

WORKING ABROAD: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN
MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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List of Acronyms

UAE	United Arab Emirates
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
RAK	Ras Al Khaimah (one of the Emirates)
UN	United Nations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Organization

Key words

Kafala Sponsorship, Social Isolation, Migration, Migrants, Migrant Workers, Labour Supply Agencies, UAE, Exploitation, Women

Executive summary

This research project explores and examines the treatment of women migrant workers in the UAE. Central issues examined were: 1) Sexual harassment 2) Mobility limitation 3) Days off work 4) Wage discrimination & salary delays 5) Housing and medical conditions, and 6) Reasons for migration. Research findings were informed by one-on-one interviews with relevant stakeholders, and personal research. The project's value was in taking an analytical approach to the topic of women working in the UAE, in order to provide practical program recommendations that the government and other stakeholders could implement.

Key recommendations are:

1. Providing psychosocial support services to the workers.
2. Reviewing the Kafala Sponsorship System.
3. Providing workers with contact persons who are always available when workers need any kind of help/support.
4. Educating migrant workers about their rights.
5. Establishing long-term collaborative partnerships that bring together key players and offer a multi-disciplinary approach to ending labour exploitation
6. Raising awareness about migrant workers' exploitation in the region.

Introduction

Although both men and women migrate to the UAE searching for employment opportunities, women are at a greater risk of experiencing exploitation resulting from gender prejudices. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), women remain one of the least protected groups of migrant workers, even in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) National Labour legislations (United Nations, 2013). Brigitte, Suter (2005) reports that the UAE government has tried to address the challenges faced by migrant workers. However, all government reforms are still falling short of their aims. This report explains the findings from a case study on women migrant workers in the UAE. Research findings are linked to social isolation and social connectedness, discussing the impacts of this and providing policy and program recommendations in response to the current issues around the treatment of women migrant workers.

Research Questions

- How does the history of the UAE contribute to the current treatment of migrant workers in the region?
- What causes women to migrate to the UAE for work even after hearing the horror stories of labor exploitation in the region?
- How does the treatment of women migrant workers influence their social wellbeing? *How does it trigger social isolation?*
- What can be done to improve the working conditions of migrant workers in the UAE?

Stakeholders

1. Manpower Supply Agencies

These agencies include: Nobalaa, Al baraka manpower supply, Al Mazaya Labour supply, Emirates manpower supply, Overseas labour supply, and DulSCO. All these manpower supply agencies recruit migrant workers from different parts of the world, ranging from: chefs, domestic workers, nurses, porters, drivers and receptionists among others. They claim to offer their clients support and guidance before migrating to the UAE, and during the transition process. These agencies' participation was in form of allowing the researcher to interact with their clients waiting for work placement.

2. Research Participants

In total, there were 82 participants in this research. All participants were women, and they included workers from the: aviation sector, domestic sector, food and hospitality sector, health sector, and business sector. All participants were between ages 19 and 42 years old, and were from various countries: India, Philippines, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Rwanda, Mali, Sudan, and Egypt.

Please Note: The government is an important stakeholder, however, it was not possible to get in touch with any government officials.

Location, Aim, and Scope

This research was carried out in the United Arab Emirates, specifically in: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Fujairah, Ajman, Ummul Quwain, Sharjah, and Ras Al Khaimah, with the

aim of examining women migrant workers experiences across the different geographical locations. This research was also aimed to discover why the UAE still has a reputation of migrant labour exploitation, and more specifically why women still move to the UAE despite the horror stories of labour exploitation in the media. Women were the central focus of the study. This was primarily due to the lack of research being conducted in the region that specifically focusses on women's issues, especially as they are one of the most vulnerable groups of migrant workers because of the limited protection they have under the National laws. Findings of the study were then used to establish suggested steps of reform for the UAE migrant labour system to ensure migrant workers are treated with dignity.

Research Methodology

The following research analysis borrows perspectives from human rights theories, and social exclusion theories of migrant workers. The research was both explorative and descriptive in nature, and participation was voluntary. All participants were issued consent forms, which they signed prior to partaking in the research. It was ensured by the researcher that every participant understood each element of the consent form.

