



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Empowering Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Sarawak through Social Capital Enhancement

Imam Santosa<sup>1</sup>, Ali Rokhman<sup>2</sup>, Ahmad Sabiq<sup>3</sup>, Ida Yuliana Hutasuhut<sup>4</sup><sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman<sup>4</sup> Department of Social Psychology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 22, 2024 Accepted: Nov 7, 2024	Bilateral cooperative relations between Malaysia and Indonesia have experienced fluctuating dynamics, especially concerning the presence of Indonesian migrant workers. While documented workers generally face minimal challenges, our focus lies on the often-overlooked situation of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers across various sectors in Malaysia. This vulnerable group lacks adequate social and legal protection, posing economic and legal risks. This study aims to address the issue of poverty faced by undocumented Indonesian migrant workers who continue to live and work in Malaysia. Additionally, it maps the roles played by both Indonesian and Malaysian governments and civil society in providing poverty alleviation support to this group. Methods: In the first year of this research, we focus on formulating an empowerment model for undocumented Indonesian migrant workers to sustain themselves in productive work through social capital management in Sarawak City. Findings indicate that the development of an empowerment model for undocumented migrants should prioritize legal support, cooperation and partnership, networking, training, and regulatory socialization. This approach will help them obtain better legality and job security. Some migrant workers have obtained permanent residency, while others have gained access to improved economic and social opportunities. These improvements are expected to enhance their social and economic resilience, ultimately enabling them to achieve greater success.
<b>Keywords</b>	
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<b>*Corresponding Author:</b> imam.santosa@unsoed.ac.id	

## INTRODUCTION

Urbanization continues to shape economic landscapes globally, often resulting in stark disparities in wealth distribution and access to resources. In Indonesia, this trend has culminated in significant social and economic inequalities, compelling many individuals to seek opportunities abroad. The alarming insights of economists like Stiglitz (Wijers, 2019) illustrate the critical nature of these disparities, as the Gini Index reflects persistent social inequality amidst rising unemployment rates. This environment prompts individuals to prioritize survival, directly affecting their ability to seek stable employment both domestically and internationally. Many become undocumented migrant workers, navigating a complex landscape often marked by the absence of legal work and residence permissions.

Research has consistently highlighted the myriad challenges faced by Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), including limited access to healthcare, education, and social services due to fears of deportation (Han et al., 2017; Kaminer, 2020). Preliminary surveys indicate that long-term Indonesian migrants in neighboring countries often avoid criminal entanglements, leading authorities to turn a blind eye to their presence. While many comply with local laws, the lack of access to essential services often results in stagnation, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage. Though some may find opportunities through local marriages, the majority of undocumented workers continue to face significant barriers.

The societal perception of migrant workers frequently frames them as unclean or unhealthy, further entrenching their marginalization (Aminah et al., 2015; Danthine & Kurmann, 2011; Dumasari et al., 2023). This narrative not only diminishes their visibility but also exacerbates their struggles, underscoring the necessity for research that addresses their unique challenges. This paper aims to assess the social capital of Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Sarawak City, exploring how social networks and community connections enable them to survive and work productively. Additionally, the study seeks to formulate a model for empowering these workers through effective social capital management, addressing the critical gap in literature regarding the interplay between social capital and the experiences of undocumented migrants in this specific context.

Given the pressing issues of urbanization and economic disparity, this study is particularly relevant. Insights from Achuo, Asongu, and Tchamyu (2022) emphasize the importance of aligning socioeconomic empowerment efforts with regionally sensitive policies to foster equitable development. Their findings highlight that creating supportive environments and ensuring access to resources can yield substantial benefits for marginalized groups like undocumented workers. Similarly, Beckert (2024) underscores the importance of understanding wealth inequality within its specific institutional contexts, advocating for a comparative approach that takes into account local dynamics. These insights will be instrumental in framing the experiences of undocumented workers in Sarawak.

The originality of this research lies in its innovative perspective on social capital as a critical factor for empowering undocumented migrants. Unlike existing studies that predominantly focus on economic aspects, this research highlights the pivotal role of social networks in facilitating access to resources and opportunities. By examining the dynamics of social capital among Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Sarawak City, this study aims to identify strategies that mitigate their vulnerability and enhance their labor market outcomes.

