Trust and Networking as Elements of Social Capital During Fieldwork in Malaysia to Mitigate Methodological Obstacles: A Bangladeshi Overview

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Abstract
This paper examines the roles of trust and networking in overcoming fieldwork challenges in Malaysia. The obstacles and their management were described using a phenomenological methodology. Among the most challenging aspects of fieldwork are gender stereotypes, language barrier, safety and security of the researcher, the inherent unpredictability of migrant workers, and the initial rejection of the primary informants. Data was successfully collected from Indonesian and Bangladeshi migrant workers by creating and strengthening networks, building relationships as a means of bonding with people from the same country, achieving acceptance, and exploring alternative means of addressing the different challenges being endured and organised. Despite the unpredictability of fieldwork, the findings demonstrated that impediments can be reduced through the active participation of researchers in identifying risks and developing strategies to mitigate them. Two essential components of social capital — trust and networking — played a crucial role in overcoming fieldwork obstacles. This article describes the researcher's fieldwork experiences and how the elements of social capital, trust and networking are utilised to overcome obstacles. This paper aims to contribute to the reduction of methodological obstacles and the development of a risk management strategy for future researchers, particularly female researchers in a foreign country, by sharing practical experiences and challenges and empowering them in their research endeavours.

Keywords: Social capital, trust, networking, migrant labourers, mitigating Methodological obstacles

Introduction

Data is the most essential aspect of a study, serving as its lifeblood and revealing the true nature of a problem. Consequently, social scientists require primary data to analyse a problem, regardless of whether they are accumulating new information, testing a hypothesis, examining existing practice, or developing a new theory. However, data collection remains a challenge in most instances, a shared experience that unites

researchers. Several researchers anticipated future obstacles by having the necessary training and preparations to face them. Male and female researchers alike face challenges during the data collection period; some are similar, while some are unique. Even though it is customary for researchers to be prepared for future obstacles, many wish they had been more organised emotionally and logistically. Due to the significant impact of human attitude and behaviour, as well as data unavailability and inaccessibility, researchers must be well-equipped (Islam & Siti Hajar, 2013). Thus, this paper contributes to the notion that social scientists, particularly female social researchers, can be better prepared, strategised, and equipped using trust and networking.

The objective of this study, which forms the basis of this paper, is to investigate the utilisation of social capital by foreign workers in Malaysia. To examine the role of trust and networking in data collection, it is necessary to understand the context of the study and the actual situation on the ground. As one of the leading labour-receiving nations, Malaysia receives a large number of workers from various countries. In contrast, the reality of low-skilled workers adjusting to life in a foreign country is quite different. Given this, they typically struggle to work and survive in a very foreign environment (Zaman & Hussain, 2019). Generally, Malaysian law applies to all individuals residing within its jurisdiction. Migrant workers are subjected to organisational discrimination concerning labour rights from the moment they enrol in a job, as well as massive exploitation in a variety of ways, revealing their helplessness. Typically, they face open discrimination in the form of uncertain job descriptions and wages (Rahim et al., 2015). The industrial strength of domestic workers is greater than that of foreign workers. The history of human development, however, has consistently indicated that when some members of a community encounter difficulties, the rest of the community assists them in overcoming those obstacles. This type of instance was also discovered to be true in Malaysia, where the community support for migrant workers is a beacon of hope in their struggle (Hasanah, 2015).

Despite all these obstacles, migrant workers also possess some strengths. Additionally, before migrating to a foreign country to work, migrant workers often attempt to locate other people from their home country. They would also attempt to locate and contact friends or relatives already living in the host country, thereby forming a social network. Foreign workers from multiple nations typically reside in the same area, and they (who are from the same nation) share their problems, which is an example of the use of social capital among themselves (Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013).

This study was conducted to examine the types of social capital elements, the nature of the identified social capital elements used by migrant workers and how these social capital elements affect their livelihoods. However, during the fieldwork, the researcher encountered numerous difficulties. Since migrant workers in Malaysia often struggle to survive, they become hesitant to provide information to foreign researchers. Hence, this study was conducted to investigate the process of overcoming methodological obstacles during fieldwork in Malaysia by establishing trust and networks among Bangladeshi migrant workers.

To comprehend the challenges outlined in this paper, it is essential to understand the background of the researcher and migrant workers, which will assist readers in contextualising the challenges and their mitigation strategies. In this study, Indonesia and Bangladesh were chosen because they have the most significant number

of workers abroad. The Klang Valley, specifically Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was chosen as the site for this study. Meanwhile, quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised, but the journey was not at all straightforward. The study's target population consisted of low-skilled male migrant workers. Their job insecurity causes them to feel anxious. Their lifestyle and means of subsistence, attitude, perception and respect for others are negatively impacted by their low income and the ongoing struggle to obtain visas; these effects are not always positive. For instance, the Indonesian workforce in this study initially lacked confidence in foreigners due to the country's high level of insecurity. It also cost the researcher some time to break the ice with the Bangladeshi workers. The challenges faced with participants, such as the initial lack of confidence and the time it took to establish rapport, added a layer of complexity and depth to the research process. Since migrant workers enter Malaysia both legally and illegally, they are not always comfortable discussing their lives and livelihoods.

