

Abstract

This thesis identifies individual recruiters as the key actors in recruitment and management of migrant construction workers in Bangladesh. It argues that the central role of individual recruiters in indirect labour recruitment and management practices produces precarious work conditions through exploitative employment relationships that contribute to various pressures and insecurities amongst the rural-urban migrant labourers and limit scope for labour protection. The study is focussed on migrant construction workers in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh where many rural labourers migrate and work. It generates and analyses empirical data collected through a survey and in-depth interviews of migrant workers, 100 and 15 respectively, and interviews with five individual recruiters. It contributes new insights to the fields of employment relations by unpacking the inter-connections between rural-urban labour migration, recruitment and precarious employment with reference to the migrant workers in the construction sector of Bangladesh. The original contribution of this study is to shine a light on the structure of recruitment practices to enhance understandings of employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector. This work can be beneficial to other global contexts where recruitment may also be key to precarious work conditions.

The thesis draws on existing literature on precarious work and performs an empirical study that complements theoretical conceptualisations of precarious work produced in the fields of employment relations by examining the connections between recruitment practices and precarious work conditions. The empirical results of this study reveal that rural-urban labour migration for construction work in Bangladesh involves a multi-tiered labour recruitment and management process in which the individual recruiters dominate in all respects through the discretion they have in determining the terms and conditions of employment. While the predominant role of recruiters offers the rural labourers easy access to work in cities, this work is stressful and can be characterised as *4D*: dirty, difficult, dangerous and disgraceful. The dominance of recruiters is conceptualised as producing "hyper-individualised employment" and this study for the first time unravels the extensive individualised layers in labour recruitment and management that contribute heavily to conditions of precariousness, and to the control and exploitation of migrant workers. Hyper-individualised employment is a specific pathway into employment relationship in which the individual recruiters dominate over the workers to create pressures and insecurities to force the workers to be highly dependent on them. Making the migrant workers individually subordinate to their recruiters, it generates a despotic employment relationship that contributes heavily to precariatization of rural-urban migrant labourers in Bangladesh.