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Risk and Protective Factors of Indonesian Women Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF INDONESIAN WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study was conducted to identify the risk and protective factors of Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. The risk factors are variables that contribute to one's psychological stresses, while the protective factors are variables that contribute to one's mental stability. The "risk and protective" concept is fluid, relative, and often overlaps according to the individuals and situations. Data for the qualitative study was gathered using semi-structured interviews with five Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. The risk factors include family poverty, poor communication, employee conflicts, and workplace hostility. Expertise and professional experience, as well as family and state support, are identified as protective factors. A combination of both protective and risk factors was also discovered, namely the recruitment and departure processes, educational background, work knowledge, working hours, healthcare access, and coping mechanisms. Understanding these aspects allows individuals to take precautions against problems upon arrival in their destination states. An insight provided by this study might inspire the stakeholders to increase international migrant workers' protection framework and further ensure their human rights.

Keywords: *Domestic Workers; Female Laborers; International Migration; Mental Health; Resilience.*

A. Introduction

In regards to international labor migration, Malaysia remains one of the most popular destination countries for many Indonesian migrant workers (Center of Research Development and Information of the National Agency for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, 2020). These workers often find employment as low-skilled or hard laborers in fields regarded as "dirty, demanding, and dangerous," such as agriculture, construction, and household chores. Given their relatively lower socioeconomic background, which often prevents them from accessing proper training, most migrants opt for work in these informal sectors (Haris, 2002; Tjitrawati, 2017).

Both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments have agreed to improve protections for Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) also known as *Pekerja Migran Indonesia* (PMI). Government and non-governmental organizations have collaborated on placement and protection, although these efforts are still considered incomplete (Fanani, 2019; Kristianus, 2019). While Malaysian law acknowledges several rights for migrant workers, such as a basic minimum wage, paid or unpaid leave, annual holidays, equal pay, and overtime wages (Sarah, 2017, Sarah, 2017), the reality on the ground is different. For example, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Board registered a staggering 9,377 complaint cases from IMWs in 2020 alone (Center of Research Development and Information of the National Agency for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, 2020).

According to its website, Migrant CARE (2014) indicates that working abroad can be lucrative due to high wages, but the risks workers face are also substantial. Migrant workers are vulnerable from the very beginning of the recruitment process in their home countries, facing risks of bribery and fraud. During their employment, women migrant workers were susceptible to potential abuse. In addition to being victims of human trafficking, undocumented workers have also faced pressure and persecution from local authorities (Komnas Perempuan, 2005; Kusmanto, 2014).

Every job presents unique challenges that can lead to stressful situations. Women migrant workers in factories face issues related to their

occupations, such as long hours, night work, fatigue, work safety concerns, sick leave policies, and general work-related stress. In these factories, Indonesian migrant workers are often required to work around 12 hours a day, which includes daily and weekly overtime. These conditions leave them with little time for leisure or a social life (Lu, 2013; Orange et al., 2012; Purba & Abdullah, 2017). Furthermore, migrant workers may experience social stigma, isolation, a loss of social status, discrimination, unfair treatment, and loneliness. All of these factors can negatively impact their psychological well-being. Consequently, the physical and psychosocial working environment becomes a critical consideration for their overall health and safety (Altanchimeg et al., 2016; Maksum & Sahide, 2019).

Given these multifaceted challenges, this study uses the "risk and protective factors" theoretical framework to systematically explore how various individual, social, and environmental influences either increase vulnerability or foster resilience among Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. This framework was chosen for its dynamic nature; some risk and protective factors can be beneficial in certain situations but also detrimental in others (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Ellis et al., 2017; Heffernan & Ward, 2017; Ward, 2016).

Previous studies also indicate that risk and protective factors vary according to sociodemographic parameters like gender, ethnicity, occupation, religion, and age (Fraser et al., 1999). Therefore, this theory might help to clarify how these factors interact within the challenging work and social environments of this specific group of Indonesian women migrant workers (Buchanan, 2014; Garmezy, 1993; Serin et al., 2016).