On the other hand, migrant workers typically work between 10 and 12 hours, and sometimes 16 or 17 hours; therefore, they can only be interviewed and interacted with in the late evenings or during their lunch break. As a foreign female researcher, it is impossible to collect data in the evenings or at night, which adds to the difficulty of scheduling time with them during their working hours. Before beginning data collection in each location, the researcher met with the authorised personnel of their workplace and presented a formal letter issued by the university. With a few exceptions, the authorities permitted the researcher to collect data but cautioned her to be mindful of time, as the workers were busy with their duties. Despite being native Bangladeshi, it was difficult to contact Bangladeshi workers, as they were concerned about their own responsibilities and job security, in addition to their lack of confidence in sharing their personal information in a foreign country. As foreigners to Indonesian workers, access to them was exceedingly difficult in many ways. However, the researcher's commitment and passion for the study never wavered (Zaman et al., 2021).

All of the above obstacles are described in this paper, incorporating the researcher's own field experience. The researcher and interpreters' (for Indonesian employees) first-hand experience during data collection, which may not have a theoretical foundation, is a reassuring factor. In addition, the researcher attempted to demonstrate that the obstacles can be mitigated through meaningful participation in identifying risks in advance and carefully strategising to manage those risks. Sharing these practical experiences and challenges through this paper helps future researchers develop a risk management plan, instilling confidence in their abilities.

Background of the Research

This study was conducted in Klang Valley, a unique area that includes Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The Klang Valley is bounded by the Titiwangsa Mountains to the north and east and the Strait of Malacca to the west, giving it a distinct geographical location (Ooi, 2009). It spans from Rawang in the northwest to Semenyih in the southeast and includes Klang and Port Klang in the southwest. This urban area is Malaysia's economic hub (World Gazetteer, 2019). The Klang Valley is home to nearly 7.2 million people, including Malaysians, expatriates, and many foreign workers (Zaman et al., 2021; Noh et al., 2016).

In 2013, Malaysia had the seventh-highest ratio of migrants to the total population among 19 countries. According to the Malaysian Labour Force Survey, between 1990 and the early 2000s, the immigrant workforce increased from 3.5 to 9.5 per cent, demonstrating the demand for foreign labour in Malaysia (World Bank, 2015). Malaysia requires foreign labour to accommodate its rapid economic growth and accomplish its objectives (Noor et al., 2011). The majority of migrant workers are Indonesian, but Malaysia also receives migrants from a diverse range of countries including Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines. It has been estimated that the manufacturing, plantation, agriculture, construction and service sectors of Malaysia will continue to rely heavily on migrant labour (Robertson & Fair Labor Association, 2009). In 2019, the Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia reported 2,073,414 migrant workers. Meanwhile, 817,300 Indonesian migrants make up 39.4 per cent of the total.

Employers and the government rely on migrant workers as they make up nearly a third of Malaysia's workforce, underscoring their vital role in the country's economy. Low-skilled migrant workers do dirty, dangerous jobs (3D jobs). They are inexpensive and diligent (Loh et al., 2019). To achieve its goal of a high per capita income, the Malaysian government must rely on migrant workers in the domestic labour market, as its citizens lack the necessary resources to perform all jobs (Bormann et al., 2010). On the other hand, although migrant workers play a crucial role in this society, they face many hardships and insecurities in their daily lives, including wage manipulation, long working hours, verbal and physical abuse, as well as a lack of leave benefits, among others (Amnesty International, 2010). These problems threaten employment security, which is often compromised by legal issues and their associated repercussions. After crossing a traditional boundary, migrant workers face differences including in languages, cultures, ethnic groups and nation-states. Migration is a challenging process and has significant consequences for both migrant workers and the receiving nation.

This study was conducted to investigate the livelihoods of Indonesian and Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia; to identify the elements of social capital utilised by Indonesian and Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia; to determine how the elements of social capital affect their livelihoods, and to suggest ways in which migrant workers can improve their livelihoods in Malaysia. This study discovered that country-by-country migration perspectives vary. In addition, developing trust takes time and repeated exposure between a diverse range of potential migrant workers' sources, including institutions, legal organisations, government agencies, agents and most importantly, migrant workers themselves. Theoretically, trust is a critical and influential component of social capital, according to Fukuyama (1996), since it enables people to work cooperatively toward common goals. Moreover, according to Portes (1998), "a community's united power not only binds them together but also ensures security and assists in obtaining any service from the society."

Furthermore, this research revealed that trust dynamics play a crucial role in the employment decisions of migrant workers. They develop an unwavering and blind trust in formal and informal networks before arriving in a new country, often believing everything they are told about their future jobs. Their perception of trust begins to change upon arrival, as they become familiar with their new job and the surrounding environment. In both countries, many respondents stated that their 'trust changes due to having to initially trust 'blindly' to progress through the primary stage. However,

according to the majority of respondents from both countries, foreign workers are not to be trusted. Conversations between migrant workers often revolve around job information and favourable opportunities, which enable them to decide whether to change their employment status (Zaman et al., 2021). These circumstances led migrant workers to distrust the researcher at an early stage, which hindered data collection.

