



Socio-cultural Adjustment of Indonesian Domestic Migrant Workers in Singapore

Muhammad Iqbal
Mercu Buana University
m.iqbal@mercubuana.ac.id

Abstract: *This research aimed to delineate the level of socio-cultural adjustment abilities of Indonesian domestic migrant workers in Singapore. This research conducted with survey methodology with quantitative-descriptive approaches. This research applied in Singapore with 124 respondents who were Indonesian female domestic migrant workers. The instrument used in this research was Socio-cultural Adjustment Questionnaire adapted from Black & Stephen (1989). The result of the research shown the socio-cultural adjustment of majority of Indonesian female domestic migrant workers was at the medium level with 68 respondents (54.8%), high with 43 respondents (34.7%) and low around 13 respondents (10.5%). From the dimensions could be observed that the low level of adjustment occurred to general environment with minimum score 9.2661, and the highest level of adjustment occurred to the work/task with minimum score 22.8629 and adjustment to interaction with minimum score 10.2581.*

Keywords: *Socio-Cultural Adjustment, Domestic Migrant Workers, Female Migrant workers, Singapore.*

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, the relation of culture and culture exchange had been attracted social science scientist, included the cultural adjustment of migrant workers abroad. Socio-cultural adjustment refers to the abilities of individual to adapt with new cultural environment measured with the total of occurred obstacles in managing daily situations. Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (in Gudmundsdottir, 013) suggested a model for socio-cultural adjustment. This model recognized three dimensions for internal adjustment, to be mentioned: general adjustment (refers to psychology pleasure which related to cultural environment factors of hosted countries such as weather, living condition and food), interaction adjustment (refers to the adaptation to the differences of communication style in the hosted countries and communication with residences of hosted country), and working adjustment (refers to the psychology pleasure which engaged the differences of working values, expectations and standards). The theoretical framework of socio-cultural adjustment had been supported and authorized by amount of researchers.

Adaptation ability is one of a must life skill to own by each human kind in their daily life, moreover the ability to adjust with new environment. Significant researches on the abilities of adjustment had been conducted, one of the interest topic is the socio-cultural adjustment of Indonesian migrant workers abroad particularly those in Singapore which has been the main destination for Indonesia migrant workers for domestic sector.

According to Singapore Manpower Ministry, in 2010 there were 105 million migrant workers in Singapore equal with 35,2 % from the total of labors. The majority of migrant workers in Singapore were unskilled and temporary workers with monthly income less than SGD 1.800 (US\$ 1.89,35) who worked in construction, manufacture and domestic sectors.

The increasing of Singaporean women entered working field in the end of 1970th was the main reason for accepting female domestic migrant workers. The growths of economy and demography factor also contribute to the raising number of skilled or unskilled migrant workers to fill the available working field. Singapore is the biggest aging population in South East Asia with lowest birth rate which caused the demand for labors to avoid the degradation of population.

The changing of pattern and wider covering problems were coping with Singapore (Institute for Ecosoc Rights, 2007). The most concerned problem is the annual increasing numbers of the death of domestic migrant workers had shown the significant changing during this period (figur 6). In addition, at least two Indonesia female domestic migrant workers abscond from their employers daily and required for assistance to the settler of Indonesian Governments as reported from study field in Singapore. Between 1999 to 2005, at least 147 workers, 12 of them were Indonesian migrant workers, were died because of jumped or fell down from the apartment of their employers (Humman Rights Watch, 2005). These incidents wheter happen at the working places such as the unsafe method of cleaning the glass/window in the apartment or suicide due to the inhuman treatment at working places which caused depression and anxiety to those workers.

The main obstacle of Indonesian domestic migrant workers challenged in Singapore is the hardness of working conditions followed by violence that significant of them caused the death of migrant workers. Other obstacles such as the extreme working conditions with low-paid, physic violence, sickness, the restriction of information and communication access, unadequated foods, mortify the workers at public area, and specific problem with member of family (especially women) and the family.

Moreover, there is no explicit policy on days off for domestic workers. Eventhough the government had encouraged the employer to provide the chance to save the once a month day off quota, however this does not follow with official regulation as day off for Indonesian domestic migrant workers. As consequence, only less than 20% of Indonesian domestic migrant workers benefit from day off. Those who were not able to access day off tend to experience hard working condition follow with stress and medically suffered such as depression. Usually, this happened for those who worked overseas at the first time.

