

Social Work Interventions: Promoting wellbeing and sustainable living conditions for Migrant Workers in Mauritius

Sanjayduth Bhundhoo¹ Preeya Vijayalakshmee Coolen², Roslyn S. Fraser³

¹Lecturer, Department of Environment, Science and Social Sustainability, University of Technology Mauritius, Mauritius

²Senior Lecturer, Department of Environment, Science and Social Sustainability, University of Technology Mauritius, Mauritius

³Associate Professor of Sociology, Stephen F. Austin State University, United States of America

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Abstract: Mauritius has a long history of labour migration and has always been an integral part in the socio-economic development of the country. Over the years Mauritius has put in place robust legal framework and has signed several laws to protect and preserve the rights of migrant workers. However, despite all these legislations to protect migrant workers, still there are lot of challenges in terms of poor living conditions, marginalization and exploitation that are still prevalent in our country. This study explores the essence of social work practices and having migrant social workers in enhancing the social and environmental wellbeing in promoting the sustainable living conditions of migrant workers in Mauritius. Qualitative methodology approach using the Grounded Theory by using semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty migrant workers coming from different countries and working in different sectors. Five key themes emanated from the results as follows: (i) Living conditions, (ii) precarious working conditions, (iii) marginalization, (iv) limited access to social support and (iv) psychosocial problems. The study emphasized on the important role migrant social workers can have in terms of advocacy for policy reforms and fostering integration of the migrant workers within the society. Moreover, Social workers can help in addressing the difficulties that the migrant workers endure within their stay in our country.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Migrant workers, Migrant Social Workers, Social Work, Well-being.

1. Introduction

Mauritius having a population of around 1.2million population has a long history regarding labour migration as most of our ancestors came to this Island as migrant labours. The country is often described as a "society descended from both involuntary and voluntary migrants" [1,2]. It should be recognized that if Mauritius is recognized as a progressive nation in the Indian Ocean and in Africa, foreign workers have consistently played an

important role in shaping its economic growth [3].However, despite Mauritius being a small Island Developing State with a small population and an unemployment of around 6% in 2024, the country still remains heavily dependent on migrant workers with a total of 35820 foreign workers primarily from India, Nepal, Madagascar, Bangladesh and Africa [4].Mauritius has several laws and signatories of conventions when it comes to laws in protecting the rights, working

conditions, regulates the living conditions of migrant workers [5]. However, despite all these policies and conventions signed by the Government of Mauritius in respecting the rights and living conditions of migrant workers still many complaints have been formulated regarding violation of these rights [6]. It is noted that there is a lack of research in terms of how social work can contribute in promoting social and environmental wellbeing for sustainable living among migrant workers in Mauritius [7]. Furthermore, this study provides the opportunity to go in depth in terms of research and proposed appropriate strategies in promoting sustainable migration practices among migrant workers in Mauritius. The fact that there is the absence of migrant social workers in Mauritius, this research open avenues to explore how migrant social workers can be of great help in enhancing the well-being and quality of life of migrant workers in Mauritius by addressing the challenges such as workplace integration, access to social support systems and safe living environment.

Research Question

In what ways social work practices can improve social and environmental well-being in promoting sustainable living conditions for migrant workers in Mauritius?

Sub- Research Questions

- (i) How can Migrant Social Workers in Mauritius address challenges regarding workplace integration, access to social support systems and provision of safe living environment for migrant workers?
- (ii) What strategies can Migrant Social Workers adopt to enhance the overall psychosocial wellbeing of migrant workers in Mauritius.
- (iii) What role can Migrant Social Workers play in fostering sustainable living conditions for migrant workers?

Migrant social worker

A migrant social worker can also be called as immigration social worker. Their role is mainly to assist immigrants or migrant workers in the availability of appropriate resources they need to live and helps them dealing with the immigration process and integrate within the society. In addition, the role of Migrant social workers is to advocate for the welfare & well-being, including safety of the migrant workers while working and residing in the country [8]. Moreover, social workers can further support newcomers by knowing the challenges they face in terms of health, legal and language barriers while migrating to a country, particularly when it comes to integrating in the local society [9]. Providing these types of support is considered as the foundation of the social work profession and social workers should endeavour in assisting foreign workers who came to work or live in Mauritius.