As the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including undocumented migrants (Meniago & Asongu, 2018), this perspective is particularly salient. The findings of this study can inform stakeholders and policymakers about the necessity of fostering social networks and providing legal assistance to undocumented workers, ultimately contributing to more equitable and inclusive labor markets.

This paper is organized as follows: 1) an introduction that outlines the research gap and the rationale for selecting the research context, 2) a literature review that elucidates what is known and unknown about social capital among undocumented migrants, 3) a methodology section detailing the research approach and participant selection, 4) findings that present general interview results, 5) a discussion analyzing the different patterns of social capital utilization among undocumented workers, and 6) a conclusion that answers the research questions and addresses study limitations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Understanding social capital among undocumented Indonesian migrant workers

The dynamics of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Sarawak City are intricately linked to the concept of social capital. Social capital, defined as the networks, interactions, and norms that facilitate collective action within communities, serves as a pivotal resource for individuals facing socioeconomic challenges (Barkensjö et al., 2018). Research has established that robust social networks significantly enhance the resilience of marginalized groups, empowering them to overcome adversity and improve their living conditions (Astono, 2023). For undocumented migrants, social capital is particularly crucial; it enables access to information, support, and opportunities that might otherwise remain elusive (Eslier et al., 2022).

However, undocumented Indonesian migrant workers face substantial barriers in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, and legal protections, primarily due to their precarious legal status (Hartono, 2021). Studies indicate that these workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, exacerbated by their limited social support networks (Kaminer, 2020). The absence of vital connections restricts access to resources and intensifies their marginalization within host communities (Han et al., 2017). Therefore, exploring strategies to cultivate social capital among this demographic is essential, as promoting social bonds and community involvement can mitigate the

negative effects of isolation and uncertainty experienced by many undocumented workers (El-Dirani et al., 2022). Thus, fostering social capital not only serves individual needs but also strengthens the overall resilience of the migrant community.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerability and resilience**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of undocumented migrant workers, disproportionately affecting their health, employment, and overall well-being (Mukumbang, Ambe, & Adebisi, 2020). Reports indicate that during the pandemic, many migrant workers experienced increased exploitation and discrimination, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to bolster their resilience (Saw et al., 2021, Farwin et al., 2023). This crisis illuminated the critical role of social capital in accessing vital resources and support during turbulent times, emphasizing the importance of community solidarity and cooperative behavior (Auliah et al., 2022). Understanding how social networks evolve during crises can provide valuable insights into strengthening community ties and facilitating collective action.

Within the socioeconomic context of Sarawak City, the reliance on foreign labor—particularly in agriculture and domestic work—creates a complex environment where migrant laborers are simultaneously essential to the economy and often stigmatized (Lumayag, 2020). Community-based initiatives that enhance social capital through solidarity and collective bargaining are crucial in addressing these challenges (Sopyan, 2022). Consequently, this study aims to investigate how strategies enhancing social capital can empower undocumented workers, facilitating their integration into Sarawak's socioeconomic landscape. This exploration not only addresses immediate needs but also considers the long-term aspirations of these workers.

### **The role of digital platforms in building social capital**

Recent research underscores the transformative role of technology in enabling migrant workers to build and sustain their social capital. Digital platforms and social media facilitate relationship-building, information sharing, and collective action among migrant workers, offering new avenues for support and engagement (Fedorova & Potemkin, 2020, (Yoo & Jang, 2023). This digital dimension has become increasingly important, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional support networks and necessitated innovative forms of community interaction (Kurt, 2024).

Understanding the legal framework surrounding undocumented migrants is essential for addressing their empowerment challenges. The legal protections available to migrant workers in Indonesia are often inadequate, rendering undocumented individuals particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Rahayu, Supaat, & Yusuf, 2024).

Despite governmental efforts to enhance the situation through various policies, significant implementation and enforcement gaps persist (Rahayu & Susilaningtyas, 2020). By gaining insights into the legal context, this study aims to identify barriers to empowerment and resilience among undocumented Indonesian migrant workers, thereby contributing to more effective advocacy and policy recommendations.

