



A Path Analysis of the Relationship between Job Stress and Care for Ageing Parents in Thailand: A Case Study of Thai Migrant Workers

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ABSTRACT

This study examines internal labour migration in Thailand to study the stress level of workers who have to care of and look after their ageing parents. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 300 Thai migrant labourers who continuously have to attend to their ageing parents. Thai Job Content Questionnaire (Thai-JCQ) was used to gather information on job stress level using the Job Demand Control (JDC) model developed by Karasek. Findings show that distance, wages, and working conditions have a direct effect on job stress. Wages had the most direct relationship with job stress with a standardised regression weight of 0.400 (p -value <0.01). In conclusion, distance, wages, and working conditions, each directly impacts job stress. However, caring for ageing parents is a mediator and a moderator of job stress levels.

Keywords: Job stress, Thai migrant labour, path analysis, ageing parents

INTRODUCTION

Thailand has experienced rapid economic growth in recent years and a rise in the cost

of living especially after the AEC (Asian Economic Community) was established by ASEAN in 2015. This has particularly affected internal labour migration in Thailand (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2013; Niyomsilpa, 2011). A survey by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security in 2013 showed that Thai migrant workers experienced high levels of job stress and

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 12 July 2017

Accepted: 07 December 2017

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tend to work in the same regions rather than in different regions in Thailand (Bureau of Policy and Strategy, 2015).

This is heightened with the stress of looking after ageing parents, some of whom suffer from mental illnesses, thus, escalating the emotional and financial costs for the migrant workers. As Thai culture places great importance on looking after ageing parents (Yodthong, Seeherunwong, Kongsuriyanavin, & Au-Yeong, 2014), this would have a tremendous effect on the mental health of migrant labourers that is further aggravated by job stress. In Thailand, there is significant cultural emphasis placed on caring for elderly parents which is quite different from the Western culture. As most of them are migrants, it makes it harder for them to look after their sick and ageing parents (Yodthong et al., 2014). Studies have shown that poor working conditions, job insecurity, poor career opportunities, distance, and transport problems are linked to job stress, anxiety, and depression (Georges, et al., 2013; Grzywacz, et al., 2011; Hiott, Grzywacz, Davis, Quandt, & Arcury, 2008).

A study in China found that working hours, wages, family support, housing conditions, age, and work characteristics are associated with mental health problems such as stress (Wong & Leung, 2008). There are both physical and psychological effects of heavy workload and emotional stress on an individual (Arcury, Grzywacz, Chen, Mora, & Quandt, 2014).

Previous studies from the public health perspective under the psychological

dimension and the social determinants of health have shown the causes of job stress among migrant workers are directly associated with the complexity of working conditions such as heavy workload (Amponsah-Tawiah, Leka, Jain, Hollis, & Cox, 2014; Dunlavy & Rostila, 2013; Filiz, 2014; Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016a; Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016b), high job responsibility (Levy, Wegman, Baron, & Sokas, 2011), or different job characteristics such as job stress among Thai farm workers under globalisation (Kaewanuchit, Muntaner, Labonte, & Johnson, 2015), poor wages (Gatchel & Schultz, 2012) and logistics, namely distance to the workplace (Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016).

A study validated the link between job conditions and occupational stress was verified using a psychosocial occupational stress model among academics in Thai government universities. The model showed that teaching tasks had the most direct effect on stress among the academics. Another study investigated the causal relationship between occupation and stress among 200 male academic university employees (200 cases) in Thailand. The results of this study showed that job and environmental condition, which is one of the psychosocial dimensions of occupational health, has the most direct effect on stress ($p < 0.05$) while variables such as family support and periods of duty are occupational stress at the low level (Kaewanuchit, 2015).

A cross-sectional survey on occupational stress using Thai-JCQ among

Thai Immigrant Employees in Bangkok using path diagram (Kaewanuchit, 2017a) was undertaken. It was found that working conditions have the most direct relationship on occupational stress while workload has an indirect relationship (Kaewanuchit, 2017a).

