

INDUSTRY RESPONSES AND SAFETY AND HEALTH CHALLENGES FACED BY FIELD WORKERS

Kelvin Tan¹ and Dr. K.S.S. Rakesh²

1. PhD Student - FNR190506, IIC University of Technology, Cambodia

2. Research Supervisor & Guide

ABSTRACT

A pandemic such as COVID-19 does not pose a threat to the country's physical infrastructure in any way. This comprises the buildings, roads, residences, cars, equipment, and facilities that are located throughout the nation. The effects of the pandemic have been negatively felt by everyone, citizens and noncitizens alike; nonetheless, migrant workers have borne the majority of the burden as a direct result of the outbreak. However, these pandemics have a negative influence on human health and have the potential to make people sick, send them to the hospital, lead them to lose their jobs, and even cause them to pass away. The banking and transportation sectors, which are Singapore's primary economic development generators, are highly dependent on the construction sector for their continued success. Eliminating the barrier that citizenship creates in terms of access to social services and medical treatment is one step that may be taken to make the battle against the pandemic more successful. Countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, which have been researched in great detail, appear to have recognized the necessity to rethink their pandemic response and adopt a system that is more accommodating to migrant workers.

Keywords: Industry, Responses. Safety, Health, Challenges, field, workers

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, as well as wildfires and wildfires, pandemics are frequently brought on by human mistakes rather than natural reasons. Because of the damage they bring to various forms of infrastructure, each of these natural disasters poses a significant threat to civilization as a whole. Nevertheless, pandemics present a threat to the human race. A pandemic such as COVID-19 does not pose a threat to the country's physical infrastructure in any way. This comprises the buildings, roads, residences, cars, equipment, and facilities that are located throughout the nation. However, these pandemics have a negative influence on human health and have the potential to make people sick, send them to the hospital, lead them to lose their jobs, and even cause them to pass

away. People who are infected with the disease might not be able to recover at all, or it can take them a very long time (months to years) to get better. Problems with one's health make it difficult to hold down a job, pay taxes, or manage a business, all of which have direct and indirect repercussions on public and private organizations as well as the government. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has had a significant influence on a variety of fields, including the arts, education, and society. The pandemic will have a significant and ongoing negative influence on both the population's overall health and the style of living that it enjoys.

Because it provides support for other industries like banking and transportation, Singapore's construction industry is an essential part of the country's economy. It employed a total of 458,000 people as of the end of 2019, which is equivalent to 12.1% of the workforce; out of this amount, 293,300 were unskilled migrant construction workers from countries in the vicinity, such as Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar. It is projected that this sector will continue to grow in the future.

Following an increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, the majority of which were caught by migrant workers living in dormitories (accounting for more than 87% of all local cases), the local government enacted a series of lockdown measures known as a "Circuit Breaker" to assist in containing the virus. These steps were designed to prevent the virus from spreading further inside the community. The intention was to stop the disease from escalating to a more serious level within the population. In addition, building activity is prohibited under any circumstances, with the exception of emergency circumstances as assessed by the appropriate authorities. It was also forbidden for migrant workers staying in dorms to leave their living quarters, with the exception of those who needed to go for required medical exams.

The Impact of the CoVD-19 Pandemic in ASEAN Countries and the Responses of Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

Because of its proximity to China and its extensive trade and economic links to that nation (OECD, 2020), Southeast Asia was one of the first countries struck by the COVID-19 epidemic. This was due to the fact that China is the most populous country in the world. The epidemic quickly caused a disruption in the normal flow of commerce in the ASEAN area as the number of new cases increased. This was in part caused by the widespread implementation of lockdown and quarantine protocols, the temporary closing of businesses and schools, limitations on travel, and other preventative and containment measures. The governments of Southeast Asia have prepared stimulus packages in an effort to decrease the impacts of the epidemic on the economy and society. These packages involve the mobilization of both fiscal and monetary measures in an effort to lessen the impact of the pandemic. However, due to

inadequate social protection mechanisms for the vulnerable sectors and expanding disparities, it is difficult to provide and enhance social assistance in economies that are developing and rising (Lee, 2020a). This presents a challenge for emerging markets and economies in the process of development.