Furthermore, the psychological well-being of these workers significantly influences their overall resilience. Mental health issues are prevalent within migrant populations and are often exacerbated by social isolation, discrimination, and economic instability. Research indicates that robust social networks can alleviate psychological distress among these individuals, emphasizing the interplay between social capital and mental health (Hasan et al., 2021). Consequently, the findings may inform interventions aimed at enhancing mental health outcomes through community-building initiatives and psychosocial support programs. This connection highlights the multifaceted nature of social capital, which encompasses not only material benefits but also emotional and psychological support.

In summary, the empowerment of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak City is largely contingent upon enhancing social capital. By synthesizing contemporary studies on social capital, resilience, legal protections, and mental health, this research aims to clarify the challenges faced by this demographic and propose actionable strategies to improve their quality of life and productivity.

## METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a grounded case study methodology to explore the experiences of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak, Malaysia. The findings are derived from primary sources collected through field observations and scripts used for analyzing events (Peters, 2014). The study was conducted in two locations: Simunjan, situated approximately 100 kilometers from Sarawak, and Kuching. The choice of these locations was intentional, targeting areas with significant populations of undocumented migrant workers primarily involved in the agricultural sector, particularly in palm oil plantations, as well as in restaurant services and construction.

### Participants and sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select informants who could provide rich, relevant insights into the lived experiences of undocumented migrant workers. In total, ten participants from the Simunjan plantation and eight from Kuching were recruited. This targeted sampling approach ensured that participants had firsthand experience with the challenges and dynamics specific to their environments, thereby enriching the depth of the findings (Tongco, 2006).

Ethical considerations were paramount in this research, particularly given the vulnerable status of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their understanding of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time.

### Data collection methods

A combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participatory observation were employed to gather comprehensive data. Each method was selected to capture a range of experiences and perspectives:

In-depth interviews allowed for detailed personal narratives, providing insights into individual circumstances, motivations, and challenges faced by the workers.

Focus group discussions facilitated dialogue among participants, revealing collective experiences and shared challenges within their community. This approach encouraged participants to build on each other's responses, leading to richer data.

Participatory observation involved the researcher engaging with participants in their work environment, offering real-time context and enhancing the understanding of their daily realities and interactions.

### Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis was performed using an interactive model, following stages of data entry, filtering, grouping, and categorization. This iterative process allowed for continual refinement of themes and insights as new data was integrated. This comprehensive qualitative approach provides a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic conditions and challenges faced by undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in the palm oil sector, thereby contributing valuable insights to the existing literature on migration and social capital in this context.

## RESULTS

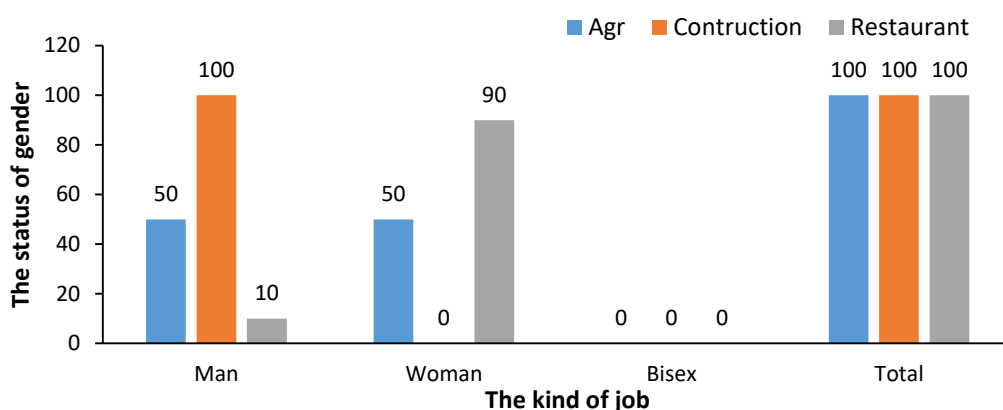
### Job type and demographics among non-documented migrant workers in Sarawak

