

Ecological system and psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers during
the COVID-19 pandemic "A Case of Mahachai"



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ระบบนิเวศวิทยาและสุขภาวะทางจิตสังคมของผู้อพยพชาวเมียนมาระหว่างการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-
19 “กรณีมหาชัย”



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ชูชาน โม เคียม : ระบบนิเวศวิทยาและสุขภาพทางจิตสังคมของผู้อพยพชาวมียนมาร์ระหว่างการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 “กรณีมหาชัย”. (Ecological system and psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic "A Case of Mahachai") อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : นฤมล ทับจุมพล

ปฏิสัมพันธ์อันซับซ้อนในแต่ละบริบทของระบบนิเวศส่งผลต่อสุขภาพทางจิตสังคมของบุคคล สุขภาวะของแรงงานอพยพได้รับผลกระทบอย่างสูงจากสภาพการทำงาน ความมั่นคงปลอดภัย และความสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม แรงงานเหล่านี้ไม่เพียงต้องเผชิญกับความเครียดอันเนื่องมาจากการเหยียดเชื้อชาติเท่านั้น แต่ยังรวมถึงความเครียดเนื่องจากความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคม-เศรษฐกิจระหว่างภาวะวิกฤติระดับโลกเช่นการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 เช่นกัน

ก่อนหน้าการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 ในประเทศไทย มหาชัยเป็นพื้นที่ที่ศึกษาวิจัยจำนวนมาก ผู้อพยพจำนวนมากนับพันคนทำงานในอุตสาหกรรมผลิตอาหารทะเล การประมง อุตสาหกรรมเหล็ก และอุตสาหกรรมอื่นๆ ในพื้นที่ ซึ่งล้วนดึงดูดนักวิชาการด้านการอพยพ ผู้จัดทำนโยบาย และนักวิจัยต่างๆ ด้วยความสำคัญทางภูมิศาสตร์ การกระจุกตัวทางชาติพันธุ์ แรงงาน และประเด็นด้านสิทธิของแรงงานอพยพ ซึ่งส่วนใหญ่เป็นแรงงานอพยพจากเมียนมาที่ได้อยู่อาศัยในพื้นที่เป็นระยะเวลานานมาแล้ว จนกระทั่งชุมชนในพื้นที่เป็นที่รู้จักในนาม “Little Myanmar” ของประเทศไทย งานศึกษาจำนวนมากในพื้นที่จัดทำเพื่อศึกษาถึงสิทธิแรงงาน ค่าแรง และการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านที่อยู่อาศัยของแรงงานอพยพ

ถึงแม้ว่าโควิด-19 ระลอกที่สองจะเกิดขึ้นอย่างกะทันหันและทำให้เกิดการแพร่ระบาดในหมู่แรงงาน ในจังหวัดสมุทรสาครทั้งที่ขึ้นทะเบียนและไม่ได้ขึ้นทะเบียน แต่ก็ยังมีงานศึกษาจำนวนน้อยที่ศึกษาประเด็นเกี่ยวกับผู้อพยพ ดังนั้นงานศึกษานี้จึงใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกจากแรงงานอพยพชาวมียนมาร์จำนวน 17 คนจากมหาชัย ประเทศไทย วิเคราะห์โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์แก่นสาระเพื่อสำรวจปัจจัยเบื้องหลังต่างๆ ที่ส่งผลต่อปัญหาความเครียด ความยากลำบากทางสังคม และอุปสรรคอื่นๆ ที่ทำให้แรงงานไม่สามารถเข้าถึงบริการทางสังคมต่างๆ ระหว่างการอยู่อาศัยในประเทศไทย ในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 ได้ นอกจากนี้ งานศึกษานี้ยังพยายามระบุถึงความช่วยเหลือทางสังคมที่แรงงานอพยพชาวมียนมาร์ได้รับ ซึ่งส่งผลต่อสุขภาพทางจิตสังคมด้วย

ข้อค้นพบเบื้องต้นของงานศึกษานี้ พบว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงเงื่อนไขทางจิตสังคมของแรงงานอพยพได้แก่สภาพแวดล้อมในการทำงานที่ย่ำแย่ การถูกจำกัดอิสรภาพในการเดินทาง และความแออัดของที่อยู่อาศัย ล้วนเชื่อมโยงกับประเด็นต่างๆ ทางอารมณ์และสังคม ภาวะว่างงานและความวิตกกังวลเรื่องการเงินยังนำไปสู่สภาพอารมณ์ที่ตกต่ำและปัญหาทางสังคมอื่นๆ อีกประการหนึ่ง งานศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าสภาพแวดล้อมทั้งทางตรงและทางอ้อมของแรงงานมีผลกระทบต่อสุขภาพทางร่างกาย อารมณ์ และสังคม สิ่งสำคัญที่สุด การช่วยเหลือทางสังคมของตัวแสดงในบริบทเชิงนิเวศน์ตามทฤษฎีของบรอนเฟนเบนเนอร์ (1975) นั้นสามารถหล่อเลี้ยงสุขภาพทางจิตสังคมของประชากรผู้อพยพได้จริง ซึ่งตามจริงแล้ว ความสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมเชิงบวกกับมิตรสหายญาติพี่น้อง และเพื่อนร่วมงาน รวมถึงการช่วยเหลือทางสังคมในรูปแบบต่างๆ เช่นการปลอบขวัญทางอารมณ์ความรัก การแบ่งปันข้อมูลข่าวสาร ให้คำปรึกษา การช่วยเหลือทางการเงิน และการหางานล้วนทำให้แรงงานอพยพสามารถปรับตัวและมีความอดทนต่อสถานการณ์ได้มากขึ้นทั้งสิ้น

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The complex interactions in each ecological setting influence the psychosocial well-being of a person. Migrant workers' well-being is highly influenced by their working conditions, security, and social relationship. They encounter not only work-related stress, and discrimination, but are also caused by socio-economic changes during the global crisis such as the Covid-19 outbreak.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand, Mahachai has been a place of many studies and research as it hosts thousands of migrant workers, and its major seafood production, fishery, metal, and other factories in its area. It draws the attention of migration scholars, policymakers, and researchers to its significant geographic nature, ethnic concentration, labor, and rights issues of migrant workers. Most significantly, the majority of the migrant workers are from Myanmar and they have been habiting there for quite a long time. It is known as "Little Myanmar" in Thailand. Many studies have been done in order to advocate labor rights, and wages, and uplift the infrastructure of migrant housing.

Although the Covid-19 2nd wave outbreak unexpectedly come up with a number of locally transmitted cases among documented and undocumented migrant workers in Samut Sakhon, Thailand, there are just a few studies that investigated migrant workers-related issues. Hence, the study utilizes a qualitative research approach by an in-depth interview with 17 Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai, Thailand, and analyzed by thematic analysis to explore the underlying factors that contribute to common stressful problems, social difficulties, and other barriers to accessing social services during their stay in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, the study tends to identify the social support Myanmar migrant workers receive that impacts psychosocial well-being.

The study primarily finds that changes in the physical conditions of migrant workers including poor working environments, mobility restrictions, and crowded housing are interrelated to emotional and social issues. Unemployment status and financial concerns also lead to emotional distress and other social issues. Secondly, the study suggests that the direct and indirect environments of migrant workers have a significant influence on physical, emotional, and social well-being. Most importantly, the social supports of actors in the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological settings indeed nourish the psychosocial well-being of the migrant population. In fact, positive social relationship with friends, relatives, and co-workers, and the various forms of social support such as emotional comfort, sharing information, giving advice, helping out with financial hardship, and seeking job connection strengthens the resilience and endurance of the migrant workers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT (THAI)	iii
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The rationale of the study.....	1
1.1.1 Migrant worker population in Thailand.....	1
1.1.2 COVID-19 situations and migrant workers in Thailand.....	2
1.1.3 Impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on migrant workers in Thailand	5
1.2 Research Objectives and Questions	12
1.3 Conceptual Framework.....	14
1.4 Research Methodology.....	16
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	23
1.6 Scope and limitation of the study.....	24
1.7 Ethical Concerns.....	24
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	25
2.1 Ecological model concept	25
2.2 Concept of Psychosocial well-being.....	29
2.3 Psychosocial well-being and migrant worker population	33

2.4 Social support in different ecological settings.....	37
2.5 Social support and migrant workers in Thailand.....	40
2.6 Literature Review Summary.....	43
CHAPTER 3: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	46
3.1 Profile of Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand	46
3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of Myanmar migrant workers	51
CHAPTER 4: PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT	63
4.1 Psychosocial issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19 pandemic	64
4.1.1 Physical issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.....	64
4.1.2 Emotional issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.....	68
4.1.3 Social issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.....	75
4.2 Social supports in different ecological stages during the Covid-19 pandemic...	78
CHAPTER 5: LIFE EXPERIENCE OF MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK.....	85
Case – 1	85
Case – 2.....	90
Case – 3.....	93
Case – 4.....	96
Case – 5.....	98
Conclusion	101
CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	106
6.1 Analysis	106
6.1.1 Entities in ecological settings enhance psychosocial well-being through various social support	106

6.1.2 The longer length of stay in the host country fosters resilience	108
6.1.3 Literacy and language proficiency foster the adaptation process.....	110
6.2 Conclusion	112
6.3 Policy Recommendations and further research	116
REFERENCES.....	120
VITA	133



LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1, Data Collection Guide	20



LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1, Conceptual Model of the study	14
Figure 2, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory	28
Figure 3, Map of Mahachai/Samut Sakhon Province (Source: Google Map 2022)	47
<i>Figure 4, Participants’ age group (Data: Survey).....</i>	<i>52</i>
Figure 5, Participants’ marital status (Data: Survey).....	53
Figure 6, Participants’ educational status (Data: Survey).....	54
Figure 7, Participants’ length of stay in Thailand (Data: Survey)	55
<i>Figure 8, Living arrangement of participants (Data: Survey).....</i>	<i>56</i>
Figure 9, Participants’ family members living in Thailand (Data: Survey)	56
Figure 10, Participants’ friends living in Thailand (Data: Survey).....	57
Figure 11, Participants’ connections to non–profit organizations, and religious or ethnic associations in Thailand (Data: Survey)	58
Figure 12, Participants’ Thai language proficiency (Data: Survey)	59
Figure 13, Participants’ Covid–19 infection (Data: Survey).....	60
Figure 14, Socio–Demographic Characteristics (Data: Survey)	62
Figure 15, In–depth interview with a female Myanmar migrant worker	63
Figure 16, In–depth interview with a male Myanmar migrant worker	63

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The rationale of the study

1.1.1 Migrant worker population in Thailand

Thailand is well-known for its hospitality, and enormous tourism sectors. It also hosts thousands of migrant workers from neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia in economic and production sectors. The majority of migrant workers are in the seafood industries and other service sectors. The jobs of the migrant workers are being perceived as 3D jobs: dirty, dangerous, and demeaning. Many concerns have been raised related to low payment, labor rights violations, and manipulation and many are unaddressed.

According to the Thailand migration report 2019, it estimates that Thailand now hosts approximately 4.9 million non-Thai residents, a substantial increase from 3.7 million in 2014 (Harkins, 2019). Along with the huge population's presence, there are underlying issues that affect psychologically and mentally the migrant workers. The majority of migrant workers are living in poor conditions and don't have a qualified lifestyle regardless of their great contribution to the economy of the host country. Furthermore, migrant workers come from a low level of education. As a result, they have very few occupational choices, accompany by low pay and long hours of working.

The migration process itself is already complicated aside from settling and adapting to the new environment. Their languages, cultural value, and beliefs are geographically isolated. They have to speak another language and customize a new clothing style. These

usually lead to the perception of the environment as a big threat. Surviving in a different environment also brings a sense of isolation culturally. The migrant families, for instance, are socially disadvantaged as newcomers due to unfamiliarity with the dominant cultural practices and social norms. They are also less privileged in terms of their capacity to voice and exercise their rights related to their children (Paat, 2013).

Migrants are usually in need of social support from the environment. The environment in where involvement of diverse and various people has interactions in terms of socially and economically. On one hand, each party has an important role in its own setting and they exchange their help and resources with one another. Social support provides physical and psychological advantages for people faced with stressful physical and psychosocial events and is considered a factor in reducing psychological distress when faced with stressful events (Harandi et al., 2017).



1.1.2 COVID-19 situations and migrant workers in Thailand

Recently, due to the Covid – 19 outbreak and its multidimensional impacts including health, economic and social issues (Joshi–Ghani, 2020). Thailand has been one of the countries that have huge impacts on tourism and exports, and as many as 700,000 migrant workers mostly in tourism, service sectors and construction sites lost their jobs as their employers downsized their workforces (International Labor Organization, 2020). Since the beginning of 2020, Covid 19 has impacted several sectors globally. New normal lifestyles

have been introduced and other services such as education have been functioning on online platforms. However, COVID 19 measurements and restrictions do not favor marginalized people such as migrants, and other low-charged workers in informal working sectors of the country. In Thailand, migrant workers play important role in boosting the country's economy yet, but their rights are usually ignored.

The initial outbreak of Covid-19 occurs between January 12 – March 2, 2020, in Thailand and mid-outbreak during March 5 – April 23 of 2020 in trolling infection cases in Bangkok. It became more severe after March of 2020 and many entertainments business had to close down (Jindhra et al., 2021). In April of 2020, the respective authority of the Royal Thai Government ordered a national lockdown, 2 weeks quarantine for international travelers, and tourists, and a set curfew. The infection cases are getting higher by cluster infections in boxing, clubs, and other entertainments within Bangkok. Infected cases are deducted more from travelers and tourists who are coming back from abroad in May of 2020 (Rajatanavin et al., 2021). During the early period of the Coronavirus disease outbreak, Thailand had 3042 cases and 57 deaths with a 1.46% case fatality rate as the first wave.

However, the second wave suddenly come up with a number of locally transmitted cases in Samon Sakhon among documented and undocumented migrant workers in mid-December of 2020. So, the authority elevated preventive measures, and quarantine systems to specific areas and populations when the 2nd wave of Covid-19 appeared in migrant workers (Rajatanavin et al., 2021). Myanmar migrant workers were among those

migrant workers. It becomes a serious local transmission issue compared to the 1st wave of Covid-19. The disease found in the seafood market of Samut Sakhon rapidly spread to the migrant community and made things complicated. However, the cases are lesser and slower in later February of 2021 (Rajatanavin et al., 2021).

The second wave brought the attention of the public to poor living conditions. One health professional of rapid assessment of the International Office of Migration in Samut Sakhon states that the quality of water, food, and the room is awful and it needs proper action for elevating the quality of life for the well-being of migrant workers (Kunpeuk et al., 2022). Bangkok Post updated the news on restricting movement and putting under lockdown migrant workers in Samut Sakhon on December 19, 2020, the second wave near the seafood market area. Migrant workers are not allowed to go out from their residential areas. On one hand, it is surprisingly found by the department of disease control in Samut Sakhon that migrant workers are at low risk of being infected as they are healthy and of working-age regardless of being in the area of seafood market (Bangkok Post, 2020). As the Samut Sakhon area is a habitat for the majority of Myanmar migrant workers, social media brought social complications and xenophobia on migrant workers as disease carriers to the community (BBC, 2020).

1.1.3 Impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on migrant workers in Thailand

International labor migration has been increasing in recent years and it is expected to continue increasing. There are various factors that influence migrating and working abroad such as natural disasters, political crises, border prosperity, and livelihood opportunities. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted various sectors including restrictions on the movement of both citizens and migrants.

During the Covid 19 outbreak, human rights violations have been observed and overlooked under the name of virus response and measurement. The vaccination was also prioritized for citizens of Thailand and other economic sectors over marginalized populations such as urban poor, slums, and migrant workers. Migration and legal status were seriously threatened during the pandemic. Not only the absence of legal protection during the pandemic but losing jobs push thousands of migrants to repatriate to their origin of country, perhaps migrant workers are able to find jobs in other provinces of Thailand.

The weak management of border control between countries and the lack of resources to accommodate the migration also add to the flame of scapegoating. Particularly, there are relative challenges in the aspects of mobility among migrant workers since the Covid 19 restrictions are seriously measured. For instance, some migrant workers want to return due to loss of job, and little access to social security aid whilst some don't intend to return to the origin of the country. Therefore, this session discusses and tends to explore livelihood vulnerabilities caused by Covid restrictions in Thailand during the pandemic.

Livelihood insecurity is one of the main hardships for migrants during the crisis. United Nations (2020) mentions that migrants suffered the consequences of economic crisis more than the citizens of the host country due to the loss of jobs, cutting off wages, and long working hours. In the Oxfam report on wages equality, companies taking a break from production by the pandemic impact significantly on fewer working hours and less incomes for migrant workers. Moreover, the report stated that 8 out of 21 workers got no financial support when they were asked to stop working during the pandemic (Triyos, 2021).

The degree of suffering is increased by the restrictions on labor mobility, and urgent repatriation of migrants (Murzakulova et al., 2021). Reducing movement, degree of connection to key personnel and public gathering severely affects the survival of migrant workers whose livelihood depends on delivering services. Furthermore, it is very challenging to meet fundamental services as a community center or other public spaces are closed down during the pandemic. For instance, inquiring about information and remote communication to stay connected is essential (Guadagno, 2020).

The migrant workers who cross the border for economic opportunities face various forms of abuse, violence, mobility restriction, and limited options for working. The inequalities and precarious conditions prior to the pandemic become worsened by the Covid restrictions which eventually lead to displacement, inhumane treatment, and poor border management (Suhardiman et al., 2021). On the other hand, working conditions and work security may

get weaker without proper protection or measurement. It is required to address to reduce the vulnerability of the migrant workers (Guadagno, 2020).

Income loss or deduction of wages can lead to the incapability of buying vital items and sanitary products for the family. It is hard for them to deal with the pandemic situations with limited migration and savings. Low wages and exploited working environment are also major concerns in migrant workforces in Thailand, especially in the seafood sectors. Piece workers in the seafood sectors of Samut Sakhon find challenging to meet their basic needs with their daily wages. They are paid only by the production of finished products which put migrant workers in more vulnerable situations. International Labor Organization reports that pandemic drawbacks all the positive progress to seize the wages inequality (Triyos, 2021).

Migrant workers encounter decision-making dilemmas as there are livelihood insecurities and uncertainties. Some were determined to stay as they had experienced a previous crisis in which they learned a chance to come back to the workplace was very less (Murzakulova et al., 2021). Lockdown restrictions and border closure make the process of migration uneasy for migrant workers. It is risky and costly for quarantine facilities. Moreover, it takes a longer time to get to their destination and to find a job to pay fees to a recruitment agency. Their spatial migrations are being monitored and unwelcomed in their communities as they are being perceived as virus carriers when they return home (Guadagno, 2020).

The failure of the state to include a marginalized group of people such as migrant workers in providing social aid, health care, and other basic needs during the pandemic

really hit them. Being excluded from the Covid income scheme, and providing accommodation or other welfare programs elevate the likelihood of income insecurity. On the other hand, accessing health care services without fear of being arrested is very important as the health data of each individual are being recorded for migration for disease control (Guadagno, 2020).

The legal status of migrant workers is seriously threatened in accessing government aid and social support. Lack of social protection, economic instabilities, and unable to go back to their home country of the lockdown closures put the migrants in Thailand in a very hard situation. Making decisions was very hard for them as there were full of uncertainties. Furthermore, when migrants who lost jobs went back to their origin of countries, they were stuck at the border as the quarantine centers were not prepared enough to accommodate them (Suhardiman et al., 2021). After the border closure announcement in 2020, a huge migration took place on the borders of Thailand. Many migrant workers went back home for the fear of job loss and lack of social protection.

