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Bargaining the Future: a Descriptive Study of the Lives of the Indonesian Illegal Migrant Workers

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Abstract

This study examines the dire lives conditions of Indonesian illegal migrant workers. Although illegal migrant workers have become aware of their weak bargaining positions because of their illegal immigration status, the desire to earn higher income often leads them to seek employment in neighboring countries. The substantial wage disparities, the difficulty of finding jobs in their hometown, and the need to get economic and social capitals are some primary factors that encourage them to become illegal migrant workers. By using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study finds that Indonesian illegal migrant workers often face threats and adverse treatments abroad. Moreover, the bargaining position of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers is generally weak. The Indonesian illegal migrant workers often experience verbal, psychological, and physical abuse from their brokers, employers, and local immigration officers. The Indonesian illegal migrant workers survive from the hardship overseas as they take advantage of the social cohesion among their fellow illegal migrant workers to deal with the life pressures and limitations abroad.

Keywords Illegal migrant workers · Social pressures · Bargaining positions · Social cohesion · Indonesia

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Introduction

In one of the latest Indonesian illegal migrant workers incidents in early 2018, it was reported by many Indonesian media outlets that some Indonesian illegal migrant workers who sought employment to Malaysia experienced a horrible boat accident. While they traveled to Malaysia, the waves hit their boat and caused approximately fourteen people found dead, and other forty illegal workers were missing. The survivors of this deadly incident were only six people (*Jawa Pos*, January 25, 2018). Previously, such cases of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers who had got involved in deadly accidents like this had occurred a couple of times.

The Indonesian illegal immigrant workers often have to take dangerous and even deadly roads because they have no other choice. The desire to improve the living condition, by working abroad, is not balanced with adequate education, professional skills, and official immigration documents needed. Because of its illegal status, in contrast to legal migrant workers who have obtained reliable support and protection from the government, the Indonesian migrant workers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* or TKI in Indonesian) often got minimum support and protection from the Indonesian government (Parreñas 2000; Axelroth 2007). Based on the fact that they come to the neighboring countries without a sufficient legal immigration procedure, some Indonesian illegal migrant workers are prone to become the victims of inhumane treatment carried out by either the intermediary who sent them, the supervisors, the employers, and even the immigration officers and police abroad (Jones 1999).

It is no secret then that most of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers who look for the employment in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Middle East, or in other countries are prone to be deported because they do not have a passport and a valid working visa (Dollah and Abdullah 2018). They usually go with a visiting visa for a temporary period of usage and then stay longer to work. In other cases, when they arrived in the country of destination, they did have the required legal immigration documents. However, when the document is expired, they often do not take care to extend and choose to survive to work abroad by moving around to different places in order to escape the supervision and raids carried out by the police officers.

Thus, instead of obtaining protection and job security as promoted by the brokers, most of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers live in the conditions that are highly vulnerable (Askola 2007). The stories of Indonesian illegal migrant workers who are unpaid by their employers for months, receive rough physical treatment, and even become victims of sexual abuse are the accounts that are commonly read in the Indonesian media outlets. In the middle of difficulties to find jobs in their hometowns, being illegal migrant workers is one of the most reasonable choices that often make poor people from many different parts of Indonesia to get jobs and money as illegal migrant workers in the neighboring countries.

The purpose of this study is to examine the various forms of life pressures and hardships experienced by Indonesian illegal migrant workers. Without being supported by the needed professional skills and legal immigration documents, the Indonesian illegal migrant workers often have to take “the path of death” before successfully landing on the ground of their dreamlands. Relatively easy access to enter the neighboring countries, as well as the jobs opportunities, such as in the large plantation and construction sectors in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other neighboring countries,

often lead the Indonesian illegal migrant workers to work without sufficient immigration procedure. Immigration documents' forgery practice, deduction of the salary of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers, and other malpractices are a few things that usually occur in the immigration process for the Indonesian illegal migrant workers while hunting for the jobs abroad.

The purpose of this research can be achieved by collecting an overview of the living conditions experienced by these illegal migrant workers. For this reason, this study focuses on the experience of illegal workers from East Java, one of the provinces in Indonesia, known as the producer center of illegal workers abroad. By utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study summarizes the descriptive stories of 400 informants of illegal migrant workers from four districts in East Java, namely Tulungagung, Sampang, Malang, and Ponorogo. With the life story data obtained, this study then attempts to explain the living conditions of illegal migrant workers and more importantly how weak their bargaining position is in the network of power relations of the illegal migrant workers industry in Indonesia.

Literature Review

The United Nations Development Program (2015) indicates that 15 to 30% of the world population tends to migrate to other countries with the primary purpose to improve the welfare of their families. Migration for a job mainly occurs in developing countries with the destination of neighboring and more advanced countries. Low-end jobs and jobs that involve much physical activity, for example, in many developed countries have been taken over by migrant workers.

However, a report from the Lowy Institute for International Policy (2014) states that there is a relationship between the increase of migration trend with the increase of the labor mistreatments. Some previous researches have described the complicated relationship between the increase of migration to human trafficking, labor mistreatment and exploitation, and even the threat of transnational terrorism (Kaldor 2013; Lowy Institute for International Policy 2014; The Heritage Foundation 2014; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2015). This phenomenon of labor mistreatments is mainly experienced by illegal migrant workers. UNDP data shows that the number of illegal migrant workers, especially those from poor and developing countries, tends to increase every year (UNDP 2015). The increasing number of illegal migrant workers, ironically, tends to be followed by an increase in cases of exploitation and mistreatment of their rights.