The profile of non-documented migrant workers in Sarawak shows significant variation in job type and gender distribution, as illustrated in Figure 1. The construction sector is entirely male dominated (100%), whereas the agriculture sector has an equal distribution of male and female workers (50% each). Female workers, however, are predominantly concentrated in restaurant services, where they represent 90% of the workforce. This gender disparity highlights a clear division of labor, where men take on physically demanding jobs, such as construction, while women are more involved in service-oriented roles, such as in restaurants. The division is particularly evident when examining the overall workforce distribution, underscoring the need to consider gender-based occupational segmentation when addressing labor market challenges for non-documented workers in Sarawak.

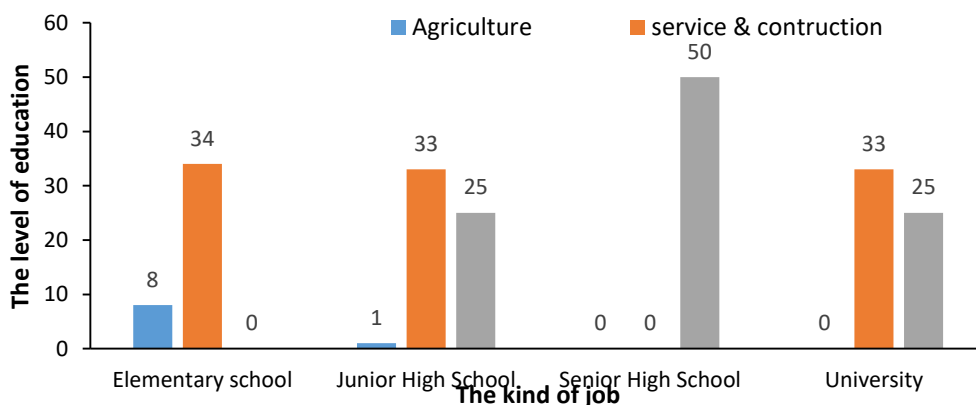
Further analysis of the workers' educational background, as shown in Figure 2, reveals that education plays a significant role in the type of job undertaken. Workers with elementary school education are mostly employed in construction, where formal qualifications are less critical, and physical labor is the primary requirement. In contrast, workers with junior high school and senior high school education are more likely to find employment in the restaurant sector. Interestingly, the workers with the highest educational qualifications—those with tertiary or academy-level education—are not necessarily employed in higher-paying jobs; they remain distributed across construction and restaurant services. This reflects a broader trend where non-documented migrant workers, regardless of educational background, often face limitations in job opportunities, further perpetuating their economic vulnerability.

**Employment stability, income, and education correlation**

The link between the type of job and the length of stay is explored in Figure 3, showing that migrant workers' employment patterns shift as they remain longer in Sarawak. Those who have stayed for 1 year are primarily engaged in restaurant services and construction. As the



**Figure 1: The kind of job and gender status among non-documented migrant workers in Sarawak**



**Figure 2: The level of education and the kind of job among non-documented migrant workers**

length of stay increases to 2-3 years, the workers are more evenly spread across agriculture, construction, and restaurant services. After 3 years, the majority of workers transition into agriculture and construction, sectors that offer more stable, long-term employment opportunities compared to the service sector. This shift suggests that workers may initially take up service-oriented jobs upon arrival due to immediate availability, but as they become more established, they seek more secure employment in agriculture and construction, which may offer longer-term prospects despite the physically demanding nature of the work.

In terms of income, Figure 4 reveals that the majority of workers, regardless of sector, remain in the low-income category, with workers in agriculture particularly affected. Even though some workers in the construction sector manage to attain middle-income or high-income levels, most remain economically vulnerable, earning insufficient wages to significantly improve their living

conditions. This income distribution reinforces the precariousness faced by non-documented migrant workers, especially in sectors like agriculture, where income remains consistently low. The few workers in the restaurant and construction sectors who achieve higher incomes likely benefit from specialized roles or more stable employment opportunities, yet they remain a small minority.

