

**THE HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOR OF
MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS IN MAE
SOT, TAK, THAILAND: A PATH ANALYSIS
STUDY OF THE INFLUENCES OF
DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, STRESS AND
COPING STYLES**

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Abstract: This study was conducted in November, 2011, to investigate the influence of Myanmar migrant workers' level of depression, anxiety and stress on their practice of certain health risk behaviors, both directly and indirectly, being mediated by their coping styles. The sample consisted of 300 Myanmar migrant workers in Mae Sot, Tak and who volunteered to fill in the study's questionnaire. The results obtained showed that these migrants reported (1) low level of depression, anxiety and stress (2) were more likely to employ problem-focused coping than emotion-focused coping when dealing with stressful situation in their life (3) their depression anxiety, stress were positively associated with their practice of health risk behaviors such as smoking, betel quid chewing, drug using, and suicidal ideation. The implications of the findings with regard to how Myanmar migrant workers in Mae Sot cope with their depression, anxiety, stress in their daily life is discussed.

Keywords: Health Risk Behaviors, Coping Skills, depression, anxiety and stress

Introduction

Mae Sot is a labor town which is located in the Tak province on the Thai-Myanmar border. Tak province is estimated to have around 200,000 Myanmar workers, with approximately 70,000 to 100,000 working in Mae Sot. The reason why there are so many Myanmar migrant workers living in Mae Sot is because of the town's easy access from Myanmar. For these migrant workers, it is simply crossing a bridge into Thailand and obtaining one day passes which are available at official check points. According to a report by the Federation of Trade Union Burma (FTUB, 2004), there are about 200 factories in Tak province and Myanmar workers constitute approximately 95 percent of the work force.

For many Myanmar people, life is very difficult in their home country as it is not easy to find employment. This is the primary reason why so many Myanmar people move to the Thai border area where jobs are available to them. There are many types of

job available for Myanmar migrant workers including sea food processing, plantation and agriculture, domestic and factory work.

Migrating to Thailand involves profound changes to the Myanmar migrant worker's social, environmental, and cultural contexts. Many migrant workers are living without their families or existing social networks (Griffin & Soskolne, 2003). They often live in cramped dormitories and enjoy few rights. They are often subjected to high levels of exploitation, including long hours and wages well below the legally mandated minimum wage in Thailand. Moreover, living conditions in factory dormitories are often crowded and unsanitary and the food/rice provided by the employers is often of poor quality. Even so, salary deductions for food and accommodation are made at rates often disproportionate to actual cost. (Pim, 2001)

In addition, for young migrants, life in Thailand limits their opportunities for normative behaviors such as going out during holidays and socializing with friends. The majority of them are poor, living away from their families, work in jobs that Thai nationals do not want to fill, and earn wages that are far less than the minimum wage mandated for Thai workers. No wonder then that they complain of loneliness, of being homesick, being depressed, and stressed in their new environment. Some are unable to access government health services and live in stressful environments, such as poor working and housing conditions (Win et al., 2002). Such conditions are the catalysts for many young Myanmar workers to engage in health risk behaviors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and psychical inactivity (Chen et al., 2004; Paavola et al., 2004).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the level of stress, anxiety and depression among Myanmar migrant workers in Mae Sot, Tak province, Thailand;
2. To investigate the direct influences of these migrant workers' levels of depression, anxiety and stress on their practice of certain health risk behaviors;
3. To investigate the indirect influences of these migrant workers' levels of depression, anxiety and stress levels, being mediated by their coping styles, on their practice of certain health risk behaviors.

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