The hardship of illegal migrant workers has become one of the important studies among social science researchers since it reveals the unfortunate facts, especially the social pressures of their lives, including the various cases of exploitation and violation of the migrant workers' human rights (Delvy 2015; McMahon 2011; Obokata 2006; Consterdine and Samuk 2018). The absence of the legal immigration documents and official migrant workers status, as well as the legal protection from the government, often leads to an unsafe life condition and inadequate treatment for the illegal migrant workers. This poor treatment was usually committed by brokers, employers, the users of their services, and the immigration officers in foreign countries (Azizah 2005; Avdan 2012). The stories of the illegal migrant workers who become victims of exploitation,

abused, and even rape also often becomes big news in the media outlets around the world (Bravo 2009; Brysk and Choi-Fitzpatrick 2012).

In the case of Indonesia, previous studies have shown that Indonesian illegal migrant workers, including Indonesian female migrant workers (Tenaga Kerja Wanita or TKW in Indonesian), is one of the vulnerable groups of people who are also prone to become victims of exploitation and human trafficking (Haris 2002, 2005; Yeates 2009; Pope 2010; Ford et al. 2012; Yea 2012). Various cases have shown the harsh reality of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers who want to try their luck to work abroad through illegal ways (Wong and Anwar 2003; Askola 2007; Pasha 2013). A study that was conducted by Ford et al. (2012), reported how illegal migrant workers from Indonesia were prone to verbal, psychological, and physical abuse because they did not go through an official immigration procedure.

The stories of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers who have the unfortunate condition, either at the time they leave or when they were already working abroad, often become a terrible image of the condition of job seekers from Indonesia, who look for the employment in the neighboring countries (Liow 2003; Haryadi 2005). The absence of protection and the condition of not being supported by a legal immigration status cause some Indonesian migrant workers vulnerable to become victims of mistreated and exploitation in the neighboring countries of destination (Chapkis 2003; Awad 2009).

The implication that should be faced by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers is not only related to the legitimacy of their working status in other countries but also about the bargaining position in the workplace or the other country due to their illegal immigration status (Killias 2010). Unlike Indonesian migrant workers who have legal working status and have a particular certificate of skill or expertise, the bargaining position of Indonesian illegal migrant workers is often weak because they do not have the required official documents that should be obtained before their departure (Sitepu 2017).

Furthermore, Sitepu (2017) argues that the weak bargaining power of illegal migrant workers is also caused by the inequality of power relations that occur within the industry of international migrant workers. At the micro-level, several studies show that the position of personal power of Indonesian illegal migrant workers is often much lower than the positions of brokers, employers, and users of their services in foreign countries (Azizah 2005; Avdan 2012; Yea 2012; Sitepu 2017). This lower position can be seen clearly in terms of inequality of capital ownership (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) between the two parties (Forsander 2004; Killias 2010; Pasha 2013; Sitepu 2017).

In this relation, the inequality of individual power possessed is a major factor which causes the weak bargaining position of Indonesia's illegal migrant workers. Meanwhile, at the macro-level, the injustice of the global economic power structure between the third and the first world also contributed to the wave of illegal migration of migrant workers to other countries. In the case of Indonesia, differences in the level of the country's economy and wage standards in much higher neighboring countries have been the main drivers of the weak bargaining power of Indonesia's illegal migrant workers. In other words, in this unequal structure of power relations, exploitation, and mistreatment is a phenomenon that is necessarily occurring and accepted by illegal migrant workers without any other choice.

Methods

¹ This study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method was used to obtain an initial overview of the hard lives of Indonesian illegal migrant workers. However, it must be noted that the sample in this study does not represent a larger population. Samples in this study were taken purposively to understand the adversities of the subjects. Meanwhile, the qualitative method was used to obtain in-depth data on the thick-description of the lives of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers.

This study was aimed to describe the hardship experiences of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers from four regencies in East Java, Indonesia. In order to collect the data, this study has tracked and extracted interview data from four regions in East Java, Indonesia that was known as the primary clusters of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers who had been prone to become the victims of human trafficking and labor exploitation.

This study specifically tracked data in four regions in East Java, Indonesia, which was known as an area with populations who were vulnerable to become the victims of human trafficking: Tulungagung, Sampang, Malang, and Ponorogo. The number of informants of this study was 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers—in which, in each region, there were 100 informants whom all had become Indonesian illegal migrant workers (see Table 1 below). The respondents for this study were not representative and chosen purposively with the criteria as follows: (1) has, at least once, experienced

Table 1 Research sites and number of informants

Regency	District	Village	Number of Informants
1. Tulungagung	Besuki	Tanggulturus	25
		Tanggulkundung	25
	Bandung	Kedungwilut	25
		Bandung	25
2. Sampang	Karangpenang	Tambah	25
		Blu'uran	25
	Sokobanah	Tobaih Timur	25
		Tobaih Tengah	25
3. Malang	Sumbermanjing	Argotirto	25
	Wetan	Harjokuncaran	25
	Gedangan	Gajahrejo	25
		Sidodadi	25
4. Ponorogo	Jenangan	Pintu	25
		Paringan	25
	Sukorejo	Sukorejo	25
		Sidorejo	25
			400

becoming Indonesian illegal migrant workers; (2) has worked abroad as Indonesian illegal migrant workers, and (3) is a resident of East Java Province, Indonesia.