Sustainable living conditions

Sustainable living conditions for migrant workers means access to safe and affordable housing and creating a conducive environment that offer basic necessities like clean water, sanitation, suitable space and safety structures, while guaranteeing access to healthcare, fair wages, language support, legal protection and social integration. This enables migrant workers to live and work with dignity and contribute positively to their host country without compromising their health or wellbeing [10].

Psychosocial wellbeing of Migrant workers

Psychosocial wellbeing for migrant workers is mainly related to their overall mental, emotional and social health considering the exclusive challenges and stressors they face due to migrating in an unknown country. It

also includes factors such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, discrimination, stress related due to family separation, unstable employment, home sickness and poor living conditions. All these difficulties can meaningfully affect their well-being and quality of life [11].

Methodological Approach: Grounded Theory and Semi Structured Interview

For this study, Qualitative method using the Grounded Theory approach was used. It enables to explore the objectives set for this study on ways social work can promote social and environmental well-being among migrant workers in Mauritius. Grounded Theory is well-suited for this study as it allows to explore in deep the social development and practices from individual and societal perspectives when it comes to wellbeing of migrant workers. purposive convenience sampling. The target group was mainly legal migrant workers who had been living and working in Mauritius for at least one year. Thirty interviewees were selected mainly from Bangladesh, India, Madagascar, Nepal, Nigeria and Botswana scattered in nine districts in Mauritius. They worked in different sectors such as textiles and manufacturing, construction, supermarkets, hotels, information and communication (ICT), Business Process Outsourcing and Agriculture.

Outline of the Proposed Analysis Methods

(i) A grounded theory approach and the framework proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2014) [12] was used for data analysis, this enables for the emergence of themes and patterns directly from the data collected for this study.

(ii) Transcription and Coding: All the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The MAXQDA software was

used for analysis and systematic coding. The coding process as illustrated by Corbin and Strauss grounded theory approach techniques was applied as follows:



(Corbin & Strauss, 2014) [12]

Data analysis

The Data analysis for this research took place just after the data collection. This enables the researcher to identify emerging patterns and themes efficiently [13]. The transcribed data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis, tailored for qualitative research [14]. The transcripts underwent an initial reading, during which comments were annotated in the margins. Manual coding was applied line-by-line to summarize specific data segments (e.g., "feeling lonely"). This was followed by axial coding to organize the data into broader analytical categories and identify relationships between the initial codes (e.g., "sending money to family as subjective well-being"). Both initial and axial codes were utilized to conceptualize and condense the data, facilitating comparisons across transcripts. Potential subthemes were then identified, supported by illustrative quotes within the context of each case. Themes were collaboratively refined and clarified by the research team until finalized. Quotes were translated into English by the first author, ensuring accuracy and maintaining fidelity to the original meaning while correcting linguistic errors for readability.

Results and findings:**Table 1 Demographic of participants**

Characteristics	Participants (N=30)	Age: 21-31	32-40	42-52
Gender:				
Male	18	10	5	3
Female	12	5	5	2
Total	30	15	10	5

Table 2: Countries of origin of participants

country	India	Nepal	Madagascar	Bangladesh	Nigeria	Botswana
Participants						
Male	3	3	3	3	3	3
Female	2	1	4	3	1	1
Total	5	4	7	6	4	4

Theme 1: Living conditions**Living environment and lifestyle**

Most of the migrant workers live in dormitory chose by their employer and have to share their rooms with other migrant workers. Overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions significantly heighten the risk of infectious diseases among migrant workers. Factors such as poor ventilation, lack of privacy, and inadequate sanitation exacerbate health vulnerabilities, leading to the spread of communicable diseases and respiratory issues. Enhancing living standards and adopting preventive health measures are crucial for protecting their well-being. Moreover, limited access to basic amenities like clean drinking water, proper cooking facilities, and reliable electricity hampers their quality of life. Many workers are forced to rely on unhealthy, easily available food due to a lack of resources or facilities to prepare nutritious meals. This can lead to malnutrition and related health complications. Compounding these challenges, the safety of their accommodations is often compromised. Poorly constructed or poorly maintained housing increases the risk of accidents,

fire hazards, and exposure to environmental toxins, especially for those living near industrial zones or polluted areas. Seasonal changes further highlight these inadequacies, as extreme heat, cold, or damp conditions leave workers more vulnerable to weather-related health problems.

