

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES: A  
PERSPECTIVE OF BANGLADESHI FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS  
IN MIDDLE EAST**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. History of Female Migration**

The surge of migrant workers into the Middle East began in the early 1970s, when increased petroleum production brought with it a demand for skilled and unskilled labor. As living standards rose for nationals, opportunities in the service sector for female labor expanded. It is no coincidence that once the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started raising oil prices, oil-importing states began sending migrant workers to the Gulf. Currently, Saudi Arabia is the largest recipient of migrant domestic labor, with the UAE close behind with over seventy-five percent of its population classified as migrant workers. Today, domestic workers primarily emigrate from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, choosing to leave their families and migrate for a number of economic and social reasons (Halabi 2008:43) .

Bangladesh is a hugely labor surplus country and consequently participates in the supply side of the global labor market (Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit, 2008). The country has a long history of migration and it is one of the major labor-exporting countries in the world. Each year a large number of people of this country voluntarily migrate overseas for both long- and short-term employment (Siddiqui, 2005). Despite country's long history of migration, increase in oil price in 1970s opened up vast scope for Bangladeshi migrants in the Middle East which was later on expanded to the newly industrialized countries of South East Asia (Siddiqui, 2003). Labor migration from Bangladesh was geared furthermore for the government of Bangladesh promoting international labor migration as part of an overall development plan since 1976 (Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit, 2007). Moreover, the country became major source country of migrant workers during the 1980s (Mannan, 2001).

### **1.2. Background of the Problem**

Bangladeshi female labors go to Middle East countries especially in Saudi Arab and UAE as migrants to have job. Women are involved in different kinds of jobs like doctor, nurse, garments worker, housemaid and so on. A good number of female labors get job as housemaid to work at household in Saudi Arab and UAE. Study shows that the percentage of

housemaids is the highest counted 30.28% among the all categories of jobs in Middle East for Bangladeshi women (BMET 2009). Unlike other labor surplus countries, in Bangladesh, female migrants make up a low proportion of labor migrants – until 2004, only 1% of Bangladeshi labor migrants were female. This number has increased to 5% in 2009, however women still represent a small minority in relation to overall Bangladeshi migrant flows (BMET 2009). Labor earns foreign money from Middle East and they send it to Bangladesh, contributing to the flow of remittance. But, practically, housemaids suffer from domestic violence in Middle East by their employer than other job holders. So this study particularly focuses on housemaids.

Although it is undeniable that many female migrant workers within Saudi Arabia return to their home countries with little to no complaints, there are several who tell a drastically different story. Though slavery was abolished in 1962 by King Faisal (Brown and Saunders 2004:1), exploitative labor practices persist; many migrant workers live in slave-like conditions with no food or wages. Passport confiscation is the most common way in which employers restrict a worker's freedom of movement. Without a passport to leave, workers become completely at the mercy of their employer. Once their freedom of movement is restricted, migrant workers face from forced labor and enslavement, to sexual and physical abuse. Such practices have become commonplace within the system and are tolerated by the Saudi government. For those workers who do not enter the country legally, the abuses can be much worse as an employer has even more power over the employee (Jessup 2010).

For Bangladeshi women, this reality is worse than for their male counterparts; many are raped and sexually assaulted by their Saudi male employers. This abuse has detrimental psychological effects on them. There are at least 1 million women from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh currently working the lowest paying jobs in the country (Brown and Saunders 2004: 47). They work long hours and are kept as “virtual prisoners in workshops, private homes, and the dormitory-style housing that labor subcontracting companies provided to them” (Brown and Saunders 2004: 2). The consequences of the violence are very pathetic. Women suffer from dissatisfaction from work. They face the low working capability. Housemaids even are being involved with HIV/AIDS that are unknown to them.

Though housemaids face multifarious violence, most of them are staying in Saudi Arab and UAE due to earn money. A few numbers of housemaids is returning to the home country being incapable to cope with violence. The housemaids, who are remaining in Saudi Arab and UAE, are taking different coping strategies to survive in there. Some women are also using the unfair means to cope with situation like stealing.