Lack of legal protection is in relation to their illegal status which eventually leads to vulnerable conditions. The absence of legal status and documents become a barrier to reaching out for social protections. Moreover, principles of nationality and territoriality are obstacles to accessing social protection (International Labour Organization, 2021). There are available social protections provided by Royal Thai Government but they are entitled only to regular and legal migrant workers. Migrants without valid work permits and documents are

not eligible to access the social security fund (SSF). Most of the programs are prioritized to the host nationals. Basically, having legal status is a ticket to access social protection programs and schemes (United Nations Thailand, 2021).

The discrimination and scapegoating of the migrant population are getting serious along with the high number of cases. The crisis has turned the livelihood and jobs of migrants upside down. Loss of income or job hit the well-being of the household in the home country and the development of the community as they could not send remittances (Guadagno, 2020). In comparative migration studies article, it highlights the study of Cohen 2020 that the well-being and livelihood securities of the migrant population are heavily hit by the lack of preparation, proper guidelines, and management of authorities to handle the uncertainties and complexities of the crisis (Murzakulova et al., 2021). Having little access to social aid from the state, finding new jobs and adequate resources to return put migrants in a hard situation. Even though some are fortunate enough to keep their jobs, work-related violence, abuses, and threat from employers are inevitable. In April and May of 2020, 32 percent of migrant workers in Thailand are forced to work and take leave without pay (International Labor Organization, 2020).

The inequalities and unequal power relationships are getting wider with the pandemic. The pandemic put migrants in the informal sector at the bottom of the power relationship and lose bargaining power regards to working conditions and wages. Widening measurement and mobility restrictions by the states not only external but also internal

movement. In the case of Thailand, the illegal migration through borders significantly increased along with the large-scale restrictions by the state (Murzakulova et al., 2021). Thereby, long migration restrictions can result negatively on the livelihood of migrant workers as well as the labor of various economic sectors. Thailand encounters a labor shortage as the majority of migrant workers return to their home countries. They work in informal sectors where lack of safeguards when they lose their job (World Bank Group, 2020). International Labor Organization stated that the huge mobility took place in the month of March and April of 2020 and around 1,500 Myanmar migrant workers return through buses from border points in the middle of June (International Labor Organization, 2020).

Moreover, the life and workplace of migrants are associated not only functionally but also emotionally. The disruption of the pandemic on the livelihood also impacts the social relationship and effective communication with the country of origin (Murzakulova et al., 2021). The legal status of the migrants was seriously threatened during the pandemic measure. The absence of legal registration pushes migrant workers into vulnerable situations in terms of wages and working conditions in Thailand. Losing jobs, being unable to pay the bills, unable to buy food, and being unable to find a new job quickly gave me no choice but to go home. Moreover, not everyone has adequate resources to return home and those finally end up on the streets by relying on donated meals (Suhardiman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, accessing social protection is still complicated as it is related to legal status. Basically, they have neither opportunity to work nor to return home as there are

restrictions on internal mobility or domestic movement. Regardless many migrants decide to return home as they do not receive social protection and mobility restrictions which prevent them to seek new jobs.

According to the International Migrants' Day webinar (2021), housing and sanitation issues are very challenging for migrant workers as they have very limited infrastructures during the pandemic. They are economically, psychologically, and socially disadvantaged. Their legal status is seriously threatened in accessing health care services and other social welfare. Social supports and other support facilities are really in need. It is very important not to overlook the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers who are one of the vulnerable groups in Thailand, especially during the pandemic period. Physical well-being, emotional well-being, and social well-being are highly shaped by changes within the pandemic. The majority of the studies stated that depression and anxiety are the most common mental issues being detected in the migrant population. The language barrier, low literacy or health-related knowledge, and legal status push migrant workers away from accessing health services. Negative feelings and emotions can appear in dealing with a different environment and culture. Moreover, the thriving life and well-being of migrants require social support and being recognized as a member of the community (Kesornsri et al., 2019).

On one hand, exploring and understanding the roles of social support in different environmental settings is crucial to seeking the means of psychosocial wellbeing. The support

can be in different forms from different actors within the embedded social networks of migrant workers. The closest people who are family or friends may offer emotional support while other civil society networks or government associations may provide financial or other material needs during a hard time of the covid-19 outbreak which can enhance the well-being of the migrants. Thus, different kinds of social support in the ecological stages of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand would have relationships to shape their psychosocial well-being.

Therefore, the study attempted to explore psychosocial issues and the deterrent of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand focusing on 1st (January – May 2020) and 2nd (December 2020 – February 2021) waves of Covid-19 infection in Thailand. And the study will be one of the early studies in terms of exploring various forms of social support migrant workers receive in different layers of ecological settings shaping the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19 outbreak.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives

This study indicates factors to address the psychosocial wellbeing of Myanmar migrants through exploring the underlying factors that contribute to common stressful

problems, social difficulties, and other barriers to accessing social services during their stay in a foreign country which is Thailand. The study therefore seeks;

- To investigate psychosocial issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19 outbreak.
- To identify different forms of social support migrant workers received in different layers of ecological settings contributing to the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19.



Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the underlying factors influencing the psychosocial problems of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19 outbreak?
 - What kinds of conditions cause Myanmar migrant workers' physical problems in Thailand?
 - What are the problems related to the emotions of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand?
 - What are the social issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand?
2. How do social supports in different stages of the ecological system shape the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand?

- What are the social conditions and issues that Myanmar migrant workers received in Thailand during the Covid-19 outbreak?
- What kinds of social support that Myanmar migrant workers received in Thailand are from different stages of the ecological system?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

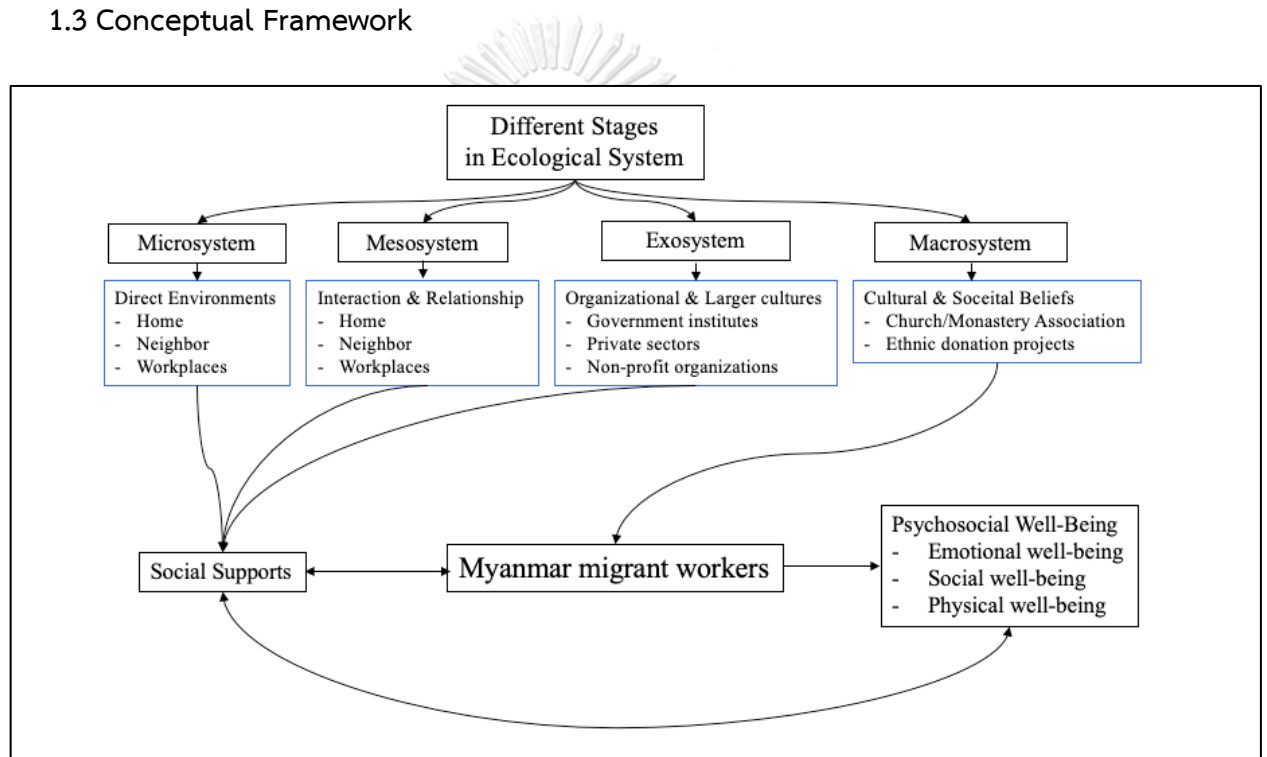


Figure 1, Conceptual Model of the study

Migrant workers need various forms of support that can foster their adaptation and coping process in the environment, especially in times of economic crisis and instability. There are five different forms of settings to analyze how each of them enhances the quality of the environment of the migrant workers. First, the emotional support and guidance from closet

groups in the immediate setting of the migrant workers who are neighbors, roommates, and co-workers are considered important factors in the microsystem. Then, the interactions and relationships between those groups of people towards the migrant workers can influence the well-being of the migrant workers in the mesosystem. In the third, layer exosystem, social services, community services, and other forms of support that offer to migrant workers matter in adapting and coping with the challenges. Next, policies, laws of governments, economic systems, labor market, and media can influence the perceptions of new cultures in a macro setting. Finally, the changes through life after various experiences shape the individuals' attitudes and beliefs about the culture. It is usually applied in longitudinal studies in understanding human development by changes or transitions in life. The social support or guidance each setting offer toward migrants determines psychosocial well-being.

Social services and guidance from friends and community help the migrant workers learn new cultures, engage in various activities in the environment, and improve their mastering of the environment. Furthermore, exploring new things and applying them in face of problems lead to personal growth and overcoming challenges. Participating, helping, and contributing to others in the community also promotes establishing meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. Mutual reciprocal relationship, positive relationship with others, and personal growth is interconnected and produce a sense of belonging. They provide a good experience and a quality environment, which results in the psychosocial well-being of

the migrant workers. To sum up, various kinds of social supports in five systems including micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono could promote Myanmar migrant workers' psychosocial well-being, particularly aspects of emotional, social, and physical well-being.

1.4 Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach in order to understand the context and implications of Myanmar migrant workers regarding psychosocial well-being in an ecological system, and additionally identify different forms of social support migrant workers received in different layers of ecological settings contributing toward the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers.

The research is applied in accordance with the following procedures;

- Firstly, Bronfenbrenner's theory is conceptualized as an ecological system. Then, concepts of psychosocial well-being and its relationship with migrant workers are also reviewed through academic articles and literature as the theoretical background of the study.
- Besides, the study reviewed migrant workers' related issues and social support in Thailand during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The study area is Mahachai, Thailand, and field research is conducted to gather primary data through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. About 17 Myanmar migrant workers are recruited to participate voluntarily in data collection.
- Data Analysis: The survey data is analyzed as descriptive statistics and interview transcripts are analyzed by the thematic analysis. Moreover, the study presented five different cases of Myanmar migrant workers' life experiences during the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand.



Sampling Design

The study recruited about 17 Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai, Samut Sakhon, Thailand. The study emphasized factory workers from Mahachai, Samut Sakhon, Thailand. A total of 17 Myanmar migrant workers in the present study are from diverse categories including gender, age, marital status, educational status, and Covid-19 infected persons and those who are not.

Study Location

The study focuses on the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai, Samut Sakhon of Thailand. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic severely hit marginalized people including migrant workers whose situations are fragile before the

pandemic. Thammasat Institute of Area Studies (TIARA) (2018) states that Myanmar migrant workers have been habiting in Thailand for a quite long time by the political conflicts and economic crisis since 1962 (Than, 2018). According to Asia Pacific Migration Network, only 10 percent of the population in Mahachai are Thais and the rest are Myanmar migrant workers. Mahachai is a hub of Myanmar migrant workers and it has stronger social networks as well as relationships in this concentrated ethnic enclave's area for the long duration of stay.

Moreover, South China Morning Post describes that the shops' signs are written in the Myanmar language, people communicate in the Myanmar language and women wear Myanmar dresses or longyi as there are 250,000 Myanmar migrants in Mahachai. It is known as "Little Myanmar" in Thailand (Eimer, 2012).

Overall, Mahachai has the biggest Myanmar population, and a long period of stay in Thailand could make the community stronger and better social relationships. For that reason, Mahachai is a significant location for this study to explore forms of social support among themselves and within their ecological settings.

Unit of Analysis

Myanmar migrant workers who are factory workers in Mahachai are considered the unit of analysis in this research.

Data Collection Guide

The survey design for this study has three parts: 1) Socio–Demographic Background 2) Underlying factors of psychosocial problems, and 3) Social support. Each part of the survey has the objective to gather data from Myanmar migrant workers that contribute to the research question of the study. Part 1 helped to find out profiles, general information, and working and living conditions of Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai. Part 2 is designed to identify underlying factors of psychosocial issues among Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai. Eventually, Part 3 assisted to identify social support in different stages of the ecological system that Myanmar migrant workers received in Mahachai during the Covid–19 outbreak.

Moreover, the study utilized two data collection methods which are questionnaires and in–depth interviews. The questionnaires (Part 1) are used for gathering the socio–demographic background of Myanmar migrant workers who participated in the study. Meanwhile, the In–depth interviews (Part 2 and Part 3) method is used to explore underlying factors of psychosocial problems and social support that Myanmar migrant workers received during the Covid–19 pandemic.

Table 1, Data Collection Guide

Part	Description	Objectives	Methods
1	Socio–Demographic Background	To find out profiles, general information, working and living conditions	Questionnaires
2	Underlying factors of psychosocial problems	To identify underlying factors of psychosocial in Thailand	In–depth interview
3	Social Support	To identify social support in different stages of ecological system	In–depth interview

The field data collection was done in May 2022 with the support of Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN) in Mahachai, and MWRN announced and invited migrant workers who are interested and willing to participate, share their experiences and insights from the COVID–19. The in–depth interviews with Myanmar migrant workers took fifteen to twenty minutes per person.

Analytical Methods

The survey data are analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to present principal findings using the Descriptive Analysis. Besides, interview transcripts with Myanmar migrant workers from part 2 and part 3 are analyzed with the thematic analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, the study also presented Narrative Case studies of Myanmar migrant workers' life experiences.

The Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The study used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006b) to analyze data collected through in-depth interviews with about 17 Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai, Thailand. Much qualitative research and analysis widely employ thematic analysis, and it is a very common qualitative analysis tool to identify patterns and themes from the findings. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are six steps in the thematic analysis as follows. To sum up, these six steps of the thematic analysis have been applied to analyze collected data from the In-depth interview in this study.

1. ***Familiarization with the data:*** In this initiative step, reading through the collective data frequently assists in familiarizing with the content of the data.
2. ***Coding:*** This stage is composed of producing codes from the familiarized data in order to figure out significant ideas. Meanwhile, repeat the generating code process from the familiarized data.
3. ***Generating initial themes:*** Based on the generated codes from the previous stage, this phase will identify patterns of significant ideas from codes as initial

themes. And gathering the codes which have relevant and similar ideas to make a cluster as a theme.

4. **Reviewing themes:** After starting with a theme or themes at the third stage, this phase involves checking those themes if they are in the right cluster and provide significant ideas and patterns of findings. Besides, reviewing those themes' connections to the research question of the study.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Deep and detailed analysis of each generated theme from generated codes with significant ideas is developed in this stage. Afterward, defining the names of each theme must be an informative and clear statement to present the main ideas of the data.
6. **Writing up:** In the end, this stage concludes with finalizing themes that ensure all data and generated codes have been placed in the rightful theme that answers the research question.

1.5 Significance of the Study

- The study contributes to the literature on the relationship between social support in the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1975) and the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers.
- The study is also a benefit to social workers, health-related workers, and researchers to better understand the ecological system including its different stages, and its contributions to the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.
- The research also provides policy recommendations that intend to improve working and living conditions for the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers in Thailand.
- The study promotes a healthy and resilient migrant population contributing to major economic development in Thailand
- The study is early field research in terms of exploring social support in ecological settings affecting the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the COVID-19 outbreak.

1.6 Scope and limitation of the study

Applying the ecological model in analyzing the well-being of the migrant workers, it is not necessary to include all five layers in the study. As the study has time limitations for applying chronosystem for a longitudinal study, it will focus on the first four layers such as microsystem, mesosystem, exo-system, and chronosystem to explore the influences of people, social and cultural contexts.

Thai Health Ministry also reports that over 1,700 Myanmar migrant workers were infected with Covid-19 in Mahachai (Thu, 2021). Moreover, as the area emerged locally-transmitted cases in the second wave where there is the majority of Myanmar migrant workers, there is just little research regarding health-related issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai. Hence, the study is planned to explore underlying factors and social support for the well-being of Myanmar migrant workers through the field research.

1.7 Ethical Concerns

As human beings are the subject of the study, the study will carefully proceed with informed consent and confidentiality. People's participation is voluntary without any demands of force or pressure. Participants are fully aware that it is their free choice to decide whether they join the interview. They will be given oral consent before the interview. They are also informed and explained necessary information including University Approval, benefits, and confidentiality in order to make decisions about their contributions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ecological model concept

The origin of the word “ecology” comes from the Greek word “oikos” which means “home”. The study of ecological human development is the study of an individual’s survival outside of the immediate setting such as a home. The ability to engage and fit in different social settings matters for human growth. Rapid changes and trends in the environments have profound impacts on the biological development process of a human. A child in a low socioeconomic family and abusive family has a high possibility of suffering mental risks in face of changes (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). A human’s ecology is referred to as an “enduring” environment. Home, street, and neighbors are the most visible setting in the ecological system. Moreover, people who have different roles and relationships with an individual and engage in different social activities will assist an individual to understand social meanings in the contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights the importance of the environment to human development. There are different layers which he called stages of ecological systems. In different stages of ecological systems, immediate individual settings, the interconnection between settings, and the influence of larger cultures' perspectives are included (Eddy, 1981). The first setting is the microsystem where an individual plays an active role in direct environments such as home, colleagues, and workplace. The second setting is the

mesosystem which focuses on the interactions between home, neighbors, workplace, and colleagues. The third system is the exo-system where larger cultures such as government, political, and economic cultures are focused. The last system macrosystem is where the attitudes, values, and ideologies towards the cultures are focused. The individual roles, activities, and relationships in certain settings are being studied in understanding human development (Horowitz, 1980).

Humans are influenced by their daily activities and interactions with various components. An environment that offers a variety of physical and social elements can encourage the participation of an individual in society. Participation will enhance building new relationships through interacting with different people. The relationships and the interaction between different groups of people such as colleagues, family, neighbors, and social workers are analyzed in the mesosystem of the ecological system (Tan et al., 1991). However, the isolation of different environments of an individual such as the far distance between home and school or workplace will result in disintegration. Overall, ecological theory indicates the need of establishing environments that can foster the process of learning and growing (Seamon, 1980).

From a developmental psychology perspective, the behaviors of individuals are predictable by observing the environments they interact with. The ability to understand social meanings in social contexts is also crucial in interpreting human behaviors. In the absence of knowledge about social meanings, interpretation of human behaviors would not be

credible (Horowitz, 1980). From the perspective of social ecology, human behaviors and social habitats are mutually influenced by one another. Different socioecological factors at the micro and macro levels such as employment status and educational background are being considered. Larger cultural systems such as political, and economic systems have heavy impacts on the membership and collective actions of people (Oishi & Graham, 2010).