The recruitment process for the informants of this study was carried out openly using the snowball method. The researchers firstly introduced themselves as researchers from Airlangga University who were looking for accounts of life experiences of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers. Moreover, then, after explaining the purpose of the study, the researchers asked permission if the informant was willing to be interviewed for this study. However, at first, not all of the informants were willing to be interviewed. All informants just agreed to be interviewed after the researchers make sure that the informants' names would not be written at all as the sources of this study.

Besides conducting the semi-structured interviews with the primary informants, this study also conducted in-depth interviews with the government and non-government parties involved in the issue of Indonesian illegal migrant workers, as well as people who have the experience of dealing with the cases of human trafficking in East Java and Indonesia in general. In-depth interviews were also carried out to some police officers in the proposed area who had handled the case of human trafficking and labor exploitation of Indonesian illegal migrant workers.

Before conducting this study, the researchers have already obtained a letter of research permission from Airlangga University as well as a letter of consent from the informants. Moreover, the researchers who were all lecturers have already understood the research ethics related to sensitive topics, such as human trafficking. In the process of collecting data, the researchers always uphold and place the best interests of the informants than any other interests.

Results

In this section, several themes that show up overtime during the data analysis will be presented in details. These themes include the background of becoming illegal migrant workers, the driving factors, the use of money, the popular employment types, the unpleasant treatment experiences, the efforts to avoid raids, and the weak bargaining position of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers.

Becoming Illegal Workers

Even though it is expected to be the solution to the economic problems that are faced by their family, becoming illegal migrant workers, in fact, often becomes a point that worsens their life, especially when they become the victims' mistreatments and abuses. Long working hours, the absence of proper health insurance, and sometimes even violence, are common things that are faced by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers when they are determined to seek employment abroad.

Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, the majority of them (70%) claimed that they had become illegal migrant workers once (see Table 2 below). Some respondents said they were no longer interested in trying to become

Table 2 Try-out of becoming illegal migrant workers

No. times of try-out	Percentage
10	
1. Once	70
2. Twice	19
3. Three times	8.5
4. Four times	1.2
5. Five times	1.2

illegal migrant workers because there were too many risks to be faced. However, 19% of the respondents claimed to have become illegal migrant workers twice, and 8.5% of the respondents claimed to have become illegal migrant workers three times. Only a small proportion of respondents who have ever tried four times to become illegal migrant workers (1.2%), and 1.2% of the respondents claimed to have become illegal migrant workers up to five times.

The age of respondents who became the illegal migrant workers for the first time is mostly around 26–30 years (35%) and 21–25 years (29.7%). A total of 12.8% of the respondents became illegal migrant workers when they were 31–35 years. Interestingly, however, this study found that 22.5% of the respondents claimed to be illegal migrant workers when they were 15–20 years old. For the 15-year-old respondents, they usually go with their parents or relatives to try to find a job in neighboring countries, especially to Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Singapore.

Most of the respondents (92.2%) had become illegal migrant workers for about 1–5 years. It was admitted by some informants that the policy of the country of destination increasingly tightens the space for illegal migrant workers that causes them to have no longer the freedom to work there. Among 400 respondents, only 1.4% of the respondents admitted to being illegal migrant workers for more than 15 years. Meanwhile, 0.7% of the respondents claimed to have become illegal migrant workers for 11–15 years, and 5.7% of the respondents claimed to have worked for 6–10 years. Among the villagers who tried to find work abroad while bringing their family, they averagely survive for years even some were over 5 years.

This study also found that the most popular destination among the Indonesian illegal migrant workers was Malaysia (46.2%). Also, other destinations that are popular for the Indonesian illegal migrant workers are Hong Kong (15.2%), Taiwan (13.8%), and Saudi Arabia (10%). Meanwhile, Singapore (4%), Korea (3.8%), and the USA (1.5%) have not been too popular among the Indonesian illegal migrant workers in East Java province. Most of the respondents of this study claimed (39%) they have no connections to find employment in the neighboring countries, and as many as 42% of the respondents claimed to have only a few connections, so there were no other options.

Popular Driving Factors

The driving factors that encourage Indonesians to become migrant workers despite being illegal are varied (see Table 3 below). The first popular reason is mainly that of the relatively high wage difference between the domestic wage standards and the wage standards of working abroad. Around 62% of the respondents stated that the difference

Table 3 The driving factors Indonesian illegal migrant workers

Driving factors	Very strong (%)	Strong (%)	Strong enough (%)	Weak (%)	Very weak
1. Difficult to find work in the village of origin	52.2	21.0	5.5	12.2	9.0
2. The differences of high wage within and outside the country	62.0	35.5	2.5	0.0	0.0
3. Invited by friends	21.8	26.0	47.0	5.2	0.0
4. Because there is a personal/family problem in the village of origin	8.5	16.0	6.8	40.5	2.7
5. Want to find experience	11.5	42.5	30.5	13.0	2.5
6. To find their own business capital after returning home	30.8	48.2	14.8	6.2	0.0
7. Family encouragement	9.2	33.8	52.0	2.8	2.2
8. Invited by the brokers	6.8	24.8	10.5	26.0	32.0

in wage standard was the primary reason that they decided to work overseas as illegal migrant workers. If they work in their village, they only earn less than one million rupiahs per month. However, if they become migrant workers abroad, they can make more than five million rupiahs per month. Therefore, it is not surprising if the choice ultimately fell on the search for working abroad.