Available studies emphasized about labor's sufferings with low importance. Even, Governments are reluctant to address problems as it is suspected that identifying violence may decrease the flow of migration. Moreover, exploitation and discrimination are conflicting issues as it goes against human nature. Any human being does not have any right to physically and mentally torture anybody. But, unfortunately, Bangladeshi migrant female labors face it in Middle East. There are few studies conducted collaboratively focusing on domestic violence on housemaids and their coping strategies in Middle East. But it is high time to address the problems and to identify the path to mitigate. So the main concern of this study will be to explore the violence and its aftermath that housemaids face in Middle East. Besides, it will try to find out what type of coping strategies they are taking to adjust violence.

This study is important as it will focus on the basic structure-income earners-of Bangladesh. Some housemaids have left their little kid in Bangladesh to earn only money, some are divorced earning money to survive by her own, and some send money to feed their parents and so on. Moreover their income is contributing to increase the remittance in Bangladesh. It will address the nature of violence and its aftermath to the government and international agency to mitigate problems of housemaids. It will then be hope for new migrants to go Middle East to earn money that will increase more the economy of Bangladesh.

## **2. Research Questions**

The main research question: How are Bangladeshi housemaid migrants being violated by their employers in Middle East?

There are three sub-questions behind this key question.

- 1) What types of domestic violations housemaids face in Middle East?
- 2) What are the aftermaths of violation on housemaids?
- 3) How do housemaids take coping strategies to sustain with violence?

Primarily the structure of this paper incorporates definition, conceptual framework, theoretical analysis, hypotheses, literature review, methodology and conclusion.

## **3. Definition of the Concepts**

*Domestic violence*: The concept domestic violence will be measured by the different types of violence like physical, sexual, economical, livelihood and mental and so on. Basically, Bangladeshi female migrant labor work as housemaid at household in Middle East. They face different exploitation from their employer those are violation of human rights.

The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence states that:

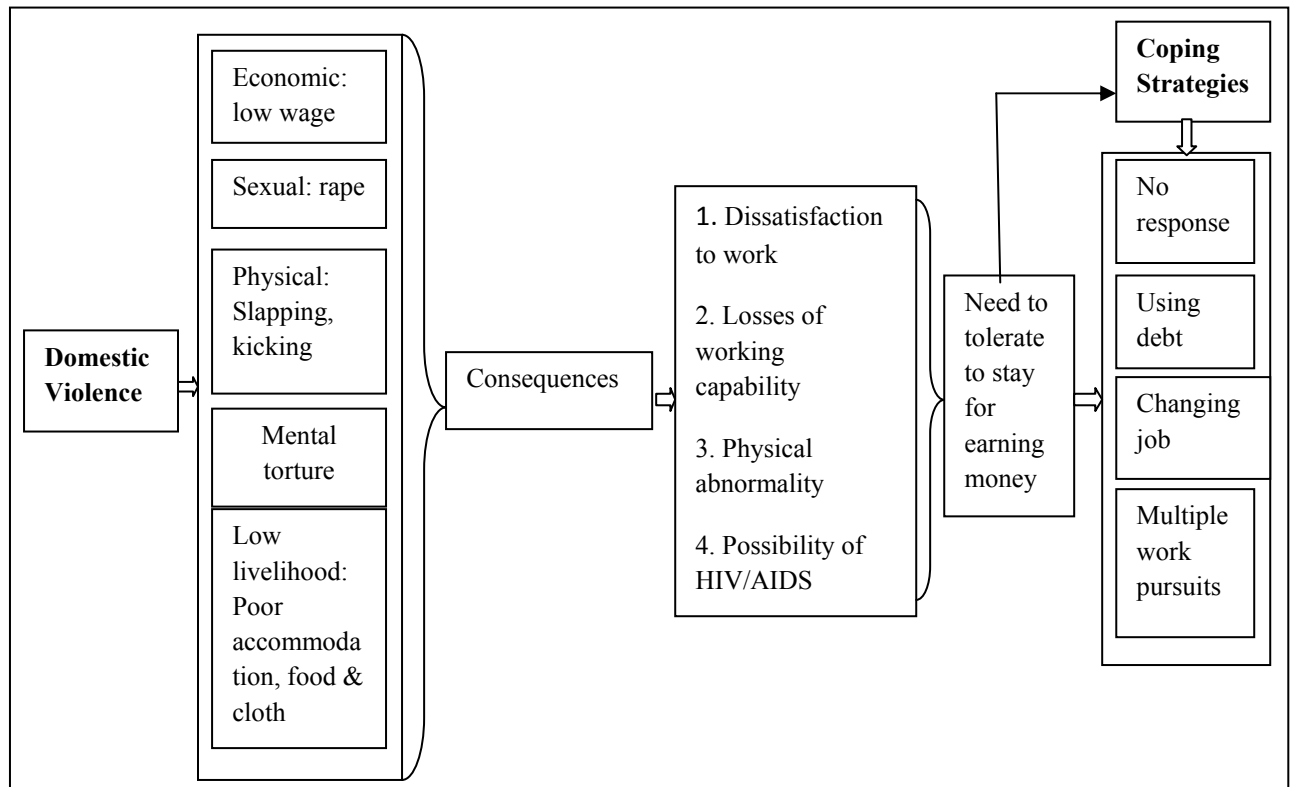
" "domestic violence" shall mean all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (2011).