The researcher began by reviewing the already existing literature about the migrant workers' population in the UAE. The literature included theoretical work by scholars, advocacy materials on migrants' rights by independent scholars and research organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), and labour policies/laws related to labour and migration systems. The literature review was helpful in informing and guiding

the researcher's interview questions, and also gave the researcher a clear perspective on the infamous Kafala Sponsorship System.

Qualitative interviews were a big part of the research process. The researcher travelled to all the different Emirates to conduct in depth interviews with research participants. The in depth interviews were people oriented and sensitive, giving interviewees the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. While interviews were the primary source of information gathering, the researcher also used reflection, and observation of non-verbal cues to ascertain the extent to which the information shared by participants was authentic. Audio recording was used to enable that the researcher was able to listen to the participants attentively. Later, all audio taped information was transcribed and deleted immediately. In situations where clarity was needed, the researcher followed up with the participant via phone-call to clarify the information before it was transcribed.

Ethical considerations

To ensure that the data was ethically collected, the researcher observed the principle of informed consent and voluntary participation from all participants. The researcher assured participants that they would remain anonymous and their details confidential. It was clearly stated, both in the consent form and at the beginning of each interview session, that no details - names, date of birth, place of work etc. - would be shared.

Participants were required to read, understand, and sign consent forms prior to participating. The researcher thoroughly explained the consent forms, and anyone who

had questions related to the consent form was invited to ask. Participants were required to only share what they were comfortable with, and that too was clearly clarified at the beginning of the research, along with the aim and purpose of the research. The benefits of participating and how the results of the study would be used were also communicated. Participants who wished to withdraw from the research were allowed to do so after informing the researcher.

Towards the end of this case study, a survey in the form of a questionnaire was conducted to receive feedback from participants. Examples of questions in the survey included:

- 1) What have you learned about yourself from your qualitative interview?
- 2) What is one thing you think can change the way migrant workers are treated in the UAE?
- 3) Would you advise a friend to participate in such a study? Why? /Why not?
- 4) What would you have liked to be done differently in the process?

Data Collection/Ethical Challenges

The research dealt with the sensitive topic of labour migration, and was conducted in a country where labour laws are not unfavourable for migrant workers. Throughout the research process, it seemed like NGOs working on labour migration issues were afraid to work publicly because of the sensitivity of their work and their location. For that particular reason, it was challenging to find NGOs and groups that were working on issues/rights regarding women migrant workers. It was also impossible to meet with

concerned civil servants in the country. The researcher hence ended up relying heavily on already existing literature for guidance in the research process.

It was also challenging to create time that worked for every participant. This was primarily because some of the participants needing to request permission from their bosses without actually telling them what they were going to do; while for others, they had to wait for when they were off work or late into the evening when they had completed their work tasks. Even though it was stressful at times, the researcher made the outreach schedule as flexible as possible in order to accommodate participants needs.

The influence of labour supply agencies in the participants' choice of shared information was another challenge. Initially, the researcher interviewed women who were waiting to be placed by labour supply agencies. From the researcher's observation, the participants were afraid to share some details of their experiences because after the interviews, they were asked what they had told the researcher. Also, a member of the labour supply agency would at times walk into the interview session without permission. Other informants were afraid to meet with the researcher for face-to-face interviews due to fear of victimization and deportation. Such fear resulted in the researcher's inability to obtain detailed information, which would otherwise help to inform the study.

In some cases, voice recording during the interview sessions was rejected. Voice recording is important in times when the researcher has to listen attentively without being interrupted. It is also helpful in the analysis of information shared during the interviews. However, a number of participants refused to be recorded due to fear. One participant stated that "I would not have minded to be recorded, but I will not have peace after the

interview, I live in so much fear and these phones can be hacked and someone will know what I said...I am not ready to lose my job...”¹ The rejection of audio recording by some participants meant that the researcher had to spend more time than planned for some interviews.

Language barrier was another challenge. Some respondents did not speak English well, while others only spoke and understood English. The researcher therefore had to find ways to translate important information shared, such as the feedback surveys, and questions asked during groups discussions. In situations where the researcher was unable to provide clear translation, help was requested from a professional translator at a small fee. This resulted in feedback being given late to participants because an outside source had to be consulted.