Another driving factor for becoming illegal migrant workers is that they find it difficult to find work in their hometown. Around 52.2% of the respondents admitted that the scarcity of the job opportunities in their village of origin is an essential factor that pushed them to become illegal migrant workers, and as many as 21% of the respondent stated it as a strong driving factor. As agricultural land in rural areas decreases, more and more young people leave their hometown and choose to work abroad even though illegally.

Thirdly, the respondents of this study are also motivated to seek for the venture capital that they can use for business after coming home from working in the neighboring countries. A total of 30.8% of the respondents said that this factor is important, and 48.2% of the respondents mention it as a strong driving factor. Many villagers aspire to set up their own business or buy land to farm, but they do not have enough savings. One of the realistic ways to achieve their goals is then by becoming illegal migrant workers abroad.

Fourthly, they have become illegal migrant workers because of their friends' invitation. A total of 26% of the respondents acknowledged that this friends' invitation is a significant driving factor, and even as many as 21.8% of the respondents said the invitation of friends is an influential factor for working abroad. Interestingly, although not many, several respondents in this study stated that offers from migrant labor brokers were also one of the driving factors that were strong enough for them to become illegal migrant workers (24.8%). The offer to be illegal migrant workers is usually accompanied by fees to be paid to brokers who facilitate the job placement abroad. This fact is proof that for some parties involved (brokers), the opportunity to become illegal migrant workers is a promising business.

The Use of Wages

According to the Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, half of the respondents (58.8%) admitted that they send the wages to their hometown about seven to twelve times a year. Meanwhile, as many as 28.8% of the respondents claimed to send money to the hometown for about once in 2 months or two to six times a year. A total of 11.6% of the respondents mentioned not to have a specific timeline when sending their income to their hometown (see Table 4 below).

Most of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers (36%) admitted that averagely they send about two–three million rupiahs each month, and even 14.5% of the respondents admitted of sending averagely three–four million rupiahs each month. Among 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers that are interviewed, 10% of the respondents admitted to sending averagely of four–five million rupiahs each month, and even 6% of respondents admitted to sending over five million rupiahs each month. Only 14% of respondents send money below one million rupiahs each month.

Almost all the Indonesian illegal migrant workers send their money or income to their hometown by using bank transfer services (97.5%). Only 2.5% of the respondents claimed to send money to their hometown by assigning their fellow migrant workers when they went home.

The money made by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers while working overseas is mostly used for family meals in their hometown (93.8%), the cost of education of the children (91.8%), the cost of renovating houses (88%), buying motorcycles (81%), and for savings (77%). About 53% of the respondents claimed to utilize their remittances to buy land. Another 37.8% of the respondents claimed to buy cattle, and as much as 46.2% of the respondents reported that their remittances are used to purchase assets or production equipment in their hometown.

Although most Indonesian illegal migrant workers are satisfied with the income earned, when being asked about what percentage of their income can be saved, not many respondents can save in large numbers. Only 28.8% of the respondents claimed

Table 4 Use of wages by Indonesian illegal migrant workers

Utilization of money transfer from illegal TKI/TKW	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Buying cattle	37.8	62.2
2. Buying land	53.5	46.5
3. Renting cultivated land	13.2	86.8
4. Buying a motorcycle	81.0	19.0
5. Renovating the house	88.0	12.0
6. Buying a house	1.5	98.5
7. Using it as capital to develop business	56.2	43.8
8. Daily meal	93.8	6.2
9. Child education costs	91.8	8.2
10. Saving	77.2	22.8
11. Buying assets/production equipment	46.2	53.8

to be able to save and set aside their income up to 41–50%, and 2% of the respondents can save up to 50% more. Most of the respondents claimed that they are only able to save under 20%. About 12.25% of the respondents claimed to be able to save 11–20% of their income, and 36% of the respondents are even only able to save under 10% of their income. A total of 14.5% of respondents can save for about 31–40%, and 6.5% of respondents claimed to save about 21–30% of the income they earn.

From the information of these Indonesian illegal migrant workers, most of their wages are generally sent to the families in hometown (70.5%). Only 19.8% of the illegal migrant worker's income went to pay off the debt to the brokers, and 2.5% of respondents admitted that most of their income was spent to pay the security money.

Popular Employment Types

While being abroad, the Indonesian illegal migrant workers interviewed in this study mostly worked in the construction sector (36.2%) or working in the plantation sector (23.5%) (see Table 5 below). According to some informants, these two sectors are indeed the favorite choice of Indonesian illegal migrant workers because they can quickly hide if there is a raid from the local immigration authorities. Moreover, these two work sectors also bring relatively high wages than any other employment types abroad. In term of gender category, these two sectors of work are mostly filled by men rather than women.

