

OHS of Migrant Workers: an international concern

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Importance of the Topic

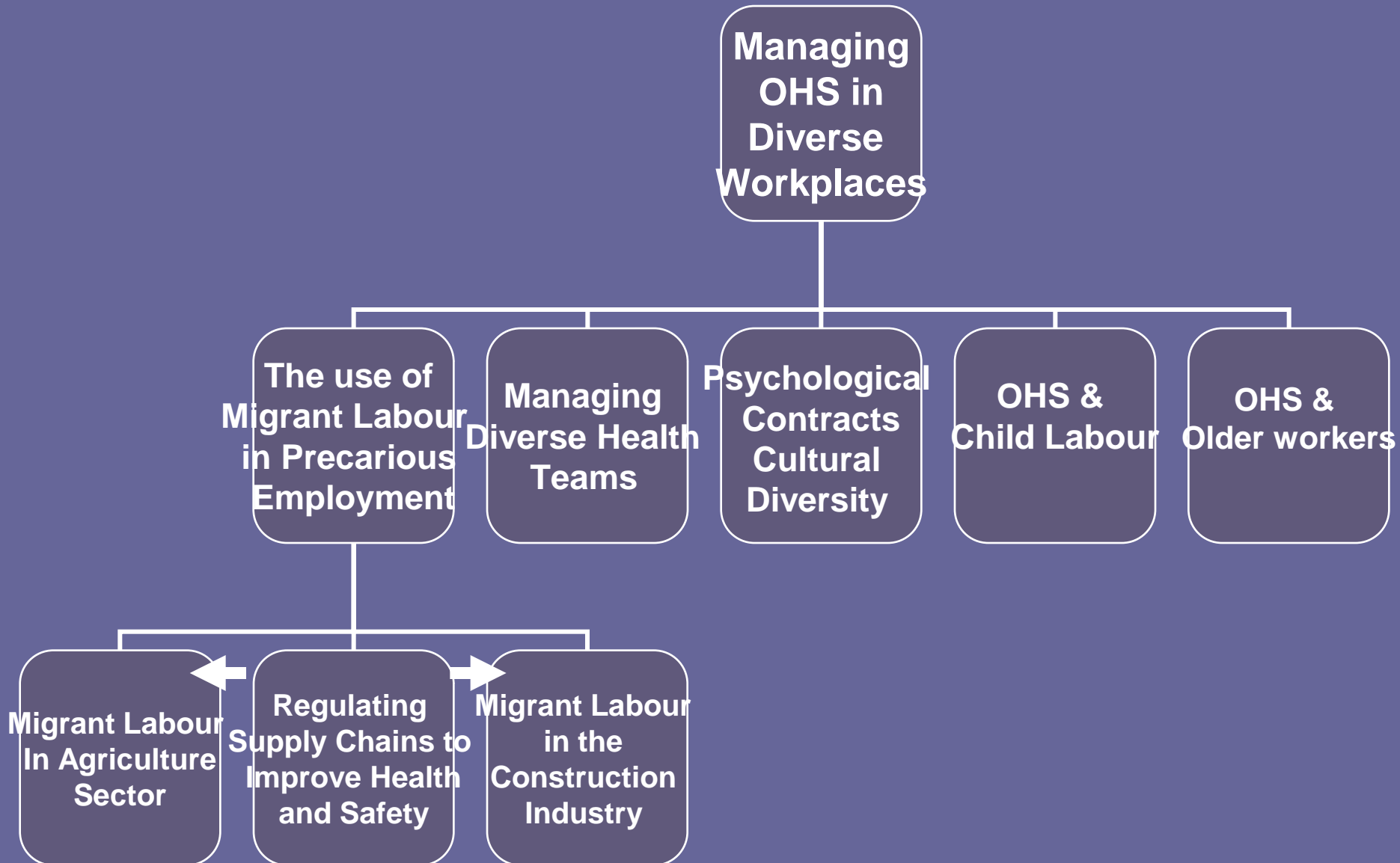
The OHS of migrant workers is at the centre of a number of intersecting issues:

