

Discrimination Against Poor Immigrant Workers in Vietnamese Urban Areas

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Abstract: Discrimination is one of the main obstacles to social inclusion faced by poor immigrant workers in urban cities of Vietnam nowadays. Identifying the nature of discrimination as well as the perception of immigrant workers on discrimination are necessary in order to find the appropriate measures to address this issue. This article analyses the discrimination faced by immigrant workers in some basic activities of the urban life. According to the authors, discrimination is one of the causes that solidify the disparities and unbeatable distance between the poor immigrants and urban communities. It is due to discrimination that the daily life of immigrant workers has become closed-up, distanced and disintegrated from that of the communities in which they reside and work in.

Key words: Discrimination; social inclusion; poor immigrant workers; Vietnamese urban areas.

1. Introduction

The rapidly increasing urbanization rate in Vietnam in the past two decades has triggered a powerful flow of migration within the country, particularly the migration flow from rural to urban areas. One of the most prominent flows is that of workers from rural areas to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. According to data released by the General Statistical Office, in 2013, the immigration rate to Hanoi was 7.7% and to Ho Chi Minh City 16.5%. Accompanying these immigration flows were numerous social issues that emerged in the urban life and were faced by the immigrants themselves. These involved issues in urban management, pressure on infrastructures, and social inclusion of the immigrants in terms of employment, income levels, housing, culture, lifestyle and social services. This research will conduct

an analysis on the obstacles and difficulties faced by immigrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City during the social inclusion process. Particularly, based on statistical data and surveys conducted with immigrant workers, this research aims to identify and clarify the barriers to social inclusion faced by poor immigrant workers in some basic activities such as employment, community life, usage of public services as well as their urban life experiences when faced with discrimination and self-discrimination.

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2. Discrimination in employment

The majority of the poor labour force immigrating into Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in recent periods was driven by economic incentives. They fled to the cities with the hope of finding a reasonable job opportunity that could suit their competency and health conditions and which could offer them a better income. They could be workers of an industrial zone or employees of small production and business entities, or members of construction, services teams/groups, or even free labourers such as motorbike taxi drivers, masons, mobile

vendors or domestic helpers, etc. Most of the works are harsh, unstable, dusty and even toxic works that urban workers rarely handle. It is this clear distinction in the nature of these jobs that has created the basis for discrimination, resulting in a specific and vulnerable labour group in the immigrants into the cities. The results obtained from a survey over a thousand poor immigrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City on the ability to find employment, the characteristics of the works, the treatment of employers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Prevalence of Employment-related Issues Faced by Respondents (%)

Issues	Frequency			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Competition for employment	17.6	32.5	21.1	28.8
Harsh, dangerous work	8.5	22.5	28.6	40.4
Lack of skills, experience	12.0	33.3	26.2	28.5
Being treated poorly by employers	2.6	14.2	30.9	52.3

Source: Results of Survey.

Table 1 shows that, despite the varying frequencies, among the 1,040 immigrant workers taking part in the survey, over 70% have acknowledged that they had to compete for employment opportunities and that they lacked the necessary skills and experience for their jobs. Particularly, nearly 60% of respondents considered that they had endured harsh and dangerous works while nearly half (47.7%) said that they had been maltreated by their employers. Although this does not occur to the majority of the respondents and neither does this take place

on a regular basis, this ratio of immigrant workers who had been maltreated by their employers definitely require for consideration under the discrimination aspect. It is such kind of behavior that keeps immigrant workers from feeling secured and attached to their jobs, while it also deepens their sense of inferiority complex in labour relations.

A deeper analysis of this indicator by profession groups shows that immigrants working in construction and services groups who reported to have been treated poorly by “owners” had the highest prevalence rate, at

53.5%, while other labour groups experienced less so: at 48.2% for workers in industrial zones and 45.2% for workers in small production and business entities. It is a fact that the bond between immigrant workers in construction and services groups are the loosest – they easily quit their jobs and return home and not being tied up by any commitment.

Perceived discrimination (self-discrimination) of poor immigrant workers in employment also needs to be addressed in this research. Due to the nature of the jobs and

differences in labour, the negative treatment of employers can easily lead to a sense of inferiority complex, lower self-esteem and lack of confidence by the poor immigrant workers during labour relations. The three indicators assessed in this case include the ability to find stable employment, concern over the lack of sympathy of co-workers, and fear of being treated with discrimination at work. The results of the survey on the perception of immigrant workers on these indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Perception of Poor Immigrant Workers on Employment and Labour Relations (%)

Issue/relation	Perceived Prevalence			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Difficulty in finding stable employment	24.1	34.3	23.4	18.2
Concern over the lack of sympathy of others at work	4.9	29.6	30.1	35.4
Fear of being treated with discrimination at work	4.4	23.2	30.5	42.0

Source: Results of Survey.