Of the 400 illegal migrant workers, 22% of the respondents claimed to work as a housekeeper, and 4.2% of the respondents worked as babysitters, and 11.5% of them worked as elderly caregivers. Indeed, in abroad, working as housekeepers, babysitters, and caregivers is one of the most attractive employment opportunities, especially for Indonesian female migrant workers (Constable 2007). These types of jobs are also very much needed in some neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, or Hong Kong.

While working abroad, although the workload and long hours of work are often severe, most respondents claimed that their sacrifice is equal with the income they earn. Compared to working in Indonesia, besides it is challenging to find a job, the salary in Indonesia is also relatively small. Looking for a job out of the country, according to most of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers offers a reasonably higher income. About 85.5% of the respondents stated that their working hours were equal to the

Table 5 Employment of Indonesian illegal migrant workers

Employment of Indonesian illegal migrant workers	Percentage
1. Housekeeper	22.0
2. Babysitter	4.2
3. Elderly caregiver	11.5
4. Working in the construction sector	36.2
5. Working in the plantation/agriculture sector	23.5
6. Not certain	0.8
7. Other (factory workers)	1.8

wages earned. Around 92% of the respondents also stated that their workplace facilities were quite good. Only a small percentage of respondents, not more than 10%, who stated their workloads were not worth with the wages received.

Unpleasant Treatment Experiences

This study also found that many Indonesian illegal migrant workers feel anxious about what they are doing abroad. A total of 10.8% of the respondents in this study admitted to feeling being intimidated by the foreman, and 37% of the respondents even admitted that they were often intimidated by their employers (see Table 6 below). The forms of intimidation experienced by these illegal migrant workers are diverse, but most of the intimidation they experience is generally psychological and verbal abuse in the form of harsh words and threats because of the asymmetrical power relations between them.

Although the majority of Indonesian illegal migrant workers claim to have rarely or never received harsh treatment or other uncomfortable treatment, this study finds that there are quite a lot of respondents who actually have experienced harsh treatment or even often feel much uncomfortable pressure. This study finds that the unfavorable forms of treatment experienced by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers during their work overseas mostly are on salary detention, being forced to work overtime without any compensation, and being yelled or scolded. About 15.6% of the respondents admitted that the employers always withheld their salary, 14.8% of respondents admitted that they were always being yelled or scolded by their employers, and 14% of the respondents admitted that they were being forced to work overtime. About 11.8% of the respondents also said that their employers often beat them. Beyond that, 12.6% of the respondents admitted that when they were sick, they were not treated well, and 11.8% of the respondents admitted that the employers kept their passport.

Among all of these unpleasant treatments experienced by Indonesian illegal migrant workers, the cases of sexual harassment and abuses seem to be the least incidents. Only 0.8% of the respondents said that they often got sexual abuses, and 65.2% of them said they never experienced sexual harassment while working abroad as illegal migrant workers.

Table 6 Unpleasant treatments experienced by Indonesian illegal migrant workers

The form of treatment is unpleasant	Always (%)	Often (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1. Forced to work overtime without compensation	14.0	3.8	43.8	38.4
2. No treatment if they sick	12.6	4.2	38.0	45.2
3. Snapped/scolded	14.8	16.4	50.8	18.0
4. Beaten	0.8	11.8	25.0	62.4
5. Sexually harassed	0.0	0.8	34.0	65.2
6. Given low wages	1.2	11.8	39.5	47.5
7. The passport is on hold	11.8	2.8	37.0	48.5
8. Salary is on hold	15.6	10.2	26.2	48.0
9. Threatened to be reported by the authorities	0.8	13.0	28.4	57.8

Efforts to Avoid Raids

Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, more than half of respondents (59.2%) claimed that their status was illegal due to a tourist visa or *Umrah* (Islamic Pilgrimage) visa, and not a working visa, so the possibility of being targeted by raids was high. A total of 29% of the respondents admitted that their status is illegal, because they live to overstay abroad, and 11.8% of the respondents are illegal because they use fake immigration documents.

During this time, the usual efforts of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers to avoid the raiding officers are mostly trying to hide. The information about the raids is usually obtained from the foreman or their employers; to save themselves, these illegal migrant workers will usually cease to work temporarily to evacuate and hide from the raids conducted by the immigration authorities. Around 55.3% of the respondents said that they often hide when the local police officers conduct the raid. Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers, around 33.5% said that they often paid security money, or tried to hide behind their employers' guard. Only 38.8% of the respondents claimed to surrender during the raid (see Table 7 below).

Although the Indonesian illegal migrant workers often feel uncomfortable and anxious about being caught when the raids are simultaneously conducted in the destination countries, the attractiveness of getting a higher income often overcomes those feelings. Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, around 78.5% stated that the salary they received as migrant workers were relatively in line with their expectations. Only 5.7% of respondents stated that their salary was not enough, and 15.8% of respondents stated that it was less worth it.

Although it is recognized that the party that mostly determines the salary (61%) is the employers, yet many Indonesian illegal migrant workers feel that if it is compared with their salary in Indonesia, the income they earn is much more promising. Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers interviewed, around 23.2% of respondents stated that the number of salaries was a two-party agreement, and only 15.8% of respondents felt that the number of salaries was based on their preference.

