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**Psychosocial Stressors:
A Study of Informal Workforce in Kashmir**

Syed Wasifa Kamili

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Syed Wasifa Kamili *

Introduction

Migration is a continuous process that has shown an upward trend since time immemorial. It is truly global and complex mediated by numerous overlapping factors be it in response to voluntary reasons or involuntary (refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, environmental migrants). However, managing its repercussions seems to be challenging for both developed and developing nations in terms of brain drain, pressure on a limited resource base, human rights violations, psychosocial stressors, discriminatory behaviour, etc. However, studies have also shown that if managed well, positive results can also be achieved.

As per the estimates, migrants constitute more than one billion people or one-seventh of the world's population¹ and are distributed across various nation-states. In developing countries of Asia, migration has become one of the essential parts of subsistence and means of livelihood with an increase in internal short-term migrations ranging from daily commuting to seasonal migration.² These temporary or seasonal migratory workers are mostly involved in an unorganized or informal labour market usually working under precarious conditions along with several challenges faced at different levels. As far as the major sectors are concerned, construction employs the biggest percentage of seasonal and temporary migrants (around 36%), followed by agriculture (20%) and manufacturing (about 16%) (Bhagat 2014, 16).³ Since the movement towards urban centres mostly occurs in pursuit of better job prospects and to escape severe economic deprivation, it is usually recognized as 'distress migration'. These impoverished migrant workers in general and construction workers in particular are subjected to numerous vagaries of labour market at the host place.

According to Deshingkar et al. (2008) and Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003), labour conditions in these sectors are often exploitative and dangerous, with low pay, lack of autonomy, lengthy hours, debt bondage, and poor working conditions.⁴ Employers and supervisors frequently set the minimum pay, without being accountable for ensuring access to their necessities like food, shelter, and access to healthcare.⁵ Besides, working conditions too depict a gloomy situation in terms of regularization, labour contracts, poor wage structure, long working hours, and lack of provision of safety and security while working in hazardous conditions. Similarly, in terms of living conditions, an overwhelming majority of migrant construction workers live in deplorable conditions without the provision of basic facilities and fixtures at living places. They usually survive in cramped spaces either in rented accommodation or accommodation provided by the employer either in the form of space close to the premises of the construction site or directly on the worksite. They are also found in

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makeshift homes along the pavement, footpaths, railway tracks, etc.⁶ As a result, they face numerous forms of stressors at a personal level, for instance sharing common limited space, lack of privacy, sleep trouble while living in hot and humid conditions within congested space, etc.

In addition to the above-mentioned vulnerabilities, migrant workers are exposed to societal discrimination which results in stigmatization and alienation while being at the host place. Being one of the economically poor sections of society, who traverse long distances with their belongings bundled over their head in search of better job opportunities, are often considered second-class citizens by local people. Derogatory remarks and verbal harassment are also sometimes used against migrant workers who migrate from Bihar and Jharkhand such as '*jungli*' meaning wild.⁷ Belonging to a particular socio-cultural group also becomes a source of animosity among the local population which further adds to their vulnerability. Words such as '*Bihari*', '*pardesi*', and '*bikaari*' along with abusive language are sometimes used both in the workplace and open spaces as a mark of insult and disgust against migrant workers.⁸ Thus, as a result, migrant workers are exposed to mental agony that takes a serious toll on their mental well-being.

In the context of the Union territory of Jammu & Kashmir, it too witnesses the huge flow of both immigrants and outmigrants every year. According to various studies, it has been revealed that among the several northern regions, Punjab & Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) are the important places of destinations, where a huge influx of migrant workers flows every year.⁹ Since there is inadequate data related to the number of migrant workers who migrate every year to Kashmir, however, according to Census, 2011 it has been estimated that Jammu & Kashmir accounts for 536,699 migrant individuals.¹⁰ Thus, migrant workers being involved in several unorganized sectors, particularly the construction sector play an important role by contributing to the local economy as well as the place of origin through remittances. However, as already discussed they face many issues such as unstable mode of employment, poor bargaining power, inadequate living and working conditions, identity crisis, etc. In addition to the above-mentioned facts, living and working in a conflict-ridden zone has its ramifications. The Kashmir Valley which is characterized by uncertainty, an insecure environment, subsequent lockdowns, and communication blockades has formidable consequences for both local and non-local labour classes, in particular the non-local labour class. As a result, living within one of the conflict-ridden zones of the world puts an undue and invisible burden on both local and non-local populations. The instances of shutdown, communication blockade, and sudden civil uprisings expose them to various vulnerabilities at the host place. For example, feelings of worry and insecurity, lack of communication with acquaintances, restrictions on movement while traveling between different workplaces, difficulties faced while developing social networks, and overall negative impact on livelihood that affect their remittances and living expenses are some of the major concerns that affect them during conflict situation while being at the host place.