Implications for Foreign Employees

According to the most important body of research in the field of health communication on workplace safety and health, the conventional wisdom is that the best method to create a safe workplace is to urge people to change their own behaviour by creating compelling messages. This is because encouraging workers to change their own behaviour is the most effective way to ensure a safe workplace. The notion of using communication as a tool to persuade workers to adjust their behaviour in favour of enhanced safety stands out as an especially important component of this framework. The primary objective of health communication is the development of efficient messaging methods, which are then put to use in the process of communicating messages to employees that are either informational or persuading in nature.

Within the worker group that is the focus of this discussion, the concept of safety is discussed in terms of fostering certain behaviours that are tied to awareness. Studies on safety cultures in the workplace ask employees how they feel about their employer's general attitude toward safety. These studies are similar to research on safety policies in the workplace. According to this view, cultures of safety are just compilations of other people's impressions. This individual behaviour modification model does not take into account the features of the working environments or the work structures that are present in the construction industry. due to its restricted focus on the modification of employees' activities, the primary corpus of research on workplace safety and health ignores the majority of the inherent dangers that are present in these settings. This is due to the narrow focus of the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study industry responses and safety and health challenges faced by field workers.
2. To study Strategy to Combat the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Construction Projects.

Threats to health and inability to get treatment

- **The chance of catching the COVID-19 virus**

In some ASEAN nations, a disproportionately high number of COVID-19 infections can be attributed to migrant workers, both men and women included. Even though overseas workers

make up 37% of Singapore's employment (ILO 2018), as of the 13th of August 2020, they were responsible for 90% of the country's total cases of COVID-19 (Han 2020). This equates to 52,516 cases. On the other hand, as of August 6, 2020 (CodeBlue 2020), foreign nationals accounted for thirty per cent of the nation's verified COVID-19 cases. Even though just 15% of employees in Malaysia are foreign nationals (ILO, 2018), foreign nationals account for 30% of all COVID-19 instances that have been validated in the country (CodeBlue, 2020). The Department of Health in the Philippines (DOH 2020) reports that as of August 4, 2020, repatriated Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) were responsible for 0.6 per cent of all recorded fatalities (13 out of a total of 2,115) and 4.5 per cent of all documented illnesses in the Philippines (5,050 out of a total of 112,593). In addition, among Filipinos working overseas, there were 9,607 reported occurrences of the sickness, which resulted in 693 fatalities (de Guzman, 2020).

The disproportionately high number of migratory workers within the affected population can be attributed to a number of different factors. To begin, because of the nature of the labour that migrant workers do, they may have a higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19 compared to those who do other types of employment. Large numbers of migrant workers are employed in what are known as "essential services" 5; in these industries, employees are obliged to show up for their shifts even if a lockdown has been enacted over the whole city. To name just a few instances, there is the healthcare industry, the logistics industry, the transportation industry, the maintenance industry, and the building industry.

According to ILO 2020c, there have been complaints of problems with working conditions, a lack of social distance, and non-compliance with the government's Movement Control Order (MCO) in the production of medical rubber gloves in Malaysia. Additionally, there have been allegations of non-compliance with the MCO. When providing medical care for their employers' families, domestic employees run the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus from their employers (ILO and UN Women 2020a).

- **Choices in testing and treatment currently available**

In the situation involving COVID-19, putting an emphasis on the protection of life should be your first concern. This can be accomplished by reducing the rate of transmission, providing medical care to people who have been affected, and taking precautions to protect medical staff. Migrant workers in the majority of ASEAN nations are eligible for free COVID-19 testing and treatment. However, in comparison to locals, certain migrant workers face greater actual or perceived hazards and blockages while trying to be tested and treated. This is the case even when these employees are in the same country.

Migrant workers in Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, and Thailand were first offered free COVID-19 testing and treatment by the governments of those countries. It has been previously stated by the government of Singapore that it will pay for the entirety of the costs associated with testing and treatment for any and all migrant workers in Singapore without exception. In the early stages of the pandemic, the government of Singapore limited the mobility of healthcare professionals to only be allowed inside a single hospital, with the exception of some exceptional circumstances, in order to stop the virus from spreading to other institutions. This was done to prevent the virus from spreading to other countries.

In order to conserve resources and put the primary emphasis on pandemic containment during the time period known as the Circuit Breaker, only the absolute essential health services were carried out at that time. This led to a decrease in services at certain clinics, which according to some observers contributed to a delay in the early identification of COVID-19 among members of the immigrant population (Geddie and Aravindan, 2020). Despite this, everyone, including seasonal workers, had quick access to necessary and emergency medical treatment at all times. By the 9th of December in the year 2020, every obstacle that stood in the way of the free mobility of healthcare professionals had been removed.