Weak Bargaining Position

Many of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers that were surveyed also claimed to have no strong bargaining position, and they tend to choose to accept the fact (60.5%). When being asked about what the respondents do when the salaries or working

Table 7 Efforts by Indonesian illegal migrant workers to avoid raids

Efforts to avoid raids	Often (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1. Hide when there is a raid	55.3	5.2	39.5
2. Pay security money	33.5	24.5	42.0
3. Being regulated by employer/foreman in order not to be exposed	31.0	21.5	47.5
4. Working in a difficult place to reach	20.8	32.2	47.0
5. Just surrender	38.8	8.8	52.4

facilities that are received are not desirable or disadvantageous, only 11.5% of the respondents claim to dare to protest to the employers, and 13% of the respondents protest to the foreman who supervises them. About 15% of the respondents said that they prefer to gossip the condition with their friends, and most of them choose to keep silence and not doing anything because they are frightened that they will be harmed if they are too brave to protest to the employers.

Among the Indonesian illegal migrant workers, so far, one of the things that make them survive of the various pressures is undeniably the social cohesion and the support of the surrounding social environment. About 76% of the respondents admitted that in their daily life they often develop close social relationships with their fellow Indonesian migrant workers, and 66% of the respondents claim to develop often close relationships with their fellow migrant workers from their villages.

Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, about 32% of the respondents also claimed to develop close relationships with any fellow migrant workers—regardless of their place of origins in Indonesia. A total of 23.8% of the respondents also claimed to seek to develop close relationships with the foreman, and 22.3% of the respondents claimed to develop social relationships with the official patrons in the local area in which they work.

Why do Indonesian illegal migrant workers tend to develop close relationships with their fellow illegal migrant workers? It is because their migrant worker friends are a helpful safety net that may help them when they are in need. When illegal migrant workers are getting sick, for example, it is admitted that the person who usually helped them were other Indonesian migrant workers (48.5%), and 23.8% of respondents stated that the one who usually helped them were fellow migrant workers from their home village. Another total of 24.5% of the respondents claimed to be assisted by their own family. Even 3.2% of the respondents claimed to be assisted by fellow migrant workers—regardless of their place of origins. For fellow Indonesian illegal migrant workers, strong social bonds and social cohesion among them are often useful for mutual support and help.

Most respondents (64.8%) stated that they often chose to avoid appearing in the crowd or showing themselves in public to avoid being the victim of raids. Meanwhile, in order to save money, the efforts made by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers are by dividing the living cost with their fellow migrant workers (38.2%), reducing the frequency of eating (27%), or reducing the quality of the food menu (22%) (see Table 8

Table 8 The efforts by Indonesian illegal migrant workers to survive abroad

The effort developed	Often done (%)	Rarely done (%)	Never done (%)
1. Reducing the frequency of eating	27.0	34.2	38.8
2. Reducing the quality of the food menu	22.0	42.0	36.0
3. Borrowing money to fellow migrant workers from Indonesia	29.0	36.8	34.2
4. Dividing the living cost together with fellow migrant workers	38.2	20.2	41.6
5. Avoiding appearing in crowds	64.8	35.2	0.0
6. Paying security money	34.2	46.8	19.0

above). Under coercive working conditions, about 29% of the respondents also admitted borrowing money from other migrant workers if the urgency of need could no longer be postponed.

Discussions

Unlike the Indonesian legal migrant workers who have the assurance and protection of laws, some migrant workers from Indonesia have illegal immigration status because they left the country without going through the legal immigration procedures. In this case, legal immigration required documents, and valid residence permits are all violated, so they are considered to be illegal migrant workers who may be deported for violating the provisions in the destination countries (Dako-Gyeke and Kodom 2017). By utilizing the shortcut and the services of illegal procedures, they choose the illegal way to enter and look for a job in the neighboring countries. Because of this, they often have to bear the adverse consequences that are the lack of protection and the decrease in their bargaining position in front of the employers or the parties who employ them. In many countries that become the destination of these illegal migrant workers, it is no secret that the Indonesian illegal migrant workers have always been the object of labor exploitation. Sometimes they even become the object of sexual harassment and acts of physical violence (Constable 2007; Palmer 2019). Therefore, their daily lives are generally uneasy because they feel anxious about being targeted in the raid, which was performed by the local police officers.

As happened in Malaysia during this time, for example, there was often a situation when the Indonesian illegal migrant workers had to face the raids from the immigration officials and experienced being caught red-handed by the officers who then later deported them to Indonesia because they have violated the immigration law. According to the estimation of the Indonesian Embassy in Malaysia, as of June 2017, there are about 1.2 million–1.3 million Indonesian illegal migrant workers in Malaysia. Most of these Indonesian illegal migrant workers work in the informal sector, such as construction workers and small factories. Although in Malaysia various raids of illegal migrant workers are often carried out, with the support of the existing Indonesian migrant workers networks, the illegal migrant workers seem to be still able to work around. They usually live as nomad and have difficulty to get a permanent employer. For a few lucky illegal migrant workers, they can play tricks to avoid the raids by hiding in areas that are hard to reach by the immigration officials, such as entering the forest or hiding in the isolated places. However, for Indonesian illegal migrant workers who are less fortunate, they can be caught by the immigration officials, go to jail, and then be repatriated to the homeland.