Table 2 indicates that, regardless of the prevalence being frequent, occasional or rare, a large part of respondents demonstrated definite aspects of perceived discrimination. Specifically, the number of poor immigrant workers who considered that they had never experienced difficulty in finding stable employment accounted for the smallest share (18.2%) while those experienced otherwise accounted for the remaining 81.8%, the highest among the three indicators examined. The ratio of immigrant workers concerned about the lack of sympathy from their co-workers also stood at 64.6% and

those feared about discrimination at work accounted for 58.0% of the cases.

Experienced discrimination or perceived discrimination during employment, especially in labour relations, has triggered in the poor immigrant workers sentiments of doubt, diminished confidence, lower self-esteem, easy acceptance of work types that are specific to the group, and a lack of the urge to adapt and integrate with the community of co-workers in the urban life environment.

3. Discrimination in participation in the residential community life

Participation in social activities at

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communities where the immigrants reside and work is an importance indicator of their social integration. For poor immigrant workers, participation in the social life of urban communities is hindered by various obstacles, in which differences in culture, lifestyle and discrimination are difficult barriers to tear down. There seems to be a clear distance, and even disregard between local residents, local unions and poor immigrant workers. In the survey conducted with poor immigrant workers, the number of immigrants who never or rarely paid visits to local residents and vice-versa were represented by significantly large shares (at 65.5% and 66.7%); the corresponding figures for encounters with representatives of local authorities and unions were even higher

(with representatives of local authorities 83.7% and 80.6%; with representatives of local unions 80.9% and 77.9%). Immigrant workers only take part in social activities or groups when they are invited by local authorities or unions, while the share of immigrant workers having received any of such invitations was always low. Specifically, the share of workers who had been invited to local cultural and sports activities were recorded at 39.0%, to local residents meetings 48.6%, to join any local union 36.5%.

Research on the response of poor immigrant workers on the two indicators related to discrimination (being alienated by local residents and disregarded by representatives of local authorities or public security) has revealed the following results (Table 3).

Table 3: Discrimination Experienced by Immigrant Workers in Community Life (%)

Issue	Prevalence			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Being alienated by local residents	0.7	4.5	18.9	75.9
Being disregarded by representatives of local authorities or public security	2.1	5.3	15.4	77.1

Source: Results of Survey.

The number of poor immigrant workers who responded that they had never been alienated by local residents or disregarded by local authorities or public security accounts for a significant proportion. However, the nearly 25% of respondents that admitted to have been alienated by local residents or disregarded by local authorities is grounds enough for concern. News about an immigrant facing such treatment may travel

fast within the community, causing an increasing number of immigrants to share the same negative perspective and assessment of local residents, authorities and unions, which ultimately would widen the gap between them as well as raise the perceived discrimination level.

The authors also surveyed two indicators related to the immigrants' perception when entering into contact with local residents

and representatives of local authorities and unions. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Perceived Discrimination by Poor Immigrants when Entering into Contact with Local Residents and Representatives of Local Authorities (%)

Issues	Perceived Prevalence			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Lack of confidence when contacting local residents	7.0	23.7	25.6	43.7
Hesitant when contacting local authorities and organizations	11.2	26.4	21.5	40.8

Source: Results of Survey.

Table 4 shows that the perceived lack of confidence and hesitation when entering into contact with local residents and local authorities and unions occur mostly on a seldom or occasional basis. The table, nevertheless, also indicate that a large share (both exceeding 50%) of immigrant workers have once felt a lack of confidence or hesitation when entering into contact with local authorities, organizations or residents. It is such fear and hesitation that shaped up their isolated lifestyle and deterred them from communicating and participating in social activities in urban cities. It can be said that these are the permanent difficulties and obstacles to the participation of poor immigrant workers in social activities of the

communities and local social organizations where they reside.

4. Discrimination in accessing and using public services

One of the important aspects for assessing the level of social inclusion of immigrant workers is their ability to access and use public services. With regard to this aspect, the research has analyzed the response of poor immigrant workers on the difficulties they had experienced when trying to access and use healthcare services, education, banking and administrative services. The survey shows that the majority of immigrants did encounter certain difficulties and barriers when using these services (see Table 5).

Table 5: Response of Poor Immigrant Workers on Difficulties in Getting Access to and Using Social Services (%)

Type of Service	Level of Difficulty		
	Very	Moderate	None
Medical examination and treatment	8.2	17.7	74.1
Birth registration for children	32.8	25.6	41.6
School application for children	32.8	28.5	38.6
Credit loan via organizations	42.0	24.3	33.7
Bank loan	39.0	22.5	38.5

Source: Results of Survey.