On the other hand, the original study on which this article is based employed a mixed methods approach to collect data, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, in-depth case studies, and a documentation survey. In the quantitative study, face-to-face interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were used. Using quantitative research methods to collect numerical data opens a vast array of research questions. In actuality, the researcher employed a quantitative approach to develop knowledge based on post-positivist claims, utilising examination techniques such as experiments and surveys, as well as collecting data using prearranged tools that provide statistical information (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A distinct set of guidelines has been formulated for in-depth case studies, ensuring inclusivity and involvement. Moreover, guidelines for key-informant interviews (KIIs) are already available for academics, migrant worker agents, assigned persons at high commissions, experts from the Malaysian Ministry of Labour dealing with migrant workers, as well as journalists. Additionally, guidelines were distributed to various groups of key informants to gather detailed information on migrant workers' use of social capital. Non-participant technique observed the facial expressions, attitude, body language, expressions of happiness and sadness, behaviour and gesticulation of respondents. Additionally, the researcher visited the respondents' homes to gain a deeper understanding of their lives, including their living environments. Due to the unavailability of respondents in a single location at the same time, snowball sampling was utilised to select study participants.

The risk of bias is low when the population is homogeneous concerning the target characteristic in question, whereas the risk of error is higher in non-homogeneous populations (Abedsaeidi, 2015). In this instance, it was assumed that migrant workers are homogeneous, hence carrying a low risk of discrimination. When a variety of data collection techniques, such as semi-structured interviews and in-depth case studies, are employed, qualitative case study research is typically used. The qualitative research method, with its in-depth nature, ensures a thorough and comprehensive understanding of life's actual circumstances. In the quantitative approach, variables are statistically analysed in multiple dimensions, but cannot explain the underlying social aspects (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Individuals' real-life experiences, socioeconomic perspectives, and realities, as well as historical and political issues, can be explored in depth through qualitative research's open-ended data, which are also primary. The qualitative approach, with its participatory nature, ensures that all voices are heard. The design is narrative, and the interview is conducted according to open-ended guidelines to explore in-depth knowledge. In a qualitative approach, researchers sought to understand the participants' actual perspectives. Through this method, respondents explain their practices, behaviours, and attitudes regarding socioeconomic and cultural issues, their day-to-day experiences, their interpersonal relationships with their community and other communities, as well as their sharing and networking issues. In addition, this

procedure allows researchers to directly observe the facial expressions, behaviour and attitudes of the participants (Zaman & Hussain, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

In light of this study's objective, it is believed that the Theory of Social Capital developed by Robert Putnam (1993, 2001) is best suited to investigate the types and nature of social capital utilisation among migrant workers in Malaysia. This research is not just theoretical, but has practical implications, as it can assist the government and policymakers in developing measures to improve the standard of living of migrant workers. Putnam (1993, 2001) identified five key components of social capital: collective actions, social trust, networking, coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits, as well as norm and value sharing among participants. Interestingly, while conducting this research considering the context of the field, the researcher also followed two elements of social capital, namely "Trust and Networking," to successfully collect data.

Methods

Before the commencement of this study, the researcher openly discussed the fieldwork-related obstacles encountered. The researchers lacked clarity regarding the data collection procedure and locations; thus, awkwardness was identified as a shared, bodily-based sensation encapsulating the researcher's experiences during the conversation. Subsequently, they recognised the need for a more systematic approach to generating knowledge regarding the nature of the obstacles faced and how to overcome them. To gain a deeper understanding of the respondent's initial experiences, their lived experiences were investigated through a collaborative process, where they discussed their obstacles with one another and conducted a joint analysis. The obstacles and their management were described using a phenomenological approach, emphasising the collaborative nature of the research.

Originally, phenomenology is a philosophical approach that sought to discover the essence of meaning structures by focusing on lived experiences, maintaining a strict non-influence by a theoretical framework. In phenomenological research, specific descriptions of lived experiences lead researchers to comprehend the inner significance of those experiences. From these meanings, essential descriptions are derived (Giorgi, 2009). The meaning structures are grounded in lived experiences and emerge from the phenomenological analysis itself, rather than being based on a presupposed theoretical reference point. Internal validation of data in phenomenology must be based on lived experiences that are presented throughout the text and evolve through descriptions (Bille & Steenfeldt, 2013).

In this study, the subjects were investigated with an open phenomenological perspective. In other words, the researcher first read the prepared field experience notes multiple times to form an overall impression. Then, these impressions were separated into meaning units and transformed into third-person perspectives. The transformed significance of these units was then clustered. These clusters are not considered to be findings, but rather groups of related meanings (Dahlberg et al.,

2011). The researcher then grouped these units into five emerging key clusters, which included (1) conducting research abroad as a woman; (2) a language barrier with the Indonesian interviewees; (3) a sense of insecurity when conducting interviews with respondents; (4) a lack of trust from migrant workers and (5) a lack of interview times from the key informants. In light of Robert Putnam's theory of social capital (1993, 2001), the researcher identified two essential strategies for overcoming these clustered obstacles: (1) trust and (2) networking, which were explored with relevant cases in this paper. After analysing these clusters, the researcher revisited these field notes for a second time. By doing so, the new descriptions of these clusters can be ensured to be genuinely representative of the field notes, a crucial component of any phenomenological analysis. The outcome of the analyses was compiled into a comprehensive and detailed description of the phenomenon's fundamental characteristics. The structure should not be interpreted as a definition of the phenomenon, but rather as a holistic perspective based on empirical factors of lived experience (Dahlberg, 2006; Giorgi, 2009).