For those illegal migrant workers who are at a loss, they are sometimes exposed in the raids and must pay security bail or to be deported to Indonesia for violating the migration terms. However, because they need income for the family, despite the feeling of anxiety, most of the illegal migrant workers claimed to be forced to seek work overseas as illegal migrant workers. No matter what challenges they face in other countries, because of the urgency of work and income, they should inevitably face the challenges.

Deciding to be an illegal migrant worker who tries to find work overseas actually is not an easy thing. Although most of the respondents in this study stated that the decision to become an illegal migrant worker is entirely their initiative, it must be acknowledged that the presence of brokers, family encouragement, and the success stories of other migrant workers who have returned home has its allure. For villagers in many parts of Indonesia, who are struggling economically or villagers who are struggling to find decent work, the temptation to work abroad is hard to push back.

In many villages, it is common knowledge that many brokers or recruiters are looking for clients who are interested in working as migrant workers. Not a few brokers who are even willing not only to help with the necessary administrative preparations, but they are also commonly willing to lend money and even the cost of the departure of villagers who decide to seek their employment abroad. This study also found that it is indeed the one who prepares the necessary documents for the prerequisites of working abroad is mostly the migrant workers themselves (47.2%). However, 44% of the respondents admitted that the administrative stuff and how to deal with the legal immigration provisions are all prepared by the brokers who invite them. For villagers who are inexperienced in taking care of visa, passport, or prerequisite documents required to work abroad, following what the broker suggested is the most practical way. For them, what matters the most is how to get to the destination countries and then make as much money as possible to bring home or send to the family in their hometown. However, for the unlucky villagers, they may become the victims of deception of brokers who offer promises which are not the real conditions on the neighboring countries.

From the interviews with the police officers in Tulungagung District, for example, it is known that many villagers become the victims of fraud from the recruiter or an authorized agency of *Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* or *PJTKI* (Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement Companies) that illegally has a side job. The recruiters, instead of looking for villagers who are interested in being migrant workers, are often looking for villagers who are willing to be offered to work abroad—outside the country listed in the decree. The villagers, then, were offered a job in Japan by paying 45 million rupiahs. However, since these villagers only use tourist visas, once the villagers arrived at the airport in Japan, they were immediately arrested by local immigration authorities and later be deported to Indonesia. Feeling victimized by the recruiter that has a side job of looking for the victims of villagers who want to become illegal migrant workers, finally the villagers reported this case to the Police of Tulungagung, so the case was then processed as a criminal case. The perpetrator of the fraud, eventually was arrested, had a trial, and then was convicted.

“In Tulungagung, the last case is on two illegal migrant workers. The first case is a fraud committed by the recruiters from PJTKI that deceives villagers, with a promise that by paying 45 million rupiahs, they can work in Japan. However, when they arrived there, they were immediately deported because they only have tourist visas. So, they were immediately arrested at the airport. Then, the victim reported the case here. We processed it, and at the end, indeed, in the trial, it was proven that the recruiter deceived the villagers. The second one is the case of the departure of illegal migrant workers. At that time, we heard information that some villagers were going to become illegal migrant workers. At that time, we intercepted, we stopped the car. We examined the documents, and it was true that they wanted to find work to Malaysia unofficially.

Finally, we gave them some information and sent them back to the village. We recommended them to take care of working abroad through PJTKI", said one of the police officers in Tulungagung.

In the various districts in East Java Province, the presence of PJTKI branch offices, also, to helping to facilitate the villagers who wish to pursue official migrant workers abroad, they generally also have a side business to search for and depart the Indonesian illegal migrant workers that violate the law. This case will be reported to the law officials when the victim complains. However, many villagers chose not to report it although they had sold some of their assets or even forced to borrow money for their departure fees. However, when they found out that they were the victims of the brokers, some residents chose not to take the case to court because it would harm them even more.

How much does it cost to go abroad? Most respondents (54.2%) confessed that it was under five million rupiahs. Nevertheless, 15.8% of the respondents admitted they spend the cost for about ten–fifteen million rupiahs, and even 20.2% of the respondents claimed to spend up to fifteen–twenty million rupiahs. Of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers, 8.8% of the respondents admitted to spending the cost up to twenty million rupiahs. In order to meet this relatively large expense, in addition to selling some of their valuable goods, these migrant workers get the funds from the debt, either from their relatives, neighbors, or the brokers which can be paid when they have earned a salary from work abroad. Out of the 400 Indonesian illegal migrant workers surveyed in this study, only 26% of them get the expenses for their departure from their savings. A total of 13.2% of the respondents admitted that the cost was obtained by borrowing money from the family, and 4.5% of them get the money by selling their valuable goods. Meanwhile, 18% of the respondents admitted that they get the money from the brokers, and 38.2% of them borrowed the money from PJTKI.

For the villagers who do not have savings or assets that they can sell for the departure to the destination countries, obtaining a loan from the brokers or PJTKI is undoubtedly a welcome and rewarding one. However, the problem is after getting a loan, then how to pay the loan? This study found that although in the beginning, many villagers found it helpful to obtain loans from brokers or PJTKI, ironically for Indonesian illegal migrant workers who borrow money from brokers or PJTKI, most of them (62.6%) had to pay a very high-interest rate, reaching almost 75% per year.