Similarly, while working in different socio-cultural contexts they face several stressors related to adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, integration, and exclusion.¹¹ Living away from family, linguistic barriers, poor access to basic amenities, and provision of inadequate welfare measures, etc. are some of the other constraints that are faced by them, thereby acting as psychosocial stressors. Thus, they are subjected to several forms of stressors at a personal, financial, emotional, and social level which they try to cope with through different means while being away from their places of origin. Hence, the current study was undertaken to explore the stressors associated with migration that have a psychological ramification, followed by coping strategies adopted by them while at the host place.

Literature Review

Migration is a complex phenomenon that not only involves the geographical mobility of people from one place to another but distributes income, population, developmental patterns, and technological advancements along length and breadth. However, working in different spatial-political contexts exposes individuals to several forms of stressors. As a result, it is considered one of the stressful experiences that affect the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers. Studies have shown that it involves acculturation to the new socio-cultural setup of the host society that accrues various forms of stressors and challenges among migrant workers.¹² The stressors include homesickness, perceived discrimination, uncertainty associated with conflict-ridden zone(s), work-related stress, familial concerns, pre-migration expectations, linguistic barriers, lack of social support, etc. In response to it, they develop various forms of coping strategies to overcome the impact of stressors.

According to Berry, acculturation is the process of psychological and behavioral changes that happen as a result of the interaction of different cultures.¹³ The behavioral aspect is pertinent to the exterior parts of adaptation, which refers to how people pick up the prevailing culture; whereas the psychological aspect is typically associated with values, views, beliefs, attitudes, and perspective.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the study shall consider the psychological aspect without considering the behavioral component, which tries to understand their social adaptation through the acquisition of various skills and interactions. Similarly in another study conducted by Berry (2005), it has been indicated that acculturation results in various challenges due to the occurrence of life events as these challenges occur due to changing individual needs to accommodate in a new society.¹⁵ As a result, people behave in one or four ways which include; *assimilation*, *separation*, *integration*, and *marginalization*.¹⁶ He further argues that the process of acculturation could be a stressful event that is mostly faced by migrants, refugees, or any other staying at places other than their origin.¹⁷ Thus, Berry put forward that the emotional, physical, and social challenges of acclimating to a new culture result in acculturative stress, and it is most often experienced when the acclimating person and the new setting do not fit.¹⁸

Thus, acculturative stress is characterized as psychological difficulties that arise throughout intercultural transitions when individuals encounter difficulties that outweigh their available coping mechanisms.¹⁹ Acculturative stress may harm one's physical and mental health. Hence, according to Berry's theoretical conception of the acculturation model, the model begins with a particular situation or event in the dominant society which the researcher refers to as the 'acculturation experience'. Hence in the present study the different forms of stressors faced by migrant workers while being at the host place were considered as 'acculturation experience'. In other words, stressors faced at personal, social, cultural, and environmental levels were explored.

Coping Strategies

In its most basic form, coping is defined as a person's ability to deal with stress. In this regard, dealing with acculturative stress holds much importance. According to numerous researchers, theories have been given that have tried to throw light on the concept of stress and coping strategies adopted in various contexts. However, the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) given and modified by Dr. Richard Lazarus (1966, 1993, 1999, 2001, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is a crucial one. According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress is a specific interaction between a person and their environment that the person perceives as exhausting or exceeding their capacity for coping and creating a risk to their well-being.²⁰ As indicated by them, if this stress remains unresolved due to

some reasons, it can have detrimental effects on psychological well-being. Thus, this relationship of stress between a person and environment undergoes two major processes (a) cognitive appraisals and (b) coping.