Challenges in the Field and Role of Trust and Networking

Gender stereotyping

One of the primary challenges encountered during the fieldwork was the prevalence of gender stereotyping among migrant labourers. Initially, participants from Indonesia and Bangladesh exhibited impolite dispositions towards the investigators, primarily due to their gender. This perspective was shaped by socioeconomic variables and the labourers' perspectives of female investigators. The researcher was frequently perceived as a labourer from a foreign country rather than a scholarly expert. The formidable challenge of overcoming gender stereotyping and establishing trust was particularly pronounced for the female researcher, who played a crucial role in this process. In addition, the data collection process posed challenges due to male participants harbouring entrenched gender biases.

In addition, they were highly suspicious of this study, which was displayed by their questions on what the researcher was doing there and whether she was a PhD student, a social outcast (sex worker) or a street walker. From their vantage point, disregard was evident. The perceptions of men continue to demonstrate "gender stereotyping," even though women are participating in nearly every field of work and sometimes performing better than men. As a result, as a female researcher, collecting data from these types of male respondents on foreign soil presented a formidable challenge, as the respondents did not always view the female researcher as an academic, but rather as a streetwalker or sex worker. There are numerous condominiums in the researcher's neighbourhood, where many Bangladeshi workers were performing 3D work. When the researcher attempted to contact them, one of them asked, "*Do you believe that these workers are your relatives, uncles and that they have so much time to speak with you?*" *It is not your country; it is a foreign nation, and you cannot work here as you please!*"

Language barrier

The language barrier, particularly with Indonesian workers who formed much of the study sample, was a significant challenge. It has been noted that most labourers are from Indonesia. Consequently, most of the sample in this study was made up of migrant workers from Indonesia. The Indonesian labour force presented linguists with a formidable linguistic challenge. To overcome this, two Indonesian students were chosen to conduct the interviews, and the questionnaires were translated into Indonesian. However, the researcher discovered that the collected data did not meet the expected standards of quality and accuracy. Upon further investigation, it was found that the interviewers had been dishonest and had even provided false data. In response, the researcher decided to postpone data collection from Indonesian labourers for a few days. After addressing the issue with data collection from Indonesian workers, the researcher established a strong network with a group of Bangladeshi migrant workers. This new network, which included four Bangladeshi migrant workers and one Bangladeshi international student at Universiti Malaya, played a crucial role as interpreters during the data collection period, highlighting the significance of this change.

Protection and safety of the researcher

The safety and well-being of the researcher were also concerns during the fieldwork. Migrant workers in Malaysia have diverse backgrounds and behaviours, making it difficult to predict their actions, besides posing risks to the researcher's physical and mental health. Poverty, unemployment and the opportunity to earn more money are not the only reasons people come to work in Malaysia. Additionally, some arrived for political reasons. Due to the diverse characteristics of labourers, it is difficult to predict their behaviour; as a result, researchers may be exposed to some risks that can have a significant impact on their physical and mental health (Islam & Banda, 2011). The researcher was aware that one of her respondents had been implicated in a murder case, thus attempting to treat his interview as an outlier. This employee assisted the researcher to the best of his ability. However, she was harassed during an interview, as described in detail with a case study example. This category of respondents required attention in both countries.

The researcher's safety was also a concern, as interviewing male respondents alone did not always instil a sense of security. Since the study's respondents were males living in cohorts, there were risks for females, as there were few negative occurrences in those regions. It was challenging to visit their home alone. Additionally, it was not always comforting to be interviewed alone. Even though the respondents did not appear to be involved in criminal activity, their perceptions of an unidentified female varied. Observing the actions of a few employees who inquired about the researcher's residence revealed their malicious intent.

Uncertainty inherent to migrant workers

The migrant workers' lack of trust in the researcher stemmed from issues surrounding their work authorisation and the complex nature of their employment.

Many workers find themselves in a precarious situation since they operate within a legal grey area and work with permits that do not accurately reflect their actual job roles. Thus, they were reluctant to divulge private information regarding social capital factors and their means of subsistence due to their "natural uncertainty", as most of the labour force is "illegally legal." They work with a work permit, but what they demonstrate to obtain a visa is not what they do; they obtain visas through agents after spending a substantial amount of money. It is extremely common for workers to enter the country with a student visa, despite their intention to work. The workers are paid a very low wage that is insufficient to cover their living expenses, visa renewal fees, and remittances to their home countries. At the same time, many of them arrive in the country with debt that must be repaid. Therefore, the workers feared that if the researcher discovered the truth, they would encounter difficulties. Some of the employees have side businesses to supplement their income, but they do not trust the researcher enough to share this information with her. Those who travelled to Malaysia for political purposes were also unwilling to share their information with the researcher.