In summary, the results indicate a clear interconnection between gender, education, length of stay, and job type among non-documented migrant workers in Sarawak. Gender influences sector employment, with men dominating physically demanding jobs like construction and women concentrated in service roles. Education plays a role, but even with higher qualifications, workers are often confined to lower-paying jobs. Over time, migrant workers shift from service-based roles to more stable jobs in agriculture and construction. Despite these shifts, most workers remain in low-income brackets, particularly in agriculture, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions to improve their economic prospects and job security.

Furthermore, Table 1 summarizes key interview findings, aligning closely with themes discussed earlier. The selective code Trust in family, avoiding unreliable agents reflects the reliance on family networks to navigate migration, supporting the discussion on the importance of social capital for undocumented workers. Job sector: Services connects to the gender division of labor, highlighting women’s concentration in low-paying service jobs, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. The Personal profile: Education, Experience, Economic Success code underscores that while education plays a limited role, job experience helps some workers achieve modest economic stability, reinforcing the findings from Figure 2 on the role of education. “Economic motivation for migration” confirms that poverty drives migration, a key point in both the Introduction and Literature Review.

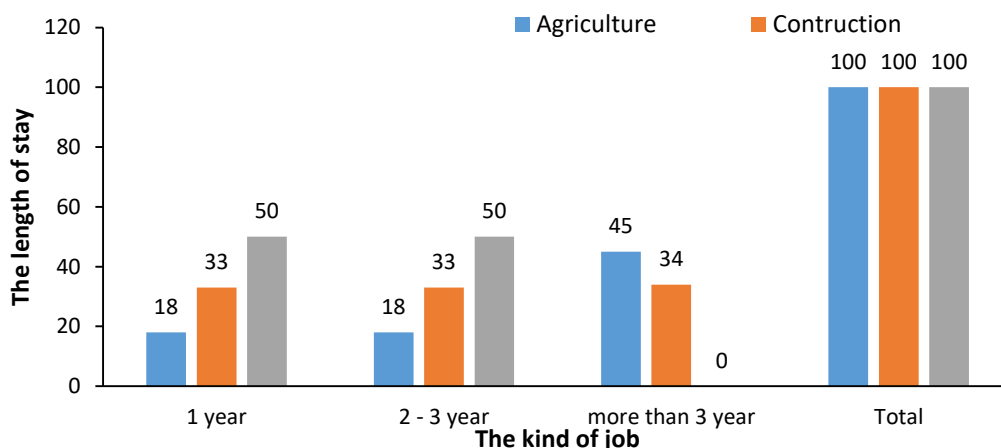


Figure 3: The kind of job and the length of stay among non-documented migrant workers

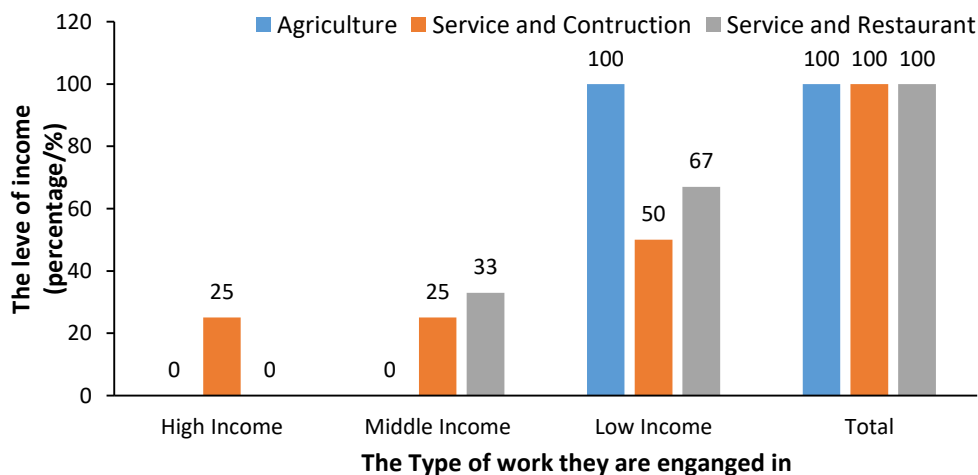


Figure 4: The level of income and the kind of job among non-documented migrant workers

Legal support from the Indonesian Consulate ties into the discussion on the need for stronger institutional support and legal protection, crucial for empowering migrant workers, as emphasized in the Formulation Model for Empowering Migrant Workers. Finally, Satisfaction, Government policy critique reflects mixed sentiments, with workers criticizing government policies, which supports the discussion on the need for policy reforms to address the vulnerabilities of undocumented workers. This concise summary connects the interview results to the broader challenges discussed, reinforcing the need for legal and social interventions.

