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Recruitment Debt and Job Changes among Nepali Workers Returning from Malaysia

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Abstract

Recruitment borrowing can influence workers' choices long after arrival in a destination country. This study examines the relationship between recruitment debt and job changes among Nepali workers returning from Malaysia. A survey of 336 returnees in four districts was combined with 44 employment-history interviews and examination of available recruitment receipts. Event-history models related the timing of job changes to repayment schedules, reported workplace conditions, and access to support networks. Workers facing high monthly repayments were less likely to leave jobs during the first year, even when they reported unpaid overtime or differences from promised duties. Informal assistance from relatives sometimes enabled later moves by covering temporary income gaps. Receipts captured only part of recruitment expenditure because several payments were described as personal facilitation charges. The findings link debt pressure to constrained employment mobility. Returnee recruitment excludes workers still abroad and may overrepresent disrupted migration trajectories. Recruitment monitoring should account for the timing and full composition of worker payments alongside contract terms and formal fee schedules.

Keywords: recruitment debt, labour migration, job mobility, Nepali returnees, Malaysia

1. Introduction

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2. Methods

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