Migrant Technology
Empowering Migrant Workers with Technology

BACKGROUND

Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth; full and productive employment; and decent work for all. The targets for this goal include promoting decent work for all (8.5), with specific mention to eradicating forced labor, modern slavery and human trafficking (8.7); and protecting labor rights and promoting safe and secure working environments (8.8). The targets specifically call for labor rights to be protected for migrant workers, particularly women migrants and those in precarious employment (8.5).

SDG 8 draws on International Labour Organization's (ILO's) definition of decent work as "productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security, dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage is provided" (ILO, 2006, p. 15). The ILO defines situations that are not decent work as unacceptable forms of work (UFW) as those that: deny fundamental principles and rights; put lives, health, freedom, human dignity, security of workers at risk; and keep households in conditions of poverty (Fudge & McCann, 2015).

UFWs can be broadly summarized as consisting of work environments where there are violations of: structural empowerment; human dignity; physical integrity (Fudge & McCann, 2015, p. 19). This project investigates the use of technology among migrant workers to support their structural empowerment, human dignity, and physical integrity.

Unacceptable Forms of Work

This project investigates the use of technology to empower migrant workers across their migration cycle, to support their structural empowerment, human dignity, and physical integrity. It augments these three pillars on top of Skřivánková's continuum of exploitation (Skřivánková, 2010) to illustrate the varied forms and severity that exploitation within the

workplace can take (Figure 1). 'Decent work' and 'forced labor' are depicted as the two extremes of the continuum, and the situations between the two represent different UFWs. These range from, on the left, more benign forms of labor violations such as discrimination and payment under minimum wage to, on the right, more exploitative acts that lead to forced labor.
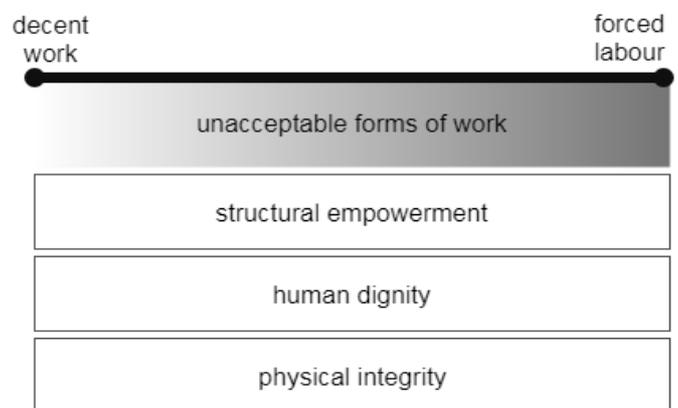

Figure 1: Continuum of exploitation and UFWs

Structural empowerment is defined as how the work environment nurtures or obstructs the self-empowerment of workers. Empower Foundation suggests that it can be assessed by looking at: workload; resources; control; rewards; community; fairness; and value (Empower Foundation, 2016, p. 69).

Drawing on Buchanan's reflection on human dignity and the central role that it plays in human rights discourse, we define the term using what he refers to as 'a basic minimum core' of (Buchanan, 2001, p. 686–694):

- Prohibition of all types of inhuman treatment, humiliation or degradation by one person over another.
- Individual choice and the conditions for self-fulfillment, autonomy, and self-realization.
- Protection of group identity and culture.
- Creation of the necessary conditions for individuals to have essential needs satisfied.

Physical integrity (or bodily integrity, using political theorist Martha Nussbaum's terminology (Empower Foundation, 2016. p. 41)) can be defined as "being able to move freely from place to place; being able to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault". This definition highlights the importance of autonomy and self-determination. When applied to a work environment, physical integrity also includes both an employer's responsibility for a safe and healthy work environment, as well as a state's responsibility for creating structures to honor and protect the physical integrity of the worker.

The next sections describe each of the four activities that currently make up the project:

- Social media usage of dual migrants in border crossing
- Apprise: Identifying exploitation of migrant workers
- ICT skills training for survivors of sexual exploitation
- ICT use among North Korean women in South Korea

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE OF DUAL MIGRANTS IN BORDER CROSSING

The dichotomy of internal and international migration doesn't fully reflect the characteristics of migration. Mainland Chinese dual migrants in Macao act as a special case. "Dual migrants" are individuals who have left family and friends in other provinces of China and moved to Zhuhai, and migrate daily across a regulated, political border. In this particular study, the border lies between Zhuhai (in the mainland for housing) and Macao (for work). This study explores the perceived affordances of social media (WeChat, the most popular social networking service in China) in the cross-border life of those low-skilled mainland Chinese dual migrants in Macao, China.

