

## Contradictory Economic and Non-Economic Quality of Life of Migrant Workers: A Mixed Method Approach of Bangladeshi Construction Workers in Malaysia

Md Wahidul Haque  
PhD Researcher, Faculty of Applied  
Social Science, University Sultan Zainal  
Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu,  
Malaysia, +601160828424,  
wahidorion5155@gmail.com

Adekunle Daoud Balogun  
PhD Researcher, Faculty of Law and  
International Relations, University  
Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA),  
Terengganu, Malaysia,  
balo1960@gmail.com

Vol.5, Issue 1 | January 2022

### KEYWORDS

Contradictory Economic  
Pursuit, Quality of Life,  
Migrant Workers,  
Bangladeshi Construction  
Workers

### ABSTRACT

Migration studies are increasingly validating that non-economic factors like subjective well-being or Quality of Life (QoL) carry substantial weight over the economic dimensions. Yet, there is a lack of research on the economic and non-economic wellbeing or QoL of the migrant workers in Asia, in respect of QoL of the Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. This parallel convergent mixed method research investigates to find out the levels of QoL of Bangladeshi construction workers in Malaysia, the reasons behind those levels and the correlation of economic and non-economic factors. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative research to find out the levels of QoL and quantitative research followed the hypothetic-deductive method to examine the correlation of income, housing and freedom over QoL. The scope of the study covers only the Bangladesh construction workers who have been staying in Malaysia for less than ten years. Results show that 20% of the respondents are leaving a measurable life and around 60% of workers are prone to illegality in terms of informal striving for economic activities, whereas, 12% of workers enjoy their QoL. 'Paradox of economic activities pushing Bangladeshi construction workers towards non-economic paradox like ignoring housing and legal freedom' is also an outcome of this research.

### Introduction

Lately, migration studies have increasingly validated that over the economic dimensions, non-economic factors like, subjective well-being or QoL carry substantial weight (Amit, 2010; Karin Amit & Riss, 2014). Yet, subjective well-being of immigrants are known little (Karin Amit & Riss, 2014). There is lack of research on non-economic and economic wellbeing or QoL of the migrant workers in Asia (Reza et al., 2019), which also implies on Bangladesh

and Malaysia. For the deviations of the findings in various sources, many gaps are found while conducting the research in this area (Reza et al., 2019). These gaps prove that experts in this field are yet to grasp the holistic picture about economic and non-economic phenomenon of the migrant workers, let alone the workers, who are making all the decision regarding their destination and economic activities.

Recent literature on migration emphasizes more on developing social networks, local language

acquisition, sense of identity and subjective well-being which are basically of non-economic dimensions (K. Amit, 2012; Amit, 2010). Bangladeshi migrant workers are still putting more emphasis on economic issues that is rather putting them in trouble and lowering the QoL. Researchers found that there is a positive correlation between well-being and material conditions. This correlation is again higher in the poorer strata of societies (Havasi, 2013). QoL consist of subsistence, good health state, good human relations, the security of the individual and his property, freedom, opportunity to develop (Havasi, 2013). This research is aimed to investigate the levels of QoL of migrant Bangladeshi construction workers in Malaysia, its reason and relation with economic issues like, income and non-economic issues like, housing and freedom and limited to the workers staying for last ten years in Malaysia.

## 2 Literature Review,

Migration economists agree that, when immigrants receive the same salary as natives 'economic integration' happens ( Borjas, 1990; Karin Amit & Riss, 2014). The economic integration process of in-migrants are usually a long-term process, which counts the number of years in destination (Years of Migration-YoM) (Preston & Grimes, 2019). YoM is an important consideration because there are time-specific effects of migration (Nowok, B., Van Ham, M., Findlay, A. M., & Gayle, 2013) like, knowing the culture, language of the host country. Latest migration researches reveal that subjective considerations (non-economic) form a very important factor that affects the in-migrant integration process.

Economic integration is found to be low in Malaysia, as in the construction sector, Malaysians are at the top of the wage hierarchy while Bangladeshis are at the bottom (Reza et al., 2019). This is due to the presence of outsourcing companies in between the employers and Bangladeshi workers, who are taking the share of the hard-earned money. Nielsen (date) has mentioned that the Indonesian migrant labors tolerate personal economic hardship, many works without salary in the initial periods to cover the fees charged by their recruitment agent (Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, 2014). These studies reflect the same picture of Bangladeshi workers. The scenario is rather worse because the workers don't have any knowledge, why their salary is deducted. This economic vulnerability unpleasantly impacts on economic well-being.

