

A SOCIO - DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to examine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in Migrant Health studies. It was based on questionnaire survey among 820 respondents from the Klang Valley and the State of Kelantan from 6th January 1998 to 14th Jan 1999. Majority of the respondents (47.9%) were from Bangladesh, followed by Indonesia (14.8%), Thailand (13.7%), Myanmar (20.4%), Pakistan (9.9%) and Others (1.3%). The male to female ratio is 7:1. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 69 years with a mean of 30.5 years. More than 70% of them are adults (25 - 44 years). Females were older than males (mean age of 33.8 years and 30.5 years respectively). Majority of the respondents were married (females 75.8% and males 52.6%), 93.7 were Muslims. About 87.4% of them had some formal education. Majority of the foreign workers were employed as factory workers (35.7%), followed by construction workers (18.3%), agricultural workers (33.6%), service workers (13.3%) and self-employed (11%). Nevertheless, the profile of these responding do not conform to the national profile. (JUMMEC 2002; 1:24-27)

KEYWORDS: Unskilled workers, Semi-skilled workers, Legal and Illegal foreign workers.

Introduction

The influx of foreign workers into Malaysia can be traced back to the pre-independence and colonial period. However, the entry of foreign workers in the post independence era began in the early 1970s especially after the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. Initially, foreign workers were brought in to cater for the acute shortage of labour in the rural plantation sector as a result of rapid urbanization, industrialization and also improvement in the educational level of the rural population. During this early period, the entrance of foreign workers were largely illegal because there was no legal provision for the importation of foreign unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

The rapid development of the industrial and construction sectors created a further need for labour and more employment opportunities for the foreign workers. This led not only to an increase in the number of foreign workers. The country saw an influx of foreign workers of various nationalities and their involvement in several job sectors.

Since then various issues related to foreign workers have surfaced and efforts to regulate them were initiated. While the efforts were rather successful to bring in foreign labour, attempts to curb illegal entry failed. Thus until today, statistic pertaining to numbers and types of foreign workers (legal or illegal) is still inaccurate.

Foreign workers are a dynamic group of people to study. This paper attempts to examine the socio-demographic

profile of the respondents in the present study. The socio-demographic profile of respondents, their migration patterns will provide some background information of the respondents which may have an important bearing on various aspects of health. The study was based on a questionnaire survey carried out on a total of 820 respondents from the Klang Valley and the state of Kelantan. The interview survey was carried out during the period of 6 January 1998 to 14 January 1999.

Demographic Profile

The various socio-demographic characteristics examined were nationality, gender, age, marital status, religion, educational status, present occupation and also their occupation in their country of origin. Whilst the information on present occupation will give a picture on the current pattern of employment, the past occupation would indicate the reasons for them seeking jobs in Malaysia.

Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 shows the country of origin of the respondents in the present study. It shows that, nearly half, i.e 47.9 per cent of them were from Bangladesh. The rest were from Indonesia (14.8%), Thailand (13.7%), Myanmar (2.4%), Pakistan (9.9%) and Others (1.3%). For all the nationalities the males far exceeded the females and generally the male:female ratio is about 7: 1.

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Further analysis of the travel documents possessed by the respondents revealed that nearly all of them had some form of travel documents to enter the country. A major proportion (77.8%) had both passports and work permits, while 6.7% of the respondents had only passport and about 14.5 % had work permits only. (Table 1.2)

The existence of foreign workers with passport means that they had entered the country for social visits and later decided to stay and work. Those with work permit only had entered illegally and later got registered during one of the regulation exercises carried out. However, further analysis shows that 99 out of the 117 of those with work permits only were from Thailand. This is not surprising as it occurred in the northern state of Kelantan only.

The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 69 years with a mean of 30.9 years. On the average, the females were slightly older i.e mean of 33.8 years as compared to the males whose mean age was about 30.5 years. Distribution of respondents according to age groups can be seen in Table 1.3 and Figure 1.2.

As can be seen, a large proportion of the migrants were in the age category of 25-34 years old and a further 16 per cent in the 35-44 age group. This shows that more than seventy percent of the respondents are considered as mature adults while about 14 percent can be considered as young population. The rest of the migrants (about 6.7 per cent), fell into the 45-54 and above 55 years old. Detailed analysis showed that amongst the Indonesians and the Bangladeshis, most respondents are in the first two age groups and the older age groups are predominantly Thais, Burmese and the Pakistanis (Figure 1.3).

With regard to marital status, more than half of respondents were married. The proportion of married respondents were higher amongst the females (75.8%) as compared to the males (52.6 %). Among respondents who were single, the Bangladesh forms a prominent group compared to other nationalities (Table 1.4).

Socio-Economic profile

A majority (93.7%) of the population were Muslims. However, there exist followers of other religions especially amongst the Burmese who were either Buddhists, Christians or Hindus. The educational level defined by the number of years of formal

education varies greatly among respondents. Majority of the respondents i.e about 87.4% possessed some form of formal education. Only about 12 % of respondents did not have any form of formal education. The level of education however is higher for male respondents compared to females.