To dealing with these problems, the ability to adjust with new occupation and environment are significantly important for Indonesia domestic migrant workers in Singapore. In this regard, the research of the socio-cultural adjustment level of Indonesia domestic migrant workers in Singapore was conducted to figure out the

comprehensive situations and to acknowledge the socio-cultural adjustment ability of Indonesian female domestic migrant workers in Singapore.

Review of Literature

Socio-Cultural Adjustment

Study on culture derived from Mary Douglas's anthropology study, Douglas argued that for any existed danger in the world the social organization tend to emphasize to something that empower moral politics and religious regularity which made the group still engaging each other. Self adjustment might be defined as a form of interaction between individual with their environment. Each individual is always trying to fulfill their needs and achieve their goals of life. At the same time they are forced by the environment to comport with specific manners.

Socio-cultural adjustment simultaneous with psychological adjustment had been conceptualized as main dimension of inter-cultural adjustment. Where psychological adjustment based on the prosperity and mental health in general, in the other side, socio-cultural adjustment mostly consists of cognitive behavior components and learning culture for effective occupation at new environment.

Socio-cultural adjustment divided into two dimensions that are psychology aspect and socio-cultural aspect. Psychology aspect refers to the welfare or mood whereas socio-cultural aspect refers to the ability to adapt with local culture interactive aspects which appraised through the daily experienced of difficulty in that culture.

The experiences in the new culture may lead culture shock that defined as stress and conflict, happen when an individual contacted with different culture (Winkelman, dalam Wilson 2011). Culture shock frequently caused perplexity and anxiety which related to the changing regulation of culture and social (Oberg, dalam Wilson 2011).

Winkelman (in Wilson 2011) identified culture shock as normal part in differences culture environment. He argued that in the first stage the individual have to recognize that he/she was culture shocked before overcome the situation. He described the phase of culture shock as mentioned: the first phase is honeymoon or touring, the second phase is crisis or culture shock, the third phase is re-orientation and ploddingly recovery, the fourth phase is adaptation, resolution or acculturation.

Adaptation with local culture through understanding and accommodation, uncertainly with assimilation, had to engage with culture shock (Winkelman, dalam Wilson 2011). Ward & Kennedy stated that socio-cultural adjustment defined "in the term of behavior competitions" and "strongly influenced by factors which supported culture learning and social acquisition skills".

External demand is every aspects which engaged the social process where he/she affiliated. Internal demand is related to personal interest. An individual classified had no adjustment problems when he/she able to learn to act toward him/her self and the environment with mature and responsible manners.

The deeds have to be guided to constraints which seen in the personality and ability of individual. When an individual measured with mature and responsible manners, he/she will be able to solve the mental conflicts, disaffections, and difficulties involved without emerged self-defence mechanism or extraordinary behaviour. In the other words, self adjustment refers to the ability of individual to satisfy the demand in the environment in-line with the requirement of his/her self.

Torbiorn stated culture barriers as reaction of individual in the situation of the relation in cross-culture. He defined culture as psychological barriers particularly on ability or desire to understand, to accept, or to adopt the norm of migrant cultures. Moreover, he emphasized that cultural barriers existed in individual reaction to other people, object or situation which represented different cultures (Selmer, 2004) Self adjustment had three main dimensions: general, interaction and occupation. Self adjustment in general dimension means the comfort feeling associated with various factors out of occupation such as life condition in general, local food, transportation, entertainment, health facilities and services in the destination country. Self adjustment in interaction means the pleasure associated with local citizen both at working place and out of working place. Whereas self adjustment at occupation dimension means the pleasure associated with working tasks. This frame of work constitute as reinforcement to the aspects of socio-cultural adjustment. (Selmer, 2004).

Socio-cultural adjustment together with psychological adjustment had been conceptualized as main dimension of inter cultural adjustment (Searle & Ward 1990; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Psychological adjustment refers to welfare affective and mental health in general and socio-cultural adjustment consists of behaviour cognitive components and culture learning for impressive performance at new environment (Ward et al, 2001)

In the research to professional migrant workers (expatriate), the experiences of pressure depend to expressed reaction pattern with adjustment or incapacity to adopt with pressure which consist of effective, cognitive, and result of behavior such as working satisfaction, the decreasing of psychology in thinking, going back home earlier than the contract and low working performance.

Socio-cultural adjustment model submitted by Black, Mendehall and Oddou are the most influence and treatment theory that most frequent to be quoted in term of the experiences of professional migrant workers (expatriate). One of contribution of this model is adjustment conceptualization which has various aspects defined as pleasure level or the existence of non pressure experiences as expatriate.