Upon collecting data from Indonesian labourers with the help of Bangladeshi labourers, the Indonesian labourers initially lacked trust in the researcher since she is a foreigner. They had concerns, such as the possibility that the researcher was an agent or would use their information inappropriately. In the community of labourers, it is common knowledge that not all labours are "legal in the legal sense." As a result, they are constantly anxious and have trouble trusting others. To counter this issue, the researcher would first explain who she is and her mission; however, this approach was not always successful. As foreigners to them, they could not trust the researcher. When inquired about their age, they often regarded the researcher with suspicion since many worker identification documents lacked accurate ages. In addition, they believed that the researcher was a spy or agent who could cause them trouble when they saw her holding a questionnaire.

To establish rapport with respondents and collect reliable data, it is essential to earn their trust (Islam et al., 2014). The impact of language barriers on trust is significant and should not be underestimated. During data collection, it became routine for the researcher to observe interviewees fleeing without showing signs of withdrawal, requiring her to pursue them and explain that she was not intending to harm the workers. However, they lacked faith in the researcher and feared encountering obstacles. This circumstance lent credence to the notion that this study would be impossible. The use of one's native tongue can rapidly break down barriers and foster trust. As a foreigner to Indonesian workers, the researcher found it took a long time to complete this survey due to language barriers and trust issues. Additionally, every worker has unique working hours, making it challenging to conduct interviews during their shifts. They do not enjoy conversing with others as they live in their world and refuse to let others in.

Even when granted permission, the Indonesian employees were not always cooperative in all locations involved in data collection. On occasion, the officer in charge of a particular location did not cooperate with this request. Due to their proximity to the researcher's living quarters, some of the Indonesian workers were already known to her. After receiving formal communication, they initially refused to engage in conversation. Even after being contacted by the researchers' Indonesian

friends, they still refused to communicate. Their supervisor attempted to persuade them that it was merely an academic matter. However, they responded, "*We are workers who are not particularly educated, so we cannot answer your question.*" Undeterred, the supervisor and the researcher persisted in explaining the purpose of the study, which eventually convinced the workers to participate in the interview.

Initial rejection from the primary sources

One of the most common obstacles encountered during fieldwork was initial rejection, especially from personnel agents and relevant authorities. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with workforce agents, assigned personnel from the high commissions of Indonesia and Bangladesh, journalists, assigned personnel from the Malaysian Ministry of Labour's labour wing, as well as employees of non-governmental organisations. They differed in their ability to provide information. Specifically, neither the workforce agents nor the Bangladeshi High Commission was willing to freely provide information or allow the researcher to record the interview. After contacting the Bangladeshi High Commission through proper channels, they denied permission to interview the assigned personnel of the labour wing. The researcher, respecting their decision, continued the fieldwork. Concerning the exportation of labourers from Bangladesh, multiple contentious issues were observed. Other members of the high commission agreed to make considerable effort.

Strategies for Overcoming the Obstacles and Role of Trust and Networking

Utilising networking

The utilisation of networking is a pivotal factor in successfully navigating obstacles encountered during fieldwork. Through establishing connections with migrant workers, the researcher effectively recruited participants and gained their acceptance. The investigator encouraged each participant to promote the engagement of their colleagues in the research, thereby enabling a recruitment strategy based on networking. Generally, the researcher would meet with a single respondent three or four times. During data collection, the researcher asked each respondent to invite their coworkers to also participate as respondents and then asked them to name others who might be willing to participate in the study. This proved to be a highly effective strategy for recruiting members of the target group. The power of networking is genuinely remarkable and functions exceptionally well in this context. As a result of her ability to persuade numerous respondents while establishing a network with them, they did not exhibit gender-stereotypical behaviour and instead treated her as a sister. In addition, the Bangladeshi employees stated that they felt a profound connection with the researcher due to their shared nationality, which significantly strengthened their bond. Here, the connections between the researcher and the migrant workers grew stronger.

The researcher encountered a language barrier with Indonesian respondents, but not with Bangladeshi workers. Networking with workers from the same country

helped the researcher overcome the language barrier, as they acted as interpreters when collecting data from Indonesian workers. Once a strong network was established, some respondents accompanied the researcher during data collection, particularly when she visited their homes. The cooperation of these respondents was crucial in the success of the data collection process. When one respondent attempted to abuse the researcher verbally, the other respondents objected and occasionally warned them not to behave in such a manner. Despite initial rejection by key informants, country networking with them enabled the researcher to collect data exceptionally well. Some Bangladeshi respondents were extraordinarily cooperative and fully comprehended the purpose of the study, for which the researcher is highly appreciative.

Consequently, they invited their personal friends and well-known co-workers. On their days off, some of them would accompany the researcher to their known locations to find respondents. It was extremely dangerous to visit the respondents' residences, but these individuals were willing to assist with this challenging task. On occasion, when the researcher had to accompany her child during fieldwork, respondents who already knew her alerted their fellow citizens to come to the closest location, allowing her to do so easily. To conduct primary research that contributes to the development of new knowledge, a researcher must interact with the target population, maintain a network with them, and the importance of maintaining regular contact cannot be overstated (Hussain, 2013).

