

## Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia: Damages in Family Structure System in Their Hometown

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### Abstract

This article intends to investigate how temporary migrant workers' families adapt once they depart for employment in Malaysia. Families of migrant workers in Air Joman Village, Asahan Regency, Indonesia, were subjected to a qualitative method involving case studies and interview data collection. It utilizes eight elements of Bowen's family system theory as a data analysis technique on various

families' situations in migrant workers' villages of origin. The findings of this study revealed several instances that led to the dissolution of the families of Malaysian migrant workers. 1) divergence of self, including family estrangement, discordant husband-wife relationships, elopement, kid and parent land conflicts, and entangled family debts. 2) Triangulations similar to those of other ideal ladies, misuse of remittances by siblings and in-laws, affair with in-laws 3) Emotional systems of the nuclear family, such as domestic violence and infidelity 4) Family Projection Process including Divorce and Parental Death 5) emotional disconnection, such as child delinquency or the dissolution of the child-parent relationship 6) Multi-generational transmission method including the tradition of working in Malaysia and intragenerational mobility 7) sibling position including orphans and substitute roles played by siblings 8) societal regression, such as new wealthy individuals and neighbors' pouting. Facilitators should work directly with migrant families to provide social assistance and counseling on family dysfunction to prevent occurrences of conflict caused by this issue. The government can also play a role by creating policies to enhance motivation, outreach, and employment possibilities, emphasizing indigenous Malaysian knowledge for those who do not work in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Migrant Workers; Family System; Family Bowen; Indonesian; Malaysian

## 1. Introduction

The phenomena of migrant workers are inherently scientific; as a result, this study incorporates numerous scientific disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, politics, legislation, economics, demography, geography, psychology, and cultural studies (Brettell & Hollifield, 2015). In addition, it was an anthropological and sociological study of how migrants influenced and altered their hosts and themselves (Favell, 2001; Xu & Palmer, 2011; Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976). In addition, how the assimilation and integration processes are applied in the nations of destination (Banton, 1992; Gans, 1992; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wang & Fan, 2012; Zhou, 1997). This migratory component implicitly stresses the relationship between economic resources and the availability of jobs, which is highlighted as a region's deficit in a broader coverage (Edwards et al., 2016).

In modern-day social studies, discussing migratory labor is not novel. Families work abroad primarily as itinerant laborers to meet their fundamental needs and improve their economic situation. Several supporting circumstances, such as the short distance between the two nations and the almost same religion, language, and culture,

have allowed migrant workers to adapt easily to their new surroundings (Ab Ghani, 2012; Boyd, 1989; Massey, 2015; Rashid et al., 2019). The enabling and environmental variables, such as migrants from the same hometown, friendships, families, and neighbors, form the allure for individuals seeking employment (Faist, 2000). Other factors include poverty and unemployment in Indonesia, the difference in the exchange rate between Indonesia and Malaysia, which makes the payment much higher in Malaysia, the fragility of the regulation system in Indonesia, lenient sanctions, the ease of obtaining false documents regarding a migrant worker's identity, and the poor coordination between the Ministries and agencies in Indonesia (Febrihapsari, Prihartanti, & Rahmanto, 2021; Husna, 2014). All of these variables are possible due to the ease of access to the Immigration Office in Malaysia, the bureaucratic network, the conveniences of transportation, the opportunity to obtain semi-skilled and unskilled labor, and the lack of agency oversight (Farbenblum, Taylor-Nicholson, & Paoletti, 2013; KBRI Kuala Lumpur, 2015; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2014; Mei, 2006; Tuccio, 2017).