Though the relationship is more between subjective well-being and relative satisfaction than between subjective well-being and income itself (D'Ambrosio,

C., & Frick, 2004; Havasi, 2013), Bangladeshi workers are yet to understand that. To some people, related issues such as power and status contribute immensely to happiness and not necessarily the income per se. It is also possible that income doesn't only have benefits, but also creates more stress, which counterbalance the positive effects (Havasi, 2013), which is not understood by workers who wants to switch to construction sector only for increased income.

Quite a few studies documented the impact of living and working conditions on the physical and mental health of migrants, which ultimately affects the QoL. (Alswaidi, F. M., Memish, Z. A., Al Hakeem, R. F., & Atlam, 2013) have found that most of the migrant workers have inadequate sleep, and give no consideration to healthy food, they work in and live in substandard and crowded places and carried out their work mostly in poor condition with access to health care services. On the contrary, their remittances mostly used for living expenses and to finance major household projects such as renovating or building a house back home and agricultural input (Reza et al., 2019).

Many contributions on the QoL in the recent literatures showed how the Indonesian labors in Malaysia suffered standard social well-being as a result of low wages, lack of social security and freedom. These have negative impact on their social life. (Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, 2014; Smyth, R., Nielsen, I., Zhai, Q., Liu, T., Liu, Y., Tang, C., 2011). These cases are also found to be true in the case of Bangladeshi workers. Productivity and earnings are likely to be affected due to the lack of freedom of choice in work environment (Ruhs, 2016). There is a huge difference in the migrant worker's sense of personal security, and civic freedoms (Czaika, M., & De Haas, 2012). The issue of poor salary, low access to the public services, poor health, lack of legal rights, lack of job security, unexpected physical and mental stress experienced while poor living and working conditions deprived them of social and economic well-being (Reza et al., 2019).

## 3 Theoretical Framework

Noble laureate Amartya Sen conceptualized 'capability theory of wellbeing', proposes that quality of life or wellbeing could be assessed according to individual's capabilities to work. One should not be evaluated according to the achievements, but within the contexts of the real opportunities available to him/her (Binder, 2014). Sen argues that QoL or wellbeing comprises the "capability to achieve the valuable functioning that are constitutive of flourishing lives" (Qizilbash, 2012). Furthermore, Sen legendarily defined the importance of economic development as 'expanding the capability' and so, the

'liberty of individuals' to engender their opportunities to lead a life that is worthwhile (Binder, 2014). Equal opportunities as well as equal possibilities are mostly required for human being to perform functionally. In this thought, there is a necessity to focus on real opportunities rather than the means while the freedom of being and doing are given attention (Sen 2010). In the presence of equal opportunities for the people, expression of capabilities with potential opportunities become functional to achieve well-being status. The same concern of freedom is raised for Bangladeshi migrant construction workers; they have the capability and opportunity for functioning and flourishing. Through withholding the legal documents by the employer and binding or virtually captivating them to an unfavorable work place raises the question of the workers' freedom of movement and QoL.

#### 4 Conceptual Model

Researcher have both positive and negative arguments of effect of income on subjective QoL or subjective wellbeing. Positive correlation between material condition and wellbeing is found, which is again more profound in poorer strata of the society (Havasi, 2013). Relation between wellbeing and relative satisfaction is found more than the relation between wellbeing and income (D'Ambrosio, C., & Frick, 2004; Havasi, 2013), which is not yet understood by the Bangladeshi workers. It is also argued that income also counterbalance the positive effect of QoL instead of only having benefits (Havasi, 2013). Therefore, we can hypothesize that income and QoL of life have significant correlation (H1).

Studies have found the impact of living and working condition on physical and mental health and ultimately QoL. Migrant workers live and work in poor condition like crowded and substandard places, experience insufficient sleep (illegal workers can't even sleep regularly, in those substandard accommodation) and often lack access to health care (Alswaidi et al., 2013). Though, workers in the construction sector build houses for others but ironically, they live in a very shabby accommodation. On the contrary it is found that whenever, they can finance from the remittance, any project back home such as renovating or building a house while agriculture is the first priority (Reza et al., 2019). Therefore, we can hypothesize that housing have a significant influence on QoL of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia (H2).