A Bangladeshi named Arman (fictitious name) said *“even I have to share room with other Bangladeshi colleagues, at least I have a concrete room to stay compare to my country where I used to live in a hut”*. This statement gives a clear indication that the Migrant workers’ living conditions in their home country were worst off and they were very poor.

Theme 2: Working conditions**Precarious work conditions and health**

There was a direct correlation between hours of work and health consequences of migrant labours. Participants reported that they often feel tired, insomnia and weak when they worked for long hours (16 hours/day) repetitively during an entire week.

A young Bangladeshi worker name Ajmal (fictitious name) of age 29 years works in a textile factory informed *“I am ready to work from morning 7.15 am to 11.00pm every day. Yes, I feel tired and very often feel pain in my head. But by doing so enable me to get extra money. More money means more salary to send back to my family”*.

Other workers working in the construction sector informed *“we have been fooled by our recruitment agency in our native country. We were told to get better job as supervisor in the construction sector. But arriving here we were employed as mason and our salary are low compare to what we were told. There are lots of deduction made from our salary in terms of foods, rent of house and other deduction that we were*

not told earlier before our recruitment". In addition, migrant workers often work in a perilous condition and their salaries are often low. This definitely has an adverse consequence on their physical and mental health problems. The relationship between the working conditions of migrant workers and their health outcomes is captured by this theoretical code Precarious work conditions and health Migrant workers are willing to work for longer hours so as to get higher salary (overtime). On the other hand, working long hours will eventually be detrimental to their health and happiness.

Theme 3: Social Inclusion and Marginalization

Socialization among local community

The main theme emanate from the interviews was socialization among local community. From the data received most of the migrant's workers reported that they have difficulty in socializing with local people mainly because of language barriers. One female Malagasy worker age 22 years old name Ameliarozana (fictitious name) working in the hotel sector, reported that *"At times I feel going to the activities organized by the community where I live but I have never participated in any cultural activity organized by the locality as I feel uncomfortable to socialize with the local people due to language barriers and their style of living and culture are different compare to mine"*.

Marginalization

She also claimed that she has no friends with the local residents. Even at her place of work she is isolated doing her job and has no friend. When she feels alone, home sick or facing any difficulties, she has to sit alone and cry. She cannot even relate the difficulties she is facing to her parents as they would be anxious and sad as well. As a result, migrant workers often feel being marginalized. Social isolation among migrant workers results into

psychological stress and feeling of being marginalized. Thus, this affects their mental state and often lead into psychological stress at workplace or within the community where they are living. The identifying relationship results from social isolation is Psychological stress and feeling of marginalization.

Theme 4: Social Support system

Access to community network

Migrant workers do not benefit much from community networks that provide emotional support, cultural connection, and practical assistance. *One Nigerian migrant worker and two participants from Botswana said "there is no help provided for migrant workers to navigate in our new environment, cope with homesickness, and integrate into our host communities. We do feel cultural shock and we have no one here that we can rely on, we have to be emotionally, mentally and physically strong to overcome our isolation"*.

Role of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations

Non-governmental organizations play a critical role in offering services such as legal aid, language training, financial literacy, and emergency support. They often act as intermediaries between workers and local authorities, advocating for fair treatment and better conditions. We do have some NGOs advocating for the rights of migrant workers in Mauritius but when it comes to provide social support at field level, these NGOs are absent. The participants informed that there has never been any home visit or in their workplace to provide any kind of moral or psychological support by any NGOs or Social workers.

