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THE CONSTRUCTION PRECARIAT

DEPENDENCE, DOMINATION AND LABOUR IN DHAKA

Selim Reza



The Construction Precariat

Positioned within the discourse of neoliberalism and precarious work, this book draws on Guy Standing's notion of "the precariat" in an examination of the role of recruiting individuals as the key actors in labour recruitment and management practices that produce precarious work conditions. Based on extensive empirical work on migrant construction workers and their recruiters in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh and one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, it explores the ways in which exploitative employment relationships contribute to various pressures and insecurities amongst migrant workers and limit the scope for labour protection. Offering new insights into the field of labour migration by unpacking the interconnections between rural-urban labour migration, recruitment and precarious employment, *The Construction Precariat* conceptualises the dominance of recruiters as producing "hyper-individualised employment," and sheds light on the manner in which this relationship of domination and dependence contributes heavily both to the conditions of precariousness and to the control and exploitation of migrant workers.

Selim Reza is Assistant Professor of Development Studies at the Asian University for Women, Bangladesh. His key research interests span labour migration and employment relationship issues that are theoretically founded in the political economy of migrant labour and contingent employment practices.

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To the migrant workers who are systematically exploited at work

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	viii
<i>List of boxes</i>	ix
<i>Foreword</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xvii
1 Precariatized labour in construction	1
2 Working conditions of construction workers	31
3 The migration–construction nexus	67
4 Recruitment practices and the key actors	91
5 Working with the recruiters	118
6 Hyper-individualised employment	142
7 Conclusion	168
<i>Index</i>	187

Figures

2.1	Dust and mud on Dhaka's construction sites	33
2.2	Workers working underground with unsanitary sewage	35
2.3	Workers lifting bricks, to the sixth floor of a building, for the whole day	42
2.4	The weight of clay bricks in Bangladesh	43
2.5	Workers operating power tools without wearing PPE	49
2.6	Workers engaged in making asphalt pavements with hot-lay bituminous materials	50
2.7	Workers working on high scaffolds and ladders made of bamboo	55
2.8	Workers working near exposed electric switchboard, transformer and overhead power line	56
2.9	Unorganised power cables and switchboards in the dining space and sleeping room	57
2.10	Poor living arrangements inside building structures and temporary sheds	58
2.11	Female workers having their lunch beside a water reservoir	60
3.1	Wage payment practices in Dhaka's construction projects	78
4.1	Sources of work-related preliminary information	93
4.2	Modes of recruitment	94
4.3	Labour recruitment through recruiters' social networks	95
4.4	Labour recruitment through migrant workers' social networks	98
6.1	Hierarchies and involvement in the recruitment process	145

Boxes

2.1	Payment, overtime and protection of workers	62
3.1	Work period in the city, primary livelihood and visits to the village	68

Foreword

Selim Reza's book is an important addition to the literature on migrant labour in Bangladesh and South Asia more broadly. What sets it apart are his insights derived from a deep personal engagement with the world of migrant construction workers from a young age. The book is a testimony to the passion that Selim has for making a difference for those who have been left behind in the development process. He has been able to capture the nuances of how precariatization of migrant workers occurs and the key role played by recruiters in this process. He carefully unpicks the social relations in the workplace to show how migrant labourers are positioned in exploitative work and why it is difficult for them to break the cycle. The first-hand accounts in the book provide a bottom-up view on the everyday lives of poor migrant workers who are the backbone of development in Bangladesh and yet remain excluded from the gains of the construction boom. The findings are important not only for those with an interest in migrant labour but also for those who are striving to improve working conditions and create responsible, fair recruitment practices. Efforts to operationalise decent work goals must be underpinned with a solid understanding of the inner workings of the migrant labour market in nationally important sectors like construction. This book is therefore an invaluable source for policymakers, researchers, practitioners and students alike. As an author and researcher Selim has made a rich contribution to the field of migration studies and it has been a pleasure to follow his trajectory since the days of the *Migrating out of Poverty* Research Programme Consortium.

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Preface

*This happiness is in this land
I do not know where to go again.
I have a damaged boat
My life ends up stressful to bail the water out.*

This book reflects not only my academic interests but also the passion and lived experiences I have gained throughout my long engagement with the precarious work community in Bangladesh. I was born and grew up in a village in Bangladesh where farming was the core livelihood. When I was a child, I saw my family members migrating to cities for work during the lean harvest season. Leaving and returning to the village back and forth, they had little option other than working as informally recruited construction workers in cities. I had the opportunity to closely observe their daily life struggles related to the pressures and insecurities of their work. The predominant recruitment practices often helped them get work but contributed to various forms of precariousness by which I was also affected. Pressures in the workplace often contributed to work-related accidents and the poor health of my family members, interrupting my early education in schools.

My grandfather was a migrant construction worker who lived almost half of his life with chronic eyesight problems and respiratory diseases. His work-related health problems made him dependent on his sons, including my father, who were then financially stressed to afford adequate support for him. Financial hardship forced my father to think about permanently migrating to a nearby town.

When I was only seven years old, my father permanently migrated from our village to a little town with an aspiration for better income security. We lived in a shanty, and eventually my father purchased a piece of land to build a small house. A recruiting individual, along with a group of workers, started building our house. This construction work gave me an important opportunity in my childhood to observe the migrant construction workers and their work thoroughly. This was the time when I first heard the lines of a mystic Bangla song translated and quoted above. The song was originally composed by 19th-century Bangladeshi folk poet Lalan Shah Fakir, and I translated it

from Khan (2007, p. 113). I saw one worker singing the lines every now and then while working hard to build our house. One day he casually waved to me to ask if I was interested to know about the meaning of the lines he was singing. I remember the brief discussion where he described the metaphoric sense embedded in the song relating to his uncertain and stressful working life.

Later, I moved to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, to complete higher secondary education at Notre Dame College. I got accommodation in a student dormitory that was close to a new construction project. Living on the top floor of my dormitory allowed me an opportunity to see the daily work activities and interactions of the workers and their recruiters on the construction site. It was an everyday experience to hear their conversations, arguments and coarse languages, which distracted my reading and writing. I gradually started realising there was an exploitative control relationship embedded in the dominance of the recruiters over the workers on the site. This made me enthusiastic about examining their employment relationships, but I was then not ready to conduct academic research due to my academic naivety. Therefore, I moved to the University of Dhaka to complete bachelor's and master's degrees.

My research interest in labour migration and employment grew out of my studies in International Relations at the University of Dhaka that made me interested in the critical interlinkages between rural-urban migration and the political economy. I was then involved in some field-based research activities in Dhaka. As a field researcher in Migration Studies, I became familiar with the dynamics of internal and international migration and the impact of labour migration on Bangladesh's economy.

After graduating as the top of my class in my master's studies (first position, first class), I started my research career as a Coordinator at the Young Researchers' Forum (YRF), which was the student wing of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. My responsibilities at YRF included the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and report writing. Through this work, I was involved in a research project titled "Migration of the female street workers and their livelihood in Dhaka city," which gave me important and concrete insights about the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers in the country. I worked in a team led by Professor C. R. Abrar that surveyed and interviewed 100 female workers on street corners in Dhaka. This project made me collaborate with researchers at RMMRU, which led to my appointment first as Junior Programme Officer and later as Research Associate at this organisation. In these positions, I gained first-hand experience in quantitative and qualitative data analysis, including the statistics and use of statistical software such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I drafted research reports based on fieldwork and led various research teams and provided training on data collection and analysis and data storage. I was responsible for managing media relations and prepared media releases and briefing notes on the results of the research carried out by RMMRU and its partners. I developed skills in applied research, data analysis, project management and research communication through these experiences.

I was then promoted to Research and Communications Officer for the *Migrating out of Poverty* Research Programme Consortium, coordinated by the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, of which RMMRU was a consortium partner. I was responsible for conducting fieldwork using surveys, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews as the main data collection methods; data quality control; supervising research assistants in data analysis; and drafting research reports, journal articles and conference and other presentations. In this role, I worked on a research project that examined the impact of policies on labour migration in Bangladesh. In this project, I led a team of researchers and was responsible for overseeing the interviewing of 200 migrants, including people thinking of migrating, returnees and cross-border migrants. I also worked as a leader of field researchers in a research study titled “Climate-induced migration in Bangladesh,” commissioned by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN). Eminent migration scholar Professor Tasneem Siddiqui was the lead researcher in the study, and under her supervision I carried out a comprehensive literature review on the impact of climate change on migration from coastal areas. My engagement with CDKN projects significantly enriched my knowledge in understanding climate change and rural-urban migration.

In 2013, the UK-based Commonwealth Scholarship Commission awarded me a fellowship in recognition of my professional engagement with the research and communication activities in Bangladesh. The University of Sussex hosted me for three months, and through this fellowship I increased my skills in research communication and dissemination to reach both academic and practitioner audiences. During my time at Sussex, I was inspired by Professor Richard Black, Dr Priya Deshingkar and Professor Dominic Kniveton at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (SCMR). Reading their influential work in international migration and related social, economic and environmental transformations made me academically ambitious. I was specially inspired by Professor Ben Rogaly and his eminent research on the intricacies of employment relationships involving rural-urban migrant workers. At SCMR, I attended some presentations of PhD students in Migration Studies that eventually intrigued my academic interests.

I first came to know about Guy Standing and his notion of “the precariat” when I was at Sussex. I read his work extensively in the library of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex. At one stage, I became obsessed with Standing. When I returned to Bangladesh from Sussex, my wife diagnosed “Standing syndrome” in me!

Before going to Flinders University for my PhD, I was involved in a regional research project that examined the impact of migration on poverty for construction workers in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. A total of 450 construction workers were interviewed in these three countries, and I was responsible for leading the field-based research team in Bangladesh. During the course of my involvement in this study, I acquired knowledge that I wanted to build upon through examining the structure of recruitment practices in Bangladesh’s construction sector.

The “Standing syndrome,” however, has been a key motivation for designing my PhD project on the migrant construction workers in Bangladesh. During my early PhD candidature, I read Sarah Swider’s book *Building China: Informal Work and the New Precariat*. The book somehow confused(!) me to some extent when I compared Chinese workers with Bangladeshi workers; however, it increased my academic thirst. Sometimes confusions lead to big dreams!

This book project has grown out of many such big dreams and experiences and motivations outlined above.

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This book would not have been possible without the exceptionally generous support and guidance that I received from my PhD supervisor Associate Professor Marinella Marmo at Flinders University in Australia. She infused me with the dream and passion for writing this book. I am eternally grateful to her for her enormous support during this book project.

I was really privileged to have another wonderful person, Dr Maria Giannacopoulos, as my PhD supervisor. I received a lot of insightful advice, helpful criticisms and valuable suggestions from her that helped me think rigorously while writing my doctoral dissertation upon which this book is built.

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I owe special thanks to Dr Cécile Cutler and Sathya Dalton for their incredible hard work in proofreading the drafts of the manuscript. It has been a great blessing to get their editorial support. Any remaining errors are my own.

My heartiest thanks go to my teacher and later colleague Professor C. R. Abrar at RMMRU, University of Dhaka. My life changed because of him. He believed in me and happily accepted many challenges to make me a field researcher. All my field-based research experiences are due to his countless intellectual support. I am indebted to Professor Tasneem Siddiqui for her immense support to my academic aspirations. I also thank my other colleagues at RMMRU for their valuable support during my fieldwork in Dhaka. In particular, I owe a deep debt to Dr Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder, Marina Sultana, K. N. M. Hossainul Huq, Mahmudol Hasan Rocky and Parvez Alam for their endless support.

My friend Owasim Akram at European Union Delegation to Bangladesh has always been a great source of motivation to me. I have learned a lot from him. We had many productive discussions during my fieldwork in Dhaka. His original scholarship in informal sector workers and their poverty really

benefited me in understanding the inner dynamics of employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents, who have been a constant source of courage, empathy and comfort during this book project. I am deeply indebted to my father Yakub Ali, who shared a naive perspective in understanding my argument in this book. As the eldest child of a migrant construction worker, he offered me many helpful insights based on his lived experiences. His unbiased comments on my research findings provided me important directions. My mother Monira Begum has sacrificed a lot in her life for my comfort. She always gave me endless courage and motivation. I am eternally indebted to her. I am also grateful to my parents-in-law for their empathy and courage.

Without the incredible patience and encouragement of my wife Farhana Fatema, it would have been impossible to finish writing this book. She is someone special to me. She has made so many sacrifices towards the completion of this book. She constantly motivated me to face everyday life challenges and stay focussed on writing the manuscript. Her practical experience in precarious employment arrangements in Australia gave me important insights. She endured many troubles during my fieldwork. Moreover, she has been a wonderful woman in managing daily household chores, providing me with ample time for writing.

I am thankful to my beloved son Siyam Reza, who was born in Australia when I was in an important stage of developing the research proposal for my PhD. I have seen him growing up throughout the process of completing this book. Every time I returned home stressed, he generously gave me a big smile and a great big hug. Struggling with the inevitable loneliness and isolation during the intense stage of writing, sometimes I had to deprive him of the quality time and true love and affection he deserved from me. In spite of this, his beautiful smiling face was very inspirational and engaging to me.

At Asian University for Women, I am grateful to its Vice-Chancellor Professor Nirmala Rao for her endless encouragement. I am also thankful to the Founder of the University, Kamal Ahmad, for appreciating my research. I am indebted to my colleagues and students who shared with me their ideas and knowledge on migrant workers.

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Last but not least, my heartiest thanks and gratitude go to each migrant construction worker who participated in the surveys and interviews conducted for this book. Their active participation and endless support at every stage of the primary data collection immensely helped. This book is about them, and its richness is bestowed on their individual narratives. I have learned many things from them. I am truly indebted to them.

20 February 2020
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Abbreviations

BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BWI	Building and Wood Workers' International
GDP	gross domestic product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PPE	personal protective equipment
REHAB	Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh
RMG	readymade garments
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank

1 Precariatised labour in construction

A high hazard industry for migrant workers

The economic outlook for the global construction industry is positive with enormous opportunities for steady growth over the next decade. Global construction output is forecast to rise to US\$12.7 trillion in 2022 (Reuters, 2018), the year when the 2022 FIFA World Cup will take place in Qatar. The first Middle East nation and also the smallest country to host a FIFA World Cup, Qatar has officially promised unique attractions; spectacular, state-of-the-art stadiums; and the bonus of traditional Arab hospitality to host the tournament like no other and thus to offer the visitors experience unlike anything encountered before. In order to ensure hosting the best World Cup ever, the Qatari organisers have promised a pioneering air-conditioning technology that would cool not only the stadiums but also the entire neighbourhoods for the visitors in the summer temperatures of up to 41°C (106°F). Behind all this extremely impressive experience are the cheap South Asian migrant construction workers, primarily originating from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, who have long been abused and exploited to build the stunning stadiums and immaculate infrastructure. Every year hundreds of them, including many young men in their 20s, are dying of heatstroke while working long hours in unshaded outdoor areas. To avoid paying compensation, the Qatari authorities generally attribute the majority of these deaths to cardiovascular causes or “natural death” (Kelly, McIntyre, & Pattison, 2019). Thus they are alleged to have covered up the work-related deaths of the migrant construction workers due to extreme heat stress and its deadly consequences such as fatal heart attacks and other cardiovascular fatalities. Similar deadly working conditions are almost everywhere, not only in Qatar, and have made construction a highly dangerous industry in the world despite being one of the fastest-growing industries in terms of revenue.

I visited Qatar in November 2013, three years after the official announcement that Qatar would host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. While interviewing some Bangladeshi migrant construction workers about their living conditions in their labour camps in Doha, the capital city with magnificent skyscrapers and modern architecture, I was heartbroken to learn about the workers’

squalid living conditions in the overcrowded camps. The workers reported many problems including rows of bunk beds in a cramped room, a very dirty kitchen, poor toilet and washing facilities, broken sewage pipes, noisy environments for sleep, insufficient food and running water, restrictions on the freedom of movement and a lack of entertainment. Their narratives revealed slavery-like working and living conditions of migrant workers in a rich country which was then preparing to invest US\$200 billion in infrastructure for hosting one of the biggest sporting events on the planet. The precarious employment of the migrant construction workers has not even then received adequate attention from Qatari authorities although international human rights groups and trade unions reported 1,200 deaths since the World Cup was awarded in 2010 and also predicted that the poor working and living conditions in Qatar could result in at least 4,000 more worker fatalities by the time the World Cup begins in 2022 (Booth, 2013; ITUC, 2014). However, Qatar has now moved to respond to criticisms of its exploitative labour conditions by promising reforms. Despite the authorities' repeated promises to improve workers' rights, many migrant construction workers from Bangladesh are still being abused in the country. Their precarious life is fundamentally rooted in the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which grants Qatari employers excessive control over the migrant workers, including the power to prevent them from changing jobs or leaving the country without their permission. Criticising this control as a form of modern slavery, human rights groups have long called for the end of the abusive *kafala* system.

Pathetic working conditions on World Cup 2022 construction sites in Qatar have affected many migrant workers. Migration of labour for construction work, both internal and international, is still increasing. Construction is one of the most hazardous industries in the world, and its workers are three to four times more likely than other workers to die from workplace accidents (ILO, 2015a). Nevertheless, construction work is a common source of employment for migrant labourers. Construction is “an industry of migrants” (Buckley, Zendel, Biggar, Frederiksen, & Wells, 2016, p. 20). Many migrant labourers are employed in the global construction industry where the terms of employment and working conditions are predominantly poor. The industry represents high rates of workplace accidents, fatal injuries and health hazards. Employing more than 180 million construction workers worldwide (BWI, 2006), it is known to be responsible for the accidental deaths of at least 108,000 workers a year, which is 30 percent of all occupational fatal incidents in the world (ILO, 2015a). Like many other industries, the construction industry is known to be subject to contemporary changes in work arrangements and labour recruitment practices under neoliberalism that have produced profound impacts on the quality of employment. The poor working conditions in this high hazard industry are squarely related to the neoliberal developments in the world of work. Flexible labour market policies, such as outsourcing and subcontracting, are the key developments that have generated multiple forms of non-standard employment contributing to the

precariousness of the migrant construction workers (Buckley et al., 2016; ILO, 2001; Wells, 2006, 2007).

Globally, the precarious life of migrant construction workers reproduces a poor image of construction work. Whilst construction is a crucial sector for employment in many countries, it poses serious challenges related to its workforce and their dignity. Construction work is traditionally regarded as an unattractive and low-status job. Often regarded as dirty, difficult and dangerous work, it shares a 3D image¹ in the world of work (Connell, 1993; ILO, 2001). Becoming a construction worker has traditionally been considered as a relinquishment of honour and status in human society. This trend has characterised construction as a low-status job over the last few decades (Lawrence & Werna, 2009). Nevertheless the actual reason why construction is regarded as a low-status job is much more related to the terms on which labourers are recruited than the nature of the work itself (ILO, 2001). The process and quality of recruitment have significant ramifications on the economic and social security of the construction workers. The poor image of construction work is not only related to how the work is routinely accomplished but how the work is regarded by the wider social world that the workers live in. In this context, construction work and its image and language are important to understand the consequences they create for the economic and social life of the migrant workers, particularly in connection with the contemporary changes in labour recruitment practices.

Subcontractors and labour flexibility

Subcontracting is a widespread labour recruitment practice in the global construction industry. It is a multi-layered contracting system to outsource labour recruitment for building construction where the production process is divided into a number of discrete activities (Costantino, Pietroforte, & Hamill, 2001; Yoke-Lian, Hassim, Muniandy, & Teik-Hua, 2012). Subcontracted employment has been widely normalised in the global construction industry to help minimise the cost of production. Subcontracting of labour is not possible without the subcontractors who supply low-cost labour through indirect recruitment. In fact, the subcontractors function to reduce costs associated with a permanent workforce by maximising the flexibility of labour (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2012; Standing, 1999, 2008; Strauss & Fudge, 2014). Taking responsibility to manage the pressures and risks of production, they supply cheap and flexible labour to the builders. In order to do that, subcontractors manage labour in a manner that creates pressures on the workers. Labour management practices of subcontractors are therefore characterised by uncertainty, extreme work pressures, exploitative working conditions and a lack of bargaining power of the construction workers (Buckley et al., 2016; Lawrence & Werna, 2009; Swider, 2015b; Zeitlyn, Deshingkar, & Holtom, 2014). Recent developments in subcontracting practices in the global construction industry reveal a range of individual agents as subcontractors. Unlike the traditional

business model of single subcontracting firms, the subcontracting individuals share an intermediate employment relationship to link the job-aspiring workers to the builders and building contractors for whom they subcontract.

The neoliberal practices of subcontracting have contributed to the indirect recruitment of construction workers through extended layers of subcontractors. The poor working conditions of the migrant construction workers are substantially related to how the subcontractors and their extended layers recruit and manage the workers. The core essence of the employment relationship in subcontracted employment is the mechanism through which the workers are flexibilised to be subordinate to their employers through individualisation of work. In the absence of state regulations of the labour markets, the workers can be subject to dominance and control of the employers who may create pressures and insecurities to force the workers to be highly dependent on them (Standing, 1999, 2008). Unlike in developed countries where subcontractors are systematically regulated, the subcontractors in developing countries are generally not registered and/or regulated. Over time, this regulatory divergence has created barriers to protect the subcontracted construction workers through a standard regulatory framework. The construction workers in developing countries therefore work with poorer terms and conditions than the workers in developed countries (Wells, 2007). Also, the number of subcontractors is increasing more rapidly in developing countries than that in developed countries. The intertwined relationships between a lack of regulation, poor working conditions and an increasing number of subcontractors are creating serious fragmentation of policies to standardise the labour practices in the global construction industry.

The growing layers of subcontracting individuals in the global construction industry have blurred the concept of direct employment by a single employer. The long-running practices of indirect recruitment under neoliberalism have eventually normalised the subcontracting individuals' role as employers. Their typical responsibilities have extended from recruitment to management of migrant labourers in order to accomplish the specific tasks they subcontract. Globally, many migrant construction workers are indirectly recruited by them (Buckley et al., 2016; ILO, 2001; Wells, 2006, 2007). For the rural-urban migrant labourers, in particular, their recruitment practices offer easy entry to urban construction jobs. This important dimension has traditionally popularised construction work to be one of the most common jobs for the rural labourers migrating to cities (BWI, 2006; ILO, 2001; IOM, 2005). It is estimated that more than 111 million construction workers are employed in 90 countries worldwide and a large proportion of them are migrant labourers (ILO, 2001). Although this figure represents the global construction industry as a big source of employment for the migrant labourers, very little is known about internal migration and recruitment and working conditions of the construction workers. The lack of academic research on rural-urban migrant labourers in the global construction industry and their employment relationships is influenced by two important factors.

First, the perceived importance of international migration has traditionally undermined the scope for academic research on internal migration. As pointed out by King and Skeldon (2010), “most migration scholars nowadays research international migration, even though, quantitatively, internal migration is more important” (p. 1619). Rural-urban migration has long been a common livelihood approach in many developing countries. Despite the fact that the number of internal migrants globally is at least 740 million (IOM, 2013), nearly four times the number of international migrants, the research and policy issues have traditionally concentrated on so-called immigration and border issues due to their specific relevance to developed countries (Skeldon, 2014). This general trend has contributed to the scarcity of academic research on the rural-urban migrant construction workers in developing countries. While there are a number of international conventions to protect the interests of international migrant workers, both forced and voluntary, no such convention is applicable for internal migrant workers. Employment in the construction sector of developed countries generally involves a complex set of international migration legislation, and therefore existing knowledge on work and employment with reference to construction work is dominated only by the debates on work visa arrangements (Anderson, 2010; Bahn, Barratt-Pugh, & Yap, 2012; Pijpers & Velde, 2007). Internal migration, rural-urban labour migration in particular, for construction work in cities generally does not involve complicated migration legislation and border control. Due to the informal nature of migration and job contracts, the rural-urban migrant construction workers have received little scholarly attention.

Second, empirical research on individual recruiters of migrant construction workers remains an exception in the field of labour migration. This is because the traditional perspectives frequently used to discuss labour migration and employment under neoliberalism are hesitant to consider the individual recruiters as crucial actors (Rodriguez & Mearns, 2012). The role of individual agents in subcontracting has therefore not been problematised yet as the key actors in producing employment relationships for the migrant workers. As a result, the labour migration researchers have rarely considered subcontracted employment and its growing diversity as an important area relating to individual experiences of migration and work. In this context, the structure of subcontracted recruitment and its relationship to rural-urban migration and employment are a worthy area of study. Examination of the role of subcontractors and other individuals as recruiting agents is important in understanding the changing employment relationships that have profound impacts on the quality of employment in global and local workplaces.

Although the labour management functions of the subcontracting individuals still remain inadequately researched in the field of labour migration, subcontracted employment through individual agents and labour intermediaries is widely argued to be a core form of precarious employment under neoliberalism (Chang, 2009; ILO, 2015b; McDowell, Batnitzky, & Dyer, 2009; Quinlan, Mayhew, & Bohle, 2001; Strauss & Fudge, 2014). Such employment

practices heavily erode labour-related security and contribute to precariatization of workers (Standing, 2011, 2014b, 2014d, 2016a). The migrant construction workers have a significant representation in expanding forms of such employment. However, the notion of precarious employment is quite ambiguous due to its limitations on conceptualising the features of such employment under neoliberalism. Existing literature on precarious employment considers the role of state regulations crucial in forming the labour market, and therefore discussions on regulations occupy a substantial part of the literature. Precarious employment is frequently argued to be intrinsically entrenched in the neoliberal policies of non-regulation that have promoted an employment system characterised by flexible and low-cost labour (Anderson, 2010; Kalleberg, 2009, 2011, 2012; Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013; Standing, 1997, 1999, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Vosko, 2006).

Labour regulations in Asia

In Asia, there is a trend to label employment in the informal sector as precarious. Because of differences in their level of development, historical trajectories and cultural traditions, Asian countries differ in the aspects of precarious work. However, increased flexibilisation and insecurity in employment have been the recent features of precarious labour in the region (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2012; Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013; Standing, 2017). It is regularly claimed that precariousness in the construction sector of Asian countries is backed up by the absence of regulation (Agarwala, 2014; Buckley, 2014; Raftery, Pasadilla, Chiang, Hui, & Tang, 1998; Swider, 2015a, 2015b; Wells, 2007). While the essence of precariousness is argued to be the essence of informality in the region, the linkages between formal and informal are complex and interlinked. Often they reinforce each other. This is because individual recruiters operate through interconnected networks of actors and across multiple regulation regimes (Fernandez, 2013).

As part of liberalising the economy by deregulating labour markets, reluctance to enforce labour regulations is evident in the construction sector of Asian countries. Deregulation of the local labour market creates the space for individual recruiters and eases their function of supplying low-cost labour for building construction (Chang, 2009; Mosse, Gupta, & Shah, 2005; Pattenden, 2012; Suresh, 2010; Wells, 2006, 2007). To the local builders, indirect recruitment of internal migrant workers through individual recruiters is traditionally an easy option to evade laws. The kind of regulatory structure in place for international migration does not exist in this area. This is because finding employment within the country does not involve crossing international borders or facilitating actors in the international recruitment process. Thus there is little relationship between individual recruiters and the state with respect to internal migrant construction workers. As they do not have written contracts or other job-related documents, they are excluded from legal provisions

(Buckley et al., 2016; ILO, 2001; Kumar & Fernández, 2015; Wells, 2007). Because the existence of individual recruiters in labour recruitment is not acknowledged through national laws, their predominant role does not allow the state to engage in labour management. This enables the recruiters to avoid visibility and operate outside the purview and protection of legal regulations. Their day-to-day operations and associated practices put labour management issues beyond the state's capacity (Agarwala, 2014; Fernandez, 2013; Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). The lack of state-based labour enrolment opportunities, coupled with the absence of regulation, therefore increasingly normalises their role and thus the growth of their layers in recruitment process.

Like many other countries in Asia, neoliberal developments are integral to the rural-urban migration and labour market practices in Bangladesh. Internal migration of labour in Bangladesh is intrinsically linked to urbanisation, a recent phenomenon. After the liberation of Bangladesh from the Pakistani government in 1971, a sharp increase in the rate of urbanisation contributed to growing economic and commercial activities in urban areas (Afsar, 2003; Nabi, 1992). Therefore, rural-urban migration and recruitment of internal migrant labourers became a relatively new reality in the country, when compared with other countries in the region. Being born in the neoliberal era, Bangladesh embraced indirect recruitment practices from the very beginning. The rules of business and labour management strategies already prevalent in the world influenced the emerging country. In particular, deregulation of business and private investment since the early 1990s has led to rapid increases in urban construction activities and competition in the internal labour market (GoB, 2011a). These neoliberal developments have introduced a new world of work for Bangladesh's construction workers who have traditionally been accepting indirect recruitment practices as an embedded phenomenon in their working life. Although subcontracting and outsourcing had always been common labour-hire practices in Bangladesh, the contemporary nature of these practices reveals a new and distinct labour recruitment strategy that has emerged as the most viable option to the urban builders.

Bangladesh's construction sector is officially declared as a formal sector. In spite of this, informalisation, more specifically individualisation, of labour recruitment is the key aspect of precarious work that the internal migrant labourers are experiencing in the sector (Reza, 2016). As in many other Asian countries, Bangladesh's internal migrant labourers are generally familiar with such recruitment practices. What is new in the country are extended layers of individual recruiters that dominate contemporary recruitment practices, particularly for the migrant construction workers. Addition of layers of individual recruiters in multi-tiered recruitment practices in recent times has triggered specific areas of precariousness in construction that was perhaps less precarious in the past. In this context, it is important to empirically examine the inter-connections among the layers of individual recruiters and their labour management functions that implicate significant impacts on the working conditions of migrant construction workers in Bangladesh. This book sets out in this

direction, and its original contribution is to help understand the structures of recruitment practices and employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector. It aims to produce new knowledge that can be complemented to understand the growing diversity of precarious employment in other geographical settings.

Understanding precarious work

The main theoretical lens of this book, precarious work, is generally characterised by high levels of labour insecurity and the lack of labour protection. It is a prominent theme in recent work and employment research (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; Campbell & Price, 2016). Although the concept of precarious work is being increasingly used in the academic and activist research on labour and work, theoretical conceptualisations of precarious work are ambiguous because of conceptual slippage and confusions that have led the academics to either misinterpret or entirely overlook the theoretical foundations of precarious work (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017). The definition of precarious work is quite vague and multifaceted due to the multidimensional nature of precarious work and the differences in its understanding, which typically depends on the geographic, economic and social structure of the political systems and labour markets. As a result, the concept of precarious work has been extensively debated and refined (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; Campbell & Price, 2016; ILO, 2012; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017; McDowell et al., 2009). A variety of terms, such as "precarity," "informalisation," "casualisation," "contractualisation," "flexibilisation," "non-standard," "irregular," "subcontracted," "atypical" and "contingent work or employment," have emerged from particular national contexts. Precarious work has generally been conceptualised to include all forms of work involving job insecurity; limited statutory entitlements, both in the workplace and to social benefits; low wages; and high risks of ill health.

As the ILO (2012) mentions:

Although a precarious job can have many faces, it is usually defined by uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with employment, low pay, and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining a trade union and bargaining collectively.

(p. 27)

Precarious work is a multidimensional concept. Labour and work researchers have often theorised it in connection with the structural changes in employment arrangements introduced by neoliberal developments. Political economists and economic sociologists, in particular, have explored how profit motivations had let the employers introduce flexible employment practices that cut costs and shift risks onto individual workers (Beck, 2000; Kalleberg, 2011; Ross, 2009;

Standing, 2011, 2016a). Researchers in the field of sociology of work have associated the concept of precarious work to workplace conditions and the quality of employment. They have referred precarious work to involve high employment insecurity, low regulatory protection, low wages and a low level of employee control over wages, hours and working conditions (Cranford & Vosko, 2006; Vosko, 2010).

In spite of theoretical debates and confusions, precarious work has been frequently conceptualised as an employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky in which the workers bear the risks of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections (Kalleberg, 2009; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017; Standing, 2011, 2014b, 2016a, 2017; Vosko, 2010). Defined in this way, the concept of precarious work encompasses not only the working conditions but also a range of emerging employment arrangements that the workers are forced to accept and/or continue. Among them, outsourced and subcontracted work arrangements are the key work arrangements, introduced by neoliberal policies, that can be attributed to the contemporary rise of precarious work (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2012; Standing, 1997, 1999, 2010; Strauss & Fudge, 2014; Vosko, 2006). Precarious work is characterised by the diversity of individual work experiences, whose impacts may differ from one society to the other, but they are fundamentally the same in terms of diminishing rights. In particular, the migrant labourers experiencing precarious work face extreme forms of labour exploitation that flexibilise, subordinate and coerce them to continue with widespread insecurities in employment arrangements (Standing, 2011, 2014b, 2016a). Because the process of labour recruitment and labour management has important effects on the migrant workers' working conditions, this book examines precarious work in this important area and builds on conceptualisations. It theorises the connection between recruitment practices and precarious work and in doing so casts new light on migrant workers and their working conditions.

Given the complexity of defining precarious work, this book limits its scope to the nature of employment relationships characterised by poor working conditions. It measures precarious work through four dimensions of precariousness that represent instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability, as suggested by Rodgers (1989, p. 3):

- a) Temporal dimension: low certainty of continuity and availability of work;
- b) Organisational dimension: lack of workers' (individual and collective) control over working conditions, wages and the pace of work;
- c) Social dimension: legal, collective or customary protection against discrimination; unfair dismissal or unacceptable working practices; and social protection (access to social security benefits covering health, accidents, unemployment insurance, etc.); and
- d) Economic dimension: inadequate and irregular payment.

This book purposefully draws the boundary around the theoretical concept of precarious work and hypothesises that precariousness in Bangladesh's construction sector is identified by the combination of the above factors. Since precarious employment is recognised as "the dominant feature of social relations between employers and workers in the contemporary world" (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 17), it considers social contexts (i.e., same locality effects) of employment relationships important in understanding precarious work conditions. This theoretical position allows the book to examine the employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector by emphasising not only the dimensions of pressures and insecurities produced by indirect recruitment practices but also the social relations of demand and supply in generating precariousness, as suggested by Standing (2011) and Vosko (2006). It therefore extends the scope of this book to examine the role of individual agents and their social connections to labour recruitment and management practices that produce precarious work conditions for the migrant labourers.

Mapping out the precariat

The major conceptualisations that have been developed to explain the meaning and origins of precarious work do not consider the recruiting individuals as the key actors in labour management. As a result, the discussions on how their labour recruitment and management practices produce precarious work conditions predominantly remain uncertain and confused in the academic discourse on precarious work. The debates on the conceptual ambiguities of precarious work have been renewed through the popularisation of the term "the precariat" that was recently revitalised by eminent scholar Guy Standing. Although the term "precariat"² has long been used in European languages, Standing's (2011) prominent work *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* widely popularised the term in English. Conceptualising the role of neoliberal developments in creating the precarious existence of working people or "the precariat," it introduced a paradigm that comprised multiple forms of social insecurities in the labour market. The term represents a "class-in-the-making" that is a "new dangerous class." Analysing the human and economic costs of labour market flexibility, Standing (2011) argues that neoliberal restructuring has shifted economic risks onto workers, and in turn globalisation of economic life is rapidly giving rise to a new social class, "the precariat," a flexible workforce subject to overwhelmingly unstable and insecure employment. The workers lack channels of upward occupational mobility and prospects of career identity as their economic, social and political rights are limited to fragmented occupational identities due to the increasing casualisation of work.

Flexibilisation of labour is a key trend that has significantly affected the work life of working class people, making them vulnerable to neoliberal changes in labour markets. The pressures of globalisation, according to Standing (2008), have produced an agenda for the casualisation of labour through "flexibilisation and informalisation of labour markets" (p. 16). Casualisation of labour represents

a key component of broader transitions from regular and permanent employment to insecure and casual employment. In the absence of state regulation and intervention in the labour markets, working class people are constantly experiencing insecurities tied to casualisation of their employment. According to Standing (2008), “now workers are enjoined to enjoy being active individuals in the risk society, facing the insecurities as a matter of personal responsibility” (p. 19). For Standing (2008), globalisation, labour flexibility and re-commodification are associated with four closely related but distinctive trends of informalisation, casualisation, contractualisation and occupational commodification. In particular, the broader trends of contractualisation reveal that governments and employers are inclined to dismantle collectively bargained contracts. With the demise of collective bargaining mechanisms, the scope for individualised labour contracts has emerged as a norm in globalised labour markets.

Standing (2008) argues:

Contractualisation refers to the global trend towards individualised labour contracts. The motives for this are complex. The employment relationship is always an incomplete contract, since workers can always adjust their effort [to] bargain, and there is always a process of informal renegotiating as an employment relationship unfolds. What individualised contracts often attempt to do is to tighten the conditions to minimise the uncertainty for the employer and to maximise the capacity to impose penalties for abrogation of the terms of the labour agreement.

(p. 25)

The neoliberal developments in the labour markets characterise a generic trend from regular to casual work status. Because of the state policy and the relative absence of explicit state involvement, this trend had normalised the individualisation of labour. Standing (2008) points out that many people are working with insecure employment status and with no rights or power to bargain. Such forms of informalisation have become institutionalised in the developing world, particularly in South Asia, where the business firms are increasingly informalising employment by turning to the use of subcontractors. The increasing practices of subcontracting are based on “as much labour as somebody sees fit” (Standing, 2008, p. 24). In these practices, labour is increasingly being individualised with the growing demands of global capitalism that stagnate employment security and expand the precariat. Standing conceptualised the individualisation of employment earlier in his influential book titled *Global Labour Flexibility: Seeking Distributive Justice*, published in 1999. Comparing the welfare capitalism in the West and state socialism in the East, he then conceptualised how employment arrangements became individualised in more flexible and insecure labour markets. He discussed the deterioration of job security that contributed to flexible and insecure employment during the 1970s. He conceptualised this specific period as the end of market regulations “to promote subordinated flexibility” (Standing, 1999, p. 76). He attributed

this era to the growing rise of non-standard employment, which was mostly outsourced to agency personnel and subcontractors. Employment relationships produced through such individualisation of labour are generally characterised by the “lack of workers’ (individual and collective) control over working conditions, wages or the pace of work” (Rodgers, 1989, p. 3).

Given the conceptual ambiguity and slippage in relation to precarious work, the theoretical framework of this book is built on eminent scholar Guy Standing’s notion of “the precariat” that is fundamentally derived from Marxian interpretations of global capitalism and struggles of the working class people. Standing (2011) conceptualises the contemporary changes in employment arrangements and their repercussions in producing multiple forms of insecurities in the lives of working people. He refers to the precariat as a new “class” that lacks seven forms of labour-related security in relation to their employment: labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security. According to him, flexible labour practices under global capitalism have contributed to the emergence and growth of this class. Benchmarking this new class with Karl Marx’s “proletariat,” he argues that the precariat has a distinctive bundle of insecurities and they are a “class-in-the-making” rather than Marx’s “class-for-itself” (Standing, 2011, p. 7).

As he argues:

The precariat was not part of the “working class” or the “proletariat.” The latter terms suggest a society consisting mostly of workers in long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionisation and collective agreements, with job titles their fathers and mothers would have understood, facing local employers whose names and features they were familiar with ... The precariat has class characteristics ... And it has none of the social contract relationships of the proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare states. Without a bargain of trust or security in exchange for subordination, the precariat is distinctive in class terms.

(Standing, 2011, pp. 6–8)

Distinguishing the precariat from Marx’s class interpretations, Standing (2011) claims the precariousness of working people as a new development of global capitalism that aims to make labour temporary, flexible and subordinate through flexible labour market policies such as subcontracting. These policies have already contributed to the erosion of the standard employment relationship and thus diminished the rights of the workers. In particular, the subcontracting practices have induced contingent employment arrangements to flexibilise labour to the benefits of capital. Labour-capital relations in such practices are despotic where the employers control and subordinate the workers to maximise their labour productivity in pursuit of competitiveness in neoliberal markets.

The precariat therefore represents the victims of neoliberal policies that have significantly curtailed the state regulations of the labour markets. While they are flexible and subordinate to their employers, they are vulnerable due to the lack of rights and labour security. In the absence of upward mobility, they are overrepresentative in “insecure forms of labour that are unlikely to assist them to build a desirable identity or a desirable career” (Standing, 2011, p. 16).

One of the core propositions of Standing’s theory of the precariat is the process through which the employers subject the workers to their subordination in flexible arrangements. He conceptualises this process as “precariatisation” that isolates the workers and limits their space and opportunity for collective action. Precariatisation is a process through which the employers establish control over the workers by making them “subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence” (Standing, 2011, p. 16). Taking this important conceptualisation of employment relationships for the precariat, the overarching theoretical framework enables this book to examine the specific conditions that create pressures and insecurities to subordinate the workers to their employers with reference to construction work in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. It also extends the scope of this book to confirm the mechanism of precariatisation that the migrant construction workers experience in the city. Thus this book is theoretically positioned on Standing’s interpretations of the new class of working people, the precariat, and it endeavours to map out the characteristics of the precariat in the construction projects in one of the fastest-growing cities in the world.

Building cities in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a small country, predominantly rural in nature, located in South Asia. The country is least developed, and it has a population estimated at around 162 million within a land area of 147,570 square kilometres, a per capita annual income of US\$1,212 and a foreign aid-dependent economy (UN, 2016a, 2017; WB, 2016). The country is internationally known for a few important characteristics such as extreme poverty, cheap labour for global manufacturing of readymade garments (RMG), international labour migration and frequent natural disasters. According to the World Bank’s latest statistics, 51.5 percent of people in Bangladesh earn less than US\$3.20 a day, and therefore they live below the lower-middle-income-class poverty line (WB, 2017). Bangladesh’s labour regulation and working conditions have recently been covered in international media following the deadly collapse of Rana Plaza, a building complex which housed several RMG manufacturing factories, leaving 1,129 garment workers dead and a further 2,500 injured (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). In the past 40 years, more than 10 million Bangladeshis have migrated overseas for employment and international remittance has become an important source of foreign exchange earnings (GoB, 2017). Although Bangladesh is the origin of extensive communities of global migrants present in the Gulf States, Europe and North America, the country receives little attention from international media because of the limited geopolitical interest of the Western

nations (Lewis, 2011). However, Bangladesh is exceptionally vulnerable to severe cyclones and storms, and every few years pictures of severe flooding or cyclone damage make headlines in international media. Although international media limitedly highlights human sufferings due to natural disasters, they hardly examine the structure of Bangladesh's economy and livelihoods that have largely been shaped by the outrages of the disasters undermining agricultural development and inducing internal migration.

Bangladesh's agrarian economy is highly dependent on the extremely fragile ecology. Farming is primarily dependent on monsoon-based harvesting, while the land is productive but scarce and highly concentrated (Lewis, 2011; Nabi, 1992). Employment and income related to farming activities therefore fluctuate between seasons and years. The lack of year-round employment in Bangladeshi villages has been attributed as the most important reason for rural-urban migration of labour. A vast majority of the rural labourers migrate to cities, during the lean season when job opportunities are scarce in villages, in search of income opportunities (Afsar, 2000; Alam & Barkat-e-Khuda, 2011; Herrmann & Svarin, 2009). Although recent national economic development policies in Bangladesh postulate that the migration of rural labourers from the agriculture sector has pushed up agricultural wages, leading to higher income levels for the landless workers, the increasing migration of rural labourers has contributed to rapid urbanisation in the country.

However, migration to cities has been an important adaptation strategy for the rural people affected by climate change. Being a deltaic country, Bangladesh is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and it regularly encounters climate shocks including tropical cyclones, tornadoes, drought, flood, riverbank erosion, salinity and water pollution. Due to climate change, millions of people are forecast to be displaced in upcoming years (Akter, 2009). The country has a big coastal area throughout different regions and a summer-dominant hemisphere in the north-western region. Climate change is increasingly affecting the fertility of lands and human settlements (Kuhn, 2003). Climate change-related displacement has therefore been a vital cause of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh (Afsar, 2000; Martin et al., 2014; Siddiqui & Billah, 2014). Every year many people from climate-affected areas leave their homes and migrate to cities. Also, there are some people who stay in the city for a particular period of the year, known to be the most critical time for climate hazards; they, however, return to their villages. Thus rural-urban migration enables them to escape climate vulnerabilities and adapt to climate change-related hardships (Jones, Mahbub, & Haq, 2016; Siddiqui & Billah, 2014).

Weather-conditioned farming and climate-induced migration have been crucially associated with the growth of the informal sector in urban areas in Bangladesh. Many migrant labourers coming from climate-affected villages get work in the urban informal sector such as rickshaw pulling, street vending and domestic care (Siddiqui & Billah, 2014). Nearly 75 percent of the total labour force in cities is employed in the informal sector (GoB, 2015). The migrant labourers arriving in cities can easily access informal jobs that do not require formal training or professional skills. Despite the lack of labour protection and

employment benefits, a large proportion of the internal migrant labourers are traditionally found in informal jobs in cities that enable them to earn better (Amin, 1987). Because of this increasing trend, rural-urban migration is one of the most important reasons for the rapid growth of urban population and thereby urbanisation in Bangladesh. With 34.3 percent of the total population living in urban areas, the average annual growth rate of urban population was 3.6 percent during 2010–2015 (UN, 2016a). The trends of rapid urbanisation have led to significant demographic change in the cities of Bangladesh, particularly in the capital city.

Dhaka, the capital city, is the largest city in Bangladesh. With 18 million residents, it is one of the fastest-growing megacities and the most densely populated city in the world, where more than 44,000 people live in 1 square kilometre area (Smith, 2017; UN, 2016a, 2016b). Dhaka is the 11th largest city in the world, and 11.2 percent of the country's total population and 32 percent of the country's total urban population live in the city (UN, 2016b). It has been a popular choice to the rural-urban migrant labourers in terms of searching for informal jobs. Rapid urbanisation, coupled with the recent growth of many urban centres in Dhaka, has created an increasing demand for migrant labourers. Dhaka receives an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 migrant labourers every year, predominantly young unskilled rural labourers (Afsar, 2000, 2003; Sanderson, 2012). The age-selective nature of rural-urban labour migration in Dhaka is due to the fact that young people make up a large proportion of Bangladesh's population. Bangladesh is a country of youth labour force, where 23.4 million young people aged between 15 and 29 years represent around 40 percent of the total labour force (GoB, 2015). Although the vast majority of the youth labour force is employed in the agriculture sector, there is little incentive to remain in agriculture due to contemporary changes such as declining agricultural productivity, high costs of production, fluctuations in the price of crops, low profitability and mechanisation in small farm agriculture. These developments have curtailed the capacity of the agriculture sector to employ young rural labourers, while the overall growth of the sector is very slow (Saha, 2002). As a result, rural-urban labour migration for more remunerative non-farm work has increasingly become a livelihood strategy for young people and their households in villages. These changes have significantly contributed to increasing rural-urban labour migration for construction work in cities.