Number of studies in the recent literature showed how the lack of freedom in workplace and social security negatively affect the social wellbeing of migrant workers in Malaysia (Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, 2014; Smyth et al., 2011). Productivity and earning are likely to be effected by the lack of freedom of

choice in work place (Ruhs, 2016). There is also huge difference of personal security and civic freedom between a local worker and a migrant worker (Czaika, M., & De Haas, 2012) which negatively influence their QoL. Therefore, we may hypothesize that freedom has a significant relation with the QoL of Bangladeshi migrant construction workers in Malaysia (H3). Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this research.

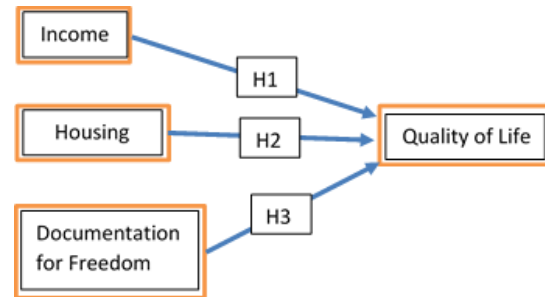


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Source: Researcher's Concept

#### 5 Research Design and Methodology

A parallel convergent mixed method (Yin, 2015) was applied in this research to find out the levels of QoL of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia and the reasons behind those levels and the correlation of economic and non-economic factors. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative research to find out the levels of QoL and quantitative research followed the hypothetic-deductive method to find out the correlation of income, housing and freedom over QoL. Population of the quantitative study included temporarily migrated Bangladesh construction workers in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baharu, Penang and Kuala Terengganu in Malaysia, which were randomly selected from amongst the 11 districts of the mainland of Malaysian peninsular whereas qualitative study included the workers, visa agents/ employers, Bangladeshi embassy personalities in Malaysia and intellectuals in this field. However, in quantitative approach, stratified sampling technique was used to get a suitable sample size following Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which is 385 for quantitative part and for qualitative part, sample size was taken following the data saturation technique (Yin, 2015) for thematic analysis.

A close ended survey questionnaire on QoL was adopted from Norizan Abdul Ghani (Norizan Abdul Ghani, Sulaiman Md. Yasin, Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmed, 2010) and modified to fit the situation on Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. To test the reliability and validity of the scale, a pilot study and a pretest were conducted with 31 and 52 respondents respectively. Because of the interest in dual state (earning and living in Malaysia and sending

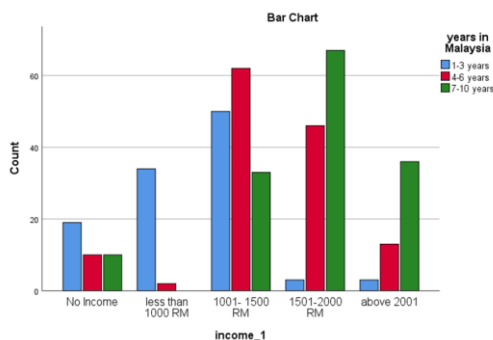
remittance in Bangladesh), some questions were found to be double-barreled and some were ambiguous to understand by the workers. Those questions were adjusted and broken down before the commencement of the research. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) scale was determined as a measure of reliability and validity of the used instrument, which was 0.738. A total of 410 questionnaires were disseminated. Though most of the questionnaires were filled up face to face by the researcher, three hundred and eighty-eight questionnaires were eventually found perfect for statistical analysis. Respondents were assured regarding the confidentiality of provided information on the instrument.

## 6 Results and Discussion

The quantitative data were analyzed statistically with SPSS software version 25. Besides calculating descriptive statistic, inferential statistics was calculated by Pearson product-moment correlation.

### 6.1 Descriptive Analysis

Out of 388 respondents 49 were below 25 years, 103 were between 26-30 years, 114 were in between 31-35 years, 122 were more than 36 years of age. 28% of the total respondents that is 109 were in between 1-3 years of migration (YoM), 133 respondents making up 34.2 % were 4-6 YoM and 146 respondents making up 37.6% were 7-10 YoM. Maximum number of respondents which is 67 persons, making about 17.2% were aging in between 36-40 years and staying in Malaysia for the last 7- 10 years. Out of 388 respondents, 245 (63%) respondents are married, while 133 (34%) are unmarried and 10 (2.5%) are divorced.