The socio-ecological approach recognizes the influencing power over the micro and personal factors. It basically focuses on embedded layers of social networks and the importance of those networks (Oishi & Graham, 2010). Beyond the direct setting, larger cultural and public factors in multilayers of the ecological system can influence an individual indirectly. Public policies, transportation systems, and working industries are essential in determining the growth of an individual in the enduring environment. Being familiarized and oriented with the social norms, and policies will equip an individual in adapting to changes in different social settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

The role of the environment in human development is assumed as embedded structures from the ecological perspective. Not only a single setting of a human but also wider social-ecological contexts are also being analyzed in order to understand human growth and potential. Basically, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system of human development is constructed on four major parts; people, place, community, and practical programs. He also illustrated mutual reciprocal relationships in the interactions of various environments (Seamon, 1980). Different forms of aids and assistance to enhance an

individual's life skills are considered social supports. The support can be sharing information, giving advice, and other social actions for the well-being of others. These social supports usually come from interconnected groups such as family, colleagues, and other social groups (Whittaker et al., 1986).

In the early time, Greif and Lynch (1983) illustrated the ecological theory as a process of an individual adaption to the changes in a new environment. An individual has to restructure and adapt according to the demands of the new environment they are in (Ungar, 2002). In analyzing the "environment" in the ecological system, Bronfenbrenner (1975) describes formal and informal social structures such as neighbors, media, and government agencies as exo-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

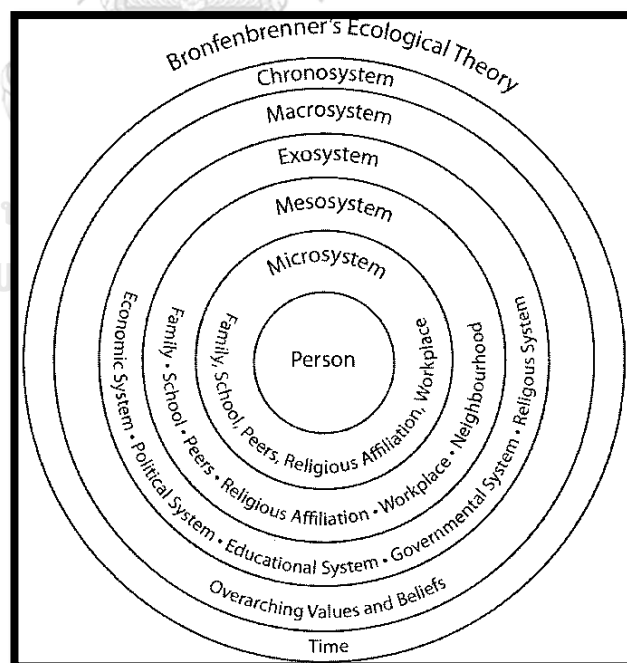


Figure 2, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1979) portrays positive behaviors model in multiple ecological settings contributed ways to look beyond personal factors and it stimulated a way to analyze victim-blaming in struggling to fit into society (Grzywacz & Marks, 2001). Germain and Gitterman (1996) suggest that the conceptual life model portrayed areas to emphasize such as power, privileges, cultural sensitivity, the political culture of the context, and reciprocal exchanges between individuals in determining the adaption of a life's transactional process (Ungar, 2002). The last layer Chronosystem which focuses on time was intended for longitudinal studies to analyze the impacts of changes in the environment over time in human development. It is not compulsory to include all layers in the study, but correlated interactions or proximal processes should be taken into account to identify influencing factors to human development. In investigating growth and wellbeing through the ecological model, Bronfenbrenner (1979) recommends cooperating at least two layers (Eriksson et al., 2018a).



2.2 Concept of Psychosocial well-being

Psychological well-being means positive relationships and attitudes towards self and others which produce a sense of personal growth and mastery of the environment. Subjective well-being reflects dimensions of affect judgments of life satisfaction (Burns, 2016). Well-being is more than a health perspective. The well-being of individuals is associated with a person's reflection on daily experience and identifying their own's potential which also leads to becoming an active member of society (Kumar, 2020). Satisfaction and

positive feeling toward life and daily experiences stimulate a sense of meaning and purpose in life. People who have fulfilling relationships, achieve things, and meet expectations in life nourish self-efficacy. On the other hand, the psychosocial dimension of well-being is studied in relation to social protection in African families. The relationship between social protection and psychosocial wellbeing shows a decline in risk exposures. People who receive social protection are more likely to maintain their psychosocial well-being. This study in Ghana shows that the availability of regular financial resources to meet the basic needs of the family enhances self-esteem and purpose in life (Attah et al., 2016).

There is more than one dimension to measure a person's well-being. The majority of scholars stated that well-being is multidimensional and is composed of social, psychological, and subjective definitions. Participating in different social activities produces happiness and a sense of pleasure which leads to subjective wellbeing. Keyes (1998) highlights the contributions of well-being when a person is socially engaged in society and being a part of its function. For instance, the ability to contribute or share something with the community and be accepted as a member of the community. These can eventually produce a sense of belonging for social well-being (Negovan, 2010). The quality-of-life shares similar characteristics to psychosocial well-being which includes social, emotional, and physical well-being. A person's ability to adapt to the changing environment and cope with the stress can determine personal growth as well as psychosocial wellbeing. Moreover, the recent global pandemic outbreak gives much thought to health practitioners, researchers,

and social scientists on understanding psychosocial wellbeing. Eriora-Orosa (2020) conducts a cross-sectional study of psychosocial well-being in various sectors of the general population. It found out that people who interact with a community that has a negative attitude are likely to radiate negative energy. So, the roles of neighbors and social community are crucial in building social and emotional wellbeing (Eiroa-Orosa, 2020).

Socio-economic inequalities and unequal access to health care are also challenging the overall well-being during the pandemic especially the vulnerable group of people such as migrant workers without legal status and asylum seekers. Mental and psychological well-being is paid more attention to during the pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 by health workers. A study in the International Journal of the mental health system mentions that mental health hotline calls increased at the beginning of the 2020 Covid outbreak in the United States (Otu et al., 2020). People are exposed to anxiety and psychological distress highly as the situations during the pandemic are overwhelming. World Health Organization (WHO) announces the importance of treating one another with kindness and compassion. The initiative programs of community and networks to support the needy population should be widespread in order to reduce the negative impacts on wellbeing (Otu et al., 2020). Psychosocial health is also being studied through a sociological framework. Micro, macro and meso levels are conducted to determine the role of psychosocial factors in relation to wellbeing. According to Martikainen et al., (2002), family, home, and neighbors at the meso level and incomes, resources, welfare, and other legal structures at the macro-level are

taken into account in determining psychosocial well-being. For instance, social support, work-related security, and family matters or conflict as major factors to consider the impact on well-being. Furthermore, the emotional and material support from people or organizations within social networks can contribute to emotional well-being significantly (Martikainen et al., 2002).

Social skills and emotional intelligence contribute to psychological well-being. Morales-Rodríguez et al., (2020) conduct the relationship between psychosocial well-being and psychological factors in university students. It highlights that understanding social behaviors and interaction are important for emotional wellbeing. Human emotional feelings are influenced by cognitive abilities. The ability to adapt and adjust accordingly to the environment is one factor of emotional intelligence as well as emotional wellbeing (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Psychosocial well-being is studied from the urban science perspective through exploring urban landscapes. Landscapes have a deep connection to the psychosocial well-being of the residents physically, emotionally, and culturally. Comfortable interaction within the human environment and achieving identity in the environment are vital in determining well-being psychologically and physically (Hussein et al., 2020). As the perceptions toward the environment can shape the behaviors and attitudes of people, it is important to analyze the society in which people live. Humans' thoughts, emotions, and feelings are closely related to the environment and cultural context. World Health Organization also highlights the importance of cultural context and connection with regard

to psychosocial well-being as they can enhance psychological health through setting goals and building positive relationships in the community (Hussein et al., 2020).

2.3 Psychosocial well-being and migrant worker population

Regardless of significant contributions to the economic growth of the country, there are rooms to improve in addressing health services, poor working conditions, and low social support for the migrants in Thailand (Ewers et al., 2020). The importance of social well-being is highlighted by Reza et al., (2019) who explore economic well-being in relation to the social well-being of Asian labor. It emphasizes that active participation in the community, organization, and receiving social services are important to nourish the social dimension of migrant workers for overall well-being. There are many restrictions, and requirements they encounter to receive their social benefits, especially for temporary and short-term stay workers. Lack of social security and social protection from both the original and host country worsen the fragile condition of the migrant workers (Reza et al., 2019).

The process of socialization in the new cultures is a stressful experience for migrant workers such as learning the rules and laws, values, and beliefs of the host country. Poor working environment, low access to social services, and discrimination are common unavoidable factors for migrant workers. Regardless of having legal status and being skilled workers, migrants are usually viewed as workers for dirty and dangerous tasks by locals. Discrimination always comes along when they seek employment (Noom & Vergara, 2011).

A stimulating variety of coping strategies are required to deal with acculturation stress for migrants. An individual who recognizes coping strategies is able to manage the situation as an active and productive member of society (Ewers et al., 2020).

Psychosocial well-being is required to view from more than individual-level and biological mental health. The field of psychosocial well-being is the integration of individual factors as well as social relations of the individuals (Renkert, 2005). Moreover, Wright (2011) states that individual-level well-being is being shaped not only by individual differentiation but also by social connections to others at the societal level. Individual values, experiences, and social networks are also parts of the migrant's self-assess well-being dimension (Eriksson et al., 2018b). Not only the state of being happy but also actively engaging in life activities and with other people are also considered part of social well-being (Reza et al., 2019).

Building friendship or social network plays an important role as it enhances emotional support in the journey of adjustment and adaptation to a completely new environment. Reaching out to people and making new friends are very helpful to overcome psychological stress and loneliness (Ewers et al., 2020). Having trusted and reliable friends foster the process of coping with the emotional, and psychological distresses of migrant workers. From the sense of belonging aspect, being needed and being helped in society matter to receive a meaningful living (Reza et al., 2019). Moreover, in immediate settings of the microsystem, the attitudes and perceptions of family members, colleagues, and shared roommates play

important role in the adaption process of new migrants as they are likely to influence them (Korinek et al., 2005).

Besides, migrant workers' well-being is highly influenced by their working conditions, security, and social relationship with others. Migrant workers encounter not only work-related stress but also discrimination from colleagues or local neighbors. Engaging in long hours of work, and having no chance of decision-making in work can stimulate stress and affect mental wellbeing. Working conditions of migrant workers in Spain are being studied in relation to psychosocial well-being. The study by Bretones et al., (2020) find that poor living standards, insecure working conditions, and being discriminated can lower the quality of the environment of migrant workers and become barriers to personal development in the long term from the conceptual framework of the study based on work-related and organizational factors. Moreover, the psychosocial distress of the migrant workers is quite high as they encounter discrimination and a lack of support from fellow workers (Bretones et al., 2020).

In order to be a well-functioning member of society, it is important to build a meaningful relationship with others and build a sense of belonging by contributing to society. Having good friends, participating in community activities, learning new things and mastering skills such as language or work-related can enhance the psychosocial well-being of the migrant workers. Expanding social networks and building meaningful social relationships are associated with the well-being of the people. Campbell highlights the importance of social

connectedness which can enhance the mental-wellbeing rather than material needs (Campbell, 1981).

The long-term survival and growth of migrant workers require more than physical needs. Lack of purpose and autonomy over self can diminish a sense of satisfaction in life. The social psychology study by Emmons (1986) at the University of Illinois explores subjective well-being with a personalized approach. Having opportunities in work, and the ability to overcome negative experiences stimulate a sense of stratification in life. Motivation and goals in life come from the positive emotions of a person. In contrast, having a life goal decline negative experience and situation. Seeing purpose in life, and being respected and acknowledged can drive personal striving and development (Emmons, 1986).

Undocumented migrant workers have a high possibility of being exploited and encounter security issues in terms of food and labor. The vulnerable status of migrant workers has a heavy impact on access to health services and the ability to cope with stress regarding food, and accommodation. Those migrant populations especially those from low educational backgrounds are in need of helpful accompanies or friends for social wellbeing (Sedmak, 2019).

The vulnerability to mental disorders is explained from biological, environmental, cultural, class, and race in the book the return migration in later life by Leavey & Eliacin (2013). It highlights that return migrants encounter culture shocks and challenges to adapt to their home community environment. Thus, having an environment in which migrants can

build positive relationships, and improve self-esteem and personal growth is very critical for overall wellbeing. The psychosocial or mental well-being of migrants is related to a vulnerability in culture, social capital, family structure, and class. Factors such as coming from a certain ethnic background with shaky identity and racial issues contribute to mental well-being in a negative way (Leavey & Eliacin, 2013).

A systematic review of the well-being of unskilled migrant workers is being studied by Wang et al., (2020) that there are several factors that contribute well-being of migrant workers such as financial condition, social relations, and psychological and physical conditions. Low socioeconomic status of unskilled migrant workers disadvantages in accessing resources. In terms of physical conditions, migrants in crowded places or dormitories are unable to apply Covid measurements. Moreover, they usually face social discrimination and negative perceptions from the people. The pandemic outbreak has doubled their vulnerabilities in their livelihoods (Wang et al., 2020).

2.4 Social support in different ecological settings

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was studied as a groundwork for understanding resilient communities in the anthropologic field of study. Proximal processes between individual and broader contexts are emphasized by sociologists to have a wider picture of how individuals manage to live their best and adapt to circumstances accordingly (Gulbas & Zayas, 2017). The study of accumulative stress among Burmese female migrant

workers 2011 states that low self-esteem is related to accumulative stress. Migrant workers need to learn and adapt to the cultures urgently in order to survive and function well in society. When they are unable to adapt, they are more likely to suffer psychological distress as a result (Noom & Vergara, 2011). The social integration of urban migrants lies upon social organizations in different layers of the ecological system. Daily activities of migrant workers in urban settings such as going to work, and taking public transportation are required information and support that assist them in the transition period of residing in urban (Korinek et al., 2005).

The cultural role was heavily emphasized within Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological development framework. Daily social actions, behaviors, cultures, and beliefs of different cultural groups shape individuals' experiences and outcomes. The resilience study in Mexican immigrant families highlighted the beliefs and lifestyles of a family through Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological settings in relation to well-being. Practices within the family matter for the positive outcomes of the individuals. However, environments outside of the family such as access to resources, neighborhood safety, and formal and informal supports foster the well-being of the individuals (Gulbas & Zayas, 2017). The migrant workers in Thailand, have less voice in practicing their rights. Employers control their freedom of association, and limited wages, and were against forming their own labor union in the past years. In the later period of 2007, the Action Network for Migrants (Thailand) along with the Thai Labor Solidarity Committee (TLSC) launched an introduced Thai workers to migrant workers issues and

worked on social integration of migrant workers through Thai unions membership (Pollock & Aung, 2010).

In mixed-status family studies of Mexican immigrants, educational background, internal resources, language, and legal status were analyzed in the cultural script of silence. Receiving health care services, social support, and community solidarity are highlighted under the category of political economy and distribution of resources to vulnerable people. All these factors shape the outcomes of the child or individual in terms of a sense of belonging, social well-being, and perception of identity (Gulbas & Zayas, 2017). Migrants encounter major difficulties in trying to get access to the healthcare system by the absence of health insurance information, discrimination, language, and financial difficulties (Hall et al., 2019).

Weak implementation of social security, welfare programs, declining rates of unemployment, and political populism contribute to misconceptions among natives and guest workers (Reza et al., 2019). Many local workers encounter insecure and unreliable employment. The importance of occupational health and safety is being emphasized by Flynn & Wickramage (2017) in relation to the migrant population. Uplifting the working conditions of migrants will be beneficial to both migrant and local workers such as holistic health programs in the workplace. Most importantly, this will seize the gap between these workers and initiate social integration (Flynn & Wickramage, 2017). Protection for the rights of vulnerable workers in accelerated changes within the global economies is very

challenging. Discrimination, being abused at the workplace, additional assignments at the workplace, low wages, and less power in decision-making have significant effects on physiological well-being (Mucci et al., 2020).

Positive health behaviors are studied from an ecological perspective. It highlights that community characteristics in the mesosystem of the ecological model have much influence on the health behaviors of individuals. Insecure neighbors keep individuals from active participation as fear of victimization acts as a barrier (Grzywacz & Marks, 2001). Labor law in Thailand stated the protection of migrant workers regardless of status and premises the payment for urgent discharge situations in workplaces. However, the majority of migrant workers do not benefit from the payment package yet. Laws restrictions and policies on documentation such as prohibiting traveling across the provinces to find a new job make them lose their legal status rather than gaining legal protection (Pollock & Aung, 2010).



2.5 Social support and migrant workers in Thailand

The support of government matters in order to survive throughout the pandemic period, especially for workers in the informal sector. According to an Asian foundation report, low-skilled workers who have very low incomes are seriously impacted and they have lower survival possibilities compared to other areas of the workforce. The government has initiated support programs such as 5000-baht cash support to vulnerable labor workers. However,

the eligibility criteria to fit in the program and registration process are still complicated. The majority of migrant workers are not covered in the support programs (Thaiprasert et al., 2021). On the other hand, the Royal Thai government–initiated social security fund (SSF) for migrants' informal workforces and provided basic health protection to migrants in informal workforces. However, the process of acquiring services is still challenging as there are language gaps, heavy documentation, and time–consuming (Ansart, 2021).

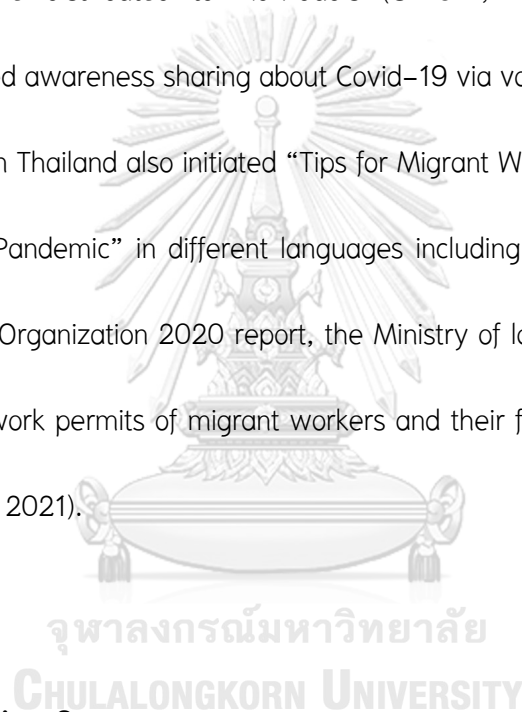
Low wages and exploited working environment are also major concerns in the migrant workforce in Thailand, especially in the seafood sector. The covid–19 has widened the existing inequality gap in the global economic system and labor market. The ASEAN community also prioritized social protection and supports for migrant workers during the pandemic. The 13th ASEAN forum on migrant labor report by International Labor Organization stated that the Thai government elevated the coverage scheme of the Universal Health Care (UHC) for migrant workers in Thailand. For instance, the expenses of health treatments in public and private hospitals are free of charge regardless of status (ILO, 2021). Moreover, the Oxfam report of the CSO coalition mentioned that the Civil Society Organization Coalition for Ethical and Sustainable Seafood has been working on better working conditions, especially for regular minimum wages. As getting sufficient wages is recognized as a human rights issue, the CSO coalition has a strong faith that can support decent living and bring food security to the migrant workers who have families to feed. Not having enough income can lead to more vulnerable situations. For instance, basic sanitation

items such as masks and alcohol gels are needed in their respective workplaces which will encourage to imply the measurements during the pandemic in their respective workplaces (Triyos & Oxfam, 2021).