Except for healthcare services which offer immigrants a variety of options for medical examination and treatment and which seem to not pose any restrictions, other public services such as birth certification, school application for children, application for credits and banking services all seem to be related to household registration, while the majority of immigrants taking part in the survey admitted to lack household registration in the cities. Most of the respondents are temporarily registered under KT3 and KT4 categories or not registered at all (93.3%). Therefore, when accessing and using such services, the poor immigrant workers are frequently experiencing specific difficulties. This is one of the forms of discrimination and one of the indications of experienced discrimination.

Table 5 shows that at least a third of poor immigrant workers have found it extremely difficult to access and use services such as birth certification, school application for their children, application for credits and banking services, the most prominent being the application to credit services offered by unions. It can be said that the limitations in accessing and using public services are one of the factors which have intensified the “disadvantageous” and “vulnerable” position of the poor immigrant workers, and which have created a solid obstacle against their integration into the urban life.

The authors have placed more emphasis

on immigrants’ perceived discrimination in accessing and using healthcare services. This is the public service that had been used by the majority of immigrant workers. The research shows that nearly two thirds of respondents (69.7%) admitted to have been concerned on the behavior of healthcare professionals when seeking healthcare services for themselves or for their friends and families; 12.9% of which having experienced this feeling on a regular basis. It is due to this lack of confidence and the fear of being discriminated that has led to a treatment methodology that is typical within this group: self-treatment by medicines bought over the counter (47.3% of cases) and withdrawal from the diverse and effective healthcare services offered in urban cities.

5. Discrimination through experience of urban life

Social issues pertaining to the daily life experienced by immigrant workers are invaluable living experiences. These experiences can be helpful and may even become the driving force for the immigrants to integrate and adapt to the urban life. On the other hand, they can also be the barriers, posing difficulties for the social inclusion process of the immigrants in the urban life. In this research, the authors will address a few experiences that have negatively impacted the social inclusion process of immigrant workers in urban cities. These include experiences in terms of sexual abuse, discrimination, bully, threats against the

vulnerable, as the varying aspects of discrimination (see Table 6).

Table 6: Prevalence of Incidents Experienced by Poor Immigrants in Urban Life (%)

Incident	Prevalence			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Being sexually abused	0,6	3,9	12,8	82,7
Being bullied, threatened	1,1	7,0	20,0	70,9
Being discriminated	1,3	8,6	20,3	69,8

Source: Results of Survey.

Experienced discrimination accounted for the largest share in the three levels (regular, occasional and rare), at 30.2%. The number of immigrants who have been sexually abused accounted for the lowest share (17.3% in total for all three levels: regular, occasional and rare). When analyzing by sex, age groups, time of immigration and profession in correlation to the experiences incurred, the authors have identified a specific difference between the immigrant groups. The group of recently immigrated young females and the group of free labourers or mobile vendors occupy the largest share in the group of those having experienced these incidents. However, in each and every social labour group there was a certain share of respondents having gone through these incidents. Even the groups of workers looking after patients in hospitals, so-called “hospital aids”, are also frequently bullied and abused: They usually have to pay “under - the-table money” to nurses, convalescent workers in hospitals or otherwise be regularly questioned and inspected.

Being bullied abused and discriminated and other similar treatments are popular and typical experiences lived by poor immigrant workers. Discrimination in such cases are yet to the level of despise, alienation or

boycotting but they played a significant role in driving the immigrant workers to the acceptance mode, resulting in their gradual withdrawal from community activities of urban residents.

6. Conclusion

It has been shown in practice that there is discrimination against poor immigrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City today. Although it is not yet a popular issue, discrimination has been clearly identified in some basic life activities of immigrant workers.

The special characteristics of labour, employment and income levels of the poor immigrant workers in urban cities have resulted in a specific social – labour group that is vulnerable and treated with discrimination in labour relations. And because they are socially discriminated, these immigrants lack confidence and have to lower their own capabilities, live distanced and alienated from local communities and lack the urge to integrate within the community of co-workers in the urban life.

At the communities where they reside, there is poor interaction, courtesy salutation and a seemingly invisible barrier between the poor immigrant workers and local residents, local authorities and unions. The

immigrants usually feel the ignorance and indifference of a large part of urban residents as well as the disregard and alienation of some representatives of local authorities. Such discrimination has resulted in the immigrants' loss of confidence when entering into contact with local residents or fear when having to deal with local authorities and unions where they reside. As a result, they have distanced themselves from community activities as well as from the local organizations and unions.

Discrimination related to household registration together with difficulties in accessing and using public services are also one of the contributing factors leading to the increased vulnerability of immigrant workers, and which have intensified the gap between them and urban residents.

The experiences faced by the poor immigrant workers during their urban days such as being abused, bullied and discriminated although is not yet common and does not represent the advanced level of discrimination, these incidents have magnified the specific features of this labour group, resulting in their sense of acceptance, bearing, and a fear of social inclusion.

Identifying discrimination against poor immigrant workers in urban cities is crucial to help competent agencies propose sound solutions that can foster the social inclusion process of immigrant workers.

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