As the concept of coping is a central part of the study and keeping this into consideration, Folkman has defined it as activities that a person performs in a particular situation to lessen stress. For instance, asking for assistance is one example of a coping strategy.²¹ However, when someone is incapable of coping, it indicates that the demands surpass the available resources.²² In addition, according to the *transactional model of stress and coping*, people usually adopt two modes of coping which are directed toward changing the person-environment (problem-focused) and dealing the emotional distress (emotion-focused).²³ Thus, while looking at the ways of dealing with stress, it has been seen that the forms of coping vary among individuals which are often governed by various factors. According to Noom and Vergara (2014) the most common coping responses adopted by Burmese female migrant workers were *approach coping* such as positive reappraisal and seeking help, and *avoidance coping* such as seeking incentives and behavioral inhibition.²⁴ Further, Mak et al (2021) conducted a study to understand the coping mechanisms among Malaysian immigrants²⁵. It was revealed that participants mostly used active coping styles which involved looking for solutions, taking steps to minimize risks, etc. whereas, passive forms like seeking support, negotiation, accepting stressful situations, etc. were also adopted by them while confronting various stressors at the host place. It thus becomes evident that migrant workers employ various coping strategies based on resource availability and their methods for alleviating migration-related stress.

Research Methodology

Data and Methods

The study was part of a doctoral thesis in which a concurrent triangulation mixed method was employed to analyze the acculturative stress among interstate migrant workers while being away from their place of origin. This design enabled the collection of data both qualitatively and quantitatively, thereby, adding value to the obtained results. As the studies have revealed that the construction sector forms a significant proportion of migrant workers, migrant construction workers were selected. In terms of inclusion, only those male migrant workers who voluntarily gave their consent to participate and who have been migrating for more than 5 years, residing continuously for at least 2 months at the host place, and who were continuously working in the construction sector, not less than a period of 3 years were included. It is evident from several studies that female immigrants comprise around 90% from rural areas and 10% from urban areas who migrate each year to get engaged in different forms of informal work. However, it is pertinent to mention here that considering the nature of work they were associated with street vending, rag picking, broom making, domestic work, brick kiln, and other forms of self-employment resulting in the generation of livelihood opportunities. In contrast, female migrant construction workers ceased to exist in the construction sector with the male population being the only available workers found in the sector. Hence, females were excluded and it was one of the limitations of the study in the context of Kashmir Valley.

Thus, 100 such construction workers who have migrated without their families have been considered to maximize and represent the migrant workers, who were selected by stratified random sampling. Since the respondents usually prefer to live in groups, clusters were selected from the district Srinagar of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. Srinagar, being the urban area, with

the highest prevalence of migrant workers in the whole Union territory according to Census 2011 was selected as the universe in the study. However, district Srinagar was divided into 7 tehsils/zones. Later using cluster sampling, a form of probability sampling was employed in which a random sample of clusters from the population, with all members of each selected cluster, were invited to participate.²⁶ Besides, an equal number of respondents from each tehsil were selected using cluster sampling for the study.

Data Collection

As the study involved both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect the data, an interview schedule comprising both open and close-ended questions was used. Besides five-point Likert scale was also used to assess the extent of stressful situations. In-depth interviews were also conducted to have a comprehensive understanding of their everyday experiences. However, 20 out of the total 100 respondents were purposively interviewed based on the 'saturation' which was already achieved after interviewing 18 respondents. But to recheck, a few more interviews were conducted which finally resulted in the conclusion of the interviews with 20 respondents. Thus, data was collected by directly approaching migrant workers either at their dwelling place or at nakkas (labour chowks) where the workers gather every morning to get hired for regular casual work. Besides, they were also approached indirectly through employers (contractors, subcontractors) at their workplaces. Thus, after acquainting them about the purpose of the study, the respondents were interviewed. In certain instances, a specific time was chosen based on the willingness and possibility of the respondents regarding their work hours. All the interviews were documented in written form considering the reluctance of the respondents. Hence no tape recorder was used and *the principles of acceptance and confidentiality* were taken into consideration with each interview lasting for 40-60 minutes. Moreover, in-depth interviews lasted for a few hours to days depending on the availability of the selected respondents.

Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The migrant workers in the study were interstate labour migrants who have travelled from different parts of India. Of the migrant workers (N=100), respondents were the construction workers who were either working as skilled or unskilled labourers. In terms of age group, the majority of them were between 18-30 years, which was followed by the respondents falling between 31-43 years. However, a lesser number of them were falling above 50 years. Besides, the respondents migrated from various parts of India with the majority belonging to Bihar. It was followed by respondents who traversed from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, in terms of religious affiliation, the majority of them (57.3%) belonged to Islam, followed by a smaller number of respondents (37.8%) who belonged to Hinduism. As far as marital status is concerned, the majority (70.2%) were married, whereas (29.5%) were unmarried. Further, in terms of educational attainment, the majority of respondents (31.5%) were illiterate and had never been to school, which was followed by (23.4%) who had studied till the primary level. Besides, only (1.26%) were graduates. It thus clearly reflects that respondents were mostly poor and were unable to spend on their education, thereby forcing them to earn from an early age to meet the family requirements.

Stressors at a Personal Level

Homesickness

While interviewing the respondents regarding their experiences of separation from acquaintances, especially family members, the majority of them (27.7%) expressed feelings of sadness and loneliness as the stressful experience that affected them often at the host place. It was followed by (22.7%) of respondents who considered it sometimes as a stressor. While a small proportion comprising (18.6%) revealed that it did not affect them.

Raheem, one of the respondents from Bihar stated;

Living away from a family stresses me a lot...Sometimes it becomes impossible to survive alone without them...But then I distract myself... (Age, 26)

Rajesh, another respondent from Rajasthan stated;

I feel lonely at the host place...Living away from family and friends fills me with sadness...It is only work that keeps me engaged and detaches me from such emotions for a certain period... (Age, 33)

The above narratives depict that living with group members was not enough to replace the importance of family members and friends at the host place. They were continuously being affected by the absence of their acquaintances and tried to mitigate either through avoiding the situation or being involved in work. Zhong et al. also concluded similar results in their study, that homesickness in terms of missing family members and not being able to visit them both became a stressful situation for them.²⁷ Further, those who were married and had migrated to cities were worried about their children and old parents back home. Thus, they were experiencing anxiety and loneliness as they were separated from their family.

Perceived Discrimination

Perceived discrimination in terms of unfair treatment faced at the societal level was analyzed and it was found that the majority (48.9%) did not face it, hence it did not act as stressful to them. It was followed by (17.9%) where the respondents stated that 'rarely,' it was a distressful situation for them. Besides, only a small proportion covering (6.3%) considered it 'often' a stressful situation.

Ajay, one of the respondents from Uttar Pradesh narrated;

In government hospitals sometimes people don't talk well... they stare... so we often feel scared... Doctors treat us differently... Nobody listens to us there... (Age, 30).

Vijay, one of the respondents from West Bengal stated;

Everybody does not have a similar mentality... During any untoward situation, they abuse us verbally, and we lose our sanity... so we either leave or avoid it... (Age, 20).

It becomes clear that in a few cases, respondents were subjected to marginalization and alienation in public spaces which became a source of stress to them. They were treated as third-class citizens with no sense of dignity who were victimized during critical times. In response, the respondents felt helpless as they found it difficult to respond accordingly (preferably violently) against the demanding situation which in turn filled them with feelings of frustration and mental agony. Similarly, discrimination perceived at big hospitals while seeking treatment due to low caste and belonging to lower socio-economic status also became a source of stress for the participants in the study conducted by Devkota et al.,²⁸ thereby supporting the results of the present study.

Stressors at Workplaces

Working in Hazardous Conditions

Perceived health hazards in the absence of safety measures also became a source of stress for the respondents. During the study, it came forth that the majority comprising 36.6% reported that 'sometimes', it became a source of stress for them. For 19.9% it was 'not at all' a stressful situation as they were least bothered about it. However, 18.9% were 'very often' stressed about the lack of safety measures while at work.

Amit, one of the respondents from West Bengal stated;

It is a risky work...There is no safety particularly, at heights... We often fear falls and accidents... We just manage at heights without any safety gear or ropes...(Age, 32).