- The increasing international movement of people;
- The vulnerable position in which many migrant workers find themselves;
- The lack of regulatory and social support mechanisms associated with migrant labour.
- Migrant workers have higher rates of injury & illness compared to non-migrant workers in standard employment.
- (McKay, 2006; Tinghög, et al. 2007; Anya, 2007; Lay, et al. 2007; Passel, 2007; Quinlan et al, 2009).
- http://www.ted.com/talks/cameron_sinclair_the_refugees_of_boom_and_bust.html

Under-developed research area

- The theoretical and empirical research on the health and safety of migrant workers is underdeveloped for a number of reasons.
 1. It is difficult to gauge the extent of occupational illness and injury amongst migrant workers as government databases rarely capture these transient and so-called 'invisible' workers.
 2. Studies are typically located within a limited number of industries and within large businesses and focus on young, professional migrant workers in standard employment.
 3. Orthodox research designs are inadequate when eliciting information about work experiences of migrant workers in precarious employment located in (or any) small businesses.
 4. (Limit of time data with most being cross sectional)

Research Developments



Roundtable Discussion – USE, Denmark, 2009

- **Session One:** The purpose of this session was to present an overview of the challenges of managing OHS in small culturally diverse businesses
- **Session Two:** discussion was opened up to participants to explore and comment on the following topics:
 - Characteristics of culturally diverse workforces
 - Issues around managing OHS in small, culturally diverse businesses
 - Methodological issues (how to capture data from “invisible” workers?)
 - Research gaps and proposed future directions
- http://www.use2009.dk/Background/Roundtable%20discussions/~media/use2009/Lamm_%20Summary%20of%20the%20Danish%20SB%20Workshop%204th%20Dec.ashx

Emergent Research Questions

1. What are the OHS experiences (including workers' comp) of precariously employed migrant workers; and
2. What is the extent of their injuries and illnesses;
3. What are the most effective methods to capture this data;
4. How best to give migrant workers a voice regarding their health and safety issues?

Stages of the Project

- The research, the proposed project has been divided into three stages:
 1. *Description*: identify industry sectors where migrant workers are employed in significant numbers
 2. *Data collection & analysis*: gathering field data using a range of instruments;
 3. *Planning*: evaluate the findings & assess whether the sectoral analysis might be applicable to other sectors

Proposed Methodology

- The methodology adopted for this study is a form of action research and involves a dialectical and reflexive process (Kemmis, 2008: 595).
- While action research is understood as qualitative methodology, the proposed methods include both quantitative and qualitative instruments.
- Decisions about the appropriate method, the ways and means of collecting the data (whether qualitative or quantitative), is a part of evolving nature of this research project
- The appropriate method ensures that sufficient data are gathered in order to develop better description and analysis – and possibly a solution for the social problem being investigated.

International Comparisons: Divergence

1. How “migrant” workers are legally and culturally defined differs between countries
2. Colonial vs indigenous differences in vulnerability (France & Kuwait nationals vs Aust, US & NZ indigenous who are more vulnerable compared to colonials)
3. The different levels of legislative sophistication and protection covering vulnerable workers, including migrant labour.
4. Wide variances in quality and reach of the different injury surveillance data sets

International Comparisons: Convergence

1. Governments have tended to treat migrant labour as a disposable commodity.
2. Limited injury surveillance data suggests that migrant workers are significantly over-represented in the work-related injury, illness and fatality rates in each of the countries.
3. Migrant workers tend to operate within the so-called “secondary” or peripheral labour market, in which precarious, non-standard employment is routine and where the small, sub-contracting businesses are the primary employer.

Next stage

- Refine the methodology
- Undertake pilot studies
- Identify sources of research funding (EU, ILO, etc)
- Develop a post-graduate cohort around this topic
- Undertake a study on the perceptions of the research cluster

Internal reflections

- Studies on vulnerability, including migrant worker studies, typically focus on the perceptions of the interviewees, rather than the perceptions of the interviewer.
- The perceptions of the interviewer, nonetheless influence the way the research is framed and the interpretation of the findings.
- Therefore, we thought that we would also survey the researchers for their perceptions of “migrant”, “culture” , “vulnerable” and “decent work”

Conclusions

- This is evolving research in which we are grappling with core concepts, such as “cultural”, “migrant” and “vulnerable”, as well as methodological issues
- However, comparative, multidisciplinary approach to OHS of migrant workers will hopefully generate findings that are more robust and valid than uni-disciplinary, myopic research.

THANK YOU