

Invisibility of deceased International Labour Migrants: Politics of recognition

SUMMARY: Death of international labour migrants in Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning (3D) work is accounted only for counting. The politics of recognition is either absent or abysmal in the case of migrant death. Life of the members of their family after migrant's death has been completely untouched. Challenges remain with regard to the impact of death on the family and their ordeal, compensation package the family received, the response of the State and corporate accountability. The present study captures the neglect and distress situation of the deceased migrant family through a case study method in Tamil Nadu by selecting one destination country. Besides, the role of diaspora organisation and volunteers at destination country are examined.

ABSTRACT

Background of proposed research plan

Human rights and labour rights do exist, but they are exercised very little for migrant workers especially if they are international migrants working in dangerous, demeaning and very difficult (3D) work environment. They become stateless community both in the source and destination countries even though countries economy is premised based on the remittance. Since they are invisible on the policy matters of the Government, their experiences, their personal loss and situation in the destination and country of origin becomes insignificant.

The proposed research is based on understanding the relatively new and under-researched theme in international migration studies i.e. the death of Indian workers in Gulf countries, which was seriously discussed, by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Parliamentarians in 2019. The process of repatriating the mortal remains of Indian workers in Gulf countries as well as the factors that hinder them must be studied. Also, the family situation of the deceased worker must be examined together to attain effective understanding of the phenomenon.

Purpose of proposed research

According to MEA statistics, placed in the Parliament on November 2019 had disclosed that 33,988 Indian migrant workers have died in the Gulf between 2014-2019.ⁱ Among the deaths, it was reported that 10,416 occurred in Saudi Arabia.ⁱⁱ Sadly the total number of deaths has increased over the years. However, the absence of both national- and state-level data on deceased Indian workers and non-workers abroad is indeed unfortunate.

It is a fact that mortals are transported back to India with a State supportive mechanisms namely Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), GoI and the office of Non-Resident Tamils (NRTs), GoTN. The pain of losing a key family member or many a times the only source would devastate the families. The term 'Invisibility' was used in a sense that the death of is not studied or researched in depth except on the demographic count (Gaikwad PB et.al: 2018).

There are many studies show that migrant workers are not paid regularly; no health insurance is either inadequate or not available; they are exposed to occupational hazard;

live in poor, unhygienic, insecure conditions without access to health care (S. Priebe, et al., 2016; Norredam M, Mygind A, Krasnik A. 2006; I. Keynaert, et al.,2016). Detailed studies on issues leading to death of workers and the consequences followed by it are either absent or not undertaken. Cause of death and compensation claim is close to nil.

Migrant families would only be informed of the death and would receive the mortals at the airport after a prolonged period. Hence, the inherent dignity of human being or of citizen, which is premised on an egalitarian perspective, is either not recognized or set aside as it is insignificant. Hence, the death becomes yet another number which requires to be settled. Research is particularly needed in understanding how the death of a migrant worker affects left-behind family members. Indeed, the family may experience financial stress and role changes among the family members etc.

The politics of recognition becomes very pertinent for the migrant death in a foreign land, as the families have no agency to raise their voice for the existing legal remedies within and outside the country.ⁱⁱⁱTamil Nadu is one of the highest in labourers working abroad and the State administration has an office named as Non-Resident Tamils (NRTs) to coordinate and to hand over the mortals to their family members. According to the data published by the NRTs, nearly 621 death cases of NRTs were reported between 2014 and 2018. In the same period, the TN government also paid death compensation for 388 cases, rescue/repatriation of NRTs (2,341) and general grievances from NRTs (926). The data also indicates that every year (2014 to 2018), nearly 155 NRTs died abroad.

There are few of voluntary organizations in Tamil Nadu and Tamildiaspora groups or volunteers facilitate the mortals to be transported. But the situation of left-behind family members after the loss of their breadwinner has been undocumented in migration studies particularly in the context of India. National Domestic Workers Movement working with migrant labour reported 90 deaths for the last 3 years out of which only 12 have applied for compensation from the employers. There are multiple causative factors for this low claim rate which requires detail situations study.

Proposed plan

Considering the feasibility, the proposed research will take Tamil Nadu as a case study by only focusing on death cases reported from Kuwait for the last 3 years (2016-2019). Research is proposed to be in exploratory in nature. This research will cover the following three objectives:

1. To analyse the reason for cause of death of an international migrant worker through the existing social network (family, relatives, friends and co-workers) and with the available data.
2. To understand the role and procedure of the State, diaspora network, family with regard to transportation of the mortal.
3. To study the present condition of the family and to suggest a policy framework (Standard operating procedure) when families of the migrants encounter such situation.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives, families of deceased workers in Tamil Nadu, Tamil diaspora groups and Indian workers who are also involved in community work to assist distressed Tamil workers in Kuwait will be interviewed. Qualitative method of conducting focused interviews shall be used as the gather primary data from the fieldwork. Due to own contacts established through other research activities, contacts already exist with Tamil diaspora groups and community workers in Kuwait, so it would be easy to reach them. Apart of fieldwork will be carried out in Kuwait to meet the stakeholders. To reach the families of deceased workers NRTs department will be approached and links with few NGOs in Tamil Nadu exists to identify the deceased migrant worker families.

The narratives of family members, friends and welfare associations who facilitated in transporting the mortal of the migrants are not scrutinised in detail and analysed in depth. The deaths of migrants are reported to their family members and mortals are transported through friends, welfare associations and other agencies working closely with migrants. The researchers have so far identified 15 families from a migrant welfare association called as Reaction Team, which helped the mortal remains to their family members in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, family details from the National Domestic Workers Movement working with migrant labour in Tamil Nadu will be sought apart from NRT, GoTN. Data from all the above sources are tapped to identify families and friends. Narratives of 15-20 families will be part of the study, as many would have changed their residence and refuse to meet the researchers.

Two researchers will be involved in conducting this study.

Reference:

Gaikwad PB, Khandare KP, Dan A, Jalaluddeen M, Pasi AR, Singh SK. Profile of Indians died abroad: analysis of secondary data of human remains arrived at point of entry in Mumbai. *Int J Community Med Public Health* 2018;5:3577-81.

I. Keynaert, et al.,(2016): “What is the evidence on the reduction of inequalities in accessibility and quality of maternal health care delivery for migrants? A review of existing evidence in the WHO European Region.

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/317109/HEN-synthesis-report-45.pdf?ua=1

Norredam M, Mygind A, Krasnik A. (2006): Access to health care for asylum seekers in the European Union – a comparative study of country policies. *Eur J Public Health* 2006;16:285-9.

S. Priebe, et al., (2016): “Public health aspects of mental health among migrants and refugees: a review of the evidence on mental health care for refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants in the WHO European Region (2016)”, 2016. http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/317622/HEN-synthesis-report-47.pdf?ua=1

UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990. 18 December 1990. A/RES/45/158

ⁱ<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/india-34000-migrant-workers-have-died-in-the-gulf-since-2014-activists-criticise-lack-of-protections>

ⁱⁱ<https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/blog/rfi-reveal-more-than-10-indian-workers-died-every-day-in-gulf-countries-in-the-last-six-years-117-deaths-for-every-us-117-remitted->

ⁱⁱⁱ http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics_of_Recognition.pdf