Despite the extensive literature on migrant workers, there is a critical gap in understanding the specific risk and protective factors influencing Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. This is particularly true for research using a qualitative method and a psychosocial perspective. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining the lived experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers during their time in Malaysia. The findings will contribute to academic knowledge and practical efforts to mitigate risks and enhance protective mechanisms for this group. It addresses limitations in

previous studies that often overlook gender-specific and contextual nuances. Many stakeholders—such as governments, non-governmental organizations, and psychologists—may find this research useful in assisting migrant workers with the psychosocial stress they experience from their working conditions and culture shock.

B. Method

This study applied a qualitative approach, which is designed to describe in-depth, personal experiences and understandings of certain people regarding a specific topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population for this research was Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. The informants were purposively sampled based on four criteria: they must (1) identify as a woman; (2) be between 21 and 40 years of age; (3) be of Indonesian nationality; and (4) have worked in Malaysia for at least one month.

As seen in Table 1, all of the informants were Indonesian migrant women between the ages of 20 and 30, employed as housemaids or in other informal jobs. These five informants were considered adequate because the data from their interviews had reached saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Notably, none of them had a college degree, which may have influenced their decision to migrate and work in the informal sector. Only two informants (Informants 2 and 5) received job training. Additionally, with the exception of Informant 2, all of them had prior work experience.

Table 1. List of informants

No.	Age	Origin	Education	Job Training	Work Experience
1.	24	East Nusa Tenggara	Junior high school	No training	Housemaid, cafetaria assistant
2.	25	East Nusa Tenggara	Senior high school	Hair salon	No work experience
3.	33	West Nusa Tenggara	Senior high school	No training	Selling traditional dishes
4.	38	North Sumatra	Elementary school	No training	Housemaid
5.	37	West Java	Junior high school	Domestic work, eldercare	Factory worker, housemaid

Semi-structured interviews and field observations were conducted to answer the inquiry, "Explain the conditions and situations that help and hinder you as a migrant worker in Malaysia". Additional questions were asked as needed, depending on the informants' responses. The study design followed Rabionet's semi-structured interview guidelines (2014), which consist of these phases: (1) selecting the interview type; (2) establishing ethical guidelines; (3) crafting the interview protocol; (4) conducting and recording the interview; (5) analyzing and summarizing the interview; and (6) reporting the findings. Data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

The study used an inductive thematic analysis, a bottom-up approach, to uncover themes within the data and use them to explain the research topic. Interview transcripts were thoroughly reviewed to create initial codes related to risk and protective factors. These codes were then refined, merged, split, or discarded to improve clarity and focus. A codebook containing definitions and examples was maintained for consistency. To enhance reliability, the co-authors independently coded a subset of the data, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Final themes were developed by grouping related codes and verified against the data to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences. This transparent process supports the credibility and reproducibility of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For data analysis, the "risk and protective factors" theoretical framework was the main tool used to understand how certain factors increase vulnerability (risk factors) while others promote resilience (protective factors) among Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. By using this framework, the study identified and analyzed individual, relational, and community-level influences that either heighten or buffer against negative outcomes. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and supports migrant workers experience, which can guide the development of targeted interventions to reduce risks and strengthen protective mechanisms (Buchanan, 2014; Garmezy, 1993).

Ethical considerations were a top priority in this study. Before collecting any data, we informed potential informants about the benefits and risks. We then provided a consent form for them to complete, along with a verbal confirmation of consensual participation. Data collection was scheduled to minimize interruptions to the informants' working and leisure hours. This study received ethical clearance from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Airlangga's Faculty of Nursing, with the Ethical Approval Number 993_KEPK.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. The results are divided into three subthemes: (a) risk factors; (b) protective factors; and (c) dynamic risk and protective factors. Quotes from the interviews are included to provide insight into the lived experiences of these migrant workers.

1. Result

This study highlights several themes from the qualitative data. Based on the interviews, at least 13 themes were identified and are listed in Table 2. This table also summarizes the risk factors, protective factors, and aa combination of both found in the migrant workers' experiences.