Issue, Evidence and Key Findings

The UAE is one of the world's most popular destinations for migrants seeking employment opportunities. According to the Migration Policy Institute, approximately 74.4% of the total UAE population are immigrants (Almannaee 2014 & United Nations, 2013). Countries most represented are: Pakistan, Philippines, India, and Bangladesh (Vlieger, 2011). The first group of UAE migrants came from other Arab countries; however, in the early 1980's, many more migrants from Asia and some countries in Africa immigrated to the region (Almannaee, 2014). It is commonly said that the first group of migrants came to build the country, while those that migrate presently maintain it. Reema Almannaee (2014) & Antoinette Vlieger (2011) contend that, with the help of

¹ Name concealed, personal interview, January 29th, 2018

migrant labour, the region shifted from poverty and underdevelopment to massive modernity.

The mobility of migrant labour increased when the UAE government introduced the Kafala sponsorship program in 1971, which granted citizens and national companies to hire migrant workers (Brigitte, 2005 & Migrant-Rights.Org, 2015). A *Kafala* is a UAE national who assumes legal and economic responsibility for the migrant worker during the contract period. The Kafala sponsorship program determines the terms of migrant workers' residence/work permit, and the conditions for contractual and temporary employment (Migrant-Rights.Org, 2015). The sponsorship program was also a way to regulate labour migration by the UAE government; however, this sponsorship system has faced international criticism for facilitating exploitation of labour exploitation (Migrant-Rights.Org, 2015). According to Almannae (2014), labour exploitation takes many forms, including poor living conditions, limited mobility, restricted freedom to bargain for good wages, delayed wages, sexual abuse, and all other forms of manipulation which affect the social wellbeing of migrant workers in the UAE. This research particularly focused on seven issues namely: sexual harassment, mobility limitation/ lack of days' off work, wage discrimination & salary delays, housing and medical conditions, as well as reasons for workers' migration.

1. Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a situation that involves making unwanted sexual advances; it can be in form of rape, obscene remarks, inappropriate touching, or requests for sexual favours (Jennifer, 2007). Researcher analysis indicated that women who worked in the

household are exposed to sexual harassment the most due to limiting access to community support systems. Unfortunately, the labour law in the UAE does not cover the domestic sector— all issues that arise in the domestic sector are handled by the labour supply agencies through which the workers received employment (Brigitte, 2005). Of the 20 interviewees from the household sector, 16 reported to have been sexually harassed by their bosses but had never told anyone about it even though they were still living in fear that it would happen again. A respondent who works in a home in Dubai reported that her boss had inappropriately touched her on several occasions but she was scared to say anything to him because he was very tough; “he had previously told me that I am his property so he could do whatever he wants...I think he said that our of anger”² she added.

Another participant mentioned that her boss allowed her to go back to her home country to carry out an abortion twice (both were his); she was worried that her health was at risk, yet she could not disclose the secret to anyone. In Sharjah, one girl reported that her sister, who worked for her boss’s relative had been deported the previous year in 2016 because she was found pregnant and could not disclose who had assaulted her. Another lady stated that her employer made several advances to her, and when she rejected, he started to harass her and would occasionally touch her inappropriately. Some participants were not comfortable to share the actual form of harassment that they had experienced

According to Froilan Malit Jr. & Ali Al Youha (2013), many countries which provide domestic labour for the UAE, receive several reports of abuse from domestic

² Name concealed, personal interview, February 28th, 2018

workers. For instance, every month, The Philippine Consulate in Dubai receives complaints from domestic workers from the Philippines. The complaints involve cases of beatings, rape, and other forms of sexual harassment (Courtney, 2014). Moreover, there has been instances when The Philippines government has been advised to stop sending domestic workers to the UAE; however, The Philippine government is afraid to do so, reasoning that it will result in the UAE's refusal to take Filipino employees in other sectors (Courtney, 2014 & Turner, 2007). When respondents who work in the households were asked why they do not rather go back to their home countries when they experience such troubles, they all shared that it was not possible because employers would not let them go, and that if they escaped, they would be prosecuted, imprisoned or even deported.

2. Mobility Limitation/ Denial of Days Off Work

All participants reported that their passports had been taken away as soon as they arrived in the UAE. It is true that migrant workers only get their passports when they are going to renew their residences/work permits, or when they have been granted permission to go home for annual leave. Even though the law does not permit employers to take employees' passports, it is a common practice throughout the UAE to do so.