Another study focused on psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families and findings found the former faced many family conflicts in raising their children, and looking after their ageing parents. This psychosocial stress problem is directly linked to poor mental health (Hettige, Ekanayake, Jayasundere, Rathnayake, & Figurado, 2012). A study on male Mexican migrant labour separated from their families for long periods showed they suffered from poor mental health issues, such as, fear, anxiety, and depression (Letiecq, Grzywacz, Gray, & Eudave, 2014). The same effects were noted among female migrant labourers in Sri Lanka, who were employed as maids, leaving behind family members to work in other countries such as, Europe and the American regions (Siriwardhana et al., 2015). Their ageing parents faced physical and mental health issues, while caring for their children left behind in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, a research in Thailand showed that job conditions were linked to mental health problems among Thai migrant labourers (Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016). However, the distance between home and workplace was negatively associated with mental health. This is because the workers regularly returned home (every

one or two weeks or once a month) thus, reducing stress levels as they are in the company of their family. Therefore, it is important to examine job stress among Thai migrant labourers who are simultaneously looking after their ageing parents.

METHODS

Sample and Recruitment

This study was conducted in 2016 among selected Thai migrant workers, aged between 20 and 59, who were also looking after their ageing parents. The respondents were working in Bangkok and in Nonthaburi province which borders Bangkok. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents who consisted of Thai immigrant employees who were caring for their ageing parents (300 cases). The researchers invited the same population who fulfilled the following criteria: self-identified as Thai migrant workers who looked after their ageing parents and who worked in Nonthaburi province and Bangkok. An exclusion criterion was Thai migrant workers who worked and lived in other provinces. The sample size was calculated using the M-plus guideline. It considered no less than 10-20 times the number of parameters for the path model $((p^* (p+1)) / 2) X (t \leq (p^* (p+1)) / 2)$. Thus, the sample size of 300 participants was enough to reduce proportional errors.

Research Instruments

Research instrument was a questionnaire which contained 76 closed items (three

parts): individual characteristic in first part (eight questions), working conditions while supporting ageing parents in second part (14 questions), and Thai Job Content Questionnaire (Thai-JCQ) in the final part (54 questions). The details below were analysed:

- (1) Individual characteristics such as province of the workplace, sex, education, marital status, age, occupation, wages and distance.
- (2) Working conditions, namely, whether they were exploited by their employer, job stress, poor work environmental condition, heavy workload, and difficult job assignments. Moreover, the perceived potential of an employer to affect the working conditions is a perception of employer control too. Items in the second part were answered using a 4-point Likert-type scale of “none” (coded as = 1), “less” (coded as = 2), “more” (coded as = 3), and “most” (coded as = 4). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of working conditions among Thai immigrants who cared for their aging parents was 0.80. There were also eight applied questions namely (i) travels undertaken to take care of aging parents, (ii) care for them, time spent on caring for them, (iii) their direct responsibility in caring for their parents, (iv) time spent on caring for their parents, (v) distance between their workplace and their home (far distance) in order to support their ageing parents, (vi) self-care by their ageing parents, (vii) time off from

their jobs to meet physicians to discuss health of their parents, and (viii) how supporting their ageing parents affect their job performance. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.75.

- (3) Job stress was measured using 54-items version of the Thai-JCQ (Phakthongsuk, 2009) and items were modified based on the Demand-Control-Support Model (Karasek, 1979). There were six dimensions: job control, psychological job demands, physical job, job security, social support, and hazard at work. 51 of the items in the scale used a 4-point Likert-type of scale of “strongly disagree” (coded as = 1) through to “strongly agree” (coded as = 4), except for items 32-34. For item 32 (Do you work continually throughout the year?), the answers ranged from “No, I am sometimes an employee and sometimes I am laid off” (coded as = 1), “No, I am always being laid off” (coded as = 2), “No, I work sometimes” (coded as = 3), to “I work the whole year” (coded as = 4). For item 33 (Did you face unemployment in the past year?), the answers ranged from “I was an unemployed person/ laid off last year” (coded as = 1), “always” (coded as = 2), “sometimes” (coded as = 3), to “never” (coded as = 4). For item 34 (Will you become unemployed in the next two years resulting from action by your employer?), the answer ranged from “high” (coded as = 1), “sometimes” (coded as = 2), “seldom” (coded as = 3), to “none” (coded as = 4). The total Thai-

JCQ test was calculated by summing the items ($\alpha = 0.84$). An interpretation of the total score of Thai JCQ test is < 60 scores (low stress = coded as 1), 60 -80 scores (medium stress = coded as 2), and > 80 scores (high stress = coded as 3).

Data accuracy, content and construct were validated by five professors. Item Objective Congruence Index (IOC) was 0.84. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (reliability score) of the questionnaire was 0.82, using SPSS program version 20. The questionnaire consisted of multiple choice and single-choice items and had a high response rate of 80.86%.