Receiving reliable information and knowledge in a timely matter is a key factor in keeping safe from Covid 19. The migrant communities need not only basic physical needs but also knowledge assistance. After the border closure announcement in 2020, huge mobility took place within the borders of Thailand. The majority of Myanmar migrants went back home for fear of job loss and lack of social protection. Moreover, the political instability in Myanmar has also worsened the precarious conditions of the returning Myanmar migrant workers. A Situational Analysis of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Covid-19 Before and After February 2021 in Myanmar stated the absence of safety facilitations for returning migrant workers (La et al., 2021). The way the government channel key information or announcement to various group of people especially non-Thai communities are important. In order to give the best possible access to information to migrant workers, the Thai government delivers information via community leaders, and social workers in their own languages (Internews, 2020).

The roles of local and international non-governmental organizations are crucial in assisting the social needs and protection of migrant workers along with trained social workers. The cooperation of actors from multilayers is crucial in reaching out to vulnerable groups during the pandemic. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

(UNICEF) Thailand 2020 report stated that UNICEF cooperated with U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) and Raks Thai Foundation (RTF) partners for workshop training in Samut Sakhon Myanmar migrant communities. In order to seize the language barrier, the essential information about protecting families during the pandemic was being delivered in the Myanmar language. Furthermore, soap bars, face masks, and hand sanitizing gels were distributed to individuals (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, actors in multilayers increased awareness sharing about Covid-19 via various platforms. International office of Migration in Thailand also initiated “Tips for Migrant Workers Whose Job Is Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic” in different languages including Myanmar. According to the International Labor Organization 2020 report, the Ministry of labor in Thailand granted and approved expired work permits of migrant workers and their families for a temporary stay without a fine (ILO, 2021).



2.6 Literature Review Summary

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights the importance of various environmental settings to the development of a person. The complex interactions in each setting influence the psychosocial well-being of a person. The origin of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is about the study of child development and the influence of the environment. The quality of a child's environment is much associated with the level or degree of support that each setting offers to learn and adapt to various social meanings such as

school, church, and home. Moreover, the ecological model seeks not only the child and various settings but also the interactions among various settings towards the child. Changes in different sectors such as economy, lifestyle, and technology can also mix up the development process of the child.

As the study focuses on a vulnerable group of people who are migrants, the ecological setting of Bronfenbrenner can be very helpful to analyze how social relations among new settings towards a person enhance or break down the adaptation process. Receiving various kinds of support not only from the closed environment such as neighbors and collages but also from wider environments such as government social services, and policies foster long-term wellbeing and shapes the attitudes of a person towards a new environment. Furthermore, the migrants are a group of people who mostly suffer the consequences of economic crisis and instability. They do not have enough resources in terms of finances, food, and accommodation to cope with the pandemic crisis and follow strict measurements by themselves. A majority of migrant workers are low-skilled with little payment, they cannot afford special space for social distance, daily masks, and other sanitizers. Heavy attention of the state or health officers to the migrant populations also makes the situation harder such as bubbles and seals in Mahachai, Thailand. They require social support and services from different stakeholders to be able to survive the unexpected shock.

Most significantly, the vulnerability of migrant workers has become twice in times of economic crisis and instability worldwide. Social media also brought sensitive news with unfiltered information which disturb social cohesion among Thai and non-Thai residents. Misinformation also shot up Xenophobia in society. These factors can impact their psychological, social, and physical well-being. The level or degree of help that each setting offer is very critical in determining their survival and adaptation to overcome challenges in the crisis. What various organizations and actors in each setting connect and initiate support for the migrant people matter in defining psychosocial well-being within the ecological model.

Particularly, the pandemic has terribly hit and changed various sectors worldwide. Along with the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, perspective on well-being also changes. The concerns related to the vulnerable population such as migrant workers are getting higher for researchers, health officers, State Government, and the general population. Limbo situation of migrant workers are also highlighted in news media when the Thai Government announced the border shut down. Surviving in an economic crisis is very challenging as it impacts the sustainable livelihood of the migrant population. The good progress of labor and human rights practices are drawbacks to the economic crisis of the pandemic. Therefore, the study will attempt to explore the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers and means of seeking support through the lens of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model by focusing on the first four layers from the direct environment to the indirect environment.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

In this section, the geographic nature, livelihoods of the people, and significant economic characteristics of Mahachai, Samut Sakhon will be portrayed in relation to migrant workers. Besides, data from questionnaires will be illustrated and explained in charts and graphs to highlight the socio-demographic features of the sample population in the second section.

3.1 Profile of Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand

The study is conducted in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province. It is a home for thousands of migrant workers from neighboring countries, especially from Myanmar and it is located southwest of Bangkok. The province is composed of three districts such as Muang Samut Sakhon, Krathum Baem, Ban Phaeo. The province was known as “Chin” as it was near the Chin River and trading port in the former days. When the canal was made in 1704 for the area, the name was changed to “Mahachai”. However, it was renamed King Rama IV as “Samut Sakhon” yet it is still known as Mahachai by the locals (Barrow, 2022).



Figure 3, Map of Mahachai/Samut Sakhon Province (Source: Google Map 2022)

As it is the largest seafood production area among coastal provinces, it attracts migrant workers which majority are ethnic groups from Myanmar. There are approximately 3,000 factories and 100,000 migrant workers in fishery sectors (Karnjanatawe, 2012). Labor Rights Promotion Networks (LPN) states that there are 199,508 registered migrant workers in 2012 and 70,508 are from Myanmar among the total population of Mahachai (Masardi, 2013).

In the comparative studies of the well-being of the two provinces Samut Sakhon and Samut Songkhram, it finds out that regardless of the higher economic growth of Samut Sakhon, the well-being of Samut Songkhram is much higher. The study brings attention to social factors of Samut Sakhon province such as migrant labor, population, and ownership of lands. Many undocumented migrant workers do not get access to health and other social services. Human trafficking and labor rights abuses occur more often (Parks, 2012). The

majority of small seafood factories had to shut down as they encountered labor abuses and human trafficking in 2015. On one hand, large seafood factories still stand and they become vital to seafood production (Areeprachakun, 2020a)

In terms of population and ethnicity, there are Chinese, and Mon ethnic from Myanmar who migrated many years ago. Thai people from another part of the country habitat in the Samut Sakhon area for job opportunities. However, the majority are Myanmar migrant workers and it is known as "Little Myanmar" in Thailand (Areeprachakun, 2020b). The lifestyle study of Mahachai, Samut Sakhon states that it becomes a set of diverse ethnic workers. A social network is a key for various social supports for migrant workers in terms of information, emotional and instrumental aids. The social network is a vital source of job seeking and housing. They also build positive relationships with Thai neighbors, peers, and employers. Strengthening the social network assists migrant workers in dealing with economic and other social issues (Sarapirom et al., 2020).

According to the provincial office of Samut Sakhon, half of Myanmar migrant workers are undocumented workers who lack proper access to accommodation, and social services (World Health Organization, 2020). Mon ethnic is one huge group that made up the migrant population there. They are able to speak both Mon and Burmese languages. However, the language barrier is one common issue encountered by migrant workers communicating in Thai. In order to assist migrant workers in adapting to the cultures, there are language–

teaching programs provided by Rak Thais Organization and Labor Rights Promotion Networks (LPN) within Samut Sakhon area (Adkins et al., 2015).

Scholars describe this province as a culture overlapping area with the combination of several cultural practices and identities. With the mixed ethnic group, it encourages cultural boundaries among ethnic groups, insiders, and outsiders (Areeprachakun, 2020b). The province becomes a high ethnic concentrated area by its geographical nature and biggest industrial sectors. Along with the employment opportunities in those industrial and fishery sectors, migrants create habitat in the area, which is relevant to their income as well. It eventually leads to ethnic enclaves with the growing ethnic characteristics and cultures in the area. For instance, restaurants, groceries, and other shops operated by ethnic groups. The advertisements and signposts are written in ethnic languages (Vanpetch & Sattayathamrongthian, 2019).

The Samut Sakhon province is considered one of the most prosperous provinces in Thailand yet the prosperity does not benefit migrant workers. Migrant families earn around 13,000 baht as a monthly average for various expenses. They are usually in poor living and working conditions (Adkins et al., 2015). The province significantly boosts the GDP of the country through its fishery, and various industrial productions such as plastic, textiles, and metal. Moreover, there are huge numbers of workers in Samut Sakhon working in tuna processing which demands an intensive labor force. Migrant workers are being hired as they demand payment lower than native workers in Thailand. However, fishery and industry

sectors face labor rights issues and human smuggling issues regard to migrant workers. On one hand, there are organizations that work for labor and migrant rights near the seafood productions area of Samut Sakhon such as Labor Rights Promotion Networks (LPN) and Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRL) (Areerachakun, 2020b).

Recently, the second wave outbreak of Covid-19 in Mahachai made the life of migrant workers more challenging as it brought huge complications in social, emotional, and physical well-beings. The disease control department stated that undocumented migrant workers and their free mobilities are the causes of the rapid spread of infections. The issue of Xenophobia reached a peak in the Thai community but the entertainment business is still operating. Migrant workers are being discriminated against as virus carriers to society. There was a certain period of time that put migrants in a very harsh situation. Health officials announced “Bubble and Seal” to the Samut Sakhon area to contain viruses when the Covid-cases were over 7,000 in February 2021. It was a pressure for factories to provide on-site accommodation for workers. The bubble and seal measurement does not allow factory workers to leave their dormitories (Tylor, 2021).

The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) has a strong belief in the bubble and seal measurement and proposes to the National Communicable Disease Committee (NCDC) for funding (National News Bureau Thailand, 2021). The state’s response to the Samut Sakhon case was being critiqued as it heavily puts measurement only on the migrant community who are in crowded accommodations. Along with this challenge, the corruption, and

fragmented administration of government regarding human smuggling are being highlighted (Wattanasukchai, 2021). As Mahachai is a habitat for a large population of migrant workers who are documented and undocumented, handling infection cases were quite challenging for health officials and the state government. Many concerns regarding national security and racialism were raised with the second wave of Covid-19 in Thailand.

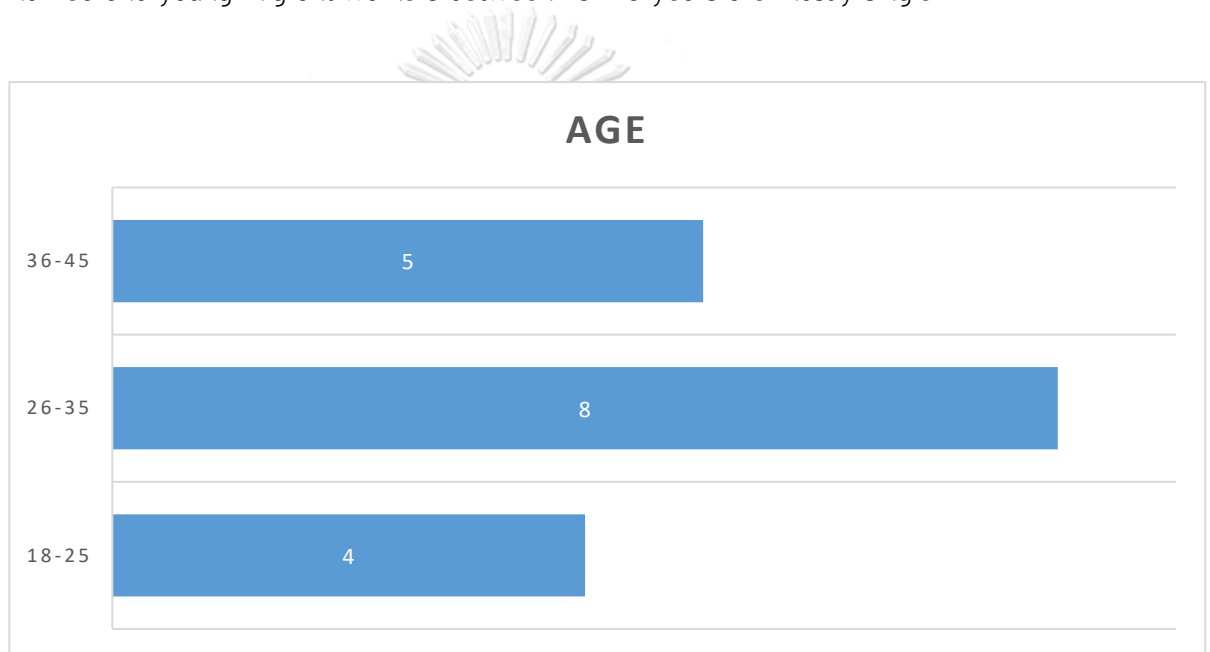
3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of Myanmar migrant workers

In this session, the principal findings (data) of the research are presented. The data represents the socio-demographic characteristics of 17 Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai, Thailand who voluntarily participated in data collection for this study.

The majority of participants in the study are female: 11 (65%) and male: 6 (35%). All of them are factory workers regardless of small or big factories, and the study includes participants from different factories in Mahachai. In fact, the study planned to have gender balance for data collection. However, as the data collection is voluntary basic for participants, female participants are more active than male participants when they have been invited to participate voluntarily.

The participants' age range is from 18 to 45 years old in the study. The age group of 18 – 25 years old is 24%, 26 – 35 years old is 47%, and 36 – 45 years old is 29% of the study (See Figure 4). Moreover, there are three categories of marital status in this study. There are 71% of participants are married, 23% of participants are single, and 6% of

participants are divorced (See Figure 5). Between those participants' age and marital status in this study, only 25% of the age group 18–25 years old who is married and the rest 75% are single. There is only 13% of the age group 26–35 years old are divorced and 87% are married. Besides, only 20% of the age group 36–45 years old is single and the rest 80% are married. Therefore, the result shows that the majority of the age group 26 – 45 are married and young migrant workers between 18–25 years are mostly single.



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Figure 4, Participants' age group (Data: Survey)

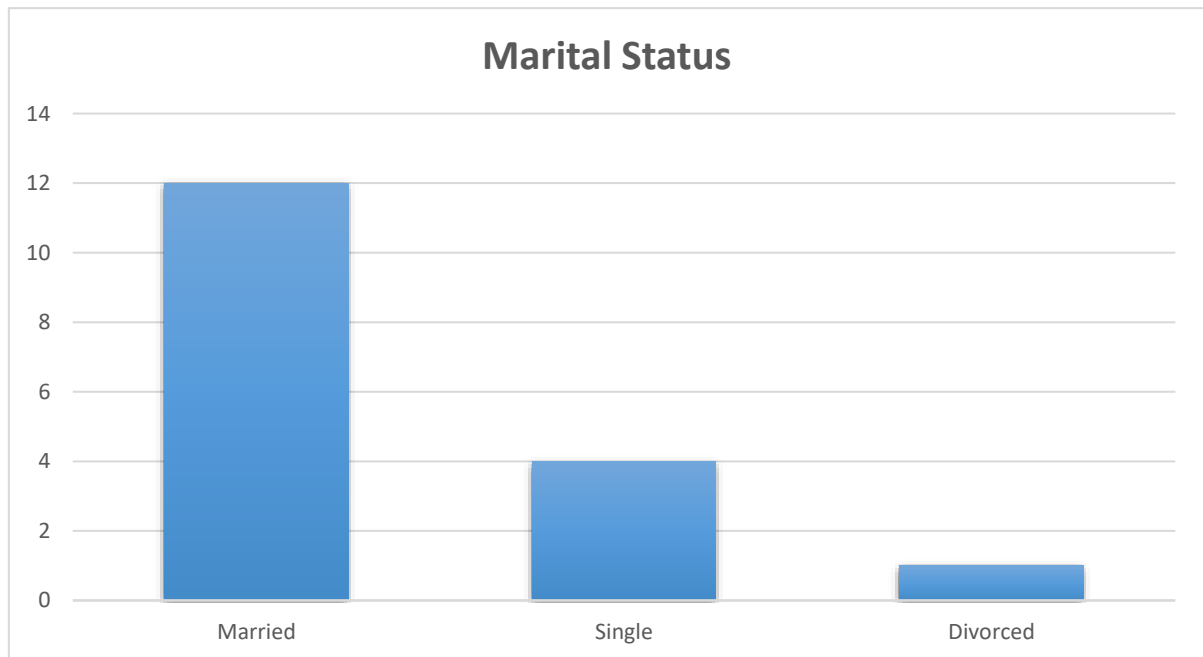


Figure 5, Participants' marital status (Data: Survey)

According to the present study's data, the majority of participants had the chance to study. There are 29.5% of participants went to High School, 35% of participants went to Middle School, 29.5% of participants went to Primary School, and only 6% of participants didn't have a chance to go to schooling (See Figure 6). However, regardless of the educational level of Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai, their income relies on their skills and the factory where they work and get paid a certain amount per hour. For example; some participants who have a different level of education, but work in the same factory and get paid the same amount. However, there is just a slightly different based on the overtime working.

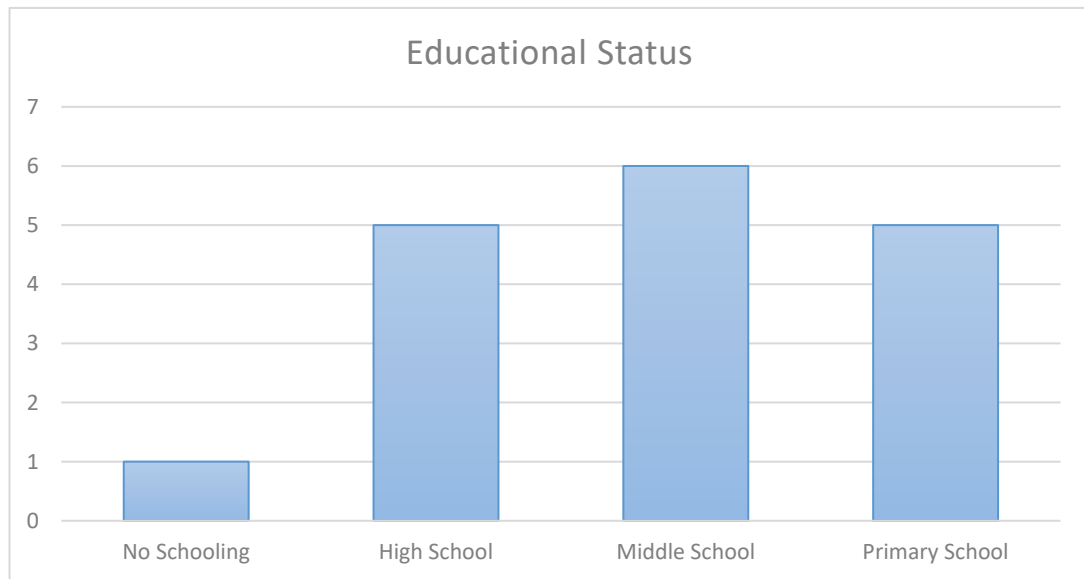


Figure 6, Participants' educational status (Data: Survey)

In terms of length of stay, the majority of participants who have been staying and working for 4 to 8 years in Thailand are 59% of participants in this study. From 0 to 3 years, there are 23%, from 9 to 12 years were 6%, and participants who have been staying and working for more than 13 years in Thailand are 12% of participants (See Figure 7). Especially, for a group who has just been in Thailand for 0 to 3 years, they would have been tougher in the midst of the COVID-19. Since they arrived in Thailand just a year/half year before the pandemic, they did not have a long period to adapt to the new environment, new culture, and new people. When it comes to a difficult situation, it could have more impact on their survival and thriving livelihoods during the pandemic with fewer social connections and relationships. In contrast, Myanmar migrant workers who have stronger social connections and relationships in Thailand could have more support physically, emotionally, and financially.