Bar Chart 1: Cross tabulation of YoM and Income

Source: output of SPSS from the primary data collected

Bar chat 1: shows the relation between YoM and income. It is found that 39 persons, making almost 10% were without income during the time surveyed. A total of 18 of them were 1-3 YoM and were struggling with income generation and ten persons each from the group of 4-6 and 7-10 YoM were

probably in the transition of job. Other ten percent workers were earning less than RM1000, almost all were 1-3 YoM. 151 workers were found earning in between 1000-1500 RM which made the highest percentage of population that is around 40%, of which 56 workers were 1-3 YoM, 62 workers were 4-6 YoM and 33 persons were from 7-10 YoM group. Around 30% workers were found earning in between 1501- 2000 RM, of which 46 persons were in 4-6 YoM and 64 in 7-10 YoM group. 12%, that is 49 workers were found, earning above 2000 RM, of which 13 from 4-7 YoM and 36 were from 7-10 YoM group.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the independent variables (IV) and the dependent variable (DV). Total score of Quality of Life (Total QoL) represents the sum of all 13 items of the dependent variable. Income (Total Income), housing (Total Housing), and documentation and freedom (Total Freedom) are the independent variables each having 6 items.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Total Income	15.54	3.316	388
Total Housing	9.18	2.734	388
Total Documentation and Freedom	11.82	3.752	388
Total QoL	25.81	7.007	388

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of IVs and DV

Source: Primary Survey Data

### 6.2 Pearson correlation

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficient, significance values, and the number of cases with non-missing values. Pearson correlation coefficient assumes that the data are normally distributed, and it is a measure of linear association between two variables. The values of the correlation coefficient range from -1 to 1. Closer to 1 is positively highly correlated and closer to -1 is negatively highly correlated.

		Total_QoL	Total_House	Total_Freedom_1	Total_Income
Total_QoL	Pearson Correlation	1	.359**	.474**	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Total_House	N	388	388	388	388
	Pearson Correlation	.359**	1	.320**	.426**
Total_House	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	388	388	388	388
Total_Freedom_1	Pearson Correlation	.474**	.320**	1	.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
Total_Income	N	388	388	388	388
	Pearson Correlation	.710**	.426**	.378**	1
Total_Income	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	388	388	388	388

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Correlations Coefficient of IVs and DV (n=388)

Source: Primary Survey Data

In table 2, the correlation coefficient value for income is 0.710, which is very close to 1. It indicates a strong correlation effect on QoL. The result indicates that the higher the income, the better the QoL. Hence in the case of H1, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. In the case of H2, the correlation coefficient value of housing with QoL is 0.359, which is close to 0 and away from 1 and do not indicate a strong correlation. The result indicates that housing in Malaysia does not have a strong positive relation with QoL. Therefore, accepting the null hypothesis, this study rejects the alternative hypothesis. Documentation and freedom is also not very strongly correlated to QoL, it is 0.474, which is closer to 0 than 1. The result indicates that H3 is not also supported. Therefore, in the case of H3, this quantitative survey study rejects the alternative hypothesis and accepts the null hypothesis. Documentation and freedom may not have any direct influence on QoL of Bangladeshi workers. It might happen that due to many factors, like over emphasis on income, expenditure, influence of the unscrupulous visa agents so on. All the variables are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### 6.3 Finding of the Qualitative Research

#### 6.3.1 Income Paradox

Bangladeshi migrant construction workers in Malaysia has a high fluctuation, in regards to the income generation. Income depends upon the availability of job (construction work again depends upon the economic condition of the country), networks with other workers in different construction site, working experience, language proficiency, smartness to manage a job, legal documentation, CIDB card and YoM. Chart: 2 shows the variables of income. Legal documentation, network with other coworkers and language proficiency express the freedom of individual for expanding capabilities to lead a meaningful life.