Data Collection

Data was collected via self-administered questionnaire. Respondents took about 60 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All the completed questionnaires were placed in a sealed box.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed for percentages, minimum scores, maximum scores, mean, and standard deviation. The link between job stress and caring for ageing parents was verified by path analysis using version

5.2 of the M plus program (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). Researchers considered p-values less than 0.01, and 0.05 as statistically significant. The path analysis was used to analyse r square and measure the fit of the path analysis. The rule for the test of the path model fit for a population of over 250 and variables < 12 is "chi square and degrees of freedom $\neq 0$, P-value > 0.05, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) > 0.95, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) < 0.08, and SRMR (Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual) < 0.05" (Hair et al., 2009).

RESULTS

General geographic data in this study (n= 300) are presented (Table 1). The model fit of the path analysis was accepted by M plus program (Table 2). In this path analysis, the addition of various factors explained variance in job stress by 33.6% (p-value < 0.01) (Table 2). This path analysis showed a mediating effect of causal factors, such as, Thai migrant workers caring for ageing parents on the relationship between working conditions, wages, distance, and job stress (Figure 1). Findings show distance, wages, and working conditions have a direct effect on job stress. Wages had the most direct relationship on job stress with a standardised regression weight of 0.400 (p-value < 0.01).

Table 1
General data (n= 300)

| Data | Percentage | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|------|--------------------|
| Previous workplace | Nonthaburi 33.4% | - | - | - | - |
| | Bangkok 66.6% | | | | |
| Gender | Females 73.3% | - | - | - | - |
| | Males 26.7% | | | | |
| Education | Primary school 8% | - | - | - | - |
| | Secondary school 40.4% | | | | |
| | Bachelor degree 50.6% | | | | |
| | Master degree 1% | | | | |
| Marital status | Single 66.7% | - | - | - | - |
| | Widowed 30.3% | | | | |
| | Married 3.0% | | | | |
| Age | 20-29 years old 10% | - | - | - | - |
| | 30-39 years old 50% | | | | |
| | 40-49 years old 26.7% | | | | |
| | 50-59 years old 13.3% | | | | |
| Occupation | Civil servants 10% | - | - | - | - |
| | Permanent employees 56.7% | | | | |
| | Temporary employees 33.3% | | | | |
| Wages (baht/ month) | ≤ 5,000 = 5.0% | Code as = 1 | Code as = 7 | - | - |
| | 5,001-10,000 = 10.5% | (≤ 5,000 | (30,001- | | |
| | 10,001-15,000 = 30.2% | baht/ | 35,000 | | |
| | 15,001-20,000 = 33.3% | month) | baht/ | | |
| | 20,001-25,000 = 16.0% | | month) | | |
| | 25,001-30,000 = 3.0% | | | | |
| | 30,001-35,000 = 2.0% | | | | |
| Distance (km) | 1-30 = 1.0% | Code as = 1 | Code as = 14 | - | - |
| | 31-60 = 6.4% | (1-30 km) | (391-420 | | |
| | 61-90 = 7.4% | | km) | | |
| | 91-120 = 28% | | | | |
| | 121-150 = 9.2% | | | | |
| | 151-180 = 19.5% | | | | |
| | 181-210 = 1.1% | | | | |
| | 211-240 = 2.0% | | | | |
| | 241-270 = 3.1% | | | | |
| | 271-300 = 13.3% | | | | |

Table 1 (continue)

| Data | Percentage | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | 301-330 = 3.2% | | | | |
| | 331-360 = 3.7% | | | | |
| | 361-390 = 1.1% | | | | |
| | 391-420 = 1.0% | | | | |
| Working condition With rearing ageing parents | None = 10.5% | Code as = 1 (none) | Code as = 4 (most) | - | - |
| | Less = 25.5% | | | | |
| | More = 34.0% | | | | |
| | Most = 30.0% | | | | |
| Job stress | None = 0.0% | Code as = 1 (none) | Code as = 4 (most) | - | - |
| | Less = 10.7% | | | | |
| | More = 45.0% | | | | |
| | Most = 34.0% | | | | |
| | Low stress = 15.3% | Code as = 1 (low stress) | Code as = 3 (high stress) | 88.7 scores | 0.8 |
| | Medium stress = 30.0% | | | | |
| | High stress = 54.7% | | | | |

Table 2
Overall Test of Model Fit for Path Model

| Criteria | Value with looking after ageing parents |
|--|---|
| Chi-Square | 0.384 |
| Degrees of freedom | 1 |
| P-value | 0.5354 |
| CFI | 1.000 |
| TLI | 1.020 |
| RMSEA | 0 |
| SRMR | 0.006 |
| R-square (with looking after ageing parents) | 0.277* |
| R-square (job stress) | 0.336* |