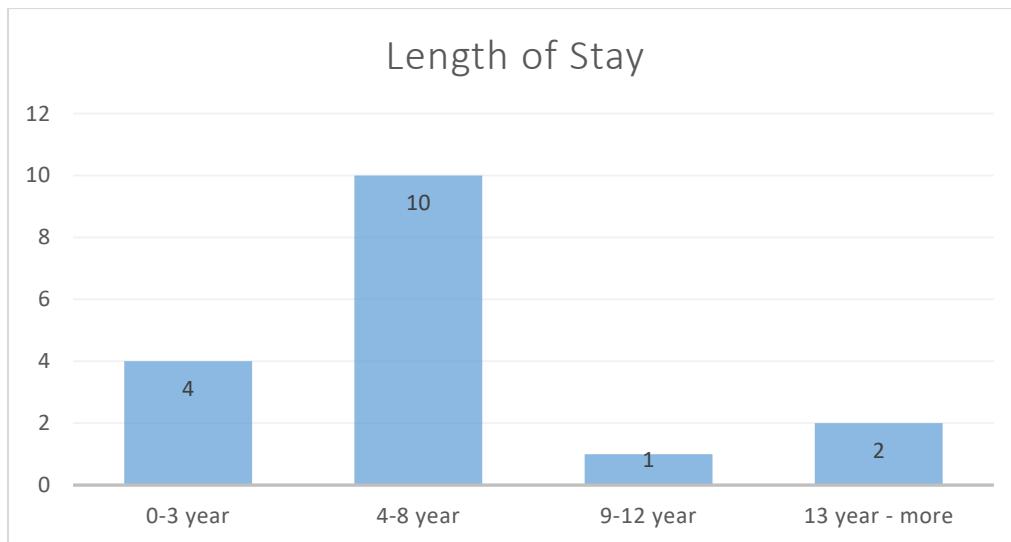


Figure 7, Participants' length of stay in Thailand (Data: Survey)

The data in Figure 8 presents that 59% of participants stay with family, 29% of participants stay with friend/s and 12% of participants stay alone in Mahachai, Thailand. In addition, more than half of the participants have family and family members in Thailand. There are 59% of participants have family members living in Thailand. Meanwhile, there are 41% of participants do not have family members living in Thailand (See Figure 9). Moreover, the study also found that all participants have friends who are living in Thailand as 100% of 17 participants (See Figure 10).

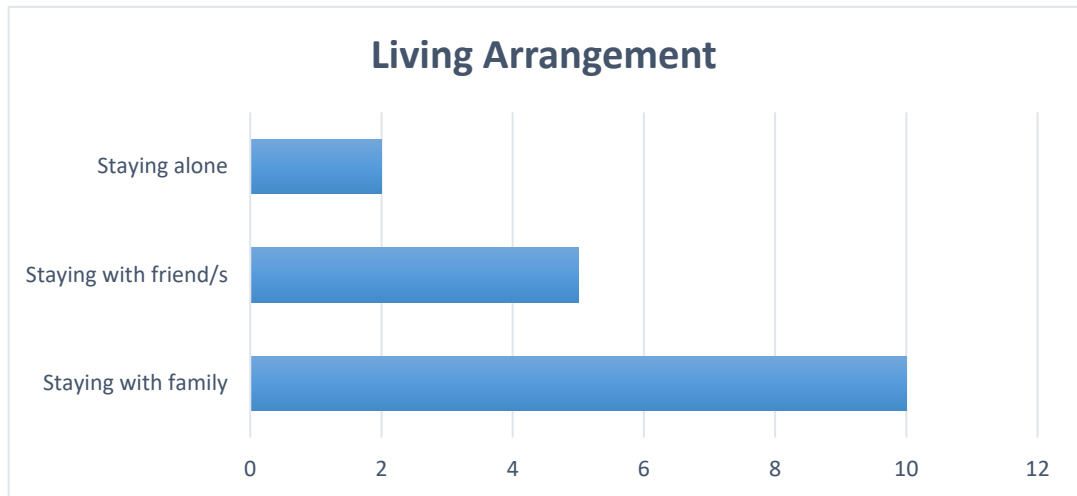


Figure 8, Living arrangement of participants (Data: Survey)

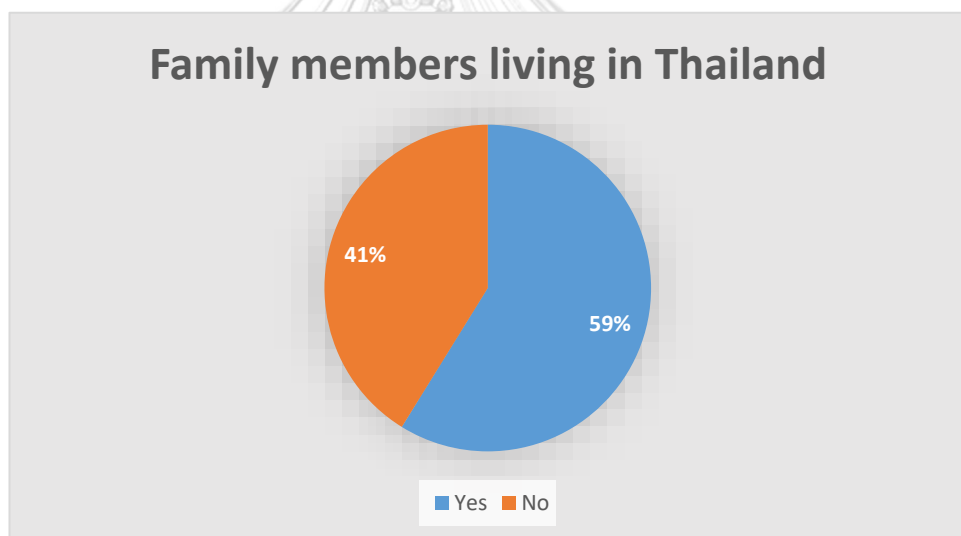


Figure 9, Participants' family members living in Thailand (Data: Survey)

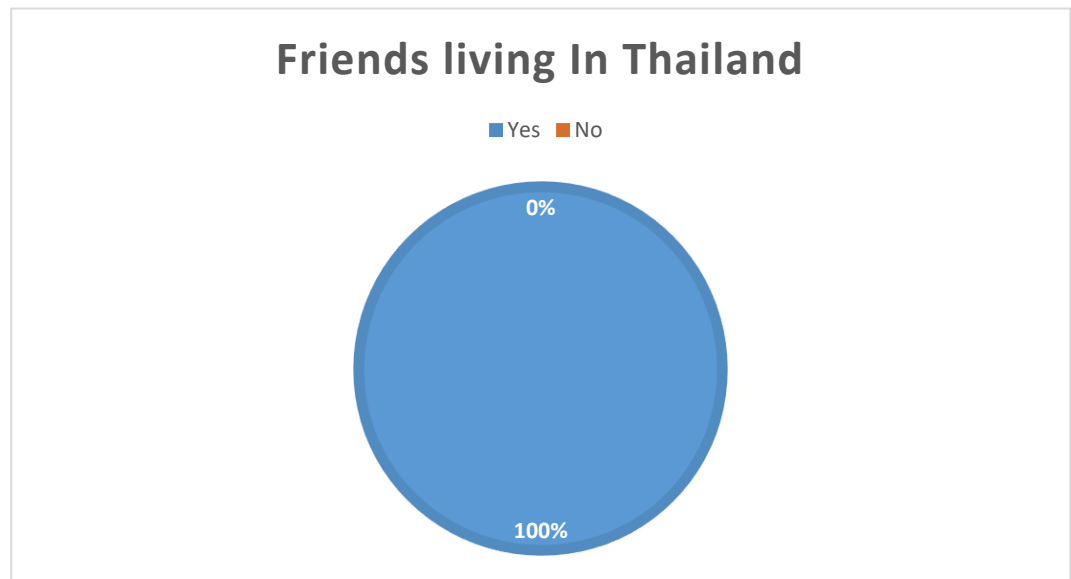


Figure 10, Participants' friends living in Thailand (Data: Survey)

The study also found that Myanmar migrant workers from Mahachai have connections to non-profit organizations and religious or ethnic associations in Thailand such as the Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN), Migrant Working Group (MWG), and Aid Alliance Committee for Myanmar Workers (AAC). Statistically, there are 76% of the participants have connections to non-profit organizations and religious or ethnic associations in Thailand. Meanwhile, there are 24% of the participants do not have connections to non-profit organizations and religious or ethnic associations in Thailand (See Figure 11). Particularly in a difficult situation like the COVID-19 outbreak, vulnerable people including Myanmar migrant workers have been hit the most economically and from health perspectives in Mahachai. Despite various adversities caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, Myanmar migrant workers who have connections to non-profit organizations and religious or ethnic associations are able to reach out to request support as well as participate in donations and voluntary work.

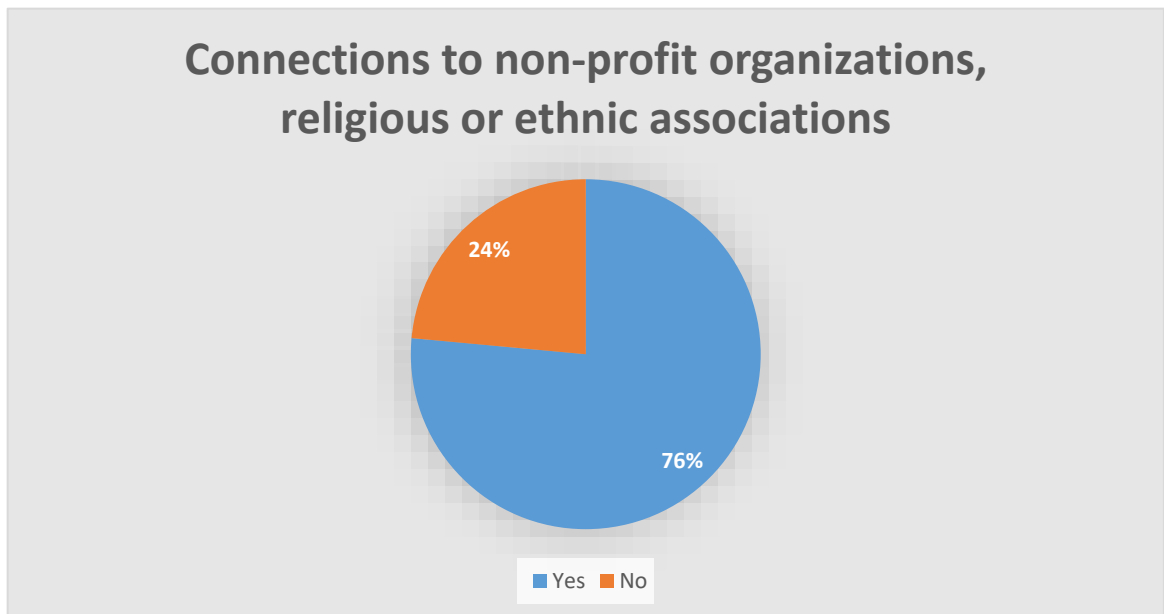


Figure 11, Participants' connections to non-profit organizations, and religious or ethnic associations in Thailand (Data: Survey)

Assessing participants' Thai language proficiency with self-assessment which includes 4 scales: Not at all, A little (Very limited words), Fairly well (Able to perform and communicate daily and jobs-related conversations such as taking orders, selling products), and Fluently (No difficulty of understanding the Thai language as a native speaker).

According to the present study's data, there are 29% of participants do not know Thai at all, and 53% of participants have little knowledge of Thai. Besides, 6% of participants have good knowledge of Thai and are able to perform and communicate daily and job-related conversations. Lastly, 12% of participants have fluent Thai language proficiency (See Figure 12). Comparatively, participants in this study who have been staying in Thailand for a longer period have more ability in Thai language proficiency.

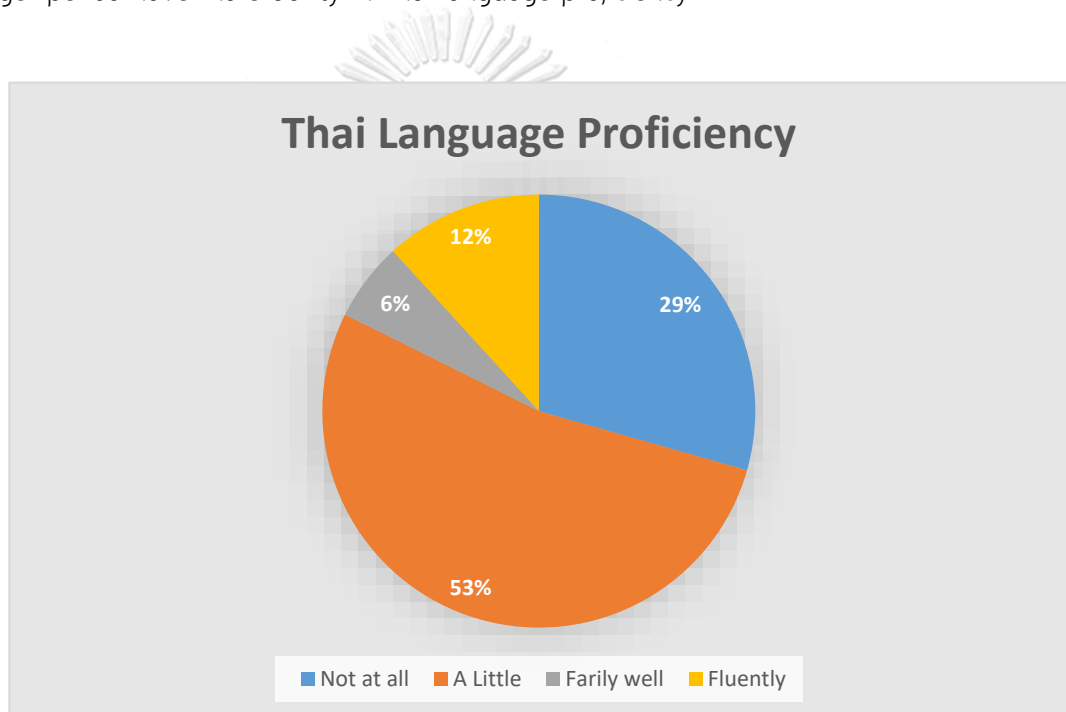


Figure 12, Participants' Thai language proficiency (Data: Survey)

Regarding the Covid-19 infection during this period, a few participants 18% had been infected with the Covid-19, and the majority of participants 82% had not been infected with the Covid-19 in Thailand (See Figure 13).

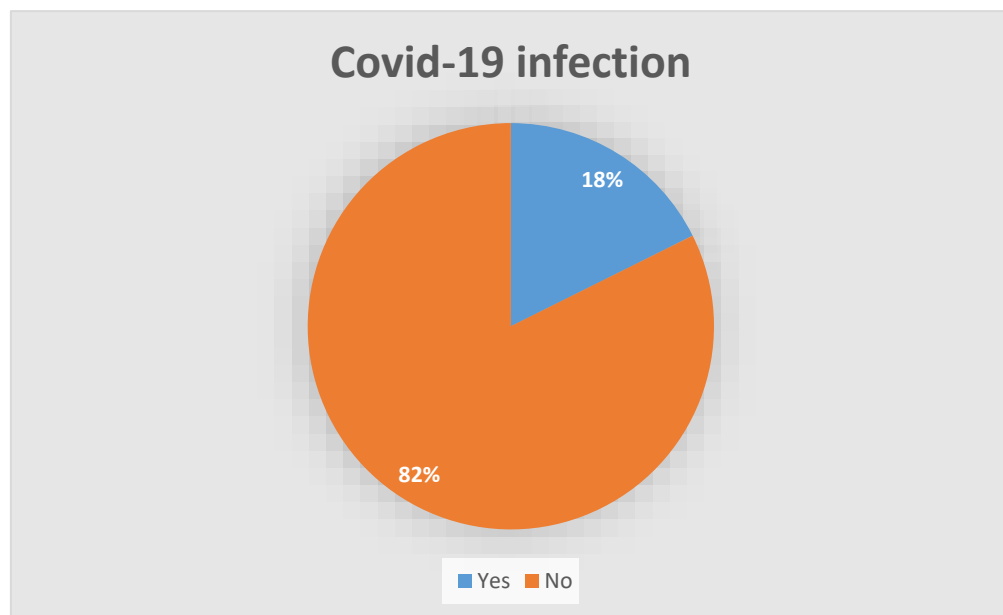


Figure 13, Participants' Covid-19 infection (Data: Survey)

In summary, the present section shows data on the socio-demographic characteristic of interviewees which includes variables in terms of gender, marital status, age, educational status, length of stay, Thai language proficiency, family members, friends living in Thailand, connection to religious, ethnic associations, other organizations and most importantly whether infected by Covid 19 or not in exploring psychosocial wellbeing of Myanmar migrant workers. As it is illustrated in Figure 14, the majority of interviewees are women and married. The minimum length of stay in Thailand is at least 3 years. Regardless of their length of stay, the majority of them cannot communicate in Thai very well. Taking into account those socio-demographic factors will assist in analyzing the underlying psychosocial issues of the interviewees. Additionally, the next chapter (4) will focus on and discuss findings from this collected data.

Variables in detail	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	6	35%
	Female	11	65%
Age	18–25 years old	4	24%
	26–35 years old	8	47%
	36–45 years old	5	29%
Marital Status	Married	12	71%
	Single	4	23%
	Divorced	1	6%
Educational Status	No Schooling	1	6%
	High School	5	29.5%
	Middle School	6	35%
	Primary School	5	29.5%
Living Arrangement	Staying with family	10	59%
	Staying with friend/s	5	29%
	Staying alone	2	12%
Length of stay in Thailand	0 to 3 years	4	23%
	4 to 8 years	10	59%
	9 to 12 years	1	6%
	13 years and more	2	12%
Family members living in Thailand	Yes	10	59%
	No	7	41%
Friends living in Thailand	Yes	17	100%
	No	0	0%

<i>Connections to non-organizations, religious or ethnic associations in Thailand</i>	Yes	13	76%
	No	4	24%
<i>Thai language proficiency</i>	Not at all	5	29%
	A little	9	53%
	Fairly well	1	6%
	Fluently	2	12%
<i>Covid-19 infection</i>	Yes	3	18%
	No	14	82%

Figure 14, Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Data: Survey)

CHAPTER 4: PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

This chapter discusses the emotional, physical, and social issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai and how they cope with the psychosocial issues will be emphasized. In the second section of this chapter, various supports they receive from ecological settings during the pandemic will also be discussed in relation to psychosocial wellbeing.



Figure 15, In-depth interview with a female Myanmar migrant worker



Figure 16, In-depth interview with a male Myanmar migrant worker

4.1 Psychosocial issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand during the Covid-19 pandemic

4.1.1 Physical issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand

The housing and living arrangements of Myanmar migrant workers are at high risk for the Covid-19 infection

In general, the migrant population does not have major health issues. During the Covid 2nd wave, some were infected by Covid-19. Some had to undergo quarantine as their roommates or co-workers were infected. They are very cautious with Covid-19 and follow hygienic practices their best. However, in the absence of spacious and good ventilated rooms, migrant workers do not have many choices. The crowded accommodations do not favor practicing social distancing. For instance, they are asked to quarantine when people their family members, or roommates are conducted as Covid positive cases.