It was nearly impossible to collect data from Indonesian workers; however, some Bangladeshi respondents fluent in *Bahasa Melayu* accompanied the researcher on their days off to serve as interpreters. Only with their help was the researcher able to complete data collection. This benefit was granted to the researcher as she was a native of the region. In this instance, the researcher kept in constant contact with a subset of respondents who were instrumental in achieving the goal. After an initial rejection, which was a common occurrence, the researcher persisted. She understood that it would be unwise to give up. The worst nightmare of a researcher is hearing "no" from a respondent. Nonetheless, a researcher must have alternative solutions for this type of problem.

In addition, the researcher must be prepared to provide certain documents, such as permission from their academic institution, a questionnaire, interview guidelines, or an abstract, if requested. Personal motivation is also essential in this context; being nervous on foreign soil is normal, but the researcher must possess determination, a positive attitude toward a problem, personal commitments, the courage to accept a challenge, and the ability to overcome a situation. A researcher's expectations may not be met in the field or may take time, but they should approach fieldwork with an attitude of enjoyment. Meeting new people and gaining insight into their lives is a fascinating and singular experience.

Establishing rapport with respondents was essential to the data collection process. Before collecting data from a worker, the researcher communicated with them and arranged a time, then collected data according to the agreed-upon schedule. In this instance, the researcher's role in maintaining a respectful and cordial relationship with the respondents was crucial. After collecting data, the researcher-maintained contact

with the participants, who in turn assisted in recruiting additional subjects. To establish rapport with the respondents, it was necessary to make them feel appreciated. When someone believes they are an integral part of this research, they will cooperate without question. The primary responsibility of the researcher was to convey to the participants that they were essential to the study. This made them feel privileged, motivating them to work diligently and cooperate.

Building trust

When migrant workers share confidential information with a researcher, unquestionably, the researcher's credibility is crucial. However, it was evident that respondents and researchers must establish a relationship of trust. When the researcher felt unsafe travelling alone to reach respondents, she was accompanied by Bangladeshi workers to ensure her safety, thus requiring her to trust them. Bangladeshi respondents disclosed information about their extra income and its legality or illegality, as they trusted the researcher. Owing to their trust in her, the workers confided in the researcher that they had legal work authorisation but were performing work for which they were not authorised.

Thus, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of migrant workers. Even though the key informants initially rejected the researcher, they eventually agreed to participate in the interview once they realised that they could rely on her and her research. Nonetheless, they shared confidential information about the migrants' arrival and employment procedures. To establish a relationship of trust between the Bangladeshi respondents and the researcher, the workers disclosed confidential information that they would not normally reveal due to their increased vulnerability in a foreign country. When workers were finally able to trust the researcher, they not only shared information but also actively aided her in data collection, demonstrating their trustworthiness and the reciprocal nature of trust in qualitative research.

Establishing trust and rapport with participants was a crucial step in overcoming the language barrier and encouraging disclosure. The researchers' approach went beyond the research scope, showing not just curiosity but genuine empathy for the personal lives and experiences of the labourers. This human touch helped to establish a sense of worth and respect for the participants, fostering a collaborative and honest exchange of information. Regular communication and follow-up meetings were also instrumental in building trust. However, it was the researchers' recognition of the employees' efforts that truly fostered a sense of value and respect, gradually gaining the trust of the migrant labourers.

Acceptance is contingent on confidence in this case. Acceptance of the research by both the researcher and the respondents is essential. If the respondent does not feel accepted by the researcher, they will cooperate less effectively. The researcher needed to gain the respondents' acceptance by displaying an accepting attitude to collect accurate data. However, it is not just about acceptance, it is about the relationship between researchers and respondents, which serves as a crucial conduit between them.

To influence a person's attitude, behaviour, and gestures is indispensable. With all due respect to all professions, the respondents came from a lower-income class; therefore, the researcher adhered to a straightforward dress code when meeting with

them to ensure that no class distinction was perceived, as the researcher had learned from a colleague that the less complicated one's attire, the warmer the reception. Furthermore, the researcher's gestures, which were extremely generous, played a significant role. There was a significant academic and socio-cultural gap between the researcher and the respondents; hence, the researcher's non-verbal communication was essential in establishing cooperative relationships with the respondents and gaining the workers' acceptance in exchange for their time.

Concluding Remarks

Fieldwork is a realm of uncertainty, where plans often go awry. Despite researchers' efforts to foresee and plan for potential obstacles, unexpected challenges can emerge. It is important to note that these obstacles are not fixed, but rather contingent on a variety of factors. In this paper, the authors aim to outline some common challenges that are not unique, but rather universal occurrences. They also demonstrate how these challenges can be effectively managed through the strategic use of social capital, particularly through networking and trust.

It was determined that gender stereotypes are a significant concern for female researchers, particularly in foreign countries. Even though women participate in nearly every field of work and sometimes perform better than men, the perception of men demonstrates 'gender stereotyping.' As a result, as a female researcher, it was challenging to collect data from these types of male respondents on foreign soil, as respondents did not always view the researcher as an academic but rather as a streetwalker or sex worker. Although this barrier may not directly affect the study or its topics, it can have a significant impact on the researcher's mental health. The toll of gender stereotypes on the mental health of female researchers is a serious issue that requires attention and empathy. This may affect the researcher's mental health or the study's timeline in the long run. To alter the gender stereotyping mentality of the Bangladeshi respondents to conduct the research, networking and establishing trust were crucial tactics.