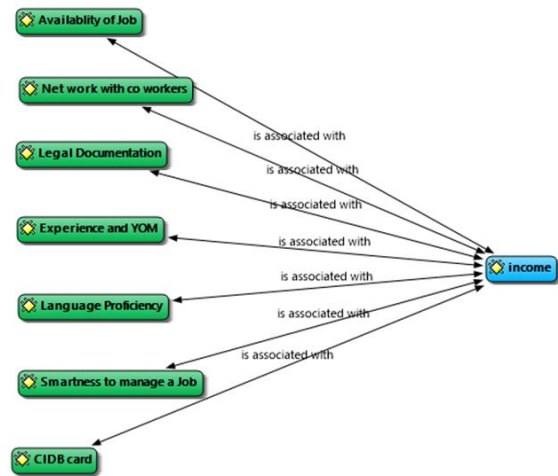


Chart 2: Factors of income

Source: output of Atlas Ti. from collected primary data

Monthly RN1100 is the lowest salary scale of Malaysia, but the questions remain, how many days in a month they can work? Mostly, it is half in the initial days in the face of economic downturn, so one earns only 600 RM in a month. For not being able to fulfill all the requirement of income prerequisite, 1-3 YoM worker's income is very low. Life is further miserable if they are working in outsourcing company, because they can't provide continuous job for the whole month. Many of the workers become illegal during this period of time without being able to withstand the stress and hardship of earning and managing the expenditure. One informant even reported about bringing money from home just to bear the cost of levies.

After working for the whole month without holidays (except half day in Friday), if the income is around 1100 ringgit along with the overtime pay, then that's considered to be a low income. It is because Bangladeshi workers migrate to Malaysia with a lot of debts and bank loans. Construction workers need to spend at least around 300-400 ringgit for own expense, need to keep aside around 400 ringgits for the yearly levies and 500 RM for clearing the bank loans back home. Expenditure of family in Bangladesh remains as a big burden to the married workers. Many of them leave the initial working place in search for higher income. At least 1500 ringgit is considered as manageable income, which can take them throughout the hard way of life. Respondent number seven (R-7) reported that:

*If I can earn at least 1500 ringgit then I can pay back 500 RM for bank loan, can keep aside 400 ringgits for levies, that makes 900 Ringgit and then to RM300 to 400 for my own expense here in Malaysia, which makes 1200 or 1300 and then rest to 300 for my family. It is balanced way of expenditure and income, but*

*if the income falls below 1500 then I can't bear the financial load. (R-7)*

Workers with 4-6 YoM earns a bit more, because of experience and language proficiency acquired. They achieve a little bit of stability by this time. They can send money for the family to lead a better life, like, renovating house, contribute for marriage of offspring and education of the kids. Workers with the experience of 7 to 10 years have higher quality of life. With the increased earning they can purchase land or construct new houses or can save or someone can even invest.

Paradox of income is, even after entitled to have huge earning, if someone has to shift from one workplace to another, there is no income for initial 15 days and another two/ three month's salary is withheld by the employer/agent. In some case they remain unemployed for months altogether. For income generations, they become so puzzled that they move from place to the place, outsourcing company employs them even switching the occupations. This instability continues for initial three to four years and then takes another four years to be stable and settle down. So, after six to seven years they come to a balanced position and then next three to four years they can save and buy some property, like build a house or purchase some lands.

### 6.3.2 Paradox of Housing

Generally Bangladeshi constructions workers live in shamble and shabby conditioned temporary house in Malaysia. Illegal workers even can't sleep in that house for a complete rest. Toilets are also of very low quality, unclean and mostly not a flushed one. Number of users are much more than prescribed. Usually it is observed in Malaysia that, before constructing a house, a land is prepared and a very temporary house is made with plywood or shipping container for the workers to stay. Toilet is not at all taken care of.

On the contrary, may be after 6-7 YoM workers can save some money for constructing a building back home. Four main reasons came out from the informant for the concern of building a house. Firstly, it is symbol of having money, pride, and honor. Secondly, a beautiful house is a visible wealth, which talks about the family culture, environment and status. Lot of lands or other forms of wealth is not visible. Thirdly, a well-built house provides the security for the generations together. Finally, constructing a house means a permanent residence, a permanent address to live for the rest of the life.

