many Cambodian migrant workers came to Thailand through different channels such on their own, brothers and recruiting agencies, the living condition and quality of life of the Cambodian migrant works become central issues to be tackled as it was relatively low. Moreover, the workers were

frequently reported encountered a number of challenges such as legal status and poor working condition (ILO, 2020; Royal Embassy of Cambodia to the Kingdom of Thailand, 2021).

Research objectives

This study had two objectives as below:

1. To study the current situation of Cambodian migrant workers working and living in Thailand.
2. To propose learning model to improve the quality of life of the Cambodian migrant workers living and working in Thailand.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based the social capital theory proposed by Bourdieu (1997) and Putnam (2000) and the domains of quality of life proposed by WHO (1997). According to Bourdieu (1997), the membership, such as the kindship, the family relationship, and the background of one's history, could be the resources of a human being's social capital. The membership, as the "collectivity" functioned as social capital, which an individual could gain from the social relationship, stood as social resources. Correspondently, Putnam (2000) proposed that the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the networks of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of whom he is connected. Additionally, Putnam summarized that social capital is embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. Social capital refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In social capital, many factors would affect the agent, such as: Social/ Cultural Background, Networking Relationship (Culture, place, language) and attitude. However, to understand all things around, people have to understand the language which is the basic path and important way to bring them to be connected with others. Moreover, living in this era, information technology is considered to be also very important tool to get accessed to more information and stayed connected with one another.

LEARNING MODEL HOW STAKEHOLDERS COULD IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF CAMBODIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN THAILAND

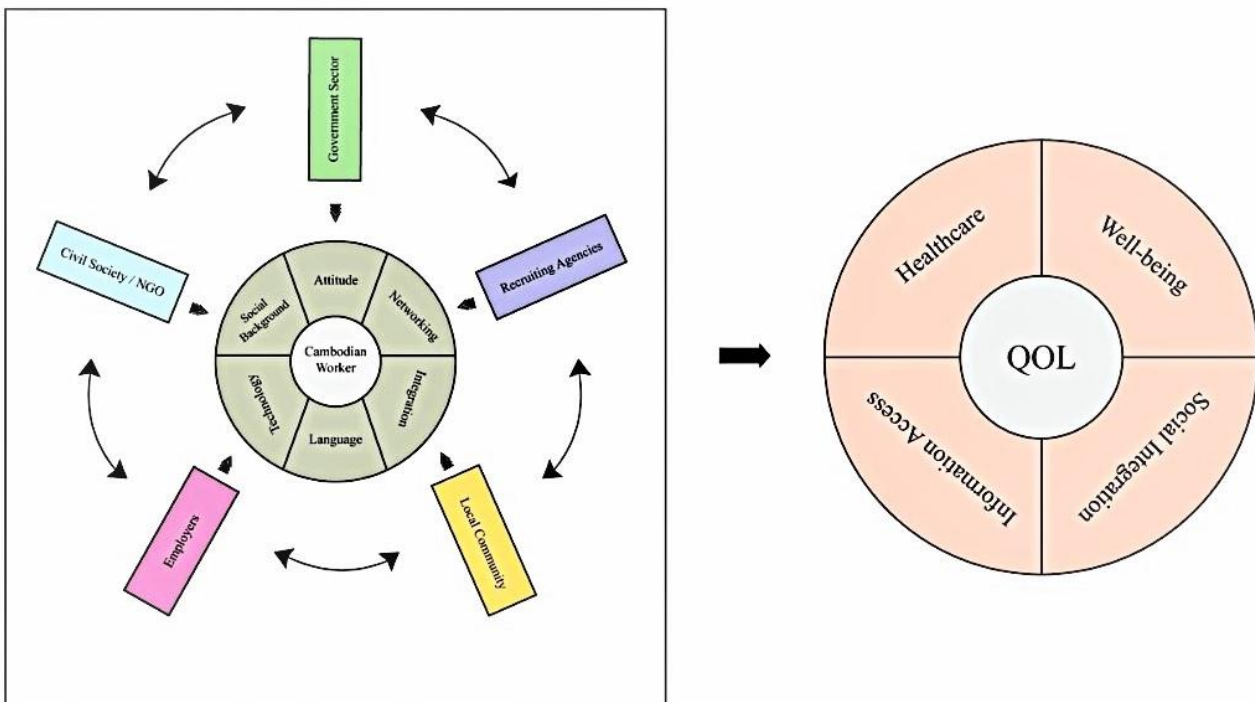


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Living Condition of Cambodian Migrant Workers