Health services

Participants informed despite healthcare facilities are free for them in all public health institutions, yet they have difficulties in accessing these

healthcare centres. Because of language problems most migrant workers are either hesitated to go to hospital or do not received appropriate health care when required. Majority of the migrant workers have no medical insurance and therefore have to rely on public hospital and health care services. As a result, they have to wait for long hours to get appropriate treatment. Matias (fictitious name) a migrant worker from Madagascar working in the plantation field reported *"Once I went to hospital because of severe back pain, I had to wait for 5 hours to get appropriate treatment. The hospital staff made me to wait for long because I was not understanding their language nor they were understanding mine. When they treated me instead they gave me medicine for stomach pain"*.

Other migrants reported *"At times when my friends and I we are sick we are not willing to go to hospital, we prefer to take self-medicine. We feel awkward and marginalized when we go to the public hospital"*. This study reported the difficulties that migrant workers encounter in obtaining healthcare services and delays in receiving treatment in an appropriate manner.

Theme 5: Psychosocial wellbeing Mental Health and Counselling Services

Accessible mental health services, including culturally competent counsellors, are vital to help workers manage stress, trauma, and the emotional toll of migration and challenging living conditions. Nadia (fictitious name) from India informed *"when I came to Mauritius, I feel home sick, I was not able to adapt to the environment and lifestyle here, I wanted to go back to my country, there was no pre-departure counselling or post arrival counselling provided. It is so hard for us as migrant worker to adapt by our own"*.

Peer Support Groups

Peer-led initiatives such as support groups or worker associations provide platforms for sharing experiences, addressing challenges collectively, and building resilience within the migrant community. However, there is no such facilities that offered here. One participant from Nepal informed *"Thank to social media platform such as Facebook and WhatsApp that enable us to connect and meet with other Nepalese community. But we came here to work, we don't have time to meet and to make party because the cost of living is so high for us to afford for party time"*.

Cultural and Religious Spaces

Access to spaces for cultural or religious practices helps migrant workers maintain a sense of identity and connection to their roots, which help them to mitigate feelings of isolation and promote mental well-being. Mauritius being a multi-cultural community with different religions, the religious spaces such as Mosques, Temples, Churches are open not only to local but for Migrants as well. The Bangladeshi respondents informed *"we are lucky enough to allow us to practice our religion here and we can go to any mosque here, but at times due to lots of work we are unable to go on a regular basis"*.

Challenges faced

Exploitation and Wage Disparities

Migrant workers reported they are often subjected to unfair wages, delayed payments, or unauthorized deductions from their salaries. Some workers report working excessive hours without overtime pay, violating labour rights and no work-life balance. The migrants reported that *"we fear to report this problem to the authority with the fear that we might get deported or got our contract terminated by our company. We have contracted out loan in our home country, if we lost our jobs here, what we are going to do? We don't have any*

other choice than to adapt with the system here”.

Another challenge that these migrant workers endured is the difficulties to send remittance to their families. The migrants informed *“sending money to our families is a real nightmare here, we have to go very early in the morning to the banks, at time we went there at 5am to wait for the bank to open so that we can be among the first to send the money. The bank has a quota system on the amount of money that we can send and on the number of persons they can accommodate per day for fund transfer, that why we have to go early and then afterward go back to work”.*

Workplace Abuse and Discrimination

Physical and verbal abuse, along with discriminatory practices, are significant concerns. Migrant workers are often face mistreatment from employers or colleagues, leading to a hostile work environment. The migrant working in textile companies informed *“we are often discriminated in terms of privileges and facilities compare to Mauritian, all the hard tasks come to us, we cannot refuse overtime nor we are allowed to take day-off during public holidays. The Mauritian do not mingle with us nor they invite us for any social or cultural activities, it is very hard when we see such discrimination taking place”.*

Discussion

This study allowed a deeper understanding on the social and environmental well-being of the migrant workers. The data gathered open avenues for migrant social workers to promote the living conditions and wellbeing of the migrant workers while they are working and living in Mauritius. Five main themes were identified from the analysis: (i) Living conditions; (ii) Working conditions; (iii) Social inclusion & marginalization; (iv) Social support system and (v) Psychosocial wellbeing. It is noted that

there are very few research conducted in Mauritius when it comes to social and environmental wellbeing of migrant workers. Therefore, this research adds to the existing gap when it comes to understand the challenges migrant workers are facing in terms of their living and working conditions, marginalization, social support and inclusion within the Mauritian society. Migrant or Immigration social workers can play a vital role in terms of understanding the challenges they face and advocating for their well-being and safety both at their place they are living and in their workplace. According to research conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University, it is important that in Mauritius the Government recruit Migrant Social Workers and set up a department that specialized in finding possible solutions to the problems migrant workers faced in terms of health, legal system, language barriers and integrating within the Mauritian society.