**Table 1: Summary of key themes from interviews with undocumented migrant workers in Sarawak**

Axial Code	Selective Code
Trust in family, Avoiding unreliable agents	Trust in family, Avoiding unreliable agents
Trustworthy intermediaries, Migration success	
Job sector: Services	Job sector: Services
Personal profile: Male, Primary education, full experience, married, economic success	Personal profile: Education, Experience, Economic Success
Demographic details, Economic success	
Migration motivation: Economic	Economic motivation for migration
Economic motivation	
Legal support: Indonesian Consulate	Legal support from Indonesian Consulate
Legal support: Consulate	
Satisfaction with living in Malaysia, Criticism of government policies	Satisfaction, Government policy critique

Sources: Primary data, 2024

## DISCUSSION

### Profile of undocumented migrant workers in sarawak city

The demographic profile of Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak reveals significant distinctions based on type of employment and gender. Notably, the construction sector is exclusively male, while the plantation sector exhibits a balanced gender distribution, with 50% male and 50% female workers. Despite receiving the lowest incomes among various sectors, workers in the plantation sector often report a sense of comfort due to the stability and predictability of their work environment. However, undocumented status presents substantial challenges, particularly concerning maternal health. Many female workers must return to Indonesia for childbirth, often traveling to Pontianak City, the nearest urban area with satisfactory hospital facilities.

Indonesian migrant workers, especially those in the plantation sector, exemplify a complex socio-economic dynamic. While the majority of these workers are female, their economic vulnerability persists. Many in the plantation sector earn very low wages, which can adversely affect their families' financial stability. Nevertheless, the predictability and stability of plantation work provide a comfort not commonly found in more hazardous and male-dominated sectors, such as construction (Silvia et al., 2020). This preference for stable employment highlights a broader context of limited job opportunities in Indonesia, which drives many individuals to seek employment abroad despite inherent risks (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Moreover, the undocumented status of these workers exacerbates significant challenges, particularly in relation to maternal health. Their immigration status compels many to return home for childbirth, often necessitating travel to areas perceived as having superior healthcare facilities, despite the logistical and financial burdens this entails (Weng et al., 2021). The absence of comprehensive health services for undocumented migrants severely undermines the survival chances of both mothers and infants. This situation highlights the urgent need for targeted policy interventions aimed at improving the living and working conditions of Indonesian migrant workers, both domestically and abroad (Venisha, 2023).

Another critical concern is the low level of formal education among Indonesian migrants, which heightens their vulnerability when interacting with Malaysian law enforcement. Many navigate multiple layers of security personnel upon entering the country (Todaro & Smith, 2015). The limited educational attainment of these workers complicates their ability to navigate complex legal and bureaucratic systems, exacerbating their marginalization. Many undocumented migrants face precarious conditions upon arrival in Malaysia, which increases their risk of exploitation or abuse. This fear often prevents them from claiming their rights or seeking assistance when confronted with discrimination or mistreatment, thus perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability.

Additionally, the impact of low educational levels extends to interactions with security forces and access to essential services such as healthcare and social security. The lack of social protection mechanisms often leaves these workers without the necessary support systems to cope with health issues or emergencies, thereby increasing their susceptibility to labor market exploitation. The inability to communicate effectively with healthcare providers further complicates their access to appropriate medical care.

To address these challenges, comprehensive policies are required to improve not only educational and social support for Indonesian migrant workers but also the overall quality of their lives. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between educational levels and types of employment among migrants.