*Coping strategies*: In this study coping strategies refer to the mechanisms that Bangladeshi female housemaids take to sustain against violence in Middle East to earn money. According to Taylor 'Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events' (1998).

*Housemaid Migrants*: In this study, housemaid migrants, who work at household of Middle East countries to earn money, are female person from Bangladesh. They are also called domestic servant or labor.

#### 4. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Domestic violence and coping strategies



This conceptual framework is drawn from the basis of assumption of previous studies about domestic violence and coping strategies patterns of housemaid migrants. Here domestic violence includes different types of violence like economic, sexual, physical, mental and low livelihood. All violence have aftermath on the housemaids. When they face that exploitation without any cause, they feel dissatisfaction to work, losing working capability, physical abnormality and the possibility of sexual transmitted diseases. But housemaid migrants need to stay in pressure as they need to earn for their bread for surviving. To survive in hostile environment, housemaids take coping strategies using their techniques and supports. So this above conceptual framework shows the link of violence and necessity of coping strategies.

## 5. Theoretical Background

This study has theoretical usages and literatures. Some theoretical explanations are presented through which the proposed study can be explained. The theories are following:

It has relevance of globalization theory that focus on structures and variables of unequal economic exchange (Appadurai, 1990). The process of change in the UAE and Saudi Arab cannot be adequately understood outside the dynamics generated by the oil economy and larger forces of globalization. The flows of strategic resources such as oil and of migrant workers across national boundaries are among the most conspicuous phenomena within the present-day global scene. Appadurai notes that the process of 'deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies' (1990).

Writers have explained this international labor migration using different analytical perspectives, such as the historical structural perspective located within the framework of the dependency model (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). According to this perspective, international movement of wage labor is conceived as unequal interchange of different modes of production. The exploitation of foreign migrant laborers is viewed as generating profit for the capitalist system. However, the socioeconomic disequilibrium approach looks at the movement of labor as a necessary element of normal population adjustment equilibrium (Ling, 1984). While global labor markets are now inter-dependant on skilled and low-skilled people from countries like Bangladesh, there remains a gap in addressing the impacts that migration has on those leaving behind their families and communities, their social structure and culture (OKUP 2009).

The general belief is that female migration for overseas work relates to sex and entertainment services. Prostitution is hidden by some of these activities and has become very lucrative, sometimes for co-ethnic employers pimps (Anthias, 2000:27; Ullah and Rahman, 1999). Overseas domestic workers are almost always unjustly considered "potential prostitutes" by local lay people (Jones 1996:25); and unmarried women leaving to work abroad are imagined as "social misfits" because they could not get husbands or manage a work locally that prompted them to leave. The proverbial oldest profession commoditized the female body long before capitalism came along, but globalization has tended to enormously increase prostitution (Lewellen, 2002:141). Women's merit and their work are generally recognized as domestic lore that often subsume their interests to their families, hereby making their

migration work largely unpaid and under-valued. Women, whose careers are often contingent on family outcomes, must generally be the more flexible spouse (Partridge, 1996; Bonney and Love, 1991).