Limitation and further research

This study has contributed to a neglected area of research when it comes to the lived experiences of migrant workers regarding the important role of social work practices in enhancing social and environmental well-being of migrant workers in Mauritius. However, this study has some limitations in terms of its study design that rely only on thirty migrants from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Nigeria and Botswana working in a particular sector only. It is noted that there are many undocumented migrant workers working illegally in Mauritius. Future studies could explore the experiences of undocumented migrant workers or examine the impact of gender and age on their access to social support systems.

Recommendation and Conclusion

This research portrayed how social exclusion, marginalization, poor living and working conditions have an adverse effect in terms of social, psychological and physical wellbeing of migrant workers. Additionally, this research highlights the importance for inclusive policies, social support networks, counselling and empowerment programs so as to eliminate structural challenges and develop the holistic wellbeing of the immigrant communities working in Mauritius. Initiatives should come from the Government in terms of recruitment of migrant social workers. By so doing, this represents a promising approach to deliver specific and tailored social services and nurturing trust and empowerment within the community of migrant workers. Moreover, it is important that migrant social workers are equipped with essential tools and resources in facilitating the integration of migrant workers within the society. Migrant social workers can play a very important role in bridging the gaps and improving access to opportunities for foreign workers. It is equally important to coordinate efforts from different stakeholders such as policy makers, social service organizations and leaders from the communities in order to fully leverage the potential of the social workers in promoting inclusivity, social cohesion and the overall well-being of society. The insights derived from this study can guide policymakers in the formulation of targeted interventions that promote inclusivity and safeguard the rights of migrant workers across various sectors.

Ethics

Since this study comprises of human participants, the ethical guidelines of the University of Technology, Mauritius were strictly followed. The element of confidentiality was strictly followed, ensuring that all data gathered for this

study was used mainly for this study without causing any prejudices to any person or organization.

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Author(s) Profile

¹Mr Sanjayduth Bhundhoo is a lecturer in the field of Social Science at the University of Technology, Mauritius. He is presently pursuing his PhD at the University of Technology; Mauritius and his research focuses on promoting the wellbeing of migrant workers in Mauritius. Mr Sanjayduth Bhundhoo area of research is mostly in the field of sustainable migration, drugs and substance abuse and social development. Before joining the Academia, Mr Sanjayduth Bhundhoo was a professional Social Worker working both for the Government and NGOs. He has been actively involved in many social projects related both a local and international level. He has been

selected for the prestigious Hubert H Humphrey Scholarship 2024-2025 to specialize in the field of Drugs and Substance Abuse Education, Treatment and Prevention at Virginia Commonwealth University.

²Dr Preeya Vijayalakshmee Coolen is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology, Mauritius. She holds an engineering degree in Electrical Engineering and did her PhD at the University of Technology, Mauritius. Her area of expertise are: Environmental Sustainability, Environmental Accounting, Waste Management, Climate Change. She has over fifteen years of Teaching Experience at both Undergraduate and Post Graduate levels. Over and above, she has been Adjunct Professor at Chhatrapati Shahu Institute of Business Education and Research, India. She has been Chairperson and member of Undergraduate & Post Graduate Dissertation Committees, Academic Council, School Board & Research Degree Committee member, Head of Department, Department of Environment, Science & Social Sustainability and Member of organizing committees of local and international conferences and workshops.

³Dr. Roslyn Fraser, associate professor of sociology in Stephen F. Austin State University's Department of Anthropology, Geography and Sociology, has been named Fulbright Scholar for the 2024-25 academic year. Dr Fraser is a sociologist curious about the connections between economic development and the worlds of gender, race, and work. Her research examines the various consequences of macro level social changes like development, globalization, immigration, and state policies. As a teacher-scholar at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, she has several

publications and research conducted in
Bangladesh and Mauritius.

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