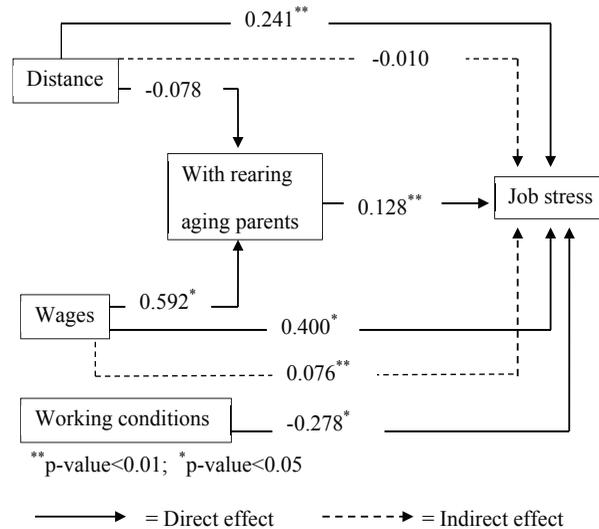


Figure 1. A Path Analysis of the relationship between job stress and caring for ageing parents in Thailand: A case study of Thai migrant workers

DISCUSSION

Previous studies found that migrant workers who looked after left-behind family members, especially, their ageing parents, spouse, and children experienced relatively high levels of stress (Perry-Jenkin & Wadsworth, 2013; Siriwardhana et al., 2015). It was also noted that wages are most consistently associated with job stress among Thai migrant workers. Nevertheless, there was no significant association of working conditions with job stress showing its negative direct effect on job stress (Figure 1). However, it could be considered that distance variable had the least direct effect on job stress in this group (Figure 1). Therefore, it can be surmised that working condition and distance variables had little effect or association with job stress compared with wages in this study. Earlier studies that looked at the relationship between job stress

and working conditions, wages, and mental health problems (such as stress), and health among migrant workers did not provide in-depth understanding of this link (Grzywacz, Quandt, & Arucry, 2008; Grzywacz et al., 2012; Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016; Swanberg, Clouser, & Westneat, 2012). The findings of this study showed the importance of causal factors, especially, path analysis for understanding and improving public health perspective based on the occupational health of vulnerable Thai migrant workers who looked after their ageing parents. The Thai culture clearly plays a role in defining the filial duties of a son or daughter. This is different from the western culture. In addition, a recent study (Siriwardhana et al., 2015) examined the health impact on family members left behind by migrant workers. This was done through in-depth interviews with affected parties. The findings indicated

a negative overall health effect (such as low moods, cheerlessness, and anxiety) among family members as a result of their parents taking up job offers abroad. The present study was different in that it examined the link between job stress and caring for ageing parents in the context of Thai migrant labourers.

The findings are consistent with those of previous studies (Rubalcava, Teruel, Thomas, & Godman, 2008) and the negative health effects of international migration on families in Indonesia (Hugo, 2002). In contrast, (Hsich et al., 2016; Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016b) found that working conditions had a direct positive effect on job stress (Kaewanuchit & Sawangdee, 2016b).

This study had several limitations. It examined the link between job stress and migrant labour caring for their ageing parents but it did not examine its impact on those left behind. This can be explored in future studies especially the impact on children and spouse in the context of Thai society. Another limitation is its methodology which only uses path analysis to understand the real causes of this phenomenon. Thus, this study could have benefited from in-depth interviews, and observation. What was interesting in the study is the fact working conditions have a negative direct effect on job stress contrasting earlier literature findings.

The strengths of this study are its contribution to knowledge on this topic especially in explaining the causal factors

of job stress, and caring for ageing parents. Based on these findings, better mental health promotion and better health policy for migrant labour can be formulated by the government from the public health perspective. Future research should look at the link between working conditions, and job stress as this study has shown a negative direct effect on job stress. A qualitative method based on in-depth interviews and observation should be adopted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank all the respondents who participated in this research. They also express their gratitude to the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), Thailand for funding this research project under the title, "The comparison of causal relationship of job stress between Thai immigrant employees with and without rearing their ageing parents".

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

This study was part of a research entitled "The comparison of causal relationship of job stress between Thai immigrant employees with and without rearing their aging parents" which was accepted by the Human Ethics Committees (Social Sciences) from Mahidol University, Thailand. The human ethics code was COA. No. 2016/254.0507 and the Thai Clinical Trials Registry code was TCTR 20160712002 of Thailand.

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