Globalization carries relevance in providing analytical integration only when its constituent macro processes are contextualized within the particularities of the local society and culture. Gulf society as an emerging type has the dual characteristics of rapid economic modernization, yet remaining traditional in the politico-legal and cultural dimensions. This affects how society reacts to the various scopes of globalization, including migrants. The interplay between the local particularities and global forces produce conditions which affect the way migrants adjust their behavior and create coping strategies (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 1999).

The creative use of situational tactics and flexible coping strategies provide the migrant with greater adjustment abilities, thus enhancing his long-term survival prospects (Conquergood, 1992).

Finally, the above theoretical discussions are applicable to this proposed study. Every theory has specific focus. Globalization theory explains the unequal economic exchange. This theory is fit to explain economic domestic violence. Dependency model shows unequal interchange of different modes of production. Unjustly considering housemaids as potential prostitutes make the labor risky physically. This theory is applicable to understand the sexual violence by lay people in Middle East. The theory of analytical integration and creative use of situational tactics show the way of exploring coping strategies of housemaids.

## **6. Hypotheses**

Here hypotheses are following:

1. Paying low by employer makes housemaids hopeless;
2. Forced sexual violence insists the tendency of HIV/AIDS;
3. Physical torture increases the physical abnormality;
4. Mental torture leads to dissatisfaction to work;
5. Low income of housemaids lead to involve with multifarious works as coping strategy;



6. Facing more physical torture increases to the tendency of job changing as coping strategy and
7. Physical treatment increases the dependency on debt of housemaids as coping strategy.

## **7. Literature Review**

### ***First, CEDAW and the Female Labor Migrants of Bangladesh by MFA Members in Bangladesh in 2002.***

Women suffer from various forms of mistreatment and abuse, not only in the process of migration but also on their arrival in the destination country. They become victims of sexual harassment, physical abuse and are denied basic rights by their employers and co-workers. Female domestic workers are in the worst position, as they are often forced to accept conditions akin to a state of captivity. Migrant women are often denied access to any forms of redress in case of maltreatment or abuse in an alien country. In addition, due to traditional expectations in terms of what constitutes ‘appropriate women’s work’, most migrant women are concentrated in jobs that are ‘typically female’ – working as domestic workers, entertainers, restaurant/hotel staff, assembly-line workers in clothing and electronics industries, etc. These jobs are low in pay, are subject to harsh conditions, and are generally shunned by local women. Many migrant women are subject to patriarchal stereotypes that cast them as docile, obedient, and willing to provide personal service. Their jobs and their social status lead to isolation and vulnerability, and oftentimes exploitation and abuse. This is exacerbated by the fact that many migrant women are low skilled, uneducated, and illiterate, and as such, it is difficult for them to access the information they might need to remedy their situations.

This study identifies the violence of female domestic labor face in Middle East like sexual harassment, physical abuse. These problems have similarity with my proposed study. But this study did not identify the aftermath of problem and how female labors are adjusting with violence there.

***Second, Foreign Workers in Saudi Systematically Abused: Some Even Treated Like Slaves by The Daily Star on 16 July in 2004.***

During the mid 70s, potential migrants preferred Middle East countries to migrate. However, this trend has declined over the years following disillusionments caused by the misbehavior of the employers towards the laborers, declining salary base and many incidents of brutalization. Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia have systematically been abused and exploited, and that some of them living in conditions akin to slavery. Discrimination against women in the conservative oil-rich kingdom compounds the plight of female workers, some of whom have been victims of sexual abuse and forced confinement.