In 2017 this activity has recruited in total 24 low-skilled mainland Chinese dual migrants (13 male security guards; 11 female cleaners) to participate in in-depth interviews, group discussions, and WeChat conversations. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed to reveal the offline-online life of those dual migrants.

The physical life of mainland labor migrants has been found to be marked by vulnerabilities in terms of precarity, isolation, and discrimination. They desire for digital empowerment and online adaptation built upon their structured agency (e.g., not well-educated and low-skilled). WeChat is perceived as an online space affording solidarity, conviviality, cognizance, and monetization. In terms of structural empowerment, dual migrants enjoyably seek online support from bonding and maintaining social capital, and to access information related to job vacancies and their host environment. Though WeChat contributes to virtual connection and work facilitation, it also turns out to be a digital panopticon, monitoring workers' punctuality and work performance. Findings of this activity have been presented at two international conferences.

This research aims to illuminate migration and adaptation studies within ICT-based communication. In 2018 two peer-reviewed journal articles are expected to be published. Meanwhile, a follow-up study on new media literacy skills and civic participation among Chinese cross-border migrant workers will be conducted through survey and in-depth interview.

APPRISE: IDENTIFYING EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Thailand, one of the largest economies in the Mekong sub-region, is hailed as the land of opportunities by those living in the neighboring Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia (Safe Child Thailand, 2017). Its rapid urbanization has generated a constant demand for cheap labor which is met by workers migrating to urban and semi-urban Thailand from its neighboring countries or from rural Thailand (Safe Child Thailand, 2017). This mismatch in the labor market gives rise to a conducive environment for exploitative working conditions.

The extent of the problem related to human trafficking and forced labor is clouded by the lack of reliable data on the number of victims. The most conservative estimates of forced labor and human trafficking statistics indicate that there are almost 21 million people in situations of forced labor or human trafficking (ILO, 2012), with a large number of these being migrant workers (Schenker, 2010; Ahonen et. al., 2007). The US State Department's 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report illustrates that in 2017, only 0.3% of the total estimated victims were identified (66,520 people) (US State Department, 2017). These exploitative work situations are able to exist due to a number of reasons, including poor regulation and enforcement of labor

standards across the labor market. Local and federal police, as well as labor inspectors, are tasked with the role of ensuring that cases of labor exploitation are firstly identified and then dealt with (typically using penalties for exploiters and recompense for victims). In Thailand, the state actors (local and federal police, labor inspectors) work with non-state partners including social workers, inter-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations to assess working conditions, to help potential victims become aware of and gain access to social services, complaint mechanism, and support (for example emergency shelters, legal representation).

In 2017 this activity has undertaken four consultation sessions with over 100 stakeholders representing: migrant workers in vulnerable situations; local and regional NGOs; Thai Government; Royal Thai Navy; regional embassies; and inter-governmental institutions. The first of these sessions aimed to understand the problems that frontline responders currently face in identifying victims, and how they believe technology can be used to support this process. From this session, a proposal was developed to use a simple mobile phone application on a frontline responder's phone, to allow them to ask questions in different languages to potential victims.

The feedback from subsequent sessions has been used to develop four sector based lists of indicators of trafficking (at port or sea, processing and manufacturing, sexual exploitation, forced begging), and an app to support migrant workers to self-identify as being in a vulnerable situation. In January 2018, this activity was awarded a research grant by Humanity United to support the pilot and evaluation of the mobile application, within the seafood industry in Thailand.

This activity aims to contribute the following research output and policy implications:

- Co-designed, developed and evaluated software solution aimed to allow authorities to identify victims of forced labor.
- Data on patterns of forced labor, contributing towards monitoring of SDG 8 targets; and Article 40 of New York Declaration.
- Impact assessment on the use of technology to support the identification of victims of forced labor.

- Policy recommendations on the incorporation of technology into the support of Articles 35 and 40 of the New York Declaration.