Table 2. Risk and protective factors of Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia

No.	Themes	Risk Factor	Protective Factor
1.	Recruitment process and departures	√	√
2.	Educational background	√	√
3.	Skills and work experiences		√
4.	Familial poverty	√	
5.	Job knowledge	√	√
6.	Family support		√
7.	Working hours	√	√
8.	Limited communication	√	
9.	Accessible healthcare	√	√
10.	Conflict with employers	√	
11.	Abuse by employers	√	

No.	Themes	Risk Factor	Protective Factor
12.	State support		√
13.	Coping strategy toward problems	√	√

a. Risk factors

Family poverty is the primary driver for IMWs to migrate to Malaysia. All of the informants came from low-income families, and their main motivations for migrating were to earn money and improve their living standards. Informants 1 and 2 were driven to work abroad to support their parents, while Informants 4 and 5 sought to earn more money to help their husbands provide for their children. Informant 3, however, was an exception; she did not mention her family at all. Instead, she stated that her migration was a personal choice driven by her desire to own land and a house with a stable income.

During their time in Malaysia, each informant faced communication difficulties with their relatives in Indonesia. Their use of communication media was restricted, and some were even forbidden from contacting their families. As Informant 2 stated:

> *I am not allowed to use social media... I cannot communicate with my family. I hid my cell phone use [from my employer]. I am not allowed to have a cell phone. Usually, I use my friend's cellphone to look at Facebook* (Informant 2, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Similarly, Informant 3 noted,

> *I am allowed to use the cellphone for 10 minutes per week. In the previous month, I could not use a cell phone at all to communicate with my family. I usually use Facebook, but I am not allowed to use it anymore* (Informant 3, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

During their employment in Malaysia, migrant workers face additional risk factors related to their employers. Disputes and hostility from employers negatively impacted the mental health of all informants. This behavior could escalate from verbal aggression to physical abuse or violence. Informant 1 shared, "*They accused me of stealing and they cursed me. Did I feel sad? I could not say anything, even though there was no proof of stealing… I have never met people outside*

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the house" (Informant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2018). Informant 4 stated, "*I was afraid of my employer. I wanted to go home and give up*". (Informant 4, personal communication, July 16, 2018). Similarly, Informant 5 recounted, "*Yes, [I experienced violence]. Also, my employer often insults my country [Indonesia]… I did not get any salary or food*" (Informant 5, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

b. Protective factors

In addition to the risk factors that make IMWs vulnerable to mental health problems, they also possess protective factors. One such factor is the skills they gained through training or prior work experience, which can support their performance in the destination country. Almost all informants received job training and skill enhancement relevant to their professions. For example, Informant 2 explained that she received training in waxing, plucking, pedicures, and massages at a hair salon in Kuala Lumpur. As a housemaid, Informant 4 was trained in household chores and childcare, while Informant 5 received training in eldercare, cooking, and foreign languages.

Informants 1 and 3 did not participate in formal training before leaving for Malaysia. However, they had a solid grasp of fundamental work skills due to having the same job experience in Indonesia as thye did in Malaysia. For instance, Informant 1 had prior experience as a housemaid, while Informant 3 had sold traditional fried dishes.

Another protective factor is family support. Despite coming from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, these women have strong family ties. All informants felt supported by their family members, whether it was their husband, parents-in-law, or father. Their families often took on the responsibility of child-rearing and household management in their absence. One informant explained the deep support she received:

> *I want to go home because my father passed away and I did not know about it… I left, and my husband told me to go to this shelter… When I left my family, my parent–in–law took over my role at home* (Informant 3, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

The support from husbands was also a crucial protective factor. Informant 4 shared:

> *In my family, I was not the one responsible for supporting the family income. It was my husband's responsibility instead. He works as a tailor. My husband signed the contract… Yes, my husband indeed permitted me to leave my hometown [to work]* (Informant 4, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Informant 5's experience also highlights this:

> *At first, my husband did not agree when I wanted to leave my hometown [to work], but he finally gave me permission, and he took my role to take care of the family* (Informant 5, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

State's support is a crucial protective factor, especially when migrant workers in Malaysia face hardship. All informants stated that they would contact the Indonesian Embassy (*Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia* or KBRI) for assistance. According to their interviews, the Embassy is generally supportive of their well-being. They even helped Informant 3 return to Indonesia for her father's funeral: "*I was very happy during my stay in the Embassy's shelter. They gave me help and support*", (Informant 2, personal communication, July 16, 2018). Informant 5 also relied on the Embassy for help: "*My employer did not pay my salary. When food was not always available, I then contacted the Embassy*" (Informant 5, personal communication, July 16, 2018)

c. Dynamic risk and protective factors

Some circumstances can be classified as a combination of both risk and protective factors. If the hiring and departure processes are conducted legally, they become protective factors. Conversely, an illegal departure is a risk factor for migrants. Only one of the five informants departed legally with assistance from the Ministry of Labor and Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia. The others chose to depart without completing the necessary paperwork or any government involvement.