Construction in Bangladesh is a dominant sector in terms of its enormous economic contribution and employment. It has been a popular source of employment for the rural labourers migrating to cities. Their migration provides them with opportunities for better income in cities and thus helps their households minimise the financial stresses tied to their original occupation in their village. In 2010, the construction sector contributed 8.4 percent to Bangladesh's gross domestic product (GDP) and gained a 6 percent annual growth rate, higher than that of the largest sector in Bangladesh, agriculture (GoB, 2011a). Recent demographic changes, infrastructure and housing development activities and

the massive expansion of private real estate business in the country have further boosted the growth of the construction sector. The sector involves more than 200 large construction firms and 5,000 small and medium-sized private contractors and real estate developers (Chowdhury, 2010). While in the past Bangladesh's construction sector was largely dependent on imported materials, most of the construction materials are now being locally produced. It is estimated that there are more than 269 industries allied to the sector, consisting of more than 2,000 factories producing cement, steel, bricks, sand, paint, tiles and ceramics, pipes and fittings, cables, glass, stone, wood, glue, etc. (Sejuti, 2015).

Construction has been a significant source of employment for rural labourers in Bangladesh. A Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey of farm and non-farm employment shows that in the three-year period through 2006–2009 more than 600,000 workers switched from agriculture to non-farm sectors in addition to another 3.6 million workers who joined various non-farm occupations (GoB, 2011a, 2011b). While the share of the farm sector in the labour force dropped by 4.5 percent during this period, nearly half a million people switched to the construction sector, making the total number of construction workers 2.6 million in 2010 that was forecast to be 2.9 million in 2015 (GoB, 2011a, 2011b). The growth rate of employed persons in construction was 13.52 percent in 2010, and the sector offered employment to 6.6 percent of urban and 4.3 percent of rural labourers by employing 4.84 percent of the total labour force and 5.49 percent of the total youth labourers (GoB, 2011b). Bangladesh's latest development policy documents, including the Vision 2021, pointed to construction as one of the main engines of high growth in upcoming years in terms of employment.

According to the association of real estate developers in Bangladesh, known as Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB), the construction sector employs 33,500 technical persons such as architects, graduate engineers, diploma engineers and management officials.³ In addition to the mainstream construction workers, around 1 million people are employed in allied industries such as cement and steel-producing factories (Kabir, 2016). Once the number of people employed in these allied industries is considered, the construction sector's total employment is estimated to be more than 3.5 million. However, very few of this group are female workers in urban construction projects (Choudhury, 2013; Rahman & Islam, 2013). The low employment of women in construction work is reflective of the overall female employment rate in the national labour force. While female employment in the national labour force is 33.5 percent, the construction sector employs only 1.0 percent of total employed women in Bangladesh, and thus only 7.94 percent construction workers are women (GoB, 2015).

Rural-urban migrant labourers constitute the bulk of construction workers in large cities and migrate from different parts of Bangladesh. They migrate to cities seasonally when they have few options to survive on farming. Many marginalised peasants and agricultural labourers migrate from rural areas to major cities such as Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet and gain employment

in urban construction projects (Abrar & Reza, 2014; Chowdhury et al., 2012; Farhana, Rahman, & Rahman, 2012; Uddin & Firoj, 2013). The internal migrant labourers in Bangladesh consider construction work as the most favourable income option, considering the predominantly easy access. When compared to another vibrant sector, RMG manufacturing, the recruitment process for construction employment is less demanding in terms of age, skills and education. Although recruitment practices in the RMG manufacturing sector have mostly been standardised due to its linkages with foreign buyers who pressurise the sector to maintain international labour standards, Bangladesh's construction sector is purely a domestic sector that does not share any international linkages in relation to labour standardisation. As a result, construction has emerged as a sector where informal recruitment practices are widely established and poor labour standards are normalised. Entering the sector as unskilled labourers coming from villages, the migrant labourers work in an environment that is traditionally marked by poor occupational safety and high rates of accidents (BILS, 2007). Local newspapers regularly report the accidental deaths of construction workers in cities although many incidences remain unpublished.

Employment of the rural-urban migrant labourers in urban construction projects is represented by poor working conditions and the absence of labour protection (Abrar & Reza, 2014; Reza, 2016). The traditional practices of recruitment are characterised by the unavailability of formal recruitment agencies and thereby the lack of institutional commitment to the construction workers. Indirect recruitment practices, where the builders indirectly recruit construction workers through a multi-layered process involving a range of individuals, are long established in Bangladesh's construction sector. The lack of regulation in the sector is rooted in the absence of statistics on workers and their recruiters. Apart from estimation, the official statistics available on the construction sector do not reveal the genuine census of workers and their recruiters. A large proportion of the workers remain uncovered in the government censuses due to their constant mobility. Labour issues in the construction sector are therefore not adequately covered in the available official data. While there are a few micro studies on the construction workers in major regional cities, they hardly discuss recruitment practices and working conditions. These limitations have traditionally made the construction workers an underexplored labour group in Bangladesh, restricting the scopes for getting empirical facts about their recruitment and working conditions. This book is situated in this context to undertake an empirical examination of rural-urban labour migration and recruitment practices in Bangladesh's construction sector, through the theoretical lens of precarious work.

Objectives of the book

The overall objective of this book is to understand how recruitment practices produce conditions of precarious employment for the migrant construction workers in cities. It aims to investigate the inter-connections between

rural-urban labour migration, labour recruitment practices and working conditions in Bangladesh's construction sector through the theoretical lens of precarious work. By doing this, it aims to discover why construction work is precarious for the migrant labourers in cities. The narratives of the migrant construction workers and their recruiters are particularly helpful to measure the extent and nature of labour recruitment practices for construction work, and to explore the possible intersections between rural-urban labour migration, recruitment practices and precarious employment with reference to urban construction work. Their emic perspectives offer new knowledge on the image of construction work and its relation to rural-urban labour migration, modes of recruitment and their own ways of viewing and negotiating employment relationships in their migration experience.

A key feature of the book is to tease out the specificity of recruitment practices in Bangladesh's construction sector to explore what unique work experiences are available to the migrant labourers. Although construction in Bangladesh has been a popular source of employment for the rural labourers migrating to cities, employment of the rural-urban migrant labourers in the urban construction projects is represented by stressful working conditions and the absence of labour protection. The predominant structures of informal-cum-indirect recruitment, through a multi-layered process involving a range of individuals, contribute to various forms of dominance and control relationships that have not yet been examined. As a result, research on the migrant construction workers' workplace experiences and their employment relationships in Bangladesh remains an exception. Considering this important gap, this book sets out to identify the key actors in the recruitment and management of migrant labourers and examine their dominance in producing an exploitative employment relationship that contributes to various pressures and insecurities amongst the migrant workers in Bangladesh's construction sector.

This is why the specificity of recruitment practices is important. The scope of this book is to examine the role of individuals in the labour recruitment and management practices that produce precarious work conditions for the migrant labourers. Situated in this specific context, it investigates what particular aspects of individualised employment create precarious work conditions for the migrant labourers. Within this context, the book contributes new insights to the field of labour migration by unpacking the complex inter-connections between rural-urban labour migration, recruitment and precarious employment with reference to the migrant workers in the construction projects in Dhaka. It also produces original knowledge on the structure of recruitment practices to enhance the understanding of employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector. Painstaking attention is taken to accurately capture the essence and substance of the migrant labourers' work experiences so that readers might vicariously experience the working conditions themselves.

Ultimately, the book addresses a simple but as yet unanswered question: why construction is a precarious job for migrant labourers? To the extent

that the migrants make up a large share of the world's precariat (Standing, 2011), to what extent do recruitment practices intensify the precariatization of the migrant construction workers? Indeed, the book questions as to whether recruitment practices produce any specific conditions for deliberate and systematic exploitation of the migrant construction workers in cities.

Primary data sources

The data for this book was collected first-hand through a three-month-long fieldwork in Dhaka from December 2015 to March 2016. Before commencing data collection, human ethics approval (project no. 6761) was sought from the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University to ensure respectful treatment of the research participants and minimise potential risks and burdens in relation to participation. In order to access, recruit and treat the participants, Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (ANSECHR) guidelines were followed. Participation in data collection was voluntary, and the participants provided informed verbal consent as per the information provided to them. Participants were anonymous, and all information they provided was managed in the strictest confidence.

A mixed-methods approach was followed to combine quantitative and qualitative data gathering through a questionnaire-based survey and in-depth interviews. The survey followed the purposive random sampling technique through which a conscious selection of 100 migrant construction workers was made on the basis of specific characteristics such as at least six months' work experience in urban construction projects. The basis for recruitment was mainly the participants' experience of migration and work in Dhaka. The participants were selected from the age group of 15 to 50 years, whereas 27 participants were adolescents aged 15 to 17 years. The ratio of male and female participants was not even, and thus 86 male and 14 female workers were surveyed. This is reflective of very low participation of women in construction work, as discussed above. In addition, construction work in Bangladesh is predominantly regarded as labour-intensive masculine work, and the recruiters prefer male workers to female workers due to their physical strength and fitness for menial work for excessively long hours (Ahsan, 1997; Choudhury, 2013; Rahman & Islam, 2013). Overall, more than two-thirds of the survey participants were the sole member of their family migrating and working in Dhaka, and all of their family members were living in villages. More than half of the participants had relied on farming as their only livelihood option in their village before migrating. The majority of the participants did not have reading and writing capabilities, and thus none had technical education or training in construction work.

The qualitative interview participants were drawn from the overall survey sample. A sub-sample of 15 participants was selected for in-depth interviewing. The purposeful sampling strategy was used to select them. In addition,

five individual recruiters were interviewed to obtain employers' perspectives on recruitment and management of migrant construction workers. The interviews with the recruiters were conducted in order to gain rich insights on the employment relationships by exploring their original knowledge in how they recruited and managed workers onsite. As suggested by Bloemraad (2007), the survey data laid the groundwork by testing the concept of rural-urban labour migration and its association with construction work in Bangladesh whereas the in-depth interviews uncovered the critical mechanisms structuring indirect recruitment practices and employment relationships by providing migrant construction workers' own narratives.

The survey and in-depth interviews were conducted in Bangla, the native language of the participants. The survey data was analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The interviews, recorded in a voice recorder, were transcribed in Bangla and then translated to English. The extracts of the transcripts were manually coded to thematically match with the overarching research questions. Combination of the statistical and thematic analysis of primary data extracted from the survey and in-depth interviews provided first-hand knowledge to produce empirical evidence that this book is based on.

Original contribution of the book

While the global construction industry represents a significant proportion of precarious workers, the changes in work in this industry are representative of many of the broader trends evident in employment under neoliberalism. Therefore, this book is situated in the scholarly literature on precarious work and neoliberalism that offers a way of understanding how the neoliberal developments have contributed multiple forms of insecurities to the lives of working people. The theoretical framework for this book is derived from Marxian interpretations of the contemporary changes in employment arrangements and struggles of the working class people under global capitalism. Integrating eminent scholar Guy Standing's theoretical contributions on the precarisation of working class people, it proposes that precarious employment of migrant labourers is a consequence of flexible labour practices such as outsourcing, subcontracting and casualisation. Thus it attributes the precariousness of migrant labourers to a new phase of global capitalism that aims to make labour temporary, dependent, subordinate and flexible. Claiming the rise of precarious employment as a new development under global capitalism, this book focuses on the changing nature of employment relationships through which the migrant workers are systematically flexibilised to be subordinate to their employers. In the absence of state regulations of the labour markets, the workers, through individualisation of work, are subject to dominance and control of employers who create pressures and insecurities to force the workers to be highly dependent on them. This theoretical understanding of employment relationships under global capitalism, as conceptualised predominantly by Standing (1997, 1999, 2008, 2011, 2014b, 2014d, 2016a), sets the scope of this

book to explore global labour flexibility and its repercussions on the working conditions of the migrant labourers.

Taking the case of migrant construction workers in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, this book sets out to examine the role of recruitment in producing precarious work conditions. The aim is to examine the structures of labour recruitment practices and employment relationships contributing to the precariousness of migrant labourers in Bangladesh's construction sector. One original contribution of this study is the empirical work conducted, which reveals that indirect recruitment is fundamental to the production of poor working conditions and thus the precariousness of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. This book, for the first time, unravels the extensive individualised layers in labour recruitment and management that contribute greatly to the conditions of precariousness through subordination, control and exploitation of Bangladeshi migrant construction workers. Empirical evidence generated and analysed by the book helps understand how recruitment practices and the prevailing conditions of employment in Bangladesh's urban construction projects attract the labourers from villages. It argues that the predominant role of the individual recruiters offers the rural labourers easy access to construction work in cities, but this work is stressful and can be characterised as *4D*: dirty, difficult, dangerous and disgraceful. The empirical results reveal that rural-urban labour migration for construction work in Dhaka involves 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. This book identifies them as the key actors in the recruitment and management of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. It argues that the central role of the individual recruiters in the 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 the scope for labour protection.

This book uniquely conceptualises the dominance of individual recruiters as producing "hyper-individualised employment," 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 precarious conditions for rural-urban migrant labourers in Bangladesh. Through the conceptualisation of hyper-individualised employment as a mode of dominance in the workplace, the book produces new knowledge that improves the theoretical understanding of precarious work with reference to the migrant construction workers in Bangladesh. The new knowledge produced by this book complements theoretical conceptualisations of precarious work produced in the field of labour migration by examining the connections between recruitment practices and precarious work conditions of migrant workers. It contributes new insights to this field 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 book is to shine a light on the structures of recruitment practices to enhance the understanding of employment relationships in Bangladesh's construction sector. The new knowledge produced by this book can be beneficial to other global contexts where recruitment may also be key to precarious work conditions.

Outline of the book

The second chapter examines the working conditions in Dhaka's construction projects and conveys an image of construction work perceived by the migrant construction workers. In doing this, it produces empirical evidence and analyses why the migrant construction workers in Dhaka predominantly consider construction as an unpleasant, hard and insecure job. The chapter provides migrant construction workers' personal perspectives on their everyday experiences of work. The perspectives of the recruiters are also discussed to contextualise the employment relationships surrounding the workplace conditions.

Chapter 3 investigates the connections between construction work and rural-urban labour migration in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on Dhaka. It explains the structural context and socio-economic dimensions of rural-urban labour migration for construction work and explores the prevailing conditions of employment in Dhaka's construction projects that attract the labourers to move from their village. In doing this, it analyses why the rural labourers continue to migrate to cities for construction work that is predominantly regarded as a low-status job. The chapter provides the migrant construction workers' own perspectives and reasons for this migration.

Chapter 4 uncovers the structures of recruitment practices. It identifies the actors in the recruitment of migrant labourers for construction work and explores the contexts and conditions of the recruitment process that the migrant labourers experience. In doing this, it analyses how the rural labourers are recruited for the construction projects in Dhaka. The chapter discusses the role of individuals as recruiters of the migrant construction workers. It reproduces empirical evidence and explains the central role of individual recruiters in the indirect recruitment and management of the construction workers. Examining the modes of recruitment, it explores the navigating and intersecting role of various individuals in determining terms and conditions of employment in Dhaka's construction projects.

Chapter 5 unravels the employment relationships in Dhaka's construction projects and the role of recruiters in shaping them. It examines the migrant construction workers' experiences of working with their recruiters. It is particularly focussed on how the workers deal with the recruiters and their extended layers in their workplace. Given the complex structures of recruitment practices, the workplace experiences of Dhaka's migrant construction workers are determined by the employment relationships that they go through.

The chapter therefore examines the migrant construction workers' own views and lived experiences regarding the prevalent structures of the employment relationships that they find themselves in. It explains how the recruiters flexibilise migrant labour through their individualised labour management practices. Probing into these practices, it explains the workers' own views that help them continue to work with their recruiters.

Chapter 6 focuses on interpreting the research results theoretically in order to understand how recruitment practices mediate the employment relationships that generate different forms of precariousness for the migrant workers in Bangladesh's construction sector. It discusses the relevance of the empirical data in relation to the main theoretical concept of this book, i.e., precarious work. In the light of previous knowledge, the chapter identifies new knowledge by examining and benchmarking this study's findings with others. It evaluates the in-depth meaning of the empirical findings and explains their theoretical and empirical significance.

Chapter 7 presents a conclusion to this book. It outlines the original contribution and significance of the book and summarises the major findings and arguments. In doing this, it refers to the unique conceptualisation of "hyper-individualised employment" that represents the dominant role of the individual recruiters and subordination of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. Considering hyper-individualised employment as an emerging form of employment relationship for the precariat in Dhaka's construction projects, it offers some recommendations to the policy makers in their efforts towards improving recruitment practices and workplace conditions for the migrant construction workers. The chapter endorses the recruiting individuals as the key actors in the recruitment and management of migrant labourers and thus presents their individualised practices as an important research agenda for the future study of migration and labour. It analyses how the new knowledge offered by this book can be utilised for further analyses of structural changes in employment relationships in local and global workplaces.

Notes

- 1 The concept of the *3D* job originates from English neologism derived from Japanese *3K* expressions: *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous) and *kitsui* (difficult), introduced by Connell (1993).
- 2 The term also exists in French (*precariat*), German (*prekariat*), Greek (*prekariáto*), Italian (*precariato*), Spanish (*precariado*) and Swedish (*prekariatet*).
- 3 REHAB was established in 1991. The association had 1,151 members in 2016, mainly involved in building residential apartments and land development. Its members have constructed and sold more than 100,000 residential units, approximately 10,000 residential units and 6,000 land plots each year (REHAB, n.d.).

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2 Working conditions of construction workers

Stressful and hazardous working conditions on construction sites in Dhaka convey a poor image of construction work perceived by the migrant construction workers. This image is fundamentally related to the way the workers perceive and perform their work onsite. I found them working long hours in extremely dirty, difficult and dangerous conditions. While they predominantly considered construction as an unpleasant, hard and insecure job, their personal perspectives on daily life experience suggest that they were systematically subjected to various indignities and discomforts caused by the lack of respect for them in Bangladeshi society. Because construction work in Bangladesh involves high amounts of physical labour and hard work, it is commonly regarded as an extremely laborious job in the local labour community. The workers in Dhaka believed that working as migrant construction workers carried a low status that eventually affected their social relationships. Such beliefs were embedded in their social connections and everyday interactions with their family members, friends, neighbours and other social contacts. Moreover, the workers' own perception about their work-related indignities was shaped by their fleeting and incidental interactions outside the workplace. These aspects are really important to understand the magnitudes of social acceptance of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka.

In the sections below, I will present the workers' narratives on their working conditions and the three-dimensional image (dirty, difficult and dangerous) of construction work tied to that. I will also present the views of the subcontracting individuals or recruiters who have a dominant role in determining the working conditions on construction sites. Abusive labour management techniques that they practise often intensify the workers' humiliations. Evidence extracted from the interviews with the workers and their recruiters will therefore help understand not only the working conditions but also a unique structure of employment relationship surrounding them. I will quote the interviewees sparingly to discuss the specific contexts of the working conditions and thus to inform the subjective meanings of the workers' daily experience inside and outside the construction sites.

The dirty working conditions

In Dhaka, a typical construction site in its early stages looks like a rubbish dump or a landfill site. I found most of the sites in messy conditions. Apart from a handful of them, the sites did not have fenced boundaries. At the entry to the construction sites, either fenced or unfenced, there was no signage to demarcate specific areas or items throughout the site. Health and safety signs were not displayed even in the highly hazardous areas. Excavations, pits and electric installations were not securely bordered. I saw various equipment and construction materials such as nails, screws, bolts, reinforcement bars, plastic pipes, stones, shuttering plates, steel sheets, sand, bricks, cement, wood, tin sheets, bamboos, electrical parts, containers, tiles, glass, flammable liquids, lubricants and greases, etc. scattered all over the ground. Depending on the stages of the building process, the sites were generally messy due to reckless storage, stacking and handling of these materials. On every site, I noticed huge construction debris along with mud and dust. Standing for a while in one corner of a site can easily make anyone sneeze. The hands of the workers get dirty within a few minutes after starting their work. By the time they finish the work, dust and mud are all over their body.

The migrant construction workers in Dhaka reported that their work was extremely “dirty.” They believed that their work was treated as dirty when they happened to interact outside their workplace. Their negative perceptions about their own work are actually shaped by the way the construction jobs are undertaken. The workers on Dhaka’s construction sites endure physically unpleasant working conditions in order to accomplish their assigned tasks. The lifetime of a construction project involves a wide range of tasks beginning with site excavation through finishing tasks such as painting. Unlike in developed countries where most of these tasks are accomplished by utilising modern construction equipment and machinery, in Bangladesh, construction projects are still highly dependent on menial labour. At every stage of a construction project, the workers are required to handle huge amounts of soil, dust and construction materials. Due to manual handling, they frequently deal with piles of debris that eventually spread to their clothes. The process of accomplishing construction jobs therefore involves specific conditions that make the work messy and unpleasant for the workers.

As one worker reported:

People often hate us when we have nasty mud and debris on our clothes ... We can understand that when we are in dirty clothes. At that moment, I feel sad but there is nothing to do. We cannot change this anyway; it’s our fate.

The worker, as quoted above, was aware of the negative perception about the construction workers outside the workplace. Handling of soil and mud is integral to construction work in Dhaka. The construction workers accomplish their jobs in a messy environment where they are required to manually handle piles

of debris. Although handling dust and dirt is very common on Dhaka's construction sites, as seen from Figure 2.1, the quoted worker's personal accounts suggest that the mud affects his status. Due to the negative perception outside the workplace, he regretted and felt helpless with the situation. However, the quote indicates that the unhappy feelings of the workers are significantly prompted by their fleeting and incidental interactions outside their workplace.

The migrant construction workers often compared themselves with the salaried job holders in other sectors and consequently considered their own work less prestigious. They had infrequent and brief contacts with some people whom they perceived to be salaried job holders. They actually cited their own clothing as contributing to their low feelings.



Figure 2.1 Dust and mud on Dhaka's construction sites

One worker reported:

At the end of the day I am a “labourer.” It is all about dignity. There is huge difference between a labourer and a job holder. For example, when I ride a public bus after finishing work, no one wants to sit beside me seeing me wearing dirty clothes. People think that sitting beside me will degrade their prestige. I also feel penitent. But there is no option left to us. We work with dust, and hence our clothes get dusty.

The worker’s frustrations associated with the image of construction work are clear from this quote. Considering unpleasant treatment on public transport, the worker perceived the social identity of a construction worker to be undignified. His personal experience on public transport suggests that the dirty clothes of the construction workers represent indignity and barriers to interact socially. Similarly, the workers’ experiences in other public places are negative due to the dirt and mud they handle in their workplace.

One worker reported:

I do not wish to have any future plan surrounding this work. I do not wish to continue this work for a longer period ... [This is because] people do not respect us. They disrespect the work itself. Mud is everywhere ... If we go out for buying something from a roadside grocery shop, other customers in the shop will stay away from us seeing mud on our clothes.

Similar negative experiences to those outlined in the above quote are due to the workers’ fleeting and incidental interactions outside the workplace. Their persistent frustrations in relation to dirty clothes have attributed to their mindset that their work has no dignity in their society. Therefore, the migrant construction workers in Dhaka do not want their occupations to be carried on by their children. Due to the lack of dignity and social status tied to construction work, none of the workers I surveyed and interviewed wanted their next generation to become construction workers in future.

As one worker reported:

No, I will never want my next generation to continue this work. If I had wanted this, I would have not given them education. This work is dirty because of dust. I wish my sons should complete their education and get salaried formal jobs. I do not want them to do any dirty jobs at all, like mine.

The workers frequently attributed their health concerns to the unpleasant work environment that demotivated them to engage their next generation in construction work. In fact, in Dhaka, many workers are employed in infrastructure and heavy construction projects where they are required to work in a severely disgusting environment such as a sanitary sewer system, as seen in Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.2 Workers working underground with unsanitary sewage

In Dhaka, the underground sewer pipes and the sanitary lines are highly obnoxious job locations where the workers are required to handle polluted water and sanitary waste. These confined spaces are usually not designed for continuous occupancy, and the workers have limited means of entry or exit. Working in the sewer systems therefore requires a great deal of physical effort.

The workers regularly working in these hazardous locations suffer a variety of accident hazards including poisonous sewer gases, lack of oxygen, hot conditions, high concentrations of dust, cuts and injuries caused by sharp items, toxic chemicals, fire and explosions. While working underground on the live sewers or sanitary drainage pipes, the debris not only spreads onto their body but also passes through their lungs, contributing to their health concerns.

One worker elaborated:

This is a seriously dirty job. I will never want my next generation to do this. If anyone works here, he will be at higher risk of developing heart disease. The disgusting mess we work with passes through our lungs. The polluted water we work with is also disgusting. Sometimes the sewage pipes burst and make nasty sewage flood. We must work in that big mess.

The worker, as quoted above, describes the unpleasant working conditions he experiences every day. The sewer construction workers in Dhaka reported a variety of health problems such as cramping stomach pains, diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, dry cough, persistent and severe headache, jaundice, asthma, chest tightness, skin infection, eye strains, allergy, and aching muscles and joints. They believed that their exposure to sewage resulted in these work-related illnesses even for the young workers who were in their early 20s.

The overall negative perceptions about construction jobs are significantly related to the traditional processes of undertaking the jobs and the unavoidable handling of messy substances. Dirt, dust and filthy soil are frequently linked to the low status of the workers, but there is something more important than these. The migrant workers on Dhaka's construction sites reported that the use of offensive language was common in their workplace. They reported the frequent use of reprimanding and coarse language by their team leaders, project supervisors, site managers, (sub)contractors and engineers. In particular, the female workers reported that they experienced coarse language and rebukes while their performance was slow.

One female worker reported:

I work with masons, and when I help them properly, they do not behave indecently. However, if my performance is subpar, they will rebuke me. That's normal here.

This worker confirms that the use of coarse language due to slow performance is common on Dhaka's construction sites. Therefore, the female workers view this culture as normal. They believe that their superiors have every right to scold them in case of poor performance. One of the main reasons that the use of coarse language is considered "normal" is due to the workers' narrow perspectives on employment relationships. They consider their relationship with their employers only in terms of wages and payment. Many of them believe that the common problems, like coarse language, are

traditionally embedded in their working life, and hence they consider such practices inferior to the money they primarily work for.

However, the traditionally normalised culture of rebuking in case of subpar performance is not acceptable to all workers. In general, offensive language has had profound impacts on the workers' psychology. Although they are unable to protest against this practice, frequent use of coarse language is found to be detrimental to workers' self-esteem. The workers lose motivation when they experience coarse language at work. Due to the incidents involving coarse language, the workers often feel insulted and abused and thus leave their work immediately.

As one adolescent worker explained an incident:

Sometimes they rebuke by calling us “son of a pig” or “son of a prostitute mother.” Look, we are human beings and we do have human physique. We are not machines. We should work according to whatever our body allows. At our previous worksite, one day we were all having lunch during our lunch break. At that time, he [the recruiter] suddenly appeared and started rebuking us by saying, “hey son of a bitch, your performance is very poor so far and the project is not progressing fast. Bloody bastard bitch, your mum is a dirty whore.” Hearing this, I left the work and went back to my village. One of my co-workers who was just my age protested instantly, and then the recruiter beat him. He also left the work being upset.

This incident confirms the use of foul language, designed to be offensive and to discipline workers, on Dhaka's construction sites. The worker's personal experience with the incident reveals that he felt insulted due to the bullying and personally abusive language used by his recruiter. The local context of using such highly offensive language on construction sites is associated with the recruiters' performance expectations. Although often denied by the recruiters, the practice of using coarse language is perceived as normal to them. They treat this practice as integral to training the novice workers and keeping them focussed on the assigned tasks.

As one recruiter asserted:

All day I differ with the workers. When they make any mistake, I scold them. But after a few minutes I hug them. I scold them for their own benefit. I scold them to help them to become serious about learning work perfectly. Later I explain the reason for scolding to them.

Claiming the importance of such practice in training and disciplining the apprentice labourers, many recruiters argued in favour of maximising labour productivity by scolding the workers. While most of the recruiters were once themselves probationary labourers, they referred back to their personal experience with coarse language and supported the practice of using offensive

language at work. Thus they regarded scolding as an essential part of work, especially when managing and leading a big group of workers.

The use of coarse language is so common on Dhaka's construction sites that the workers can hardly ignore this. Even in situations where the workers are not directly involved, they hear heated arguments marked by rage between their recruiters and other people such as contractors. The everyday quarrels in the workplace contribute to their perceptions about the image of construction work.

One worker pointed out:

There is no dignity in this work. I work all day and work so hard but there is no respect. For example, my foreman does not get respect and he is often involved in heated arguments with other people like engineers and contractors. Seeing this, I do not think this job has any dignity.

The context of the above quote suggests that the incidents of heated arguments or raised voices demotivate the construction workers to perceive their job positively. The workers see their superiors get involved in intense arguments with the builders and contractors, and this aspect of work heavily contributes to their negative perception about their work. Due to this, the dignity of work with reference to construction work in Dhaka is compromised in the workers' workplace environment. Locally known as a dirty job, construction work has a poor image because of not only the debris the workers handle but the sense of indignity and discomfort they relate to the work. The use of bullying and personally abusive language is an important factor that justifies their perceptions of indignity.

The *difficult* working conditions

Construction jobs in Bangladesh are difficult; there is no doubt about this. The jobs are difficult not only because of the amount of physical labour they require but the poor working conditions that the workers experience on construction sites. All tasks are primarily menial and labour-intensive, and therefore the workers need to work hard physically. In order to accomplish the assigned tasks, they often work long hours in an unhealthy work environment.

Working for extended hours is very common on Dhaka's construction sites. The workers I surveyed confirmed this, with 76 percent of workers reporting that they did not have a fixed work schedule and thus their shifts and working hours were determined by their recruiters according to demands for progress. A variety of situational factors including constant pressure for meeting deadlines were associated with the demands. The workers worked up to 18 hours a day, although many of them did not receive overtime in spite of working long hours. This is because working extended hours is considered a norm on Dhaka's construction sites. Time pressure for ensuring assignment-based progress creates conditions that compel the workers to take on a huge

workload and work long hours. The workers are required to work without any weekly rest. As a consequence, 74 percent of workers reported that they did not have any days off in the week that preceded their inclusion in my survey. Many reported that they worked for several months at a stretch without having any days off.

One worker confirmed:

Our work continues for all over the whole year. We work all 30 days in a month. Except physical sickness, we work every day in a month. There is no leave. There is no official leave like weekends. We work continuously.

This quote confirms that the workers on Dhaka's construction sites do not have a day off. In order to double-check the work schedule of the worker quoted above, I spoke to his recruiter. The recruiter confirmed that he had been working for the last 78 days without having any leave. I found many other workers in a similar situation. The interviews with the workers revealed that their indirect recruitment was based on a "no work, no pay" principle. Without any leave, the workers were actually treated by their recruiters as day labourers.

One worker clarified this point:

We do not enjoy any leave here. We work all 30 days in a month. Even we work on Fridays.¹ If I do not work for a day, that will be counted as an absence and I will not get daily wage for that day. Leaves can be applicable for the salaried workers who are directly recruited, but we are not recruited directly. Although our subcontractors pay at the end of the month, our payment is calculated on a daily basis, and hence we are actually treated as day labourers. We are not entitled to any leave.

Leave or time off for the workers on a construction site is occasionally imposed by their recruiter when the site comes to a halt due to an uncertainty. The lack of supply of materials seldom disrupts the production process. The workers have a common tendency to conceptualise this kind of disruption as leave. However, disruptions due to supply shortage eventually result in worker unemployment and income instability.

As one worker explained:

Except those days of sickness, I work continuously throughout the whole month. I am not entitled to any kind of leave ... Normally I work throughout the whole year except those days of sickness. There are a few disruptions [related to the supply of materials] as well. For example, a few days ago we faced disruption due to a shortage of materials. Shops were closed on last Friday. The next day our contractor and builder spent the whole day getting some materials. Thus we did not have work on Friday and Saturday, and we will not be paid for these two days. Due

to material shortage, we had no tasks to complete. Sometimes these things happen.

Sickness is commonly regarded as “leave” on Dhaka’s construction sites. Working on the “no work, no pay” basis, the workers are not entitled to any sick leave. On account of sickness, the workers may be allowed to be absent, but their absence due to sickness is not a paid absence. Moreover, the interviews with the workers revealed that they often visited their village to attend to family-related emergencies such as illness of their dependants. In such circumstances, the recruiters did not offer any paid “compassionate leave.” While the workers were not paid for taking time off work to deal with emergencies involving their family members, the process of getting prior approval for such an unpaid leave of absence was time-consuming and tedious. In spite of notifying the recruiters about family emergencies, the workers had to wait long for their permission and payment of due wages before setting off for their village. The recruiters practised an individualised approach to meet the special needs of the workers and approve their absence requests. Because of absolute dependency on the recruiters, the workers had little option except to wait for their recruiters’ individualised consideration and payment of due wages.

The worker continued:

Leave depends on my requirements actually. For example, I left behind my family members in the village. If they have an emergency situation, I will need to go to the village to deal with that. I have to inform him [the recruiter] that I would like to leave work and go home tomorrow. He may advise me to go the next day instead of tomorrow. I have to argue with him that I must go home tomorrow to attend something urgent. After this, he may allow me to leave. Usually if I want to go home instantly, he will not pay the dues. He might tell me, “you want to go home but I do not have enough money to pay your due wages today. You better leave tomorrow so that I can pay you a portion of your due wages.” In spite of emergency, sometimes I must wait a day because I want to get some of the dues to take with me while going home. If it takes one week to attend my family [due to emergency], I will not be paid. No work, no pay here.

In the absence of leave, the workers on Dhaka’s construction sites work restlessly and they always feel exhausted. When I asked the workers about their health issues, many perceived that they had ill health because of long working hours and associated pressures. Many workers reported that their sleep schedule had been affected due to erratic work schedules. Sleep deprivation was common to most of the workers who reported serious decline in the quantity and quality of their sleep. In relation to this, they reported symptoms such as insomnia, persistent headaches, high blood pressure, muscle aches, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal problems including flatulence and constipation and low vision. I found that the workers were anxious about the risks of cardiovascular

diseases such as hypertension, heart attack and stroke that are linked to long working hours. Referring to their mental health issues, the workers reiterated fatigue, anxiety, depression, pessimism, feelings of being overwhelmed, mood swings, disinterest and isolation. Some adult male workers reported increased smoking because of their persistent fatigue.

Living away from their family, the young male workers on Dhaka's construction sites believe that construction work is very monotonous for them. Excessive work pressures make them too tired to go out to socialise. Interviews with these workers revealed that they did not get adequate rest breaks during work. The lack of rest made them fatigued at the end of the day. In particular, the young bodies of adolescent workers were seriously exhausted due to long working hours.

One adolescent worker reported:

After working hard all day, I feel very tired in the evening. After having a shower, I do not have the energy to move out of the site. Hence I hit the bed immediately after having dinner. The next day our work starts again at 7.00 am and finishes after 6.00 pm.

While the terms of employment on Dhaka's construction sites include no provision for leave, the workers endure excessive stress by working long hours. The ability to work hard for long hours is considered to be the most important attribute of a construction worker. The recruiters therefore consider physical strength to be the main quality of a good worker for their projects. In the selection and recruitment process, they discuss and verify the potential workers' physical strength at length.

One worker confirmed this:

Before coming here, they [the recruiters] asked me, "will you be able to carry and lift heavy sacks of cement? Will you be able to start work very early in the morning and continue till sunset?" I replied "yes" to all these questions ... This is a hard job ... I wake up very early in the morning and finish my work after sunset. I also lift heavy loads of sand or bricks.

Working from sunrise to sunset is a traditional concept on Dhaka's construction sites. Summer is the predominant season in Bangladesh because it is a tropical country, and hence the workers usually have long workdays. While being in Dhaka, I personally noticed many construction workers starting their work at 6:00 am and continuing until 6:00 pm. The "6-to-6" working hours included very short breaks for breakfast, lunch and snacks. On some sites where the time pressure was intense, the working hours were even longer than this.

As seen in Figure 2.3, brick lifting is a strenuous job. Workers in Dhaka work very hard to lift bricks to upper levels of high-rise buildings. Usually brick lifting starts early in the morning, and the workers are assigned to move



Figure 2.3 Workers lifting bricks, to the sixth floor of a building, for the whole day

a large pallet of clay bricks before sunset. The recruiters therefore consider the physical ability of a worker to be the most important factor in determining his or her capacity to undertake the hard job of brick lifting.

The traditionally made clay bricks in Bangladesh are heavy as shown in Figure 2.4; a single brick weighs around 3.32 kilograms. While visiting the construction sites in Dhaka, I noticed that some workers were capable of carrying 20 bricks, weighing more than a total of 66 kilograms at a time on their head. In this sense, they were capable of lifting thousands of kilograms in one day.



Figure 2.4 The weight of clay bricks in Bangladesh

The construction workers in Dhaka usually start their work before sunrise and continue until night. Considering the amount of physical labour the workers put in, the recruiters reported that their work was extremely strenuous for a human body. They attributed long working hours to the inhumane nature of construction work.

One recruiter confirmed this:

People say we the poor people work hard like donkeys. No other job in the country is as hard as this one. We start at 6:00 am and finish our work at 10:00 pm.

Long working hours are detrimental to the health and psychology of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. The workers frequently mentioned that they had health issues due to long working hours as discussed before.

Irrespective of the types of jobs they undertake, they are required to work by standing or sitting for a long time in confined spaces. This often requires them to work in an awkward posture, which causes musculoskeletal pain such as back pain and neck pain. Moreover, the unavoidable construction dust causes eye problems.

As one worker stated:

We always suffer from health problems. The main health problem I face is widespread body pain. This is because we work sitting down. While working at height, we sit or stand in constrained postures for a prolonged time. Then we feel cramps in our knees and lower back. Sometimes dust particles enter our eyes and cause eye irritation.

In particular, the adolescent workers reported that their job was very hard for them because of long working hours and the lack of rest. After interviewing the adolescent workers, I realised that in addition to long working hours several other factors made construction work particularly hard for them.

For example, one adolescent worker reported:

This job is very hard, and it gives many sufferings. Every day we get up early in the morning and take a shower at night [after finishing the work] ... See, this is winter now and the water is freezing cold to take a shower at night.

This worker relates his workplace experience to the long working hours and the difficulty of cleaning and washing after hours. In the winter, when the workers finish their work late in the evening, the water available onsite is very cold. It therefore becomes difficult for them to clean their clothes and have a shower. The difficult working conditions were particularly arduous for the young and adolescent workers. In Dhaka, I saw many adolescent construction workers taking workloads like adults, although their physical immaturity often does not permit them to endure such pressures. As a result, adolescent workers often felt exhausted and unwell. They reported various types of health problems, including chest tightness, chest pain and heart palpitations. One of the main reasons behind the adolescent workers' health problems was malnutrition. Interviews revealed that most of them originated from extremely poor households where they could not afford to have sufficient foods since their childhood. Growing up with malnourished bodies, they do an equal amount of work that adult workers do, which contributes to excessive stress on their young body and mind.

Although long working hours are reported to be a common characteristic of construction work in Dhaka, the workers expressed mixed perceptions about the usefulness of their long working hours. Some said that working extended hours enabled them to pick up skills quickly, and thus they accepted long working hours positively. Similarly, a few workers reported

that working long hours enabled them to earn some overtime and extra money to spend in the city.

As one worker reported:

I work from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm. [Before coming here] I thought that I would get some overtime in addition to the payment for usual working hours. Thus I would be able to earn some extra cash by working overtime and spend that liberally ... After working the whole day, when I finish in the evening my body becomes exhausted. Having a shower, I just go straight to bed. I do not like going out to have unnecessary chats.

However, the calculation and payment of overtime in Dhaka's construction projects are not straightforward. Despite legal rules, many recruiters do not count and pay for overtime. This is because of the traditional practices in the entire sector that consider "long hours" as "normal hours." Due to the lack of labour protection and unequal power positions, many workers give up claiming overtime.

One female worker hired off street corners reported:

If the day is long [during summer], they [the hirers] tell us to continue to work beyond 5:00 pm. It may go up to 7:00 pm. The wage remains the same though. We cannot claim overtime as we have already negotiated our wage before joining the work.

Like the workers, the recruiters also reported that construction work is difficult for the workers. In addition to physical attributes, the ability to withstand harsh and unhealthy work environments is an important consideration to the recruiters. The recruiters aim to get maximum performance and gain profit out of that. Although the recruiters' aspirations for high performance from the workers are related to their own profit, they pressurise the workers in order to please the builders and contractors they subcontract for. Taking the risks of production from the contractors, the recruiters actually transmit their own pressures to the workers they employ.

As one recruiter clarified:

I am always under pressure to deliver high performance that will ensure a profit for my contractor. If my performance is found subpar, the contractor will not continue with me the next day. My pressure certainly passes in turn to the workers. The workers also understand that they have to perform in a way that will ensure some profit for the contractors. They know that it is they who the contractor makes a profit through. They aim to perform in a way so that the contractors do not experience a financial loss. I always try to perform in a way so that the contractor can make some profit through us. It is understandable to us that they have employed us only to make some profit out of us ... Sometimes I pressurise the workers

to perform a bit more than they were initially supposed to. They accept such pressure [and they do not complain]. This is just to ensure the contractor's profit and so that we do not lose the job the next day.

The recruiter, quoted above, clarifies how the workers are pressurised in Dhaka's construction projects to ensure profit for the builders and contractors. While this profit maximisation through optimum performance of the workers is the main consideration for the recruiters, there is no official guideline to measure a construction worker's performance in Bangladesh. In the absence of any institutional mechanism, it is the subcontracting individuals or recruiters who discretionally assess the workers' performance and thus determine their working conditions including working hours and wages. The migrant workers are coerced to accept the conditions due to their poverty.

The recruiter maintained:

This is a hard job, and not all bodies can endure the job because of dust, sun and noise ... When I recruit a labourer from the street corner, I consider if his performance deserves the amount of money I am offering him. He must be hardworking, and I must make some profit by employing him ... They [the labourers] want to get a job because they need daily cash. It does not matter how hard the job is.

This statement suggests that the construction workers in Dhaka work in very stressful working conditions. The ability to work hard is the main physical strength that the recruiters look for. The workers are employed to work hard in dust, sun and noise. In spite of this, the recruiter's key task is to earn a profit by employing them. Poor working conditions, along with pressures for high performance, make construction work highly repressive for the migrant labourers. In most cases, the recruiters have specific profit targets and they are aware of the amount of profit they would like to make by employing a group of workers. The pressures and stresses that the construction workers experience in the workplace are actually designed to implement that.

As one recruiter disclosed:

My wages are determined by the contractor. He implements projects through me. I accomplish the assigned tasks by employing the masons. While doing that, I earn some profit and in order to earn profit I instruct the masons in a specific way. I pressurise them so that I can avoid the risk of financial loss. I frankly tell them, "if you do not perform sincerely, I will not be able to make a profit. If your performance is worth 8 Taka, I will pay you 6 Taka. But if your performance is worth 5 Taka, I cannot pay you 6 Taka." This is how the contractors [and I] earn profit through them.

The recruiter, a subcontracting individual employing a group of workers, clarifies how he intensifies the pressures and stresses to earn profit through the workers. On top of his own wages from the contractor, he compels the

workers to earn at least 25 percent profit out of labour. He instructs and pressurises the workers to accomplish the assigned tasks in a speedy way so that his own profit is ensured. The profit motivations of the recruiters are thus embedded in the traditional structure of subcontracting in Dhaka's construction projects. To serve the interests and profit of the builders and contractors, the recruiters have predominantly structured the working conditions in the construction projects that intensify pressure onto the workers. The image of construction work has therefore been contributed by the poor working conditions that make the work difficult.

The *dangerous* working conditions

Construction in Bangladesh is a dangerous job. It contributes to very high fatalities. According to a report of Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE), a total of 1,509 work-related deaths occurred in Bangladesh's construction sector in the decade ranging from 2008 to 2017 (Wardad, 2018). Many workers were seriously injured during this period. Although construction has always been in the list of Bangladesh's top three riskiest sectors, the labour recruiters have been alleged to have neglected preventive health and safety measures while setting up construction sites. While the other sectors in the list have started taking sustainable initiatives to improve their workplace safety, construction has yet to build a strong safety culture to effectively reduce frustrating workplace hazards and fatalities. This is partly because working conditions in Bangladesh's construction sector do not involve noteworthy international expectations that we see in the RMG sector. For instance, pressure from international buyers after the tragic fire in the Tazreen Fashions factory in 2012 (killed 112 and injured 170) and the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory complex in 2013 (killed 1,132 and injured 2,500) pushed the RMG factory owners and the Government of Bangladesh to take serious initiatives for improving labour conditions in RMG factories (ILO, 2013, 2016). Such international pressure for labour reforms is absent in the construction sector as its production does not reach international markets. Both of the deadly accidents that brought the international pressure for labour reforms in the RMG sector happened nearby Dhaka and received extensive coverage in both regional and international media. However, similar workplace accidents on Dhaka's construction sites do not receive such media coverage, despite the fact that they result in high levels of death and injury to workers.

Migrant construction workers in Dhaka are exposed to a wide variety of occupational hazards. Almost all conceivable hazards exist on Dhaka's construction sites where workplace accidents are very common. The survey I conducted in Dhaka revealed that 70 percent of workers personally experienced accidents in their workplace. The accidents included a slip/trip/fall from height, electrocution, falling object, unpredicted collapse, burn and severe fracture/injury. Workplace accidents often contributed to the workers' deaths. Twenty two percent of workers reported that they personally saw someone dying in a workplace accident. Another 78 percent reported that although

they personally did not see anyone dying, many of them saw someone getting seriously injured or becoming disabled. While fatalities and injuries are very common, many of these occupational hazards are related to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). From the survey results, it was clear that 69 percent of workers did not wear any PPE while working onsite. A large proportion of them reported that this was due to the fact that their recruiters did not provide any PPE such as work gloves, safety glasses, helmet, ear muffs or work boots for their use.