According to International Trade Union Conference (2011), taking away migrant workers' passports is a way to control them; the common reason is that it prevents migrant workers from escaping back to their home countries without permission, and that it prevents migrant workers from finding employment elsewhere. Some employers do not allow migrant workers to go for annual leaves with confidence as they hold onto their

passports. Seven participants reported that they had never been allowed to go back and visit their families for over two years—the exact number of years spent without returning home differed from each participant. Unfortunately, employers and labour agencies continuously breach the law by withholding migrant workers' passports, and do not receive any penalty for doing so (Al Hashimi, 2002).

Majority of the participants also reported that they had encountered problems in getting their weekly days off, and their annual vacations/leaves. One informant shared that her boss used to call her on her supposed-to-be weekly day off and wanted her to arrange some things for him. “Sometimes it was even his personal stuff but I just did not pay so much attention.”³ she explained. However, her efforts were not remunerated; and when she refused to do the tasks or refused to take his calls, he would penalize her the rest of the week by overloading her with work, letting her work overtime, and sometimes not granting her, her one day off. Some informants reported that even when they are granted days off, they never enjoy themselves because they lack people to spend their free time with. One young lady from India, and works as a waitress in Ajman added that, she normally sleeps on her day off because she does not have friends to visit, and neither does she have money to spend; “I never sleep enough, so I just use my day off to at least get extra sleep, plus, I don't have so much money to spend...I send my money home to take care of my parents and siblings.”⁴

3. Housing and Medical Conditions

³ Name concealed, personal interview, March 4th, 2018

⁴ Name concealed, personal interview, March 28th, 2018

By law, employers are supposed to provide housing for their employees, and to provide for their medical needs (Mohammad, 2010). However, this is not always the case, and the quality of housing offered to migrant workers is deplorable. From the interviews, it was reported that up to 8 people can be put in one room, sharing one bathroom and kitchen. The researcher also confirmed the poor quality housing conditions of migrant workers through home visits conducted during research outreach. In addition, some migrant workers are housed in state sanctioned camps, with very poor ventilated sanitation facilities. One may actually think that domestic workers are lucky to have accommodation in their employer's residences, however, that makes them more susceptible to sexual harassment. Most domestic workers shared that living with their employers is stressful; one young lady related that she is never allowed to watch any TV. According to her, living in congested labour camps would have been a better option because she would then have had some liberty.

Furthermore, employers and labour supply agencies breach the law by not providing medical treatment to the migrant workers. Ten people reported that they had been sick previously and used their wages to cover their medical expenses. One informant, who was feeling unwell at the time of the interview, shared that "it is very expensive to get treatment here...and when you are an immigrant, doctors do not care as much...I hate how hospitals work here."⁵ Another interviewee who lives in Dubai also shared that she was then (during the time the interview was conducted) still paying bills for her treatment of Pneumonia without her employers help; she also shared that her

⁵ Name concealed, Personal interview, March 17th, 2018

employers refused to cancel her contract so that she could go back to her country, even when she requested; “...at this point I would be deported because I am suffering here...I have more problems here than I did in India, I wish they would just let me go and die in my country”⁶ she added in tears. Not surprisingly, according to (Sonmez, et al, 2011), there has not been any penalty for employers and labour supply agencies that breach such labour laws in the region, a factor that leaves migrant workers more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

4. Wage Discrimination and Delayed Salaries

Wage discrimination is when people are paid differently even when they are carrying out the same tasks (Tong, 2010). In the UAE, wage discrimination is typical; nationals are given different salaries in comparison to those given to migrants. Moreover, there are situations which make it look like the UAE government supports wage discrimination; for instance, it is obligatory that in every profession, nationals get the highest salary regardless of their level of education (Tong, 2010). In 2015, all national public employees were given a salary increment of 25 per cent, while migrant workers were to receive an increment of just 15 per cent (Almannaee, 2014). One Indian informant who works for the Emirates Airlines Company reported that the wage discrimination in the company occurs between nationals and foreigners, with all foreigners earning the same wage, and all nationals earning a higher wage for the same job. A participant, originally from India, who works as a nurse, also shared that she earns 4,000 dirhams a month while her counterpart from Britain earns 11,000 dirhams. All

⁶ Name concealed, Personal interview, March 28th, 2018

other interviewees acknowledged that their system of payment was based on ethnic stratification, where salary corresponds directly to nationality, gender and religion.