ICT SKILLS TRAINING FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

One of biggest concerns of trafficking survivors is what they will do when they leave the immediate post-trafficking service provider (Baumann, 2016). Economic and financial factors are often main motivations in the decision to migrate in the first place, and survivors are similarly concerned about how they will make a living post-trafficking (Lisborg, 2009, p. 3). Although aftercare organizations commonly provide vocational training programs, many of these are very limited, gendered training options (such as cooking, knitting, or sewing), vocational training that are not relevant to local job markets in survivors' home communities (Richardson et. al., 2009), or vocational training without access to actual employment opportunities because of lack of linkages to actual businesses (Surtees, 2012). When inadequate employment options are provided to trafficked persons after their exit from human trafficking, survivors may experience worse financial difficulties than before they were trafficked and be vulnerable to re-exploitation (Tran et. al., 2017).

This research proposes to contribute to the understanding of technology-based training in the post-trafficking stage by partnering with a local social enterprise (SE), in the Philippines that provides ICT-based training, core skills training, and employment to survivors of exploitation and abuse. Specifically, the project will investigate the impact of digital skills training on the psychosocial wellbeing of the survivors, as well as how the training program and the security of high-skilled employment affect recovery and reintegration. For those employees in particular who are survivors of online sexual exploitation, or for whom ICT played a key role in their trafficking experience, the training/work offers the possibility of the 'redemption of technology'- an opportunity for them to use ICTs to enhance their structural empowerment, human dignity, and physical integrity, rather than ICTs being used as a means of exploitation.

The research aims to produce knowledge and policy implications regarding the use of ICTs by

practitioners/stakeholders to support structural empowerment, human dignity, and physical integrity during the post-trafficking/reintegration phase to improve the human condition of survivors.

Through continuous provision of services; an intentionally supportive workplace; and highly-skilled, well-paid employment the SE creates an environment that nurtures the structural empowerment of employees. Additionally, their human dignity and physical integrity may be enhanced by the opportunity afforded by their acquired tech skills. These skills allow them to engage in decent work in a safe environment, free from exploitation and risk of violence, along with the ability to satisfy their own needs and exercise agency in their life. The research will particularly examine the impact on survivors' self-esteem/ self-efficacy of high-skilled and non-gendered work.

This activity began early in 2018. Achievements to date include several meetings with the Philippines partner organization and the review of interdisciplinary literature to provide context, theoretical basis, and motivation. Fieldwork, using participatory methods to gather qualitative data, was undertaken in April 2018. Specifically, survivors 13 survivors of sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation of children took part in a two-week participatory video workshop in which they produced self-reflexive films about their experiences with the training program. The participants also took part in one on one interviews, where they reflected on the training program, and how their use of ICTs and development of higher order digital skills have affected, modified, and challenged the way they view themselves (e.g. moving from victim to professional worker). Targeted outputs of this activity include:

- Impact assessment on ICT-based training for post-trafficking survivors;
- policy recommendations of best practices for supporting survivors post-trafficking.

ICT USE AMONG NORTH KOREAN WOMEN IN SOUTH KOREA

About 31,000 North Koreans are currently resettled in South Korea after taking life-changing journeys between two Koreas. Their migratory experiences involve a dramatic transition between the two highly distinct societies. With regard to technology, it also reflects the flipped ICT contexts as they transposed themselves from one of the world's most digitally-oppressed societies to one of the most digitally-oriented societies. Throughout these experiences, ICTs, particularly mobile phones, become an essential means to empower their situated agency.

This research examines the role of digital technology in the migratory experiences of North Korean women who managed to settle in South Korea. In particular, it asks (1) how mobile communications play into their journey from North Korea; and (2) how they use it to assist their resettlement process particularly as to manage existing barriers in South Korea. The research was conducted in collaboration with Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

The research found that their mobile use in North Korea and during the journey was clandestine and fraught with danger, including restricted access and dangerous use via smuggled Chinese mobile phones. However, mobile played a critically instrumental in the escape. By contrast, in their flipped home in South Korea where not having a mobile phone is a problem, their mobile access is granted and the use is socially assumed. Yet, the impact of mobile use is limited by discrimination and prejudice. The study also found that North Korean migrants tend to hide their identity behind anonymity on ICT-based communications. In addition, it examined how ICTs facilitate their structural empowerment by assisting their escape from North Korea or trafficked situations as well as enhance human dignity by enabling them to manage identities via online anonymity to cope with discrimination.

In 2017, two conference papers have been written and accepted (e.g. the 68th ICA conference in Prague and the ICTD 2017 in Lahore). In 2018, these papers will be made into academic journal publications and the follow-up research will be prepared on the subject of the intersectionality of gender, migration, and identities reflected on their everyday use of ICTs.

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