> *An agent took care of my departure. No village government office workers knew about my departure. I did everything alone, without any documents or a permit letter. The process took two weeks. I departed from Surabaya,*

then went to Batam, and took a boat to go to Johor Baru (Informant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Similarly, Informant 4 said, "*I departed with an agent's help. No village government office workers knew. I prepared everything alone*" (Informant 4, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

An individual's educational background can be a protective factor, particularly for those with at least a senior high school diploma. However, individuals with a lower level of education (elementary or junior high school) might be seen as having a reduced capacity to handle challenges, making them seem less favorable for certain jobs.

Work experience and job knowledge are essential for migrant workers, as they can enhance a worker's appeal and perceived competence. Conversely, a lack of understanding regarding their employment status is a significant risk. According to the data, several informants had an inadequate grasp of their legal documentation. For example, Informant 1 was confused about her legal status because her agent provided no information, "*I did not know whether it was legal or not. The agent did not give any information… Even from social media, I still did not get any information,*" (Informant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Informants 2 and 5 learned about their legal status from social media, with their sponsor and agents assuring them they were legal immigrants, "*Yes, I knew it from the social media, but nobody told me the process of leaving for other countries… What I knew was that it was legal from the sponsor*" (Informant 2, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Informant 4's agent told her it was legal, and her sponsor educated her on the procedures for working abroad, "*Yes, I knew it only from social media. Information about the procedures working in other countries was from friends, and they told me what job I was going to do there…*", (Informant 3, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Informant 3 mentioned that the procedures she went through were consistent with what her friends had told her, "*I did not get any information from social media. I did not know anything, but the sponsor told me the work procedures*

for working abroad. The agent also told me that it was legal" (Informant 4, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Access to healthcare can be both a risk and a protective factor. When available, it allows migrant workers to conveniently receive necessary medical and psychological treatment. Some migrant workers receive this benefit from their employers or from an authorized labor institution. However, a significant number of migrant workers, like Informants 1, 2, and 4 remain uninsured and are unsure who would care for them if they became ill. "*Yes, I had a toothache once. My employer took me to the hospital and paid for me, but I do not have health insurance*", (Informant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2018). Informant 4 shared similar concern: "*I do not have insurance. If I get sick, I do not know who will be responsible for my sickness*" (Informant 4, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

Working hours also present a dynamic risk. While they can vary, most informants reported working hours that exceeded the standard. Informant 1, for instance, worked from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week, with no holidays. This no-holiday policy was also an issue for Informant 3. Informant 4 even stated that her employer did not allow her to take breaks, rest, or sleep. She was also limited to one meal per day. All five informants mentioned that they felt they had no choice but to accept this inhumane treatment.

Migrant workers require effective coping mechanisms to maintain their mental health in the face of high stress. However, ineffective strategies can increase the risk of poor mental health while abroad. Our informants' coping strategies often involved "accepting their fate", largely due to the power imbalance with their employers. This social subordination forced them into silence, leading them to cry alone without anybody knowing. Informant 4 also shared her fear of conflicts with her husband and her regret about leaving Indonesia to work overseas. Informant 3 recounted a particularly difficult experience:

> *My employer was easily agitated, particularly at the end of the month. He once accused me of stealing when he assigned me to work for his younger brother. I could only accept my fate in silence when he invited the police to force me to take a religious oath… (Informant 3, personal communication, July 16, 2018)*

Informant 5 also described a form of passive coping: "*When problems arise, I accept them... Once, my employer did not pay me or provide meals. I attempted to be patient... After five months, I was able to escape from him*" (Informant 5, personal communication, July 16, 2018).