It is clear that lack of safety gear while working in hazardous conditions, particularly at heights filled them with feelings of terror and fear. They find it difficult to manage but at the same time were unable to demand their labour rights. Similar results have been confided from another study where the mental health of the respondents seems to be affected by a lack of occupational safety resulting in constant fear of injury, accident, and falls due to lack of provision of safety measures at the workplace (Devkota et al., 2020).²⁹

Work Pressure

Work pressure was another important concern that was reported by the respondents. During the study, it came forth that meeting deadlines and working under pressure was a stressful situation among some respondents. For, 39.14% it became 'rarely' a source of a stressful situation, while among 21.46% it was not at all, a source of stress. However, 15.40% stated that 'often,' it was a stressful situation for them. Besides, a small proportion covering 9.60% considered it 'very often' a source of stress while working at the host place.

Gurpreet, one of the respondents from Punjab narrated;

Sometimes meeting deadlines and finishing at times becomes a source of stress... We have to work under pressure as it is demanded by the employer... (Age, 40).

Another respondent, Avinash, from Bihar, stated;

We are paid in casual mode...but the employer makes us work in contract mode...It puts us under great pressure...we are supposed to work more in less time...it stresses us a lot... (Age, 23).

From the above narratives it is clear that working under definite deadlines as directed by their employers was perceived as one of the critical issues by the respondents. They faced several instances of work pressure like being scolded by employers to finish the task in short duration or receiving the less wages in exchange of more work. Thus, they tried hard to get it done within the stipulated time that often affected their psychological wellbeing. Similar findings have been found in another study where respondents pointed to high workload and work pressure while meeting deadlines as a source of stress which resulted in poor mental health.³⁰

Stressors at Living Place

Stressors while sharing common living place was also analyzed and, in this regard, concerns related to sharing limited space and lack of privacy were found to be the major ones. Thus, it came forth that

the majority comprising 39.39% stated that ‘very often’, the lack of privacy was a stressful situation for them. They find it difficult to talk with their family members and other acquaintances while living in the same room. In fact, they mentioned spending time all alone on footpaths and balconies while communicating with their family in hometown. However, it was followed by 22.2% who did not consider it a stressful situation. Besides, 10.86% of respondents reported that it was a source of stress which affected them ‘often’. It is pertinent to mention here that while interviewing it came forth that the provision of choosing a suitable living place was not available for the respondents. They were subjected to survive in unhygienic conditions within cramped establishments either provided by employers or rented by respondents on their own with basic or no amenities at all. The instances of living within under-constructed structures and buildings with bare minimum fixtures concerning the lack of washrooms were also disclosed by the majority of respondents. In addition, limited space deprived them of *sleeping properly*, within hot and humid conditions with no provision of basic amenities like fans or coolers which forced them to sleep on bare tile flooring (if available in living space). They also disclosed that poor living establishments often exposed them to infestation by rats and other pests that affected them a lot.

Aslam, one of the respondents from Madhya Pradesh revealed;

The condition of the room is not good.... There is a lack of space for keeping things, so we hang it on rope...We face sleep issues in limited space...Sometimes food is infested by rats and cockroaches...There are open spots everywhere...One has to bear it... (Age, 22).

Another respondent, Raju from Bihar narrated his ordeal;

We have to adjust in the same room...Some do not maintain hygiene...The transmission of disease increases from the infected person... To avoid this, I sleep quite early and separately... (Age, 28).

From the above narratives, it came forth that sharing a common space exposed them to several challenges that in turn affected their mental health. The deplorable condition of rooms deprived them of a basic sense of ‘space’ where an individual feels comfort and sense of belonging. They could not compare it with their own living place back at hometown, that usually instilled them with feelings of safety and peace followed by emotional attachment with each belonging of ‘home’. They found the present living place just a ‘transit place’ to manage leaving early in morning and to return in evening followed by preparation for another day. In addition, they were subjected to sleep deprivation, living amid unhygienic conditions, and lack of privacy that was affecting them at personal and familial levels. Regmi et al. (2020) in their study also confided that respondents were subjected to survive in poor, congested, and unhygienic conditions with limited basic amenities available to them³¹. It thus leads them to stressful situations while living at the host place. Further, in another study it was expounded that while living together in groups, very little space was available within a single room, resulting in a lack of privacy, thereby, corroborating the results of the present study.

