

Workplace discrimination faced by first generation migrants



The phenomenon of migration is prominent on a global scale and is considered one of the most crucial components of population change (Newell, 1988). The term migrant is widely discussed across a plethora of literature, however, a commonly used definition of a migrant is a person who has spent a year or longer outside their country of birth or citizenship (Sasse and Thielemann, 2005). Migrant is an umbrella term and be categorised depending on the individuals motives and intentions. A first generation migration refers to a person who has moved to another country by choice. If they seek leave to remain prior to entering the country they are commonly referred to as a refugee. On the contrary, if the person seeks leave to remain once they are already in the host country they are defined as an asylum seeker. This paper will aim to discuss the extent to which we can see if all migrants experience the workplace in the same way. Firstly, the potential reasons for migration will be discussed in order to develop an understanding of the global inequalities that are in place. Furthermore,, this paper will contain a discussion of the factors which shape their experiences within the work environment. This will involve an analysis of migrant discrimination, de-skilling, gender and race.

In order to fully understand the adversities faced by migrants in the workplace it is important to identify the various reasons that encourage a person to leave their country of residence. These are commonly described as push and pull factors. Push factors are circumstances which compel a person to leave their current place for another. Common push factors for migration can be identified from an economic standpoint and include high unemployment rates, under-development and lack of advancement

opportunities (Kainth, 2010). A study carried out by Bloch (2003) identified that the migration of Chinese and Ukrainian workers was primarily attributed to the accumulation of debt in their home country. Other reoccurring push factors can stem from political and social factors and may involve fear of political execution, inadequate medical care and famine due to inimical weather conditions (Nurse, 2004). In contrast, pull factors refer to the elements which dictate the country that a person chooses to immigrate into. In contrast to push factors, pull factors involve the appeal of receiving a higher standard of living. For example, although unemployment rates of Mexico are lower, the wages in the US compared to Mexico are significantly higher (Hanson, 2006). A large number of Mexican migrants move to the US seeking improved economic opportunity. Furthermore, the majority of developed countries have a growing need for low skilled labour demands. This creates a large opportunity for unskilled migrants to become an important segment of the countries labour force. An example of this is evident In Canada, In a study carried out by Geddes (2012), over the course of two years Canada's migrant population had nearly doubled in size. Push and pull factors can vary depending on the race of the individual and the country of origin. A study was carried out by Borooah and Hart (1999) regarding the labour market perspectives of ethnic minorities in the UK. They found that Indians were captivated by pull factors specifically, whereas for black minorities, push factors were at least just as important.

Discrimination has been a widely researched topic regarding the workforce for a number of decades (Zanoni, 2010). The bulk of this research primarily

focuses on overt discrimination which involves a display of immoral treatment followed by a visible outcome (Deitch, 2003).

It can be argued that this type of discrimination is gradually being supplemented and employees are facing more subtle forms of inequity (Cortina, 2008). Subtle discrimination tends to be ambiguous, therefore is often not punishable under employment legislation. This may be brought about unintentionally through everyday interaction, avoidance or harassment (Dipboye and Halverson, 2004). This is reinforced by a study carried out by Van Laer & Janssens (2011) which aimed to uncover the processes of subtle discrimination in the workplace. The authors conducted 26 interviews with Turkish or Maghrabi migrants in majority-dominated organisations and found that the discrimination stems from the ambiguity of the migrant worker's actions. In addition, a study by Krings et al (2014) concluded that individuals belonging to competitive immigrant groups from immediate neighbour countries were much more likely to be subjected to workplace incivilities. Furthermore, it is common for migrants to join ethnic enclaves upon arrival to their new country which can limit them to low status jobs with low pay, long hours and poor working conditions (Ahmad, 2008).

Another form of discrimination which is prominent on a global scale is the exploitation of migrant workers. This may involve forced labour for little to no compensation stemming from unethical recruitment practices. Statistics reported by the International Organisation for Migration (2017) reported that approximately 25 million people worldwide are in a situation of forced labour. Forced labour not only alludes to the restriction of wages or poor working conditions, It describes a violation of human rights and a restriction <https://assignbuster.com/workplace-discrimination-faced-by-first-generation-migrants/>

in human freedom (Rogaly, 2008). A well-documented example of forced labour in the UK is the “ Morecambe bay” incident in 2004. This involved the death of 23 Chinese cockle pickers who were swept away by the tide whilst working illegally (Glover, 2014). Human trafficking is particularly prominent among undocumented workers as they have higher potential to circumvent employment legislation (Ryan, 2005). A crucial example of this is the illegal sex trade which has been commonly described as modern day slavery (Gentleman, 2014). The participation of migrant women in the global sex industry is of international concern as vulnerable women are coerced into non-consensual sex work for the financial gain of traffickers (Kaya & Erez, 2017).

In addition to discrimination, it is extremely common for migrants to experience occupational downward mobility, also known as ‘ deskilling’. This involves migrants who are classed as professionals undertaking low skilled and low paid work due to educational bias and misrecognition of their foreign credentials (Siar, 2003). According to Bauder (2013), deskilling is likely to result in an economic loss and carries the potential to cause psychological damage and health problems. A crucial impact of deskilling is the inability to find work in the destination country. This is evident in the study carried out by Henderson et al (2001), which explored the experiences of Chinese migrants living in new Zealand. The study found that the high skilled individuals struggled to find work due to their qualifications not being accepted – particularly among doctors, engineers and teachers.

Discrimination among migrants also flags a number of gender and race inequalities. Woman are particularly vulnerable against the negative effects
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of deskilling. A study carried out by Dumont and Liebig (2005) concluded that women in countries belonging to the OECD were likelier to be overqualified for their job than their male counterparts. This is highly evident in the highly feminised nursing sector as migrants claimed that they experienced xenophobia, racism and a disregard for their ability to carry out their profession adequately (Allan & Aggergaard, 2003). The absence of formal support structures creates an barrier for migrants as they are forced to rely on informal networks - delaying integration into the labour market. This frequently has a greater impact on women as childcare responsibilities may prohibit the ability to attend language classes and develop professional relationships through social networks (Piper, 2005). Another common theme which occurs among migrants in the workplace is racialisation. A study carried out by Fox et al (2012) concluded that shared whiteness constitutes motive for social inclusion and cultural differences serve purpose for exclusion. An intersectional viewpoint can be undertaken when analysing the experiences of migrants as they face common prejudices shared with other social categories.

This paper highlights number of negative experiences relating to migration, however, in many cases migrants are well integrated into the economy and society of the country of destination. A large number of cases involve migrants positively settling down and experiencing a higher quality of life than in their origin country. This may involve receiving higher wages, improved healthcare and political freedom. A study conducted by Sang et al on female migrant professors found that the group of participants framed their career on their successes rather than their disadvantages (Sang et al,

2013). Furthermore, due to the marginalisation and the inability to find a job, a large number of migrants opt to pursue self-employment. A vast amount of success can be credited to foreign born entrepreneurs, more than 40 percent of organisations on the US fortune 500 list were founded by 1st or 2nd generation migrants (Leadem, 2017).

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