As one worker outlined:

Operating construction machinery is risky. The way we operate them and perform our job is not similar to what you see in developed countries. They wear a helmet, safety glasses and gumboots. The main reason is the absence of such practices in our country. Personally I have never seen a site where protective equipment was provided ... Neither have we asked our recruiter nor has he advised us anything about protective equipment. We really work carelessly. Our main target is to finish the assigned task as quickly as possible, and hence we do not get time to look at our own safety and health.

The statement makes it clear that the practice of wearing PPE is absent on Dhaka's construction sites. This can be attributed to profit maximisation motives of the recruiters who are reluctant to invest in workers' personal safety. When in Dhaka, I was unable to find any specialised shop trading in PPE for construction sites. This indicates what an unimportant consideration the construction workers' safety is. I found a training institute called REHAB Training Institute set up and operated by an association of private real estate companies in 2015. The institute was set up to provide free training in skilled trades, and a key admission requirement was the completion of primary education. In addition, the applicants were required to submit official documents such as a birth certificate or national identity card as proof of their age (15–45 years) and identity. Informal recruitment practices of construction workers in Bangladesh actually denote that the workers, particularly the rural-urban migrant labourers in Dhaka, do not feel comfortable to submit these documents and get formal training by fulfilling the official entry requirements. Most of the workers I interviewed commented that they would not be interested in such formal admission procedures for receiving training. While some workers did not receive elementary education, they considered the entry requirements as impractical and reported that they would not be interested to submit any proof of age document while staying in Dhaka. This is because, as I found, they were generally suspicious about unknown people around them, and thus they wanted to avoid any potential risks of fraudulence.

However, I found that there was no other specialised training centre in the country, apart from the REHAB Training Institute, to impart construction work-related safety practices and thereby train workers on how to use PPE on construction sites. As is evident in Figure 2.5, the workers on Dhaka's



Figure 2.5 Workers operating power tools without wearing PPE

construction sites operate a range of power tools such as metal cutting saws, angle/disc grinders and welding machines without wearing PPE.

The workers reported that they did not receive any basic PPE from their recruiters. They worked without any PPE even when operating risky power tools such as angle disc grinders or ceramic tile cutters that usually have a sharp saw blade or diamond blade. They considered operating these power tools without wearing PPE extremely risky, and therefore they had a constant fear of injury.

One worker explained:

Here we risk our life by not wearing gumboots. Sometimes we work barefoot. My feet may step on an exposed live electric wire. That's a risk. While cutting ceramic tiles, a shard of tile may hurt my eyes [as I do not have safety glasses]. That's a risk too. The cutting disc or blade of my grinder may shatter producing fragments which may become lodged in my eyes or other parts of my body ... I may die at any time in an angle grinder accident.

Many other workers were highly concerned about the potential risks of injury due to working without PPE. I noticed the workers working in high-risk conditions such as making and reinstating pavements with hot bituminous road materials. While dealing with these hazardous materials, the workers did not have any protective equipment such as heat-resistant safety boots or gloves to wear. Wearing simple rubber thongs, as is evident from Figure 2.6, they were directly exposed to extremely hot substances that could injure them anytime. I found the workers working near ignition sources while heating bitumen for



Figure 2.6 Workers engaged in making asphalt pavements with hot-lay bituminous materials

preparing asphalt mixture. They did not have any respiratory protection, and thus they were breathing toxic asphalt fumes. While asked about their health, they reported many health issues, including eye irritation, cough, skin rash, headache, fatigue, reduced appetite, breathing problems, asthma, bronchitis and low vision.

Burns are common for the workers on road construction sites. The workers reported that they did not have protective clothing to protect their skin from burns. Working without safety gloves and safety boots, they often expose their hands and feet to bitumen burns. The workers also reported that all kinds of bitumen burns were extremely unbearable. Despite this, the workers disappointedly reported that they did not have access to any first aid facilities in case of burns. In the absence of first aid kits, they used an easily available solvent such as kerosene or diesel to remove bitumen from the skin. Although medical practitioners consider this practice as ineffective and sometimes harmful, the asphalt workers on Dhaka's road construction sites believed that this was the only option for them to access immediate onsite care. However, some workers perceived that using solvent on their bitumen burns created further skin damage, which caused long-term complications.

Irrespective of the types of construction jobs in Dhaka, the workers were exposed to a wide range of health risks due to the lack of protective equipment. For instance, the masons and plasterers reported a variety of skin diseases and lung-related problems that they were constantly suffering from. Linking these health problems to cement that they often dealt with, they also reported that overexertion and awkward postures produced some chronic musculoskeletal problems such as pain in their joints, ligaments, muscles, neck and back. In the case of the welders, inhalation of welding fumes caused some health problems. While nausea, dizziness and eye, nose and throat irritation were very common health issues, few welders believed that welding created risks of bronchitis for them. In addition to these issues, the tilers reported that they often suffered from hand-to-arm vibration or numbness because of working with vibrating power tools such as grinders. They believed that this problem created further health complications such as insomnia. Personally some tilers showed me their fingers and described that their finger(s) occasionally turned blue and red and this caused numbness or pain.

Dust is the most notorious material that all construction workers deal with. Almost anything that is sanded, milled, sawed or crushed can release dust. Dust can be created during construction as well as demolition. While in Dhaka, I found various types of dust, including sand, metal, wood, concrete, ceramic, sheetrock and plastics. In spite of this, neither the recruiters nor the workers had a dust control plan to protect themselves. Almost all kinds of construction jobs in Dhaka require the handling of dust. Depending on the types of materials being used, the dust on Dhaka's construction sites is full of numerous particles because working with cement and bricks is a common source of dust while cutting ceramic tiles releases a lot of particles. Cutting reinforcing steel bars, wood and concrete blocks also creates a lot of dust.

While dealing with dust and debris, the workers have a frequent and long-time exposure to dust, which causes various respiratory health issues. The silica particles from these materials can travel deep into the lungs of construction workers and cause *silicosis*, an incurable and, on rare occasions, a deadly disease. Respirable *crystalline silica* is a common mineral that could be found in many building materials including sand, clay brick, stone, concrete and glass. It is also linked to lung cancer and other serious respiratory diseases that may mean permanent disability and early death. In this context, construction sites in Dhaka could be called “death trap” for the migrant construction workers. However, these diseases usually occur after years of exposure to the harmful materials and therefore the workers can hardly realise the relationships between dust and their lung health.

In fact, dust is everywhere on the construction sites, even inside the workers’ temporary camps that are built adjacent to the sites. While the workers’ prolonged exposure to high levels of dust leads to permanent damage to the lungs and airways, asthma is an everyday struggle for the construction workers in Dhaka. Many workers reported that they experienced coughing and/or shortness of breath. Working without any respiratory protective equipment, such as masks, the workers are at high risk of dust-related diseases because they regularly perform the same job day after day. I found many workers having asthma who reported that the poor-quality air on construction sites made their asthma chronic. As the workers described, they were often required to deal with water, mud or damp materials for long hours. I found mould and rats when I visited some temporary camps. Working and living in damp conditions caused skin diseases and chronic allergies for the workers.

While visiting the construction sites in Dhaka, I found that only a handful of recruiters provided PPE to the workers. However, the quality of the equipment was generally poor and due to excessive wear some were practically unusable. I also found that even if the recruiters gave PPE to the workers, the latter were not interested in wearing them due to the lack of guidance and/or supervision.

As one worker told me:

There are laws but we do not abide by them. There is a law to wear gumboots, helmet and protective clothing. We do have [a few of] these but we don’t wear them at all ... The subcontractor does not force us to wear them. In fact, wearing them feels warm. That is not usable because we work in mud and wearing protective clothing and gumboots in sticky mud is impossible. Sometimes we work in deep water, and working there wearing gumboots is difficult.

In addition to discomfort, the lack of training and awareness on personal safety is the main cause of workers’ unwillingness to wear PPE. While physical discomfort due to the poor quality of PPE is an important issue for the workers in a tropical country like Bangladesh, the absence of compulsion from the

recruiters is attributed to the workers' unwillingness. Often the recruiters discretionally determine the circumstances for wearing a PPE, and they decide when to use it and when not.

One recruiter reported:

Sometimes we do not use safety belts for the sake of our own convenience. The belts are four feet long but we are required to stretch and reach up to 20 feet above us. The belts limit our movement and thus interfere with our ability to perform the assigned jobs. We just try to build a strong scaffold and stay cautious. All accidents happen because of bad luck actually.

Because of the time pressure for finishing contracted projects, the recruiters prefer speedy completion, neglecting the personal safety of the workers. As a result, they perceive PPE as an interruption to performance, whereas they attribute accidents to ill luck. This wisdom is basically rooted in the recruiters' profit maximisation motivations that make them ignore the hazards and thus evade investment in the workers' personal safety.

The workers reported that another important cause of workplace accidents was workers receiving phone calls while working. My survey revealed that 79 percent of workers received phone calls during work. Despite their recruiter's verbal restrictions, they received phone calls from their family members, friends and co-workers. A common reason for receiving phone calls, as reported by the workers, was work-related uncertainties. They reported that mobile phone calls were important to them as they were continuously looking for work opportunities or trying to switch to better projects.

Death anxiety is a common phobia among the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. The frequent workplace accidents that they personally experience lead to a fear of death, which is a constant worry. This worry creates intense psychological pressure on the workers, and the fear of workplace death makes the work unattractive. Therefore, the workers often feel demotivated to continue their work anymore.

One worker reported:

Sometimes I feel too anxious to continue this work anymore. When I see someone dying following a fall from a high scaffold, I get scared that I may also die this way. After ten minutes [of anxiousness], I try to convince myself and return to my work. I really feel worried.

While anxiety about their own death is common among the workers on Dhaka's construction sites, fear about losing body parts is also an important fact that makes construction work dangerous. Considering the long-term impacts of workplace accidents and lack of support for medical treatment, the workers frequently reported a fear of severe injury that could cause the loss of a body part.

One worker commented:

This is an extremely hazardous job. Hazard means death ... Any time an accident might happen ... Many people have died this way. I have seen in person. At a time 3–4 workers died in front of me ... There is no guarantee of life here, and anytime I can die. A heavy pipe may fall upon me, and I may not be able to escape instantly. I may die or lose a part of my body such as hand or leg in a crush injury.

Hazards and accidents associated with construction work in Dhaka have contributed to categorising the work as dangerous in Bangladesh's rural society from where the migrant construction workers originate. This is because occupational accidents have long-term effects on the workers' families and communities. The lack of financial support and inadequate medical treatment often makes an injured worker a "burden" for his family. Considering this reality, local people's perspectives on the social effects of workplace accidents have shaped the dignity of the workers and the image of construction work.

One worker reported:

None of my friends in my village know about what I have been doing in Dhaka. I tell lies to them to avoid any prestige issues in the village. Otherwise, I will feel bad and they will think that I have embraced a disgraceful life ... Back in our village, many people do not like this [construction] work. People do not even want their daughter marry a construction worker. They do not like the work because of the hazards.

As this statement confirms, due to the image problem the worker thinks that revealing the truth that he has been working as a construction worker in Dhaka will create a dignity crisis for him back in his village. This is because construction work is not socially accepted as a decent job in Bangladesh, and since the work does not require any technical education or training, there is a common perception that ending up in construction work is not prestigious. On top these, work-related hazards represent construction work as disgraceful. The migrant construction workers frequently attributed the risks of occupational accidents and their constant fear about accidental deaths to the image of construction work as dangerous. They perceived the risks of accidents as one of the key reasons for their indignity outside their workplace. The workers believed that they were not respected by the outsiders because their job was very hard and involved life-threatening hazards.

As one worker explained:

We do not get respect from outsiders. We are inferior to other people doing better jobs. This is because we wake up early in the morning, finish our work after sunset, lift sacks, mix cement and sand, lift bricks, etc. ... There are risks too. We work outside on high scaffolds. If the scaffolds

collapse, life will stop. I have not seen such incidents, but I have heard that a worker had died falling from the fourth floor of a building. Or someone had fallen and his head or chest was severely injured. Such incidents happened to my neighbour. Sometimes I feel very anxious thinking about potential accidents. When I am instructed to work on a high scaffold or formwork, then I become nervous thinking how I could accomplish the task by protecting myself from an accident.

It is clear that bamboo scaffolding is a major factor contributing to workplace accidents. In Dhaka, bamboo scaffolding is a traditional building practice that the construction workers follow to work at heights. As seen from Figure 2.7, the construction workers use bamboos to make high scaffolds and ladders to accomplish jobs at heights. Standing on the high scaffolds and ladders without safety belts, they work on a narrow track. Falling off the bamboo scaffolds and ladders is very common in Dhaka, and many workers die in their workplace due to this.

Slipping off the scaffolds often contributes to serious injury and death of the construction workers. Carrying heavy items along the narrow passage on the scaffold is extremely risky. The workers therefore commonly cite scaffolds as a risky place to work. The apprentice workers are required to climb scaffolds that are comparatively lower. In spite of this, many probationary workers dislike the traditional practice of working on bamboo scaffolds.



Figure 2.7 Workers working on high scaffolds and ladders made of bamboo

One worker stated:

When I joined this work first, I escaped after seeing the task that I was assigned to. I was instructed to work on a bamboo scaffold made 50 feet high above the ground. That was very risky. Carrying heavy materials through a narrow passage is really hazardous.

Referring to the first observation, the novice worker quoted above identified bamboo scaffolds as a risky place to work. Moreover, while visiting the construction sites in Dhaka, the workers told me about the accidental deaths of their colleagues due to electrocution. I noticed that most of the bamboo scaffolds and ladders were built at the edge of the sites adjacent to exposed electric switchboards, transformers or overhead power lines, as seen in Figure 2.8. The workers often carry metals along their scaffolds and ladders, and fatal accidents occur when the metals come in contact with electricity.



Figure 2.8 Workers working near exposed electric switchboard, transformer and overhead power line

Electric power cables remain unorganised all over the sites in Dhaka. The workers work very close to the power lines. I noticed workers cooking, dining and sleeping beside exposed electric switchboards and power cables. As is evident in Figure 2.9, uncovered electric switchboards and power cables are located all over the place where the workers frequently walk. These switchboards and cables often turn into their death traps because of a momentary lapse of attention.

My survey findings revealed that 69 percent of migrant construction workers lived in temporary sheds and structures built on worksites. These sheds are basically multi-purpose sheds that the workers and recruiters frequently use for storing tools and construction materials. The poor living of the construction workers in the temporary sheds and structures is an important factor contributing to dangerous working conditions. The workers living onsite eat and sleep in casually built designated spaces, as seen in Figure 2.10. I personally noticed



Figure 2.9 Unorganised power cables and switchboards in the dining space and sleeping room



Figure 2.10 Poor living arrangements inside building structures and temporary sheds

that they slept on the floor where the risks from falling heavy bricks and other materials were high. This kind of living space was completely open, and the workers suffered from cold during winter. Moreover, I found that cans of flammable substances such as diesel, necessary for excavating machines, were stored carelessly in the temporary sheds where the workers slept.

All these factors add up to the nature of occupational hazards in construction work and their relationship to the overall image of the work in Bangladesh's local society. It is evident that construction work in Dhaka is highly dangerous because of frequent occupational accidents, severe injury and death in workplaces and the workers' death anxiety. The risks associated with the working conditions have contributed to the poor image of the work in the workers' villages, affecting their social relationships and status.

Gender differences in working conditions

The female migrant workers on Dhaka's construction sites experience worse working conditions than the male workers. In addition to the overall poor working conditions, the female construction workers are vulnerable to some specific circumstances because of their gender. The bathroom is a basic requirement of a workplace, but the female construction workers I interviewed in Dhaka reported that, among many issues, the lack of access to a separate bathroom was the most critical problem they faced. This issue made construction work harder for them. Most of the female workers reported that they

practised drinking very little water to avoid going to bathroom. While visiting the construction projects in Dhaka, I found that none of the sites had a separate bathroom for female workers.

One female worker explained:

There are some sites where there is no toilet facility at all. It is really difficult to work a whole day without going to the toilet. In case of an emergency, I knock on a neighbouring house's door and earnestly request them to allow me to use their toilet. If the house owner is rich, they do not allow this. If there is a slum near the site, I try to go there.

This statement shows how female workers struggle the whole day without going to the toilet. Although there were a few construction sites where I found a poorly built temporary toilet, the workers on those sites reported that they built the toilet themselves only for basic use. I found that those toilets did not have adequate water supply and drainage and were very unhygienic.

One recruiter also outlined the sufferings related to the toilet:

Sometimes the female workers have their meals on the footpath ... When they need to go to the toilet, they will need to approach a nearby house's gateman and request him to get permission to access the toilet. If the gateman is kind, he may allow this, otherwise not. This is particularly inhumane for the female workers here. When they unexpectedly get their period, they instantly leave the site in that condition ... Here they are having meals but they do not get water. They bring in their own water in a bottle from home. If not, they will need to wait until a prayer time to get some water [from the nearby mosque] ... Really lots of sufferings here.

Describing how vulnerable the female workers in Dhaka are, the recruiter showed concern about their terrible situation. The female workers reported that the scarcity of drinkable water was acute. During lunch time, they did not get water to clean the lunch box and wash their hands. To get water, they often flocked around water reservoirs and ponds near their worksite where the water was predominantly polluted, as Figure 2.11 shows.

In addition to the toilet and water problems, the lack of basic safety equipment further increases the health risks of female workers. Since the recruiters do not provide any kind of safety equipment, they buy nonstandard and poor-quality items to use at work. I found them using condoms and balloons instead of hand gloves to cover their fingertips.

One female worker reported:

See, how bad my palms are. Sometimes I cannot have my meals using my hands. Cement has caused this hand eczema, and now the palms are always inflamed [because of acute inflammatory dermatitis]. I am worried



Figure 2.11 Female workers having their lunch beside a water reservoir

about this. I am taking pain killer tablets. Everyone doing this work suffers from this problem ... I use condoms to cover the tips of my fingers and protect them from cement burns. Recruiters do not offer anything for hand protection.

Another important problem that the female workers reported was indecent gestures and behaviour from their male colleagues and recruiters. Having a male-dominated work environment, the construction jobs in Dhaka overrepresent the male workers in almost all categories. Although I found very few female workers working on the construction sites, they reported that they experienced various types of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature.

One female worker reported:

Sometimes they [the male colleagues and recruiters] proposition us. They propose indecent things through a sexually suggestive reckoning. There are some mean people who give indecent sexual proposals at work, but I reply straight away by saying, “we are poor people. We feed ourselves by working only. All we want is work. We do not wish to accept any indecent offers.” [This is why] people usually do not consider construction as a decent job.

Due to the indecent behaviour of male colleagues and recruiters, the female workers reiterated that construction work was a difficult choice for them. Their own perceptions about their work reflected local cultural and social factors that do not consider construction jobs acceptable for women. They told me that

construction employment was not only difficult but also demeaning for them. In fact, the female workers were predominantly employed in the entry-level positions to assist the male superiors, and they described negative perceptions of their local society in relation to these positions.

One female worker stated:

For female workers, this job is not good as we work with different types of male personalities. Moreover, it is a hard job that requires physical labour ... This job does not have dignity. When someone learns that I work as a “helper,” they will not respect me. This is because I go outside the home to work with various types of males. [In our society] it looks odd.

Working with male colleagues and recruiters, the female worker quoted above perceived that she was not respected because of her skill level. In addition to the frustrations with the “helper” position, the female construction workers in Dhaka perceived their work as difficult for another important reason. The female workers with children were unable to bring their children to their workplace. They relied on their family members and neighbours to look after the children when they were at work. Leaving young children at home, for the whole day, increased the psychological pressures they felt while working.

As the worker continued:

The recruiters never allow me to bring my young child into workplaces. They scold ... Once I took my three-year old child to work. But they instructed me to leave the child at home and warned that I would not be allowed to work if I took my child again. Then they discontinued me. I feel very anxious about leaving my child at home. She is very young, and someone has to feed and make her sleep. I leave her with my older child, who is just six years old. I always feel anxious about them.

While visiting the construction sites in Dhaka, I got confirmed that there was no day care centre or crèche for the children of female construction workers. I noticed that the working mothers on the sites were highly anxious about their children due to the rising trend of crimes such as child kidnapping in the city.

Lack of bargaining capacity

In addition to the dirty, difficult and dangerous working conditions, the lack of bargaining capacity is prevalent in Dhaka’s construction projects. A large proportion of the migrant construction workers do not have any options to seek redress in case of any dispute or discontent in their workplace. The survey findings, as presented in Box 2.1, reveal that the terms of employment in Dhaka’s construction projects are predominantly verbal. In the absence of

written job contracts, the workers are unable to access legal protection in case of any disagreement with their recruiters regarding the payment of wages and overtime. Due to frequent mobility, the workers do not have the scope to form and participate in a trade union.

BOX 2.1: PAYMENT, OVERTIME AND PROTECTION OF WORKERS

Payment of wage

- Payment calculated at a daily rate (73 percent) *but*
 - Paid weekly (1 percent)
 - Paid monthly (19 percent)
 - Paid at discretion (53 percent)
 - Recruiter did not follow a specific schedule to pay due wages (73 percent)

Overtime

- No overtime for working over eight hours a day (58 percent) *because*
 - Overtime *not* counted at all (46 percent)
 - Overtime counted *but* never paid (12 percent)

Protection

- Did not have any written contract (100 percent)
- Could not say anything on wage or overtime (77 percent) *because*
 - Risk of losing the job (63 percent)
- No opportunity to seek redress in case of dispute in the workplace (68 percent)

In the absence of opportunities for dispute reparation, the workers could not secure mediation when something went wrong with their recruiters. They reported that they feared losing their job if they were to complain about anything. Losing the job could lead to starvation and hardship, and therefore they preferred to continue in spite of a disagreement with their recruiter.

As one female worker reported:

In case of a dispute, there is no room to secure mediation here. Even if something goes seriously wrong, I do not protest because I need to continue my work for some days to support my family. Even if I get deeply upset, I stay quiet. I just show patience and continue the work.

Although this female worker showed patience and continued her work despite her discomfort, few male workers reported that they wished to discuss the issue of contention with their recruiters. However, their endeavours were not successful as the recruiters dominated the discussion showing anger.

One worker reported:

In case of any dispute, I try to discuss with him. But if he is angry with me, I do not dare to argue with him.

The workers reported that exiting from employment was the only option they could choose in case of prolonged dissatisfaction. This allowed them to return to their village after getting the payment of due wages. Thus they had to wait a long time to find a new job opportunity in the city.

As one worker stated:

No, I can't secure redress in any case of a disagreement here. If I see that the dispute has become too bad, I will ask him [the recruiter] to calculate my due wages and pay me immediately so that I can leave the work and go home. I will find a work opportunity with another recruiter and go for that.

The bargaining capacity of the migrant construction workers was marked by the absence of participation in a trade union. While visiting Dhaka, I tried to locate a trade union for migrant construction workers. I found a few names, but their activities were very limited. The workers were not even aware of their existence. Investigating further, I found that the workers' frequent movement from one place to another, as well as the temporary nature of their jobs, was the major constraint in forming and participating in a trade union.

As the worker quoted above continued:

We do not have any union here. We help ourselves. We are very mobile, and there is no certain place to stick to. Today we are here, but tomorrow we may need to move to some other project ... We are continuously moving. That's why we cannot participate in a trade union.

Unionism was not possible for the workers because of the lack of permanency. Frequent movement did not allow them the scope for union participation. Essentially, due to the lack of bargaining capacity and the absence of a trade union, the workers preferred to stay reticent and non-complaining in spite of a disagreement at work.

Who wants a bad worker?

In interviews, the workers recurrently referred to the term "good worker" in association with their situation, which was characterised by a lack of bargaining

opportunities. They stressed that their recruiters always desired workers with the attributes of a “good worker.” They therefore preferred to continue their work being non-complaining, even in unacceptable situations. They wanted to perform their job by conforming to the image of an ideal worker that their recruiters perceived and promoted. In order to explore the inner dynamics of the good worker image, I asked the workers and their recruiters about exactly which personal attributes were commonly expected from the workers. They reported a few attributes such as politeness, good-looking body shape and quick performance. It was revealed that the recruiters preferred these attributes not only to accomplish the assigned tasks on time, but also to stay hassle-free and non-disruptive when managing workers onsite.

One worker reported:

A “good worker” means a worker who can deliver quality work, a great amount of work and perfect work. Even if a worker has all these attributes but he is not polite enough, he will not be considered good. Above all is the prestige of the subcontractor. In spite of being a subpar performer, a worker with a polite behaviour is always valued by the subcontractor. If a worker is not polite, the subcontractor will not feel mentally comfortable dealing with him.

The polite and well-behaved workers being the top preferences of a recruiter, the workers’ interviews helped me find another dimension of politeness. They referred politeness to a respectful approach and the ability to perform extraordinarily fast. Thus they believed that the capability of completing a task, with respect, within the shortest possible time is the most important attribute to prove themselves as good workers.

As one worker explained:

A “good worker” means he works well and his behaviour is polite. For example, I am assigned to complete a task with some pieces of steel bars. The task may take a whole day. However, I should finish the jobs by 3.00 pm anyway, without showing any disrespect. Thus I will be seen as a good worker. The quicker a worker can work, the better he is in the eyes of the subcontractor.

While the quick performance with perfection was essential, the performance on Dhaka’s construction sites related primarily to the physical ability to work hard. The recruiters therefore considered the outlook of the labourers’ body shape before recruiting them. They believed that a good worker must have some particular qualities such as physical fitness, capacity to fetch and lift heavy materials, assist the superiors and respect senior colleagues.

One worker noted:

If someone from my village requests me to bring him to Dhaka, I will be happy to bring him to this site. Seeing his body shape, I can assess if he is

capable of doing the work he will be recruited for. If he fails to perform properly and wants to leave his job after two days, I will allow him to leave [rather than wasting time here]. A “good worker” means he is able to fetch and lift heavy loads and assist his superiors properly. He should have the ability to do his job perfectly. Moreover, he must have a lot of respect for his superiors.

Physical strength is one of the important factors for the masculinity of construction jobs (Fielden, Davidson, Gale, & Davey, 2000, 2001; Ness, 2012; Wolkowitz, 2006). In Dhaka, however, the recruiters frequently attribute body shape to the assessment of the physical strength and endurance capacity of the labourers. Although this is not the only factor in determining a labourer’s prospects for getting work in construction projects, specific age and gender groups experience stricter assessment than others. The recruiters of the adolescent labourers, in particular, consider body shape as the most important factor in recruiting labourers from villages.

One recruiter stated:

Before selection, I just see if the aspirant labourer does have a good-looking body shape. Then I consider if he will be suitable for the tasks to be assigned. Then I consider his age. A 15-year-old will be okay for the jobs I offer.

This recruiter clearly considered certain types of body shapes and specific ages for the jobs he was offering in Dhaka. The process of such assessment is completely discretionary where the recruiters look at the prospective labourers’ bodies and check the specific body parts by pressing hard, if necessary. Like the adolescent groups, the female workers on street corners had to go through an assessment of physical attributes. While their hirers were predominantly male, they had to accept an open-eye assessment of their physical outlook before getting a job.

One female worker told me:

Many hirers lash out at short women. They do not hire short women remarking that they are weak and unable to lift heavy sand bags by carrying these on their head. Some hirers avoid hiring mid-age female labourers thinking that they are not strong enough to lift and carry heavy loads.

The discretionary process of selecting workers by eyeing the physical outlook puts the female workers in indecent and uncomfortable situations. On the basis of such assessment, the hirers discretionally decide the types of tasks the female workers would not be fit for. However, the female workers reported that this rude practice was very common and without being part of this they would not get hired. While there was no formal recruitment process for the construction workers in Dhaka, they had to frequently experience this without complaining.

The above discussions reveal that construction work is perceived as a dirty, difficult, dangerous and low-status job by the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. The poor working conditions and the image of construction work reported by the workers and their recruiters are rooted in the terms of recruitment that impose severe physical, psychological and social costs on the workers. Making the female and adolescent workers particularly vulnerable to various unpleasant experiences at work, the construction jobs characterise precarious employment. In spite of this, the construction projects in Dhaka represent employment for a significant proportion of rural labourers migrating to the capital city of Bangladesh. In this context, it is important to investigate the relationships that construction work shares with rural-urban labour migration in Bangladesh. In order to do that, I examined why so many people migrate for construction work in Dhaka despite it being a dirty, difficult, dangerous and low-status job. This examination revealed some unique structural features of rural-urban labour migration for construction work. The next chapter will explore them in detail.

Note

- 1 In Bangladesh, Fridays and Saturdays are officially declared weekly holidays.

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3 The migration–construction nexus

The connections between construction work and rural–urban labour migration in Bangladesh have a structural context. While the structural causes of migration are very important to understand individual decision–making and its socio–economic dimensions, an in–depth examination of rural–urban labour migration for construction work in Dhaka can explain the prevailing conditions of employment on Dhaka’s construction sites that attract the labourers to move from their villages. The key question for such examination is why the rural labourers continue to migrate to cities for construction work that is predominantly perceived as a low–status job. In this chapter, I will present the migrant construction workers’ own perspectives and reasons for this. Their accounts will reveal a range of comparative advantages that they consider in choosing construction work over other options.

The rural–urban labour migration for construction work in Dhaka is related to a range of factors that suggest a complex migration–construction nexus. The empirical evidence that I collected through a survey and some in–depth interviews reveals that the rural labourers migrating to Dhaka for construction work compromise between physically demanding work and better earning. In fact, the hardship they accept in the city is a necessary cost in their quest for better earning. The migrant construction workers in Dhaka go through a multifaceted structure of migration involving various forms and patterns of labour mobility between rural and urban areas. Due to the nature of the mobility of labour, their migration involves many spatial and temporal differences surrounding their work–related experiences. As discussed below, a wide range of factors are intrinsically linked to the rural–urban migration for construction work in Dhaka.

Seasonality

The migrant construction workers in Dhaka are not permanent. Their work period in the city and the patterns of return to their villages confirm that seasonal migrant labourers are very prevalent in Dhaka’s construction projects. They predominantly originate from agrarian rural villages where their primary livelihood is related to farming. My survey results, as presented in Box 3.1, revealed that 68 percent of workers worked on the construction sites for the entire year except the peak harvest months. The rest (32 percent) worked for specific periods

throughout the year, including the lean season and the eve of a festival. In fact, short-term employment in construction was a supplementary income option for these workers. Consequently, 67 percent of workers reported that their main livelihood was farming and farming-related seasonal employment in their village. Being a weather-reliant and monsoon-based livelihood, farming offered inadequate work opportunities in villages to sustain their household. Most of the workers (73 percent) reported that the income in their village was insufficient to live on, and they migrated to Dhaka to supplement their income. They reported that farming was not profitable anymore due to recent increases in the wage rate of rural labourers and the scarcity of labour in the peak harvest season. Therefore, they wanted to get regular employment and better earnings. However, their migration to Dhaka was not permanent; rather they had close contact with their household members in their village. Altogether 83 percent of workers reported that they regularly visited their village to look after their family, support household work and work during the peak harvest season.

BOX 3.1: WORK PERIOD IN THE CITY, PRIMARY LIVELIHOOD AND VISITS TO THE VILLAGE

Work period in the city

- Whole year except the harvest months (68 percent)
- Specific days/months only (32 percent)

Primary livelihood in the village

- Farming-based livelihood sources in the village (67 percent):
 - Seasonal employment in farming (7 percent)
 - Farming in own land (21 percent)
 - Farming in leased land (20 percent)
 - Agricultural labour (19 percent)
- Other livelihood sources in the village (33 percent):
 - No fixed source (17 percent)
 - Non-agricultural labour (6 percent)
 - Small trade activities (9 percent)
 - Others (1 percent)
- Income in the village was insufficient to live on (73 percent)

Visiting the village

- Visiting the village on a regular basis (83 percent workers):
 - To look after the family (31 percent)
 - To support household work (7 percent)
 - To work in the peak harvest season (35 percent)
 - Occasional visit on the eve of festivals (10 percent)

In Bangladesh, many rural labourers migrate from their village to the city in search of work during the lean season (Afsar, 2000). This pattern of internal migration suggests that rural people travel a long way and they work in cities for a short period. Bangladesh's weather-reliant farm jobs do not offer year-round employment for the rural labourers, and hence a large proportion of them stay unemployed during the lean season. Being an agrarian country, Bangladesh mainly has crop-based farming activities. Rice is the main crop of the country. Production of rice involves a wide range of activities, including sowing, seedling, planting, irrigating, fertilising, reaping, harvesting and storing. The country's rice-based farming activities mainly take place from December to May. This period is considered the most suitable season for producing typical types of *Aman* and *Boro* rice (Kabir, 2015). The monsoon period is from June to October, and during this period farming activities are generally very limited due to heavy rainfall and inundation. Therefore, many rural labourers migrate to Dhaka and other cities in search of work, leaving their family members in the village. Since the unskilled rural labourers are unqualified for the jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors in cities, they get menial jobs that do not require much skill or previous experience. Construction work, rickshaw pulling, street vending and working as a day labourer are the most common options they choose in cities. However, the seasonal migration of rural labourers to Dhaka involves seasonality not only in rural agriculture but also in urban employment opportunities. There are certain types of informal urban jobs where the demand for labour is acute during specific periods of the year. For example, on the eve of the religious festivals many rural labourers migrate to Dhaka to supplement their income by doing a short-time job such as pulling a rickshaw or vending on street corners for a couple of weeks. These seasonal employment opportunities in cities provide migrant labourers with a quick income during the peak period of urban economic activities.

The seasonal migration of construction workers in Dhaka reveals a circulatory pattern. While seasonal migration takes place during a particular period of the year, circular migration is commonly understood as the repeated seasonal migration (Hugo, 2013). Moreover, seasonal migration takes place during a specific period of the year, but circular migration reveals a circularity of movement between rural and urban areas. This kind of migration allows the migrant labourers to simultaneously be engaged with both the village and the city. Circular migrant labourers return to their village from time to time and repeatedly move to the city (Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). Thus they remain connected to both places and both occupations. A significant proportion of the construction workers in Dhaka are therefore circular migrant workers who visit their village from time to time. Seasonality is intrinsically linked with this form of migration, and many workers stay in their village during the peak harvest season. They do not necessarily produce crops themselves but rather work as agricultural labourers when the demand for labour is high.

Crop production does not require the same amount of labour in each stage of production. For example, in order to plant the rice seedlings farmers require

sufficient labour. Due to the high demand for labour, wage rates increase in rural areas during the period of rice plantation. Many labourers therefore return from the city to their village to work on rice plantations at this time for a quick income. After the rice is planted, the demand for labour in villages starts decreasing and then the labourers start returning to the city. Again farmers need sufficient labour once the rice is mature enough for harvesting. Harvesting is the most critical stage, and farmers employ the maximum number of labourers to maximise the turnover of crops. The migrant labourers in the cities again start returning to their village. This is how the rural labourers repeatedly migrate and return to cities, responding to the demand for labour in villages.

In-depth interviews with the migrant construction workers in Dhaka confirmed that the seasonality of farming activities was one of the main factors that facilitated their migration. While the seasonal migrant workers in the construction projects work for short periods, during the lean season, their short-term employment and the money earned through this enables them to adjust their household debts. Thus their migration helps their families adapt to farming-based income uncertainties and financial hardships during specific times of a year.

One adolescent worker confirmed this:

We come to work in Dhaka seasonally. Working for a certain period of time, we return to our village. Mainly we do agricultural work in our village. We spend most of the time of the year in the village doing farm jobs. Here we come to work for a few months only. Over 12 months of a year, I work four months in Dhaka and the remaining eight months in the village ... There were no jobs available in our village and hence I came here. At that time flash flood started and all rice plants and farmlands were inundated. In the rainy season, we do not get [agricultural] work in our village. Then some of us come to Dhaka and do this job ... During this lean season, we need to adjust our household loans and advances. Coming to Dhaka, we can earn some cash.

This worker clearly remains connected to his primary occupation for most of the time in a year. Working in Dhaka for a specific period, he earns money that can be used to repay the loans and advances taken in the lean season. Thus he returns to his village back and forth. Due to the seasonality of farm work in the village, the work period of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka is often brief but recurring.

One recruiter confirmed this:

Most of the workers were involved in farm work before coming here ... I have some workers who work here seasonally only. They work here two months at a stretch and return to their village after that. Again after a few months when they do not get [farm] work in their village, they come back and join the site.

The recruiter's statement reveals that the workers employed on Dhaka's construction sites are predominantly involved in farm jobs in their village. When the workers become unemployed at home, they migrate to Dhaka for construction work. As the seasonality of farm work significantly affects the household income during seasonal financial hardships, it is one of the main factors to induce adolescent migration to Dhaka. Many adolescent labourers migrate to earn and support their family income; as a result, they start their working life with a physically demanding job.

One adolescent worker narrated this reality:

I came here because of the financial hardship in my family ... My father does farm work in the village, but he does not get enough work to live on in the lean season. Now I have financial responsibilities to my family. I work here and send money back to my family.

Although these quotes, as above, confirm that rural labourers supplement their income by migrating to Dhaka, there is some evidence suggesting that the migrant construction workers supplement their income by keeping their connections to their village. In this particular context, seasonal migration is intrinsically related to the flexibility of employment on Dhaka's construction sites. The interviews revealed that the migrant workers preferred flexibility in their employment in order to keep themselves attached to various supplementary income activities in their village. These activities allowed them to earn some quick cash within a short period, and at the same time they could stay with their family and look after their personal assets. The close connections that the migrant workers maintained with their family networks allowed them to follow up the trend of these quick cash-earning opportunities. Thus they were able to catch the best time for the seasonal trading activities in their village.

As one worker said:

Back in my village, fishery trading is a seasonal business. I trade fish during the period when catching *Jatka* [juvenile Hilsha] is restricted by the government. I have a boat in my village. I go to visit the village during that season and catch fish [to trade]. My younger brothers also join me. Catching *Jatka* the last season, I earned over 200,000 Taka. That is a very short season of 15 to 20 days during *Ashwin* [early October]. When that season comes, I just leave my job in Dhaka without giving any notice to my subcontractor. He understands that we are poor people and we should do something to supplement our income. He does not pay me for those days as I remain absent.

However, flexibility related to the seasonal migration of workers creates pressures on the recruiters on Dhaka's construction sites. The recruiters reported that retaining workers during the peak harvest season in the village was difficult

for them. Due to uncertainties related to labour turnout, they had to encounter problems like delayed completion and intense time pressures.

One recruiter explained:

When I will start the next site, it may not be possible to join that site by retaining the same group of workers I have now. Some from this group may go back to their village for doing farm work [in the peak harvest season]. I will need to bring another group then. Every month the team composition changes because of their frequent switching.

This comment points to the seasonality of farm work as being a significant factor contributing to both rural-urban and urban-rural migration of the workers on Dhaka's construction sites. It confirms that the workers engage in supplementary income opportunities back in their village by taking advantage of flexible employment arrangements. Labour turnout is therefore significantly related to the circulatory pattern of the seasonal migration of the workers.

Availability and continuity of work

In addition to the seasonality of farm work, one of the main reasons that labourers migrate from villages to Dhaka's construction sites is the availability and continuity of construction jobs. Migrant construction workers reported that their current employment was better than the original one in terms of availability and continuity. The workers did not have a constant employment in their village. Since construction activities are predominantly urban, construction sites are less available in their village than Dhaka. As a result, construction-related work opportunities in rural areas are scarce, and this scarcity of long-term employment prompts the migration of labour from villages to the capital city.

As one worker explained:

Dhaka is better than my village in terms of work opportunities. In our village, out of ten days we can work for five days only. The other five days we do not get work. Here I can work all ten days. I do not stay jobless here. Unlike Dhaka, buildings are not being constructed at a large scale in villages. That's why we do not get this work continuously in our village. The availability of work is the best thing here.

Construction work in rural areas is not available for long-term employment due to the lack of rural development, which is considered to be one of the main reasons for unemployment and inconsistent employment in villages. Bangladesh's rural development policies reveal that the government has always focussed on core farm activities in villages (GoB, 2011, 2015). In order to tackle food crises, grain-based farm activities have been made the top priority. While various types of strategies have been promoted to diversify farm activities, seasonal rice cultivation has still been the most common option for

the peasants. Because of this, a large section of the rural people live off rice cultivation-related agricultural tasks that do not require year-round labour.

One recruiter stated this:

In our locality, there is no factory. All we have there is rice cultivation only. When they [the rural labourers] do not get work during the lean season, they have no alternative but to migrate to Dhaka for work.

The above quote of the recruiter confirms that the migrant workers on Dhaka's construction sites do not have alternative employment options in their village other than rice cultivation. In order to avoid unemployment, particularly during the lean season, and secure a long-term employment, migration to Dhaka is the only option for them.

Urban mobility

In addition to the problems related to the seasonality and unavailability of year-round employment in rural areas, the opportunities for urban mobility are an important factor to attract labour migration. I categorise urban mobility in Dhaka into two types: adaptive mobility and variation mobility, as reported by the migrant construction workers. Adaptive mobility is the migrant workers' opportunity to move out of their workplace to adapt to changes in work opportunities. Due to flexible work arrangements, migrant construction workers in Dhaka can easily move out of their original workplace in case of insufficient work opportunities. Thus they can adapt to employment uncertainties in the city. This kind of flexibility is considered to be an advantage for the migrant workers, allowing them opportunities to switch to another construction project or assignment when the current one is finished or not available.

One recruiter confirmed:

If there is no work for a day here, they [the workers] can go out and wait on the street corner to be hired. Someone will be there to hire them for somewhere.

This recruiter confirms that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are rarely unemployed even in case of the unavailability of work in their projects. Due to flexible employment arrangements, they are free to arrange work from the street corners, if they have no work available on their site. In addition to this opportunity for adaptive mobility, the migrant construction workers are free to choose from a wide range of variations, if they do not like their current job. This opportunity for variation mobility is the workers' flexibility to choose from a range of job options in Dhaka. The migrant construction workers reported that Dhaka was better than their village in terms of opportunities from which to choose a suitable job category. While they had only one type of job in their village, i.e., farm work, they perceived that in the city they had a range of job opportunities to switch to if the current one did not suit them.

Thus they reported the opportunities for quick changes through which they can shift to different types of jobs within the sector they work. The variation in job categories is therefore a significant factor for the migration of the labourers in Dhaka's construction projects.

One worker stated:

One thing unavailable in my village is available here. That is work. In my village, there is only one type of work and that is farming. That does not change. I have to work as an agricultural labourer and work hard in farmlands. Here I can get different types of jobs. If I do not like this job, I can get a different one.

Extensive work opportunities in Dhaka enable the migrant workers not only to adapt to work uncertainties but also to choose work from a wide variety. Thus the migrant construction workers can move from one project to another; also, they can change their work and choose a different one. They perceive these flexible opportunities in a way that presents Dhaka as a better-earning option than their village.

Better income

Aspiration for better income is another important factor leading to rural-urban labour migration for construction work in Dhaka. Referring to the income from the original occupation, the workers reported that construction work in Dhaka offered better income to them than their original occupation in their village. Eighty-one percent of workers reported that they were able to earn and save better by working on Dhaka's construction sites. I found five significant factors that led to better income and savings: better wage rates in the city, free accommodation, confined urban life, delayed payment and spouse contribution.

Better wage rates

The interviews with the migrant construction workers in Dhaka revealed that the seasonal and inconsistent employment in their village did not provide adequate income to them. In addition, the wage rate in their village was usually lower than that in cities. Although the wage rate for agricultural labourers has recently increased in Bangladesh's villages due to the scarcity of labourers in the peak harvest season, the wage rate for construction work in villages is still lower than that in cities. In some cases, the wage rate in cities is twice that of the village. The workers interviewed reported that they migrated to Dhaka not only with hopes of obtaining a consistent employment but also with hopes of earning better by working long term.

One worker stated:

Here the daily wage rate is higher than the village. I would have got 140 to 150 Taka daily in my village. Working on this site, I am getting 280 Taka daily.

While the better wage rate in Dhaka is an important motivating factor for rural-urban labour migration in the construction projects, the prospects of wage increments are also important motivations. According to migrant construction workers, the rate of wage increment in their village was too slow compared with that of Dhaka; hence they reported better earnings in Dhaka due to rapid wage increases.

As one worker explained:

When I came to Dhaka, the highest rate of daily wage of a day labourer in our village was 200 Taka, whereas the first monthly salary I got here in Dhaka was 8,000 Taka. My salary has gradually increased, and now it is 18,000 Taka. In my village, there is no option to move upward. My daily wage in the village may increase from 200 Taka to 250 Taka. That is not enough. I have learned on the job, and by working on this site my earning in one month equals whatever I would have earned in three months in my village.

As the above quote indicates, wage rate increments in Dhaka are closely related to the skill acquisition capacity of the migrant workers. There is no fixed time or rate. In the absence of an official skill assessment procedure, it is the recruiters who assess the workers' skill acquisition and thus determine the increment rate of their wages.

One recruiter confirmed this:

If a worker in the northern districts works in his village, he will earn daily 200 Taka maximum. But if he comes to Dhaka and joins this site as a "helper," he will earn 350 to 400 Taka daily. After picking up skills within a few months, he may become a mason and earn 400 to 500 Taka daily. Thus he will see a gradual increase in his income.

The recruiter clarified the wage gaps between the rural areas and Dhaka and outlined the prospects of rapid wage increments. His quote confirms that in Dhaka's construction projects the wage rates are better and the rate of wage increments is faster than that in villages. Together these contribute to better wages and overall better incomes for the migrant workers doing construction jobs in Dhaka.

Free accommodation

Another important factor that led to better incomes for the migrant construction workers in Dhaka was free onsite accommodation. While visiting the living arrangements of the migrant construction workers, I noticed that most of them, except those hired off street corners, lived onsite in the structure and temporary site shed built at the early phase of a construction project. Thus they lived in the building that was already under construction or in the site shed. Apart from the costs for daily meals, this kind of living arrangement does

not require any other costs such as rent. As a result, they live free and their living place and workplace are the same. The living conditions in this type of arrangement have been discussed in Chapter 2. Here I want to focus my analysis on how this kind of free-living arrangement is related to the migrant workers' better savings and income. Many workers I interviewed reported that they considered free onsite accommodation as a built-in incentive, allowing them to save their money in the city.

As one worker explained:

Free accommodation is the best advantage that this work offers. If I want to work in a garments manufacturing factory, I will need to find accommodation and pay rent. For the first month, the salary might be 6,000 Taka. After paying rent and buying meals, I may be able to save only 3,000 Taka. On the contrary, here I will save 6,000 Taka after deducting all expenses. Thus I will be able to send a large sum of money to my family each month.