Feelings of Fear and Uncertainty in the Conflict Zone

As the Kashmir Valley has been one of the conflict-ridden societies, it is characterized by uncertainty, an insecure environment, subsequent lockdowns, and communication blockades. As a result, it has placed formidable consequences for both local and non-local labour classes. Thus, stressors about living and working in the conflict-ridden zone in the present context were assessed. The study revealed that ‘very often’ feelings of fear and safety concerns were perceived as a stressor by the

majority of respondents comprising 38.13%. It was followed by 21.46% who 'often' considered it a stressful situation. Besides, only 9.60% reported that 'rarely,' it was a stressor for them.

Ravi, one of the respondents from Punjab narrated;

During hartal and curfew, the feelings of fear wrap around us... We get concerned about our safety... what will happen in the next moment... (Age, 27).

Another respondent, Satish from Rajasthan stated;

Whenever there is any untoward situation, people refer us by Bihari or Punjabi... they direct us to stay indoors... otherwise, we will be beaten up... We remain quiet... But feel tense... (Age, 40).

The implications of the shutdown have not been confined to the living and working aspects of migrant workers only but have affected their emotional well-being as well. The respondents reported *instances of fear, getting worried, feeling lonely, and distraught* while being confined to rooms amid conflict situations. Some of them had faced backlash from the local people in the form of discrimination (through name-calling and verbal abuse) which in turn affected their mental health.

In addition, blockade of communication as a stressful event was also looked upon and it became evident that 'very often' blockade of communication became a source of a stressor for the majority of respondents comprising 40.91%. The reason was that the snap down of communication channels deprived the respondents of being in touch with their family members and other acquaintances back at home. However, it was followed by 19.44% who did not consider it a stressful situation. It has been attributed to the fact that due to cordial relationships developed with the host population, some of them were able to communicate with the help of local friends and neighbors. Besides, only 9.09% reported that 'rarely,' it was a stressor for them, thereby, pointing towards better handling of the situation.

Abbas, another respondent from Uttar Pradesh mentioned;

Life becomes tough during the snap-down... either we manage to contact through BSNL sims and landline... or do not remain in contact at all... (Age, 35).

The authors verbatim signifies that the respondents were affected by the communication blockade. They either used a local strategy such as procuring BSNL-Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited sim cards (a government of India-based telecommunication company that was the only functional company) or maintained no contact at all and waited for the restoration of communication services. This signifies that in case of migrant workers as well, the brunt of communication snap down was equally shared by them with local population that could not find any other way to get in contact with their family members except either to contact from someone's sim network or to close all the channels of communication till the restoration of services.

Coping Strategies

Seeking Perseverance

While looking at the ways of dealing with several migration-related stressors that the respondents dealt with in their everyday lives, they revealed numerous coping strategies depending upon the stressful event and other associated factors. In the case of handling communication blockade and shutdown, they reverted to emotion-focused coping frequently, with very few instances of 'doing something about the situation' to alleviate the associated stress. Mostly they stated being patient and seeking help from God through praying and meditation as the common ways. However, it is pertinent to mention here that over the years there has been found a shift in patterns of coping

among migrant workers. Initially, they used to leave in haste from the host place subjected to any civil/political disturbance. But with time they got acquainted with local means of adapting and surviving in conflict situation by being in close proximity with local friends and landlords. This enabled them to assimilate in host population which in turn nourished their interaction and ways of handling the stressful situation more aptly.

Neeraj, from Punjab, narrated his ordeal as;

Whenever there is a shutdown or communication snap-down, we do not get to work... we cope by remaining calm and seeking patience... (Age, 19).

Another respondent, Saleem, from Bihar stated;

During the onset of hartal and curfew we used to leave early ... but now coming for more than ten years, I have learned a lot.... the local connections have made my life easier... they share their phones and help me when I need them... (Age, 33).