Although becoming illegal migrant workers are risky and prone to exploitation, for the villagers who wish to earn an income by becoming migrant workers, they generally prefer to keep going to look for a job abroad. From the in-depth interviews, it was found that Indonesian illegal migrant workers, before they set out to seek their work abroad with illegal status, mostly had heard sad stories about the condition of illegal migrant workers who looked for a job without legal working status. However, as the urgency of life needs is felt more urgent, and also because of the persuasion of the brokers, they often deny that condition, and console themselves that all the mistreatment that are faced by other illegal migrant workers will not be experienced if they are careful. When in the village, the jobs become scarce to find, and wages earned from various sectors were no longer promising, so the chance to try their luck in search of work abroad becomes a tempting offer (Kloppenburger and Peters 2012; Karachurina

2018). When there is a modernization of agriculture that comes to the rural areas which cause many jobs to begin to disappear and the process of succession of ownership of production assets owned by villagers, it can be understood if some villagers were no longer feel comfortable working in their villages.

As this study revealed, there were quite a lot of Indonesian illegal migrant workers who repeatedly tried to seek work overseas because regarding the income that they obtained, it is considered to be significantly high. As long as they can find decent work within the destination countries and have connections to enter and enable them to obtain promising jobs, they will go to work in other countries. By working as illegal migrant workers, it is recognized that the socio-economic conditions of the family are getting better (Palmer 2019).

Working as illegal migrant workers, although full of risks, remains as an interesting choice for the villagers because this work is auspicious from the economic standpoint (Suziana et al. 2017). Some Indonesian illegal migrant workers said that they were determined to try their luck working abroad because of the insistence of the necessities of life and the family needs that are likely to increase (Kanapathy 2006). Furthermore, social cohesion among migrant workers is also one of the factors underlying the consideration of why villagers are determined to choose their work overseas even though it is considered to be very risky (Taylor and Foster 2015). For illegal migrant workers who are poorly educated and have only skills in the agricultural sector and construction laborers, they generally will choose to work as farm laborers or construction workers. In Malaysia, in particular, the plantation sector has become one of the most popular choices for the Indonesian illegal migrant workers since over there, they are relatively protected from the risk of the raids. By entering and hiding in the forest, these Indonesian illegal migrant workers will usually be able to deal with the raids held by police officers and then return to work if the conditions have been felt safe.

When leaving the country as illegal migrant workers, half of the respondents of this study (55.2%) said that they already knew the risks they would face, even if they feel uncertain about the details of the risk. About 24.8% of the respondents even claimed that they know quite a lot about the risks, and 1% of the respondents admitted to understanding the risks they will face. Only 19% of the respondents said they did not know the risks they would face with their illegal working status. In short, as illegal migrant workers, most respondents are generally aware of the weak bargaining position of their condition.

As described by Sitepu (2017), the weak bargaining power of Indonesian ²illegal migrant workers in the presence of their employers is caused by two factors. First is the relatively lower educational, economic, and social background of Indonesian illegal migrant workers. This imbalance of capital ownership often forces illegal migrant workers from Indonesia to submit and surrender to their severe living conditions (Azizah 2005; Avdan 2012; Yea 2014; Sitepu 2017). Second, there is an unequal relationship of the structure of the global economy between the first and third world countries. The contrast difference in the level of welfare and the number of wages between these two has made illegal migrant workers from developing countries such as Indonesia to migrate to developed countries. In conditions of weak bargaining power like this, Indonesian illegal migrant workers often have no choice in facing severe life pressures, including the risk of violence, abuses, exploitation, and even prison sentences.

Conclusions

The Indonesian illegal migrant workers are one of the vulnerable groups of labors that are potential as the victims of human trafficking and labor exploitation. Due to their weak bargaining position, illegal immigration status, and no proper legal working protection, there is often a case when the Indonesian illegal migrant workers must face threats and costly mistreatments. In the matter of determining the number of wages, the length of working hours, and other working related issues, it is no secret that the Indonesian illegal migrant workers are always prone to be the victims of the mistreatments by their employers.

Although Indonesian illegal migrant workers have become aware of their weak bargaining position, the inequality of power relations, and the lack of protection because of their illegal working status, and the desire and need to earn a substantial income lead many poor people to seek employment abroad as illegal migrant workers. The disparity of significant amount of wage and the difficulty of finding work in their place of origin as well as the need for looking for economic capital are the primary driving factors that often encourage the migrant workers to seek jobs outside the country illegally.

Concerning the workplace, the bargaining position of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers, in general, is weak, especially in determining the number of wages. Even in their daily life, the Indonesian illegal migrant workers often experience verbal and physical abuses from their employers. During this hard time, the Indonesian illegal migrant workers can survive and escape from various raids conducted by the law enforcement officers generally because they play the game of “hide and seek,” and utilize social cohesion among the Indonesian migrant workers networks to tackle their social pressures and limitations of living abroad.

The unfortunate life of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers described in this study is a big challenge for the stakeholders involved in the labor issues of the Indonesian migrant workers. The government agencies, business people, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders should work together to find a better solution with regard to the exploitation, abuses, and weak bargaining position of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers.

Future research study on the lives of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers would benefit from the addition of gender analysis of the male and female illegal migrant workers. It is generally argued that Indonesian female illegal migrant workers often face much worse treatments than their male counterparts. Also, a comparative study with regard to the country of destinations of the Indonesian illegal migrant workers might reveal further live dynamics and other critical issues often encountered by the Indonesian illegal migrant workers.

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