This quote suggests that the migrant workers in Dhaka's construction projects are well aware of other sectors and the monthly income there. Comparing with the RMG manufacturing, another competing sector employing hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers from villages, they reported that the saving rate in Dhaka's construction projects was higher than that in other sectors due to the free onsite accommodation that enabled them to save more.

Confined urban life

The migrant construction workers reported that their social life style in Dhaka was different from what they had in their village. In fact, I found that their life was mostly confined to the site boundary. Due to overwork and restrictions from their recruiters, they were frequently not allowed to go outside the boundary. Their meals were cooked onsite, and, in some cases, they had the chance to go out only for shopping necessary groceries. Otherwise, they were not allowed to go out for a walk or mingle with outsiders outside the site boundary. This was because the recruiters wanted them to stay away from potential chaos of the city. However, this kind of confined social life also prevented unnecessary spending in the city. Living a life without city friends meant the migrant workers were able to save their money.

One worker explained:

While I was in my village, I had friends and we used to get together every evening. I used to spend money for that ... Here in Dhaka, I do not have any friends to mingle with ... Who should I spend the money with? I look

after myself only. I do not spend a single penny outside ... I do not buy any special food for myself too. The money I spend is only on three daily meals and a few biscuits when I get hungry after mixing sand and cement at around 12:00 pm. That's why whatever I earn here I can save all of that.

Compared with rural workers, the migrant construction workers in Dhaka do not have many opportunities to socialise. Irrespective of the impact of a confined life on their psychological well-being, in most cases, the workers reported the advantages of having such life in the city. In particular, the young migrant workers reiterated that because of the restricted social life in Dhaka, they were able to save money out of their income. They indicated that they perceived this reality as beneficial for them.

One worker explained the benefits of having a restricted life in Dhaka:

Back in my village, I had a job. But I had too many friends there, and I had to get together with them. That's why I came to Dhaka. I have none in Dhaka. No family and no relatives here. The only thing I have here is work. Work and work only. I can seriously focus on work here, keeping myself away from other things ... I could have done this work in my village. The only difference would have been the savings. I would not have been able to save money working in the village as I had friends there. All friends are not the same. They would have called every now and then and asked me to go with them. If I had not gone with them, they would have misunderstood me. Without spending money, friendship is hard to maintain. I realised that I would not be able to save money by working there, and therefore I came to Dhaka.

It is clear from this quote that the limited scope for spending money is significantly related to the workers' confined social life in Dhaka. The money spent on socialisation and recreation is often perceived as an unnecessary expense and is less relevant in the city than the village. It suggests that the migrant construction workers have fewer social ties in the city than the village. Being away from social relationships helps them save out of their income.

Delayed and irregular payment

The migrant construction workers reported that the practices of delayed payment helped them save money. In Dhaka's construction projects, migrant workers do not get the full amount of their daily wage paid every day although their wage is calculated at a daily rate. As shown in Figure 3.1, large portions of the wages are retained by the recruiters. They pay the due amount altogether after the month ends. This practice is locally called *Khoraki*, meaning "cash payment as part of the daily wage." Every evening a portion of the daily wage, around one-third, is paid to the workers. In most cases, it is 100 Taka. However, this money is usually not paid as cash in hand. Rather the recruiters spend most of this amount primarily

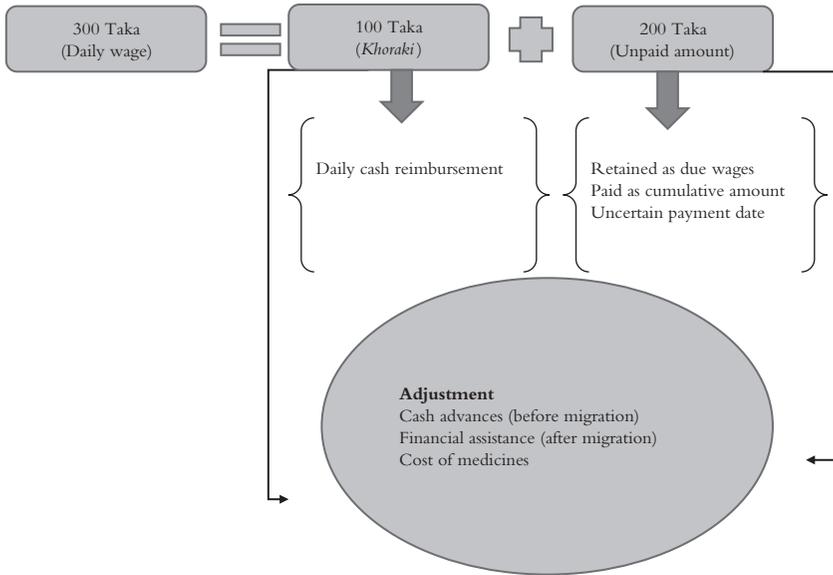


Figure 3.1 Wage payment practices in Dhaka's construction projects

for purchasing daily meals for the workers and keep a note of the amount as cash reimbursement to the workers. The small amount of money left after buying daily meals goes to the workers for meeting their daily pocket money expenses. While visiting the sites, I found that the actual cash amount that went to the workers as daily expenses was 20 to 50 Taka. Thus the workers' wages were actually retained by their recruiters, and due wages were paid altogether at the end of the month. At the time of paying the cumulative amount of due wages, the recruiters adjusted the money already reimbursed daily as *Khoraki*. They also adjusted the money that the workers received as cash advances before migrating, advance money taken by the workers after migration and the money the recruiters spent for purchasing the workers' medicines in case of their sickness.

However, the so-called monthly payment of due wages did not follow any specific day or schedule. Sometimes it was the 10th day of the next month, depending on the transactions between the contractor and the recruiters. In this context, the payment of wages was not only delayed but also irregular. In spite of this, the migrant construction workers considered this practice of delayed and irregular payment beneficial for them to save better.

One worker stated:

We each get 100 Taka daily as *Khoraki*. The whole money paid as *Khoraki* is not given into my hands. From that money, the foreman shops for groceries from the market and divides the expenses among us. After doing

that, he distributes the rest of the money that has remained unspent. Thus every day I get 40 Taka as pocket money. To me, *Khoraki* and paying our due wages together at the end of month is good for us, because we cannot help to save the money. The money will run out quickly if the full amount is paid daily.

This comment suggests a few dimensions related to the payment of *Khoraki* and associated savings. Although the accommodation was free and the workers had a substantially confined life in Dhaka, they reported that they had a tendency to spend money extravagantly in the city. Spending on recharging their mobile phone account and purchasing cigarettes and tobacco was the most common expense that the workers reported. The recruiters added that a common concern in relation to the workers' extravagant spending was due to gambling and the drugs that they often fell prey to. In many cases, the workers experienced such unwanted situations through their brief interactions with outsiders.

However, my background conversation with other workers on a similar topic revealed that the foreman took the responsibility to shop for groceries for the workers' daily meals because (allegedly) it gave him the opportunity to steal money. The workers reported that they realised this; however they did not have enough courage to follow up the matter with the foreman. While it may appear that the foreman has additional responsibilities for the workers he recruits, in many ways, all he does is to serve his own interests. For instance, it is the foreman's choice that determines what the workers should eat in their meals. Selecting and purchasing specific types and amounts of foods for the workers, he actually wants to keep the workers healthy for the purpose of maximum labour productivity. Moreover, he takes on the specific role of shopping for groceries because he wants to avoid any interruption in terms of supplying daily meals to the workers. Thus by ensuring a regular supply of meals, he wants to keep the labour force fit and disciplined at the worksite. I wanted to delve further into this by asking a few foremen in different construction projects. My conversations with them suggest that the reason that foremen take responsibility for purchasing meals for the workers is to ensure that no one skips meals. They reported that if the full amount of *Khoraki* was given to the workers, they would skip meals in order to save money. Thus they might become sick, which could in turn affect the labour turnout, risking timely completion of a project.

Another important dimension that I found in relation to this issue was the foreman's personal companionate love for the workers he recruits and supervises. He wants to help the workers refrain from extravagance while purchasing meals. Taking the responsibility of purchasing meals himself, he exercises his discretion to determine the amount of money to be spent on meals and ensures that the workers do not spend too much. Thus he helps the workers save money by spending rational portions of their income in Dhaka. While the workers see the process themselves, they appreciate their recruiter's insightful management of money to help them save better; this strategy also helps maintain the foreman's

personal image as acceptable to the workers. If too much money is spent on food the migrant workers might leave him, complaining that they could not save money by working with him. This might demotivate the aspirant migrant labourers in the villages from where he would recruit labourers in future.

However, the practice of giving *Khoraki* is mainly a part of the labour retention strategy that the individual recruiters exercise in Dhaka's construction projects. From the interviews with the workers, I realised that their recruiters wanted to retain them for a long time, and hence they were paid late. This practice created a situation where the migrant workers did not want to leave the project until their due wages were fully paid. *Khoraki* is therefore one kind of "wage bondage" that keeps the workers tied to their recruiters for due wages. Considering the practical effects of such practice, the workers, however, regarded this as beneficial for them.

As one worker argued:

I think the reason why they [the recruiters] do not pay us the full amount of our daily wage is after getting payment all the workers might leave the project together. They pay us in fractions so that we can send money back home and save some money with them [through the retention of due wages with the recruiters]. I think this is beneficial for me, although I do not get my full daily wage paid daily.

Although the above quote indicates labour retention through the delayed payment of daily wages, few workers opposed this argument. They maintained that the practice was only to assist them in saving money in the city, and no other intention was associated with this practice. Supporting their own position in favour of partial payment or *Khoraki*, they argued that this practice was to benefit not only the labourers working in Dhaka but also their family members in the village.

As one worker argued:

I don't think that *Khoraki* is a strategy for retaining workers. There are workers who themselves do not want to take payment of the full amount every day. They think that if the full amount is paid every day, they might spend all the money [in the city]. They prefer retaining a portion of their daily wage with the foreman so that they can save the money and send that back home at the end of the month. Taking a large amount of savings, workers can make the best use of that. Sometimes he [the foreman] tells us, "it is not a good idea to take the whole amount lest you spend the whole money here. If you take the full amount of money and spend all of that money extravagantly here, you will not be able to organise money in case of an urgent need of money for your family. No one can predict an emergency. I may get a serious accident too, causing my absence. If you need to go to your village instantly, I may not have the money ready to give you at that time. This is not our own village, and

we do not have relatives here to approach for borrowing money. This is Dhaka, and here one cannot favour the other. For this reason, if I retain your wage, I will certainly pay that later. If you do not do this, in spite of earnest request, I will not be able to organise money for you in case of your urgent need.” That’s why it is we who allow him to retain a portion of our daily wage.

This long quote suggests the mutual agreement between the workers and their recruiters on the retention of wages. The reciprocity of this agreement suggests that the workers want to save their money better and the recruiters want to guarantee that by strategising the payment procedure. Whatever the rationale is, it is evident that the delayed payment is an important factor leading to the workers’ improved savings in Dhaka compared to their village. Referring to their past experiences in their village, some workers reported that the full amount of their daily wage was paid daily in villages, which did not help them save money until they migrated to Dhaka. Both workers and their recruiters therefore perceived the delayed payment in Dhaka as a helpful way to save money.

As one worker outlined:

In my village, I can earn 300 Taka daily, but I have to spend all that money for meals and other stuff. It is very hard to save money there. Whatever I earn daily, all gets spent daily. All the money I get every day in the village gets spent in full. Here I get my wages at the end of the month, and that is good for saving.

It appears that in the village it is hard to save because of the lack of retention options. The recruiters also confirmed this point, arguing that the delayed payment helps the workers save money in Dhaka. They reported that payment of due wages after the end of the month was beneficial for the workers to enable them to save a large amount of money for their family.

One recruiter confirmed:

Everything in the village is on a daily basis. Daily income finishes daily just by buying daily meals there. Here a worker receives his salary for the 30 days of a month together [usually] on the 10th day of the next month ... Together they can save a big amount of money and then send it to their family.

Saving money to send to the family members in the village was a key concern of the migrant workers. In addition, the investment of savings was an important consideration. The workers therefore believed that the delayed payment of wages made a greater amount of money at the end of the month. Even if the due wages were paid after a few months, which was quite common, they perceived that as beneficial in terms of saving money. They argued that this

practice enabled them to utilise their savings effectively back in their village where this appreciated advantage was not available.

One worker reported:

Getting a few months' due wages together is good to have a large sum of money for investing it somewhere. This is not possible in the village ... Daily income runs out daily there ... If I take the savings to my village, I will certainly be able to do something by investing. This will help me prosper in the future ... In Dhaka, money is not readily available as our salary is retained by the employer. If the money is not with me, I will not be able to spend unnecessarily, and my inability to spend lavishly means greater savings. The moment I receive my due wages, I send that straight to my family, keeping a small amount for me. With that little amount of pocket money, I can restrict myself by keeping me away from unnecessary spending in the city.

It is evident that the retention of wages contributes to greater savings by preventing the workers from unnecessary spending in the city. It also helps them invest their savings in their village. Previous studies, such as Breman (1996), Mosse et al. (2005) and Picherit (2012) on migrant construction workers in Indian cities, have argued that the delayed payment created wage stress for the migrant workers. My findings presented here are quite contrary to this. Interviews with the migrant workers and their recruiters in Dhaka's construction projects reveal that the partial and delayed payment is appreciated among the migrant workers, and this practice attracts the labourers from villages. While the practice of delayed and irregular payment represents comparative advantages between work in the city and the village, construction work in Dhaka is reported to be an attractive work opportunity to earn better by saving money through the delayed payment and retention of wages.

Spouse contribution

The gender segmentation of migrant labour in Dhaka's construction projects enables the female workers to contribute to their family income. Interviewing the female workers and their recruiters, I found that this was an important pull factor for the female labourers' migration to Dhaka. By migrating and working in Dhaka's construction projects, they got an opportunity not only to work but to support their family financially. The female construction workers reported that they did not have similar opportunities back in their village.

As one female worker confirmed:

In my village, we had a hard time. All work available in the village was for male labourers only ... But that was not available continuously. There were no jobs for female labourers ... I was just a housewife and looked after the household matters like taking care of the cattle.

This quote provides evidence that although male labourers in the village get more work opportunities than the female labourers, jobs in the village are not sufficient and regular enough to live on. Due to gender segmentation of work in rural areas, women living in Bangladesh's villages do not get adequate job opportunities. However, migration to Dhaka's construction projects offers them opportunities for earning, and thus they can eat better in Dhaka than in their village. Joint income is therefore an important consideration for the female construction workers.

As the female worker further explained:

In the village, my husband was the only earning member in our family. We did not have our own farmlands. He worked as an agricultural labourer on other people's lands. It was very difficult to survive there, and I could not even afford basic meals ... Every day I had to skip one meal as it was very difficult for only one earning person to fulfil so many people's needs in our family ... Now I can at least feed myself three times a day in Dhaka ... Both my husband and I work here, and whatever amount we earn together, we can at least buy our meals for that.

It is evident that the female workers in Dhaka's construction projects originate from extremely poor rural households. Severe poverty is the main factor for their migration to Dhaka. Low income and the inability to purchase basic daily meals force them to migrate. Once they have migrated, the most common work they undertake is construction. My interviews with them revealed that their migration and job in construction enabled them to live marginally in the city. Despite that, they considered marginal city living as a major improvement in their living compared with their extremely poor life in their village.

Unlike the construction sites-based male workers, the female construction workers usually lived in slums. They did not live on the construction sites. They were usually hired off street corners, and thus every day they returned to their slum after work. While interviewing the female construction workers, some offered me a quick look at their accommodation and daily living arrangements in order to better realise their marginal living standard. I found that they were living in congested slums where the residents had to struggle to get their turn in the kitchen to cook meals. The number of toilets was also insufficient. People were living there in a very unhygienic environment. I saw leftover and rotten food particles here and there. Strong and unpleasant smells were everywhere. The living rooms, kitchens and toilets did not have sufficient light. The supply of water was also insufficient in the overcrowded place. In spite of all these disadvantages, the female workers reported that Dhaka was better than their village to them. This was primarily due to their perceived capacity to purchase basic foods in the city. Investigating further, I found that although the female workers were satisfied with their ability to purchase foods in the city, the quality of foods they purchased was poor.

One female worker stated:

Whatever I earn here, I do not have a better option than this life. People buy standard-quality long-grain rice, but I buy the cheapest broken rice. Look at my rice pot. Every day I need two kilograms of rice for my seven family members. Before going out to work, I cook a large quantity of rice, and the children share that throughout the whole day. Being poor, I am unable to afford any side dishes to serve with rice. Still I think we can at least survive this way ... Working in Dhaka is better than borrowing in the village ... I did not want savings. I just wanted to survive.

It is clear from this worker's comments that the migration of female labourers for construction work in Dhaka enabled them to live marginally in the city, but this was acceptable to them. The main reason that the female construction workers were satisfied with their marginal life in the city was due to their capacity to buy rice, the main local food. Working on Dhaka's construction sites, they gained the capacity to buy poor quality broken grains of rice, which still appeared to satisfy them. Thus they considered that construction work in Dhaka was good for them, and they were living better at least in terms of affording three basic meals a day for their family members. Their migration to Dhaka enabled them to support their family with their income contribution, and thus they were able to live better in Dhaka.

Cash advance

The availability of cash advance is another important factor that attracts the rural labourers to migrate and work in Dhaka's construction projects. The survey results show that 49 percent of workers took cash advances from their potential recruiter before leaving the village. They took the cash to meet travel expenses, clear their debts and meet family expenses before migrating to Dhaka. They argued that the opportunity to get cash advances before migration was an attractive feature of construction work in Dhaka.

As one worker reported:

I did not spend my own money to meet the travel costs. I took advance money from the subcontractor, and that has already been adjusted from my wages. I do not have any problem with that. Rather I am grateful for the generous support. Without advance money, it would have been impossible for me to come to Dhaka and find work.

This comment invalidates a few previous studies such as Breman (1996) and Pattenden (2012) that found that migrant workers' debt bondage was associated with cash advances in India. The Indian practices of offering cash advances involve punitive interest rates. In Dhaka's construction projects, I did not find such evidence in spite of rigorous exploration with the recruiters and the

workers. Migrant construction workers in Dhaka considered advance money from their potential recruiters as generous support enabling them to meet travel costs and settle in Dhaka. Due to the local contexts of employment relationships, the migrant workers and their recruiters were known to each other, and their social relationship did not create a debt bondage situation in their workplace. Moreover, flexible recruitment practices and employment arrangements allow the workers to leave their work anytime without any compulsion. In the context of reciprocal social connections between the workers and their recruiters, the predominant concepts of bonded labour or similar concepts cannot be related to Dhaka's construction projects. In fact, the demand for labour is high in Dhaka, and the recruiters always want to ensure regular labour availability. In order to do that, they offer a wide range of assistance to the workers. Recruiters I interviewed reported that they also made an advance payment or cash transfer to the workers in case of an emergency.

As one recruiter reported:

Among many other job options in Dhaka, people choose construction work because here they get an advance cash transfer, and they can earn better. If anyone needs urgent cash on the 15th day of a current month, the manager will pay his dues. Moreover, if I see that a worker is performing well, I am happy to give him 10,000 Taka as advance money in case he needs that for his family. But he has to continue the work and pay back all that money later.

The money that the recruiter mentions as the advance money in the above quote is actually the payment of due wages. It is evident from the existing practices related to the delayed payment in Dhaka's construction projects that any kind of payment received by the workers before the payment date is considered as the advance money. For instance, as the recruiter states, if a worker asks for urgent cash on the 15th day of an ongoing month, he will actually ask for his due wages that are expected to be paid in the next month. This is a terminological fallacy that the workers and recruiters frequently use in Dhaka. It originates from traditional payment practices in construction projects, as similar practices of advance payment, before the stipulated payment date, are not available in other sectors in Dhaka, such as RMG manufacturing. While interviewing the migrant construction workers and their recruiters, I noticed that this practice of the early payment of due wages was termed as advance money. My background conversations with the recruiters suggested that this kind of terminological fallacy was used by the recruiters to remind the workers about the amount of money already reimbursed to them. Thus the recruiters were able to avoid any potential confusion and disagreement regarding the amount of due wages at the time of final payment. However, taking payment of due wages in the name of advance money meant that the workers received money before the payment date. This practice of taking advance money is embedded in the social networks-based trust relationship between the workers

and their recruiters that reflects mutual empathy on the workers' financial crises, as discussed further in Chapter 5. The workers viewed such opportunities for getting advance money as beneficial for them.

Lack of education and skills

I found that 43 percent of workers were illiterate and 38 percent did not complete their primary education. None had formal technical education in construction work. My interviews with the workers and their recruiters suggested that there was no requirement for education in order to get a job in Dhaka's construction projects. As a result, anyone could work without having literacy capabilities. Moreover, no previous experience or training was required. Consequently, 84 percent of workers reported that they did not have adequate knowledge about construction work when they first started their job. Many did not even have a basic understanding of their job. In addition, 64 percent of workers reported that they did not have any kind of first-hand experience in relation to construction work when they migrated. Although a few in this group had some basic knowledge about some menial jobs, they had not worked on a construction site before. The survey also revealed that all workers acquired work-related knowledge and skills on the job.

The workers reported that they learned on the job by following others. My interviews with them revealed that most of the workers started their career as apprentice helpers. Initially their recruiters assigned them some elementary menial tasks of a helper to adapt to the work environment. The core responsibility of a helper was to provide standby support to a mason. Being superior and more experienced than helpers, the masons were the trainers of the helpers. They constantly instructed the helpers to fetch necessary tools and construction materials close to them. Standing by the masons, the helpers got opportunities to see the processes used in completing the skilled tasks.

One worker explained this on-the-job skill acquisition process:

I picked up the skills after coming here. Before that, I did not know how to mix cement and sand for making a concrete mixture. At first I had to learn this. Then I noticed how a mason was applying the concrete mixture on walls. I followed him. Then I noticed how a mason was plastering the walls. I followed him. Thus I picked up the skills gradually by following only.

The recruiters also confirmed that the entrance to the construction jobs in Dhaka did not require any kind of previous knowledge, skill or training. They maintained that all the workers they recruited acquired their expertise through following their seniors and learning on the job. This practice suggests that the skill acquisition is solely dependent on the individual capacities of the workers and the learning opportunities provided by their superiors.

As one recruiter reported:

These workers came from their village without having any previous skills. They learn here on the job. I mix the newcomers with the already-experienced workers so that the novice workers can learn quickly. Following the superiors for two days, they promptly pick up the skills.

While learning on the job is the only method of acquiring skills, it also represents gender differences in the workplace. My interviews with the female construction workers suggested that for them the process of learning through following others was not as simple as it was for the male workers. Due to local cultural beliefs, the female workers were not comfortable in learning from the expert males. They learned everything on the job only by following their female co-workers. As a result, avoiding male contact, they always stayed in the group of unskilled workers.

As one female worker reported:

When I first started this job, my performance was subpar. By following other female workers, I picked up the skills within a few days. Another female worker showed me how to work ... She was already working there, and she helped me get the job. She showed me how to mix sand, water and cement. She did not tell the subcontractor about me. I followed and worked with her quietly. The subcontractor did not know if I was experienced or not. He paid my wage to her to pass on to me.

Clearly, female construction workers get unskilled jobs and learn through their peers of the same gender. The gender realities in the construction projects are determined by the local cultural beliefs that dominate the female workers' opportunities to access work and acquire skills. Gender relations existing among the male and female workers actually restrict the latter's opportunities to come into direct contact with their male counterparts and to advance to more skilled positions.

Comparative advantages

In addition to the factors discussed above, there are a few comparative advantages and trade-offs that attract the rural labourers to construction work in Dhaka. My interviews suggested that the migrant workers were well-informed of these comparative advantages, and thus they made conscious choices to take on construction work in Dhaka. The comparative advantages reported by the workers are substantially related to employment situations in origin and destination areas, i.e., the comparative advantages over their original occupation and the advantages over other available occupations in the city.

Since most of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka originate from farm work-based rural areas, they reported that a construction job in Dhaka was better than the original job they had in their village. They maintained that

farm work was no longer profitable due to several factors, including the shortage of labour, price fluctuation of produces and increased costs of irrigation and pesticides.

One worker outlined the problem of the labour costs in farming:

I have seen that nowadays farming is not profitable anymore ... That's because I have to pay labour costs ... The cost of agricultural labour and the price of crops have become equal. How much profit will I make? It's similar to giving away all the crops to the labourers. Even my own labour does not get paid. My family cannot survive this way. That will be a complete loss. Therefore, I have left my farm.

Originating from poor backgrounds, the workers believed that they did not have sufficient capital to start trading or small business. Thus they perceived that construction work was the only suitable option for them that did not require any kind of investment. This perception led to increasing migration for construction work in Dhaka. On the other hand, the interviews with the workers revealed that they found construction jobs more rewarding than other available options for them in the city. They reported the RMG manufacturing sector was a potential alternative; however, they reasoned that construction jobs had more advantages compared with RMG manufacturing jobs. One of the main advantages was related to the level of educational qualifications that RMG manufacturing jobs required; another was rented accommodation. Comparing both sectors, the workers reported that construction work offered better opportunities to them.

One worker reported:

If I want to work in a garments manufacturing factory, I will need educational qualifications that I don't have. They do not pay straight after joining ... Here I can get *Khoraki* immediately after joining. With that money I can buy my meals, and I do not need to pay for accommodation ... Working in RMG manufacturing factories will require renting accommodation. I will need extra money for that. Here I do not need that.

As the above quote suggests, construction work in Dhaka does not require initial financial investment like other jobs such as RMG manufacturing. On top of this, another important factor that the workers considered while comparing their existing work with the RMG manufacturing jobs was a sense of flexibility. They believed that construction work in Dhaka had better advantages in terms of flexibility.

One worker explained:

The main advantage of this work is the flexibility. If I don't feel motivated, I can stop working for today. If I work with someone on a monthly contract

basis, then I have to answer a lot of questions before going on leave [in spite of serious illness]. Here if I do not feel well in the morning, I can say that I will not work today. That's all. The subcontractor will not insist on me working. What I will lose is the daily wage for the day. No work, no pay.

This worker notes the advantage of the flexibility to get unpaid leave during his sickness compared with the hard-and-fast rules in the RMG manufacturing factories. The recruiters also confirmed flexibility of leave in Dhaka's construction projects. Interviews with them revealed that the workers preferred flexibility of leave and absence, and it was an important reason for choosing construction work over RMG manufacturing jobs in Dhaka.

One recruiter told me:

If a worker is unwell, he is allowed to take a day off and it is okay if he does not turn up. On the other hand, in a similar situation RMG factories will cut his monthly wage at a rate higher than he usually receives. They will deduct 100 Taka if his daily wage is 50 Taka. In case of an emergency in the village, he may need to complete lots of formalities, including a gate pass, to obtain leave. He will cry, but they will not allow any leave. On the contrary, here a worker can just leave without asking anyone [in case of an emergency in the village]. No one will ask him anything if he is absent for a day because of illness.

The idea of flexibility and getting unpaid leave during sickness and on occasions for urgent family matters in the village is an important consideration in choosing construction work over other available options such as RMG manufacturing jobs in Dhaka. Such flexibility is related to the terms of employment that are mostly formalised in the RMG manufacturing sector but informal and individualised in the construction sector.

The empirical evidence presented above reveals a range of factors that Bangladesh's rural labourers consider when migrating for construction work in Dhaka. These factors contextualise the rationale for choosing construction work over other available employment opportunities. Construction work in Dhaka, despite being a physically demanding low-status job, is perceived as the most suitable work for the rural labourers who have limited options to choose from. The migrant construction workers' own accounts suggest that given the lack of choice, the prevailing terms and conditions of employment in Dhaka's construction projects encourage them to migrate from their village for construction work. However, these terms and conditions of employment are fundamentally rooted in the structures of recruitment that they experience. In this context, it is important to investigate the recruitment of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. This necessity leads to the detailed examination of the structures of recruitment practices in Dhaka's construction projects, which will be investigated in the next chapter.

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4 Recruitment practices and the key actors

This chapter uncovers the structures of recruitment practices. It identifies the key actors in the recruitment of migrant labourers for construction work in Dhaka and explores the contexts and conditions of the recruitment process that the migrant labourers experience. In doing this, it analyses how the rural labourers are recruited for the construction sites in Dhaka. The chapter discusses the role of individuals as recruiters of the migrant construction workers. It reproduces empirical evidence and explains the central role of individual recruiters in the indirect recruitment and management of the construction workers. Examining the modes of recruitment, it explores the navigating role of various individuals in determining terms and conditions of employment in Dhaka's construction projects. The chapter starts with briefly outlining the modes of recruitment and then moves on to present empirical evidence for explaining each mode in detail. Through the analysis of data and relevant contextual discussions, it explores why individual recruiters are the key actors in prevalent recruitment practices in the construction projects of Dhaka.

Modes of recruitment

The results of this study reveal that the recruitment of migrant labourers for construction work in Dhaka is predominantly indirect. In all three major types of construction projects, such as residential, non-residential and infrastructure and heavy construction projects, neither the builders nor the contractors are involved in the labour recruitment process. Each construction project is contracted through a number of stages whereby the builder or owner of a project subcontracts the entire project to an individual contractor. The contractors are usually attached to private real estate development companies, and they subcontract the projects to various persons for specific tasks. Starting from preliminary excavation to final closeout, the lifetime of a project requires several task-specific subcontractors, such as one for excavation, one for building the structure, one for establishing electricity, one for plumbing, one for painting and one for carpentry. All these subcontractors are individuals who have their own teams of workers. In most cases, these subcontracting individuals retain

their particular teams from project to project to accomplish the tasks they subcontract. Thus they move from one site to another with their teams of workers. However, due to flexible employment arrangements, workers might leave the team midway or upon completion of the subcontracted task. This may particularly affect labour turnout when the subcontractors join a new project. The switching phase is therefore critical to the subcontractors in terms of retention of labour. As a result, the subcontractors are required to recruit labourers constantly, particularly before they start a new project. Moreover, when the workers leave in the middle of the task, it necessitates the recruitment of new labourers to fill the labour shortage.

Indirect recruitment of migrant construction workers is long-established in Dhaka where there is no public or private official recruiting agency. Regardless of the variety of construction projects in terms of their nature, ownership and size, the recruitment process is the same. In general, the builders and contractors informally recruit migrant construction workers through various individuals such as subcontractors and their personal networks located in cities and villages. In the absence of an official recruitment agency, these subcontracting individuals overwhelmingly dominate the recruitment process; however, identifying their role as recruiters is not straightforward. This is because the recruitment of migrant construction workers is a multi-tiered process that involves several layers of individuals in each stage. Moreover, a wide range of social and local cultural factors determine the employment relationship between workers and their recruiters. Such an employment relationship characterises the navigating and intersecting role of subcontracting individuals, which makes it complex to thoroughly understand their role in the labour recruitment process. However, the terms and conditions of employment in Dhaka's construction projects are discretionally determined by these subcontracting individuals who recruit individual labourers to work for them.

Due to the indirect recruitment practices, the migrant construction workers usually get work through their personal social networks. The survey results I obtained revealed the significant role of social networks in obtaining preliminary information on work opportunities in Dhaka. As Figure 4.1 shows, 37 percent of workers received preliminary information about their work from their relatives, friends or neighbours. Another 28 percent of workers received information from a migrant worker from their village or another village in their locality. Moreover, 20 percent of workers received information from a subcontractor, while only 9 percent of workers independently migrated without having any information regarding job options in Dhaka.

The survey results also revealed that 80 percent of labourers were offered construction work in Dhaka before they left their village. They reported a number of individuals, such as their current team leader, a subcontractor, a fellow worker, a neighbour, a relative or a friend, who offered them a job before migrating. The survey responses, in fact, confirmed the existence of a wide range of individuals in the recruitment process in Dhaka's construction projects.

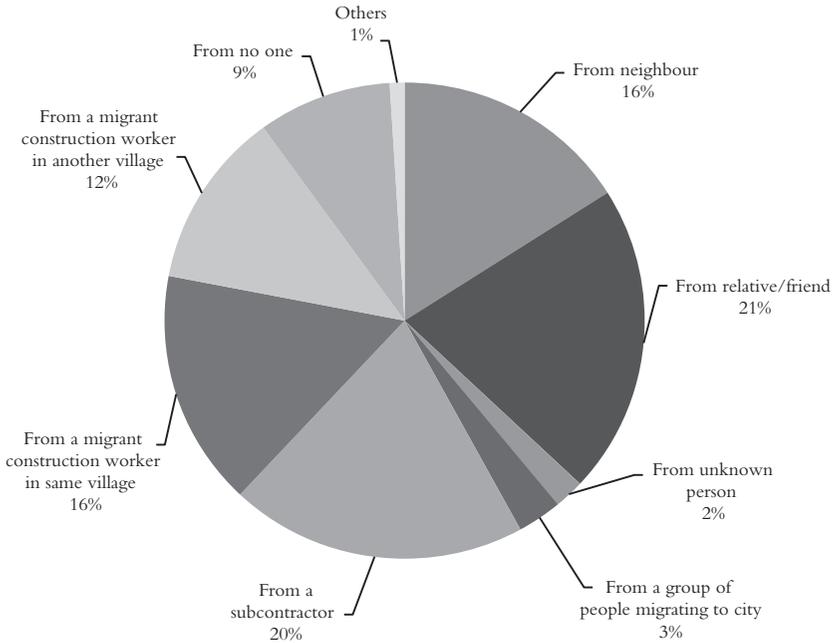


Figure 4.1 Sources of work-related preliminary information

In-depth interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters revealed that there are nine types of recruitment practices in Dhaka's construction projects. Considering the physical location of the recruiters and the labourers, I have categorised the recruitment practices into four modes: recruitment within the project, recruitment in the village, on-demand recruitment and on-street labour hire. The four modes are further extended to nine specific categories, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Migrant construction workers are often recruited through the social networks of the subcontractors and migrant workers already working in Dhaka. In the "within-project" mode of recruitment, as shown in Figure 4.2, the recruiters are physically located within the construction projects in the city. Rural labourers are collected and recruited for a site through existing recruiters and migrant construction workers already working on the site. On the other hand, the "in-village" mode of recruitment shows that the recruiters and the labourers are physically located in the village. Recruiters and potential migrant labourers drop by the villages, potential migrant labourers approach the recruiters to express their interest, and some situational factors help the recruiters and potential migrant labourers come together in the village. The "on-demand" mode of recruitment shows seasonal recruitment and adaptive recruitment. Usually the recruiters visit their own village to get labourers to fill labour shortages during

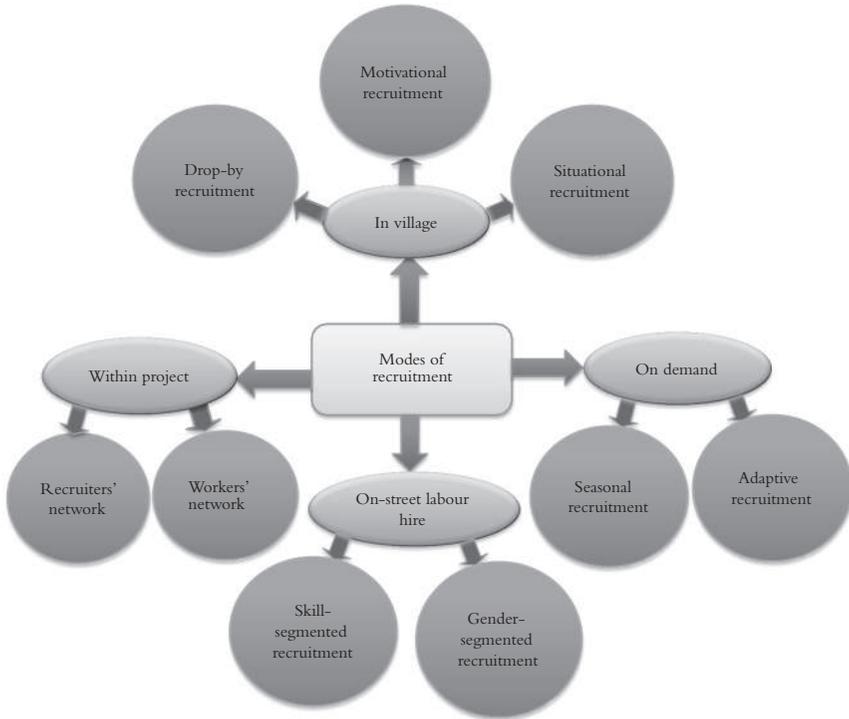


Figure 4.2 Modes of recruitment

the peak harvest season in the village, and they recruit labourers to adapt to time pressures or project completion challenges. The “on-street” labour hire practices reveal the skill-segmented recruitment and gender-segmented recruitment on the spot. Recruiters hire labourers off street corners, located at various points in the city, matching their preferred skills and gender. The sections below discuss these modes of recruitment in detail.

Recruitment within the project

The “within-project” recruitment occurs when recruiters are physically located within the construction projects in the city. They themselves operate in the city but recruit labourers from villages through the help of their social networks. A large proportion of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are recruited from villages through the personal networks of the subcontractors and workers. Labour recruitment through social networks suggests a complex process through which the subcontractors and the migrant workers working in the city connect with rural labourers. A range of local cultural and social factors

are involved in this connection. In the “within-project” mode of recruitment, the experienced subcontractors and migrant construction workers play the key role in collecting and recruiting rural labourers from villages through utilising their social networks in a number of ways.

Subcontractors’ social networks

In Dhaka’s construction projects, the subcontractors are individual recruiters who collect and recruit labourers through their own social networks without visiting villages in person. Whenever they are in need of labourers, they contact their personal networks in the villages to find labourers on their behalf.

One subcontractor confirmed this practice:

Whenever I need, I bring labourers from villages. I ring my friend living in the village and ask him to find some labourers for me. I also tell him that I am happy to offer some advance money if they want. My friend will visit some houses in his locality and thus collect some labourers. Upon his confirmation, I will transfer some cash [through mobile banking]. Then he will pass on the cash to the labourers and send them to me in Dhaka.

In this way, although the subcontractor stays in Dhaka, he utilises his social networks in the village to recruit migrant labourers for the site he is subcontracting in Dhaka.

As Figure 4.3 shows, in the “within-project” mode of recruitment, a subcontractor does not visit the village in person to recruit labourers. Located in Dhaka, he continues his engagement with the ongoing project in spite of the

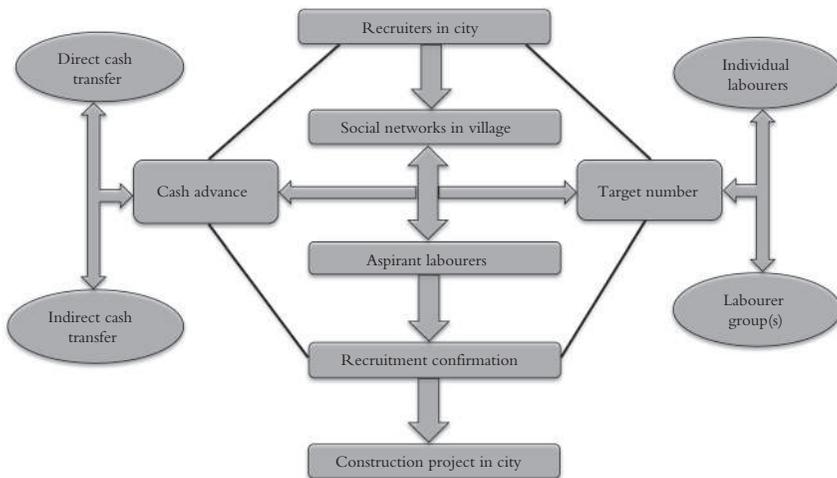


Figure 4.3 Labour recruitment through recruiters’ social networks

labour shortage. In order to search and recruit new labourers for his team, he contacts his friends, relatives, neighbours and previous colleagues or team members staying in the village. They help him find aspirant labourers who wish to migrate to Dhaka for construction work. Although the subcontractor stays in the city, he keeps regular contact with his social networks in the village and gets updates from them, regarding the progress in the recruitment process. Whenever an aspirant labourer is found, the subcontractor is instantly informed. He then confirms the recruitment of the labourer by directly speaking to him by mobile phone. However, the recruitment confirmation depends on the circumstances related to advance money and the number of labourers required. In most cases, the aspirant labourers ask for some cash as advance money to meet travel costs and family needs.

As one recruiter reported:

The advance money we offer [before migration] is not only to cover the travel costs but for some other reasons too. Sometimes we offer a large amount as demanded by the aspirant labourers. Before a labourer decides to leave his village, he may ask for up to 5,000 Taka for his family. We give that amount and adjust his wage when he arrives here.

Circumstances related to advance money, in the “within-project” mode of recruitment, reveal that the aspirant migrant labourers receive advance money in two ways. The subcontractors directly send them the money from Dhaka through mobile cash transfer, or they receive the money from the subcontractors’ social networks in the village through which they get the preliminary information about the work. Either way, the advance money is treated as “token money” to confirm the recruitment of rural labourers for work in Dhaka.

In relation to the number of new labourers to be recruited, the subcontractors may need only a few or a large group of labourers. Therefore, the aspirant labourers are confirmed one by one and they are advised not to leave their village until the subcontractor’s target number is fulfilled. This way a subcontractor recruits a group of labourers through their own social networks. Recruiting a group of labourers helps the recruiters fill labour shortages quickly. However, recruiting only a few individuals is easier than recruiting a large group of workers. In order to ease the preparatory tasks, ranging from organising travel to placing labourers in project accommodation, individual recruiters usually prefer a handful of labourers over a big group. While most of the labourers come to Dhaka by trusting the recruiters, one-to-one communication and associated promises before migration favour the latter by simplifying their tasks of managing and overseeing labourers upon their arrival. Another important benefit the recruiters get by preferring individuals over a group is the lowest chance of group dynamics and peer influence resulting from potential interactions of group members that can negatively impact the migration decision. Furthermore, the practice of offering cash advances implies that offering a large amount of advance money to a group

of labourers is riskier than offering a small amount to a handful of labourers. Thus the recruiters can easily adapt to the uncertainties of investment in case a labourer does not show up in Dhaka.

An important dimension of recruitment through the recruiter's social networks is the relationship between the recruiters in Dhaka and their social networks in the village. While interviewing the recruiters, I got the impression that the recruiters themselves did not pay any kind of monetary commission to their relatives or friends for helping them recruit labourers from villages. In fact, all recruiters denied any kind of financial transactions between their networks and themselves. However, the local cultural context of social relations between the recruiters and their networks indicated that the recruiters occasionally offered them non-monetary treats and gifts for their involvement in the recruitment process.

As one recruiter explained:

I do not offer any commission to my friend. But when I visit the village, we have tea together and sometimes I top up his mobile phone.

Despite this comment, my background discussions with other recruiters revealed that not only did they offer similar treats and gifts while they visited the village, but they favoured their friends and relatives in several ways. Even when staying in Dhaka, they sent them some in-kind gifts such as dresses and occasionally recharged their mobile phone accounts. They reported that they did this with an intention to maintain close contact with their networks in the villages through which they could search and recruit migrant labourers for the construction sites they subcontract in Dhaka.

Workers' social networks

Another type of labour recruitment in the "within-project" mode suggests the involvement of migrant construction workers in the labour recruitment process. Like the subcontractors, the migrant workers already working in Dhaka's construction projects recruit labourers from their village. As seen in Figure 4.4, they act as mediators in the recruitment process upon approval from their subcontractors. In general, they contact their social networks to find out about aspirant labourers who wish to join them in Dhaka. While they often do this to assist their subcontractors, labour recruitment through workers' social networks requires direct involvement of the migrant construction workers as recruiters. Their direct involvement suggests two important benefits for them. By recruiting labourers themselves, they minimise the risks of non-completion of the projects they are based in, and in recognition of their involvement as recruiters, they win their subcontractor's favour in terms of skill acquisition.

Interviews with the migrant construction workers revealed that in some projects the workers were aware of the overall project management by their

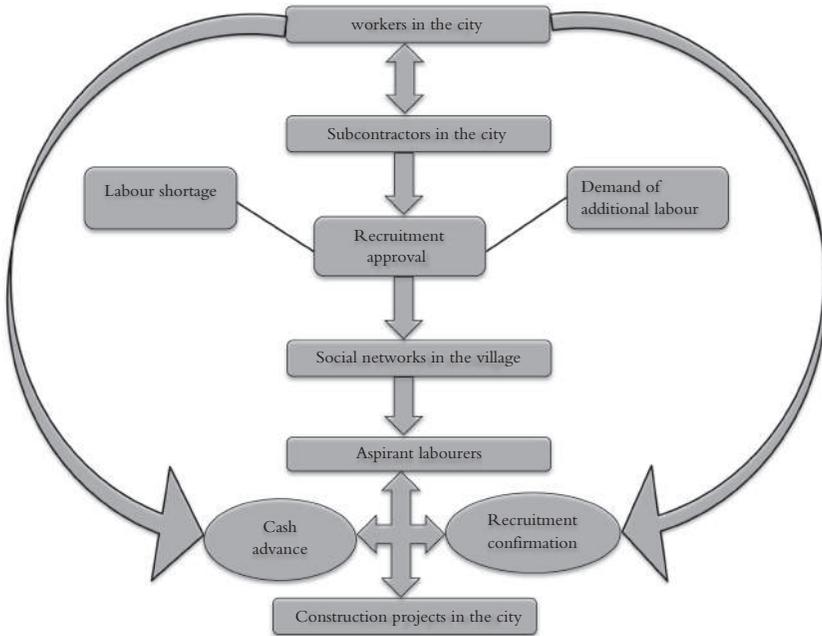


Figure 4.4 Labour recruitment through migrant workers' social networks

subcontractor. They shared their subcontractor's concerns in relation to project completion. As a result, they were adequately informed of daily labour turnout and progress of their project. In these projects, the workers and their subcontractors were found to have an approachable mutual relationship. In the case of uncertainties in relation to labour turnout, the workers took the responsibility of recruiting labourers for their subcontractors.

As one worker reported:

When our foreman left the project, the subcontractor told me, "I am badly in need of some workers now. Ring your contacts and keep searching for people from your own village. Let me know if any of your friends is interested to work in Dhaka." Then I rang one of my friends and asked if he was interested to come to Dhaka to work with me. He replied that it would be wonderful if he could work and stay together with me in Dhaka. He responded positively because he was unemployed at that time. Then I asked him to come to Dhaka. Depending on the verbal conversation, he came and joined me.