This report presents the problems of female workers experience in Middle East like disillusionments, declining salary, brutalization. These problems are specifically different from the previous study. These problems have similarity with my proposed study. But like previous study, this study did not identify the aftermath of problem and how female labors are coping with those exploitations.

***Third, Returning International Labor Migrants. From Bangladesh: The Experience and Effects of Deportation by Nazli Kibria in 2004.***

Eighty-one interviews were conducted in 2003 in Bangladesh with former international migrant workers. The interviews were conducted in the Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet regions of Bangladesh. The sampling method was thus a convenience one, producing a non-random sample of returned migrant workers. Some informants spoke of having actively sought return to Bangladesh. They had done so in order to escape from the highly abusive working and living conditions in which they had found themselves abroad. Thus although they had in fact traveled back to Bangladesh of their own accord, the coercive circumstances of their stay abroad sharply distinguishes their situation from those who had returned voluntarily. Those who related stories of escape from abuse all spoke of going overseas voluntarily to work. Once abroad however, they had found themselves living and working in conditions that were vastly different from what they had been led to expect. These conditions were coercive and punitive and typically involved little or no financial remuneration. Faced with these conditions, they actively sought return to Bangladesh. As suggested by their expressed desire

to have stayed in the overseas country longer if conditions had been different, they had sought return as a way of escaping from the abuse; their return was not a rejection of the strategy of working abroad.

This paper explored the data from the previous International migrants. It was quantitative study and data collection technique was face to face interview from 81 returnee migrants in three regions using convenience sampling. Here highly abusive working and living conditions are identified as domestic violence. This paper has similarity with my proposed study to find violence and choosing method. But I found some problems like the choosing of sampling. I think here stratified sampling technique was better. Moreover, there is no comparison about the problems between regions.

***Fourth, Contract Enslavement of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates by Romina Halabi in 2008.***

Due to the individualized working environment of household labor, female domestic servants are the group most vulnerable to exploitation in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Domestic workers are often denied freedom of movement, and are either locked inside or forbidden to leave the home without permission. Violence against maids includes physical attacks ranging from rape to slapping; other forms of violence include overwork, including forcibly working in more than one household and the refusal of days off, non-payment of wages or a reduced salary. Maids also often experience poor living conditions, such as lack of food and privacy. Physical violence is usually perpetrated by the female employer, or madam of the household. Most workers have reported suffering from more than one type of violence during the course of their employment, and many are so traumatized by the experience that it even negatively affects their ability to reintegrate into society upon returning home.

This study presents the problems of female workers face in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Here new kinds of violence are identified than previous study like overwork, forcibly working in more than one household and the refusal of days off. These problems have similarity with my proposed study. But this study did not identify the aftermath of problem and how female labors are coping in there.

***Fifth, HIV and Bangladeshi Women Migrant Workers: An Assessment of Vulnerabilities and Gaps in Services by Bindhya Pradhan Priesner in 2012.***

The study was designed to follow a hybrid approach by using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data collection includes three techniques FGD, In-depth interview and a key informant interview. Data were collected from returnee migrant and prospective migrants and stakeholders (those who send migrants to Middle East). Most (83%) of the respondents, while working overseas, lived in the employer's house in a room of their own; 9 per cent lived without a dedicated space (they slept in the kitchen, the store room, or under the stairs); and another 9 per cent shared an apartment with other migrant workers. This finding is also corroborated by the FGD. The participants who lived with their employers had to share rooms with other members of the family, or they slept in the kitchen or living room. Some were provided rooms of their own. One participant shared a room with other migrants, and in one case the company provided a room which six people had to share. There seems to be a big variance in the treatment of domestic workers by employers. While 60 per cent of the respondents seem to have been "generally treated with respect", 16 per cent were verbally abused (with 6% saying they were verbally abused often), and 23 per cent were beaten (with 13% beaten often) by their employer. The bulk of the respondents (84%) never received a day off from work. This corresponds to other studies which show that domestic workers frequently experience physical, psychological and verbal abuse. Although some were treated fairly, some of the FGD participants shared that they were physically and verbally abused for small misunderstandings or mistakes arising from their limited knowledge of the local language. Some had to resort to stealing food because they were not given enough to eat.