It is clear from above narratives that the respondents adopted an emotion-focused coping style, whereby the emphasis was laid on regulating the emotional response through endurance. They also tried to adopt informational support – an approach based coping style that aims at seeking support from others to address stressful circumstances. The respondents sought help and advice from local social network either in tangible or perceived forms. In this vein, the use of different forms of coping strategies has also been highlighted by Van der Ham et al. (2014) in which the participants adopted emotional forms of strategies such as offering prayers, and reflecting patience and perseverance while dealing with migration-related stress.³² Further, according to another study, the use of informational support while sharing stressful experiences and getting information about the strategies was evident among female returnee migrant workers³³ thereby corroborating the results of the study.

Accepting the Situation

Similarly, to cope with the stressful situations faced in terms of sharing space and living together, the respondents resorted to various strategies in addition to being patient such as; accepting the problem, showing tolerance, and trying to solve the issue.

Ali, from Uttar Pradesh, disclosed:

Well, we don't have any other option, we face it... We have to manage our situations as we have no other alternative... We are all brothers here, so we share things... We try to help and understand each other... (Age, 22).

Thus, it is evident that the respondents accepted the reality of the situation despite the circumstances seeming to meet the expectations. Although initially, they were reluctant to accept the situation that has resulted in several instances of temperamental issues between group members, however, with time they adopted other modes of coping like 'accepting the situation'. According to Nakamura and Orth (2005), acceptance can assist in retaining a person's mental health and ability to act in the face of unavoidable unpleasant occurrences.³⁴ Thus, the use of acceptance (emotion-focused coping strategy) enabled them to navigate the stressful situation aptly.

Finding the Solution

In addition to above mentioned coping strategies, some of the respondents resorted to finding the solution in response to stressors being faced. They thus adopted problem-solving strategies while concentrating their efforts on the situation they were involved in.

Ajay, from Madhya Pradesh, stated;

We are not provided with any safety gear... it is just a single shirt that they have given us... I have bought these gloves as my hands get affected... (Age, 37).

Sameer, from Uttar Pradesh, stated;

To escape from the feeling of fear and lack of security, we try to remain in localities closer to each other... a sense of 'we feeling' provides us comfort... (Age, 30).

It is evident from the narratives that the respondents tried to find the solution and adopted active coping (a form of problem-solving strategy) where emphasis was given to resolve the situation that was becoming a source of stress. They developed strategies that invoked the sense of doing something about the concern, for instance, 'buying a pair of gloves' and 'forming colonies' so as to live nearby with rest of the interstate migrant workers. Similar form of using problem-solving techniques like active coping has also been analyzed by Mak et al.³⁵ According to the study, respondents resorted to active forms of coping by doing something to relieve the stressful situation.

Conclusion

Labour migration represents a livelihood strategy employed by a considerable segment of the human population. It plays a significant role in the growth and development of humanity. Individuals engage in transnational migration, typically moving from less developed areas to more developed regions in pursuit of economic advantages. Nevertheless, living and working in a diverse socio-cultural environment, coupled with limited familiarity with spatial political contexts, increases their vulnerability in the host location. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the migration-related stressors associated with everyday lives among migrant construction workers in one of the districts of the Union territory of Jammu & Kashmir. In this study, it was found that most of them originated from Bihar, one of the developing regions of Indian states. The majority of them were illiterate and had been never to school, with a lower proportion who were graduates. They were mostly married and had migrated from distant regions to earn a decent living for their family members.

Upon arrival, the respondents were subjected to various stressors that affected them at personal, social, and emotional levels, thereby impacting their mental health. However, in response to it, they resorted to various forms of coping strategies that included seeking endurance, trying to solve the situation, and rarely avoiding the concerning issue. In terms of living together in rented accommodation, they were crammed into a single room amid unhygienic conditions along with a lack of privacy. As far as environmental challenges are concerned, discrimination at the societal level particularly in public spaces was disclosed by the respondents. Further, the feelings of melancholy and distress while being away from family, friends, and other social contacts always haunted them, thereby, affecting their mental well-being. Additionally, living and working in a conflict zone also instills feelings of fear, agony, and distress during civil uprisings that too put a toll on their mental health.

Hence, this study emphasized the several forms of stressors encountered by migrant workers along their journey. It sheds light on the physical and mental disruptions they suffered at various points in their lives, as well as the negotiations they had to make when navigating challenging situations.

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