The paradox of Housing for the construction worker is, they are preparing a beautiful house and lives in a very low-quality house in one hand. On the other hand, whenever he can send some money as

remittance, he constructs his own house in Bangladesh. Chart: 3 shows the paradox of housing in regards to Bangladesh and Malaysia. Two types of psychology, housing in Malaysia is the lowest priority, just to spend the night under a shed, whether standard doesn't matter. The same person has a different psychology for housing in Bangladesh, which is the first priority. The irony of fate is the house he lives in Malaysia and the house he makes in Bangladesh or in Malaysia. This is an example of self-sacrifice for the family back home.

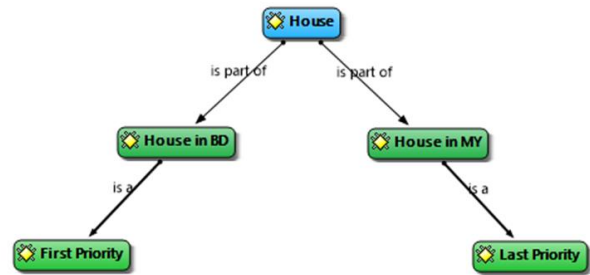


Chart3: Paradox of Housing

Source: Output of Atlas Ti. from primary data collected

### 6.3.3. Legal Documentation and Freedom Paradox

Those who can't withstand these economic stress and pressure, move away from those outsourcing agents leaving behind the visa and passport and become illegal. If someone is an illegal entity, he can save 400 ringgits every month for the levies and documentation purpose and also doesn't have to depend on the agent for his work and share his hard-earned money as commission (may be around 300-600 RM). There is a dilemma here, those who are smart, can learn the language very early and can manage financial transaction with locals, can earn much more than others (bonded by the outsourcing agents) and lead a happy life. If one just leaves the outsourcing agent and goes for his own work and can manage well, he earns even 2000-2500 RM in a month. In this case the agent is not getting any commission (around 300-600 RM) for managing the job and not receiving any money for levies (400 RM). There are many workers who are encouraged to go for this type of illegal movement.

Legally documented workers, employed under an outsourcing company can't work in any other construction site without a valid agreement named as 'Surat'. This 'Surat' is again a precious document which is only issued to a personally known and very trustworthy worker. For that reason, even after having a valid passport and work permit, workers are liable to be arrested while working in a construction site not owned by his outsourcing company. In this case, the company owners come and rescue him from police detention with a huge

penalty, which again has to be borne by the worker, including the travel cost of the boss. That is why remaining legal is not appealing, this real freedom doesn't allow them an equal opportunity of economic development through flourishing capability and individual freedom.

Illegal workers on the other hand are earning much more (around 700-1000 RM ) from those who are bounded to the visa agents. But the problem is they are illegal, so they're afraid of police and they keep themselves hidden and lack real freedom. There are also instances that, these people are exploited more, for not being paid the wages as per the oral contact (usually written contract is never signed before employing these illegal workers). Eventually, the workers cannot do anything, and they cannot even launch a police report against the hiring agents for non-payment or exploitation.

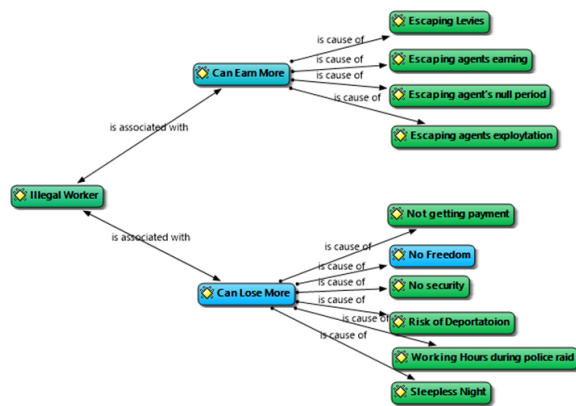


Chart 4: Loss and Benefit of an illegal worker

Source: Output of Atlas.Ti from primary data collected

This scenario shows us two sides of this illegal worker, one is a bright part with more income and the other is a dark side with no freedom and exploitation. An illegal worker can earn more by escaping payment for levies, commission of agent, exploitation, and null period of employment. He can also lose more by not getting payment, having no freedom, no social security, experiencing sleepless nights, escaping during working hours following police raid for risk of deportation after being arrested. Chart 4 shows the gain and loss of an illegal worker; this is the freedom paradox of being illegal worker. For gaining economic freedom, they are losing true freedom. With this paradox of freedom, Bangladeshi worker don't lead a High QoL even after earning higher wages.