The subcontractors perceived this practice, as outlined above, as beneficial for them, because recruiting labourers through the networks of existing workers

helps them minimise their own risks and involvement in the recruitment process. This practice is regarded as a time-saving one that does not require travel to villages. Thus a subcontractor can recruit labourers while staying in Dhaka. In particular, when a subcontractor needs labourers urgently, they ask workers in their existing team to help him recruit other workers.

One recruiter confirmed this:

I ask the workers, already working with me, to find some labourers from their own network. If they really help searching, they can easily collect some labourers for me.

In fact, this practice of recruiting rural labourers through construction workers already in Dhaka guarantees the safe return of the advance money that the subcontractors distribute to the potential labourers in the village. The existing workers mediate between the potential migrant labourers in villages and the subcontractors in the city. They get advance money from their subcontractors and then pass that on to the potential labourers. The subcontractors consider this a low-risk practice as the existing workers are directly involved in the process. As a result, often they offer a large amount of advance money to bring labourers from the village.

One worker reported:

Here are my two nephews. They were already working here and rang one day to ask me to join them by bringing some workers along with me from my own village. I came with three workers ... When my nephews first offered me this work, I asked them to get some advance money from their subcontractor for me [and the other labourers coming with me]. They said they would do so. The next day they sent 10,000 Taka through mobile cash transfer, and I distributed the money among ourselves.

While this practice of recruiting labourers through existing migrant construction workers' social networks appears to be an outcome of the reciprocal relationship between the subcontractors and the workers, it indirectly creates opportunities for the existing workers to get closer to their subcontractor. Bringing in unskilled labourers from villages, the existing workers often get opportunities to train them on the job. Thus a skilled worker gradually becomes a team leader or foreman nominated by the subcontractor. A group of unskilled workers then works under his supervision. He oversees their performance and pays them after being paid by the subcontractor. The key benefit of the reciprocal relationship between a novice unskilled labourer and a skilled worker is the assurance of obligation. With an aim to pick up the skills, the unskilled workers follow instructions without any objections; moreover, they respect their superiors and prove themselves to be disciplined and hardworking. In return, the skilled workers expect them to do more than what is assigned. By doing an additional amount of work, the unskilled workers want to satisfy their superiors

and maintain a respectful relationship in the workplace. This kind of obligation helps the skilled workers get the maximum output from the apprentice workers whom they lead and supervise. Additional job performance also guarantees their profit through the timely completion of a project. Therefore, the skilled workers prefer recruiting unskilled labourers from their village.

As one worker reported:

I am a mason and I brought some helpers [from my village] to work with me ... Working with my own people gives a comfort. The workers coming from outside start washing their hands and feet immediately after the *Asar*.¹ Even if their team leader [or mason] does not finish his work, they will wrap up everything and leave him. In this kind of situation, the mason feels helpless. It is not possible for a mason to do the tedious things onsite. For this reason, most of the masons retain helpers coming through their own networks or who are personally familiar. Having our own people onsite can make a proper balance between job performance and commitment.

As this comment shows, the worker's personal preference is for unskilled workers due to their work commitment. His perceptions denote that the unskilled labourers coming from his own village are more considerate and obedient than outsiders; therefore his engagement in the recruitment process as a recruiter enables him to work more comfortably in Dhaka.

Recruitment in the village

Unlike the “within-project” recruitment discussed above, the “in-village” mode of recruitment is characterised by the physical location of recruiters in the village. Interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters reveal that some workers are recruited after meeting with their recruiters face to face in their village. Based on their experiences, there are three types of recruitment practices: drop-by recruitment, motivational recruitment and situational recruitment.

Drop-by recruitment

The drop-by recruitment suggests a recruitment practice where the recruiters and the labourers are both located in the village. The recruiters may work in the city but visit their village without having the specific intention to recruit labourers. In general, the subcontractors and the migrant construction workers visit their village from time to time, particularly during religious festivals. At that time they hang out, have fun and mingle with the residents in their village. Despite having no predetermined intention for recruitment, they may come across aspirant labourers in the village who wish to migrate to the city upon the availability of work. In many cases, the aspirant labourers also do not have a predetermined intention to migrate to the city for construction work at

that very moment. Thus neither the recruiters nor the aspirant labourers have a predetermined intention as the recruitment occurs unexpectedly by chance.

As one worker reported:

Initially no discussion took place between the subcontractor and me in relation to work ... He was then visiting the village on the eve of *Eid*² ... One day while chatting in front of a retail shop in our village, he said, "I am subcontracting a project in Dhaka and I may need a worker." I said I might be able to join him without any issue.

This comment suggests that the recruitment occurred in a social setting. While the preliminary information regarding the availability of work was shared in a casual discussion, neither the recruiter nor the labourer had a predetermined motivation. Moreover, it is evident from the quote that aspirant labourers in villages often do not get sufficient information regarding the terms and conditions of the job that they would get in the city. It suggests a social bonding between the recruiters and labourers that helps complete the recruitment process in a casual way. As a result, the aspirant labourers often do not consider getting work-related information in detail before they migrate.

The worker further commented:

I was not fussy about wages, and hence I did not wish to haggle. I was confident that he would offer me a wage at least as similar as what others were getting in his project. I knew that he would determine my wage only after observing my performance. I understood that he would offer me whatever I would be eligible for. No discussion on my wage took place before I came here. I did not ask him anything about my wage either. I trusted him, and I would never question him even if he offers me a lower wage.

Interestingly this worker did not ask the recruiter anything in relation to wages, the most critical part of employment terms. It is evident from the quote that the rural labourers trust their recruiters despite not having negotiations on the terms and conditions of their employment. Since both the recruiter and the labourers are located in the same village, perhaps their shared locality has an important effect on this. The recruiters' location and social position make them responsible for the overall well-being of the labourers they recruit. They therefore put all their efforts into avoiding any kind of negligence that could denigrate their social prestige back in the village. On the other hand, due to the reciprocal relationship the aspirant labourers not only trust their recruiters but also try to give the best effort towards their job performance to keep them satisfied. The labourers also put all attempt to avoid any unwanted situation that could harm their social image in their village. Thus the shared local identity puts both the recruiters and the labourers in a practical and functional employment relationship, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Another dimension of the reciprocal relationship between the recruiters and the labourers suggests that the labourers in villages are adequately informed of the market rate of wages. This means the rural labourers are socially connected to the migrant construction workers in Dhaka, and thus they get information about the current wage rate. This social connection, as well as the awareness of wage rates, enables them to verify the initial wage offer that they receive from their recruiters. Conversely, the recruiters do not want to disappoint the labourers as they are also conscious of the labourers' awareness. Due to flexible terms and conditions of recruitment, the recruiters think that the labourers might leave work if they offer an uncompetitive wage. Therefore, the employment relationship, built upon the drop-by recruitment practice, between the recruiters and the workers is essentially self-checked and guided by the labour market situation.

One recruiter confirmed the market trend of wage:

There is a market trend ... Whether a labourer has skills or not, we must start with 300 Taka minimum a day. Now it is impossible to employ a labourer for less than that. After a few months, we increase the amount by 10 to 20 Taka monthly.

The demand-and-supply mechanisms operate in a system where both the recruiters and the labourers are informed of market trends. The recruiters need labour, and the labourers need a job; however, the employment relationship is so fragile that both can leave without any restrictions. Since labour shortage is a critical challenge for a recruiter to accomplish a project on time, he intends to retain workers by offering them a competitive wage in line with market rates. On the other hand, finding a new job is a challenge for the workers, and therefore they wish to stick to their recruiters upon payment of competitive wages. In a few cases, the workers might not be aware of the market trend, but their own perspectives on wages could help accept whatever they are offered.

As one worker reported:

I asked him [the recruiter] about the types of tasks I would be doing in Dhaka. He then replied that it could be just excavating. I said yes, as I was confident of my capability in doing this type of task. After coming to Dhaka, he told me that my monthly salary would be 8,000 Taka. I thought that out of this money I would be spending 2,000 Taka for meals and still 6,000 Taka will be saved. At that moment, I thought it would be sufficient for me.

Clearly, the worker's own perception helped him accept the initial wage offer because he thought that he would be able to save a large amount of money out of his wage. However, determining wage for the workers requires practical knowledge about the ongoing market rates. While in Dhaka, I spoke to a few builders and contractors. My informal discussions with them revealed that one of the main reasons that they did not engage directly in labour recruitment and

management processes was the potential stress in relation to wage determination. They commented that the subcontractors had proper knowledge about the concurrent market rates of wages, and hence they were the right people to be involved in recruitment of construction workers.

While the drop-by recruitment suggests the recruitment process is through the subcontractors visiting the village, it is not limited only to subcontractors. It can also involve migrant construction workers visiting the village. They can recruit rural labourers from their own network upon approval from their subcontractors. The involvement of migrant workers in the drop-by recruitment reveals that sometimes their subcontractors request them to find labourers in their own village and bring them to Dhaka where their projects are located.

One worker reported:

My recruiter found me through my cousins that went back to visit home. He rang my cousins and said, "I need some workers in Dhaka. Is there anyone [in your village] interested to come with you? Could you please help get a few workers for me?" My cousins replied that they would try to get some workers soon. I came with them.

This shows that migrant construction workers already working in Dhaka but visiting their village recruited this worker. The background discussions revealed that neither the worker nor the recruiter was predetermined for the recruitment. It occurred by chance whenever the subcontractor needed some additional labourers to finish his project.

Motivational recruitment

Motivational recruitment is another type of recruitment practice that represents the physical location of both the recruiters and the labourers in the village. Unlike the drop-by recruitment where recruiters approach the potential labourers through casual discussions, the motivational recruitment practices are the opposite. Here the aspirant rural labourers are self-motivated to migrate to the city, and they approach the recruiters in the village. The motivated rural labourers find the recruiters to get work in the city. They express their personal interests to the recruiters, and thus they migrate to Dhaka to work in construction projects. A range of factors contribute to their motivation. Unemployment in their village is the most common reason for their motivation.

The structure of motivational recruitment reveals that recruitment confirmation depends on specific circumstances including the availability of jobs in the city and the relationship between the person the labourers approach and the subcontractors. The aspirant labourers approach either a subcontractor or a migrant construction worker who is already working in the city. In any case, the process of recruitment takes a longer time than the other modes discussed above.

One worker reported:

It is I who went to him [the recruiter]. I requested him earnestly that everyone was working in Dhaka, and I would also like to go to Dhaka anyway. He then assured me it would not be a problem ... After knowing my intention, he told me, "it is not possible to offer you a job instantly. However, as you seem very serious, I will let you know whenever I need a worker. I will give you a phone call and you will go to Dhaka." After eight days I received a phone call from him asking me to come to Dhaka ... He did not say anything about the terms and conditions of employment. My only intention was to leave the village by any means. He called me to come to Dhaka, and I came straight after the call.

This worker was eager to get a job in Dhaka immediately. Although the subcontractor did not confirm the recruitment instantly, he indicated that he would be able to consider it upon his return to Dhaka. During my informal discussions with the subcontractor, it was evident that he did not have any jobs to offer at that moment. Nevertheless, after returning to Dhaka, he assessed the request further and confirmed accordingly. He based his assessment on a few things such as if the labourer would be physically capable of doing a construction job. In addition, he assessed if the labourer was polite and had a good character. However, these assessments were informally completed through verbal conversations among the subcontractor and his social networks in the village. I asked him why these assessments were so necessary, and he explained that sometimes young labourers in villages might have a strong motivation but have very weak health. Since construction is a hard job, those labourers give up after a few days. This kind of situation creates an image problem for the subcontractor in his village, and therefore he does not recruit labourers without knowing their full details.

In motivational recruitment, the aspirant labourers usually approach the subcontractors visiting their village. However, in a few cases they seek help from migrant workers too. Migrant construction workers visit their village, and at that time the aspirant labourers approach them to seek help to get work in Dhaka. In this case, the migrant workers speak to their subcontractors and get approval before promising a job.

One worker reported:

I got this job through my cousin. He also works here ... He went back to visit his village, and I approached him at that time. My cousin replied, "do you really wish to go to Dhaka? I stay there myself. If you wish to go, I will take you along with me." ... He later confirmed [after speaking to his subcontractor] that he would take all responsibilities to bring me to Dhaka.

It is evident from this comment that kinship or family relationship is an important dimension of motivational recruitment. In Bangladesh's rural areas, the

local culture helps people get close to each other. Often this leads to a close bonding similar to a family relationship. As a result, rural people often use various kinship terms such as “uncle,” “brother” and “cousin.” This kind of relationship is crucial in finding job opportunities in Dhaka because the rural labourers are not familiar with the urban work environment, and hence they want to trust somebody to help them migrate and settle in the city without experiencing any unwanted situation. The locality-based social ties therefore play an important role in getting work through migrant workers.

As one recruiter reported:

For example, one worker is working with me for a long time and while visiting his village he would call me saying that he had got someone in his village interested in coming to Dhaka. He could ask for some advance money. Then I would send him some advance money, and he would bring the labourer. This way he may bring ten labourers for me. Out of the ten labourers, all may leave the job later except two. The remaining two labourers may bring another two labourers from their village. We [the subcontractors] supply the advance money, but the migrant construction workers who already work in Dhaka recruit the new labourers through their own networks and acquaintances.

From this quote, it is clear that the direct involvement of migrant construction workers in recruiting labourers from their village is important. It also confirms that the recruiters offer advance money that helps the migrant construction workers recruit labourers from their own networks and acquaintances. The example given by the recruiter suggests that the direct involvement of migrant workers in recruitment not only eases the task of recruitment for him but also guarantees the safe return of his advance money. However, indirect labour recruitment through migrant workers creates barriers to labour protection. The labourers coming to the city cannot access the subcontractors directly, and hence their ability to negotiate employment terms and conditions is often curtailed. On the other hand, the migrant workers who engage themselves in the recruitment process double their pressures by forfeiting their own rights to their recruiters and taking an additional responsibility to look after the labourers they bring in. Therefore, motivational recruitment creates pressures on both the workers who are recruited and those who recruit them.

Situational recruitment

Situational recruitment is characterised by some particular factors that help the recruiters and aspirant migrant labourers meet in the village. The labourers may want to leave their village due to several factors such as climate change, social or political problems, drug addiction, household poverty, the death of a family member or family tension. Either the labourers or recruiters approach first, depending on the context in which they meet each other.

One worker reported:

Our house was on a floodplain in a *Char*³ area. The house was swept away in the recent flood. My younger brother died, and I had two sisters. I was the only son in our family. My parents were alive ... I felt that I should not stay unemployed ... We did not have any farmland. I did not have the capital to start a business either. It was not possible for me to work as a day labourer [because of social prestige] in the village. Considering these, I came to Dhaka ... I approached my friend. He was visiting our village then. I asked him if his project was in need of a worker. He replied that he would discuss this with his subcontractor after returning to Dhaka and let me know ... After getting approval from his subcontractor, my friend confirmed. Then I came to Dhaka.

Some situational factors were important here in helping the worker meet his friend in the village and move to Dhaka. First he approached his friend who was already working in Dhaka and visiting the village at that time. Knowing about his intention, his friend discussed this with his recruiter and then confirmed his recruitment. This way a migrant construction worker can recruit another migrant labourer from his networks with approval from his recruiter. However, this kind of recruitment does not involve any predetermined motivations; rather, specific circumstances necessitate the recruitment. As a result, in the case of situational recruitment, the migration decision is determined upon the confirmation of job availability in the city.

One female worker extended this point:

In the village, my husband used to catch fish, and after selling fish in the market he used to buy foods for us daily ... The river in which my husband used to catch fish was suddenly taken over by some politically influential people, and they imposed big payments to get permission for fishing. That was not affordable for us. We are poor. We cannot feed well, let alone pay permission fees for catching fish ... I came with my relative [the wife of my cousin] ... She brought me here and showed me how to find a job as she was already working here ... It was the pressure of poverty that pushed me to Dhaka. Another factor was the sudden loss of my husband's fishing job in our village.

Obviously, in this case an unexpected job situation impacted on the female labourer's decision to migrate. The role of kinship in situational recruitment is evident in this case. I discussed the dynamics of situational recruitment with the subcontractors at length, and a few of them confirmed that they often became part of it, especially when they visited their village. They stated that they helped their relatives, friends and neighbours to migrate to Dhaka. Considering special circumstances such as extreme poverty, debt, unemployment, climate shocks or the death of a family member, they willingly offered

them a job. It is evident that this kind of recruitment is characterised by family ties and social relationships between the subcontractors and the labourers whereby the latter originate from specific vulnerable situations. Apparently situational recruitment therefore is considered a favour from the subcontractors to the vulnerable rural labourers.

On-demand recruitment

Unlike the recruitment modes discussed above, the “on-demand” category of recruitment is characterised by the pre-planned recruitment of a group of labourers. While visiting a village, the recruiters may recruit labourers one by one and thus form a group to bring to the city. Although the recruiters are primarily urban project-based, they visit their own village to bring labourers either to fill a labour shortage or to adapt to time pressures and project completion challenges. On-demand recruitment is therefore divided into two categories: seasonal recruitment and adaptive recruitment.

Seasonal recruitment

Seasonal recruitment is an “on-demand” recruitment practice that represents recruitment during a specific period of a year, for example, the peak harvest season. At this time, the recruiters visit their village to recruit a group of labourers together. They themselves distribute the advance money among the potential migrant labourers. In most cases, they return to the city along with the group they recruit. The interviews undertaken revealed that due to the availability of high-wage farm jobs in villages during the peak harvest season, many workers in Dhaka’s construction projects leave their work and return to their village, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3. The mass absence of workers during this period creates completion challenges for the projects. To meet the challenges due to increasing labour turnover, the subcontractors themselves go to their village to bring a group of labourers.

One recruiter confirmed this:

The peak harvest season will start in a few days. I will therefore need to go to the village to bring some labourers. I will manage 10 to 12 labourers and form a group. If someone wants advance money, I will offer it. Then I will return to Dhaka along with the group.

Seasonality in the villages has a significant effect on labour supply in Dhaka’s construction projects. In order to cope with labour shortage, the subcontractors in Dhaka plan their travel to the village. They visit with cash in hand and offer advance money to the aspirant migrant labourers. Often they meet the labourers’ travel costs, including bus fare, out of their own pocket. While interviewing the construction workers and their recruiters, I discovered that there were some trade-offs between the farm work in the village and construction work

in the city during the peak harvest season. Although at that time the wage rate was higher in the village than the city, some rural labourers still wanted to come to the city because advance money offered by the subcontractors was a stimulus to them. They utilised the money to adjust their household debt, feed the cattle, repair and maintain irrigation pumps and purchase fertilizer, insecticides, etc. Moreover, their own perspectives revealed that construction work in the city would last longer than the farm work in the village. Thus they believed that they would be able to continue construction work for a longer period and adjust the advance money through long instalments. This way they would achieve two benefits: first they would get a job for a long period, and second the advance money would help them invest in farming-related activities to get better returns.

I was very eager to explore further why the rural labourers wanted to leave their village during a particular period of time of the year, especially when the wage rate and demand for labour in rural areas were higher than those in the city. To be specific, I wanted to investigate why the rural labourers wanted to come to the city at a time when many migrant labourers in the city left their work. Informal discussions with the construction workers and their recruiters in Dhaka revealed that during the peak harvest season there would always be some labourers unemployed in the village, due to the early completion of the harvest. Moreover, there were some labourers in the village who quit their harvest just because of a lack of finance. The subcontractors actually took advantage of this situation to recruit the rural labourers who were relatively poor compared with others and unable to continue their harvest in the peak harvest season. As a result, the supply of rural labourers even in the peak harvest season was not a problem for the subcontractors. They could easily attract a group of poor labourers by dint of the advance cash that the labourers and their family members badly needed to continue the harvest in their village.

Considering the factors discussed above, seasonal recruitment can be viewed as an opportunistic model of recruitment whereby the recruiters take advantage of the unemployment of financially struggling rural labourers. On the contrary, the rural labourers take advantage of the instant cash offered by the recruiters as advance money. The migrant construction workers reported that the leverages between farm work and construction work usually operate in a system that forces them to swap between the two to ensure the highest returns. The seasonality of the harvest in rural areas has the most significant role in deciding which job will offer them the highest returns.

As one worker reported:

My long-term plan is to do farm work in my village during the peak harvest season ... And in the lean season I will come to Dhaka to do a construction job. Doing so, I will always get a job either in agriculture or in construction. Thus I will be able to look after my own farmlands when it is peak harvest time ... Many people do this.

This statement suggests that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka want to stay attached to their primary occupation back in their village. The rationale for this kind of attachment, as revealed from background discussions, is to ensure that they grow plenty of food crops to feed their family. The workers believed that since they originated from a farming background they should continue cultivating rice to ensure year-round smooth food supply for their family. They perceived that construction work in Dhaka was an all-time available job, and hence they would be able to migrate to Dhaka anytime they wish. On the other hand, since farming is a specific season-based job, they thought they should invest all their efforts in seasonal farming to grow sufficient crops to live on. The interviews with the workers indicated another important social dimension in relation to this. The workers shared that they held a belief such as “buying rice from a shop is no good for farmers.”⁴ This socially constructed belief was quite widespread among the workers. They believed that buying instead of growing rice is denigrating for a peasant family, and it proves incapability and insincerity to the inherited occupation.

Adaptive recruitment

Adaptive recruitment is another “on-demand” recruitment practice through which the recruiters recruit some individual labourers or a group of labourers to meet time pressures or project completion challenges. In adaptive recruitment practice, the subcontractors located in Dhaka want a quick completion of the recruitment process. In most cases, the subcontractors do not visit villages due to the commitment to their ongoing projects in Dhaka. However, they send their representative to the villages to complete the recruitment process. In the case of a sudden labour shortage, they try their own social networks first. If it becomes impossible to recruit labourers through social networks, they then send someone from Dhaka to bring labourers from villages, on their behalf.

One recruiter explained:

For instance, I am now badly in need of some additional labourers for my project. I already have some contacts in the village. If they are unable [to recruit labourers shortly], I will send someone there. I will ask him to find some labourers, and he will look for the labourers interested in migrating to Dhaka. The interested labourers will assess my wage offers, advantages and payment dealings and then decide to leave their village.

When a recruiter sends his representative to the village to bring labourers to his ongoing project in Dhaka, he achieves two main benefits. Firstly, by sending a representative he can verify the potential migrant labourers’ background and previous experience; secondly, it saves time and travel. When he sends his representative, he hands over cash to distribute among the aspirant labourers as advance money to meet their travel costs. Thus his representative returns to Dhaka along with the labourers. In fact, although the subcontractor sends his representative to recruit labourers on his behalf, his involvement in the process

ensures continuous contact with shortlisted labourers in the village. This is because of the social connections that link the rural labourers and the subcontractor closely. Moreover, before leaving the village the aspirant labourers assess the image of the subcontractor and his payment dealings; they also assess the practicality of the wage offer. Their assessment requires talking with a few other villagers who may know the subcontractor. Thus the social settings in rural areas enable both the subcontractor and the labourers to come into contact although the former is physically located in the city. In this context, the subcontractor's representative is basically an added layer in the recruitment process who connects the labourers and the subcontractor for the purpose of recruitment.

Although adaptive recruitment predominantly occurs during an ongoing project, in some cases subcontractors may complete adaptive recruitment before the start of a project. In those cases, the subcontractors may already retain some workers from previously completed projects and need additional workers for the new project. Therefore, they may recruit some workers to form a big group of workers to begin the new project. In such cases, subcontractors may visit the village themselves and return with some labourers to mix with the already-retained workers.

As one worker explained:

The subcontractor's house is next to ours in the village. We used to see each other always. Sometimes we have tea together. Often he goes to visit his family in the village. Usually he secures a contract from an engineer [based in Dhaka] first, and after that he goes to the village to bring in some labourers. He starts a new project only after bringing labourers like us. While visiting the village, he offers construction jobs. He offers some cash advances too.

While visiting various construction projects in Dhaka, I was curious to explore how the subcontractors get the money to offer to the potential migrant labourers in the village. My interviews with the subcontractors revealed that they actually got lump sums from their contractor. The contractors passed on hard cash to the subcontractors to enable the latter to bring labourers from the villages, before starting a project. Thus the money the subcontractors offered as cash advance was basically passed on by the contractors who were contracting for the project builders or owners.

One subcontractor confirmed this:

After securing a contract for a project, the contractor first makes a phone call to me and discusses if I could help him [complete the project]. Then I promise him that I will be able to start the project upon receiving some advance money so that I can bring some labourers from the village. After receiving the advance money from the contractor, I bring some labourers from my locality and thus start the project. Usually I visit the village, stay there for a few days and return to Dhaka with the labourers. After that, I start the specific tasks I am subcontracting.

The actual process of such recruitment reveals that the subcontractor recruits labourers individually and then forms a group. He then leaves the village along with the group. My discussions with the contractors and subcontractors revealed that every subcontracted assignment had a particular timeline for completion, and therefore time pressure was an important consideration for labour recruitment. While recruiting labourers, the subcontractors usually consider two main issues: the number of labourers they recruit should ensure a quick and timely completion of the subcontracted tasks, and they must recruit capable labourers who can endure time pressures. Thus the subcontractors want to employ and manage the labourers in a specific way that guarantees their profit by accomplishing the assigned tasks in time. However, in order to do this, they often recruit fewer labourers than required. By overworking the labourers, they earn more profit as fewer labourers incur fewer costs.

On-street labour hire

The “on street” labour hire practices are typified by labour recruitment from the street corners in Dhaka where the migrant labourers congregate to find a job. These street corners are the places where the potential recruiters and the labourers meet each other face to face on the spot and negotiate wages and terms of employment before hiring. In Bangladesh, many rural-urban migrant labourers individually migrate to Dhaka and wait on street corners where the subcontractors who maintain regular contacts with builders and contractors hire them. These are the locations where the recruiters meet workers in person, as found in other parts of the world (Anand, 2001; Chowdhury et al., 2012; Jha, 2002; Mosse et al., 2005; Swider, 2015; Yoon & Kang, 2000). These street corners are generally located at certain points in Dhaka, predominantly near busy bus stops where the migrant labourers congregate every morning in a huge volume and wait to be hired for construction jobs on a daily basis. In addition to the subcontractors, a specific kind of recruiter, locally known as *Sardar*, hires labourers off the street corners on a daily basis. *Sardars* are not typical subcontractors, but they are skilled construction workers who supply small groups of labourers for specific tasks. Often the subcontractors recruit day labourers through the *Sardars*. Interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters revealed that the labourers were hired off street corners based on their skills and gender. There are two types of on-street labour hire practices: skill-segmented recruitment and gender-segmented recruitment.

Skill-segmented recruitment

Skill-segmented recruitment is an on-street labour hire practice through which the recruiters hire migrant labourers who have the specialised skills that they need. Labourers’ specialised skills denote their capability to accomplish

specific tasks such as excavating, concreting, plastering, tiling and painting. However, the labourers waiting on street corners do not generally acquire these skills through any formal institutional training; rather, they learn on the job. Gaining some first-hand experience means they can certify themselves verbally while being present in the markets. At the time of visiting the workers on street corners in Dhaka, I noticed that every morning, hundreds of labourers congregated at designated points in the city, waiting in groups. Coming since 5.30 am, they continued to wait until 1.00 pm maximum. I saw the labourers sitting with a set of personally purchased hand tools required for the task he or she was skilled in. Possessing proper hand tools is a requirement to get hired off street corners. The hirers or recruiters do not provide the tools, and they do not hire any labourers who do not have their own tools.

One female worker reported:

If someone does not have own tools, they will never get a construction job. They might get another job, but not this one. If a recruiter wants to hire me for excavation, he will first ask me if I have the proper tools such as a spade. No one will hire me if I do not have that.

Hiring off street corners represents significant differences between the migrant labour groups in Dhaka's construction projects. The distinction between the two groups, workers who work and live onsite and the workers on street corners, suggests that the migrant construction workers living onsite come alone from their village, leaving their family at home. On the other hand, workers on street corners have families in Dhaka and their family members may be involved in some other types of jobs. Although the wage rate for workers on street corners is usually higher than that for the project-based workers, the time period of an offered job on street corners is shorter. Moreover, background discussions with the workers on street corners revealed that their wage rate was higher because they had to pay rent for accommodation whereas the project-based workers had free accommodation on their worksite.

The migrant construction workers in Dhaka, those who worked and lived onsite, were asked about their personal experiences in relation to on-street labour hire practices. One worker reported that he was never recruited off street corners; however, he had often helped his subcontractor recruit labourers off street corners. He explained that the labourers waiting on street corners were segregated based on their skills, and thus it was easy to select them according to his requirement.

As he explained:

For example, the labourers waiting there with a basket and a spade will be hired for fetching the sand, bricks or stones nearer to the project location. They will be on a daily rate. If I need a helper to lift bricks or sand upstairs,

I may hire a labourer from there. After explaining the tasks in detail, I will negotiate the daily wage and bring a labourer to work for me.

I followed up the worker as to how he assessed the skill level of the waiting migrant labourers on street corners. He then explained that labourers had separate groups according to their skills and after identifying the relevant group he approached the relevant group with his offer. Interested labourers asked him about the details of the task and wage offer.

As he further extended:

It is easy for me to get an idea about the skill level of the labourers waiting there. The tilers will sit in a separate group. The labourers with carrying baskets and spades will sit in a separate place. The helpers of masons will also sit separately. There are some segments actually. If I need a tiler, I will go straight to the tiler group. I will tell them that I will need a helper. Some of them will instantly respond to my call. Then daily wage will be negotiated on the spot.

The interviews with the recruiters revealed that they actually utilised their personal judgement to assess the skill level of the labourers waiting on street corners. Due to frequent visits and constant dealings with this particular group of labourers, they had gained extensive experience and knowledge about hiring off street corners. The subjective knowledge of the recruiters helped them assess the labourers' skills and negotiate wage accordingly.

As one recruiter reported:

I have all the knowledge to assess if a labourer is a novice or experienced. His tools will indicate. If he is experienced, his spade and carrying basket will prove that he is already experienced. The spade possessed by an experienced labourer must have some signs of wear, whereas a novice worker's spade will look new.

Although this recruiter reported that he determined labourers' wage on the basis of his subjective judgement of skills, the workers reported that there was no specific rate for a labourer waiting on street corners. Wage rates fluctuated every day, depending on the demand and supply of the day labourers. When the demand for labourers was high, the wage rate was high too. On the contrary, when the supply of labourers was abundant, the wage rate decreased. The migrant workers' own perspectives revealed that they had no idea about which factors affected the availability of job offers and wage rates on street corners. Therefore, they set their own rate just by following what rates other labourers were accepting.

As one female worker reported:

The wage rate fluctuates every day here. We know what rate is being frequently offered today. The hirer will offer me following that rate. Usually

I ask other labourers, “sister, how is the wage offer today?” Hearing from them, I decide my rate accordingly ... Some days the wage is high, but some days the wage is low.

From this comment, it can be seen that the female migrant labourers on Dhaka’s street corners experience wage fluctuations that heavily affect their daily earnings. When a labourer sees someone accepting job offer with a low wage rate, then she starts accepting low rate too. This practice indicates that the migrant labourers waiting on street corners are vulnerable to considerable uncertainty and instability in relation to income. For the recruiters, street corners are the most favourable place to hire cheap labourers when the fluctuations are high. For the labourers, street corners are the most unpleasant place to find a job. A brief period of the offered jobs and the abundant supply of poor labourers in the city create pressures for the female migrant labourers to compete in a highly unrewarding recruitment process for their daily survival.

Gender-segmented recruitment

On-street labour hire practices characterise a gender-segmented recruitment process through which the recruiters recruit only female labourers. In fact, this is the only way the female labourers are recruited. They are predominantly recruited for a range of tasks often described by the recruiters as “light jobs.” The range includes excavating, lifting, brick crushing, hammering, scrubbing and cleaning. The recruiters claimed that these were the common tasks that female labourers hired off street corners did. The interviews with the recruiters revealed that their specific preference for female labourers, for these tasks, was related to wage differences. They paid female labourers less than male labourers, and this ensured their profit.

One recruiter reported:

There are some specific tasks in a project where female labourers are commonly employed. For example, there are some light jobs where we prefer female labourers over males. This is because of the subcontractor’s own profit. He will need to pay a male worker 500 Taka, but a female labourer for the same task will be paid 300 Taka.

This recruiter specifies that inequality favours the subcontractors who choose female labourers over the male labourers in the name of recruitment for light jobs. This inequality shows that the female labourers’ wage can be 40 percent less than male labourers’. In spite of accepting this unequal wage, job availability for female labourers on street corners is scarce. While visiting the street corners, I noticed hundreds of female labourers sitting idle and gossiping. They were waiting in the hope of finding a job, but most of them went home unhired. Observing them for a whole day, I found that every day a large

number of female labourers congregated on street corners but many failed to get a job, and it was clear that staying unhired was very common for them.

As one female worker reported:

I do not get work every day. Sometimes six days, sometimes four days and sometimes two days a month. It depends. But I come here and wait every day. I just wait here, hoping to be hired. The day I do not get a job I feel disappointed ... I often decide to accept a lower wage because if I do not get a job for the day, money will not be earned and it will be hard for me ... When I do not get a job, I believe that luck did not favour me that day.

There is a daily struggle for women to get work by waiting on street corners. In spite of accepting low wages from the potential recruiters, this woman did not get a job every day. The job unavailability contributed to her disappointment. Since the female labourers on street corners are basically day labourers, their daily income is mainly spent on the basic needs such as meals. Returning home unhired therefore means starving or debt. Background discussions with the female labourers revealed that in order to cope with the situations related to the job unavailability they either starved that day or borrowed money on high interest rates to purchase daily meals.

Since there is no guarantee of getting a job on street corners, female labourers do not bring their lunch or food along with them while coming for waiting there. Many of them rent and live in a room of a slum near the location of a street corner. As discussed in Chapter 3, I visited a few slums to see their living arrangements.

One female worker reported:

I rented this slum room here because I wanted to stay close to the street corners. Everyone living around this place goes there. This location saves time. After completing all necessary household work in the early morning, I can go out and wait there to be hired. Once confirmed, I usually request the recruiters to allow me [a few minutes] to go back to my room so that I can take some food with me for the whole day. They usually allow this. Some recruiters are kind, and they wait until I come back. However, some are unkind and they do not wait even after promising. In some cases, when I go to bring food from my room, they leave me in the meantime and hire another female labourer instead.

This comment suggests that in the absence of any guarantee of getting a job the female labourers do not take food with them until they are sure of their employment. However, the brief time they take to fetch food is also marked by uncertainty as the hirers may not be willing to wait and thus they may hire another labourer. It can be argued that, considering the time pressure and insecurity, the street corners in Dhaka operate in an intense way revealing insecurities at every layer of operation.

The most critical problem evident in the case of gender-segmented recruitment is the personal security concerns for the female labourers. The street corners operate in a way that does not specify the location of the workplace. After hiring off street corners, the recruiters transport the female labourers to various project locations in the city. As a result, the family members of the female labourers do not know where they are finally transported to. It contributes to personal security concerns for the female labourers on street corners.

As one recruiter of female labourers explained:

In case of hiring off street corners, a female labourer's family only knows that she has gone to the street corner in search of work, but they do not know where and which project she has gone to today. If an accident occurs, it is difficult to trace her address and family details.

Gender-segmented on-street recruitment practice creates various types of risks for the female labourers. While their recruiters get cheap labour by offering a lower wage than the male labourers, this recruitment practice does not guarantee continuous employment. Unpredictable work opportunities, unstable income and security risks characterise this recruitment practice.

Empirical evidence and contextual discussions, as presented above, reveal that the recruitment of migrant construction workers in Dhaka is a multi-tiered process where the individual recruiters, in various capacities, dominate and discretionally determine the terms and conditions of the employment. The recruitment practices discussed above show a wide social context of recruitment that helps the rural labourers interact with their recruiters. In all nine types of recruitment practices discussed above, the role of individuals, as recruiters, is predominant. These individuals include a range of people in the village and the city. They include subcontractors and the migrant workers themselves. They are socially inter-connected with each other through their friends, relatives and neighbours, and therefore they navigate and intersect throughout the process of recruitment. Their extensive layers confirm that they are the main actors in recruiting migrant labourers for Dhaka's construction projects. Their labour management functions contribute to employment relationships that significantly influence the employment conditions and migration outcomes for the migrant construction workers. In this context, it is important to investigate the migrant construction workers' employment relationships and the role of individual recruiters in shaping them. The next chapter will therefore examine the workers' experiences of working with the recruiters.

Notes

- 1 In Bangladesh, *Asar* refers to daily prayer time before sunset.
- 2 *Eid* is a religious festival celebrated by Muslims. As a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh celebrates two *Eids* each year: *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha*.
- 3 *Char* is a Bangla word for a riverine island.

- 4 Such belief is originally based on traditional Bangla proverbs and religious notions that dignify rice cultivation as the core farm work for the farmers. Due to the increasing retail price of rice, it is widely believed by the rural community that buying rice, instead of cultivating, creates barriers to the economic prosperity of rural households.

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5 Working with the recruiters

This chapter unravels the employment relationships in Dhaka's construction projects and the role of recruiters in shaping them. It examines the migrant construction workers' experiences of working with their recruiters. It is particularly focussed on how the workers deal with the recruiters and their extended layers in their workplace. Given the complex structures of recruitment practices, the workplace experiences of Dhaka's migrant construction workers are determined by the employment relationships that they go through. The chapter therefore examines the migrant construction workers' own views and lived experiences regarding the prevalent structure of the employment relationships that they find themselves in. Situated in thematic discussions led by the "individualised labour" theme, the chapter explains how the recruiters flexibilise migrant labour through their individualised labour management practices. Probing into these practices, it explains the workers' own views that help them continue to work with their recruiters.

The interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters reveal that the employment relationships in Dhaka's construction projects are embedded in the indirect recruitment practices. The employment relationships represent that the individual recruiters dominate in all respects through the discretion they have in determining the terms and conditions of employment. The predominant role of the recruiters is not limited only to the workplace; they make the workers dependent on them in all respects. Extending from the workplace to personal life of the workers, the recruiters evidently play a dominant role in job searching, upward career mobility and offering personal support to the workers. The workers perceive the extensive role of their recruiters as enabling, but their lived experiences suggest that the recruiters create various forms of pressures and insecurities, which make the workers individually subordinate to them.

Recruiters in job hunting

The workers' views on their indirect recruitment and employment relationships revealed that their recruiters had the capacity to help them find jobs in Dhaka. Upon completion of one project, the recruiters found another to relocate the

workers attached to them. Thus the recruiters continuously relocated the workers from project to project. By finding new projects, the recruiters actually guaranteed continuous employment of the workers in their teams. The workers perceived the job-hunting capacity of their recruiters to be an obligatory responsibility that enabled them to be employed without interruptions.

One worker reported:

Once this project is completed, the person [the subcontractor] who brought me will find a new project for me. It is his responsibility, not mine. Our subcontractor starts finding the next project while undertaking an ongoing project. We constantly get projects one after another. He already has an offer for contracting another project immediately ... That will be an industrial project.

This comment shows that the workers consider that it is the subcontractor's responsibility to find new opportunities once the current project finishes. In Dhaka's construction projects, the subcontractors usually take full responsibility to place the workers in another project when their current project is accomplished. However, in the absence of a written contract, this is only a verbal commitment. The perceived mutual trust between the workers and their recruiters functions as a catalytic factor to impose the responsibility of finding new projects onto the recruiters although the recruiters are always not capable of offering a continuous job to the workers.

As one recruiter reported:

If I do not have any jobs [or projects] to offer, I will dismiss the workers, saying that currently I do not have any work for them and therefore they should leave me. Then some of them may try finding a job with another recruiter; some may return to their village.

Uncertainty of employment is very high in Dhaka's construction projects, and the recruiters are not always able to offer constant employment. The individual recruiters, as perceived by the workers to be the guarantor of continuous employment, occasionally dismiss the workers on account of the unavailability of employment. Background discussions with the recruiters revealed that the lifetime of a construction project and thus the availability of construction jobs could be affected by several factors. A project may unexpectedly terminate or halt due to various reasons including bad weather conditions, lack of materials, inadequate labour turnout, interrupted funding from the builders and contractors, machinery collapse, technical faults and design alteration. Since most of the workers in Dhaka's construction projects are recruited from the recruiters' own networks, the recruiters are under constant pressures to find and offer continuous employment to the workers they recruit. An inability to offer continuous employment can affect a recruiter's personal image, which might, in the long term, dissuade the potential rural labourers from joining his team in

future. To maintain his credibility as a competent recruiter in terms of the capacity to offer long-term employment, he continuously searches for a project to fit the workers he recruits and retains.

One worker reported:

After finishing the earlier project, I moved here. Upon completion of that project, one day our recruiter confirmed that he was going to contract the Moghbazar flyover project [the current one] too. In fact, while we were working on the earlier project, some preliminary work on the current project had already started. The recruiter confirmed then that we would be moving to this project shortly.

The recruiter of this worker confirmed that the next employment was organised while undertaking an ongoing project. The workers often appreciate this kind of job-hunting capacity of the recruiters. However, the recruiters' capacity to find work opportunities is usually determined by their relationship with the builders or contractors who subcontract them for specific tasks in construction projects. The relationship between a contractor or builder and a subcontractor may not guarantee the constant availability of projects, but it is likely that the former helps the latter by fitting them into suitable options at a specific time. However, the contractors or builders themselves may not have projects ready to be offered all the time. The workers' views revealed that they considered these practices good for them as they were usually not under double pressure of finding a job and dealing with the pressure of timely completion of assigned tasks in their ongoing project.

One worker reported:

The only advantage of being recruited through the subcontractors is the continuity of work. They always have some jobs to offer. I do not see any other advantages except this. They help us get work constantly, and hence we remain attached to them. They also retain us for their own benefits.

Migrant workers prefer to remain attached to particular subcontractors, or recruiters, believing that they have the capability to find and offer work to the workers. The subcontractors have jobs to offer, and the workers need assured job availability. The employment relationships between the workers and their recruiters are guided by this practicality.

Recruiters as employers

Due to the extensive role of the recruiters in job hunting and job matching, most of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka strongly supported indirect labour recruitment through individual recruiters. Accepting indirect recruitment as a normal phenomenon in their work life, they believed that the personal network effect was the most crucial factor in finding and getting a construction job

in Dhaka. They reported that labour recruitment through personal contacts was so widespread in Dhaka's construction projects that it could be very difficult, even impossible, for a newcomer to get a job without having good references.

One worker reported:

I would have not been able to migrate to Dhaka, had there been no sub-contractors. I came through them. Otherwise, the builders would not have found me. Their contractors would have not brought me by locating me in the village. They just sit on chairs and do official routine jobs. A rural labourer would never be able to find a construction job directly if he had not come through a subcontractor. For example, a labourer from Noakhali¹ came here yesterday and approached our team leader to get a job. Our team leader told him that initially he must come with identity documents because he was unfamiliar to him. I did not need to give any identity documents in my case. Many subcontractors bring labourers from their own district only and retain them. Here we are all from Pabna². While staying with people from other districts, they may treat us badly and we may also treat them badly, whereas living with people from the same district only, we are happy to endure each other even if someone does something unacceptable.

This is a very strong evidence, confirming that indirect recruitment is the only option for the rural labourers to migrate to Dhaka for construction work. Without the involvement of individual recruiters, it is impossible for them to get a job in Dhaka's construction projects. For a newcomer, checking identity documents is one of the critical steps they need to pass. Background discussions with the workers revealed that many labourers in Bangladesh did not have such documents. Moreover, in spite of having identity documents some labourers were reluctant to present them to their recruiters, fearing that they might be traced and charged in case of any unexpected circumstances such as theft. Trust was therefore a significant factor in recruiting novice labourers. The individual recruiters preferred recruiting the labourers whose identification they could trust easily. In this context, labourers originating from the recruiters' own locality were preferred over others. It not only helped the recruiters minimise their security concerns but also created a non-complaining team. As the worker quoted above indicated, their common locality made them considerate and caring about each other. Thus they were able to live together in harmony, which eventually benefited their recruiters by seeking fewer interventions at the time of misunderstandings or disagreements. These factors are discussed further, in the sections below, and conceptualised as "same-locality effects."

Interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters confirmed that trust was one of the important factors in recruiting new labourers. Many elements could confirm trust; having an identity document was one of them. When the recruiter and the labourer were both from the same locality, identity documents would not be an issue. However, there was a rampant and

discretionary practice of checking identity documents if the labourer and the recruiter were unfamiliar to each other and not from the same locality. This practice characterised personal network-based individualised labour recruitment practices in Dhaka's construction projects. Many workers therefore believed that they would not have got a job if they had approached their recruiters without having a strong reference from their own networks.

As one worker explained:

If my cousin had not helped me get this job, I doubt if I would be able to get it directly. No one wants to offer a job to a labourer coming directly. He will not get a job because anyone wishing to give him work is not sure of his residential address and identity. No one will offer a job readily without verifying these.

For the individual recruiters, a new labourer's identity and address are the key matters to check. Due to this predominant practice of verification of identity, the rural labourers are actually forced to be part of the indirect recruitment process.

Because trust is an important component of the employment relationship between the workers and their recruiters, it significantly resonates the assurance of continuous availability of the workers. The recruiters in Dhaka's construction projects reported that they preferred labourers from their own locality because they believed that the labourers originating from their personal networks would be non-complaining and thus able to continue for a long term. This could minimise their risks to timely production due to labour shortage or unexpected absence of the workers. However, I realised that most of the workers were not aware of this dimension of the trust relationship. Their subjective narratives revealed that the rampant practice of personal networks-based recruitment was to prevent only unexpected circumstances (e.g., theft of a piece of equipment). As a result, the workers overlooked the assurance of continuous availability, the key benefit that their recruiters preferred. The workers accepted the networks-based recruitment practices as common affairs in their working life, and direct recruitment appeared to be an impossible event in their workplace.

As one worker stated:

For a newcomer, it will be impossible to get a job if he comes alone directly. This is because no one knows him in the city. Who knows, he might have a motive to steal or do something bad. Therefore, no one will give him a job. It is absolutely impossible to get a job alone, without approaching a subcontractor.

Indirect recruitment was so widespread and common that the concept of an "employer" was illusive to the migrant construction workers. I asked them about their own perceptions on the concept. In particular, I repeatedly asked them to identify the person that they perceived to be their employer. For the

term “employer,” they generally pointed out the person who employed them and paid their wages. The workers argued that the person responsible for the payment of wages should be their employer. Sharing their personal experiences, they specified that indirect recruitment practices did not allow them to contact the builder or contractor of their project. Therefore, they simply termed their payer, predominantly a subcontractor, as employer.