A Hierarchy of Controls to Reduce the Risk of occupational infections

The same hierarchy of controls that are used to restrict exposure to potential hazards on the job should be used to prevent infections in the workplace. This will ensure that employees are protected to the greatest extent possible. The controls are organized into a hierarchy, with the most effective measures given precedence over those that rely only on the actions of individuals. One example of this would be ensuring that individuals comply with personal protective measures. By way of illustration, each and every worker is shielded from danger by the use of engineering and administrative regulation.

- a) Removing possible hazards. The most efficient method of preventing the spread of infectious diseases in the workplace is to do away with any and all potential entry points for infection. This objective may be accomplished from the convenience of one's own office by utilizing telehealth services, working remotely, or participating in teleconferences, all of which are feasible possibilities.

Engineering and environmentally responsible regulatory standards

- b) If the risk cannot be eradicated entirely, it is essential to take steps to lessen the pathogen's ability for spreading and the amount of it that is present in the air of the workplace. This may be accomplished in a number of ways, two of which are the design

and reuse of wards, as well as the modification of structural design to make it more favourable to the movement of patients and the spatial separation of areas used for isolating patients. It is essential to have enough ventilation, sanitation rules and procedures, 'touch-free' technologies, sneeze guards and barriers, safer needle devices, and secure waste management in the medical field.

- c) The rules and regulations imposed by the government. To modify the way people work, some potential measures that may need to be taken include restricting access to the workplace except for essential workers who possess specialized training and skills for protection; ensuring that appropriate working hours are maintained; rostering; and, whenever possible, avoiding the practice of shifting workers from high transmission settings to low transmission settings. All of these are examples of potential measures that may need to be taken.

Plan Development to Mitigate the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Building and Infrastructure Projects

In light of what has been discovered up until this point, it is quite evident that an effective plan is necessary in order to resist the COVID-19 pandemic. The following ten-step method has been devised with the intention of reducing the negative effects that the EV-D68 pandemic will have on CP's construction workers:

1. Social Distancing

It has been established that creating a physical distance between individuals is an efficient technique for preventing the spread of COVID-19. In order to reduce the likelihood that other people may become infected with COVID-19 and to stop the spread of the virus, a number of organizations concerned with public health advise maintaining a distance of at least one meter from other people. It is imperative that the CP building sector implement a strategy like to this one as soon as possible. When individuals are outside, it is recommended that they maintain a gap of one meter, 1.5 meters, or 2.0 meters between them selves; however, this distance should be increased when they are inside. This recommendation is supported by both the research and the practice that is currently being done.

2. Utilization of Face Coverings

In the beginning, there was controversy on the question of whether or whether construction workers in CP ought to be required to wear face masks in order to prevent themselves from being exposed to the virus. Others believe that it may encourage individuals to engage in risky behaviour while they are wearing them, while others believe that they are ineffectual, yet others

believe that they do not give sufficient information on how to use them effectively. Initially, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that face masks should only be used by patients who were experiencing respiratory symptoms as well as healthcare personnel. However, much later on, cloth masks won widespread acceptability and were even required to be worn in certain societies.

The most recent accumulation of information reveals that wearing masks at all times is absolutely necessary in order to put a halt to the spread of COVID-19. It is possible for hazardous viruses to be carried through exhaled air; however, using a face mask can help reduce this risk. It was discovered that cloth masks had a filtering performance of greater than 80% for particles with a size of less than 300 nm and greater than 90% for particles with a size of less than 100 nm. Therefore, it is possible that the use of face masks by construction workers in CP might be an extremely successful technique for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Taking Care of Oneself By Keeping Clean and Providing Sufficient Airflow

According to the research that have been done thus far, the damaging effects of the COVID-19 virus might linger anywhere from a few hours to a few days, depending on the sorts of surfaces that they come into contact with. It might be useful to clean the equipment at the building site that is regularly touched. It is vital to clean construction tools and areas as thoroughly and thoroughly as possible and as appropriately as is possible with the resources that are available.

CP players in the construction sector have a responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness of their preventative measures with great attention. Additionally, it is imperative that employees in the construction industry wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and maintain clean working conditions. All of the employees must have immediate access to any and all vital information that has been recently discovered. Included in these plans are guidelines for contact and cleanliness, the correct way to wear a mask, and steps to take in the event that a coworker develops symptoms such as a fever or cough.