“The housing style is one of the main factors to spread the virus among us like Myanmar migrant workers in Mahachai. Once my roommate got infected, I got it as well. The majority of Myanmar migrants in Mahachai stay with family, relatives, or friends so that the infection is easy if somebody started.” (Female Participant 10)

“The Covid-19 is something beyond my control. I myself try to follow and use hygienic items like hand gel and face mask. My roommate got infected, and I did. In fact, my roommate used the hygienic items as well, but she was infected. However, as we stay together in one room, spreading the virus to

roommates like us is very common among Myanmar migrant workers who stay together.” (Female Participant 12)

New normal working environments as challenges for Myanmar migrant workers

Migrant workers have to spend their own money on masks and soaps aside from work that masks are provided at the workplace. It was also uncomfortable as their movements are highly restricted such as going to the market within a limited time. Moreover, wearing facial masks for long hours is very unpleasant for those who have nostril and mild asthma issues. They are more sensitive to abnormal oxygen and breathing pattern. Besides, longer working periods and little break time make them more tiring.

“Buying masks and other hygienic items are extra expense during this period. Besides, restrictions are not quite adaptable easily such as wearing a mask at all times at work and outside. Wearing the mask for a very long time at the work makes uncomfortable and breathing problems. Those all conditions are new challenges during this period and beyond it.” (Male Participant 1)

Myanmar migrant workers with poor health conditions have been more vulnerable at the workplace during the Covid-19 outbreak

Some migrant workers who do not have much experience and a short stay in Thailand find going to the hospital a scary thing. Self-quarantine with over-the-counter medicines seems a better choice for those who lack Thai language skills and proper information in accessing health care. More importantly, their daily wages cannot afford extra costs such as going to the clinic.

“I can’t be thinking of going to the hospital during this period although I had illness and health issues as I don’t have complete legal documents and it really takes time along with language problem. So, I only rely on Burmese traditional medicines most of the time that is not costly. If I really must go to the hospital, I only visit to counter and ask for a prescription.” (Female Participant 13)

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A certain group of the migrant population suffers more than others. For instance, pregnant women had to deal with sickness and tiredness. Their physical conditions are incapable to continue work accordingly to the Covid-19 measures. Wearing a facemask for long hours makes pregnant women with unstable blood pressure dizzy. They have to leave factory work for a full recovery, and needed many days off that factory would not grant. Thus, going to work is also impossible with early pregnancy sickness. They do not have a

choice but to quit their jobs. Hence, the family's financial contributions lessened as one of them had to quit her job.

“I wish I continue my work at the factory. But I didn’t have a good stand on pregnancy. I feel tired and ill often so I took leaves frequently. After all, I quit the job to have full rest, but it affects on household’s income.” (Female Participant 2)

Covid-19 vaccination has also brought the physical problem to Myanmar migrant workers

Fortunately, some migrant workers got the opportunity to get a vaccination in their respective factories. Vaccination is not always a smooth and pleasant experience for everyone. It is risky for certain individuals who have underlying health conditions. Some are physically sick after vaccination yet they do not get a rest day for that matter. Standing for long hours and enduring pains are indeed challenging. As they want to have daily income, they chose to be at work rather than putting their livelihood over the edge.

“I had Covid-19 vaccination assisted by the factory, and some of my friends got it prepared by the hospital. Some hours later after the shot, I felt my fingers and legs could not be moving properly and they were heavy. But I didn’t check with doctors that I thought it wasn’t serious. However, it lasts until today. Sometimes I feel the pain to move those and sometimes I don’t.

Nevertheless, I continue working with this condition to thrive on my livelihoods and support my family.” (Female Participant 11)

4.1.2 Emotional issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand

Employment status and working conditions are an integral part of emotional well-being

Migrant workers feel insecure and worried regarding infection with Covid-19, financial problems, and legal work documentation during the Covid-19 restrictions. Labor-intensive sectors such as seafood, noodles, and fish can industries are significantly impacted by the disruptions of the pandemic. Shutting down factories and laying off a certain percentage of workers are inevitable emergency actions for factories’ owners in order to survive in the midst.

Employment status and working conditions are major factors for the migrant population in the aspect of getting stressed and depressed. The majority of migrant workers have become unemployed that lasts long at least one to two months. They suffer from depression and stress from the overwhelming situation. They feel hopeless as their livelihoods are seriously threatened by the crisis. The level of anxiety is higher when they perceive things are far more beyond their control during the pandemic.

“I didn’t have a job for about a month in the midst of Covid-19 since I had to change my job due to some social problems with the head of labor at a

previous workplace. It was a really frustrating and stressful situation that I didn't have any sort of income and stayed at home. Moreover, finding a new job wasn't straightforward which gave me so much depression and concern as I used to see and hear reports and news about migrant workers across Thailand have been tricked by fake recruiters or brokers for money.” (Male Participant 6)

Some are fortunate to be still employed but have to endure long working hours with little break. A certain percentage of the labor force is laid off during the Covid-19 outbreak for many reasons, and the rest of the migrant workers have to work harder and longer to meet production requirements. They have little break time for lunch and more overnight shifts. Furthermore, the workplace becomes more labor-intensive by the Covid-19 restrictions. Not only workers are assigned to work into a smaller number of the group but also have very distancing lunch spots. For instance, each designated area is quite far from one another. Walking back and forth is time-consuming and tiring. These physical conditions eventually lead to emotional exhaustion at the workplace.

“Lately, working hours and conditions have become so intensive. However, the factory pays extra for those who work overtime. Apparently, the workforces become less at the workplace since the factory attempted to follow covid restrictions such as social distancing. So, factory workers like me like to earn work longer hours. In addition, some arrangements at the workplace with

the covid restrictions are also frustrating those areas of different purposes have far distance to go around within the factory including changing room, rest area, and dining place.” (Female Participant 15)

Lack of knowledge and essential information concerns the emotional well-being of Myanmar migrant workers

Migrant workers lack proper information on protection and prevention from the Covid-19 at the time of the Covid-19 1st wave. There is unfiltered news spreading around about the deadly virus. Information regard to Covid-19 is also overloaded and makes things more complicated. Accessing up-to-date news during the Covid-19 is not an easy thing for the migrant population. Different sources portray different things that add more anxiety, especially the legal work document process during the pandemic outbreak.

“I felt frightened at the very beginning when the virus started spreading. Many accessible media also portrayed the dangerous sides of the virus and its impact on human beings like death. Then, I was really concerned about the virus at home and at work.” (Male Participant 17)

In the absence of health insurance and information, their worries reached a peak along with increasing infection cases. Going to hospitals or clinics is the latest thing they want to do by its heavy documentation process and language barrier. They are also aware

that accessing social services is hard to reach. It is hard to build up a positive attitude and perception of the migrant population during the pandemic.

“I can’t be thinking of going to the hospital during this period although I had illness and health issues as I don’t have complete legal documents and it really takes time along with language problem.” (Female Participant 13)

The lack of reliable information makes the precarious conditions of the migrant population more miserable. Things become more hectic for those who are planning to move workplace or extend work permits along with changing policies of government offices. They don’t have sufficient information or channel to make the best possible decision.

Language proficiency is also essential to maintain the emotional well-being of Myanmar migrant workers

Not only employment status but also the educational background of certain migrant workers triggers anxiety and stress. Some cannot even read in the Burmese language. Therefore, understanding and communicating in the Thai language are far more stressful. Things are more complicated when announcements of the covid situation. Moreover, finding reliable new sources are hard.

Low self-esteem and lack of confidence affect migrant workers’ social dimensions. Their limited knowledge of the Thai language or literacy also limits their knowledge of current

affairs and other legal work permit processes. Not having wider knowledge also make them worry about everything they hear. They feel that their anxious minds are hard to be present and focus on an important matter.

“One of the main concerns is understanding the Thai language.

Sometimes I feel anxious about covid-19 restrictions at commuting and transport that I might break the rules.” (Female Participant 12)

Changing environments due to the Covid-19 restrictions affect the emotional well-being of Myanmar migrant workers

The atmosphere at work, at home, and neighborhood become stressful and uncomfortable due to the Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown measures for those who still are working. Besides, working and having lunch with a designated small group of people accordingly to the Covid-19 restrictions and the ability to reach efficient production results are very stressful. Therefore, lessening social and physical interaction among co-workers also impacts the emotional well-being of Myanmar migrant workers.

“Since returning to the workplace, the look and environment give different feelings like quiet and not friendly as used to be before the Covid-19.

Rules and regulations of the Covid-19 such as social distancing, wearing a mask at all times, and being unable to do gatherings during the break and lunch press

negative emotions at work. For instance, I feel bored and tired since just working the whole day with no any contact and chatting with friends at the workplace, sometimes I feel lonely even though I am not alone at work.” (Male Participant 3)

Some are fortunate enough to continue working yet have to carry out overloaded tasks to meet maximum production needs. Insufficient rest time, lunch period, and long night shifts lead to exhaustion emotionally and physically. Moreover, discrimination in the workplace is getting worsen for those who have been infected by Covid-19. They are being looked down and verbally assaulted by co-workers. The level of homesickness is also higher for those who are emotionally abused in the workplace and stay far from their family.

“Unfortunately, I was one of the infected patients by the Covid-19, but it didn’t last long to recover. Thankfully, my factory provided full payment during my leaves at the workplace. However, once I returned to work, I felt discriminated against by co-workers like they don’t want to have contact with me and don’t talk with me. But I understand their feelings and behaviors since they also have to worry about themselves and their family at home if they have been infected. Nevertheless, it’s strange feelings happened among us at the workplace. At that moment, I really miss home and family back in Myanmar who would be very supportive.” (Female Participant 5)

Economic burden and financial problems also bring more attention to the emotional well-being of Myanmar migrant workers

Things are harder when Covid infected their family members. They cannot go to work for 2 weeks. Financial concerns and worries for beloved family members really drain the energy. As they earn from day-to-day labor, they do not want to take leaves as much as possible. Medical and treatment fees are a burden for them financially and emotionally. They are anxious about the financial dimension of their lives, as they do not have much savings for the emergency matter.

“It was indeed a bleak situation. I quit my job due to a few concerns with the head of labor, colleagues, and working conditions. And it lasted likely a month to get a new job. Within that month, my parents got the Covid infections as well. It was really depressing and concerning for a quick recovery since I didn’t have income and I was worried for my parents that I couldn’t contribute anything to my parents’ financial burdens.” (Female Participant 8)

4.1.3 Social issues of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand

Social distancing is a critical factor in miscommunication and misunderstanding among

Myanmar migrant workers

Warmthless and kindness in social relationships among employers and employees are lesser due to the strict restrictions. Migrant workers can feel lesser social interactions significantly and the atmosphere seems very uncomfortable. Along with the social distancing measurement, the physical interactions among workers also decline. Misunderstandings also occur more often in work-related communication. Workers feel burned out with the precarious situation and unfamiliar working conditions during the pandemic crisis.

The workplace is not pleasant and enjoyable anymore. Workers have to work, eat, and rest accordingly to the strict measurements of the Covid-19. They have to communicate remotely which reduces the quality of information at the workplace.

“Workplace’s atmosphere has changed a lot. Workers are not friendly anymore for certain reasons like wearing a mask all time, social distancing, and less talking to each other. So, relationships among us have been quiet at the workplace. Those situations bring along other concerns like misunderstanding one another. For instance, I felt discriminated against after returning from leaves due to the Covid-19 infection. In fact, the workplace itself has become quiet and more serious.” (Female Participant 5)

Lack of work–life balance due to the Covid–19 restrictions causes social problems among Myanmar migrant workers

As the working system changes, it is challenging to balance life and finance. Those individuals who stay with the other family members face small conflicts in their houses regarding household chores and finances. Some do not have a chance to come home and spend time with their family. Tiredness and exhaustion from work also bring unnecessary tensions to the families.

“During this period, work–shift has changed since the factory tried not to gather all workers at the same time. I work at night shift and my family members work during the daytime. I don’t really have much time to meet and talk with family since all of us in the family are occupied with our own stuff. Sometimes our tiredness causes small arguments among us.” (Male Participant 17)

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Being infected or in contact with the Covid–19 patient also distracts the social life of Myanmar migrant workers

On one hand, having roommates brings both advantages and disadvantages for those who share a room with others. They are not allowed to work if Covid infects their roommates. Undergoing 14 days quarantines is compulsory regardless of their physical

condition. As a result, they are paid only half of the payment. Furthermore, their wages or income are not sufficient enough to endure an economic crisis as their livelihoods are already in fragile condition.

“One of my friends who is also my roommate got the Covid-19, later I also had to go for quarantine at home for 14 days. But we didn’t get full payment from the factory when we took 14 days’ leave. It was only half. Besides, a moment of returning to the workplace after being infected was not pleasant, our friends and colleagues looked unwanted to socializing with us.”
(Female Participant 10)

Discrimination is one factor that is inevitable for migrant workers during the time of pandemics. When some migrant workers who recovered from Covid-19 return to the workplace, other workers are treating them as frightening things. They are told to stay away during lunch break.

“My roommate got infected with Covid-19, then we both had to go for 14 days of quarantine at the hospital. After the quarantine, we returned to the work where our colleagues’ behaviors at the work have changed like they are taking cautions not to be infected from us.” (Female Participant 12)

4.2 Social supports in different ecological stages during the Covid-19 pandemic

Individuals in the micro–system and mesosystem of Myanmar migrant workers contribute emotional and financial support

Migrant workers who are in a direct environment such as roommates, family members, relatives, and co-workers are the first group of people that they usually reach out to for help. Trust and reliability are much stronger among them. When they face urgent financial difficulties, they get help from relatives or very close friends. They usually exchange different forms of help.

“Financial need is a critical concern only in my family. Since I don’t have a job as a pregnant woman that needs a lot of care and medicines. The family’s welfare and medical expenses are more costly than my husband earns monthly. So, we have to manage carefully and ask for a favor from family and relatives from both sides.” (Female Participant 2)

Through their closest friends, and relatives, they receive accommodations, new jobs, and financial aid. As they have regular communication and mutually reciprocal relationship, the possibility of social support is very high. They are important to one another. Migrants get to learn about non-government organizations from their friends. The unemployment periods do not last long for people who lost jobs when the factory shut down as family members, close friends and relatives use their social connections in searching for a new job. While they are unemployed without income, they are being taken care of by relatives who

work in other factories. Furthermore, accompanying the clinic, and other documentation processes which require Thai language skills are also helpful social aids. They have a strong sense of belonging through mutual reciprocal exchange and appreciation.

They share important information and update announcements with other fellow workers. Receiving information in a timely manner is very crucial in a pandemic outbreak. Migrant workers have to be very attentive to changes in labor practices and policies from the state. They stay connected virtually via social platforms. They have social pages and groups where they can express their concerns and share information as well. Some add their friends to respective social media groups or pages to let them benefit from updated information. Being a part of the group or membership also enhances a sense of belonging.

“I always ask my friends and discuss with them about work, vaccines, and the Covid-19 situation. However, my uncle is the one who guides and helps me to get the job and prepare for legal documents. Thus, I follow and read news and information about migrant workers in Thailand on Facebook.” (Female

Participant 8)

Migrant workers have got close friends who listen to their concerns and worries. They are being comforted and encouraged by their good friends. Having a good relationship and regular communication with family not only in Thailand but also back in Myanmar fosters emotional wellbeing. In fact, social connectedness enhances mental well-being aside from meeting physical needs.

“Especially, during 14 days quarantine and after it, I have financial problems since I didn’t receive the full amount of payment. I felt really anxious and difficult to move on with financial concerns. However, I was indeed relieved that one of my friends could help me with my concerns. She is very close to me and we share and listen to one another.” (Female Participant 10)

“Mainly, parents and friends of mine console me at any time I feel tired and depressed. I also discuss and consult with them if I need pieces of advice and suggestion.” (Female Participant 13)

Entities in the exo-system of Myanmar migrant workers contribute toward physical health and financial support

The Covid infected some migrant workers and they received health services from the hospital and medical fees from the factories. In fact, Samut Sakhon Province is well known for its bubble and seal measurement. Regardless of criticism, the cases are under control within a short period. Health officials and hospitals in the province really put the effort into reaching out to migrants and marginalized populations. They cooperate with the migrant workforce for awareness training regarding the Covid-19. As the province is home to thousands of migrant workers and industries, the health officials know the importance of effective communication with the migrant population for safety and protection measures.

“Although I didn’t receive full payment for my absences during attending the hospital for the Covid-19 infection, I didn’t have to worry about medical costs and food during those 14 days. The hospital support migrant workers for those expenditures. Moreover, the hospital provides hygienic items including masks, hand gel and soaps, and medicines.” (Female Participant 10)

Migrant workers do not have high expectations of health officials and government social services by their heavy document requirements. However, migrants from some factories imply good labor practices by paying full wages for those who have to undergo quarantine for 2 weeks or take care of medical fees along with the hospital’s medical letter. In some cases, migrants are paid half of their wages and provided medicines.

“During the period, the factory provides few medicines to prevent the infection and, other purposes like to lower expenses in buying common medicines for the Covid-19.” (Female Participant 4)

“It was really helpful to factory workers when they had to go for 14 days quarantine like me. I received full payment from the factory although I had to take 14 days absence.” (Female Participant 12)

Experience throughout the hardship shapes attitudes and values of Myanmar migrant workers

The experience of migrant workers' stay in Thailand also influences the way they view the hardship. Migrant workers who have longer stays and have friends know the importance of social support. As they have experienced adapting cultures and customs of a foreign country like Thailand, they are willing to help others who lack language proficiency or have a short stay. They know whom to reach out to for certain kinds of help in the hardship. They have established positive social relationships with various stakeholders from the neighborhood to other social organizations.

“Since I have been here in Thailand for about 20 years, I know the language very well and understand the concerns of our fellow migrant workers in Thailand. I try to help them when I have a chance to intervene in their concerns. Thus, I often participate in social activities, do volunteer work, and join religious ceremonies that connect more people in Thailand” (Male Participant 9)

“Active participation in voluntary work and social activities to help fellow migrant workers in Thailand make me satisfied and happy with what I’ve been doing. I am always willing to address their concerns as much as possible. However, we live in a limited context, but we always try out best.” (Male Participant 17)

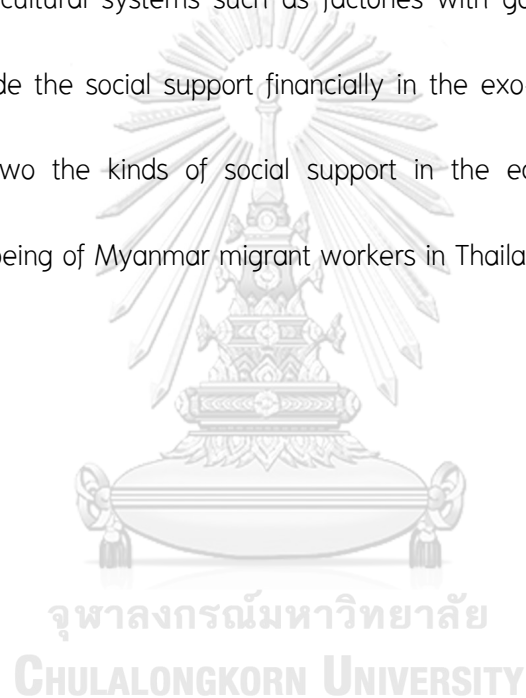
They have learned life skills to survive in a foreign country from experience in social activities. They are aware of the mutually reciprocal relationship and its significant contribution to their well-being. Some of them volunteer to deliver food packages to those who quarantine and take care of meal donations for those who are unemployed. Some are in charge of a specific position in non-government organizations that work for labor rights and migrant workers' issues. Their social actions add meaning and value to their lives. Some get to know their potential by participating in social activities and taking responsibility for those activities.