One female worker stated:

We do not need to know who the builder or contractor is. Whoever pays my hirer, that’s not my concern. I will take my wage from my hirer ... So the person who hires and pays me is my employer.

As this comment suggests, for the female workers hired off street corners, there are two key components associated with the term “employer”: hiring and payment. In Dhaka, I found that many workers preferred to identify their subcontractors as their employer. When asked further, they replied that their subcontractor not only helped them come to Dhaka and get a job but was socially connected to them. They thought that the term “employer” should be quite broad and founded in reciprocity. Therefore, for them the term “employer” referred to a person who extended support both in Dhaka and in the village where their family members were living.

One worker commented:

I will say my subcontractor is my employer, because he has brought me here and he pays my wages. He often visits my village [and my family members]. We are from the same village and my uncles and other relatives are his relatives too.

A subcontractor recruited this worker, and he therefore prefers to identify his subcontractor as his employer. This is because of the subcontractor’s role in the recruitment process, payment of wages and the socially constructed relationship he shares with him. The detailed exploration of the common perceptions of the workers in Dhaka revealed that the workers perceived their subcontractor as employer because of his central role in the workers’ working life and personal life. The workers were highly dependent on their subcontractor in all respects.

Recruiters in upward career mobility

Interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters revealed that the workers had strong aspirations and confidence in regard to their upward career mobility. Working with the recruiters onsite, they believed that they would be able to acquire on-the-job skills and get promotion in the near future. Much of their confidence was actually supported by their lived experience and personal real-world observation.

One worker reported:

Here I have seen people move upward, and I believe that I will be able, too. I am confident that if I continue doing this job for another five years, I will be able to prosper more. Here everything increases and nothing decreases ... It is quite common that people started as a novice worker and got promoted by acquiring skills. This way they became a foreman.

The worker's personal belief on upward career mobility was developed by observing many other people around him. He considered becoming a foreman as a major development in his career. This is because foremen in Dhaka's construction projects are generally seen to be wealthier and more powerful than the general workers. Having the ability and power to manage and control a group of workers, a foreman is considered to be a lucrative position that the workers aspire to. The workers in Dhaka are quite aware of the process of getting a promotion to become a foreman. Their daily experience and personal observation help them believe that they are correctly placed to achieve necessary promotions.

When asked about upward career mobility, the workers frequently referred to a phrase "my foreman once was a worker like me" or "my subcontractor once was a worker like me." I realised that they were matching their personal expectations and career aspirations to their superiors' experience. As a result, when asked about the opportunities for career mobility, they instantly referred to what they had already seen. Seeing daily activities performed by a foreman or a subcontractor onsite, the workers aspired to these positions to earn more and have more power. Thus they viewed the life history of their foreman or subcontractor as an exemplary success and believed that a similar thing could happen to them.

One apprentice worker reported:

Our foreman once was a helper like me. Then he became a mason. He has been appointed as foreman now because he was a good mason earlier. One day he may become a subcontractor. I believe that it is possible to move upward. I do not bother what other workers think ... My wage will increase when I will become a mason from being a helper. I am just waiting for that opportunity.

When the workers were referring to their career aspirations, I noted that they were optimistic and prepared to take over more responsibilities and thus progress their career up to a subcontractor position. This is because they were aware that becoming a foreman or subcontractor would require them to perform a wider range of tasks than the workers usually do. They also referred to the capacity of retaining a large group of workers as an important career attribute.

As one worker explained:

I have joined this project as an experienced worker. I may get some extra responsibilities [as a foreman] if I move just one step upward. Thus I might

move upward gradually. Someday an opportunity might arise to become a subcontractor for a project. I understand fitting jobs well, and after having some money I might contract a project where I should be asked to accomplish the project by employing some workers. Similar things happen quite often in the sector. It is very common that a helper eventually becomes a subcontractor. Without working as a helper, no one has become a subcontractor. I do not think that is possible ... Our subcontractor in this project was once a foreman, and now he works as an independent subcontractor in another project too. At least 100 workers now work in his team. My future plan is to become a subcontractor. Then I will try to make a team of workers and employ them ... I have personally seen many people progressing fast; why shouldn't I? One day the opportunity will arise for me. I have to wait for that.

Although the workers aspired to become a subcontractor, as evident from the above quote, they were concerned about the additional responsibilities and daily hassles associated with the subcontractor position. Explaining the pressures of a subcontractor, they reported that career mobility up to the subcontractor position incurs many risks. Thus becoming a subcontractor will require them to deal with a range of daily issues in relation to onsite labour management.

One worker stated:

I am very hopeful, and I believe that this job provides opportunities for occupational mobility. Many people like my uncle, who was a poor herdsman in a farmer's house, came to Dhaka and learned masonry work. At present, he is a subcontractor. He is a millionaire now ... Now he rides a motorcycle. He just pops in to see the progress of tasks assigned to the workers and pay their wages ... I understand that his life is not hassle-free either. He has the responsibility to pay wages, take care of any sick or injured workers and find out if someone is lost in the city. To say, if I am lost, certainly he will be under pressure. My family members will pressure him by saying, "he was working with you. You should know about his whereabouts well. You must trace him."

In spite of knowing the pressures associated with the subcontractor position, the workers in Dhaka's construction projects reported that they wanted to become a subcontractor not only for the sake of better income and more power but also for the advantage of earning money without working with their own hands. Since construction is a physically demanding job, the workers reported that they wanted a life where they would not be required to work so hard. Therefore they perceived that becoming a subcontractor would allow them to earn money without doing such a hard job.

One worker reported:

For the construction workers, career mobility means becoming a subcontractor. It means I will not work using my own hands. I will just recruit

some people from my own networks, and they will work for me. It gives an opportunity to earn without working hard.

Becoming a subcontractor was, in fact, a common aspiration among the migrant workers. Although they referred to their personal observation and real examples, they indicated that the process of achieving upward career mobility was not always very straightforward. In the absence of any official skill assessment system, such opportunities were largely influenced by the workers' personal relationships with their superiors and recruiters. In most cases, the recruiters' discretionary choice gave the workers suitable opportunities to move upward.

As the worker continued:

Promotions depend on acquiring skills. Moreover, if superior workmates [or trainers] are your own relatives, that could be very helpful. Therefore, even if the trainers are unknown, the learners should consider them close relatives. This is like a teacher-student relationship. A helper must obey the mason and follow his instructions. Then the mason might think, "this helper is good. If I can make him skilled, he will remember me forever." Actually it does not take too long.

In addition to skills, an apprentice worker's personal relationship with his trainer could be an important factor to get promotions. Thus the opportunities for upward career mobility could be influenced by simple factors such as a mason's interest in making someone a mason. The trainers could offer opportunities to the apprentice workers, thinking that the latter would remember them for the rest of their life. This way the trainers' aspirations for getting gratitude could lead to the prospects for workers' promotions. In addition to this, some workers believed that a heaven-sent opportunity could be the only way to move their career upward. They believed that an appropriately generous offer could make a big change in their career by helping them become a subcontractor. They reported this kind of offer might come anytime.

As one worker stated:

While working here, one day a contractor may come to me and approach me by saying, "I can see that you are very skilled in this job and you deliver a good performance. I want you to become a subcontractor for one of my projects." If such opportunity comes to me, I will be able to subcontract the project and I think I am now capable enough to accomplish a project as a subcontractor. Working in that project, my contacts will increase, and thus I may get another project to subcontract.

This worker perceived career mobility as an opportunity to become an independent subcontractor, which he saw happening every now and then around him. Seeing others going through similar opportunities, he also believed that

this kind of opportunity might come to him anytime. I asked the recruiters to reconfirm this fact, and they reported that similar opportunities came to them, and thus they became a foreman and then a subcontractor. However, as they explained, there were several other factors linked to the opportunities.

One recruiter explained:

Every worker cannot become a foreman. It depends on opportunities. Ultimately the subcontractor will give that opportunity. You have to have a really good relationship with the subcontractor. You have to prove to him that you perform sincerely. Experience does not matter. It is only hard work that he likes. Workers have to consider working hard in order to enable the subcontractor to earn a profit.

This recruiter noted that dependence on the subcontractor would be the only option to receive a job promotion that the workers aspire to. Possibilities for such opportunity could be shaped by several factors such as the personal relationship with the subcontractor and the ability to work hard and perform extraordinarily. A subcontractor offers opportunities to those workers who are perceived to have these qualifications. In fact, the subcontractors in Dhaka choose only those workers for a job promotion who have the abilities to show outstanding performance for the timely completion of assigned tasks so that they can earn a profit.

Recruiters in offering personal support

The recruiters, or subcontractors, had a central role in terms of not only hunting for jobs and offering upward career mobility for the workers but also offering personal support to the workers. The interviews revealed that the recruiters had an extensive role in looking after the personal matters of the workers in Dhaka and their family members in their village. They extended personal support to help prevent the workers from worrying at their worksite. They offered financial assistance, purchased over-the-counter medicines and protected the workers from police arrest and outside chaos. This support was mainly intended to stop the workers and their family members from worrying in order to get maximum output from the workers. However, due to the social connections between the recruiters and the workers, the latter appreciated such support.

Financial assistance

The workers in Dhaka's construction projects reported that their recruiters offered financial assistance not only when they needed it but also when their family members needed it. Whenever the workers or their family members received some advance money, either the full or a part of the amount they needed, they considered this an important favour from their recruiters.

As one worker explained:

When my parents have financial hardships, I ask for his favour to get some money. Then he informs the contractor about that. If he has some money with him at that time, he will give that to me to send to my parents. He will adjust my *Khoraki*, or I will repay the money when I get payment of my due wages.

This statement makes it sound as though the recruiter lent money to help the worker; however, he actually paid the worker's due wages, when the worker needed money urgently, before the stipulated pay day. Other workers in Dhaka's construction projects frequently reported similar circumstances. They viewed this as a generous help, being part of the recruiters' responsibilities to look after the interests of the workers' family members in their village. Even if the recruiters were not able to help with the full amount requested, the workers considered the positive attitude of their recruiter as a great favour to them.

As one worker stated:

If I tell him that my family is struggling and I will need some money urgently, he will try his best to solve that by giving at least half of the requested amount. He will say, "please keep this amount. I do not have enough money to give you the full amount at this moment." I will understand that.

It was considered by the workers that this immediate financial support was part of the personal care that their recruiters offered to them.

Caregiving

In addition to urgent financial assistance, another important support that the workers commonly mentioned was the recruiters' caregiving during their sickness. In particular, workers who worked and lived onsite with their recruiters frequently mentioned their recruiters' caregiving as integral to their employment relationship. Migrating and living without close family members in Dhaka, the workers perceived themselves as helpless during sickness. Their recruiters offered a range of caregiving tasks such as body massage, special diet, over-the-counter medicines and a leave of absence.

As the worker continued:

When I am sick [because of body aches], he massages my hands and feet. Even if I wish to eat something special during that time, he brings that for me. He takes me to a doctor or hospital if needed, although he adjusts the expenses later from my due wages.

From this statement, it seems that the worker got personal care from his recruiter when he was unwell. This quote can be critically linked to another

worker's statement above in the section on upward career mobility where he indicated that he and the recruiter shared the same region of origin, and therefore the former was under social pressure if he became affected by any unintended circumstances. The village-based social bonding between the workers and their recruiters was an important factor that could make the recruiters responsible for the physical well-being of the workers they recruited. The recruiters in Dhaka were aware of the potential social pressures they might face in case of any negligence to the workers.

As one recruiter stated:

In case of sickness, I take care of them. Otherwise, if the worker's family members know that I am not attending them well that will defame my image in the village.

While the family members of both the recruiters and the workers were in the village, they were mutually acquainted. The recruiters' social position and prestige in the village could be affected in case of any negligence to the workers they had recruited and brought to Dhaka. The village-based social relationship therefore made the recruiters compassionate to the workers in case of sickness. The section on the same-locality effects will discuss in detail similar issues in regard to the effects of the same locality on the employment relationship.

Nevertheless, although the workers were generally very appreciative of the caregiving support they received from their recruiters, informal discussions with the recruiters revealed an important dimension behind this. The recruiters explained that their projects had specific completion timelines, and therefore they had to work through strict time pressures. The workers' sickness could severely affect the progress of their projects. In order to get the maximum labour turnout and thus meet the deadlines, they helped the workers recover quickly. All their caregiving tasks were related to this intention. To aid the workers' speedy recovery, the recruiters purchased over-the-counter medicines for the unwell workers based on their own discretion. In many cases, the recruiters themselves determined the level of injury and the nature of treatment required, as if they were medical doctors.

One worker said:

In case of an injury, he [the subcontractor] takes care of me. This is because I work under his supervision and he must look after me. If I have an injury or severe pain, he brings syrups and tablets and I take them. If the pain is serious, he will allow me to rest for a day or two. If I get well by then, I will work. However, if I am not able to continue due to severe illness, he will send me home.

While in this case the recruiter supplied medicines, his lack of expertise in deciding and getting a medicine, from the nearby pharmacy, could pose greater health risks to the worker. Informal discussions with the recruiter revealed that he

usually purchased strong antibiotics for the workers. In spite of potential health risks, the worker viewed his recruiter's medicines as showing great care; however, I found that the costs of medicines were adjusted from the worker's due wages.

As the worker continued:

He buys medicines for us and adjusts that later from our due wages. Sometimes I buy medicines myself after taking advance money from him. He adjusts that money by cutting my wage later.

While the workers had no idea about what type of medicines they were given and how much they cost, a wage cut was common on the grounds of purchasing medicines during an illness. In addition to that, there was no paid sick leave.

One worker told me:

During sickness such as flu for two to three days, I have to pay for the medicines I will be taking. I will not be paid at all for those days. I have to help myself at that time.

Although there was no sick leave in Dhaka's construction projects, the recruiters occasionally practised forced unpaid leave due to sickness. They insisted that sick workers should leave Dhaka. The workers who did not leave in spite of sickness had the challenge of curing themselves within a certain period of time; otherwise if they continued to be ill they were not allowed to stay onsite anymore.

One worker explained:

I have been feeling ill since yesterday. I have got flu. I am taking rest now. I took the medicines that he [the recruiter] gave me. If I fail to recover in the next three to four days, he will ask me to go back home. I am staying here in spite of the illness because I have no other option as a poor worker. If someone is ill for a long period, he will ask them to leave the project and go home. Being ill, it is not possible to bear daily meal costs as I do not receive wages during illness. Therefore, we are forced to go home in such situation.

From this quote it can be seen that the migrant workers are under double pressure when they are unwell. On the one hand, the sick workers take on time pressures to recover from their illness and pay for the medicines. On the other hand, recruiters do not pay the workers on account of their illness. Thus the workers are forced to leave Dhaka as they are unable to bear the costs of their daily meals. Any kind of sickness therefore increases the precariousness of the migrant workers in Dhaka's construction projects. In the absence of a paid sick leave, their physical illness increases not only their financial pressures but also job uncertainties.

Protection from harassment

In addition to the financial and medical support, the recruiters in Dhaka offered support to protect the workers from chaos and harassment in the city. The workers coming from villages generally viewed their surrounding urban environment as unsafe and chaotic. As a result, they wanted to keep themselves protected by their recruiters in order to avoid an unexpected situation outside their projects. Interviews with the workers and their recruiters revealed that, in some cases, the recruiters had to intervene in resolving the chaotic situations the workers experienced in the city. In serious cases such as police arrest, the intervention from their builder and contractor was necessary; however, in those cases, the main point of contact was a subcontractor who later involved the builder or contractor.

A worker gave an example:

If in any case the police arrest us, he [the subcontractor] will free us. This is his responsibility. This happens frequently. Police arrest us so frequently ... I have had a beard since my adolescence. Once police arrested me suspecting that I was an Islamic extremist. I was taken to the police station. He went to the station and freed me ... In case of a major incident such as police arrest, the subcontractor contacts the contractor first and then he contacts the local police station. If any bribe is needed, he pays that ... The bribes are not adjusted from us because we are arrested while working for him, not for ourselves.

Clearly, migrant construction workers in Dhaka are vulnerable to police arrest on account of alleged suspicious activities. Interviews revealed that when they were arrested, they usually rang and contacted their team leader and colleagues. If their team leader and subcontractor both were away, they themselves tackled the situations keeping constant contact, over the phone, with their subcontractor.

One worker told me:

The other day we four workers went to the bazaar to buy some groceries in the evening ... In that bazaar, there are some troublemakers who liaise with the police to target innocent shoppers to harass and arrest. After giving bribes, they can be freed. The troublemakers grabbed one of us and dishonestly accused him of stealing their mobile phones. He denied that and argued ... Then the police arrested him. The police were not willing to release him ... The police were saying that he would be sent to jail shortly. We were trying to negotiate with the police. Everyone was saying that we should pay 1,000 Taka as a bribe to the police and thus he could be freed. At that moment, we did not have that amount of money with us. Concealing all the money that I had with me, I just kept 350 Taka in my wallet and showed that to the police. We begged

the police for mercy. At last, at midnight we managed to release him for 300 Taka.

The workers reported that any kind of unintended circumstances they faced outside their project usually required their subcontractor's intervention. The majority of the workers reported that their subcontractor's intervention, including the money to be paid as a bribe, was guaranteed in case of any chaotic situations outside the project boundary.

A worker confirmed:

In the case of police harassment, he helps us to get released ... The police arrested me the other day. After showing his visiting card and mobile phone number to the police, I rang him to establish a conversation between the police and him. He arrived and released me from police custody. He has a very good relationship with the police and other armed forces. If the police demand a bribe, he pays that on our behalf. He does not cut that money from our salary. This is because we work for him and we do not have any control over such incidents.

The worker proudly outlined his recruiter's intervention in the case of police harassment, as the above quote suggests. He believed that his subcontractor had good contacts to protect the workers in Dhaka. The common perception of the workers in regard to their recruiters' capacity to protect them was backed by the recruiters' commitment to them. The interviews with the recruiters suggested that they morally and socially felt obligated to look after the workers in critical situations. They believed that their failure to protect the workers in the city might lower their image in the village and thus put them under social pressures.

One recruiter explained:

For example, one worker has gone out into the city, and the police have arrested him. In that situation, he will ring me and ask my favour. If needed, I will go to rescue him from the police or send some money through mobile transfer to pay the police bribe. I will need to manage all these because I have brought them from their village. All risks are mine. Their life is in my hands.

Clearly, the recruiter was prepared to give bribes to the police in order to free the workers that he recruited and managed. Because of his village-based social relationships with the workers, he was concerned to keep his personal goodwill and status back in the village where the workers also originated from. Given the widespread effects of this relationship, it is important to look into how the same locality, shared by the workers and their recruiters, influences the employment relationships in Dhaka's construction projects. The sections below discuss this dimension in detail.

Recruiters and the same-locality effects

The employment relationship found in the construction projects revealed reciprocity among the recruiters and the workers. Their mutual interdependence contributed to their employment relationship by enabling them to look after each other's interests. The reciprocal relationship was based on trust and loyalty, whereby the recruiters trusted the workers and the workers were loyal to their recruiters. Moreover, the sense of obligation surrounding the relationship made the recruiters duty-bound to pay the workers on time while the workers offered their maximum productivity to please their recruiters. In this context, the employment relationship is significantly attributed to social connections among the recruiters and workers who often share the same original locality.

Risks of non-payment

Interviews with the workers and their recruiters revealed that the most significant consideration in the same locality-based employment relationship was the payment of wages. Among many other factors, the workers viewed the same-locality effects as a highly influencing factor for the timely payment of their wages.

One worker stated:

There are many advantages to coming from the same locality. Since he [the recruiter] is from the same village as me, I will never need to worry about my due wages. In any way [fearing his own prestige], he will pay my dues. On the contrary, if I work with someone unknown, I may need to fight for my due wages and eventually I may need to leave the money at the end.

The migrant construction workers' concern about wage payment was linked to the origin of the recruiters they worked for. They believed that the recruiters from the same locality would not deceive them in terms of wages. The social ties they commonly shared in their local areas supported their belief. The recruiters also had similar views suggesting that their social bonding with the workers pressurised them to be meticulous in terms of paying wage.

One recruiter outlined:

It is beneficial to have workers from my own locality. The recruiters from the same locality will have some kind of sympathy ... If in any case I do not pay due wages on time, it is easy to pressurise me from the village. Therefore, recruiters from the same locality cannot deceive the workers under any circumstances.

Clearly, this suggests social pressures on the recruiters that make them socially accountable to other people outside the workplace, including their family members, neighbours and kin in their village. The recruiters in Dhaka were

aware of the strength of the social bonding that could enable the workers to force them to pay their due wages. Considering the social accountability, they therefore dealt with payment matters with empathy.

Personal safety and protection

Interviews revealed that the same-locality effects also impacted on the workers' moral strength and their feelings about personal safety. The workers believed that the recruiters from the same locality were more caring for their personal safety. Their mutually shared social bonding allowed them to believe that they would never need to confront any physical assault in the presence of their recruiter.

As one worker reported:

In the case of people coming from another locality, they will not even protest if anyone hits me in front of them. On the other hand, here my uncle [the recruiter] will never allow anyone to hit me even if he himself is attacked.

When asked further about the rationale of similar confidence, as the above quote suggests, other workers reported that the same-locality effects helped minimise the potential chances of misunderstanding in the workplace. As a result, they thought they were able to work in a friendly relationship with their recruiters, which would not be possible if recruiters were from other localities.

One worker explained this:

If the recruiter is from the same region as my origin, there are some advantages. This is like a friendly relationship. Friends are always different from other people. There is no chance of misunderstanding [even in case of serious issues] in our workplace.

The friendly relationship between the workers and their recruiters was embedded in the peace of mind that came from both sides. From the workers' side, they offered maximum commitment and obedience for the financial support and flexibility they received from their recruiters. On the other hand, the recruiters were assured of the workers' identity in their locality and thus offered exceptional support to them.

One worker reported:

If I need and want some extra money, he will certainly help me. This is because he knows very well that his money will not be forfeited, as I am not going to escape from him ... For example, earlier I told him that I would like to go to visit my family. He instantly gave permission. I was allowed to visit my family, and I stayed three days in my village ... It is

always good for a worker if the subcontractor is from his known contacts and the same locality. It gives mental strength.

In addition to the mental comfort in the workplace, another important dimension related to the workers' feelings about their personal safety and protection was familiarity in the city. The workers believed that working with the recruiters from the same locality allowed them to be familiar with the areas near project locations. Quick familiarity offered them some advantages such as shopping on credit.

For example:

He [the recruiter] has been working here for a long time. With his reference, I can shop at local grocery shops on credit. In case of any problem [I make here], he will be made liable. If anything happens, he will take responsibility. If I do not pay the shop's dues, he must pay on my behalf. He has already introduced me to the shop owner.

The workers reported that this kind of support was available only when the recruiters and the workers were from the same locality. They could not think of getting such benefits if someone from another locality recruited them.

Loyalty of workers

The notion of loyalty usually involves a desire to remain with an employer and feelings of attachment to him (Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). Although the workers in Dhaka frequently reported that their recruiter's reference helped them become familiar with the city, I discovered that their familiarity in the city contributed to a challenge to their loyalty. In many cases, an extended network in the city helped the workers come in contact with outsiders and unknown people, including an unfamiliar recruiter. As a result, they were eventually offered the chance to switch to other projects with better wages. However, the workers' strong loyalty often prevented them from moving to other recruiters.

One worker explained:

When I work for him, I get familiarity in the city and thus I am able to switch to another recruiter. Some recruiters often come to us and offer better wages [up to 25 percent more than my current wage]. They attract us. However, we do not wish to move to them because it is our present subcontractor who has trained us. We once were laymen. He brought us from our village and made us skilled.

It is evident from the above quote that the sense of loyalty among the migrant construction workers in Dhaka can be very strong. Although they migrate from their village to earn better, they reject better offers from the recruiters

from other localities. The relationship with their existing recruiters can be marked by a high level of loyalty, allowing them to continue even though their wage is less than that are offered by outsiders.

Recruiters and their costs

Most of the construction workers expressed positive views supporting the indirect recruitment practices that enabled them to migrate and work in Dhaka, as discussed above. Despite this, some workers were concerned with the multiple layers of individuals and their costs in the traditional practices of indirect employment. They pointed out wage cuts and underpayment as the key problems of the multi-layered employment practices that deprived them from a fair wage in Dhaka's construction projects.

For example:

The building company does not recruit us directly. If they had done so, we would have received a fair wage. I personally went to the building company and asked them why they were not interested in recruiting us directly and why they were recruiting us through subcontractors. They replied, "look, you are a worker. There is no guarantee that you will turn up tomorrow. Any time you may request a leave of absence. We subcontract the projects to the subcontractors and they are the best people to manage workers like you efficiently. Thus the projects can be completed quickly and on time. If we recruit you directly, we will incur a financial loss." I don't agree on this point. Direct recruitment will actually require the builders to pay a fair wage; that's understandable.

In this example, the worker personally went to see the private building company executives with a hope of getting a position that was directly recruited and managed by the company. He believed that he was underpaid because of indirect recruitment. His conversation with the building company executives confirmed that the companies in Dhaka were not interested in recruiting construction workers directly because they considered a subcontractor as the right person to manage workers onsite on their behalf and ensure the timely completion of a project. He also believed that the practice of labour recruitment and management through individual subcontractors actually deprived him of a fair wage, to ensure greater financial gains of the building companies.

As he continued:

We are actually sold many times. The building company sells us to the subcontractor; he then sells us to the foreman, and the foreman makes a profit by underpaying us. The wage reaches us after cutting in a few tiers. They trade us in various tiers. For example, 700 Taka daily wage [as per the current market rate] becomes 400 Taka in our case. The tiers are the result of the building company's own interests ... If the building

companies had recruited workers directly, the workers would have been interested to work even if the wage rate was lower than the market rate. For instance, [after direct recruitment] if they wish to pay 600 Taka that will still not be too bad compared to 700 Taka market rate. But now although the building company originally disburses our wage at 700 Taka rate, it reaches us as 300 Taka. It is the subcontractor who is getting benefits out of this practice.

This worker provides important evidence explaining how indirect recruitment through individual recruiters such as subcontractors operationalises wage cuts in several layers. He personally described the practice of indirect recruitment as labour trading in several layers. Much of his frustration was related to his depressed wage. He personally aspired to be a directly recruited worker, and for that he was prepared to accept a slightly lower wage rate than the market rate.

The workers' narratives revealed that their recruitment followed a layered recruitment practice that marked many scopes of exploitation such as wage cuts. I was convinced that the workers' perspectives on employment relationships were narrow. They considered their relations to the recruiters in terms of wage payment only. Many of them believed that working hard in poor work conditions was traditionally embedded in their life, and hence they were more cornered about their payment than the workplace conditions. The workers' key concern was in relation to who would be recruiting them and who would pay their wages. Due to the nature of recruitment practices, in some cases it was very difficult for the workers to reach the responsible person to seek redress in the event of non-payment.

One female worker explained:

Earlier I worked somewhere for three days, but the hirer did not pay my wages for one day. Now he is advising me to see the contractor and get my wages from him. Today I saw him on the street corner. He was hiring another female worker today. He did the same thing [non-payment] to many female workers like me. One lady was saying that she had a similar experience, and she went to chase him at his home but could not find him at home. Earlier one mason paid my wage partially. I informed the project owner about that, but he refused to pay me as he did not hire me ... I felt helpless and left without my dues.

This comment suggests that the migrant construction workers hired off street corners often experience non-payment of their wages. Due to the nature of the verbal contract and the high flexibility of employment relationships, the female construction workers are unable to recover their dues. The prevalent structures of the employment relationships in Dhaka's construction projects actually favour the hirers or recruiters while intensifying the female workers' economic risks. In this context, gender relations are important. Since the recruiters in

Dhaka are predominantly male, the female workers tend to think that they are unable to chase and win over their male recruiters. This belief is rooted in local cultural traditions where the males are seen to be more dynamic and powerful than the females (Ahsan, 1997; Choudhury, 2013).

The recruitment practices revealed that the project builders and owners never felt obligated to the workers. This is because they do not recruit the labourers themselves. The layered recruitment practices allowed them to distance themselves from labour-related issues while also keeping separate from any complaints from the workers. The individual recruiters situated between the workers and the builders were therefore able to exploit the workers through their own discretionary practices that the builders or owners might not be aware of.

As one female worker explained:

In some cases, cutting our wages the hirers keep a portion to themselves. The owner of the project will pay them 300 Taka, but they will pay us 250 Taka. Thus they will cut 50 Taka from our wage. If it is a subcontracted task, a subcontractor hires us. If it is an owner's project, the owner may ask someone to hire a female worker. In that case, the owner will originally pay him 400 Taka to pass on to me but he will keep 100 Taka from that. This way he will earn 200 Taka just by hiring two female workers like me ... In some cases, the hirers will instruct us not to tell the owner the actual wage he is paying us. For example, if the owner reimburses 350 Taka for each female worker, he may pay us 300 Taka and ask us not to reveal the real amount we are receiving. Thus he instructs us to tell the owner that we are receiving the same amount the owner reimburses ... If we tell the owner the real amount, he may pressurise the hirer and eventually dismiss him. Thus both the hirer and we may lose our employment ... This is so common for us ... Arguing does not look good. I do not want to upset the hirer. I want to continue my job for the promised days, and therefore I do not protest cutting my wage as he does always. Everyone makes profit out of a female worker's wage. In this world, no one is honest actually.

This shows the wage exploitation that the female workers experience. It is crucial evidence on how the female workers' wage is cut and underpaid through multi-layered recruitment. As the female worker explained, the hirers cut wages and pay less than the project owner originally reimbursed. Wage cuts, particularly in the case of the workers hired off street corners, were common in Dhaka's construction projects. The workers, both male and female, reported that they were well-aware of the wage cuts, but they regarded this as normal, fearing that any complaints might cause them to lose their job and discontinuation of their recruiter. Being financially stressed, the workers really wanted to continue their job despite their depressed wage. Taking advantage of the workers' fear of losing jobs, the recruiters were able to make a profit.

One recruiter justified this:

When I need some [female] workers, I can ask a *Sardar* to supply a group. He then brings labourers for me. The advantage of using *Sardar* is to ensure that workers will be continuing their job and not leave me until the entire assignment finishes ... He will tell me beforehand about how many workers he will be giving me and how much they should be paid ... Thus I pay 340 Taka for each worker but the *Sardar* cuts 10 Taka and thus pays 330 Taka. He tells the workers that he manages and endures pressures from the subcontractor and organises equipment and tools for the workers. This way the workers accept such wage cuts because their *Sardar* guarantees to get a job continuously for some days ... The workers are aware of this. They see this happening in front of them and accept this, believing that he deserves the cut as he manages countless workplace pressures and chaos. Thus a *Sardar* earns a large amount of money if he manages 50 labourers. This is his profit.

The justification provided by the subcontractor suggests that he engages another person, locally known as *Sardar*, to supply a group of labourers for the tasks he subcontracts in Dhaka. The subcontractor in the above quote unveils how the individual hirers earn a profit by cutting and underpaying the female workers' wages. When following up this issue with the workers, they reported that they accepted the wage cuts believing that their *Sardar* was working hard to find jobs for them and manage pressures at their worksites. In addition to wage cuts, another issue I was told about by the subcontractor was irregular or non-payment of wages. In some cases, the individual hirers did not pay the workers in spite of receiving payment from the subcontractor. The discretionary payment practices followed by the *Sardars* led to irregular and non-payment of wage, particularly for the female workers hired off street corners.

As he continued:

There are some *Sardars* who do not pay the workers regularly in spite of receiving regular payments from the subcontractor. They lie to the workers that their subcontractor did not reimburse them yet. Sometimes, the subcontractor reimburses two days' due wages together but the *Sardar* pays one day's wage and lies that the subcontractor did not reimburse another day's wage yet. Moreover, sometimes the *Sardars* go to visit their village and do not return to Dhaka. They may stay in their village and not return anymore. As a result, the workers lose their due wages. This is how the *Sardars* deceive the workers ... If the workers complain to me that the *Sardar* did not pay them, I will not take that responsibility. This is because I did not recruit them. It is the *Sardar* who recruited them for me, and hence I should not bother with the complaint.

This clearly shows the wage deception that occurs. As the subcontractor outlines, the *Sardars* in Dhaka deceive the workers by paying them irregularly. They not only cut the wages but keep the workers' wages unpaid in spite

of receiving payments from their subcontractor. Moreover, sometimes they deceive the workers by going out of reach. As a result, the workers' due wages remain unpaid when their *Sardars* lie to them and leave the city. Because of indirect recruitment through an additional layer, the subcontractor, as quoted above, did not bother to find out if the *Sardar* was actually paying the workers or not. In case of any incidents of wage deception, he was unwilling to take any responsibility arguing that a *Sardar* recruited the workers and therefore he (the subcontractor) should not be responsible.

In spite of a wide range of malpractices, indirect recruitment was the norm in Dhaka's construction projects. During fieldwork, I had the chance to speak to a few builders, project owners and building companies. They reported that they were totally reluctant to recruit and manage workers onsite. They thought that labour management issues were too complex and cumbersome to be dealt with. Therefore, they supported indirect recruitment while mentioning that it helped them get the maximum labour output and complete projects taking into account intense time pressures. From the discussions, it appeared that subcontracting and indirect management of migrant labourers were so embedded in Dhaka's construction projects that every layer involved in subcontracting had a profit-making intention. From top to bottom of the subcontracting process, workers' wages were cut at every layer and the actual wage they received was severely affected by this process.

One recruiter explained this:

For example, the contractor told me that he was contracting this project [from the building company] at 200 Taka per feet rate. But perhaps he is actually contracting at 180 Taka rate. This way he will earn 20 Taka per feet and thus he will earn a large amount of money just by subcontracting one project through me. He will show the building company one rate but pay me [the subcontractor] at another rate ... The building companies do not implement the projects directly because they do not want to endure the hassles related to labour recruitment and labour management. They just implement projects through contractors.

Clearly, practices of profit making through underpaying the workers are fundamental to the structures of subcontracting in Dhaka's construction projects. The builders make their profit through engaging contractors; the contractors again make their profit by underpaying the subcontractors. Being recruited and managed by the subcontractors, the workers are in the bottom layer of the subcontracting process where the structural problem of underpayment affects them the most and they have no way to redress the issue.

Empirical evidence and contextual discussions presented above reveal an all-embracing role of the individual recruiters in mediating the migrant construction workers' employment relationships in Dhaka. The wider social context of the employment relationships makes the workers highly dependent on their recruiters. Providing the migrant workers' own perspectives, the evidence

explains the key roles of their recruiters in shaping individualised labour management practices that create various forms of pressures on the workers. Detailed exploration of the employment relationships and the role of the recruiters and their extended layers now confirms that the structures of recruitment practices lead to various forms of precariousness in Dhaka's construction projects. The next chapter will build on and discuss this argument in detail.

Notes

- 1 Noakhali is a south-eastern district in Bangladesh.
- 2 Pabna is a north-western district in Bangladesh.

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6 Hyper-individualised employment

In this chapter, I will interpret the research results in order to explain how recruitment practices mediate some specific forms of employment relationships that generate precariousness for the migrant workers in Bangladesh's construction sector. In doing this, I will discuss the relevance of the empirical data in relation to the main theoretical lens of this book, i.e., precarious work. By evaluating the empirical findings, I will explain their theoretical and empirical significance. Thus this chapter will identify new knowledge, in the light of previous knowledge, by examining and benchmarking this book's findings with others.

The field findings presented in previous chapters reveal that indirect recruitment is fundamental to producing poor working conditions in Dhaka's construction projects. For the rural-urban migrant labourers, the prevalent structures of indirect recruitment offer easy access to construction work in Dhaka but create the conditions of precarious work. While construction work in Dhaka offers some incentives to the rural-urban migrant workers, the recruiting individuals play a crucial role in meeting the special requirements of the workers. In fact, the recruitment of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka is a multi-layered process in which multiple individual agents predominate. Extending from selection to management, these individual agents and their extensive layers individualise migrant labour to meet their own interests. Their intermediary role helps modify labour recruitment and management practices according to various circumstances tied to construction site management. Their distinctive practices reveal a unique model of employment relationship that represents the dominance of individual agents in the recruitment and management of migrant construction workers. This book conceptualises this unique model of employment relationship as "hyper-individualised employment."

Hyper-individualised employment and the precariat

Hyper-individualised employment shows the oppression and struggles of the migrant construction workers in their workplace. It is a specific form of employment relationship in which the recruiting individuals dominate over

the workers to create pressures and insecurities to force the workers to be highly dependent on them. Making the workers individually subordinate to their recruiters, it generates a despotic relationship, between the workers and their recruiters, that contributes heavily to precarious work conditions. Despite the national labour policy, labour regulations are not effective in Bangladesh's construction sector (Abrar & Reza, 2014; Reza, 2016). This has also been confirmed by the field findings, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In the absence of any effective official regulations, the recruiters have the ultimate discretion in determining the terms and conditions of employment and labour protection for the workers. Their discretionary authority over the workforce produces varying sources of control and exploitation and results in multiple forms of precariousness including all-time dependence; wage deception; unequal, irregular, underpayment and non-payment of wages; insecure and unstable jobs; occupational stress and risks; and a lack of labour protection. The employment relationship built on these precarious conditions represents subordinated flexibility for the migrant construction workers but low-cost labour for the builders.

The conceptualisation of hyper-individualised employment in this book was originally built on the “employment configuration” developed by Swider (2015a). The employment configuration, as defined by Swider (2015a), is a “specific pathway into employment linked with a specific mechanism that regulates the employment relationship” (p. 8). It allows this book to analyse the dynamics that shape the migrant construction workers' employment relationships and recruiters' individualised practices surrounding those relationships. Moreover, it focuses on how the rural-urban migrant labourers find a job, rather than how they enter the urban economy, and how their working life gets shaped. While the concept of precarious employment represents the growing diversity of employment arrangements in the contemporary world, its use has differed from country to country (Seymour, 2012; Vosko, MacDonald, & Campbell, 2009). Therefore, the original concept of employment configuration described by Swider (2015a), focussing on the construction sector in China, may be inadequate to capture the full dimensions of precarious work in Bangladesh's construction sector where indirect recruitment is standardised, widespread and increasingly exploitative.

As the structures of recruitment and the extensive role of the individuals in labour recruitment and management in Dhaka are revealed through the findings presented in previous chapters, hyper-individualised employment emerges as a key aspect leading to precarious work conditions. Such employment is unique because the number of layers of individuals in labour recruitment and management process is more than that found in traditional outsourcing and subcontracting practices. While contractors or subcontractors have a long history as recruiters in construction across many national contexts, the latest development of outsourcing practices is “secondary subcontracting” that engages additional layer(s) of subcontracting for sub-letting work (Sözen & Küçük, 1999, p. 216). Bangladesh's recruiters heavily dominate recruitment and management of migrant construction workers in Dhaka by mobilising

labour and determining the terms and conditions of employment. Because of their central role in the recruitment and supply of labourers, they are often, though not always, referred to as “subcontractors” as they take contracts from the builders and head contractors. They operate in a multi-tiered contracting system, and their overwhelming dominance in recruitment is embedded in the practices of subcontracting. In fact, several layers of individual recruiters are involved in labour procurement, and their number is more than that we see in the case of outsourcing, subcontracting or secondary subcontracting.

While traditional outsourcing or subcontracting practices in global construction projects generally involve three to four firms or entities preferably between a general contractor and special trade subcontractors (Costantino, Pietroforte, & Hamill, 2001; Fellini, Ferro, & Fullin, 2007), the recruitment of migrant construction workers in Dhaka often involves five or more individual entities including subcontractors, foremen, *Sardars*, masons, workers and their social networks. They operate in multiple combinations. Figure 6.1 shows their hierarchies and involvement in the recruitment process. Although not all projects have all of them, they exist hierarchically and their hierarchical power impacts onsite labour management in construction projects. In the absence of a written contract, they can intervene in overseeing the project progress and pressurise the workers to perform tasks that they discretionarily assign. The structures of recruitment practices, as presented in Chapter 4, reveal that the process of selection, recruitment and management of migrant labourers for construction work is conspicuous by the discretion of the individual recruiters. The discretionary practices and choosing vulnerable people as migrant labourers allow the recruiters to exert control over the workers and utilise them for maximum output. At the same time, in the absence of any state-sponsored formal recruitment opportunities, rural labourers are forced to depend on individual recruiters, and hence it is literally impossible for a rural labourer to find a construction job in the city without being part of the process that the individual recruiters predominantly control.

However, the navigating and intersecting role of the recruiting individuals creates specific conditions for the workers’ high dependence on their recruiters. While the all-time dependence of the workers on their recruiters is a core element of precarious work (Anderson, 2010), it is also fundamental to unfree labour. The nature and extent of the recruiters’ daily activities reveal that they perform three critical roles that substantially conform to the traditions of labour management practices under global capitalism. Firstly, by keeping a flexible labour force, they reduce urban builders’ direct and indirect expenses related to labour (Standing, 1999); secondly, they make the relationship between capital and labour indirect to the advantage of capital (Ball & Connolly, 1987; de Haan & Rogaly, 2002; Firman, 1991; Standing, 2008; Vaid, 1999), and finally they generate their own profit through the power differentials between labour and capital (Standing, 2016). Whilst hyper-individualised employment of migrant construction workers in Dhaka serves the interests of capital by ensuring a flexible labour supply at low costs, it is absolutely central to the

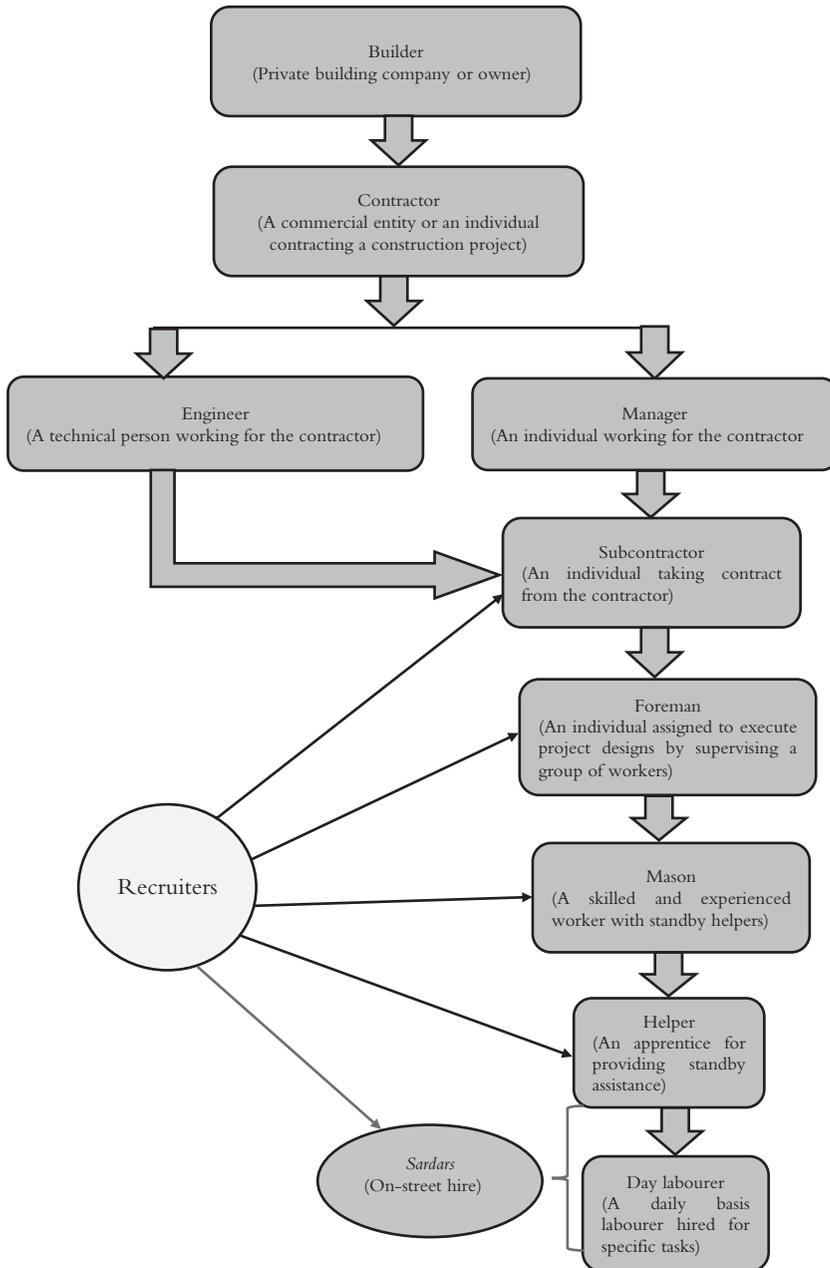


Figure 6.1 Hierarchies and involvement in the recruitment process

precarious forms of employment under global capitalism. The overarching role of the recruiters in this model of employment, and their control over the migrant workers, simplifies the task of minimising labour costs and shrinking the scope for labour protection while passing production risks on to the workers (Standing, 1999, 2016). To shift the risks, their labour management functions produce various forms of pressures and insecurities in the workplace that precariatise the workers. As hyper-individualised employment is fundamental to the production of the precariat, the findings of this book contribute conceptual implications of such a distinctive form of employment to the general debates on how unfree labour, employment relationships and global capitalism are interconnected.

Construction: A 4D job

The migrant construction workers in Dhaka perceive their job as dirty, difficult and dangerous. The workers also consider that the job has a low status. They perceive that their workplace conditions affect their social relations and status. Their perspectives on their work are shaped not only by a wide range of occupational risks and stresses experienced in the workplace but a sense of lack of dignity outside work. The workers believe that the local society perceives their job as dirty and treats them in an unpleasant way; the dignity of the workers is compromised due to this. The lack of social status prevents them from passing their occupation on to the next generation. Moreover, the frequent use of bullying and personally abusive language in the workplace offends the workers and makes them feel intimidated and insulted. Dealing with dirt, dust, debris and abusive language in the workplace, the workers perceive that their work fails to convey human dignity in the society they live in.