When planning fieldwork on foreign soil, researchers must always consider 'language' to be one of the greatest barriers. This can pose a significant threat to the integrity of the data. However, this barrier can be diminished by carefully considering interpreters. Moreover, safety and security pose significant obstacles to any fieldwork planned by female researchers. The predominant feelings of insecurity and discomfort during the data collection of this study could pose a grave threat to the researcher's safety, particularly if respondents are brutal, hostile or occasionally cruel. To overcome this obstacle, the researcher relied on her extensive network and rapport with Bangladeshi workers, in addition to keeping her sources nearby during the interviews.

The 'natural uncertainty' of migrant workers often prevents them from sharing private information about social capital factors and their means of subsistence. Their concerns about work authorisation initially led to a lack of confidence in the researcher, which can affect the data's quality. However, the researcher's language skills, particularly in the workers' native tongue, can swiftly dissolve these barriers, fostering trust and stronger relationships, and ultimately improving the data's accuracy.

The researcher also encountered initial rejection during her fieldwork. Fear of exposure to the outside world or the exchange of so-called "secret" information regarding the workforce industry prevented key informants from agencies and high

commissions from participating in this study. To address this issue, however, it may be possible to gain the participants' trust by utilising a proper network and a straightforward and transparent explanation of the study's objectives. This paper examines strategies such as utilising and maximising the power of networking, building relationships to establish trust, being persistent and well-prepared, as well as following one's passion and purpose.

Finally, according to the objective of this study, which is to explore the types and nature of the utilisation of social capital among migrant workers in Malaysia for their livelihoods, it was discovered that 'Trust' is one of the most important elements of social capital, with the capacity to ensure the usage of other elements of social capital among migrant workers such as networking and collective action, coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. On the other hand, 'Trust' was also crucial for data collection from the workers, playing a key role in creating a network with respondents. The establishment of trust is not just a prerequisite for data collection, but a key step in creating a network with respondents. If a respondent can properly trust the researcher, they will share information with her that is not typically shared with others; these details are necessary for the researcher to write an in-depth analysis of the research.

The researcher discovered that some workers were carrying legal documents to work when they were not performing the jobs listed on the documents; others were conducting business with the help of their friends and neighbours, while others were earning extra money by performing additional tasks that were unassigned. The business conducted by workers from Bangladesh with Bangladeshi and local individuals is a fact they usually keep secret within their fraternity, highlighting the gravity of the situation. Some respondents disclosed their involvement in business in Malaysia to supplement their income and secure a better financial future in both Malaysia and Bangladesh. After the researcher established rapport with the respondents, they understood that the researcher would not share their confidential information with third parties. As a result, they discussed their business, investment savings in Bangladesh and Indonesia and how they were able to operate the business without a business license in Malaysia. Thus, the researcher could successfully collect data from the respondents by creating trust and a strong network.

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Appendix

Case Study One: Role of Networking

Atiq (pseudonym) has worked in Malaysia for 15 years. Although he entered the country on a business visa, he has held multiple jobs. As a result of his transition from one job to another, he struggled to obtain a work permit visa in Malaysia and encountered significant obstacles. From the moment they met, Atiq was one of the most valuable sources for the researcher. When the researcher explained the purpose of her study and made him aware of the importance of collecting data, he began assisting her immediately. He reached out to the other Bangladeshi workers he knew to recruit for the survey. Owing to his remarkable ability to persuade others within minutes, he was able to schedule a time for the researcher to collect data from his co-workers at work. In assisting with data collection from Indonesian workers, he played a crucial role, as employing Indonesian students to collect data from Indonesian workers was insufficient to guarantee the data's accuracy.

Atiq played a crucial role in overcoming language and trust barriers as he assisted the researcher in collecting data from Indonesian workers over the weekend and in his spare time, when the study was at risk of being compromised. He began serving as an interpreter at his workplace, which employed many Indonesian workers. Additionally, he was familiar with the area and knew where Indonesian workers were employed. Since Atiq was a cleaner, the Indonesian workers could not deny the researcher permission to collect data based on his uniform. During his weekend, he assisted with data collection while carrying his identification card to alert Indonesian workers that he was assisting a researcher. It is essential to note that Indonesian workers have a low level of trust in foreigners, and many of them were hesitant to participate in the survey due to visa-related issues. Atiq's role in overcoming these barriers and his instrumental role in the data collection from Indonesian labourers was impressive. In addition, whenever possible, Atiq made time for the researcher at work. As a result, the other Bangladeshi and Indonesian workers observed the researcher and Atiq together, making the researcher familiar to them, which aided the researcher in persuading Indonesian and Bangladeshi workers to participate in this study. Atiq served as the conduit for establishing a network with the workers. Interestingly, two additional Bangladeshi workers from the exact work location as Atiq assisted the researcher in collecting data from Indonesian workers and scheduling appointments with Bangladeshi respondents.