Table 1.1. Distribution of respondents according to country of origin

Nationality	Indonesian	Bangladesh	Thai	Myanmar	Pakistan	Others	Total
Number	121	393	112	102	81	11	820
Percent	14.8	47.9	13.7	12.4	9.9	1.3	100

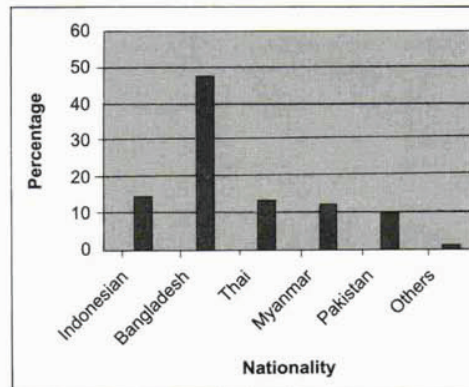


Figure 1.1. Percentage of respondents according to country of origin.

Table 1.2. Travel Documents of Respondents

Travel Documents	Work Permit Only	Passport Only	Work Permit and Passport	Others	Total
Number	117	54	629	9	809
Percentage	14.5	6.7	77.8	1.1	100.0

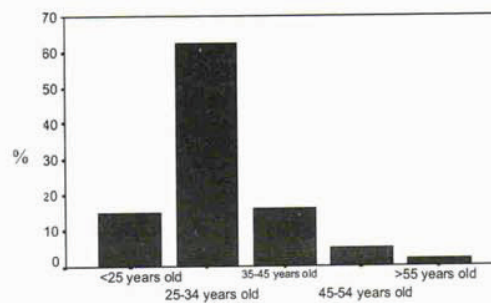


Figure 1.2. Age of respondents

Comparisons between the various nationalities showed that educational attainment was highest amongst the Burmese. The level of secondary education is high both in Myanmar and Bangladesh and the same is also true of the proportion attending 13 years and more of schooling. The lowest level of education was amongst the Thai respondents (Table 1.5). An analysis was also carried out on the present occupation of respondents while in Malaysia and that in their home countries before coming to Malaysia.

Table 1.6 shows that most of the foreign labourers in the study were employed as factory workers (35.7%), followed by construction workers (18.3%), agricultural workers (3.6%), service workers (13.3%) and about 11

per cent were self-employed. The factory workers were mostly working in Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam and were employed as production workers. Those in the service sectors were mostly working in restaurants, petrol kiosks, laundrettes and hotels. The construction

workers were mainly involved in the construction industries in and around the Klang Valley. Quite a proportion of these respondents were self-employed. They were mainly involved in petty- trading as fruit-sellers, night-market traders and also cobblers. Domestic maids comprised nearly 30 per cent of the foreign labour in the country. Only a minor proportion of the respondents in the present study were in this job category.

An analysis of occupation types by nationality shows the different job distribution of foreign labourers by country of origin (Table 1.7). They were engaged as construction workers (28.1%), in the service industry (24.8%), as domestic helpers (12.4%) and 18.2% are self-employed. About 10% of the Indonesian respondents were factory workers and a minor proportion are employed in the agricultural sector. On the other hand, the Bangladeshi were mainly engaged in the factories (62%) followed by the service industry (6.0%) and also in the construction sectors (12.2%). The Thai

respondents were mainly involved in agriculture (87.5%) while minor proportions were distributed in all the other sectors. About a quarter of the respondents from Myanmar were self-employed, followed closely by factory workers (24%) and construction workers (16%). The remainder were equally distributed in the other types of occupations and about 5 per cent of migrant workers from Myanmar were unemployed. Lastly, 28.4% of the respondents from Pakistan were self-employed, followed by 18.5%, 11.2% and about 10% working the agriculture, working in the service and manufacturing industries respectively. There was also a high rate of unemployment among the respondents from Pakistan (22.2%).

An analysis of the occupation of the respondents in

Table 1.5. Educational level attainment by nationality

Educational attainment Nationality/	No schooling	1-6 years	7-12 years	13 year and more	Total
Indonesian	10 (8.6%)	50 (43.4%)	45 (39.1%)	10 (8.6%)	115 (100.0%)
Bangladeshi	32 (8.2%)	100 (25.4%)	214 (54.8%)	44 (11.2%)	390 (100.0%)
Thai	34 (30.3%)	69 (61.6%)	8 (7.1%)	1 (0.8%)	112 (100.0%)
Myanmar	7 (6.9%)	27 (26.7%)	53 (52.4%)	14 (13.8%)	101 (100.0%)
Pakistani	16 (20.2%)	19 (24.0%)	39 (49.3%)	5 (6.3%)	79 (100.0%)
Total	99 (12.4%)	265 (33.2%)	359 (45.0%)	74 (9.2%)	797 (100.0%)