Although workers in the plantation and agriculture sectors often earn modest incomes, they tend to report a satisfactory quality of life due to the stability inherent in their employment. This phenomenon aligns with Redfield's concepts of "little tradition" and "great tradition" (Manyise & Dentoni, 2021), which suggest that local customs and practices can foster a sense of belonging and security, even amidst economic challenges. This conclusion is based on interviews conducted with numerous respondents, as depicted in Figure 4.

The interplay between occupations and income levels reveals a complex balance between economic stability and personal satisfaction for Indonesian migrant workers. While workers in the plantation and agriculture sectors may earn limited wages, the predictability of their employment provides a level of comfort and stability that is often absent in sectors such as construction or manufacturing.

Furthermore, emotional and psychological aspects of job satisfaction play a crucial role. The customary work environment in the plantation sector fosters a sense of community and belonging among workers, which can mitigate stress related to economic hardships. This is especially relevant in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated vulnerabilities related to job insecurity and health risks.

Ultimately, while financial compensation is important, qualitative factors—such as job security, community support, and the ability to maintain a stable routine—are essential for enhancing the overall well-being of migrant workers. Various studies have indicated that income levels alone do not adequately capture the lived experiences of these individuals; thus, recognizing the importance of stability and comfort in their working conditions is crucial for understanding their quality of life.

### **The condition of social capital among undocumented migrant worker in the various area in Sarawak**

Workers in oil palm plantations in Simunjan exhibit a camaraderie that parallels that of restaurant and construction workers. This close-knit atmosphere is vital for these laborers, most of whom face numerous challenges in their daily lives. Despite their modest employment status, these workers demonstrate a high level of social capital, cultivated through shared professions, geographical proximity, and frequent social interactions. The condition of social capital among undocumented Indonesian migrant workers is crucial for their survival and productivity in Sarawak City (Kuching) and its surrounding areas (Dumasari et al., 2019; Dumasari et al., 2020; Santosa & Adawiyah, 2024).

In terms of social capital, workers in the oil palm plantations of Simunjan are comparable to their counterparts in the restaurant and construction sectors. While their lives may appear simple, these workers share a robust social network, bolstered by similar professions and close geographic ties. Regular interactions among plantation workers foster a sense of community and support that is less pronounced among restaurant employees, who often work in dispersed locations. This geographical



separation leads to reduced coordination and collaboration among restaurant workers. Conversely, the construction sector comprises a few tightly-knit groups, particularly those engaged in government-funded projects. However, the income for workers in the plantation sector is generally lower compared to those in restaurants and construction.

The strong relationships among oil palm plantation workers in Simunjan exemplify the development of social networks within specific working sectors. Such networks tend to be more robust among plantation workers, as shared experiences and proximity foster deeper connections. These interactions extend beyond social exchanges; they represent a form of social capital that can enhance group bargaining power and resistance against exploitation. Supriatna (2024) illustrates how these social bonds can lead to improved economic outcomes, as oil palm plantations contribute significantly to the economic systems and livelihoods in rural Indonesian communities. This social capital provides emotional support and practical assistance essential for navigating both occupational and personal challenges.

In contrast, work relations within the restaurant industry are more fragmented due to the dispersed nature of their workplaces. The geographical scattering of restaurants diminishes opportunities for interaction and mutual support, resulting in weaker social ties compared to those found in the construction and plantation sectors. This lack of cohesion adversely affects the ability of restaurant workers to coordinate efforts concerning working conditions or to provide assistance during times of need. According to Syahza et al. (2023), the employment opportunities within the plantation sector not only lead to higher individual incomes but also foster closer community bonds. This, in turn, creates a supportive work environment conducive to overall well-being.

The disparities in social capital across these sectors highlight the importance of workplace relationships. Stronger networks among workers are positively associated with job satisfaction and overall well-being, emphasizing the role of social capital in enhancing the quality of life for undocumented migrant workers.

### **Formulation model for empowering undocumented migrant workers**

The preferred approach to empowering undocumented migrants can be summarized as follows: the fundamental aspect involves ensuring access to legal support from the Indonesian government through various channels. Currently, the Indonesian Consulate General in Kuching City plays a pivotal role as a resource for Indonesian workers, particularly those who are undocumented migrants, seeking legal protection and assistance. In addition, fostering trust and cooperation, alongside training and socialization regarding regulations, is essential for their empowerment.