With regard to the living condition of the Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand, it was found that there were substantial gaps in fundamental labour rights protection. Based on the report of ILO (2020), the majority of informal Cambodia migrant workers who were not in the social insurance system encountered many difficulties when most of business operation in Thailand temporarily closed. The report further claimed that Cambodian migrant workers who remained staying in Thailand was in uncertain condition due to they received insufficient information about health care and Covid-19 protection as well as lack of food to make their living for daily basis. Even before COVID-19 outbreak, the migrant workers received very limited access to resources which allowed them to live with the hygiene and sanitation standards. According to the report released by the Royal Embassy of Cambodia to the Kingdom of Thailand (November, 2021), while Thailand were implementing restrictions measure to close a number of high-risk construction workers camps to combat the outbreak of Covid-19, it led to the return of a number of Cambodian workers to their home country. For the unregistered workers, their employers may push them out of Thailand. With this measure, the migrant workers may fear of

prosecution and chose to return to Cambodia on their own. During the outbreak, a large number of Cambodian workers decided to illegally return to Cambodia because of unemployment, the invalidity or expiration of their working documents and unavailability to receive good health service when they got infected of covid-19 due to the lack of hospital beds. As of January, 2022, the 37,332 of the Cambodian migrant workers were recorded with positive Covid-19 (Ministry of Health of Thailand, 2022).

In relation to the assistance to the Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand, both the government of the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Royal government of Thailand as well as various institutions including NGOs and private sectors have been working on improving living and working situation of those Cambodian migrant workers. For government sector, both Cambodian and Thai government have developed the process of facilitation labour migration by establishment MoUs to serve as a formal channel to bring foreign workers and provide migrants a fully functional legal channel to access job opportunities in Thailand (Agreed Minutes, 2015). For NGOs and Labour Networking groups, they have coordinated with government sector to explore ways to upgrade the living condition the migrant workers. Despite considerable assistance, the Cambodian migrant workers have been found facing hardship in many aspects of life such as health care access, well-being, information access and social integration (ILO, 2020).

Quality of Life

In the context of developing countries, quality of life has been increasingly discussed among scholars and relevant institutions. The most frequently referenced quality of life domains are interpersonal relations, social inclusion, personal development, physical well-being, self-determination, material well-being, emotional well-being, rights, environment (home/residence/ living situation), family, recreation and leisure, and safety/ security (WHO, 1997). Similarly, the quality of life was as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The factors that determine quality of life have been outlined by physical, mental, social and economic factors which are related to health, education, working and living condition, physical environment, family life and poverty (UNESCAP, 1995; Kincaid, 2002; Novianti et al., 2020). In sociology, quality of life is understood as a subjective understanding of well-being, taking into account individual needs and understanding. A health factor is often prioritized through the quality-of-life concept (Susniene & Juskauskas, 2009).

The quality of life is significant for every individual as it brings people with happiness and prosperity and consequently it brings development and benefits to the society as a whole. As the

member of the society, the family who have a good quality of life must have the explicit goal of improving in each step of life improvements such as education, occupation, income, health, morals, and ethics. Thus, it could be concluded that quality of life consists of four components, healthcare, well-being, access to information, and social integration.

Previous Research Studies

During the last decade, quality of life of migrant workers has become a popular topic being studied by many researchers in ASEAN. The studies mostly centered on the investigation the domain of the quality of life and the living and working condition of the workers.

In general context, Novianti et al. (2020) found that there was a correlation among the quality of life, happiness and life satisfaction of the people. The psychological, environmental and physical domains of quality of life were found to be significant predictors of happiness and satisfaction of life while social domain was not found to be a significant predictor. The study suggested that improving the psychological and physical function of people and their environmental conditions would lead them to a happier and more satisfying life.

In relation to the living and working condition of migrant workers, Chaisuparakul (2015), who studied on communication channel of Cambodian migrant workers, found that in addition to their kindship networks, migrant workers also formed new social networks through modern communication platform using popular social media such as Facebook and Line. This is because they see it as an efficient way to keep in touch and reach out. Building network among migrant group is very important for those Cambodian workers to create more choice in working and living in Thailand. Accordingly, Phra Kimpicheth Chhon (2014) reported that migrant workers were generally able to meet with new friends at places they physically visited, for instance, temples and events. They also could form a new social network with local citizens because people who were socially engaged in the temple would likely have their own group that would call each other when they need assistance.