Furthermore, there have been numerous cases where employers do not pay workers regularly. The 2009 – 2010 annual report on fighting human trafficking and exploitation in the UAE stated that it was compulsory for all employers to pay workers through banks to ensure that worker' salaries were delivered in a timely manner. (UAE Ministry of Labour, 2007). However, not all employers comply, and migrant workers still experience delayed salaries. Those who work in the household are at a greater disadvantage because in most cases, they are not allowed to have bank accounts. Many women reported to have not been paid for at least more than one month in a period of 2 years, and they never received any explanation. “It is normal for salaries to be delayed, especially for us who do not work in government institutions...sadly, we have nowhere to report or complain because no one seems to care”⁷, one woman stated. In many instances, people work extra hours with even less, delayed or no salary at all. 7 out of 10 women that participated in Ras Al Khaimah reported to have been threatened by their employer when they asked why their salaries had been delayed; “my boss actually penalized me for doing that by not paying me at all that month”⁸, one participant recounted.

5. Reasons for Migration

Truthfully, the decision to become a migrant worker is not an easy choice; it requires a lot of money, and leaving family behind for long periods of time. To many migrants, especially those from developing countries, the UAE is perceived as a land of

⁷ Name concealed, Personal interview, April 9th, 2018

⁸ Name concealed, Personal interview, April 9th, 2018

opportunities. Large populations move to the region in order to be able to take care of their families back home (Shah & Philippe, 2012). Unfortunately, in most developing countries, women suffer higher unemployment rates than men (De Regt, 2010). They also bear the burden of taking care of their children—especially single mothers; hence, coupled with poverty and unemployment, women are enticed to migrate in search for employment opportunities for their families' survival.

A participant, aged 38 who works as a maid in Dubai, shared that she had left her three children with their grandmother because that was the only way she could be able to ensure that they got something to eat. Antoinette Vlieger (2011) argues that poverty and unemployment are generally more important causes of irregular migration than the search for better opportunities such as housing and education. This partly explains why even when there is a mismatch between the promised job opportunity and the job offered by the receiving country, migrant workers are likely to stay and work regardless of the working conditions.

Moreover, survival-driven migrants are the most vulnerable; most of them belong to the poorest segment of the population in their countries. They often take any risk to travel abroad for work because they do not have hope that life will get better in their home countries. Some of them borrow huge sums of money to facilitate their movement to the UAE through recruitment agencies hoping that they will be able to pay back the loan when they get a job. Unfortunately, it is never as easy as it seems before they migrate to the UAE; some of them become heavily indebted and spend a lot of time paying back the borrowed money. Hence, due to the pressure to pay off the debts, some

migrant workers remain with no choice but to work under any conditions even for lower wages than they had anticipated.

Social Isolation

The concept of social isolation was helpful in facilitating a broader understanding of the multiple stories shared by research participants. Social isolation is a deprivation of social connectedness; it involves feelings of loneliness and low levels of interaction with others (Zavaleta, Samuel, & Mills, 2014). The term social isolation is sometimes used interchangeably with social exclusion. Social exclusion has different attributes attached to it, such as discrimination, marginalization, rejection, and lack of care (Jennifer, 2001). In a broader context, social isolation relates to poverty, income inequality, deprivation or lack of employment. This research examined migrant workers' experiences in the UAE, most of which were characterized by attributes of social isolation. For instance, mobility limitation, especially for women working in the household, inability to speak with loved ones' back home when there is need, the lack of friends, wage discrimination, gender prejudices, and religious prejudices among many other factors.

Gulf countries, including the UAE, are famously known to be spaces that attract workers from across the globe (Timothy & Sasikumar, 2012). The influx of migrant workers in the UAE has led to a demographic profile development in which a few nationals sit at the top of the social hierarchy and below them a majority consisting of low wage migrant workers. The labour market of the UAE is mainly based on ethnicity, religion, and nationality. The nationals mainly take up the affluent and lucrative, white

collared jobs, while migrants are left to fight for the low paying, blue collared jobs (Brigitte, 2005). Migrants from Western countries such as Canada, USA, and the UK, are in a far much better hierarchical position compared to migrant workers from developing countries because they are given relatively higher wages (Tong, 2010). UAE nationals usually do not indulge in any service sector and manual jobs, as these are perceived as migrant workers' jobs. The disparity in the social lives of migrant workers means that some people's social standards are higher in comparison to others' lives, which also triggers social isolation.