“Most Sundays, I join volunteer work such as fund campaign for migrant workers and workers who are infected with Covid-19. Moreover, I also participate in social activities like delivering food and meal packages to fellow migrant workers who are in need and those who are home quarantine. For doing those work on my holiday, I feel good and happy to help others.” (Female Participant 14)

The interviewees in Mahachai highlighted the changes and difficulties in the transactional period of the pandemic. The disruption in the livelihoods has affected emotional, financial, social, and physical well-being of life that address the research question of one of the underlying psychosocial issues of migrant workers during the Covid-19. Changes in physical conditions and emotional issues are related. The physical conditions such as poor and long working environment, mobility restrictions, and poor ventilated housing especially

sharing public utilities lead to emotional stress and anxiety in the midst of the Covid-19. In addition, social tension among co-workers within the workplace such as discrimination, and being monitored as disease carriers also influence the emotional distress of migrant workers.

In terms of social support, the actors in the micro-and meso systems who are friends and relatives indeed assist in the adaptation process to survive in the new normal. Moreover, institutes in larger cultural systems such as factories with good labor practices and civil organizations provide the social support financially in the exo-system that addresses the question number two the kinds of social support in the ecological system shape the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.



CHAPTER 5: LIFE EXPERIENCE OF MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

In this chapter, five interviewees with different socio-demographic backgrounds are selected to highlight their experiences during the pandemic. Along with their socio-demographic characteristics, the social determinants of health models are being considered to select five participants out of the total participants. Furthermore, variables such as gender, marital status, age, educational background are also taken into account to compare and analyze differences in their well-beings. Then, the chapter covers the importance of the environment and people in the environment in coping with stress and adapting to the changes will be emphasized in relation to social support and well-being.

Case – 1

A married female 33 years old who was a former worker at the fruit cans factory shared her life and experience during the Covid-19 outbreak in Thailand. She stopped schooling after she finished Grade-7 in Myanmar. Eventually, she came to Thailand seven years ago in search of job opportunities and economic reasons and has been staying with her family members who are also working at factories in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand. She came with a MoU (Memorandum of understanding) and does not have to worry about

her status. Her family members are the ones who have been supportive since she arrived in Thailand.

“In search of a job and thriving in a foreign country like Thailand, my family members are also essential and important financially and emotionally.”

(Female Participant)

In terms of language proficiency in the host country, she understands a few Thai, but could not speak at all which limits her social relationship with the host community in Thailand. Her incapability of Thai language limits her mobility and social life during her stay in Thailand. She is afraid of taking public transports or visiting around on day offs. However, she enjoys her social life within her knitted family, and it makes her feel comfortable. Nevertheless, she rarely participates in other social activities held by a monastery or other non-profit organizations in Samut Sakhon since she does not have acquaintances or connections with any non-government organizations or civil society organizations in Thailand.

“I know a few Thai languages, but I don’t speak at all. It is a fact that I don’t have any relationships with Thai people at home and work. But I am comfortable and feel all right since I have my family members and relatives nearby.” (Female Participant)

During the Covid-19 outbreak, she and her beloved husband are fortunate not to be infected by the Covid-19 until now. She is happy that she and her husband were not

infected. Then, she does not have to be concerned regarding medical expenses for the Covid-19 infection.

“Honestly, my husband and myself haven’t got Covid-19 that we are lucky, otherwise it would bring more struggles to us.” (Female Participant)

However, her first unexpected pregnancy during the Covid-19 outbreak makes her physically sick and tired. She could not bear the sickness and had to take rest for several days from her factory work. Therefore, she had to quit her work when the factory figured out about her long leaves that became one reason to lay her off. Being unemployed eventually leads her to some emotional issues. Given these working and physical conditions, many factors put her at disadvantage, especially during the second wave of Covid-19 when temporary closure of factories in Mahachai. She is aware that going back into the workforce is not easy with a young child. She perceives that she lost her job, as her physical well-being is weak. Furthermore, the family has only one income that is from the husband who is working at another factory. From her perspective, she feels very low, as she could not contribute to the family income. She feels that she is just a burden to her husband.

“New coming member to my family as an unexpected pregnancy is happy news, but it makes me feel unwell and tired physically. So, I took some days to rest from work which was unfortunate for taking many days. Consequently, I had to resign from work. As a fact, it was not laid off, and it was regulated for every factory worker to resign if they would take many days

of absence. Lately, I've felt emotional since I become jobless. Mostly, I feel sorry for my husband that he is the only one who is working and earning money for our family. Moreover, I think it will take a couple of years to return to the work, otherwise, it will not be all right to go work with a baby.” (Female Participant)

Despite her family encountering financial issues sometimes, relatives of her husband and her always help them to lend some money so that they can secure daily basic needs and medical care, especially for her unborn baby.

“Financial needs are the main concern of my family since we only have one income from my husband. However, relatives from both sides of my husband and me in Thailand are always responsive and helpful relatively at any time when we need to address financial issues.” (Female Participant)

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, she does not find her social life has been impacted significantly. She prefers staying with her family rather than hanging out for social activities. As a pregnant and unemployed woman, her emotions are hardly stable. However, she never shares or shows her feelings to the family members for emotional soothing. Crying out makes her feel better and she believes it is her best coping strategy. Furthermore, she does not receive any social support from various organizations. She usually reaches out to relatives for any help. She seems to lose self-satisfaction or purpose along with her work. The workplace and life of migrants are more than a functional association. However, having a supportive husband and relatives gives her some relief.

“I do not have any major social problems affected by the Covid-19. I am a home person and also quiet, I listen rather talking so that I don’t share and speak out my feelings to my husband. I prefer staying low and crying when I am home alone. Aside from that, I am very grateful to my husband and relatives who are always supportive and helpful.” (Female Participant)

It is important to take notes on underlying cultural practices within her family. It can relate to the ecological framework that emphasizes cultural practices influencing individuals’ beliefs and behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). It is unusual to honestly show or speak out feelings even to family members in Myanmar’s culture. People are trained to oppress their feeling to avoid the goodness of others. Harmonious living in society is a top priority.

The next thing is a culture of giving hands when somebody is in need. Myanmar people love donating and doing good deeds. They take care of their neighbors, especially in a foreign country. Thus, family members and relatives are the first groups of people they reach out to for any help. Moreover, the neighborhood is also a good environment where she is in a good term with reliable relatives to overcome negative experiences such as finances and food. Her positive relationship with the microsystem gives her a sense of connectedness as well.

Case – 2

A married female 31 years old who was a former seafood factory worker earns between 300–400 baht per day and she has been working in Thailand for 3 years. She moved to work in a fish can factory 3 months ago. Currently, she stays in a dorm with friends. She has one child and her family is back in Myanmar. She does not have any basic literacy skills because of her poor physical condition. Most of the time, she was in the hospital and was not healthy enough for schooling.

Since she arrived in Thailand, she rarely participates in social activities and other voluntary work. She finds a lack of basic literacy skills and the Thai language as a big barrier in her life. Even though she is not infected by Covid, she has stomach pains. When she is sick, she tries to take traditional medicines. Going to the hospital is a big challenge for someone who could not communicate in Thai. She has very low Covid-19 literacy rates and has to ask friends to read for her. Furthermore, she wants to save money as much as possible due to the Covid-19 and the situation is unstable. However, friends here at home and at work are very kind and helpful.

“Lacking literacy skills and the Thai language are my weaknesses.

Whenever I have to fill form or information at work, I ask my friends to assist me. Sometimes, I request my friends to accompany me to the clinic or hospital when I am sick. Most of the time, I use Burmese traditional medicines to cure my sickness and stomach pain. So, I can save money instead of using it for the

clinic. The situation during the Covid is difficult, it's better to prepare.” (Female Participant)

Interestingly, she is the one who highlights issues regarding educational background and language issue during the interview. Apart from physical concerns, she encountered many work-related problems in her previous seafood factory. Her co-workers who have longer stay in Thailand with Thai language ability looked down on her for her literacy weakness. Discrimination occurs not only by racism but also by language proficiency in the workplace. The experiences were unpleasant and she felt psychologically abused. Aside from poor working conditions, the unkind co-workers give her more emotional stress. However, she continued working there to secure her job and income since finding a new job would be difficult during the Covid-19 outbreak.

“My illiteracy has become a weak point to my colleagues who looked down on me and I felt treated and discriminated against at work. Since I need a job and income, I continued working there until I found a new job here at the Fish Can factory.” (Female Participant)

Moreover, the restrictions regarding the Covid-19 within the factory were exhausting. Terms, conditions, and labor practices can vary factory to factory depends on scales and types of the factories. Working in the large factory with strict rules seem more exhausting during the pandemic period. For instance, having very little break time for lunch,

changing uniform, and going to a specific working spot is very tiring despite she is doing well at work and she is fine with payment.

“I understand the situation of Covid and measures of the factory to prevent the infection. But I find it is also tiring work during the breaks with social distancing and restrictions. For example, I have to go to a different place on the 4th floor to change my uniform and go down to have lunch. Then, go up again to resume work. Since I work a full day, those unnecessary movements make me exhausting at the end of the day.” (Female Participant)

However, things are much better when she starts working in the Fish Can Factory. Having a new environment with helpful co-workers improves her well-being. Her friends are always happy to assist in explaining announcements and accompanying her to the clinic.

“I am happy to have good friends here. I reach out to them whenever I do not understand some information or go to buy something. They are very patient and helpful.” (Female Participant)

Moreover, regular communication with family back home, chatting with friends via Facebook account and meditating on Buddhist teachings before bed is significant ways that elevate her emotional well-being. On one hand, being a working mother who left her young child in Myanmar, she is also worried about her child safety during the pandemic outbreak. Aside from her limbo conditions during Mahachai cluster in December 2020, her concerns

about the family back home also add certain level of anxiety. However, she is grateful for the support and encouragement of family members and friends.

“I talk to my family back home in Myanmar regularly to discuss and consult things. I also have good friends who always listen to me, give advice and comfort me when I feel low. We sometimes listen to Buddhist teaching audios before we go to bed that helps us to concentrate and focus.” (Female Participant)

It is visible to realize that her microsystem and mesosystem affect her overall well-being significantly. In the absence of discrimination, there is more opportunity for an individual to realize his or her own potential. Positive social relations with roommates and co-workers in the direct environment foster her self-esteem as well as a sense of belonging. A good working environment with proper labor practices is also crucial for the well-being of individuals psychically and emotionally. On one hand, her religious belief and friends who share the same religious belief foster her emotional well-being.

Case – 3

A 27 years old divorced man who is currently working in the Fishery sector earns between 300–400 baht per day. He stays alone in Thailand and his only child is back in Myanmar. He came to Thailand through the MoU system (Memorandum of understanding) and has been staying in Thailand for nine years. He has acquaintances from non-government organizations. He actively participates in monastery donations and voluntary works such as

delivering meal packages during the Covid-19. He has knowledge of the Thai language and can speak a little bit.

“I failed at my marriage. I think I could not put enough effort to keep up with my family. But I have regular communication with my Ex-wife regarding our daughter. I want to be a good father to her. She’s everything to me. I try to take part in voluntary and monastery works to make myself active and cope with stress. I get to know many friends here” (Male participant)

His marital status also influences how he perceives himself and his state of emotional well-being. His thoughts on having issues in marriage also make him challenging to keep a positive attitude in face of a crisis. During the Covid outbreak, he was unemployed for one month as his previous factory was shut down. He was stressed and he was hopeless. However, he got financial help from his dear friend who is working in another factory. They also take care of each other in hard times. With his connection, he got a job in the Fishery products industry.

“I was really depressed with losing my job due to the factory shut down caused by the Covid-19 impact. During a month when I was looking for a new job, my friend helped me a lot financially. We are very good to each other. We help one another in difficult times. Eventually, I was able to get a new job with his support and connection to the factory.” (Male Participant)

Unfortunately, a co-worker at the factory stole his passport and some money. He reached out to the head of the workers to resolve the problem. Most importantly, he was worried and afraid of losing his passport rather than his money. It was a critical situation, especially since legal status is a key to accessing social services during the pandemic. Renewing work permits and other extension of legal documents become big deals by the changes in economic and tourism sectors. He encountered physical issues such as headaches and losing appetite by overwhelming stress because of the social problems. With the help of the head worker, he got back his book after a few weeks. He often talks to his daughter back home in order to cope with the stressful situation. He also has a few reliable friends whom he can share honestly.

“Losing a passport was my biggest fear. I could not fall asleep or eat with this issue. Even if I couldn’t get back my money, I wanted to get back my passport which is the most important legal document to stay in Thailand. So, I requested my head worker to resolve the issue. He really took care of it. I am happy just to get back the passport.” (Male Participant)

Surviving in a foreign country without good friends and connections will be very challenging. Moreover, marital status is also important in his case. In the absence of family members with him, his life satisfaction seems quite low. On one hand, his participation in social activities also enhances his building of social connections for him. In fact, individuals’ experiences and social networks are part of the well-being assessment. Possessing

meaningful reciprocal relationships with his friends elevates his well-being to a certain level and builds up stronger connections like belonging to something.

“Life can be very depressing especially if you live alone and far from home in a time of crisis. It is good to engage in social chats with other Myanmar friends via phone call. We sometimes share our hardships in the workplace. We understand one another. I always feel better after our conversation” (Male participant)

Case – 4

An 18 years old single woman who is currently working at a Metal factory earns between 300–400 baht per day. She stays with her family. She came to Thailand by MoU system (Memorandum of understanding) and has been here for five years. She can communicate in Thai very well. She is the youngest single female among the total participants. She is very passionate about helping people, especially fellow migrant workers in Thailand. Now, she is a member of the Labor Rights Organization in Mahachai.

“I have changed my workplace for few times before working in a metal factory. Having good co-workers and working conditions are important for the long term. As I can speak Thai quite well, I help my Myanmar friends in the neighborhood.” (Female participant)

During the Covid-19 outbreak, her previous factory was shut down and she was unemployed for about a month. While she was unemployed, her parents were infected by Covid-19 as well. They had financial difficulties but were able to overcome them with the help of relatives in Thailand. Being unemployed without income made her feel low. After a month, she got a new job that is a Metal Factory with her relatives' connection.

“I would say it was the most difficult time for me. The factory was shut down. I did not have income meanwhile my parents were hospitalized by Covid. My uncle helped me out emotionally and financially. He is a staff at a non-government organization working for migrant rights. He also helped me to get a job at the current workplace.” (Female Participant)

She has no major health problems but mild asthma. It does not seriously affect her job nor receive special treatment. She often has small conflicts with her parents. As a young teenager who is still under the control of her parents, adult relatives are guiding her. She does not have full authority over her life and making decisions. She perceives their parenting style as authoritative and makes her uncomfortable. The traditional family practices make her feel annoyed. Whenever she feels sad, she comes to the organization where she is volunteering. Moreover, she has got few trustful friends with whom she can share her feeling honestly.

“I prefer volunteering rather than staying at home on off days. My parents nag me and do not want me to go out. I think they are overprotective. I

hope they understand that I can explore more only when I meet new people.”

(Female Participant)

The environment is a crucial factor that determines an individual's growth and thrives. She gets to know wider cultures and practices through her supportive uncle and volunteering work. It allows her to meet new people and widen her social network. She finds her work very meaningful. Regardless of Covid restrictions, she takes chances whenever there is food donation to fellow workers' dormitories. She takes responsibility for her tasks and she carries out assigned work. In fact, the environment outside her home assists her to learn more social meanings and contexts of the host country. Her Thai language proficiency also fosters her communication with the community. On one hand, these factors nourish a sense of autonomy over her own life and a sense of contribution.

“Participating in voluntary work and helping others make me feel much better. All my negative thoughts disappear when I go to the office. My uncle always takes me there to learn more on off days.” (Female Participant)

Case – 5

A 34 years old married man who is a Rubber Factory worker stays with his wife and a child in Thailand. He has been staying in Thailand for almost 18 years, and he can speak Thai very well. He finished high school and mastered computer skills. On weekends,

he participates in social work such as donating food to fellow migrant workers and helping in making digital cards at a non-government organization.

“Most of my fellows need help with the work-related documentation process. I always share information and announcement with them. And, only a few of us are familiar with digital computers. Thereby, I volunteer myself in making digital cards here in the Labor Rights Network.” (Male Participant)

Working at a large factory with good educational background, language proficiency, and leadership skill is a different story. His income is significantly higher than other participants who are factory workers. Co-workers and his factory worker for his integration, language skill, and good personality also cherished him. He is offered a promotion with a higher salary at the factory during the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the new position makes him work longer, night shifts and it is very tiring. He has to skip meals and has less time to take care of his fellow Myanmar migrant workers. He also realizes that he does not have enough time for his own family. As a result, he suffers stomach problems by overwhelming stress. He decided to go back to a former position that gives him a balance in his social dimension.

“I am happy to get a promotion and bonus. But I feel uncomfortable communicating with fellow migrant workers from Myanmar in the workplace. I feel like I am restless. I burn out by night shifts and could not go back home some days.” (Male Participant)

He is the only participant that has a good job position and is being offered a promotion that is quite a contractive situation with other participants in the study. He has a beautiful family living with him and under his care. He does not have to worry much about his own family. Furthermore, he is always ready to assist others and interference with conflicts among fellow migrant workers to settle in peace. He always checks on his fellow workers' well-being. He also listens to their concerns of them and tries to address by negotiating among various parties. He also has a wife who understands his day-to-day experiences and work-related concerns. He receives emotional comforts from his family.

“Nobody forces me to help others. I feel like it is my calling to help others.

Life is much more meaningful when I help someone. Even a simple act of kindness can make a change in someone's life.” (Male Participant)

It is important not to overlook the life experience and skills of individuals. Having a high level of life skills enhances the social, emotional, and physical dimensions of individual life positively. His experiences and values direct his life in a meaningful way. Possessing language skills and joining social activities strengthen his social network. Assimilating to a different culture is not a barrier anymore. Taking social actions, sharing information, and giving pieces of advice as to ways of social support foster individuals' life skills. Furthermore, he has acquired knowledge about labor rights from the wider network such as communicating with government officials, and other non-government organizations. Overall, understanding social behaviors and interaction are important for emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Despite similarities and differences in experiences during first and second waves of the Covid-19 outbreak in Mahachai, each participant in the study highlights the importance of understanding well-being in the wider picture. In order to navigate their survival during the pandemic, their social characteristics such as length of stay, and social connection play important factors.

Case-1 makes the impact of the larger culture practice in the exo-system to the individual level more visible. Labor practices of institutes and factories during the pandemic such as laying off workers, taking sick leaves, and maternal leaves put the livelihood of the migrants at risk. For a pregnant woman with an underlying health condition, it is more challenging in the midst of the pandemic. They are more vulnerable to being laid off by the factory and have less possibility to re-enter the workforce. Regardless of her unemployed status and financial concerns as the main psychosocial issues, her family and relatives in the microsystem support her at their best in terms of finance and emotion.

Case-2 emphasizes that personal socio-demographic factors have a significant impact on determining the well-being of a person. She is more vulnerable to unstable livelihood by her poor literacy skill and physical condition aside from changes by the pandemic. Thus, her low self-esteem makes her more stressed and anxious during the local transmission 2nd wave of Covid-19 when the mobility restrictions are tighter in Mahachai. Her emotional burden of not understanding the Thai language and Covid restriction increases

along with the tighter measurements. Moreover, being employed in a small seafood factory such as her previous job without regular work and income also makes a difference in her overall well-being. Besides, her irregular earnings and working condition make her insecure about her finance. In addition to that, unkind co-workers who are part of the working environment put distress that is more emotional. Eventually, changing to a bigger factory with a regular job and earning in Mahachai become the best decision she ever made during the pandemic. As she is a newcomer in the Myanmar community of Mahachai, her new roommates and co-workers gave her various social aids for her adapting to a new environment that also enhance her psychosocial well-being.

