

# AB018. Social vulnerability, stressors and adaptive strategies among migrant workers in Singapore

Aysha Farwin, Huso Yi, Amanda Low, Natasha Howard

Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore, Singapore

*Correspondence to:* Aysha Farwin. Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore, Singapore. Email: ephaysh@nus.edu.sg.

**Background:** Migrant workers make up approximately 4.8% of the global labour force of 167 million workers. Despite their contributions to the development of the receiving countries, low-wage migrant workers are not adequately protected by the labour and health policies putting them at risk of precarious working conditions and adverse health outcomes. The study aims to identify the sources of stressors and explore the interplay between social vulnerabilities and adaptive strategies to health risk among low-wage dormitory-dwelling migrant workers in Singapore.

**Methods:** In-depth interviews with 33 migrant workers that focused on their living conditions, individual and collective social capital of migrant workers, and health risks and practices were conducted by the research team. Interpretive thematic analysis was used to identify the sources and pathways of vulnerabilities, their impacts on health and their strategies to overcome the hardships.

**Results:** Major stressors that resulted in the susceptibility of migrant workers to adverse health outcomes were predominantly structural in nature, including inadequate labour protection, dire living conditions, barriers to healthcare access, food insecurity and social isolation. In addition, employer gatekeeping of healthcare and over-reliance on employers for essential needs disempowered

migrant workers and caused them to adopt maladaptive coping strategies to deal with their everyday experiences.

**Conclusions:** Non-inclusive protection systems were underlying sources of vulnerabilities, further propagated by their living conditions, making migrant workers susceptible to health risks. Collective agency needs to be developed to respond to the risk posed by these environments. Resilient health systems should be inclusive and focus on mitigating the harms caused by socio-environmental vulnerabilities of underserved populations.

**Keywords:** Migrant workers; vulnerability; structural stressors; coping mechanisms; resilience

## Acknowledgments

*Funding:* None.

## Footnote

*Conflicts of Interest:* The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

*Ethical Statement:* The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

*Open Access Statement:* This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits the non-commercial replication and distribution of the article with the strict proviso that no changes or edits are made and the original work is properly cited (including links to both the formal publication through the relevant DOI and the license). See: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

doi: 10.21037/jphe-21-ab018

**Cite this abstract as:** Farwin A, Yi H, Low A, Howard N. Social vulnerability, stressors and adaptive strategies among migrant workers in Singapore. J Public Health Emerg 2021;5:AB018.