Case Study Two: Role of Trust

Alom (pseudonym) has worked in Malaysia for 15 years. However, he entered the country with a calling visa; however, his job was unsatisfactory, with a salary of less than RM1,000, so he changed jobs. Since he had to change his name and passport, changing jobs was incredibly difficult for him; he took a risk by engaging in a fight with those involved in changing his passport. As the researcher was from his home country, he felt at ease discussing his new name and passport with him. He initially avoided the researcher, but after establishing rapport with him, he agreed to manage his time. Additionally, after multiple conversations, he played a crucial role in the research process by assisting the researcher in collecting data from both Bangladeshi and Indonesian workers. He informed the Bangladeshi workers about the researcher's study and sincerely requested the initially uncooperative Indonesian workers to cooperate

with the researcher. He was in charge of cleaning services in a residential area where he oversaw Bangladeshi and Indonesian workers.

Alom told the researcher about his supplemental income, how he earned it with the assistance of workers, how much they earned on average, as well as how he was able to save money and purchase property in his home country, among others, when he realised that his information would be helpful for her research. He stated that all of these details were confidential, including the fact that he was earning additional income alongside workers from his own country. He believed, however, that the researcher would not divulge their activities. Intriguingly, whatever they did to earn extra money was neither harmful to others nor detrimental to the foreigners residing in the residential area where Alom was employed. Alom requested that some Bangladeshi employees manage the researcher's time after their afternoon shift ended. At Alom's request, despite the workers being in a rush to leave at the time, they made time for the researcher. Additionally, he assisted the researcher during working hours in a methodical, responsible, and courteous manner. Additionally, building a trustworthy relationship between the respondents and the researcher enabled her to gather detailed information about the respondents' income and survival strategies.

Case Study Three: Role of Trust and Networking to Ensure Safety and Security of the Researcher

Despite the researcher's Bangladeshi origin, a limited cohort of Bangladeshi labourers trailed the researcher and participated in verbal and physical aggression. Upon the researcher's data collection, one participant initially exhibited appropriate behaviour and subsequently acquired knowledge regarding the researcher's place of residence. Subsequently, the researcher was asked to extend an invitation to the respondent to stay at her residence. However, the respondent's nonverbal cues, including his body language, facial expression and eye contact, were perceived as abusive and caused discomfort. As a female researcher, the process of collecting data in a foreign country was occasionally fraught with challenges related to safety, security and personal risk. During the data collection process, the researcher was presented with a specific scenario. Despite encountering challenging circumstances, the researcher's professionalism in gathering data and her interactions with a challenging participant were commendable. Upon identifying a Bangladeshi worker employed at a food establishment known as Shamim (a pseudonym), the researcher contacted the Bangladeshi manager of the shop. During the process of arranging a data collection schedule with the workers, a respondent from Bangladesh was found to have taken the researcher's phone number while she was conversing with the manager—the individual initiated communication with the researcher at midnight. In the event of a non-response from the researcher, repeated attempts were made to establish communication through multiple phone calls. Since the location in question was situated in a foreign nation, the researcher encountered difficulties in communicating the notification to the individual in question.

The researcher effectively communicated with the individual to cease his disruptive behaviour and subsequently received expressions of interest in participating

in an interview. The investigator ascertained that Shamim was allegedly involved in a homicide case in his country of origin and subsequently absconded to Malaysia to evade prosecution. The individual in question initially entered Malaysia through a tourist visa, subsequently acquiring a working visa at a later point in time. The duration of his work tenure in Malaysia was three years. During his participation as an interviewee, he refrained from causing any disruptions to the researcher. However, during the researcher's interviews with other Bangladeshi workers, he exhibited behaviour that was deemed inappropriate. Shamim exhibited persistent disruptive behaviour, and his nonverbal communication was deemed highly objectionable.

Other Bangladeshi colleagues made repeated requests to the individual to refrain from impeding the data collection process. The researcher endeavoured to establish a network by leveraging a key informant from the locales where data was gathered. Specifically, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a Bangladeshi respondent who went by the pseudonym "Bappy". Bappy, a trusted and respected member of the community, facilitated access to both Bangladeshi and Indonesian labourers at the site where Shamim was employed. Typically, Bappy accompanied the researcher to the residential areas of the labourers to ensure her safety and security. Notably, he referred to the researcher as an elder sister. Bappy, reported a monthly income of approximately 5000 RM and provided detailed information regarding his ability to sustain himself in Malaysia. Bappy expressed trust in the researcher, which facilitated his willingness to share this information.

Bappy also assisted in preventing Shamim from coming into contact with the researcher. Bappy served as a robust network for the researcher and engendered a sense of trust in the researcher. Consequently, the utilisation of this tool facilitated the researcher's ability to mitigate gender-based stereotypes, alleviate linguistic barriers, and prioritise her safety and security. The researcher came to the realisation that the concepts of "trust and networking" possess the capacity to surmount obstacles between the participants and the researcher, thereby facilitating the acquisition of comprehensive data. Establishing bonds, bridges, and trustworthy relationships is crucial to gathering information that respondents typically withhold from others. The researcher's study was completed with the aid of "trust and networking," which played a crucial role in gathering authentic information. The primary motivation behind the respondents' decision to divulge their personal information to the researcher was to establish a foundation of trust and foster a robust network.