(Donato, 1993; Georgiana, 2018; Latapí et al., 1998) (Remittances have a significant impact on migrant workers and foreign exchange for the countries of origin as the providers of migrant workers (Ukhtiyani & Indartono, 2020). The second quarter of 2021 saw remittances from Indonesian migrant workers in foreign nations totaling \$2.28 billion, according to data from Bank Indonesia (Siagian, William, & Fendi, 2021). Its sum rose by 0.75 percent compared to the first quarter of 2021, totaling \$2.26 billion (month to month/m to m). Compared to the second quarter of 2020, the cost of Indonesian migrant workers increased by 0.64 percent (year on year/y.o.y.). In the first quarter of 2021, Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia sent home the highest amount of money: \$706.65 million. This was followed by Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and Taiwan, who sent home US\$640.37 million and US\$342.05 million, respectively.

The occupation of migratory laborers prioritizes not only men but also women. Women who work as migrant laborers also contribute to the strength of migrant families. The migration of female migrant workers has altered the family's power structure, specifically by eliminating dominance over the family's final decision-making authority (Febrihapsari et al., 2021). Economic recovery necessitates

improving or strengthening women's negotiating power relative to men in the home. The economy becomes the primary determinant of change at this level. Women's social relationships with their husbands upon their return to their native countries are primarily determined by the knowledge they acquire abroad. Yet, this is often the source of friction that leads to the creation of arguments between spouses and wives. This is the foundation of Bowen's thesis, which posits that family members have different intellectual and emotional approaches to solving problems. Emotional proximity between members can result in discomfort and mutual rejection, leading to conflict and separation. The preceding explanation analyzes the lives of migrant workers in their destination nations. Yet, very few academics examine the lives of migrant workers' families, particularly those of temporary migrant workers. The purpose of this study was to investigate the situation of families left behind by migrant workers in their home countries. Bowen's family system theory was utilized in this study (Haefner, 2014; Hall, 2013; Regina, 2011). Many cases were discovered in the households from which the migrant workers originated.

## 2. Literature Review

### Bowen's Family System

This study develops eight principles of Bowen's family system that are applied to the examination of migrant families, namely: (1) Self-Differentiation: intellectual and emotional distinctions. Addresses tension or concern among family members left behind in Malaysia while the employee is working there. (2) Triangulation: involving others in coping with anxiety or emotional tension. This notion describes the intensity of involving other people (extra family/relatives) in resolving family difficulties that troubled them while working in Malaysia and how to involve other people in domestic issues. (3) Nuclear Family Emotional System: the fundamental pattern of emotional functioning within the nuclear family. The third pattern describes the family's status when the breadwinner leaves to become a migrant worker. (4). Family Projection Process: includes ties with families in the village of origin (children, husband/wife) during their time as migrant workers, changes in interaction/communication with family members, and limits that frequently

impair the household's integrity in the village of origin. (5) Emotional Cut Off: is a method of emotional disconnection between family members, how to adapt both in the work environment and with families left behind in the homeland, how to maintain emotional closeness with children left behind in Indonesia, as well as the effect it has on children when parents leave work. Multi-Generational system: a pattern of interaction between successive generations. The background of working as a migrant worker in Malaysia, the changes experienced during or after working as a migrant worker, and the consequences when successive generations of a family tend to work as migrant workers are included. (7). Sibling Position discusses the significance of additional family roles when working, the positive and bad effects of involving siblings in the family position, and the shifts in the pattern of contact caused by the role of siblings who become migrant workers (8). Social Regression: Used to view social influences on family processes and the effects of family processes on society

Bowen explores family conflict through the concept of self-differentiation, in which individuals distinguish between acts based on reasoning and emotions. In other words, Bowen examines in depth, from a psychological perspective, the tensions and issues that arise in the family, proposing psychotherapy and family mobility as solutions. In contrast to this study, the "family" investigated by Bowen is the general family, whereas immigrant families are the "family" studied in this study. To uncover examples of migrant families or social facts, the problems that occur in these migrant families are socially examined. This study examines family difficulties not in terms of self-differentiation, but from a sociological standpoint, by tracing the growth of other relevant factors such as economics, culture, and religion. Bowen's eight (8) family process concepts serve as a metric for assessing the extent of dysfunction in the family and the scenarios or experiences that family members feel in every social situation or condition when conflict arises. Sociologically speaking, this study examines migrant families' social issues. When family members opt to divorce, as well as when there is dysfunction or dispute in the family.