According to the United Nation's SDGs, in order to achieve inclusion, all efforts should be geared towards ensuring that "no one is left behind." (United Nations, 2015). Kim Samuel (2016) further explains that the possibility of achieving social inclusion by 2030 necessitates that peoples' wellbeing is given the utmost attention globally. This research was largely inspired by the desire to create positive change in peoples' lives by ensuring that they too feel valued and empowered. Samuel (2014) further stresses that strengthening and empowering people is a strategy for fostering interactions, and therefore reduces social isolation. In this research, participants were brought together during lunches/dinners, and online discussions to share ideas and experiences with the aim to foster meaningful relationships and to promote inclusion.

Policy and Program Recommendations

1. Providing psychosocial support services to the workers

Psychosocial support, such as mental health counselling, spiritual support, and group support, are crucial in helping individuals experiencing any psychological challenges (Tol, et al (2011). Psychosocial support can be provided by mental health professionals, such as, psychologists, social workers, counsellors, and specialized nurses. From the study, the majority of women reported that they lacked someone to speak to about their experiences in the UAE. According to them, reporting to the labour supply agencies through which they got employed does not help; rather, reporting is taken to mean that the individual is tired of working and therefore wants to be replaced. Hence, reporting could lead to loss of a job and risk of deportation. Psychosocial support will help migrant workers to cope, and will give them the opportunity to speak about their experiences, in turn helping to prevent any mental health disorders that could result from mistreatment.

2. Reviewing the Kafala sponsorship system

There is urgent need to review the Kafala sponsorship system, which has been criticised by several human rights organizations for fuelling labour exploitation. According to the Kafala sponsorship system, migrant workers are not allowed to quit their jobs or go back to their home countries without permission from their employer; doing so is considered as a criminal offense and can lead to heavy penalties, such as imprisonment and deportation (Migrant-Rights.Org, 2015). This implies that even when workers decide to quit their jobs due to exploitation or abuse, they will less likely receive appropriate support from the government—being penalized instead. Reviewing

such seemingly ruthless policies will help to empower migrant workers, and also ensure that they are treated with justice and dignity in the UAE.

3. Providing workers with contact persons

Contact persons can consist of government officials or well-trained professionals that are not affiliated to labour supply companies. These people should always be available in case migrant workers need help, and they should continuously check on workers to ensure that they are being treated fairly; and in case of any alarming concerns, they should be in position to discuss these with the employers immediately. Moreover, migrant workers can also directly report to their respective contact persons when they experience any threats or exploitation from their employers. The provision of contact persons can also be helpful in times when there is need of psychosocial assistance by referring workers to concerned professionals (for example social workers), that can provide psychosocial support.

4. Educating migrant workers about their rights

This education can consist of reviewing basic human rights, such as the right to shelter & food, as well as their rights as specified in the UAE labour laws, including their right to medication & the right to have an annual leave with an air ticket provided by the employer. Teaching migrant workers their rights can be done both before migrants leave their countries and after they have arrived in the UAE. Teaching can be done in the form of seminars or orientations to prepare workers for their ‘new life’ abroad. Additionally, migrant workers’ rights should be written into labour contracts; this will be helpful in ensuring migrant workers’ safety. When they know their rights, migrant workers are able

to know when they are being exploited, and when to take action. This will ensure that their employers treat them fairly with knowledge that the people they are dealing with clearly know their rights and understand what exploitation is.

5. Establishing long-term collaborative partnerships

Collaborative partnerships that bring together key players that offer a multi-disciplinary approach to ending labour exploitation are fundamental. For instance, partnerships between the governments (the UAE government & labour providing countries' governments), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and labour supply companies would be a good start. The governments' involvement is crucial mainly because the treatment of workers is largely influenced by government policies. NGOs are also essential in advocating for the rights of migrant workers, and lobbying governments to transform unfavourable labour laws. The participation of labour supply companies is paramount because it is only through them that people migrate to the UAE for work; their participation can also be a good step in ensuring that they reassess their recruitment policies. Long-term collaborative partnerships will be helpful in promoting reform of national laws in both labour giving and receiving countries. The partnerships will also improve access to community services for migrant workers and promote supportive repatriation services for abused workers.