Self-adjustment has three main dimensions: general, interaction and occupation. Self adjustment at general dimension means the comfort sense associated with numerous factors outside working conditions such as life condition in general, local food, transportation, entertainment, health facilities and services at destination country. Interaction dimension in adjustment related to the comfort sense associated to interaction with local

citizen in or out the working place. Occupation dimension in self adjustment means the pleasure which associated with job assignment or the duty of tasks. This frame of thinking is the reinforcement to socio-cultural adjustment. (Chen,2007).

Other related concept is psychological adjustment which is different concept from socio-cultural adjustment. According to Selmer (2004 in Chen, 2007) and other researches, psychological adjustment means subjective mental health or mood condition which emphasized behavior factors in the process of adjustment.

Socio-Cultural Adjustment Theory by Stephen and Black

Significant manuscripts had been researched literatures of socio-cultural adjustment. There are five dimensions (themes) emerged as component or part of inter-culture adjustment process : (1) training before departure, (2) previous experiences lived abroad, (3) selection mechanism, (4) individual talent, and (5) non-job factors.

In the most basic phase, someone scrutinize the required abilities the new culture environment. The emphasizing is culture learning, the similarity/dissimilarity of resident cultures with home cultures. Those who recognize higher dissimilarity of culture or culture distance between resident cultures with home cultures tend to experience greater social challenges in the transition process. Social cognition variable, particularly acculturation strategy, more significantly influences socio-cultural adjustment. Strong culture identity and home culture deterred socio-culture adjustment to local society. These findings congruent with social learning approaches for socio-cultural transition which documented the influence of culture distance, common knowledge about local society/citizens, culture assimilation and the number of interactions with local residents toward socio-cultural adjustment.

This research refers to socio-cultural concept developed by Black and Stephen (1998). This instrument generally used for the research of self adjustment to professional migrant workers (expatriate) at overseas. Black and Stephen stated that there are 3 factors influenced socio-culture adjustment as mentioned: firstly, the adjustment to occupation which related to psychology pleasure of the workers to work loadings. According to Black, Gregesen and Mendenhall (1992) this is the easiest dimension due to the similarity of procedure, policy and standard of operation in the working tasks at home and destination countries. Secondly, adjustment to interaction, Interaction to local residents considered as the most challenging due to the dissimilarities to the interaction and perception, belief and values. Thirdly, adjustment to the environment in general, due to the adjustment toward living condition in general and local culture, this dimension considered as the focus of inter-culture studies, this dimension related to eating difficulties, resident, shopping and health services.

Research Methods

This research used survey methodology with descriptive qualitative approach. The main variable in this research is socio-cultural adjustment. The descriptive analysis used to acknowledge the general abilities of socio-cultural adjustment of Indonesian female domestic migrant workers in Singapore.

The research conducted in Singapore with 124 Indonesian female domestic migrant worker correspondents consist of 64 problem workers who stayed at Indonesian Emabassy in Singapore and 60 non problem workers who stayed with their employers. The data collection used accidental sampling method due to the difficulty to collect the total data and certain dissemination of migrant workers, also because of the challenge to the permit in Singapore.

The instrument used in this research is socio cultural adjustment questionnaire from Black & Mandel (1996) which had been translated to Indonesia language and adopted based on the condition of domestic workers.

Result

In regard to the result of data analysis in this research, it was found that the culture adjustment ability levels of the respondent categorized medium with total 68 (54.8%), high with total 43 (34.7%) and low with total 13 (10.5%). The complete data shown in below Table 1.1 :

Table 1.1 Socio-cultural Adjustment Level of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Singapore

Socio-cultural Adjustment Level	Total	%
Low	13	10.5
Medium	68	54.8
High	43	34.7
Total	124	100.0

In the category of problem and non problem workers, counted that non problem workers having high level at socio-cultural adjustment amount of 39 respondents, medium 21 respondents and none of them at low category. In the other side, the majority of problem workers having medium category of socio-cultural adjustment with total 47 respondents, and low category amount of 13 respondents. The detail data appeared at Table 1.2..

Table 1.2 The Dissimilarity of Socio-Cultural Adjustment

Socio-cultural Adjustment	Status		Total
	Problem	Non Problem	
Low	13	0	13
Medium	47	21	68
High	4	39	43
Total	64	60	124

From above data about socio-cultural adjustment dimension had been calculated the value of mean is 22.8629, interaction is 10.2581 and environment adjustment is 9.2661. The completed data could be found at below Table.