This study used mixed methods to collect data. The data were collected from the returnee migrants of Middle East in Bangladesh. Here accommodation problem, verbal abuse, beaten, no leisure of female migrant were identified. From FGD, it is explored the causes of physically and verbally abuse due to language barrier of female migrants. This study also focused on one coping strategy such as food stealing as they did not get enough to eat. This study is helpful for me as it gives me direction to identify the problems of domestic labors and even coping strategy though it is only one.

Finally, considering the all literature reviews of this study, it is found the direction of using best methods and types of violence. There are explored many types of violence in the

previous studies. Some studies identified the same kinds of violence and some are different. My proposed study has similarity with the previous studies to identify the problems of Bangladeshi housemaids in Middle East. Nevertheless, my study will try to find out new kind of problems beyond identified if it truly exists. It is noted that the proposed study will also focus on the coping strategies of the housemaids in Middle East against violence that are hardly identified in earlier studies. So, I think this is a major gap in the previous studies with my study as previous studies could not identify the coping strategies. To identify the coping strategies is important as a significant portion of the Bangladeshi housemaids are staying in the Middle East to earn money. They are taking different traditional and new strategies to cope with horrible situation.

## **8. Methodology**

The study is explanatory in nature and survey method will be followed. Here survey method is chosen as the research questions have cause and effect relationship. To find out the true answer of questions, interview schedule will be used in direct contact with sample informants. Statistical tests will be used to show the relationship. Besides, there will be the chance of making generalization. So, survey method is chosen.

Dhaka of Bangladesh will be selected as study area as there are relatively heavy outflows of international labor migrants. The unit of analysis of this study will be returnee housemaids from Saudi Arab and UAE in Bangladesh who completed their full job tenure. Here returnee housemaids who completed their full job tenure will be selected as I think they are the best to fulfill the answer of my research questions. They will correctly address the violence and coping strategies during full work. Another, Saudi Arab and UAE in Middle East countries will be selected as more than half of the total female migrants from Bangladesh go there and contribute to increase GDP.

To identify the sample, the help of migrants sending agencies in Bangladesh will be contacted. For this study, respondents will be recruited and identified with the assistance of Government and private agencies. Government agency includes Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET). BMET is the executing agency of Ministry Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in respect to processing labor migration. Another, private agency include the recruiting agencies became organized under the Bangladesh Association

of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). The sampling method will be thus a convenience one, producing a non-random sample of returned migrant workers. Data will be collected from the informants those who have come back not before than one year. The required sample size will be 50. Here, 50 samples are chosen on the basis of the number of female migrants came back in Bangladesh in previous years.

Through face-to-face interaction, primary data will be collected by five expert interviewers conducting the research. An interview schedule will be used to write down the answers to the questions posed during an interview to the informants. The ethics that will be maintained during data collecting are voluntary participation, no physical or psychological harm to subjects, integrity and PAC: Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.

Data will be firstly scrutinized and eliminated the irrelevant data following coded by giving the specific name of every variable. Data will be analyzed and interpreted by using different software like SPSS, Excel etc. Here descriptive (frequency distribution, percentage and different charts) and inferential statistics (correlation) will be used to explain and test the study hypotheses.

## **9. Conclusion**

This final paper has been written as research proposal to identify the violence facing Bangladeshi female migrant workers in Middle East. Domestic violence is a horrific crime. Criminals are not punished as they are employers of housemaid and no evidence is found out clearly. Despite violence, Bangladeshi housemaids are working in there due to earn money. They are taking different techniques in their own to face the violence. But it is needed to stop now as violence is limitless and sometimes coping strategies are not fare. In this paper a conceptual framework has been used to show the link of violence and necessity of coping strategies. Theoretical analysis provides the justification of explaining violation. Literature reviews supply the evidence of nature of violence. Through survey method cause and effect relation between violence and strategies will be identified. This study will be helpful to mitigate violence in future opening the eyes of local and international authorities.

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