[Haefner \(2014\)](#) researched a white family patient who had divorced. The effects of this divorce induce depression in the youngster. Haefnar's writing demonstrates the applicability of Bowen's family system theory to the recovery of the kid and other

family members. As a nurse, Haefnar attempts to restore this family's health by providing counseling and modifying the behavior patterns of family members so that they can aid in the child's recovery. Similar research was conducted by [Fatma \(2019\)](#), who used Bowen's theory on households in Indonesia experiencing polygamy. The application of Bowenian family therapy techniques is effective for addressing dysfunction in polygamous families. The preceding two studies explore the implementation and application of Bowen's family system theory from a psychological standpoint, but this study examines it from a sociological perspective. In this study, the researcher outlines every other issue that develops when migrant families experience disruption.

### 3. Methodology

This paper employs Bowen's family system approach by examining eight therapy procedures ([Hall, 2013](#)). These eight (8) family therapy steps serve as data collection criteria for researchers. Bowen uses these eight stages to comprehend and investigate the difficulties faced by families. Although though Bowen uses this technique as psychotherapy, the researcher employs it in this work to explain and analyze the challenges that develop in migrant families and the remedies that family members implement. Data gathering was based on a qualitative methodology, including in-depth interviews and observation. Twenty households of migrant laborers were sampled. Interviews were conducted with migrant workers, either wives or husbands, who worked in Malaysia, and with the migrant workers' wives, husbands, adult children, or babysitters when the children were still young in Indonesia. When a member of a migrant's family worked in Malaysia for eight to fifteen years in a row, the migrant's family met the criterion. He only visited Indonesia on leave or during vacations.

Once a village became known as the "barn of migrant workers," an initial investigation was conducted. It meant that most of the village's population, men or wives, had left to work in Malaysia. In addition, employment was passed down from generation to generation, and their status as migrant workers in Malaysia was 'common.' They are typically employed as maids, restaurant kitchen assistants,

servers, air conditioning installers, construction workers, nurses for the elderly, babysitters, hospital janitors, and door-to-door janitors. These jobs represent areas of the labor market typified by low salaries, low skills, and bad job quality (Czaika & Parsons, 2017; Mason & Salverda, 2009; Wright & Clibborn, 2019).

In this investigation, the list of interview questions is directly tied to Bowen's eight system family principles. This was included in the interview guide and asked of the informant directly. This data is then qualitatively interpreted through data-collecting methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Data collection is followed by analyzing, reviewing, and linking qualitatively interpreted ideas. Typically, data analysis entails an open data-gathering procedure based on broad inquiries and the interpretation of information from informants.