In addition, Laohasiriwon et al. (2020) conducted a study with 1,200 Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand's Sa Kaeo and Surin provinces. The study found that nearly a third of Cambodian migrant workers surveyed in Thailand reported high levels of stress, depression and a low quality of life. The result of this study was also confirmed by Kongsrima et al. (2021) who studied on the influences of the quality of life and social capital on depression among 1477 Laotian migrant workers in northeast Thailand. The study revealed that migrant workers usually encounter socio-economic and living hardships resulting in complex physical, social, and mental health problems. Noticeably, the study

further found that the depressive symptom was significantly associated with having low to moderate levels of quality of life, low to moderate levels of social capital. Other significant co-variables were high stress levels, chronic disease, work permit absence, menstruation lack, physical exercise absence, and living in a room for more than four people. Nearly one-tenth of Laotian migrant workers had depressive symptoms. Quality of life, social capital, stress, socio-economic, working and living conditions, health status, and health behaviors were associated with depression among those migrant workers working in the Northeast of Thailand.

Methods

This research study aims to explore the current situation of Cambodian migrant workers working and living in Thailand and to propose a Learning Model to improve the quality of their lives. It was designed based on mixed method approach in which it combined a review of relevant published studies, a quantitative information obtained from a survey with Cambodian migrant worker and a qualitative information obtained from the in-depth interview with stakeholders.

The sample for the survey were 100 Cambodian migrant workers whose ages ranged from 18 to 60 years old and were living in four geographical areas namely (1) Bangkok (2) Pathum Thani (3) Chon Buri and (4) Samut Prakan for more than two years. These four areas were outnumbered by Cambodia migrant workers. Likewise, the informants for in-depth interview were nine stakeholders and were purposively selected based on their knowledge and experience on the matter and voluntary basis. Among the nine informants, they consisted of two government officials, one representative of civil society, one local community authority, one representative of worker recruiting companies and four were Cambodian migrant workers, Cambodian official in charge of labour issues in Thailand, 1 Civil Society group, 1 Local Community and 1 Employment agency.

The survey was carried out using validated questionnaires while the in-depth interview was carried out using interview guided questions. To ensure the accuracy of the response, the researcher help read the questionnaire in Khmer as most of the respondents were not able to read the language. Similarly, to insightfully obtain the basic information prior migrating to Thailand and the current living situation relating to social and cultural capital and to seek measures for the improvement of the Quality of Life of the Cambodian migrant workers, Khmer language was used to interview with Cambodian informants while Thai language is used with Thai informants. All the respondents and informants were informed that the given information was kept credential and used for this study only.

Results

Current Conditions of Cambodian Migrant Workers

The result of this study indicated that the majority of the Cambodian migrant workers were legally living in Thailand. Only a small number of them were in the process requesting legalization. In addition, it was found that the living condition of the Cambodian migrant workers varied from one another mainly depending on legal status and the types of employment. The legal workers were found to have better living condition as compared to those who were illegal. Considering the types of employment, legal workers being employed in the factories and construction sites, where they worked as large groups, were likely be highly satisfied with their working conditions as they were provided with opportunities to participate in extra activities such as such as Sangkran festival, New Year party, Company gathering so forth, organized by the employers. Also, workers were reported to have equal treatment from the employers regardless their working positions and nationalities. Nevertheless, it was found that the Cambodia migrant worker encountered several challenges, for instance, discrimination among workers from different nationalities, financial burden on document fee and daily expense during the earlier period of their arrival, inaccessibility of health service as they had no health insurance, and too long process of legalization.

Learning Model to improve quality of life

Quality of life of the Cambodian migrant workers working and living in Thailand was found to be related to many stakeholders, including both Cambodian and Thai governments, employers, recruiting companies, civil society, local community and the migrants themselves. These stakeholders directly contribute to the improvement of their Quality of Life during stay in Thailand. Furthermore, it was found that important factors that could determine their living conditions were social background, language, attitude, technology, networking and the social integration. With these factors, the Cambodian workers who faced problems could easily to seek assistance for the others.

The result of this study suggested that all stakeholders, such as recruiting companies, border authorities concern, government sectors, local community, employers, and relevant NGOs working with migrant workers in Thailand, were supposed to collaboratively work together and actively play their essential roles in addressing these issues. The roles of aforementioned stakeholders are as follows:

The origin government should facilitate the documentation process as requested by the workers to work legally in Thailand, while ensuring the legal document are affordable for workers. Besides, the government should reduce irregular migration by improving access to regular migration channels and

raising awareness of migrant workers on the risks of undocumented migration which later could possibly resulted in being cheated. In addition, the government should improve public relations service in terms of providing information relating to migrant worker situation in Thailand and also promoting the use of technology to better control the labor migration information. At the same time, the government should provide workers with easy access to job opportunities, recruitment, and skills training, and right protection. Moreover, the employment and social welfare department in Thailand should firmly work on the insurance system for all employers and migrant workers. The governments of Cambodia and Thailand should ensure that migrant workers are provided with clear and transparent contacts or proper documentation with terms and conditions of employment in a language they understand based on national legislation and policies.