Table 1.3. Age of Respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
Below 25 years old	120	14.8
25-34 years old	506	62.5
35-44 years old	129	16.0
45-54 years old	39	4.8
Above 55 years old	15	1.9
Total	809	100.0

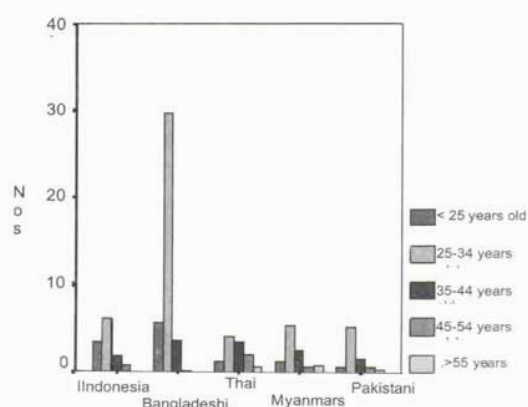


Figure 1.3. Age of respondents according to country of origin

Table 1.4 Respondents by Nationality and Marital status

Nationality/ Marital Status	Currently married	Widowed	Divorced/ separated	Single	Total
Indonesian	75	1	0	44	120
Bangladeshi	174	0	0	219	393
Thais	95	6	3	8	112
Myanmars	59	2	0	41	102
Pakistanis	45	0	0	36	81
Total	448	8	3	348	809

their home country prior to coming to Malaysia shows the reverse pattern. Generally, in their home country, the respondents were mainly non-employed (36.7%), agricultural workers (24.7%) or self-employed. A very small proportion were found in the other occupation all groups especially the professional and semi professional sector, factory as well as construction and service sectors. This confirms that the factors encouraging their migration are both the "push factors" in their home countries and the "pull factors" of better jobs and employment opportunities in Malaysia.

The Indonesian migrant workers were working as agricultural workers unemployed or self employed in their home country. The unemployment level is higher among Bangladeshis (47.9%), Thais 25.0%), Burmese (30.2%) and 22.3% among the Pakistani while they were in their home countries. The bulk of the respondents from these countries were also either agricultural workers or self-employed.

Migration Patterns

Finally, an analysis was carried out on the migration pattern of the respondents. The influx of migrants into the country had started from the very early times but escalated in the 1970s due to the rapid economic development in Malaysia. However, among the respondents in the present study, slightly more than 90 per cent arrived in the 1990s. Between 1960-1998, there was a sharp upward trend from the late 1980s until 1996, after which there was a sudden decline. This trend is similar to the national trend as a result of the rigorous efforts towards controlling the inflow of migrant workers and since the impact of the economic crisis in 1997. It is also pertinent to highlight that about 4.8 per cent of those who arrived earlier than 1990 are still living and working in the country.

A majority of them entered Malaysia directly from the country of origin, except for a very small proportion of about 1.2% who came in through a third country. Even those who came directly from their own country, there was only a few respondents or 2.5% (21) who were in transit in a town somewhere in their country, while the rest (95.3%) came directly from their hometowns. A majority (90%) have never returned home since their arrival.

Overall, a high proportion of them (70.4%) traveled by air (especially the Bangladeshis and the Pakistanis), while the Indonesians had the options of the sea and air routes. One point worthy to note is the proportion of respondents from Myanmar who came via land (30.7%), and about 20.8% who came via a combination of land and sea routes. Generally, almost all of them have some form of travel documents, either the passport, work permit or even both.

Table 1.6. Occupations of respondents in Malaysia

Types of occupation	Numbers	Percentage
Professional/ Semi –		
Professional Workers	10	1.2
Domestic Helpers	20	2.5
Construction Workers	148	18.3
Factory Workers	289	35.7
Service Workers	108	13.3
Self-Employed	110	11.0
Agricultural Workers	18	13.6
Other Workers	18	2.2
Not Working/Unemployed	6	0.7
Not Available	11	1.5
Total	809	100.0

Table 1.7. Occupations of respondents in their home country

Types of occupation	Numbers	Percentage
Professional/ Semi –		
Professional Workers	21	2.6
Domestic Helpers	3	4.0
Construction Workers	8	1.0
Factory Workers	59	7.3
Service Workers	41	5.1
Self-Employed	153	18.9
Agricultural Workers	200	24.7
Other Workers	18	2.2
Not Working/Unemployed	297	36.7
Not Available	11	1.5
Total	809	100.0

Conclusion

The above discussion focuses on the demographic, social and economic characteristics and the migration patterns of the respondents involved in the study. The profile of these respondents in some instances do not conform to the national profile and patterns. Nevertheless in many instances these findings do indicate to a certain extent the general picture of migrant workers in the country. In the context of the present study it is envisaged that certain illnesses and diseases plus the medical seeking behavior of the migrants do relate to their demographic, social and economic characteristics and their migration patterns may have an implication on certain diseases found to prevail amongst them. This will be discussed in the following sections.