Table 1.3 Socio-cultural Adjustment Dimensions

Dimensi	N	Mean
Job Adjusment	124	22.8629
Interaction Adjustment	124	10.2581
Environment Adjustment	124	9.2661

Above data showed that Indonesian female domestic migrant workers in Singapore having challenged on environment adjustment and interaction adjustment, these could be seen from the low mean values of environment adjustment and environment adjustment compare to job adjustment.

Conclusion and Recommends

The result from above data had shown that the majority of Indonesia female domestic migrant workers in Singapore had gained medium and high level of socio-cultural adjustment and only few of them had low socio-cultural adjustment level that is 13 persons (10.5%). This shown that the average level of socio-cultureal adjustment has been at medium level and necessary to be improved. The sustainable training is needed to improve the abilities of migrant workers. The training could be applied before the departure of the workers, during the working period through soft skills training conducted by migrant workers community, non governmental organization or Indonesian government in Singapore.

Despitefully, in the categories of respondents which devided to problem workers at Indonesian Embassy in Singapore and non problem workers at the house of their employers, the research found that non problem workers had high abilities of socio-cultural adjustment around 39 respondents, medium 21 respondents and none at low category. Wheres at problem workers, the majority of them had medium category amount of 47 repondents and low category amount of 13 repondents. This shown that majority of problem workers who stay at Indonesian Embassy in Singapore had problem and challenge on adaptation at the working place with employers, social and environment. This research found that the ability of socio-cultural adjustment would need to be possed by migrant workers, particularly before the departure. So that, the problem of self-adjustment could be overcame properly.

Likewise with socio-cultural adjustment dimension, the research found that the lowest mean value is adjustment with environment and interaction with local citizens. These two obstacles occurred due to the less interaction of migrant workers with society outside the house of the employers, as a result they had barriers to interact with other citizens and the environment. These conditions have to be noticed, one of them by

making sure the workers grant obtained their right of day off to interact with the society. There are numerous migrant worker communities in Singapore, therefore they could be empowered and have no obstacle in interaction.

There are several suggestions for further following up of this research, some of them are: this research will be more comprehensive by including more respondents, the research may be conducted by involving the Indonesian female domestic workers from various destination countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Middle East. Therefore, the result and description will be more completed and could be comparing the socio-cultural adjustment in each country. There are also many of psychology variables could be analysed to know further the problem of domestic workers at overseas especially in Singapore such as motivation, struggle capacity, stress, burn out, etc.

Reference

1. Bruce W. Stening and Yi Yu, 2006. Expatriates in China: A Review of the Literature. School of Management Marketing and International Business. *Working Paper Series*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2006
2. Huei-Fang Chen. 2007. An Integration of Socio-Cultural and Psychological Adjustment. Proceedings of the 13th Asia Pacific Management Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2007, 640-648
3. Hayes, Andrew R. (2014). "Overseas Assignments: Expatriate and Spousal Adjustment in the U.S. Air Force" Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects. Paper 345.
4. Mahmud, Fadli Rakasima, dkk. 2011. "5 Tahun Badan Nasional Penempatan dan Perlindungan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia : Mengabdikan dengan cinta". BNP2TKI Jakarta
5. Satia Prihatni Zen. 2003. *Penyesuaian sosio budaya ekspatriat, hubungan antar aspek-aspeknya dengan strategi penanganan tekanan*, tesis Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
6. Tim Peneliti The Institute For Ecosoc Rights. 2010. "Atase Tenaga Kerja & Perlindungan TKI antara Indonesia-Singapura-Malaysia. 2007. The Institute For Ecosoc Rights Jakarta
7. Sumer, Seda. 2009. "International Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation in the United States." Dissertation, Georgia State University http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cps_diss/34
8. UNIMIG Indonesia. 2014. *Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Pekerja Migran Indonesia Yang Berkonflik dengan Hukum. Union Migran Indonesia Jakarta*
9. Muhammad Iqbal, 2016. *A Survey of the Quality of Life of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Sabah East Malaysia*. International Journal of Philosophy and Social-Psychological Sciences. Science Arena Publications 2016, Vol, 2 (3): 34-40 34
10. Muhammad Iqbal & Yuherina Gusman, 2015. Pull and Push Factors of Indonesian Women Migrant Workers from Indramayu (West Java) to Work Abroad. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol 6, No 5 S5 (2015)