Moreover, Case 2 describes the importance of literacy and educational background in promoting life skills. Lack of assets in human capital such as poor health conditions and illiteracy affect the well-being of a person. Consequently, the social network of the person is not wide yet having reliable and helpful close friends to help with health-related and work-related matters during Covid-19. In fact, receiving emotional support and job connection from entities in micro and meso-systems indeed contribute the well-being.

Case-3 and Case-4 highlights the crucial roles of friends and relatives in micro-and meso-systems in surviving and adapting to the changing environment by the Covid. In common, they both heavily rely on personal connections for job opportunities. Being unemployed for a month without income did not last long for both of them. My trusty friends soon resolved having financial difficulties with the hospitalization of covid-infected family

members. Positive relationships with people in the host country disregard the worsening situation by the pandemic. Moreover, self-esteem and a sense of belonging are fostered by social activities in the community for Case-3 a young single woman. Volunteering to help fellows also allows for widening social networks that support social and emotional well-being.

Case 5 highlights the importance of macro-system for the psychosocial well-being. Higher literacy, language proficiency, and having legal economic status favor the well-being of Case-5 a married man who is the head of the workers with a proper salary. Regardless changed working environment makes him a bit stressed; he has some privileges and knowledge to help fellow workers during the pandemic. Besides, he feels proud and satisfied as a provider of the family. His belief and perception of the challenges are being shaped by his active participation in the ecological system. It nourishes his well-being, gives him a sense of autonomy, and shapes personal values in a positive way. In fact, individual factors such as education, language skill, and health can influence well-being. Mutual and reciprocal relationships in the environment enhance the adaptation process in the transactional period as well.

Compared to those five cases, they have a common thing that they did not receive social support such as medical, financial, and food from government sectors and institutes throughout the pandemic. Surprisingly, regardless of having social programs and services initiated by the state, none of them was able to reach out as going through with heavy

documentation is also adding burden for them. Having waited for state support seems like a long journey. According to the interview responses, they would like to solve financial issues in their own ways or contact civil or ethnic associations within the Mahachai area for urgent food and accommodations.

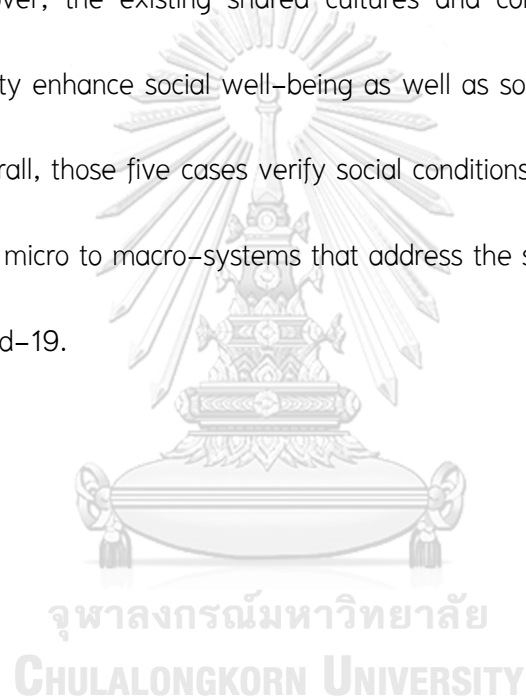
Their positive social relations take them out of miserable situations. For instance, Case 1 and Case 2 have a very good relationship with family members and relatives in direct environments compared to other cases. They also share many characteristics such as being married, narrow social life, and heavy dependency on family members and close friends for various needs. Regular digital communication via Facebook allows them to stay connected during the Mahachai cluster and get financial aid through digital banking.

Case 3, Case 4, and Case 5 have a longer length of stay in Thailand and have Thai language proficiency, which indeed widens their social connections beyond the micro-system of the ecological framework. Their new job opportunities come from friends and connections. As Case 4 and Case 5 are living with family, their emotional concerns most likely come from family-related conflicts such as autoreactive parents, marriage failure, and household chores responsibility issues.

However, worries and concerns regarding family are also presented in Case 2 and Case 3. They work at the same fish can factory and have the same amount of earnings daily. According to the experiences of Case 2 and Case 3 who do not have family members living with them, they also have heavy hearts when it comes to family matters back home

such as education, kitchen expenses, bills, and saving. The betterment of the family members and welfare is the biggest motivation to overcome and endure hardship.

On one hand, the study also would like to spotlight the community characteristics in the mesosystem of Mahachai where these participants reside. There are civil society organizations, labor networks, and ethnic associations that offer opportunities to build good connections. Moreover, the existing shared cultures and common lifestyles among the Myanmar community enhance social well-being as well as social connection, especially in times of crisis. Overall, those five cases verify social conditions, social issues, and types of social support from micro to macro-systems that address the second question about social support during Covid-19.



CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings of the study are discussed related to the emotional, social, and physical well-being of migrant workers. Various kinds of social support migrant workers receive from micro, meso, and exo-system and the influencing factors in the macrosystems are highlighted in relation to the psychosocial wellbeing of migrant workers.

6.1 Analysis

6.1.1 Entities in ecological settings enhance psychosocial well-being through various social support

Life at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak is up and down. Thousands of migrants lost their job and went back home. There are no proper measures to manage hectic situations. The livelihoods of migrant workers are at the edge and full of uncertainties. Some confront the hardship and stand firm during the time. The participants make the role of social relationships and connections more visible role in promoting resilient skills. Stronger social relationships and connections endure hardships. It can be related back to the study of Keyes (1998) which highlights the contributions of well-being when a person is socially engaged in society and being a part of its function.

Friends and relatives in Thailand are the first groups of people who give social support in terms of finance, advice, and encouragement. Those social supports are two ways and mutual. They have a reciprocal relationship in which they exchange different kinds of

help. Meanwhile, having regular communication such as chatting, and phone calls also nourishes their bonding. Trust and sympathy are built up from the regular interaction among those migrant workers.

In face of losing a job and no income when the pandemic hit economic sectors, migrant workers receive help in terms of food, accommodation, and finance from friends, relatives, and non-government organizations within Thailand. The closet people in the microsystem and mesosystem provide their basic needs and resources in order to cope with the changing environment.

The support from friends, relatives, and family members helps to handle anxiety and distress. Emotional comfort and encouragement in times of crisis are vital to the well-being of migrant workers. Transforming the working environment during the pandemic is stressful and exhausting. It demands sudden adaption in order to survive and secure livelihoods. In relation to the ecological framework of the study, micro and mesosystem are two significant systems that enhance the well-being of migrant workers. Major and meaningful social supports come from family members, relatives, and friends during the covid-19 compared to larger cultural systems.

Having someone to share and listen to their days improves their feelings. Social distancing measurements make the need to stay connected more significant as well. Regardless of physical distance, migrant workers stay active and engage via social media accounts. The role of social media especially Facebook allows them to stay connected during

the pandemic. They exchange their experiences and concerns regarding Covid regulations. Moreover, the study can relate back to Wright (2011) who states that individual-level well-being is shaped not only by individual differentiation but also by social connections to others at the societal level.

Individuals' well-being is determined by more than personal factors. The social environment and the people around them matter in determining their overall well-being as the perception toward life and cultures come from daily social interaction. Behaviors and values develop via social experience that can be either positive or negative as Bronfenbrenner (1974) states in the macrosystem of the ecological framework. In fact, the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers is associated with their experiences and discovering their potential in the context they live in.

6.1.2 The longer length of stay in the host country fosters resilience

Migrants who have been in Thailand for longer years are more socially active and have friends from various fields. They have learned many things from their experiences throughout their stay. Flexibility and adaptability are better along with the experiences. Participating or taking part in voluntary works and donation projects in their areas are helpful in seeking connections. Those social and voluntary works played an important role when the Mahachai cluster occurred in the second wave of Covid-19. Members of participants who volunteered in ethnic and civil organizations seek ways to stay connected with fellow migrant

workers in the community. They worked with schedules with a smaller group of people by following Covid-19 measurements in order to deliver food and vegetable packages to migrants who are under the quarantines. On other hand, they make social media, especially Facebook a channel to reach out for any concerns and aid. Those who can speak both Thai and Myanmar are translating update news about restrictions and labor practices. Then, the printed announcements are hung at public places in Mahachai such as train stations, markets, bus stops, and so on.

Active social participation and Thai language skill also enhance one another. They possess knowledge about their rights and important information that influences their perception and values of life. Their ideology toward the cultures of the current context is more optimistic. Moreover, they feel a sense of belonging and accomplishment by helping fellow migrant workers. Most significantly, members' participants with more experience and Thai language skills become major social supporters to fellow workers who are newcomers to the Mahachai community with weak Thai language proficiency.

Learning more about their potential from the active social dimension assist their survival skill. They also know the importance of the environment not only to survive but also to thrive in a foreign country. Building positive social relationships and making themselves useful to the community are open ways to elevate a sense of belonging from their contribution.

According to the findings, a longer period of stay with adaptation to culture and environments in society enhances the resilience of individuals in difficult situations. They have encountered and experienced changes in a larger cultural context such as labor police, and other legal documentation processes throughout their stay in Thailand. In face of Covid-19 and its impacts on the labor sector, they know where to approach and whom to ask for help. Capability and experience of overcoming hardships nourish the satisfaction and motivation of those individuals.

6.1.3 Literacy and language proficiency foster the adaptation process

Acquiring a foreign language promotes self-esteem and communication skill. Migrant workers who have a basic understanding and speaking of Thai have a wider social connection and general knowledge about the context they live in. Having information and resources assists them to make the best decision and choice. It also allows them to see things from a different perspective and assimilating to a new culture does not seem to be a big deal.

Having knowledge about the environment helps in understanding social meanings of the context that nourish communication. It is also one advantage and life skill for participants with language proficiency and longer length of stay. In fact, having knowledge of the working cultures, political practices, and social connection within the context support the adaptation process in life. Factories, labor practices, and regulations impact their personal growth.

Possessing Thai language skill also equips their capability to help other fellow workers that add meaning to their existence. Perception about self is stronger as it also gives a sense of autonomy over self in life. Moreover, for long-term survival and growth, finding purpose and motivation to direct life is very vital. Being assigned to certain positions, and being trusted for taking responsibility in the workplace or in voluntary organizations guide seeking out own potential.

The findings of the study highlight that language skills and educational background also influence the adaptation process. Migrants with Thai language skills are easier to learn and familiarized with social norms and policies that gear up the adaption in the face of changes or a new environment. Moreover, it assists in acquiring important information regards to Covid-19 protection and regulation that promote life skills. On one hand, the ability to assimilate into the current cultural context eventually opens the way to wider opportunities and being a part of society. For instance, being promoted at work, and managing donation projects with other organizations. Reciprocal relationships of those migrant workers are also nurtured through active participation.

In summary, the experiences within embedded social networks strongly direct self-awareness and attitude toward overall well-being. It also reinforces the argument from a few studies in which immediate settings of the microsystem, the attitudes, and perceptions of family members, colleagues, and shared roommates play important role in the adaption process of new migrants as they are likely to influence them (Korinek et al., 2005). Overall,

the participants of the study clearly showed that the closest environments have the highest contribution to the psychosocial wellbeing of the migrant population.

6.2 Conclusion

The humanistic perspective of the workplace is lessening along with the new normal lifestyle. Life becomes more robotic and tiring when things have to do within a limited time, space rules, and limited people for migrant workers. The sudden changes in working hours and workforce hit badly to migrant workers. Surviving in precarious situations causes many physical, social, and emotional issues. Migrant workers encounter frequent physical tiredness such as body pains, dizziness, and low blood pressure from trying to fit in new schedules.

The pandemic also disrupts the harmonious social dimension of migrant workers. Fear of being infected makes people avoid one another and initiates the culture of “victim-blaming”. The social reputation of workers with Covid experience is negatively affected. Moreover, implications in social life become more miserable for unemployed migrant workers as it includes the financial burden and the need for urgent job search. However, all the participants got a new job at different factories after being unemployed for not more than 2 months by their friends’ connections.

The sensitivity of emotion is higher during the pandemic outbreak. Worries, anxiety, and exhaustion are common emotional issues among the migrant population. Not having

sufficient resources in terms of finances, medical-related knowledge, and reliable news sources increase emotional issues at the beginning of first wave of Covid-19 in Thailand.

As a development studies scholar, paying attention to the interrelationship between emotional, social, and physical conditions such as working conditions, housing, and movement are vital to building up a healthy and resilient migrant population. Material needs and aid are being focused on studying physical well-being. It is crucial to take into consideration underlying factors that lead to emotional distress and other social complications as social, emotional, and physical well-being are all interrelated. The culture and lifestyle practices are usually overlooked in studying migrant workers' well-being. The findings of the study spotlight that social integration and social practices within the culture significantly influence the overall well-being of the migrant community. Being a part and member of the community foster, the social dimension of migrants in the host country and build up a sense of solidarity.

Migrant workers in Mahachai overcome all these hardships with the help of their good friends, relatives, and other non-government organizations. Friends and relatives give various social supports. They get a new job and a place to stay within one to two months after they lose a job by their connections. Meanwhile, close people in the ecological setting are supporting them not only physically but also emotionally. They are able to resolve financial difficulties and manage their day-to-day needs. They also receive comforts from their regular communication via various social platforms.

The findings of the study suggest that larger contexts such as factories, provincial hospitals, and labor rights networks should be more accessible in giving social support to migrant workers. In fact, factories and hospitals have bigger power and capability to provide financial needs for medical purposes. In the study, some workers received support such as hospitalization fees for Covid infection cases, and the hospital takes care of infected factory workers free of charge. On one hand, factories provide half or full wages for workers who have contact with an infected person while they are in quarantine.

Being employed, and having regular income to support self and family's daily needs influence the well-being of migrant workers significantly. In fact, it creates a harmonious atmosphere to thrive. Being disrupted in their livelihoods by a sudden shock, anxiety and worries appear which affect their psychosocial wellbeing. However, the psychosocial well-being in Mahachai in the present study argues that the environment or ecology of a migrant worker is a key that determines survival or being left behind in the adaption process in face of crisis. In contrast to what most government media portray about social programs, the majority of migrant workers do not receive much social support in the midst of Covid-19. In addition, some migrant workers are lucky to be employed unlike the media describe, their working conditions are not paid much attention to the state and public.

Mahachai is a home for thousands of Myanmar migrant workers. An environment offers many social elements, and social activities. It is a good place to study the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers as cultures, ethnic projects, civil society offices, and other

voluntary work happen in the community. The sense of belonging is very strong in the reciprocal relationship in the community that elevates collective action along with inclusiveness. Regardless of not receiving much social support from the state, they are able to overcome, as they are aware that help is available from various people or organizations in their ecological setting. The experiences in the social dimension shape how they perceive the current context, policies, and systems. The study benefits social workers, health-related workers, and researchers to better understand the ecological system including its different stages, and its contributions to the psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. The study also encourages looking not only at formal but also informal social support in cultural practices of various ecological settings that contribute to the well-being of migrant workers in Thailand.

Therefore, the key interesting part of the Bronfenbrenner (1975) theory argues that the mesosystem significantly nourishes the psychosocial well-being of the migrant workers where peers, co-workers, and relatives play a crucial role. While other studies focus on emotional and physical well-being separately and independently from ecological and social dimensions, the Bronfenbrenner (1975) theory spotlights the actors in the mesosystem have a major influence on the emotional and physical well-being of the migrant workers. Overall, the environment with a mutual social relationship in embedded layers makes Mahachai a resilient community that enhances the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers in Mahachai.

6.3 Policy Recommendations and further research

The study will conclude with this recommendation section regarding promoting better psychosocial well-being of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. Based on the findings of the research, there are three recommendations. First, labor practices concerning the new normal lifestyle should be adjusted to be more relevant to the well-being of factory workers. The practices should consider suitable working hours with proper break time, taking leaves with payment, and covering medical fees for the Covid infection cases. Secondly, establishing a proper channel to communicate effectively to the migrant workers during the pandemic. Thirdly, strengthening cooperation among various stakeholders from the government and private sectors who are working for labor and migrant rights in Thailand.

The working hours and labor practices in factories matter building better psychosocial well-being. Sufficient resting hours, and lunch breaks should be applied for the well-being of migrant workers along with the Covid-19 protection measurement. As an immediate response, providing hygienic protection materials should not only for the workplace to be used but also for personal uses at home and outside. Migrant workers should support daily necessary items such as facial masks, soaps, or alcohol sanitizer. Those factors that can affect the well-being of migrant workers negatively should be eliminated as much as possible. The capacity and health condition of individuals should be taken into account to promote a healthy and resilient migrant population. For long-term and qualified safety practices, establishing well-designed compensation regulations regards to health-related

issues will prevent unnecessary complications in the workplace and enforce good labor practices.

Accessing information and communication is more complicated with the new normal style. It is necessary to have a reliable and authentic communication channel where migrant workers can express their concerns and voices. The presence of reliable and authentic communication channels assists in reducing social conflicts and miscommunication in the respective community. It will direct migrant workers to make a good choice for their livelihood and well-being. The most common social platform such as Facebook should be utilized as a useful source for acquiring work-related matters for migrant workers. For instance, migrant workers related information, and awareness could be promoted widely through official Facebook pages. Most importantly, the official Facebook page should be an authentic and trusted agency that all migrant workers across Thailand could rely upon as a source of information.



The stronger cooperation among government officials, non-government or private stakeholders, community-based organizations, and other ethnic associations will enhance the psychosocial well-being of migrant workers. Through cooperation works, they can identify underlying psychosocial issues in various settings of ecology and figure out well-designed potential solutions. The cooperation among the stakeholders will also prevent overlapping in the allocation of resources. Exchanging challenges, difficulties, and ideas

related to the matter of migrant workers will benefit all the stakeholders. Regular monitoring and access to the factory and industry sectors will enforce good labor practices.

The government social services and social programs should address the gaps for more effective support. Various agencies have various approaches to assist migrant workers' well-being. It is important to bring the real voices of migrant workers to seize the gap in providing social support. Most importantly, it would be great to engage with the police force and media to promote the rights and well-being of migrant workers. Policymakers should put the effort into engaging in discussion to educate the public views on marginalized people. The protections and respectful treatment for the marginalized population should be reinforced to widen opportunities to practice their rights, access to social services, and mobility.

The larger cultural practices in the Exo-system such as political and social changes in the host country and country of origin affect a marginalized population in terms of their livelihood, security, and well-being during COVID-19. Migrant workers are in difficult situations not only by the COVID-19 pandemic but also by a military coup in the host country. Sending remittances back home becomes a big concern as banks and currency practices are unstable. Furthermore, the study has a limitation, as it could not analyze the chronosystem that is for longitudinal studies by the limitation of the time. However, the study can fill the gap in the ecological framework towards psychosocial wellbeing by focusing on three layers of ecological settings such as micro-, meso- and exo-systems. Thus, the study would like

to propose looking into a wider ecological framework including the chronosystem, and analyze wider cultural practices in the exo-system for future psychosocial studies.

In conclusion, the study would like to promote a more comprehensive approach to building a healthy and resilient migrant population through the academic contribution of Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological framework toward psychosocial well-being. Understanding the ecological framework in other words direct and indirect environments conceptually of migrant population widens perceptions in the aspect of creating the appropriate pathways to address migration issues. Furthermore, the present study as empirical evidence shows that the migrant worker population's well-being is being impacted by various supports of actors in the ecological settings as Bronfenbrenner (1975) claims despite adversities in the time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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