2. Discussion

Malaysia is a popular destination for IMWs seeking better financial opportunities due to its proximity and cultural similarities with Indonesia (Orange et al., 2012). Many women choose to seek employment abroad because of a lack of job opportunities and low salaries in Indonesia's informal sector, as well as the need to support their families (Anggraeni, 2006; Komnas Perempuan, 2005). This aligns with Chin's (1997) work, which found that family economic problems are a key driver for women's migration. This study supports these findings, as our informants cited familial poverty a primary reason for their migration.

Crawford established a cognitive, value-expectancy model in 1973, that might indicate how a migrant worker made a deliberate decision to migrate for economic reasons (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). The intent to migrate is based on the perceived value of migration outcome and the expectation that it will lead to financial stability. These workers often set specific goals for achieving economic independence, though these expectations are not always met. The salaries of migrant workers are also subject to discriminatory treatment. It has been found that women migrant workers in both industrial and informal sectors often receive lower wages than promised, sometimes even experiencing pay cuts (Noveria, 2017; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018; Wijayanti & Turgel, 2021).

In addition, limited communication capabilities further hinder migrant workers' ability to seek assistance. Their inability to contact family and friends is often due to workplace restriction on using communication devices. Many employers, as was the case with our informants, restrict their employees from communicating with outsiders to prevent them from seeking help in the event of abuse (Noveria, 2017; Orange et al., 2012; Wahyono, 2007).

Oftentimes, abuse and violence frequently occur when employer-employee relations are strained. This was evident with our informants, who reported verbal abuse from their employers. A case study by Subadi (2010) on Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia found that violence from stems from various factors, including differing interpretations of labor laws, miscommunication, dissatisfaction with low competence and high demands, cultural differences, feudalistic attitudes, and weak institutional frameworks. When these negative relationships develop, they become a significant risk factor. Limited access to social support exacerbates this risk, increasing workers' stress levels and negatively impacting their mental health (Bhugra, 2004; Nirmala et al., 2014; Wong & Song, 2008).

However, protective factors, such as job training, were also identified. Migrant workers need training to prepare them for the challenges of new technology and to improve their skills. This increased education can enhance their productivity and reduce workplace accidents. Additionally, work experience helps understand and anticipate job-related demands (Febriani, 2013; Hamdi et al., 2022).

Another key protective factor is familial support. Migrant workers receive this support from their spouses and parents, which allows them to pursue a new life abroad with the assurance that their families and homes are being cared for. Social support from family has been shown to help individuals cope with stress. For our informants, family support even made them feel that their job performance was optimized (Hamdi et al., 2022; Lee & Park, 2018; Lu, 2013).

In addition to support from their families, the informants also received social support from the Embassy. The Embassy's most impactful duties included assisting them with difficulties and helping them return to Indonesia during emergencies. Previous studies have also noted that one of the Embassy's responsibilities is to provide safety and shelter to migrant workers in need. According to our informants, the Embassy fulfilled this role by assisting them through their struggles (Aziz & Sudiarawan, 2022; Handayani, 2015; Situmorang, 2021; Tantri et al., 2022).

The recruitment and departure processes, educational background, job expertise, access to health care, working hours, and problem-solving skills can be either risk or protective factors. For example, an illegal departure is a risk-factor, as it can subject migrant workers to severe sanctions if caught. Conversely, ensuring a legal departure makes the process smoother and provides an effective means of control and protection for migrant workers while they are abroad (Artosa, 2018; Davé, 2014; Handayani, 2015; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018).

An appropriate educational background can be a key benefit for migrant workers. A lack of education can be detrimental, as it may hinder an employee's ability to quickly and accurately comprehend instructions. Low educational levels can also lead to social stigmatization and increased vulnerability as these individuals may be perceived as inept or unable to adapt to new situations.

Stigma is more frequent for those with limited professional knowledge and insufficient work training, especially when combined with other structural issues such as poverty, domestic violence, or psychological factors like desperation. Inadequate training, incomplete documents, and a lack of mental and language preparation also contribute to problems once they are working overseas (Febriani, 2013; Huling, 2012; Kusmanto, 2014; Subadi, 2010).

