THAI OVERSEAS JOB SEEKERS: A STUDY OF THEIR EXPLOITATION AND VULNERABILITIES BEFORE DEPARTURE

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ABSTRACT

For centuries Thai people have migrated both internally and to a lesser extent, externally. In the earlier stages during the 1950s Thais migrated to North America as well as to Europe in professional capacities. Since the 1970s, however, a new form of migration has prevailed, which has seen hundreds of thousands of unskilled Thai workers seeking employment abroad, often taking up jobs that are 'dirty, dangerous, and difficult'. It has been during this time that rampant violations of human rights of these workers in the host countries have been documented. However there has been very little study done on what happens before workers depart to work overseas. As a result of exploiting the vulnerability of Thai overseas jobseekers it is not only the individual jobseeker that suffers but also his or her family and community as well. Often jobseekers take out huge loans that they cannot repay no matter how hard they work putting them further into debt. Many even lose their land title and vital family savings, pushing them further into poverty.

This thesis studies the underlying issues of exploitation and vulnerabilities of Thai workers seeking employment abroad. It looks at the current system under which Thai workers can secure jobs abroad, putting special emphasis on the broker system, the private employment agencies, and the government's existing policies for regulating migration. The study also explores international human rights standards as they relate to the rights of overseas jobseekers.

For this research a number of case studies were conducted. The individuals were from Khon Khen, Mahasalakan, Chiang Rai and Bangkok provinces. In total, 21 people were interviewed in-depth. This study found that most of them had experienced some form of fraud as well as human rights violations. The most common form of violations included excessive recruitment fees, excessive interests on loans, payment of recruitment fees but not departing for jobs, illegal brokers and arrangements, and no government support when problems were encountered.

In order to protect Thai overseas jobseekers from exploitation, it is argued that, government policies need to be strengthened and better implemented. While government policies exist to protect the rights of oversees jobseekers, their weaknesses and lax implementation allow private recruitment firms and brokers to exploit jobseekers, who often come from poor communities, with low education and low awareness of their legal rights.

KEY WORDS: THAI OVERSEAS JOB SEEKERS / EXPLOITATION / VULNERABILITIES BEFORE DEPARTURE

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