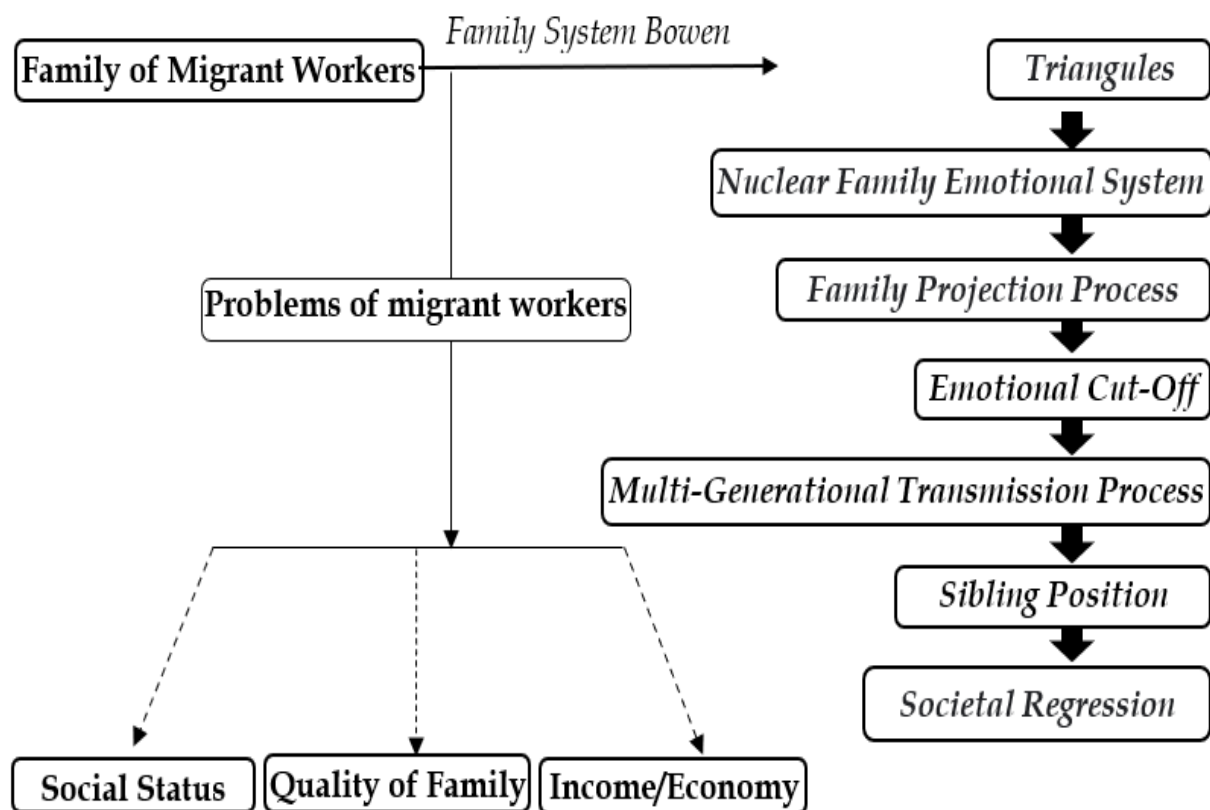


Figure 1. Framework of Family System Bowen's in Migrants Worker

### 3. Result and Discussion

Using Bowen's family system, the dilemmas and problems of migrant workers in Malaysia who are concentrated at the "Barn of Indonesian Migrant Workers" were analyzed. It was discovered that there were instances of the following:

### 3.1. Differentiation of Self

It is the capacity to distinguish between being dependent on family and being able to keep a rational mind while addressing family problems or disagreements. From the family's perspective, migrant workers are frequently portrayed as an option to prevent, restrict, or predict any issues. This is why a person becomes a migrant worker to enhance their family's economic situation and temporarily separate themselves from their loved ones to decrease and manage a chaotic family situation. The decision to become a migrant worker and live apart from one's family is made for various reasons.

#### a. Status of Marriage Duration

For instance, one of the scenarios in the household of a migrant worker is when the foreign worker is an adult but unmarried. Today, the issue of one's standing appears to be quite sensitive. Thus many individuals will avoid or anticipate questions regarding their problems. As one of the migrant workers in Malaysia, 38-year-old Nurasyiah (female), explains: "Some of them even choose to temporarily stay away from other people to reduce and manage their families' chaotic circumstances."

*..." Since I was not married while I felt I was growing older, there were numerous oppressions and insults from neighbors and my parents. I wanted to get married and have a family, but there was no marriage partner, so I felt I became a burden to my family. Therefore, to avoid anger and stress, thinking about what other people talked about me, I decided to go to Malaysia as a migrant worker. Besides preventing the problem of my weird status, it was better for me to be a migrant worker and find a mate there..."*

This informant revealed that she needed to stay away from other people and to temporarily set her mind at ease to avoid family problems and tension about her status as an unmarried daughter. To be a migrant worker was a solution for her to prevent oppression and silly questions such as "when will she get married?"

#### b. Disharmonious Relation between a Married Couple

This circumstance permits other family members to hunt for a solution in the form of escape or anticipation to mitigate the financial crisis-induced marital conflict.