Beyond these issues, working hours for migrant workers often exceeded a tolerable threshold. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), migrant workers average 15 hours of work per day with minimal rest. In many countries, including Malaysia, there is no maximum limit on the working hours for domestic employees. Even when limits exist, the hours are often much longer than those for other professions (Huling, 2012). Working more than eight hours contradicts Malaysia's standard labor law, which entitles workers to additional compensation for longer hours (Handayani, 2015; Loganathan et al., 2019). Previous studies have found a correlation between low average sleep and high levels of despair, anxiety, and stress, highlighting the link between sleep and physical and mental health (Harjana et al., 2021; Ratanasiripong et al., 2016).

Healthcare access presents another challenge. While some informants reported easy access to healthcare when ill, others received no help at all. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that some migrant workers face significant barriers when seeking medical care in Malaysia. The primary obstacle is a lack of proper documentation, such as a valid work permit or passport, which makes it difficult to get care from public institutions. Language barriers and prejudice also contribute to this problem. However, this study found that even without providing health insurance, several employers still paid for their workers' medical treatment (Loganathan et al., 2019; Tjitrawati, 2017).

As this study explored, the importance of knowledge improvement, easy access to information, and education is highly relevant for IMWs in Malaysia. One study on Indonesian migrant housemaids found they faced issues with accessing diverse information and with how that information was distributed. Previous research suggests that more-informed migrant workers are better equipped to make careful decisions, manage their expectations, access job training and assistance, and even prevent human trafficking. With proper knowledge, migrant workers can better understand the difficulties they may face, which can ultimately improve their overall well-being (Febriani, 2013; Orange et al., 2012).

Stakeholders can use this research to develop preventive training programs before workers depart. The findings on risk and protective factors can guide the creation of a program that prepares future migrants to take precautions and be ready for obstacles they might face before and after they arrive in their destination country (Goodman et al., 2005; Heffernan & Ward, 2017).

While this study focuses on Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia, the identified patterns of risk and protective factors reflect broader global challenges. Issues like exploitation, unequal access to labor rights, gender-based violence, and precarious working conditions are well-documented across diverse migration contexts, from Asia to the Middle East, and the Americas. The findings highlight the urgent need for international, human

rights-based approaches to protect women migrant workers, as recommended by organizations like the ILO. Addressing these risks and strengthening protective mechanisms requires coordinated policy efforts that extend beyond national boundaries. This ensures fair labor standards, access to justice, and support services throughout the entire migration cycle. By placing these results within a global context, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of systemic vulnerabilities and the collective responsibility to advance the rights and well-being of women migrant workers worldwide (Adanu & Johnson, 2009; Davé, 2014; Makuch et al., 2021; Shukla, 2023).

We acknowledge the limitations of this study. The restricted sample size is a key weakness. We also noted that despite providing informed consent, some informants appeared shy or uncomfortable sharing their full stories during the interviews.

D. Conclusion

This study offers insight into the risk and protective factors faced by Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia. It shows how structural vulnerabilities such as lack of legal protection, limited communication, employer abuse, insufficient job training, familial poverty, and inaccessible healthcare, contribute to precarious working and living conditions. However, some migrant workers can use certain protective variables, such as family and state support, specific skill sets, and prior work experience, to better cope with their predicament. Ultimately, this study highlights the transdisciplinary nature of migrant worker issues, which involve not only geographical mobility but also cultural adaptation, psychosocial management, legal protection, and social justice.

To support safer migration experiences, this study recommends that both Indonesian and Malaysian policymakers take practical steps to strengthen migrant protection. These include enforcing fair recruitment practices, providing access to legal aid and health services regardless of a worker's status, and ensuring accountability in cases of abuse. Pre-departure training should also be improved to include information on legal rights, mental health preparedness, and strategies for seeking help. Sanctions and penalties for abusive employers,

sponsors, and agencies should also be considered to minimize precarious work and recruitment techniques.

Beyond these national recommendations, the study highlights the need for more gender-sensitive migration frameworks at a regional and international level. Future qualitative or quantitative research could explore comparative cases across different countries or focus on returned workers to understand the long-term impact of their migration experiences. More attention should also be paid to how resilience is developed and sustained among migrant women, especially in high-risk environments. By emphasizing both risks and strengths, this study contributes to a more balanced and practical understanding of women's migration, with the goal of informing fairer and more inclusive migration policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and beyond.

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