

Migrant Workers in Qatar: Not just an important topic during the FIFA World Cup 2022

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Abstract

The human rights and health issues of migrant workers building the physical infrastructure projects in Qatar connected to FIFA World Cup 2022 is a hot topic at the moment. This November early December the world (or at least a large proportion of it) will be focusing on the men's football world cup. The FIFA world cup has also focused the world's attention on human rights issues in Qatar, especially, but not only, to the exploitation of foreign workers. Researchers internationally have been highlighting for decades the range of economic, social, health and human rights issues related to the exploitation of often low-skilled migrant workers across the globe.

At the University of Huddersfield and Bournemouth University in the UK we have conducted numerous studies on migrant workers from Nepal. Our research is particularly interested in the health and well-being of Nepali migrant workers in the Middle East and elsewhere [1-20]. None of these labour market problems are not unique to Qatar but surface across countries in the Middle East. Of course, none of these problems recent, for example the *Nepal Journal of Epidemiology* has published our work on this topic [7], moreover we wrote about it more than a decade ago [8-9].

In the Middle East working conditions for foreign low-skilled labourers are often Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult (commonly referred at as the 3Ds). Migrant workers often perform physically demanding work in a hot unprotected environment, suffer dehydration and/or exposure to chemical, excessive use of pain killers, and unhealthy lifestyle factors (such as restricted water intake and a high intake of alcohol/sugary drinks) which may precipitate them to acute kidney injuries and subsequent chronic kidney disease [12-13]. In recent years, sudden nocturnal deaths (often unexplained) of labour migrant workers who are apparently healthy have also attracted an attention of researchers [11]. Similarly, family separation, social isolation, physical and mental illness, or poor working condition (or combination of these) may trigger for poor mental health and wellbeing of these migrant workers. Furthermore, it may be too overwhelming for them to cope when they are unable to access support services due to their poor literacy skills or migrant status.

These poor working conditions are made worse by the often very low pay. For example, *The Guardian* a national newspaper in the UK reported on its front page on November 19th 2022 that "Guards at World Cup park 'paid 35 pence per hour'" [21]. This newspaper highlight that these migrant workers employed as security guards in the Fifa Fan Festival are neither employed by Fifa itself or the organiser of this festival, but by a sub-contractor.

As researchers studying the working and living conditions of migrant workers, we are encouraged that the world's media are paying attention to this problem. However, we are concerned that: (1) many people see the problem as temporary just the building of football stadiums and the running of the world cup; and (2) a unique problem in Qatar. The world cup will be all be over before Christmas, one country will have been crowned world champions and the world's media will move on from the Qatar and the plight of migrant workers. The media's focus will shift to on another global event.

Our plea is to keep the working conditions and the health and well-being of poorly paid migrant workers on the agenda of the global media, politicians, employers, and trade unions. Although our team has conducted several research on migrant health issues, further research is needed to better understand morbidity and mortality in migrant workers to enable evidence-based policy to improve their health and well-being. We strongly urge migrant sending and hosting countries to implement strategies that effectively protect human rights, safety, health, and well-being of labour migrants.

Competing interest

Authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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