Construction in Dhaka is primarily a menial, labour-intensive hard job. The job is difficult not only because of the amount of physical labour it requires but because of the poor working conditions that severely strain the workers. The workers work long hours in a harsh and unhealthy work environment. Their terms of employment include no provision for leave, and therefore they endure excessive stress by working long hours. Working up to 18 hours a day without adequate breaks, they suffer from health and psychological issues. Moreover, construction jobs in Dhaka are dangerous. The jobs involve many risks through serious workplace accidents, including death, and many workers personally experience injuries and see their colleagues die in workplace accidents. They often work on high bamboo scaffolds and ladders, very close to overhead power cables and electric transformers that cause fatal accidents. Most of them do not have PPE to wear, even while working on high scaffolds, operating electric machines and handling hot bituminous materials. Due to severe time pressure for accomplishing the contracted projects, their recruiters prefer speedy performance to their personal safety. However, experiencing injuries and seeing colleagues die in the workplace, the workers feel mentally overwhelmed with a constant phobia of death.

Persistent risks and death anxiety demotivate them to continue in their occupation for the longer term.

A lack of representation and labour protection is widespread in Dhaka's construction projects. Since the terms of employment are predominantly verbal, the workers are unable to access legal protection in case of a disagreement with their recruiters. They do not have a trade union or collective representation opportunity. A large proportion of the workers do not receive regular payment of their wages and overtime. Having a fear of losing their job, they do not seek intervention in spite of a disagreement with their recruiters in this regard. Therefore, the workers continue their work as loyal and non-complaining "good workers". While the lack of representation security is an important element of "the precariat" (Standing, 2011), the employment of Dhaka's migrant construction workers in this context is clearly precarious. The workers' fear of losing their job is justified by the absence of employment security in their employment relationships which do not offer "protection against arbitrary dismissal" (Standing, 2011, p. 10).

The working conditions and the image of construction work in Dhaka represent not only a wide range of occupational risks and stresses experienced in the workplace but a sense of lack of dignity for the workers outside their work. The original contribution of this book therefore helps by adding a new dimension, "disgraceful", to the predominant concept of *3D* jobs. Thus this book extends the concept by presenting the image of construction work in Dhaka as a *4D* job: dirty, difficult, dangerous and disgraceful. In doing this, it argues that the risks, stresses and humiliation are structurally rooted in the poor working conditions determined by the terms of labour recruitment. Identifying indirect recruitment as fundamental to poor working conditions, it also argues that the *4D* job is an essential characteristic of the precariat in Dhaka's construction projects.

In order to examine the working conditions and the image of construction work in Dhaka, this book applies the concept of *3D* jobs adopted from Connell (1993) and the ILO (2001, 2015). Using this concept, it identifies the physical, mental and social costs of doing a construction job in Dhaka as migrant workers. While applying this popular concept to the scope of this book, it is important to understand the role of recruitment in producing *3D* job conditions and thus examine how the *3D* job concept clearly relates to recruitment practices and precarious work conditions with reference to construction work in Dhaka. Also, it necessitates a thorough investigation of how recruitment practices mediate employment relationships to support poor working conditions and thereby the *4D* image of construction work in Dhaka.

In addition to the risks and stresses, the lack of human dignity is an important dimension of the image of construction work for migrant workers. Due to the lack of human dignity outside the workplace, they often feel demotivated to continue their job in the long term. Although they frequently refer to

the dirt, dust and debris as the main reasons to perceive the work as “dirty,” the predominant perspectives on the dignity of work reveal that dirt is not always the essential part of a job being regarded as polluting or dirty. Many types of work commonly involving manual handling of dirt, dust and even blood are not predominantly considered to be dirty. Hodson (2001) identifies four challenges in workplace settings that contribute to the lack of dignity for the workers: mismanagement and abuse, overwork, constraints on autonomy and contradictions of employee involvement. These four challenges may occur both separately and in every possible combination in the workplace. Comparing three occupations such as agricultural labouring, coal mining and abattoir work in the UK, Ackroyd (2007) argues that the predominant social stigma of working with dirt primarily involves polluting working conditions. Despite this, not every type of polluting job is regarded as dirty. Poor working conditions, according to Ackroyd (2007), are the main factors that contribute to the social stigma of dirty jobs. While farm jobs, in the UK, involve regular handling of earth and dirt, the opportunities for skill development, autonomy, secure location and the value of the results of the work help the jobs to be regarded as dignified and not at all polluting.

Examining the findings of this book in the light of the theoretical scholarship developed by Hodson (2001) and Ackroyd (2007), it is clear that the image of construction work perceived by the migrant construction workers in Dhaka is related to the constant physical and mental stress that they experience in their workplace. Intense time pressures to deliver the assigned tasks, long working hours, bullying and personally abusive language, constant anxiety and fear of death are the key reasons for considering construction work in Dhaka as a *4D* (dirty, difficult, dangerous and disgraceful) job. All these working conditions are attributed to the terms of employment that the individual recruiters determine. Indirect recruitment through them is fundamental to these poor working conditions. In Dhaka’s construction projects, the workers do not have fixed or consistent work schedules and thus their recruiters discretionally determine their shifts and working hours according to circumstances. The recruiters are reliant on the builders who create time pressures for ensuring the timely completion of the tasks subcontracted to the recruiters. In order to meet the project completion deadlines, the recruiters create conditions that compel the workers to take on a huge workload and work long hours. As a result, they are required to work without any weekly days off or rest breaks, and they endure intense time pressures to accomplish the assigned tasks for the builders who the recruiters subcontract for. These dimensions of labour management, undertaken by the individual recruiters, reveal that the core essence of indirect recruitment is profit through the reduction of production costs.

The structures of indirect recruitment and particularly the role of individual recruiters in labour management guarantees profit through maximising the performance of the labourers. The involvement of the recruiters reduces the cost of labour for the builders because for them “the advantages are that indirect labour costs are minimal” (Standing, 1999, p. 104). In reducing the

costs of labour for the builders, the recruiters create intense time pressures and repressive working conditions to accomplish the subcontracted tasks on time. They use bullying and personally abusive language to overwork workers which ensures their own profit and thus the builders' profit. However, their reluctance to invest in PPE helps reduce the overall costs of production but increases the risks of injury and death of the labourers. These pressures and risks intensify the job insecurity of workers by not protecting them against "accidents and illness at work, through, for example, safety and health regulations, limits on working time, unsociable hours, night work for women, as well as compensation for mishaps" (Standing, 2011, p. 10). Thus the predominant role of the individual recruiters in labour management guarantees the builders' profit at the cost of stresses and risks that contribute to a *4D* image of construction work in Dhaka and the precariousness of the workers.

The recruiters in Dhaka prefer fast and quality performance from the workers, and therefore they want to minimise the risks of complaints in the workplace. In doing this, they discretionally select and recruit the "special" workers who are committed to be loyal and hardworking and capable enough to perform well, having a good body shape. The recruiters' pursuit of "good workers" and their fast performance and loyalty has traditionally reinforced physical strength and loyalty as the most important attributes that the recruiters in Dhaka's construction projects look for. However, this contributes to multiple forms of pressures onto the workers. The female and adolescent workers are particularly vulnerable to the harsh pressures in their workplace. Although the existing literature in the field of labour migration offers some discussions on the dimensions of precarious work at various settings of global and local workplaces, the employment of female and adolescent migrant labourers has hardly been discussed as an emerging dimension of precarious employment with reference to construction work. This is because most of the literature on the employment quality of female labourers predominantly focuses on job security and contingent employment arrangements. The prominent work of Cranford and Vosko (2006), Standing (2011, 2014) and Vosko (2010) is mainly focussed on labour market inequalities and the job insecurities of the female workers. These studies are located in the discourse on international migration regimes and labour and work legislation, and examine some inner dynamics of working conditions and the employment relationships experienced in the female workers' local workplace. The findings of this book add some new dynamics to them by revealing that Bangladeshi female migrant construction workers experience more stressful working conditions than the male workers.

The social stigma and the perceived image of construction work produce many challenges for the female workers in Dhaka. They experience greater stresses and risks than the male workers at work. They experience various pressures such as the lack of access to a toilet and a dining space, the scarcity of drinking water and the sexually provocative indecent behaviour of their male recruiters and colleagues. In addition, their low skills and the recruiters' restrictions on them bringing their children to the workplace make the construction

jobs hard and undignified for them. The element fundamental to the female construction workers' poor working conditions is indirect recruitment that is predominantly associated with the presence of male recruiters in Dhaka. The recruiters' traditional perceptions and masculine practices contribute to a structure of poor working conditions for female workers. While the female workers perceive their job as "disgraceful" due to these conditions, it is their indirect recruitment, through hiring off street corners, through male recruiters that it can be attributed to. The absence of gender-specific facilities and indecent behaviour from their male recruiters and colleagues compound their pressures, making them insecure at work.

On the other hand, a significant proportion of teenage workers in the world experience precarious work conditions (Burrows, 2013; Cohen, 2013). However, research on their recruitment practices and working conditions in developing countries, with reference to construction work, still remains limited. This is because teenage or adolescent employment has traditionally been perceived to be a positive phenomenon in developed countries. The existing literature on youth employment is mainly focussed on developed economies and explains how adolescent employment helps developing personal and social responsibility and eases the transition from adolescence to adulthood to adapt to labour market challenges in developed countries (Burrows, 2013; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2000; Frone, 1999; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Adolescent employment in developing countries such as Bangladesh is less researched, particularly with reference to rural-urban migration and construction work. Unlike the developed countries where adolescent employment is regularly promoted among high school students, the construction projects in Dhaka represent the presence of many adolescent labourers who originate from poor rural households and relinquish their education upon employment in the city. They work in particularly strenuous conditions that create excessive pressures on their young body and mind. Considering this difference, evidence produced by this book on the working conditions of the adolescent migrant labourers in Dhaka's construction projects adds new knowledge on youth labour and the precariatization of adolescent workers.

Although occupational risks are argued to be integral to precarious employment (Quinlan, Mayhew, & Bohle, 2001; Underhill & Quinlan, 2011), the existing literature on labour and work hardly examines the working conditions of the adolescent migrant labourers through the lens of precarious work. This book fills this important gap by presenting empirical evidence and exploring the significance of adolescent employment as a form of precarious work. It reveals that the adolescent migrant workers are more vulnerable to the stressful working conditions than the adult workers. While the assigned tasks are extremely hard for their young bodies, they accomplish similar workloads of adult workers. Their recruiters often use bullying and personally abusive language to overwork them. Excessive stress due to overwork exhausts them and causes serious health problems. Their long working hours potentially "increase the risk of stress, depression and diabetes; stress leads to social isolation, marital

and sexual problems, and a cycle of despair” (Standing 2011, p.120). Thus the prevalent working conditions in Dhaka’s construction projects reveal high risks of health and physical danger for the adolescent workers in particular. They regard their work as *4D* because of the constant occupational accidents experienced. The predominant practices of indirect recruitment and management through individual recruiters produce stressful working conditions for the adolescent workers but profit for the recruiters and the builders. Being treated as adults, their work-related pressure and stress make them the young precariat.

Making the best of construction

In examining the nexus between construction work and rural-urban migration in Bangladesh, the research results, as presented in Chapter 3, confirm that despite being a *4D* job, construction in Dhaka is the best obtainable job for the labourers migrating from villages. The migrant labourers choose the job over other options because of some perceived benefits offered by the prevalent terms and conditions of employment. They consider the poor working conditions, causing their stress, with less importance. They perceive their low social status, stress and risks tied to the *4D* image of construction work as necessary costs in their quest for better livelihood or income. Their compromise between poor working conditions and better income in the city is facilitated by the terms and conditions of employment in Dhaka’s construction projects.

The scope of the results of this book adds to the dominant neoclassical theories led by Harris and Todaro’s (1970) work that considers rural-urban labour migration as a purely economic phenomenon. Thus the evidence produced by this book confirms the core propositions of the livelihood perspective that the livelihood is more than just income and livelihoods are not only organised individually but within a wide social setting (de Haas, 2010; Ellis, 2000). The magnitude of the research results allows this book to look beyond wage differentials and thus discover how people strategise their movement from rural to urban areas in order to secure, improve or diversify their income through involving various social institutions. Extending beyond the economic rationale of rural-urban migration, the results presented in this book confirm socio-economic contexts of labour migration and how labour recruitment and management practices are subjective to those contexts.

Seasonal migrant labourers are very prevalent in Dhaka’s construction projects. Seasonal unemployment related to the traditionally weather-conditioned and monsoon-based farm jobs in villages is one of the main factors that facilitate their migration to the capital city. Due to inadequate earning in the lean season, generally characterised by rainfall variations and the lull between harvest and the first planting of the following season when the rural people have a very little or no harvest, the rural labourers slip deeper into hardship. Their migration and seasonal employment in the city help them diversify their income and thus enable their households to cope with seasonal financial stresses subject to inadequate income from the farm work. Similar economic

benefits of rural–urban migration have already been confirmed by many studies on seasonal migration in Bangladesh (Afsar, 2000; Kuhn, 2003; Martin et al., 2014). However, measuring from the existing literature in the field of labour migration that has focussed on the seasonal internal migration of labour, the research results presented in this book confirm a unique and contemporary dimension of seasonal migration, adolescent migration. Seasonal financial hardships in Bangladesh’s villages prompt the migration of adolescent labourers to the construction projects in the capital city. The adolescent migrant construction workers embrace physically demanding work to support their households by securing income during seasonal financial hardship. While the existing literature in the field of labour migration predominantly perceives rural–urban labour migration as an “adult” phenomenon, the new knowledge on adolescent migration produced by this book is ground-breaking and shows adolescent labourers’ migration as an endeavour to reduce fluctuations in their household income.

The structures of seasonal employment in Dhaka’s construction projects reveal an important feature of rural–urban labour migration, flexibility to connect to the primary occupation. Construction jobs in Dhaka offer flexibilities to the migrant workers to return to their village and remain connected to their original occupation and some supplementary income activities in villages. In the peak harvest months, they return to their village by abandoning construction work in the city and return to the city again in the lean months. Thus they swap between their village and the city to maximise their income, depending on the seasons. In this context, construction jobs offer them not only employment flexibilities but also an opportunity to work in “dual or multiple labour statuses” (Standing, 1999, p. 103). Focussing on the industrialising economies, Standing (1999) has theorised this as “flexible labour statuses” (p. 103). However, in the Bangladesh context similar issues have not yet been empirically explored with reference to construction work. The results of this book produce original evidence by discovering the flexible labour statuses of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka.

The traditional migration theories, such as the Harris and Todaro model, have postulated this specific form of seasonal migration (switching occupations) as an equilibrating force between expected and actual wages or an adjustment mechanism by which the migrant labourers allocate themselves between different labour markets, some of which are located in urban areas and some in rural areas, as an attempt to maximise their expected incomes (Fields, 1975; Harris & Todaro, 1970). Among others, Connell, Dasgupta, Laishley and Lipton (1976, p. 9) showed this particular pattern of migration as “dependent on the availability of short-term cash-earning opportunities, either in towns or on plantations.” To extend this claim, de Haan (1997) found similar migration patterns elsewhere and explained it using the theoretical concept of “circular migration” that marked an interaction of urban and rural society through the investment of migrant labourers’ income from work outside the village in agricultural production. Also, de Haan (1997) categorically showed the strong

interrelations between employment arrangements and circular migration of the labourers. Therefore, the findings of this book may complement to de Haan's argument by confirming that the flexibilities in employment arrangements and worker-recruiter relationships based on indirect recruitment allow migrant labourers to return to their village when they wish. Mutual understandings between labourers and their recruiters, in relation to economic benefits of returning to the village, normalise the flexibilities and thereby circulatory pattern of rural-urban migration in Dhaka's construction projects.

The results of this book also confirm that due to the wage rate differences the migrant construction workers in Dhaka earn adequate and, in most cases, higher wages than in their village. Their wage differentials reveal that the wage rate of the migrant construction workers in the city is higher than that of the construction workers in the villages. If compared to other rural sectors, the wage rate in Dhaka's construction projects is higher anyway. Moreover, the rate of wage increments in the city is faster than in the villages. Together, higher wage rates and faster wage increments contribute to better incomes for migrant labourers in construction projects. These dimensions of better wage rates and income opportunities in the city are similar to the assumptions of many neoclassical studies, including Fields (1975); Todaro (1969) and Mabogunje (1970). However, this book finds three unique factors contributing to the better income of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka: free onsite accommodation, confined urban life and delayed payment practices. These three components and their interrelations to better income have not yet been adequately researched in the labour migration literature.

Free onsite accommodation in the temporary sheds and under-constructed buildings on Dhaka's construction sites is an important incentive to help the migrant construction workers save money. Regardless of the risks and poor living conditions in these free onsite accommodations, the migrant workers view them as a practical financial benefit largely absent in other competing sectors in the city. However, living in free onsite accommodations actually makes them readily available for "direct control in fixed workplaces," and at the same time the flexibility tied to their all-time availability involves "more work-for-labour; a blurring of workplaces, home places and public places" (Standing, 2011, p. 38). Living onsite, the migrant construction workers have a confined urban life other than a very limited movement and restrictive interactions within the site boundaries. They however view their social isolation as a necessary cost to better savings by refraining themselves from unnecessary spending in the city. The young labourers in particular perceive this as a great advantage to help them save better in the city than in their village, but their urban life in Dhaka represents "isolation and a lack of networking" (Standing, 2011, p. 75), making them the young precariat.

Furthermore, the practices of delayed payment in Dhaka's construction projects reveal a unique contribution of this book. Delayed payment is perceived by the workers to help them save money better. Although the workers' wage is calculated at a daily rate, they are not paid in full every day. The recruiters retain

a large proportion, usually two-thirds or more, of the amount the workers earn daily. Paying a small portion of the daily income as *Khoraki*, the recruiters keep the rest amount noted as “due wages” to pay the cumulative amount later. The delayed payment practices are fundamentally a labour retention strategy favouring the recruiters and the builders. The structural features of payment practices in Dhaka’s construction projects reveal a complex dimension of precarious employment. The payment of workers is reimbursed by the builders through the contractors. The subcontracting individuals are basically dependent on the contractors for paying the workers attached to them and for their own income. The contractors do not reimburse them on a daily basis; rather, they reimburse on the basis of the completion of specific parts of the assigned tasks. The dependence of the subcontracting individuals on the contractors and builders, in terms of payment, passes on to the workers. In this context, delayed and irregular payment practices create conditions of “wage bondage” between the recruiters and the workers. This bondage keeps the workers bonded with their recruiters, who are again bonded with the contractors and builders, for the sake of due wages. The wage bondage therefore precariatizes the workers to allow the builders to retain and control the workers and to coordinate the workers for their own advantage. This kind of bondage and associated delayed payment practices are fundamental to income insecurity, a core characteristic of the precariat, as theorised by Standing (2011, 2016).

For the rural-urban migrant labourers in Bangladesh, cash advances make construction the most accessible job in Dhaka. Considering the structural barriers they face to migrate from villages to the capital city, the easy availability of cash advances facilitates their endeavour to overcome the pre-migration challenges. Taking advance money from the potential recruiters, they clear household debts and meet travel costs to migrate to the city. Similar results in relation to the practice of offering advance money have been found in other parts of the world such as India (Mosse et al., 2002; Mosse, Gupta, & Shah, 2005; Pattenden, 2012; Vaid, 1999) and China (Swider, 2015a, 2015b). However, the huge size and diversity of economies in these geographical settings do not adequately represent internal migration for construction work in Bangladesh. While most of the studies in those countries generalise cash advance with bonded labour, the flexible employment relationships and the social bonding between the workers and their recruiters do not confirm any evidence of debt bondage in Dhaka’s construction projects. Moreover, the practices of offering cash advance in other parts of the world, particularly in India, involve punitive interest rates, which were not found in Dhaka. However, the original evidence produced by this book, for the first time, confirms the practice of offering cash advance in Bangladesh’s construction sector. This practice was not found in earlier studies on this sector including Abrar and Reza (2014), Ahsan (1997), BILS (2007), Chowdhury et al. (2012), Choudhury (2013), Farhana, Rahman and Rahman (2012) and Uddin and Firoj (2013). Therefore, the results of this book in relation to cash advance are unique in terms of not only empirical originality but also significance and contemporariness of the phenomenon.

Precariousness is fundamentally based on the trust relationship between the workers and their recruiters, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, which has epistemological roots in Bangladeshi society, which is quite different from other countries. The cases of debt bondage associated with the practices of cash advance payments to the rural labourers were particularly prevalent in India, a giant country with multicultural population, diverse economy and ethnic diversity of labour, where many migrant construction labourers are disproportionately drawn from the lower castes and tribes having the poorest socio-economic background. In the Indian context debt bondage is historically prevalent through the relations of “rights and obligations between the masters and their dependents ... system of hierarchy and interdependence between castes, while reflecting the very strong concentration of land in the hands of the higher castes” (Marius-Gnanou, 2008, p. 129). The debt bondage situation in the Indian context is therefore linked to social untouchability, and the indigenous, marginal and landless farmers working as seasonal migrant construction workers who are exploited through the advance payment system that involves punitive interest rates and multi-tiered credit system. In sharp contrast, similar caste or tribe relations do not exist in Bangladesh’s construction sector, as the empirical data for this book confirms. The participants for this book reported no case of debt bondage tied to the cash advance they received, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Moreover, the Chinese context of advance money, as Swider (2015b) shows, is different to what this book found:

Contractors agree to pay migrants a set amount of money for one year of work. In addition, contractors pay upfront costs of migration, which will later be subtracted from the worker’s salary. Contractors also provide shelter and food. In some cases, these are “free” and in other cases there is a daily charge subtracted from the salary.

(p. 47)

None of the construction workers interviewed for this book reported receiving a set amount of money for one year of work or so.

Theoretically a bonded labourer is “one who cannot choose freely between alternate employers, and who cannot, in fact, work for any person other than his or her current employer” (Marius-Gnanou, 2008, p. 129). The field findings of this book do not support similar situation in Bangladesh’s construction sector. As reported by the workers and their recruiters, the employment relationships in Dhaka’s construction projects are characterised by high flexibilities for the workers to choose freely between alternate employers.

Moreover, the aspiring construction workers in Bangladesh often had long-established social ties with their recruiters that contributed to a unique employment relationship conditioned by social and cultural factors like trust, empathy, respect and loyalty. The ties had a certain amount of mutual obligation too. The job seeker claimed support from the recruiter not merely as a service provider but more so as a social obligation. Conversely, the recruiter was also implicitly pledge-bound to make job placement not for a mere client but for

a brother, a cousin, a nephew, a neighbour, a friend, an acquaintance and so forth. It is often assumed by the job seeker that their recruiter will act in their interest, not just in the interest of the recruiter, while offering advance money and determining the wages. This is manifested in the comments made by the recruiters and the workers, as discussed in Chapter 4.

However, the cultural aspects of trust relationships surrounding labour migration are often complex to measure as “profit, trust and empathy run hand-in-hand” in such relationships, and distinctions between them are often impossible to sustain in practice (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012, p. 9). Interviews with the migrant construction workers and their recruiters in Dhaka showed a complex cultural reality where recruitment was based on trust, loyalty and respect-oriented social network and kinship relations where profit-making and reciprocity or altruism were difficult to separate. Since rural-urban migration of labour involves many social norms, religious and cultural factors (Rogaly et al., 2001), further research involving the ethnographic investigation of the relationship between them could delve deeper into ethical qualities, social bonds of trust and how these are forged.

The key actors in labour recruitment

The empirical results of this book, as presented in Chapter 4, confirm that rural-urban migration for construction work in Dhaka is intimately connected to indirect recruitment practices which are premised on social networks and relations. For the rural labourers, the prevalent structures of indirect recruitment offer easy access, through their social networks, to construction work in Dhaka. Their experiences of recruitment reveal a range of individuals, located in their social networks and relations, as recruiters. Among them, subcontractors, foremen, *Sardars*, masons, workers themselves and their extensive social networks such as relatives, friends and neighbours are the key individuals who function as recruiters.

Existing literature on internal labour migration and construction employment has generalised similar individuals into three categories. They are merely “middlemen” in collecting and supplying a team of rural labourers, or “subcontractors” in taking responsibility for labour management and accomplishment of subcontracted tasks, or “team leaders” who work onsite with a group of workers attached to them. However, the literature, on the extensive role of these individuals, is predominantly focussed in India (Mathew, 2005; Mosse et al., 2005; Pattenden, 2012; Picherit, 2012; Vaid, 1999), Brazil (Saboia, 1997; Zylberstajn, 1992), China (Suresh, 2010; Swider, 2015a, 2015b; You-Jie & Fox, 2001), Indonesia (Firman, 1991), Kenya (Mitullah & Wachira, 2003), Korea (Yoon & Kang, 2000), Mexico (Connolly, 2001), Nepal (Jha, 2002) and Tanzania (Jason, 2007). Benchmarking with these studies, the results of this book on the characteristics of the individual recruiters may appear to be overlapping and common. The backgrounds and functions of the individual recruiters in Bangladesh may thus appear similar to what has already been found in other countries in relation to the role of middlemen, subcontractors

and team leaders in construction employment. What is unique about the results of this book is the discovery of extensive layers of these individuals, their origin in social networks and relations, and the distinctive role of the migrant workers as labour recruiters.

The potential problem of categorising the individuals, involved in the recruitment of rural labourers for construction work in Dhaka, as “recruiters” is based on the extent of dependence that their role reveals. In fact, their role in the labour recruitment process is very navigating and intersecting, and thereby overlapping. For example, an individual who recruits a labourer for his subcontractor may appear as a foreman or team leader later in the onsite labour management process. Similarly, a mason hiring female labourers off street corners may appear to be a subcontractor in the process. Given this perplexity, the traditional understanding of middlemen, labour intermediaries or labour brokers in this regard will be inadequate because the recruiting individuals in Dhaka’s construction projects work directly, in different capacities, with the workers they recruit. As such the recruiters themselves are workers anyway. They are dependent on other parties, such as builders or head contractors, to get jobs for themselves and thus for the workers. In this context, Standing’s concept of “dependent contractors” is an appropriate guide to understand the role of the individual recruiters.

As he outlines:

There have been interminable debates over how to distinguish between those who provide services and those who provide service labour, and between those dependent on some intermediary and those who are concealed employees. Ultimately, distinctions are arbitrary, hinging on notions of control, subordination and dependence on other “parties.” Nevertheless, those who are dependent on others for allocating them to tasks over which they have little control are at greater risk of falling into the precariat.

(Standing, 2011, p. 16)

Taking this important point of analysis, the recruiters in Dhaka are actually concealed workers who are subordinate to the builders or head contractors and the workers they recruit are dependent on them. Since the recruitment of migrant labourers for construction work in Dhaka is primarily indirect, neither the builders nor the head contractors are involved in labour-related matters. Through the traditional practices of extensive subcontracting, they engage various individuals for accomplishing specific tasks in construction projects. The task-specific subcontractors are the individuals who supply labourers, manage them and work with them onsite to accomplish the sub-contracted tasks by the agreed timeline. They are “really indirect workers, concealed as such to avoid coverage by regulations or social contributions, or to make an undertaking look smaller so as to fall beneath some regulatory threshold” (Standing, 1999, p. 104). Their role may be limited to the

supervision and management of the workers onsite, but they work themselves. Thus they are occasionally foremen and team leaders who retain their own teams of workers and move from one project to another. Because of their direct contact with the workers, they dominate in all respects to discretionally determine the terms and conditions of employment. They follow a multi-tiered selection and recruitment process to recruit rural labourers for their teams.

As the results of this book confirm above, the four predominant modes of labour recruitment for construction work in Dhaka represent the task-specific individual subcontractors and their extensive layers as the key actors who navigate through various layers of recruitment and management of the migrant construction workers. Their navigating role further involves other individuals and their extensive social networks located in cities and villages. The migrant construction workers also become recruiters by participating in the recruitment process, and thus they recruit for their recruiters. The overall intersecting role of all these individuals and their layers reveals a unique model of employment, conceptualised above as hyper-individualised employment, which represents the dominance of extensive layers of individual agents in the indirect recruitment of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka.

Among many other things, the most interesting feature of the indirect recruitment practices that the results of this book explore is the mechanism through which the migrant construction workers themselves become “recruiters for their recruiters.” The “within-project” mode of recruitment discussed in Chapter 4 confirms recruitment through the migrant construction workers already working in Dhaka. Being physically located in the city, the migrant construction workers help find and recruit new labourers for their ongoing project. In order to help their recruiters recruit new labourers, they take help from their personal networks and contacts to find and bring new labourers from the villages. In recruiting new labourers for their project and thus for their recruiter, they mediate between the aspirant rural labourers in villages and their subcontractor in the city. Their direct involvement in the recruitment process confirms that they share their subcontractor’s responsibility by helping him minimise the risks of non-completion due to labour shortage. Doing this, they establish a reciprocal relationship with the new labourers. They train them on the job, which eventually opens up opportunities for them to get a promotion or leading role. For the subcontractors, the workers’ direct involvement in the recruitment process guarantees low risks of their investment, e.g., advance money and high assurance of obligation through extraordinary work commitment of the new workers. Similar involvement of the migrant construction workers as “recruiters for their recruiters” is also evident in the “in-village” mode of recruitment that represents the presence of the migrant construction workers in their village where they come into contact with the aspirant migrant labourers willing to migrate to Dhaka. Meeting the aspirant migrant labourers in the village, they mediate the recruitment process upon their subcontractor’s approval.

The involvement of the migrant construction workers as “recruiters” is integrated, not an isolated part, of social networks-based recruitment in Dhaka’s construction projects. Thus the social networks of the migrant construction workers continue operating as a tool of recruitment that underlies various stresses for them. In this context, the ground-breaking evidence on the involvement of the migrant construction workers in the recruitment process as “recruiters for their recruiters” confirms that such involvement of the migrant workers actually minimises the labour recruitment costs for the subcontractors. The core essence of such flexible recruitment practices is to reduce the subcontractors’ travel expenses and secure the guarantee of their advance money. Thus the mediating role of the migrant construction workers, as recruiters, serves the interests of their subcontractors who are generally wealthier than the workers. However, although recruitment of new labourers from villages through the migrant construction workers helps the subcontractors reduce the risks and pressures of recruitment, it puts pressure on the “recruiter” workers as they mediate the entire selection and recruitment process on behalf of their recruiters. The migrant workers’ combined statuses as workers and recruiters in such practices contribute to their precariousness. The effects of such duality trickle down to the new migrant workers recruited by them. Creating conditions for control, subordination and dependence of the new migrant workers, the “recruiter” workers actually help produce precarious employment relationships in which their subcontractors exploit the migrant workers and their social networks for their own advantage. The practice of recruiting rural labourers through migrant construction workers therefore reflects the recruiters’ aspirations for subordination and contingent loyalty by exploiting the trust relationships. Such practices guarantee maximum labour productivity for the builders but represent a structure of producing the precariat in Dhaka’s construction projects.

Recruiters beyond the boundary of work

The empirical results, as presented in Chapter 5, confirm a unique employment relationship in which the individual recruiters have an all-embracing role in managing and supporting the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. Their onsite labour management practices show that they have an extraordinary commitment to oversee the migrant workers’ work and personal life. Thus the recruiters’ engagement spans through both the city where the workers work and live, and the village where the workers’ family members live. The degree of commitment and the extent of the support they offer are fundamentally embedded in the social networks-based recruitment and employment relationships. Social ties between the workers and their recruiters help determine the practicality of their mutual interests and thereby guide their employment relationships.

Some important features of the employment relationships in Dhaka’s construction projects share similarities with other studies conducted in different

geographical locations, particularly in China (Suresh, 2010; Swider, 2015a, 2015b; You-Jie & Fox, 2001) and India (Mathew, 2005; Mosse et al., 2005; Pattenden, 2012; Picherit, 2012; Vaid, 1999). The individual recruiters' level of commitment to finding job opportunities, offering financial assistance and protecting the migrant workers from police harassment in the city has already been explored in these studies. However, the patterns and structures of migration and employment relationships in these geographical settings may not be comparable to what this book has discovered in Bangladesh. This is mainly because of the variations in the size of economy, diversity of populations and culture, and the controversies of regulations of internal migration in these geographical settings. For example, Swider's (2015a, 2015b) important work on rural-urban migration and recruitment of migrant labourers in China's construction sector primarily focuses on the labour politics and regulation of the informal economy with reference to construction work. Although some studies on the Indian construction sector examine the role of recruiters in workers' personal and social life quite adequately, they purposefully generalise the individual recruiters as labour brokers or intermediaries and thus often categorise their functions as labour intermediation. The received knowledge from these studies hardly examines the social relationships between the recruiters and the migrant workers. Therefore, the effects of social ties on employment relationships with reference to construction work remain unexplored. The results of this book fill the gap in this important area. The uniqueness of the results of this book is the discovery of social effects on employment relationships and the exploitative payment practices of the recruiters.

This book uniquely discovers an extraordinary caregiving commitment of the individual recruiters to the migrant workers. The recruiters' personalised support during the workers' illness, as presented in Chapter 5, is a groundbreaking discovery. The individual recruiters in Dhaka's construction projects offer body massage, provide nutritious foods and buy over-the-counter medicines for the unwell workers that they employ and manage. Such caregiving commitment of the recruiters is built upon the village-based social ties and mutual commonality that they share with the workers through indirect recruitment practices. The same locality effects on the employment relationships between the recruiters and the workers reveal strong reciprocity. The mutual relationship based on their shared social ties helps them look after each other's interests. In order to evade potential social pressures and image crisis in the place of origin, the recruiters obligate themselves to personally look after the workers and their health.

However, the core essence of such "apparently compassionate" personal caregiving support of the recruiters reveals the precariousness of migrant workers. Due to strict time restrictions for completing the subcontracted tasks, the recruiters want speedy recovery of the sick workers and therefore they ignorantly buy over-the-counter medicines, usually strong antibiotics, at their own discretion. Although the migrant workers view this practice as generous because of

their helplessness and lonely life in the city, the recruiters' knowledge in selecting genres of medicines imposes serious health risks of the workers. The recruiters discretionally determine the dosage of the medicines. An important concern in this regard is the drug expiration dates that the recruiters and workers are unaware of. Because of their ignorance to read the expiration dates, which are usually stamped in English, the recruiters are at risk of buying out-of-date medicines and the workers are at critical risk of taking them. Despite all these risks, the workers pay the costs of the medicines through wage cuts, without having any idea about the type of medicines, the actual market price and expiration dates. The extent of risks involved in this practice represents the migrant construction workers in Dhaka as the precariat who have no protection against illness, other than risking their health and life through subordination and loyalty to their recruiters.

Another important contribution of this book is the discovery of a unique mechanism through which the indirect recruitment practices produce conditions for the depressed wage of the migrant construction workers. Unlike many other studies on intermediated and subcontracted labour that predominantly conceptualise commission earning role of the labour intermediaries, the results of this book reveal a corruptive practice of "creaming off" and "wage deception," as evident in Chapter 5. The multiple layers of individuals involved in the labour recruitment and management process earn their own overheads from the workers' wage, which is already low. Wage cuts in indirect employment heavily depress the workers' wage. The migrant construction workers are deprived of a fair wage, and sometimes they receive around 40 percent less than the actual market wage rate. The predominant labour recruitment process through extensive subcontracting practices has contributed a "rigged" system that gives advantage to the wealthy builders but deprives the poor workers of their rights. In producing such a rigged system, as theorised by Standing (2016), the structural corruption of global capitalism has normalised various corruptive practices in the global and local workplaces. By weakening the security of the poor migrant workers, these corruptive practices actually strengthen the position of the builders through the intermediation of the recruiters.

Non-payment of wages is a distinctive characteristic of this rigged system that represents the recruiters' payment corruption. The migrant construction workers in Dhaka, the female workers in particular, often leave their due wages unpaid by their recruiters. Moreover, the creaming-off practice is another dimension of corruption that heavily exploits them. The recruiters cream off up to one-quarter of the workers' wage. The female workers, who are usually hired off street corners and employed on a daily basis, are particularly vulnerable to this corruptive practice of underpayment. The absence of employment security, coupled with their recruiters' coercion, creates barriers to their protection against such exploitative practices. As a result, the structural barriers to labour protection force them to work as the precariat in such exploitative conditions. Standing (2016) has theorised a similar phenomenon of creaming-off wage as "platform capitalism" that represents the vulnerability of the working class in a regime of the intermediaries. According to him, such corruptive

practices of capitalism help keep the precariat in its place, trapped in financial coercions that they cannot easily escape.

Furthermore, wage deception is a distinctive practice of exploiting the migrant construction workers' wage in Dhaka. The recruiters, particularly the *Sardars*, often deceive the migrant workers by paying them partially and occasionally not paying at all. They flee from worksites and stay out of contact without paying due wages of the workers who are eventually forced to leave their due wages with their recruiters. The incidences in relation to wage deception produce severe financial stresses on to the workers. The female workers are particularly vulnerable to such exploitation. While the workers in Dhaka's construction projects generally lack labour market security such as "adequate income-earning opportunities," such exploitation is fundamental to their precariatization because these exploitative practices severely intensify their income insecurity without the "assurance of an adequate stable income" (Standing, 2011, p. 10).

Despite widespread corruption and exploitation, there is a potential setback in identifying the migrant construction workers in Dhaka as the precariat. The results of this book, as presented in Chapter 5, reveal that the workers have confidence and aspirations in having the opportunities to gain skills and thus having the scope for upward career mobility. While there is no official skill assessment system for the construction workers in Bangladesh, these opportunities are mainly dependent on the social location of the workers and thus their personal networks and employment relationships. The prospects for upward career mobility and skill acquisition are therefore determined by the discretion of the recruiters. Measuring this evidence through Standing's notion of the precariat, however, confirms that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are the precariat because of the lack of their job security and skill reproduction security.

Standing (2011) defines job security as "ability and opportunity to retain a niche in employment, plus barriers to skill dilution, and opportunities for 'upward' mobility in terms of status and income" (p. 10). Taking this point, the upward career mobility opportunities of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka reveal an interesting point. The workers have potential opportunities to get promotions and earn better, but they do not consider their status in line with career mobility. For them, the job they are involved in has a poor image in society and thus the status of their job is always low, irrespective of their upward mobility in terms of their niche in employment and income. When this important dimension of job security is combined with the poor working conditions, presented in Chapter 2, construction work in Dhaka is fundamentally seen as a low-status job. Therefore, the upward mobility of the workers merely in terms of role and income does not prevent their precariatization.

Similarly, the migrant workers also lack skill reproduction security that is defined by Standing (2011) as "opportunity to gain skills, through apprenticeships, employment training and so on, as well as opportunity to make use of competencies" (p. 10). The skill acquisition process of the migrant construction

workers in Dhaka is predominantly on the job. Their social relationship with the recruiters is an important factor that influences the opportunities for gaining on-the-job skills. When combined with evidence on the process of gaining skills by following only the superiors and colleagues, as presented in Chapter 3, it confirms that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka do not have the opportunity to gain skills through standard apprenticeships or employment training. In addition, their opportunity to make use of their competencies is primarily dependent on the predominant structures of recruitment and social networks-based employment relationships that they predominantly experience. Considering the extent and pervasiveness of the insecurities in relation to skill reproduction, we can classify the migrant construction workers in Dhaka as the precariat.

The interpretation of research results in this chapter informs new knowledge in understanding precarious work conditions among the migrant labourers. Conceptualising hyper-individualised employment as fundamental to the precarious work conditions, the chapter benchmarks the original contribution of this book. It identifies construction work in Dhaka as a 4D job, confirming the human indignity dimensions associated with the image of the work. It analyses labour recruitment through the lens of precarious work and confirms that indirect recruitment, embedded in the social relations of the recruiters and the migrant labourers, precariatise the migrant construction workers.

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7 Conclusion

The unique conceptualisation of hyper-individualised employment in this book represents the dominant role of the individual recruiters and subordination of the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. Considering hyper-individualised employment as an emerging form of employment relationship for the precariat in Dhaka's construction projects, this chapter offers some recommendations to the policy makers in their efforts towards improving recruitment practices and workplace conditions for the migrant construction workers. It endorses the individual recruiters as the key actors in the recruitment and management of migrant labourers and presents this as an important research agenda for the future study of migration and labour.

The global construction industry represents a significant proportion of precarious workers. The changes in work in this industry are representative of many of the broader trends evident in employment under neoliberalism. Therefore, this book is situated in the scholarly literature on precarious work and neoliberalism that offers a way of understanding how the neoliberal developments have contributed multiple forms of insecurities to the lives of working people. The theoretical framework for this book is derived from Marxian interpretations of the contemporary changes in employment arrangements and struggles of the working class people under global capitalism. Integrating eminent scholar Guy Standing's theoretical contributions on the precariatisation of working class people, it proposes that precarious employment of migrant labourers is a consequence of flexible labour practices such as outsourcing and casualisation. Thus it attributes precariousness of migrant labourers to a new phase of global capitalism that aims to make labour temporary and flexible. Claiming the rise of precarious employment as a new development under global capitalism, it focuses on the changing nature of employment relationships through which the migrant workers are flexibilised to be subordinate to their employers. In the absence of effective state regulations of the labour markets, the workers, through individualisation of work, are subject to dominance and control of employers who create pressures and insecurities to force the workers to be highly dependent on them. This theoretical understanding of employment relationships under global capitalism, as conceptualised

predominantly by Standing (1997, 1999, 2008, 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2016), set the scope of this book to explore global labour flexibility and its repercussions on work conditions of the migrant labourers.

The construction precariat in Dhaka

The research results of this book confirm that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are the precariat. Following the conceptualisations of Standing (2011), they have all the characteristics of the precariat because they lack all seven forms of labour-related security: labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security. Importantly this book attributes hyper-individualised employment to these insecurities. In doing this, it discovers the predominant engagement of multiple tiers of individuals and their intersecting and navigating role in the labour recruitment and management process that creates conditions for these insecurities.

The book discovers the physical, mental and social costs of doing construction work in the capital city of Bangladesh. It identifies the individual recruiters and their dominating role in the labour recruitment and management process as fundamental to poor working conditions for which the migrant construction workers regard their job as a low-status job. The empirical evidence confirms that construction is perceived as a hard and undignified job. It represents a wide range of occupational risks and stresses at work and human indignity outside the workplace.

The traditional way of performing construction jobs requires the labourers to handle huge amounts of debris, including earth, dust and construction materials, that often spreads over their clothes and body, signifying that construction work in Dhaka is dirty. Although debris is an integral part of the construction work in Dhaka, the use of dirty language is very common in the construction projects. The individual recruiters often use bullying and personally abusive language to keep the workers disciplined and attentive to their assigned tasks, helping them maximise the workers' performance and thus productivity. While the recruiters support the practice of using coarse language on construction sites as traditional and normal, it has negative impacts on the migrant workers' psychology. This book reveals that coarse language is highly detrimental to their self-respect and motivation. Using bullying and personally abusive language in the workplace, the individual recruiters offend them and make them feel intimidated and insulted to work hard. The practices of using coarse language enable the recruiters to pressurise and overwork the workers for extended hours. Because of debris and offensive language in the workplace, the workers regard their job as dirty and believe that they receive unpleasant treatment from the local society they live in. The lack of social status and human dignity demotivates them to carry their occupation forward to their next generation. Taking this dimension as an important structural condition tied to the construction jobs in Dhaka, this book adds "disgraceful" as a new

feature to the predominant concept of *3D* job elaborated by Connell (1993) and ILO (2001, 2015). It presents a *4D* (dirty, difficult, dangerous and disgraceful) image of the construction work in Dhaka.

Construction work in Dhaka is traditionally a difficult job for the rural-urban migrant labourers because of the amount of physical labour it requires and the poor working conditions they experience on the construction sites. In the absence of written contracts, the employment relationship between the migrant construction workers and their recruiters is determined by verbal commitment and mutual trust and obligation. The verbal terms and conditions of employment are guided by their social ties based on common locality and personal networks. The scope of their social relationship and its connection to work pressurise the workers to work long hours without any designated breaks or leave. According to the empirical evidence produced in Chapter 2, the majority of the workers have no control over their work shifts and work hours. Their recruiters are dominant in determining the pace of work, and thus they discretionally determine the shifts and working hours depending on circumstances. To comply with their arbitrary instructions, the workers often work long hours, extending up to 18 hours a day, without overtime. The traditional practices of subcontracting shift the production risks onto the individual recruiters who again pass on the risks to workers they recruit. The production risks contribute to extreme time pressure to ensure assignment-based progress in the construction projects. As a result, the workers are often assigned a huge workload without allowing adequate breaks or leave. They work for several months at a stretch without having a day off. These stressful working conditions confirm the organisational dimension of precarious work as theorised by Rodgers (1989). Having no limits on the working time, the workers lack work security and thus they become the precariat (Standing, 2011).

Working conditions in Dhaka's construction projects are characterised by a lack of representation and labour protection. The workers lack legal protection due to their verbal job contract. They do not have a trade union or collective representation opportunity to intervene in case of any disagreement with their recruiters. Because of insecurities related to their collective representation, the fear of losing job is widespread among the workers. The lack of protection against arbitrary dismissal increases their employment insecurity. Many workers have disappointments with the payment of their wages and overtime, but they still continue their job as loyal and non-complaining "good workers." In order to minimise the risks of complaints, the recruiters prefer engaging the workers in a manner that ensures fast and quality performance. For this reason, they usually select and recruit workers who appear to be loyal, hardworking and physically strong, having a good body shape. These workplace conditions confirm the social dimension of precarious work. The insecurities related to representation and employment are fundamental characteristics of the precariat (Standing, 2011). In this context, the research results presented in this book confirm that the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are the precariat.

Risks of workplace accidents, often leading to death, are integral to the pressures and insecurities amongst the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. The lack of protection against accidents and injuries at work precariatise them by intensifying their work insecurity. The majority of the participants included in this book have personal experience of accidents and injuries in their workplace. Moreover, many have experience of seeing their colleagues seriously injured and becoming disabled. Fatalities and accidents on the construction sites are generally attributed to the recruiters who do not offer PPE to the workers. They are reluctant to invest in personal safety. Due to this, nearly two-thirds of the participants included in this book do not wear PPE while working onsite. They work by taking risks of their life. Although very few workers have access to PPE, they are dependent on their recruiters who discretionally assess the necessity for using PPE. Thus the recruiters, who often perceive PPE to be distracting for speedy performance, decide when to use PPE and when not. While the lack of safety accessories is an important concern for workplace security, this book finds that the workers receive distracting phone calls during work that increases the chance of workplace accidents. However, the phone calls are indirectly linked to the overall insecurity and instability of work because of which the workers are constantly required to look for new job opportunities. This book also finds that due to personal experience of frequent workplace accidents, the migrant workers in Dhaka suffer from death anxiety. The absence of social security benefits to cover workplace accidents and health risks confirms the social dimension of precarious work conditions, as theorised by Rodgers (1989), in Dhaka's construction projects.