7 Analysis of the Findings

Researchers agree that, years of migration (YoM) is important because of its time-specific effects of

migration (Nowok et al., 2013) on the QoL. Migrant workers undergo economic hardship and many of them work even without salary initially (Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, 2014). From quantitative research, it is found that almost 10% of sampled workers were without income during the time of survey, another 10% were earning less than RM1000. Qualitative survey indicates both these groups are in bad condition, causing their life and living a low QoL. Around 40 % that is 151 workers (the highest percentage of population) were found earning in between 1000-1500 RM. Qualitative findings showed that this group of workers are also leading a low QoL, because a person earning 1500 RM have a zero balance, after investing 2000 RM for migration. If the income fluctuates and drops down even by 100 RM, he is in negative balance. 113 workers which constitute around 30% were found earning in between 1501- 2000 RM are leading a medium QoL on economic QoL. Around 12% of the workers were found to be earning above 2000 RM, who were really in a good shape economically and enjoying a good QoL. Hypothesis 1 also commensurate with the same picture and proved that income strongly contributes positively towards the QoL. Qualitative study finds that the level of QoL of 20% workers are very low and prone to illegal living status, 40% are still low and can only earn a hand to mouth salary scale and are also prone to illegal living. Considering the income and economic development only, 30% are leading a medium QoL life and 12 % are in a condition of enjoying the life with a high QoL.

Construction workers in Malaysia usually live and work in poor conditions, which are crowded and substandard and sleep insufficiently (Alswaidi et al., 2013). Their remittances mostly used for living expenses of their family and to finance projects such as renovating or building a house back home (Reza et al., 2019). Quite an opposing view was found in previous researches. Hypothesis 2 disproved that housing, here in Malaysia brings a heavy impact on QoL. Qualitative survey finds out that it is just because of the nature of temporary migrant workers' situation as well as the temporariness of the job in a construction site. However, this non-economic aspect of housing doesn't impact at all on the illegal workers because of lack of real freedom and occasionally, they sleep outside the accommodation in the face of police raid. Housing back home (which is an economical issue of spending remittance), on the other hand is proven to be very important because of those four reasons found out in the qualitative study.

Lack of social security and freedom negatively impacts on the social well-being among the Indonesian workers in Malaysia (Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, 2014; Smyth et al., 2011). Opposing to these previous Indonesian researchers, quantitative study on Bangladeshi workers showed lesser amount

of correlation of freedom with QoL, which also confirmed by the qualitative study. This happens because of the psychological inclination towards getting freedom from the unscrupulous outsourcing agents, their sense of real freedom gets bleak. There is 37.6% of people amongst the groups of medium and high QoL that are undocumented workers and, are not enjoying the freedom. These 37.6% amongst the 42% (medium and high QoL), meaning 15.7 % of the total sample, which is 61 persons are enjoying economic freedom against the face of real freedom, which seems to be a freedom paradox as per the capability theory of wellbeing. 'Economic development through expanding the capability towards freedom of individual to fulfill the potential of life' (Binder, 2014), is a paradox here. Figure 2: below showing that freedom paradox leads to economic development, but because of violating the labor law of Malaysia, they are again leading a less meaningful life, a low QoL.

Though qualitative study pointed out the dark side of being illegal, such as being exploited and losing money of the oral contract, but gain and loss analysis (Chart 4) showed us why many are encouraged to remain as illegal. The problem is the workers don't understand the importance of remaining as legal and respecting the law of the land. By remaining legal, many of the exploitations could be solved with the help of Malaysian law enforcement agencies and the Bangladeshi embassy.