Undocumented migrants aspiring to achieve genuine empowerment require a robust legal support system accessible through multiple avenues, with particular emphasis on assistance from the Indonesian government. This is why the Indonesian Consulate General in Kuching is instrumental in providing legal protection and support for undocumented workers. The consulate not only offers legal advice but also facilitates liaison services with local communities, thereby mitigating some of the risks associated with their undocumented status. Numerous studies have demonstrated that access to legal resources significantly enhances the lives of migrant workers by increasing their capacity to navigate complex situations (Burton-Jeangros et al., 2020). Furthermore, establishing trust and cooperation within migrant communities fosters the development of support networks that empower individuals to advocate for their rights and seek necessary assistance without fear of repercussions (Mengesha et al., 2022).

In addition to legal guidance, training and socialization concerning rules and regulations are critical for enabling undocumented migrants. Education regarding their rights and responsibilities provides these individuals with a framework to understand their circumstances, helping to mitigate situations that render them vulnerable to exploitation. Socialization programs can cultivate a sense of camaraderie among migrants as they share experiences and coping strategies related to their undocumented status. Research indicates that when migrants are informed about their legal rights and available resources, they are more inclined to engage with support systems and seek assistance when necessary (Chirau, 2024). This empowerment not only enhances individual outcomes but also fortifies the collective resilience of migrant communities, enabling them to navigate their

environments more effectively and advocate for systemic changes that address their needs (Chen, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the multifaceted challenges encountered by undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak, revealing the intricate relationship between their socio-economic circumstances and the nature of their social capital. Despite demonstrating resilience and potential for stability, these workers face significant obstacles due to their undocumented status, which severely limits their access to vital resources, legal protections, and opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

The findings underscore that while these migrant workers can forge strong social networks and communal ties, their limited access to legal support critically undermines their ability to advocate for their rights and navigate the complexities of their environment effectively. The camaraderie observed among workers, particularly in the plantation sector, acts as an essential coping mechanism, offering emotional support and practical assistance. Nevertheless, these advantages are frequently overshadowed by vulnerabilities associated with their undocumented status, leading to heightened risks of exploitation and discrimination.

This research highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive empowerment model that addresses four pivotal areas: enhancing legal support, fostering trust and cooperation, providing targeted training and socialization, and establishing robust partnerships among diverse stakeholders. Such a model aims not only to empower undocumented migrant workers but also to contribute to the broader objectives of social inclusion and justice within host communities. In an increasingly polarized socio-political climate, where undocumented migrants often experience marginalization and vulnerability, the implications of this study extend beyond academic discourse. Policymakers, community organizations, and stakeholders are urged to take decisive action toward creating supportive frameworks that facilitate the integration and empowerment of undocumented workers. By prioritizing the rights and well-being of these individuals, society can work toward fostering a more equitable environment that acknowledges and appreciates the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their immigration status.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is not without its limitations. The qualitative approach, while providing valuable insights, is constrained by a relatively small sample size of 18 participants (10 from Simunjan and 8 from Kuching), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of undocumented workers across Malaysia. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling, aimed at capturing relevant experiences, may inadvertently overlook the diverse challenges encountered by migrants in other sectors or regions. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the research may introduce subjectivity in data interpretation, as personal biases could influence the analysis. Participants may also have hesitated to disclose sensitive information related to their undocumented status, potentially leading to response bias. These factors highlight the need for caution in interpreting the results.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample of undocumented migrant workers across different sectors and geographical areas. Employing mixed methodologies—combining qualitative and quantitative approaches—could enhance the robustness of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by this population. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be beneficial in examining the long-term impacts of legal support, community engagement, and education on the well-being of undocumented workers. Exploring the role of cultural factors and the experiences of migrant families could further enrich the discourse on empowerment and integration strategies. Ultimately, such research endeavors will contribute to the development of targeted policies and programs that address the unique needs of undocumented migrant workers.

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