The pressures and risks are particularly more intense for female and adolescent workers than male adult workers. Working in a poor work environment, the female workers cannot access a dining space with an adequate supply of drinking water. Moreover, they do not have access to a toilet during work. Although a few construction sites have temporary toilet facilities, they are often male toilets, which do not have an adequate water supply and drainage. While the use of coarse language is a common practice in Dhaka's construction projects, female workers often experience indecent gestures and behaviour of a sexual nature from their male colleagues and recruiters. On the other hand, the adolescent workers endure extra pressure on their young bodies doing construction work. This is because they are required to take workloads like adults, although their bodies are too immature and malnourished to permit that. Excessive pressure on their young body contributes to their health problems and mental stress. While the recruiters treat them as adults to overwork, their stressful work conditions and 4D characteristics of their job heavily precariatise them. This book identifies them as the young precariat in Dhaka's construction projects.

However, these pressures and insecurities amongst the migrant construction workers fundamentally emanate from the labour management practices and the predominant role of the recruiters in managing the workers onsite. Involvement of the recruiters reduces the cost of labour to ensure profit for the

builders in Dhaka. Thus the builders get advantages of indirect labour recruitment and management practices (Standing, 1999). The stresses and insecurities of the workers are fundamental to these practices that mainly aim to increase production by exploiting the labour. In these indirect labour management practices, the workers lack representation and employment security. Profit maximisation through optimum labour productivity is the core proposition of such practices where the protection of the workers against accidents and illness at work is insignificant and therefore safety and health of the workers are of less importance.

While the pressures and risks in workplaces, as discussed above, originate from the indirect recruitment practices and the way the recruiters manage the workers onsite, the informal process of recruitment helps construction to be the best obtainable job in the Dhaka. This book finds that the rural labourers are recruited through extensive layers of individuals, located in social networks and relations, as discussed in Chapter 4. It, for the first time, finds a distinctive role of the migrant workers as labour recruiters for construction jobs in Dhaka. Their direct involvement in the recruitment process as “recruiters for their recruiters” minimises the costs of recruitment by reducing the subcontractors’ travel expense and securing the subcontractors’ investments such as advance money. The dual role of the workers, as recruiters and workers, however produces stress for them. It also contributes control, subordination and dependence for the new migrant labourers they recruit. Thus the multi-layered recruitment practices and the role of migrant construction workers as recruiters characterise a structure of precariatization.

Moreover, social networks-based recruitment practices contribute to a unique employment relationship in which the individual recruiters have an all-embracing role in managing and supporting the migrant construction workers in Dhaka. Operating in such relationships, the workers consider that their employment has scope for upward career mobility, as revealed in Chapter 5. However, a detailed exploration of such scope reveals that there is no skill reproduction security and the workers are therefore dependent on the discretion of the recruiters for skill acquisition and career mobility. They gain their skills on the job, not through apprenticeships or employment training. Moreover, their job conveys a poor image and low status, irrespective of upward career mobility. Measuring these characteristics with Standing’s (2011) concepts of skill reproduction security and job security tied to the precariat, the migrant construction workers in Dhaka are the precariat.

Considering the pressures and risks as necessary costs in their quest for better livelihoods or incomes, the Bangladeshi rural-urban migrant labourers find the construction jobs comparatively better than other job options in the capital city. This book finds that seasonal migrant labourers are very prevalent in Dhaka’s construction projects, migrating from villages during the lean months when the construction jobs are available in the city. Their seasonal migration helps their households cope with seasonal financial stresses subject to inadequate income from monsoon-based farm work. Indirect recruitment processes

not only help them find construction jobs through their personal networks but also allow them flexibilities of leave. The flexibilities in employment arrangements and worker–recruiter relationships based on indirect recruitment often allow the workers to return to their village and remain connected to their original occupation and some supplementary income activities in villages during the peak harvest months. Thus flexibility of employment in Dhaka’s construction projects is reflective of flexible labour statuses of the migrant workers who work in dual or multiple labour statuses (Standing, 1999). Taking this theoretical understanding, this book argues that the predominant structures of employment relationships in Dhaka’s construction projects permeate flexibilities, and as such the circulatory pattern of migration, to allow the workers to return to their village when the chances of economic gains are high.

This book also reveals a unique and contemporary dimension of seasonal migration in Bangladesh, adolescent migration. The discovery of adolescent migration for physically demanding construction jobs in Dhaka adds to the literature in the field of labour migration that predominantly considers rural–urban labour migration as an “adult” phenomenon. Moreover, providing the adolescent migrant construction workers’ own accounts, this book unravels the confined urban life and social isolation of the adolescent workers as necessary costs to better savings in Dhaka. While seasonal financial hardships in their rural households coerce them to migrate, employment arrangements in Dhaka’s construction projects are socially restrictive for them. Such employment arrangements represent their social isolation and lack of networking, which creates pressures and makes them the young precariat.

One of the main reasons why rural labourers are attracted to construction jobs in Dhaka is the promise of higher incomes. This book reveals three unique factors, such as free onsite accommodation, confined urban life and delayed payment practices, contributing to better incomes for them. These factors represent risks and poor living conditions in free onsite accommodations that are mainly temporary sheds and under–constructed buildings. Living onsite in such vulnerable arrangements, the migrant construction workers are subject to direct control in their workplace due to their standby availability and blurring of their workplaces, home places and public places. Such living conditions therefore represent their precariatization.

Moreover, the practices of delayed payment represent a labour retention strategy for the advantages of the recruiters and the builders. The verbal contract of the workers mentions daily wage; however, their wage is not paid in full daily. As presented in Chapter 3, every day their recruiters pay *Khoraki*, which is usually a small portion of their daily wage amount. The rest of the amount remains unpaid and noted as “due wages” to be paid cumulatively later. The structural features of such delayed payment practices, as discovered by this book, explore a complex mechanism of dependence. The builders’ discretionary control on wage payment creates conditions of “wage bondage” between the recruiters and the workers, which can be attributed to confirm the economic dimension of precarious work (Rodgers, 1989). Such practices

precariatise the workers through the recruiters, ultimately allowing the builders to retain and control the workers and their coordination for the builders' own advantage. These practices intensify the workers' income insecurity, a core characteristic of the precariat theorised by Standing (2011, 2016). The structures of wage bondage tied to delayed and irregular payment practices necessitate the workers' dependency on their recruiters and solicit their favour in case of urgent need of money. Based on their personal relationship to the recruiters, the workers often get payment of their due wages in the name of advance money. These conditions represent their subordination and lack of rights to confirm their precariousness. As Standing (2017) notes the conceptual relevance of similar conditions to precariousness:

The etymological root of precarious is to beg by prayer. In other words, it refers to a person's status and a lack of rights within the state. Someone in the precariat is above all else a supplicant, dependent on others doing them favours, in response to requests.

(p. 166)

In this context, another important feature of employment, uncertainty, can be related to the temporal dimension of precarious work conceptualised by Rodgers (1989). As discussed in Chapter 4, this book finds that the degree of uncertainty might vary depending on the modes of recruitment in Dhaka's construction projects. While the labourers waiting on street corners have no work up to 28 days in a month, the hyper-individualised employment practices represent a lack of labour market security for the migrant construction workers. The verbal job contracts of the workers do not specify the duration of their employment. As such, the recruiters do not guarantee certainty and the availability of work. Although the workers perceive their recruiters to have the abilities to offer continuous employment, the recruiters depend on real circumstances and thus they do not take the responsibility to offer continuous employment to the workers they recruit. As a result, it is ultimately the responsibility of the migrant workers to find new job opportunities once their current job ends. Persistent uncertainty of employment therefore creates conditions for the workers' dependence on their recruiters, making them supplicant.

The migrant construction workers in Dhaka are supplicant and dependent on their recruiters in terms of not only wage payment and employment security but also health protection. The ground-breaking discovery presented in Chapter 5 reveals that the workers are dependent on their recruiters' personalised support during illness. Their recruiters ignorantly buy over-the-counter medicines, usually strong antibiotics, on the basis of their own discretion for the ill workers onsite. Due to a lack of health protection, the workers are generally appreciative of such a caregiving role of their recruiters. However, their dependence on the recruiters' personalised support poses serious risks to their health and life.

The empirical findings presented in this book reveal a unique mechanism through which indirect recruitment practices produce conditions for the low wages of migrant construction workers. Corruptive payment practices of the recruiters, as in Chapter 5, precariatise the workers by creaming off their wages. Due to the multi-layered recruitment and management process, various persons earn their own overheads by creaming off the workers' wage. The structural conditions of extensive subcontracting practices deprive the workers of fair wages and help in the growth of the marginalised workers as the precariat. With the increasing presence of intermediaries, such structures are representative of a "rigged" system that gives advantage to the wealthy builders but deprives the poor workers of their rights (Standing, 2016). The recruiters in Dhaka steal up to one-quarter of the female workers' wage, which is already low, and much lower than the male workers. Along with persistent employment insecurity, the corruptive payment practices of the recruiters trap the female workers in exploitative conditions and financial coercions. Similar phenomena have been theorised by Standing (2016) as "platform capitalism." Like wage creaming off, this book also finds a distinctively exploitative payment practice of wage deception. It finds that the recruiters in Dhaka often deceive the workers by fleeing from worksites and staying out of contact without paying their due wages. In the absence of protection against such exploitative practices, the workers leave their due wages and endure severe financial stresses. Undermining the labour market security of the workers, such exploitative practices precariatise them by severely intensifying their income insecurity.

Recommendations for policy and practice

The evidence produced by this book can be used to inform the policy makers and practitioners to bring in policy changes and effective interventions to improve work conditions for the migrant construction workers. Bangladesh's national economic growth policy acknowledges labour migration as "a driver of development" (GoB, 2015, p. 249). The national labour policy of Bangladesh aims to "ensure productive, indiscriminatory, fair, decent, safe and healthy work environment and establish the rights and dignity of labourers in all respects" (GoB, 2012, p. 76458). Despite this, improving the work conditions for the rural-urban migrant labourers in the country's construction sector is yet to be realised. The sector has regularly been valued for its enormous economic contribution only in terms of GDP and employment capacity.

In a labour market characterised by huge power asymmetry between organised capital and disorganised labour, and state apparatus subservient to capital, labour rights and labour regulations in Bangladesh were visibly not among policy priorities for any government irrespective of their political identities. Thus the labour regulations in Bangladesh took a long time to be guided by any labour law and policy (Kabeer, 2004). Even when it did, in the export-oriented garments manufacturing, for instance, it was more at the insistence of

labour rights non-government organisations (NGOs) backed by international donors than due to agitation or lobbying of the trade unions.

After the collapse of Rana Plaza factory building that killed at least 1,129 garment workers, the Government of Bangladesh faced intense international pressures from the United States and Europe to improve labour conditions and hence amended the labour law in 2013 (Greenhouse, 2013). While under the old law the country's workers had many legal and practical obstacles to unionisation, the new law took numerous steps backwards that undercut trade unions. After the new law, the government publicly criticised efforts to increase regulation and unionisation and thus categorically denied trade union registrations without stating proper reasons or delayed the registrations through adopting various kind of restrictive procedures. For example, nearly 73 percent of applications, submitted in 2015 for new trade union registrations, were rejected without detailed explanation (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018).

While the trade unions in Bangladesh have grown erratically, they have been criticised for their structural weaknesses. They have “proliferated but are organisationally weak, highly factionalised, and have traditionally played only a limited role in the political process” (Kochanek, 1996, p. 715). The Bangladeshi trade unions have historically been allowed and active only in parts of the formal sector such as large public sector corporations and nationalised banks, railways, telephone and postal services, public works, public health engineering, government printing press, state-owned oil and gas companies, water supply and transport sector (Faruque, 2009). They are either absent or ineffective in large numbers of manufacturing and service industries in the private sector. The informal sector of which the construction sector is a substantial part in terms of its recruitment practices and employment arrangements has hardly had any trade union presence historically. This was largely due to structural constraints like high mobility of labour, dispersed nature of the construction sites, informal employment contract, extensive subcontracting, flexible and contractual job arrangements and individualised labour recruitment practices dominated by the subcontracting individuals. Hence, unlike their formal sector counterparts, the construction workers in Bangladesh enjoyed lesser opportunities for them to come together, get organised and develop solidarity, leading to a working class identity for protecting common class interests. So, while trade unions in formal sectors were ineffective due to organisational and political weaknesses, they were virtually non-existent in the construction sector. My interviews with the recruiters and the workers confirmed this (see Chapter 2).

In addition to this, while the trade unions in Bangladesh traditionally function as extensions of political parties and are therefore limited in their effectiveness as representative of workers' interests (Kabeer, 2004), the Bangladeshi business leaders regularly complain that the unions are highly political and sometimes stage disruptive strikes as a complementary tactic to political blocs' lobbying and infighting (Greenhouse, 2013). The unions are therefore limited in their effectiveness as representative of workers' interests, and they in general

are not viable to be a social protection provider due to their structural weaknesses with reference to the construction sector.

Furthermore, as I was informed during fieldwork in Dhaka, the construction sector does not have functional trade unions, unlike the readymade garments (RMG) sector that has received a fair degree of international attention on compliance issues in the last few years, particularly since the Tazreen and Rana Plaza tragedies in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Following these tragic incidents, national and international pressures have resulted in redirecting all the allocated resources for inspection to the readymade garments sector only. As a result, irregularities in the construction sector still remain unattended on the part of the state. However, the findings of this book indicate that further work is needed to improve the work environment in line with the policy documents. The book therefore identifies the following recommendations for consideration for improving the working conditions in Bangladesh's construction sector:

Formalisation of the recruitment process

Although the construction sector of Bangladesh is covered under the national labour laws, it is marked by various sets of informal practices that originate from the traditional selection and recruitment process. The construction workers in the country do not have a written letter of appointment or job contract and identity card. A written job contract with clear mention of entitlements including provisions for work hours, minimum wages, overtime, payment schedule, leisure and leave could be a very important step towards the process of formalising recruitment. Moreover, institutional measures could be taken to formalise recruitment through the process of registering the workers as well as individual recruiters. Registration could be on the basis of a span of working years, level of experiences and skills, etc. Since the subcontractors are predominant in the sector, they should be included in the registration process.

Ensuring fair practice of wage payment

The traditional wage payment practices in Bangladesh's construction sector characterise labour retention through wage bondage. The practice of paying wages in fractions, such as *Khoraki*, creates financial pressures on the labourers. Following a specific schedule of payment is key to ensuring fair practice of wage payment, while payment of the full amount of wages is also important. Therefore every construction site should have a payment register to record the amount and date of payment. Calculation and payment of overtime should also be considered with utmost importance. While the practice of paying unequal wages to the female workers has been normalised in Bangladesh's construction sector, the recruiters should be officially instructed and monitored to ensure equal wages for the female construction workers.

PPE for all workers

The recruiters are reluctant to invest in PPE for the workers they recruit and manage. Their negligence of workers' personal safety contributes to occupational accidents and injuries in the workplace. In this context, specialised PPE shops should be set up where the individual recruiters could buy PPE for the workers. The project management, including the individual recruiters, should be made responsible for safety of all workers onsite. To ensure this, regular inspection of the construction sites by the relevant government authority will be necessary.

Workplace environment

The construction workers in Bangladesh work in a poor work environment marked by an inadequate supply of water, a lack of dining space and toilet and unhygienic and risky living arrangement. The site management should consider establishing basic facilities for the workers, and the government authorities should verify these before approving the commencement of a site. Moreover, regular inspections could help maintain the facilities in the best working condition.

Trade union

This book finds that the migrant construction workers in Bangladesh do not have options for collective bargaining. While collective bargaining and trade unions are important steps to enable the workers to seek intervention to improve their working conditions, the establishment of an effective association of migrant construction workers is necessary. The government should encourage and facilitate forming of collective bargaining agents in the construction sector. For the best outcomes of trade unions, the recruiters should be consulted to be involved in the collective bargaining mechanisms. Effective inspection and monitoring systems can also ensure the basic rights of construction workers to unite and work together for the best of their interests.

Training and skill development

With a view to ensuring proper training and skills of the construction workers, there is an urgent need to set up specialised training schools so that the workers can achieve training and skills in respective trades. Since most of the construction workers in the capital city originate from villages, some training centres and skill development colleges can be established in rural areas so that the workers can get proper job orientation in their origin areas. The existing public technical training centres should be encouraged to offer courses in trades that are currently in demand in the local as well as global construction markets. Moreover, Bangladeshi construction workers are highly dependent on their recruiter's discretionary assessment of skill level that causes delay and difficulty for them to move upward. The absence of any skill accreditation board has

created scope for such discretion of the recruiters. Therefore, an official board of skill accreditation should be established to assess and certify the skills of the workers for their on-the-job upward mobility.

Social protection

The migrant construction workers in Bangladesh are deprived of any kind of social protection schemes. All stakeholders including the government authority, the private real estate companies and their association such as REHAB, subcontractors and the trade unions should engage in a dialogue to devise appropriate social protection measures including health, accidents and life insurance schemes for the construction workers. Considering the temporal and spatial challenges in organising the migrant construction workers in cities, the trade union offices should be located within reach of the workers.

Directions for future research

Precarious employment is a reality and not a myth for the migrant workers. The key problem in researching the precarious employment of the migrant workers is perhaps the proposition that precariousness has always been there, as a permanent feature, for the migrant workers. This book does not deny this. However, it argues that the current features of employment for migrant workers are much more precarious than before. To put it another way, previously migrant employment was less precarious.

Precariousness has increased because profitable labour is fundamental to the rise of the construction sector in Bangladesh (Afsar, 1999; Ahmed, Siddiquee, & Khan, 2012). The demand for labour in the profit-driven construction sector is not determined by equitable wages. The rapid growth of the sector can be attributed to the availability of cheap construction labour in the local market. In Bangladesh, construction labourers are easily available and their wage rate is low (Ahsan, 1997; Chowdhury et al., 2012; Farhana, Rahman, & Rahman, 2012; Uddin & Firoj, 2013). Moreover, due to the lack of official formalities, anyone can hire labourers anytime for building properties without having any formal commitments of the employer. Whenever the builders wish, they can discontinue the hired labourers without giving notice in advance. Often private builders accomplish their projects step by step and thus employ labourers only on demand. This informality in labour recruitment practices has led to an increasing number of construction sites in the country. While easy availability of construction labourers is related to employment uncertainty and job precariousness, technical expertise of Bangladesh's local construction labourers gives their recruiters many advantages. One of the main advantages is related to the builders' cost of production. The local labourers' technical knowledge and expertise often allow the builders to accomplish their tasks without consulting costly professional engineers, designers or landscapers. Thus the builders in Bangladesh are highly dependent

on the labourers' expertise that minimises their overall cost of production by avoiding the involvement of professional experts in construction projects. This has made building activities easily manageable and affordable and thus profitable to the builders, contributing to the overall growth of the construction sector in the country.

Global ideological push for neoliberal economy introduced in the 1970s contributed to the development of the profit-driven construction sector since Bangladesh's birth (Afsar, 2003; GoB, 2011). Neoliberal flexibilisation in the country's construction sector occurred as part of broader flexibilisation and informalisation in the economy in conjunction with neoliberal globalisation. Although some neoliberal reforms began to take root in Bangladesh during the middle to the late 1970s, immediately after the birth of the country, the real push came in the mid-1980s in the form of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). These orchestrated changes in the country's macroeconomic directions and social policy priorities like reduced public spending in health, education and public services, marketisation of agricultural inputs, privatisation of large public corporations and market liberalisation, leading to the decline in many traditional manufacturing industries like jute, textiles and steel faced with stiff competition from foreign and multinational firms (Muhammad, 2015). Privatisation and liberalisation led to reduced employment opportunities, on the one hand, and increased flexibilisation, on the other, in the forms of contractual, part-time and casual employment in the formal sector. Such manufacturing decline disproportionately affected semi-skilled and unskilled job seekers. Reduced public spending in social and public services contributed to higher cost of living and marketisation of agricultural inputs contributed to the rising cost of agricultural production, the burden of which mostly fell on poor and lower-middle-class populations of rural areas and urban peripheries.

The above shifts in political economy played major roles behind rural-urban and international labour migrations that exacerbated since the 1980s (Afsar, 1999). Much of the rural-urban migrants who constituted unemployed agricultural labourers, small farmers, climate-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs), unemployed or laid-off labourers of privatised public corporations and unemployed labourers of traditional manufacturing industries could find informal employment in the construction sector. There was a greater availability of these informal and casual jobs from the late 1980s amid a construction boom, particularly in the capital city Dhaka, the largest urban concentration in the country, and in other major urban areas. The privatisation and deindustrialisation resulting from neoliberal reforms also led to a service sector-led economic growth thriving on foreign aid fuelled infrastructure development, urban expansion and NGO projects (Muhammad, 2015). These contributed to new accumulation opportunities in construction, transport and other service industries for a new class who were politically connected and thus many politicians turned businesspeople to make profit throughout prevalent irregularities.

For example, the average cost of construction of highways in Bangladesh is high, compared to many developed and developing countries in the world. Despite low-cost labour and competitive price of the construction materials, the overall cost of construction of highways in Bangladesh is higher than Europe, China or India (Mamun, 2016). While the average cost of constructing 1 kilometre four-lane highway is USD3.50 million in Europe, USD1.63 million in China and USD1.25 million in India, the cost is as high as USD7.38 million in Bangladesh; while the highest of all is the recently approved Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga four-lane highway where the cost per kilometre has been approved as USD11.88 million (Ali, 2015). The so-called abnormal hike in construction costs is due to illegal commission trading and a lack of transparency and accountability associated with the contracting process, as reported by the local and international media. It has been reported by the World Bank that in Bangladesh, private companies paid government officials up to 15 percent of the contract value in exchange for an award of the contract (Collier, Kirchberger, & Söderbom, 2015; WB, 2011). Citing corruption concerns, in 2012 the World Bank pulled out of a construction project to build Bangladesh's largest bridge. However, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission investigated the alleged conspiracy of corruption and found nobody to be guilty. Also, a Canadian court found no evidence of corruption in the project and dismissed all charges. Another recent dimension of cost-intensive transport infrastructure is the construction of expressways and overpasses. The recently approved costs of 217 kilometre-long Dhaka-Chittagong expressway reveal that USD40.25 million will be spent per kilometre, whereas the cost of 1 kilometre expressway is USD11.03 million in India (Das, 2016). Construction of overpasses in Bangladesh also involves higher costs than in India, China or Malaysia. In spite of the extreme high costs of transport infrastructure, the quality of construction generally remains poor (Das, 2017). Most of the roads and highways built in Bangladesh are bitumen-sealed. Because of the use of cheap and low-quality grade bitumen, the road surfaces melt in summer and potholes develop in the rainy season. Thus the newly built costly roads often become unfit for transport within a short time (Ahmed, 2016). As a result, resurfacing and upgrading tasks are considered to be a part of routine maintenance, which costs further. The lack of transparency and widespread irregularities in road infrastructure construction involves many actors and business enterprises and their profit. This has led to the speedy growth of the construction sector, where road infrastructure development involves year-long tasks and many actors, and business enterprises are involved throughout the lifetime of these projects.

In spite of this, neoliberal developments such as privatisation have helped the growth of Bangladesh's construction sector by flourishing many private industries, factories and services since the early 1980s (Afsar, 1999; GoB, 2011). A large portion of the country's production and service activities became privatised since then. This led to the emergence of private business enterprises and service organisations, including banks and insurance companies. Therefore, many buildings were built while the demand for commercial and industrial

buildings and corporate office space was increasing. Buildings for industrial and corporate use still have high demand due to economic growth and expansion of trade activities throughout the country (GoB, 2015). While the land is scarce in the country, increasing industrialisation has created pressures on land, leading to the overall growth of construction activities. Private trade activities are rapidly spreading in both rural and urban areas. For example, all private mobile phone operators in Bangladesh have drastically spread their branches and operations at the district level over the past few years. As a result, the demand for space for setting up the mobile operators' local offices has gone up and a significant proportion of Bangladesh's commercial space is now being used for mobile phone related trade activities, as I observed during fieldwork in Bangladesh. Moreover, the country's top retailers have distribution offices throughout all districts, and they have rented many buildings and houses to run their operations. At the same time, the number of NGOs, private schools, hospitals and diagnostic centres has also increased and many private buildings have been built to lease for operating these services. All these circumstances have been initiated by privatisation, and the rapid growth of the construction sector is largely attributed to these.

In this context, the worst victims of precarious employment are those working in the relatively new countries such as Bangladesh. Born in the neoliberal era, Bangladesh has inherently adopted free market trade policies and flexible labour policies for competitive production. Precarious employment has been a fundamental characteristic of employment in the country. With the increasing expansion of neoliberal policies and flexibilisation of labour, the employment quality in Bangladesh has gradually deteriorated. In particular, employment has increasingly become indirect and informalised with growing layers of agents in the recruitment process.

The latest phase of this trend is the notable presence of individual agents who subcontract, mediate, facilitate and recruit the workers as employers. Their layers are too many, and at the same time too overlapping, to identify the distinctiveness of each layer. Involvement of multiple layers of these individuals in the recruitment process has severely worsened the terms and conditions of employment. For the rural-urban migrant labourers, they are the key actors because of their overarching involvement not only in the migration journey, but also in employment and thus in the working life of the migrant labourers. When the individual agents and the migrant workers are from the same locality, there is ample opportunity for the former to circumnavigate their involvement to the personal life of the workers. Given the increasing changes in the structure of employment arrangements for the migrant labourers, the extent of the role of the individual agents, as both recruiters and employers, is therefore of vital importance. In the context of this important understanding, this book yields six important areas that warrant further research:

First, the precariatization of migrant workers in hyper-individualised employment practices requires further investigation with special attention to internal migration. Most of the literature on precarious employment is focussed

on industrialised countries, particularly the non-citizens and their employment in these countries. Research is needed on internal migrant workers and their employment conditions to explore the dynamics of contemporary changes in employment arrangements where the individual recruiters are increasingly growing, in terms of their layers as well as capacities. Research focussing on the individual agents in the internal migrant workers' recruitment process will help better understand the specific conditions of migrant labour exploitation in both local and global workplaces.

Second, the national labour policies of Bangladesh commit to ensuring decent workplace environment for all workers. Rural-urban migrant workers are different from the general categories of workers due to their exceptional personal experiences of work and living in urban spaces. While the migration of rural labourers to the capital city of the country involves a complex journey, further investigation is now needed on the impact of these policies on the workplace conditions for the migrant workers in the construction sector. It will help the migration and labour scholars understand whether the policies create barriers or offer solutions to better employment conditions for the migrant construction workers in Bangladesh.

Third, further investigation is required into recruitment practices and employment conditions of the rural-urban migrant labourers on construction sites in other geographical contexts. Considering the extent of hyper-individualised employment practices as the emerging dimension of precarious work, research in other countries and regions of similar socio-economic characteristics of Bangladesh will help migration and labour scholars critically analyse the structure of employment relationships in the global workplaces. In many contexts, precarious work conditions are permanent and not specific to migrant workers only. Comparative research in other contexts will therefore be helpful to understand the wide magnitude of precarious employment for the migrant workers.

Fourth, the structure of social networks-based indirect recruitment practices in Bangladesh reveals extensive connections to international labour migration. There is very little research on informal recruitment process in relation to the selectivity of rural labourers for international migration. In this context, there is a need for more evidence on how the migrant labourers in cities capitalise their social networks towards recruitment for international migration. Original evidence in this area will help the migration researchers explore the role of individual recruiters in international labour migration and its outcomes.

Fifth, the migration of female and adolescent labourers for physically demanding jobs such as urban construction work reveals various forms of vulnerabilities in the workplace. However, there is very little research on gender and age dimensions of construction work. Further investigation is therefore needed to understand the variability of migration and workplace experiences determined by the age and gender of the workers. This will help the migration and labour researchers examine the structure of gender relations and masculinities in work relationships with reference to the global construction industry.

Additionally, this will help them comprehend the greater extent of youth migration for precarious work in the contemporary world.

Finally, the Coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic has started changing the world of work dramatically. The very nature of how we live and work is in fact changing. Sparking fears of the worst global recession since the Great Depression, it has already caused unemployment for millions of people. While academic research on the impacts of the pandemic on work organisation is still at the nascent stage, scholars have focussed mainly on how we are working remotely with the help of modern technologies. Flexible workplace practices and physical and mental wellbeing of the workers working from home have been an important discussion in that context. However, there are many manual labour-intensive jobs, like construction work, that require physical presence and direct involvement of workers in the workplace. The construction workers are therefore at risk. Many migrant construction workers in Singapore, Qatar, US, and Europe have contracted COVID-19. They have experienced, and will continue to experience, impacts because of the pandemic that has affected the schedule of most construction projects globally. Considering their current condition, management of workers' safety, health risks and job insecurities in the context of pandemic hazards should be an important research agenda for the next few years. In particular, further research on construction workers in developing countries, like Bangladesh, who do not have access to basic PPE at work, will help identify the risks and thus organise the effective monitoring and implementation of safety measures for the protection of workers' health. Also, research on such specific groups of low-income workers will be helpful in attaining a full understanding of the scope and severity of precariatization due to income insecurities, joblessness, starvation and increased suicide risks, which the workers are now fearing.

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Index

Page numbers in *italic* indicate figures.

- Afsar, R. 7, 14–15, 69, 152, 179–181
accidental deaths 2, 17, 54, 56
accommodation 83, 96; free 74–76, 79, 88, 112, 153, 173; onsite 75–76, 153, 173; rented 76, 88, 112; *see also* sheds
Ackroyd, S. 148
adolescent employment 149, 150
adolescent migration 70–71, 148, 149, 151–152, 172–173
adolescent workers 41, 44, 66, 149–151, 171, 173; *see also* adolescent employment; adolescent migration
agricultural work 14–16, 68–70, 72–73, 82, 87, 147, 151, 179
Ahsan, R. M. 19, 138, 154, 179
Anderson, B. 5–6, 144
anxiety 41, 53, 76, 148, 171; *see also* death anxiety
Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (ANSECHR) 19
Bangladesh: construction sector 7–8, 10, 16–18, 21–23, 47, 142–143, 149, 154–155, 177, 179, 181; economy 14, 175; workers 178
Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 16
Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) 17, 154
Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) 47
bargaining capacity 61, 63
Bloemraad, I. 20
bondage 154; debt 84–85, 154–155; social 100, 128, 132, 133, 153, 155; wage 80, 154, 173–174, 177
bonding: social 100, 128, 132–133, 153
Breman, J. 82, 84
bricks 16, 32, 41–42, 51, 58, 114; clay 42, 43, 51; lifting 41–42, 42, 54, 112
Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) 2, 4
camps: labour 1; overcrowded 2; temporary 52
capitalism 11–12, 20, 144, 146, 161, 168; *see also* global capitalism
caregiving 128–129, 160, 174
cash advance 78, 84, 96, 110, 154–155
China 143, 154, 156, 160, 181; construction sector 160
Choudhury, T. 16, 19, 138, 154
climate change 14, 105
collective bargaining 11, 177
Connell, J. 3, 147, 152, 170
construction jobs 4, 32, 36, 38, 51, 60, 65, 71, 74, 85, 87, 109–110, 118, 145, 151, 168, 171, 172
construction work 2–5, 13, 15–22, 31–32, 34, 38, 41, 43–48, 53–54, 58, 60, 65–66, 68, 70–71, 73, 81, 83–88, 90, 91, 95, 99, 106–108, 120, 141, 143, 146–151, 153, 155–157, 159, 161–162, 168–170, 182–183; *see also* construction jobs; construction worker
construction worker 1–7, 13, 16–23, 31–34, 36–38, 41, 43–48, 51–55, 57–58, 61, 63, 65, 66, 68–77, 81–84, 86, 88, 90–93, 92, 96, 98, 99, 101–105, 107–108, 110–111, 115, 117, 119–122, 124, 130, 132, 134–136, 141–143, 145–149, 151–152, 154–155, 157–158, 160–161, 162, 168–178, 182–183

- control 2, 4–5, 9, 12–13, 18, 20–21, 52, 124, 132, 143–144, 146, 153–154, 157, 159, 168, 170, 172–174
- countries: developed 4–5, 32, 48, 150; developing 4–5, 11, 150, 181, 184
- COVID-19 184
- Cranford, C. J. 9, 149
- Dasgupta, B. 152
- de Haan, A. 144, 152–153
- death anxiety 53, 58, 147, 171
- dependence 133, 143–144, 154–155, 157, 159, 172–174
- Dhaka's construction: projects 13, 22–23, 45–47, 63, 66, 67, 74–77, 78, 80, 82–86, 89, 91–93, 95, 97, 107, 112, 116, 118–119, 121–122, 124–125, 127–128, 130, 132, 136–138, 140–142, 147–155, 157, 159–160, 162, 168, 170–174; sites 32–33, 33, 36–41, 47–48, 51, 53, 58, 64, 67, 71–74, 84, 153
- dignity 3, 34, 38, 54, 61, 146–148, 169, 175
- dimension: economic 9, 173; important 4, 79, 97, 104, 129, 135, 147, 162; multi- 8; organisational 9, 170; social 9, 109, 170–171; socio-economic 22, 67; temporal 9, 174
- dispute 61–63
- dominance 4, 18, 20–21, 142, 144, 158, 168
- education 17, 34, 48, 86, 88, 150, 180; primary 48, 86; technical 19, 54, 86
- employment: casual 11, 180; conditions of 21–22, 67, 89, 92, 118, 143, 151, 158, 170, 182; consistent 72; female 16; flexible 8, 72–73, 92, 154; hyper-individualised 21, 23, 142–144, 146, 158, 163, 168–169, 174, 182–183; inconsistent 72, 74; insecure 10–11; long-term 72–73, 120; non-standard employment 2, 12; precarious 2, 5–6, 8, 10, 17–20, 22, 143, 149–150, 154, 159, 168, 179, 182–183; relationship 4–5, 8–13, 18, 20–23, 31, 36, 85, 91–92, 101–102, 116, 118, 120, 122, 127–129, 132–133, 137, 140–143, 146–147, 149, 151, 154–155, 159–160, 162–163, 168, 170, 172–173, 183; seasonal 68–69, 151–152; short-term 68, 70; standard 12
- exploitation 1–3, 9, 18, 21, 137–138, 143, 155, 159–162, 172, 175, 183
- facilities 2, 51, 59, 150, 171, 178
- farming 16, 19, 67–69, 74, 88, 108–109
- farm jobs 69–71, 107, 148, 151
- farm work 15, 70–73, 87, 107, 108, 117, 151, 172; *see also* agricultural work; farming; farm jobs
- fatalities 1–2, 47–48, 171
- female workers 16, 19, 36, 45, 58–63, 60, 65, 82–84, 87, 106, 112–113, 115, 123, 137–139, 149–150, 161–162, 171, 175, 177
- Fields, G. S. 152–153
- FIFA World Cup (2022) 1
- global capitalism 11, 12, 20, 144, 146, 161, 168
- globalisation 10–11, 180
- Government of Bangladesh (GOB) 7, 13–16, 47, 72, 175–176, 180–182
- gross domestic product (GDP) 15, 175
- Harris, J. R. 151–152
- hazards 2, 14, 31–32, 36, 47, 50, 53–54, 184; occupational 47–48, 58
- health: concerns 34, 36; issues 40–41, 43, 51, 52; problems 36, 44, 51, 150, 171; protection 174; regulations 149; risk 51, 59, 129–130, 161, 171, 184
- Hodson, R. 148
- India 1, 82, 84, 154–156, 160, 181
- indignity 34, 38, 54, 163, 169
- informal: discussions 102, 104, 108, 129; economy 160; employment 180; jobs 14–15, 69; recruitment 17–18, 48, 183; sector 6, 14, 176; *see also* informalisation; informality
- informalisation 7, 8, 10, 11, 180
- informality 6, 179
- internally displaced persons (IDPs) 180
- international: media 13–14, 47, 181; migrant 5; migration 5–6, 149, 183; pressure 47, 176–177
- International Labour Organization (ILO) 2–5, 7–8, 47, 147, 170
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) 4–5
- job: construction 4, 32, 36, 38, 51, 52, 59, 64–66, 71, 74, 85, 87, 109–110, 118, 145, 151, 168, 171, 172; dangerous 1, 3, 10, 21, 23, 31, 47, 53, 54, 57, 58, 60, 66, 145, 146, 147, 169; difficult 3, 21, 23, 31, 38, 44, 51–52, 59, 60, 61, 66, 70, 82, 115, 120, 136, 145, 146, 147, 155, 169; dirty 3, 21, 23, 31, 32, 34,

- 36, 37, 38, 61, 66, 145–147, 168; farm 68–70, 106, 147, 150; insecurity 6, 8, 9, 114, 148, 153, 161, 169, 170, 173, 174; low-status 3, 22, 66, 67, 88, 161, 168; menial 19, 32, 38, 68, 85, 145; quality 2, 3, 5, 9, 40, 41, 52, 59, 64, 82, 83, 113, 148, 169, 180, 181
- Kalleberg, A. L. 6, 8–10
Khoraki 77–80, 88, 128, 154, 173, 177
 King, R. 5
- labour: flexibility 3, 6, 11, 21, 169; law 175–177; low-cost 3, 6, 143, 181; policy 143, 175; regulations 6, 13, 143, 175; *see also* camps; migrant; recruitment; rural–urban
- Laishley, R. 152
- lean season 14, 68–71, 73, 108, 151–152, 172
- legal 6–9, 45, 62, 147, 170, 176
- life: personal 118, 123, 159, 182; precarious 2–3; social 3, 76–77, 160; urban 74, 76, 153, 173
- Lipton, M. 152
- livelihood 5, 14–15, 19
- living conditions 1–2, 76, 153, 173
- low-status 3, 22, 31, 36, 66, 67, 89, 146, 162, 169, 172
- loyalty 12, 133, 135–136, 149, 155–156, 159, 161
- Mabogunje, A. L. 153
- male workers 19, 41, 58, 60, 63, 83, 87, 149, 175
- Marx, K. 12, 20, 168
- migrant: construction workers 1–7, 13, 17–23, 31–34, 43, 47, 51, 53–54, 57, 61, 63, 66, 67, 70–78, 82, 85, 87, 89, 91–95, 97, 99–100, 102–106, 108–109, 111–112, 116, 118, 120–123, 131, 133, 135, 137, 140, 142–144, 146–149, 152–153, 155, 158–159, 161–163, 168–175, 178–179, 183–184; labourers 2, 4, 7, 9–10, 14–18, 20–23, 46, 48, 67, 69–70, 76, 80, 82, 91, 93, 95–97, 99, 105–115, 118, 140, 142–144, 149–154, 157–158, 160, 163, 168–170, 172, 175, 182–183; workers 2–3, 5–6, 9, 18, 20–23, 36, 46, 58, 69–71, 73–77, 80–82, 84–85, 87, 92–94, 97, 98, 103–105, 113, 116, 120, 126, 130, 140, 142, 146–147, 150, 152–153, 157, 159–162, 168–169, 171–174, 179, 182–183; *see also* international; rural–urban
- mobility: career 118, 123–127, 129, 162, 172; upward 13, 118, 123–124, 126–127, 129, 162, 172, 179; urban 73
- Mosse, D. 6, 82, 111, 154, 156, 160
- neoliberal 2, 4–7, 9–10, 12–13, 20, 168, 180, 182; developments 2, 7–8, 10–11, 20, 168, 181; *see also* neoliberalism
- neoliberalism 2, 4–5, 20, 168
- Nepal 1, 156
- non-payment 133, 137, 139, 143, 161
- on-street labour hire 93–94, 111–112, 114
- outsourcing 2, 7, 20, 143–144, 168
- overtime 38, 45, 62, 147, 170, 177
- overwork 76, 111, 148–150, 169, 171
- Pakistan 1, 7
- Pattenden, J. 6, 84, 154, 156, 160
- payment: advance 85, 155; corruptive 175; delayed 74, 77–78, 80–82, 85, 153–154, 173–174; irregular 9, 77–78, 82, 139, 143, 154, 174; under-136, 139–140, 143, 161; of wages 40, 62–63, 78, 78, 80–81, 85, 123, 133, 173–174, 177; *see also* non-payment
- personal protective equipment (PPE) 48, 49, 50, 52–53, 146, 149, 171, 178, 184
- Picherit, D. 82, 156, 160
- precariat, the 10–13, 19, 23, 141, 145–146, 150, 152–153, 156, 158, 160–162, 168–170, 171–174
- precariatization 6, 13, 19–20, 145, 149, 153, 161–162, 169–174, 182, 184
- precariousness 3, 6–7, 9–10, 12, 20–21, 23, 129, 140–142, 148, 154, 158–159, 168, 173, 178
- precarious work 6–10, 12, 17–18, 20–23, 142–144, 147, 149–150, 163, 168, 170–171, 173–174, 183–184; *see also* the precariat; precariatization; precariousness
- pressure 3–4, 10, 13, 18, 20–21, 40–41, 44–47, 52–53, 61, 72, 94, 105–107, 109, 111, 114–115, 118–120, 125, 129–130, 132–133, 139–141, 143, 146, 148–151, 159–160, 168, 170–173, 176–177, 182
- protection: labour 8, 14, 17–18, 21, 45, 105, 143, 146–147, 161, 170; social 8, 177, 179; *see also* health; legal; regulatory; respiratory; statutory
- Qatar 1–2
- Rahman, M. 17, 154, 179
- Rahman, S. A. 17, 154, 179

- Rana Plaza factory 13, 47, 176–177
 readymade garments (RMG) 13, 17, 47, 76, 85, 88–89, 177
 Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) 16, 23n3, 48, 179
 recruitment: adaptive 93, 107, 109–110; drop-by 100, 102–103; formal 17, 65, 144; indirect 3–4, 6–7, 10, 17–18, 20–22, 39, 91–92, 118, 120–123, 136–137, 140, 142–143, 147–148, 150–151, 153, 156, 158, 160–161, 163, 172–173, 175, 183; informal 17–18, 48, 183; labour 2–3, 7, 9–10, 18, 21, 47, 91–92, 94, 95, 97, 98, 103, 105, 111, 120–122, 136, 140, 142–143, 147, 151, 157–159, 161, 163, 169, 172, 176, 179; layered 137–138, 172, 175; modes of 18, 22, 91, 94, 94, 174; motivational 100, 103–105; on-demand 93, 107, 109; process 6–7, 17, 22, 41, 65, 91–92, 96–97, 99–101, 103, 105, 109–110, 114, 122–123, 144, 145, 157–159, 161, 172, 177, 182–183; practice 2–4, 7–10, 17–23, 48, 65, 85, 89, 91–93, 100, 102–103, 107, 109, 116, 118, 122–123, 136–138, 141–142, 144, 147, 150, 156, 158–161, 168, 172, 175–176, 179, 183; seasonal 93, 107–108; situational 100, 105–107
 regulatory 4, 6, 9, 157
 relationship: employment 4–5, 8–13, 18, 20–23, 31, 36, 91–92, 102, 116, 118, 120, 122, 127, 132–133, 137, 140–143, 146–147, 149, 154, 159–160, 162–163, 168, 170, 172–173, 183; family 104–105; social 85, 101, 105, 107, 129, 132, 134, 163, 170; trust 85, 122, 155–156
 respiratory 51–52
 Reza, S. 7, 17, 143, 154
 Rodgers, G. 9, 12, 170–171, 173–174
 rural–urban: labour migration 5, 15, 17–18, 20–22, 66, 68, 74–75, 151–152, 173; migrant labourers 4, 15–18, 21, 48, 111, 142–143, 154, 170, 172, 175, 182–183; migration 5, 7, 14–15, 67, 150–153, 156, 160
 safety 32, 47, 48, 148, 170–171, 177, 183: boots 50, 58; belts 53, 55, 58; glasses 48, 50, 52, 58; gloves 48, 50–51, 59; occupational 17, 47, 48; personal 48, 52–53, 133–134, 145, 170, 177
 Sardar 111, 139–140, 144, 156, 162
 sheds 57, 58, 58, 74, 153, 173
 Skeldon, R. 5
 skill development 148, 178
 slum 59, 83, 115
 Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) 19
 Sri Lanka 1
 Standing, G. 3–4, 6, 9–13, 19–20, 144, 146–149, 151–154, 157, 161–162, 168–170, 172–175
 state regulations 4, 6, 11, 13, 20, 168
 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 20
 statutory 8–9
 street corner 45–46, 65, 73, 75, 83, 94, 111–116, 123, 137–139, 157, 174
 Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) 180
 subcontracting 2–5, 7, 11–12, 20, 31, 46–47, 91–92, 95, 101, 110, 140, 143–144, 154, 157, 161, 170, 175–176; *see also* subcontracting individual; subcontractor
 subcontracting individual 4–5, 31, 46, 91–92, 154, 176
 subcontractor 64, 71, 84, 87, 89, 91, 93, 94–95, 97–98, 100, 103–105, 108–111, 118–126, 129, 132, 134, 135–139, 145, 156–157
 subordination 12–13, 21, 23, 157, 159, 161, 168, 172, 174
 Swider, S. 3, 6, 111, 143, 154–156, 160
 Tazreen Fashions factory 47, 177
 Todaro, M. P. 151–153
 trade unions 2, 8, 12, 62–63, 147, 170, 176–179; *see also* collective bargaining; unionisation
 training 14, 19, 37, 48, 52, 54, 86, 112, 162–163, 172, 178; *see also* skill development
 Uddin, M. N. 17, 154, 179
 unionisation 12, 176
 United Nations (UN) 13, 15
 Vosko, L. F. 6, 9–10, 143, 149
 wage cuts 130, 136–139, 161
 Wells, J. 3–4, 6–7
 working class 10–12, 20, 161, 168, 176
 working conditions 1–4, 7, 9, 13, 17–18, 21–22, 31, 46–47, 58, 91, 147–151, 170, 177–178; dangerous 31, 47, 57, 61;

- difficult 31, 38, 44, 61; dirty 31–32, 36, 61; poor 2, 4, 9, 17, 21, 32, 38, 46–47, 58, 66, 142, 146–147–148, 150–151, 162, 170; stressful 18, 46, 149, 170–171
- working life 7, 37, 71, 122, 123, 143, 182
- workplace: accidents 2, 47, 53–54, 146, 171; conditions 9, 22–23, 137, 146, 168, 170, 183; experience 18, 22, 44, 118, 183; global 5, 23, 149, 161, 183; local 5, 23, 149, 161, 183
- World Bank (WB) 13, 181