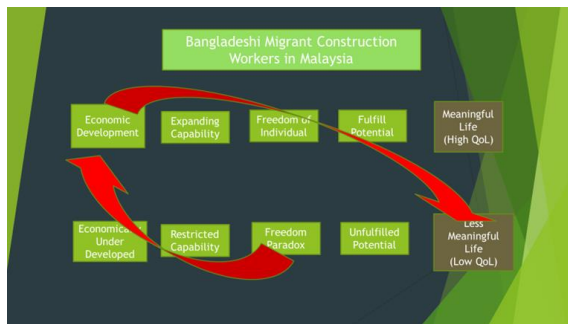


Figure 2: Relation of freedom paradox, economic development and QoL

Source: Model developed by the researcher

## 8 Conclusion and Suggestions

Bangladeshi construction workers are placing high priority on income for economic freedom rather than non-economic matters in the living and workplace. Many of them are intentionally underestimating the importance of legal aspects and documentation, which would allow to enjoy the real freedom. This situation is very dangerous for a migrant worker, because one can't improve the QoL by disobeying or violating the law of the land. A law breaker always

walks in the dark path of life and is afraid of the day light, afraid to be enlighten and there by lacks real economic development. Many of them even spend sleepless nights away from the accommodation from the fear of being arrested. House and address are rather a threat for their security. That is why they put minimum importance on housing here in Malaysia and gives maximum priority to housing in Bangladesh. These non-economic issues of freedom and housing pulling down the QoL of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. Further research should be done to formulate strategy to bring them out from this economic and non-economic paradox of QoL. More should be done to ensure that migration occurs not out of desperation and whim, but out of choice with full information and consent (Reza et al., 2019).

## References

- Alswaidi, F. M., Memish, Z. A., Al Hakeem, R. F., & Atlam, S. A. (2013). Saudi Arabian expatriate worker fitness-screening programme: A review of 14 years of data. *East Mediterr Health Journal*, 19(7), 664–670.
- Amit. (2010). Determinants of life satisfaction among immigrants from Western countries and from the FSU in Israel. *Social Indicators Research*, 96(3), 515–534.
- Amit, K. (2012). Social integration and identity of immigrants from the FSU, Western countries and Ethiopia in Israel. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. *Social Indicators Research*, 35(7), 1287–1310.
- Amit, Karin, & Riss, I. (2014). The Subjective Well-Being of Immigrants: Pre- and Post-migration. *Social Indicators Research*, 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0492-7>
- Binder, M. (2014). Subjective Well-Being Capabilities: Bridging the Gap Between the Capability Approach and Subjective. *Springer Science*, 1197–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9471-6>
- Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2012). *The role of internal and international relative deprivation in global migration*.
- D'Ambrosio, C., & Frick, J. R. (2004). *Subjective well-being and relative deprivation: An empirical link*.
- Havasi, V. (2013). Financial Situation and Its Consequences on the Quality of Life in the EU Countries. *Social Indicators Research*, 117, 17–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9901-y>



- Nielsen, I., & Sendjaya, S. (2014). Wellbeing among Indonesian labour migrants to Malaysia: Implications of the 2011 memorandum of understanding. *Social Indicators Research*, 117(3), 919-938.
- Norizan Abdul Ghani, Sulaiman Md. Yasin, Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmed, W. S. W. A. (2010). Island Communities: Level of Quality of Life, Settlements and Housing in Pulau Perhentian, Terengganu, Malaysia. *Midway Journal*, 5(5), 433. <http://docsdrive.com/pdfs/medwelljournal/s/sscience/2010/433-439.pdf>
- Nowok, B., Van Ham, M., Findlay, A. M., & Gayle, V. (2013). Does migration make you happy? A longitudinal study of internal migration and subjective well-being. *Environment and Planning A*, 45(4), 986-1002.
- Preston, K., & Grimes, A. (2019). Migration , Gender , Wages and Wellbeing : Who Gains and in Which Ways ? *Social Indicators Research*, 144(3), 1415-1452. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02079-y>
- Qizilbash, M. (2012). *Adaptation, poverty and development: The dynamics of subjective well-being* (D. A. Clark (ed.)). Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Reza, M., Subramaniam, T., & Islam, M. R. (2019). Economic and Social Well - Being of Asian Labour Migrants : A Literature Review. *Social Indicators Research*, 141(3), 1245-1264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-018-1876-5>
- Ruhs, M. (2016). *Protecting the rights of temporary migrant workers: Ideals versus reality. Temporary labour migration in the global era: The regulatory challenges* (J. H. & R. Owens (ed.)). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Smyth, R., Nielsen, I., Zhai, Q., Liu, T., Liu, Y., Tang, C., et al. (2011). Environmental conditions and personal well-being in urban China. *Population and Environment*, 32, 353-375.
- Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish, Second Edition*. Guilford Publications.