For the employers, they should treat the workers in line with humanity principle and effectively implement all protection law while employing foreign migrant workers. The employers should avoid employing illegal workers for the sake of their own benefits. Instead they should allow all recruiting agencies to continuously and regularly follow up the situation of those workers. To provide better health care, it is important that employers provide the migrant with health insurance and appropriate and safe working environment. Also, employers should provide the workers with upskilling and strengthen their working capability.

Recruiting agencies are considered as another key stakeholder to help maximize the benefit of workers. For example, the recruiting agencies could help to accelerate the documentation process, provide the workers with sufficient information on employment condition in Thailand, work with the employers to ensure good working and living environment for workers and regularly follow up the situation of the workers.

Civil Society/NGOs who are working with foreign workers to improve the quality of their lives, should cooperate with the government to insightfully investigate the root of the problems the workers encountered and to find ways to upgrade living conditions for workers as well as to promote the implementation of labor protection law. In addition to working with the government, the NGOs should work closely with the local community to upgrade the living conditions of workers.

Local Community should provide the workers with opportunities to participate in the events and activities organized in the community. With this opportunities, the workers would feel as they are part of the communities and eventually they could live in the community harmoniously. Besides giving cooperation with relevant agencies, the local community should support and provide all necessary assistance to workers to settle down in a new environment.

Despite the important roles of governments, employers, civil society and local community, the migrant workers themselves are seen as a crucial agent to improve the quality of their lives. Their decision, actions, behavior, and ways of life directly contribute to the quality of their lives. Since the time they make a decision to come to work in Thailand they should be ready in terms of physical and mental health. Plus, they should be ready to accept to comply with new regulation, tradition, culture and working condition. In this regard, they should be well-prepared for the social integration and the adaptation of mindset before legally entering Thailand.

Discussion

This research study found that the living and working conditions of those Cambodian migrant workers depends on type of works and place of work. This may due to the differences of working nature and the implementation of regulation and law of the working places. Large companies doing business in service and construction sectors promotes welfare and working condition of the workers while small business is found to be providing 3Ds jobs (Dirty, Dangerous, and Difficult). Likewise, large companies effectively implement the labour law which resulted in better working condition of the workers.

In addition, it was found that the Cambodia migrant worker encountered problems such as discrimination, financial burden on document fee and daily expense during the earlier period of their arrival, inaccessibility of health service as they had no health insurance, and too long process of legalization. This result partly supports the previous studies by Laohasiriwon et al. (2020) and Kongsrima et al. (2021) in which low quality of life was obviously found. These problem need to be tackled soonest as they are the foundation of human basic need (Danesh, 2011).

Moreover, it was found that the living condition of the Cambodian migrant workers depends on legal status and the types of employment. This result also supports because from depth interviews shows that if they entered Thailand legally, they seemed to have a job that employers respected the labour regulations. Specially, the living conditions of those who worked in big companies seemed they did not face any significant issues as those who worked in small companies, particularly those who worked in the construction, services and factory. However, the quality of life of each migrant worker either working in big or small companies depends on many factors of concerned authorities such as government sectors, employers, and recruiting companies, including themselves.

In conclusion, all stakeholders including those Cambodian migrant workers are all important for contribution to the living and working condition of those Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand. After those employers must take responsible in using those workers in order to access for health care and

efficient information, good well-being as well as could well integrated with local people. Those workers also should know having good life either in Cambodia or Thailand, they are also very important that can make their condition of life better. If they are lazy not willing to learn new things and keep blaming this and that, that's not the solution. They have to work and find ways how to make life better, especially during they are working in Thailand, they should take opportunity to learn new skills for upgrading their future. So, when all responsible their duties and implement of what they have agreed, those workers would receive what they should have, particularly, health care access and well-being.

Research Recommendations for Future Research Studies

The results from this study generated some recommendations for further studies. It is recommended that future research studies should center on the quality of life of illegal workers or those without legal status and the workers who worked in small enterprises and family business. Since the results of this study are relevant to its own context, it is remarkable to conduct further research studies in other context which focus on the living condition of dependent children who accompanied their parents to Thailand.

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