According to the findings of the tests that were carried out and the information that has been gathered up to this point, air conditioning may be a factor in the propagation of the virus within buildings. Because of this, it is best to configure ventilation and air conditioning systems to operate in a mode that does not recycle the air in the space.

4. Social Equity

The fact that many construction workers in CP find working from home to be inconvenient increases the likelihood that they may be targeted by COVID-19. In this context, it appears less frequent than it ever has been for authorities in the public transportation and infrastructure sector to be motivated as a propagator of social collaboration rather than social division. This is a change from what appears to have been the case in the past. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing, construction on buildings and other structures proceeded for the most part as normal.

Perils to Field Workers' Health and Safety and Industry Solutions

In spite of growing globalization and increased mobility of both labour and capital across international borders, citizenship has always been a need for either participation in or exclusion from a diverse array of rights and social advantages. This has remained the case despite the fact that globalization has led to increased mobility of labour and capital. This is still the case in spite of the fact that globalization has made it simpler for goods, capital, and people to travel throughout the world. They are able to impose a broad variety of rights and obligations on non-citizens due to the high barrier that nation-states have put up surrounding citizenship. Non-citizens are eligible to vote in national elections. The COVID-19 epidemic has only helped to make the disparities that already existed between citizens and non-citizens even more pronounced. COVID-19 has introduced new concerns on-the-job security, immigration status, and disproportionate infection rates for migrant workers in South East Asian countries. The solutions to each of these problems have previously been provided. In many contexts, individuals who are not citizens of the nation in issue are ineligible to participate in aid programs that are organized and operated by the government. In addition, depending on the institutions that are in place in the nation in which they are seeking employment, migrant workers could have a difficult time gaining access to essential social services such as social protection and healthcare.

The social protection and healthcare infrastructure that was already in place was utilized in many of the earliest responses to COVID-19 that were adopted by governments in the host countries. Since the beginning of the epidemic, migrant workers have not been allowed to participate in these efforts since they do not match the conditions necessary for participation. Workers received cash handouts, bonuses, and various other sorts of monetary assistance from the government at various points in time. This tendency manifested itself across a wide variety of social and economic stimulus projects, one of which was the funds provided by the government for healthcare. Worse still, in reaction to the epidemic, discriminatory employment rules that target migrant workers have been established. According to The Star (2020), the

Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) has legislated that, in the event that an unavoidable layoff becomes necessary, foreign workers would be the first to be terminated from their positions.

During the COVID-19, empirical facts and the lived experiences of migrant workers posed a challenge to the health and social protection policies and initiatives that have previously been structured around the protection of their own residents in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. These policies and strategies have traditionally been in place because they were seen to be the best way to protect their own population. The empirical data and first-hand experiences of migrant workers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were a challenge for researchers working on the COVID-19. Because of the pandemic, both citizens and noncitizens have endured hardships; nevertheless, migrant workers have been hit particularly hard as a result of the crisis. As a result, in order to combat the pandemic in an efficient manner, the barrier that citizenship presents in terms of social protection and healthcare should be lowered. It would appear that Malaysia and Singapore, two of the nations that have been the primary focus of this study, have acknowledged the need to review their pandemic response and embrace a policy that is more welcoming and accommodating to migrant workers. Malaysia and Singapore were the two countries that were the primary focus of this study.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought to light the divide that exists between people from the United States and those from other countries. Migrant workers in South East Asia already suffer difficulties such as employment uncertainty, immigration status, and disproportionate infection rates, which have been made worse by COVID-19. In many contexts, individuals who are not citizens of the nation in issue are ineligible to participate in aid programs that are organized and operated by the government. In addition, migrant workers may have a difficult time gaining access to essential social services in the nation in which they have chosen to work. This is because the social security and healthcare systems in different countries vary greatly. Everyone, including citizens and non-citizens, has been affected negatively by the epidemic, with the exception of migrant workers, who have been hit more harder than other employees. Therefore, in order for us to successfully combat the epidemic, we need to loosen the restrictions that citizenship places on social protection and medical treatment. It would appear that Malaysia and Singapore, two of the nations that were investigated for this article, have come to the conclusion that they need to alter their pandemic response and go with a strategy that is more accommodating to migrant workers. These findings will be utilized to draw attention to the existing obstacles and to offer a conceptual "best practices" framework with the goals of

assuring worker safety under COVID settings, catering to the requirements of the migrant worker population, and future-proofing the construction sector against pandemics.

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