6. Raising awareness about migrant workers' exploitation in the region

The world should continuously be informed about the unfavourable labour system in the UAE, and the rampant exploitation in the region. The inhumane labour policies and brutal acts by recruitment agencies should be exposed through published research and the

media. Furthermore, research conducted on any issue related to labour experiences in the UAE should continue to be supported. Continuous public exposure on the ruthless labour policies in the region will hopefully be a wakeup call for the government to step in and make positive changes in the system to save the country's reputation.

Significance of this Case Study

This study solely addresses women migrant workers' experiences in the UAE. Women migrant workers' experiences are compelling to examine, because traditionally, women have always been more vulnerable compared to men. Also, with respect that men who migrate to the UAE for work are also affected by the Kafala sponsorship system, women are more susceptible to experiencing violence and abuse triggered by gender prejudices and cultural influences. Moreover, in the context of the UAE, there is still a gap in knowledge about why women migrant workers are still exploited despite the fact that relevant labour and human rights laws exist.

This study is also significant to all stakeholders involved with the migrant labour industry—migrant workers themselves, man supply agencies, employers, governments, NGOs, and trade unions, among others. Migrant workers are in various countries throughout the world, both in developed and underdeveloped countries. There is no doubt that migrant workers get employment opportunities abroad, which they would otherwise not get in their home countries (Julia & John, 2011). However, their conditions and experiences are a matter of concern to all stakeholders. This study further investigates the

evidence of exploitation of women migrant workers; thus findings in the UAE can potentially inform and influence labour policies in other countries, and consequently help in bettering the lives on migrant workers globally.

More generally, the research can be helpful in:

1. Deeply understanding the vulnerability of migrant workers and why action to protect them is required
2. Identifying or understanding issues/problems that women migrant workers face in the UAE and how those problems are related to social isolation
3. Exposing areas that need to be re-evaluated in the UAE's labour policies
4. Developing programs to prevent migrant workers' exclusion
5. Analysing the role of the UAE government, and labour-giving countries in ensuring justice for all migrant workers.
6. Above all, helping in the movement to achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Conclusion

Personally, this research topic was of great importance as it relates to both my academic and personal goals. Having a Social Work and International Development educational background has exposed me to individuals experiencing various challenges, and the injustices they face in their daily lives. This is partly why focusing on women migrant workers' experiences was a priority for my research. The UAE has a reputation of violating workers' rights, and women are the most vulnerable in the region. I took this research as an opportunity to learn and better understand the life lived by women migrant

workers in the region, and to also find possible ways that can be helpful in advocating for their rights. Hence, the purpose of this research was not only to examine the conditions of women migrant workers in the UAE, but to also be able to find ways in which women migrant workers too can feel valued and appreciated, and to also ensure that justice and fairness prevails in the treatment of migrant workers in the UAE.

The objective of this research was to examine the experiences of women migrant workers in the UAE, and how this influences their social wellbeing. The research findings acted as a guiding tool in defining program and policy recommendations that could be helpful in ensuring justice and dignity for women migrant workers. However, the overall research process was not easy because women migrant workers are often unaware of their fundamental rights. While there are several international organizations that advocate for the rights and dignity of migrant workers globally, the issue of protecting migrant workers in the UAE is more complicated than it seems because the already existing laws get breached with no penalties. Even worse, the country still has a high demand of migrant workers with no sign that demand will decrease in the near future.

Although there are efforts being made by the government, through the Ministry of Labour, to protect migrant workers, women migrant workers still experience many challenges hastened by the kafala sponsorship system. Challenges such as language barriers, lack of community support systems, limited mobility, delayed salaries, fake contracts, and above all, exploitation, still exist in the UAE. In addition, there still exists gaps in the National labour laws; the findings of this study hence offer examples where several labour provisions have been violated, and where there is no indication of means through which justice can

be obtained. For that particular reason, there is a need to undertake further research to validate the impact of labor migration of migrant workers, and promising approaches in fighting social exclusion and isolation that results from working abroad.

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