The severity of the couple's quarrels has resulted in an unpleasant and unsafe home environment. The family's head exacerbated this issue, and they could not afford to sustain their numerous children. Thus, the wife took the initiative to become a migrant worker with a lengthy employment contract. Her decision to become a migrant worker had two consequences: 1) the money met her family's financial needs from her years of labor, and 2) she was separated from her children and parents as a migrant worker. The astonishing thing was that the husband and wife's relationship improved. The informant, a 37-year-old woman named Mirna Sahfitri, stated this truth as follows:

*(... "In the beginning, I was afraid of working in Malaysia because it was far away, a new environment, and I had to be separated from my family. But, since there was a family problem, I thought the solution was that I would have a chance for my husband and me to think it over, especially my husband. I went to Malaysia as a migrant worker to avoid further disputes between my husband and me. I felt dizzy and stressed because we quarreled about trivial things. I wondered why we fought with each other. My husband worked as an unskilled worker with uncertain wages. Sometimes we quarreled because of lack of money and the children's school fees. This situation was the real reason for our quarrel. Therefore, I was determined to go to Malaysia. Besides voiding quarreling with my husband, I could also earn money to support my family. Let me go to Malaysia and not my husband. I was afraid he would act dishonestly with another woman like what had been done by his friends who went to Malaysia.")*

The informant stated that working in Malaysia will allow her to avoid quarreling with her husband. She believed that her relationship with him was improving and that they required one another.

### **c. elopement**

Many problems in the families of migrant workers may be a means of defense or escape from more severe family issues, such as elopement. Malaysia is valued not just for changing one's destiny but also as an escape from complicated family issues. The subject of elopement sits at the heart of the disagreement between the two families. In addition, the problem of elopement is tied to the ethnic background or property

ownership of one of the partners, causing a dispute between the two families over the blessing of one of the parties. Elopement within a migrant's family is typically the result of an MBA, which makes it difficult for the two families to agree on each other.

This case was revealed by the information of 48-year-old Agustino (male) as follows:

*(... "The first time I wanted to go to Malaysia was when I wanted to get married to my current wife, but my mother did not approve of it since my wife-to-be came from the Batakese family, and neither did her family toward me. But, since love was a sacrifice, we both went to Malaysia as migrant workers with my wife's uncle. We worked as janitors in a Malay restaurant. We got married in 2016 without the approval of our parents. But now, thank God, both families have agreed on our marriage. Maybe we now have children, their grandchildren. It was a very bad condition at that time. We took only IDR.500.000 (five hundred thousand rupiahs) to Malaysia. Fortunately, we were helped by our friends in there.")*

#### **d. Land Dispute between Children and their Parents**

Generally, migrant workers are involved in conflicts between their children and parents. This town has a case involving a boy who stole his parents' land certificate. He pawned it and used the proceeds to live with friends in Malaysia. His parents attempted to locate him by contacting acquaintances in Malaysia but were unsuccessful. Finally, they learned that their son had married an Indonesian waitress living in Malaysia. The difference is that Self-made households in this village have varied origins and requirements. For them, working in Malaysia is not only a means of improving or enhancing their economic situation but also a means of temporarily isolating themselves from others. It is aimed at managing strain and conflicts until new family problems arise. The following event was disclosed by the offender's father, Wahyudi, who is 56 years old:

*(... "He took the land certificate without our knowledge. But, when my wife came into the room to tidy up clothing and arrange documents, she did not see the land certificate. We searched for it but could not find it. We were suspicious of Warno (their oldest son) because he talked about borrowing some money the previous day, and we did not lend it because he liked gambling and prostitution. We then asked his friends, who said he planned to go to Malaysia*

*to work and stay there. Our feeling told us that he was the person who stole it and pawned it to be used for living in Malaysia. We then accepted the fact. His brothers even did not care. We heard that he now works in Pasar Ikan in Malaysia. We currently lose contact with him...")*

**e. The family's Deep in Debt**

Debt becomes an urgent issue; it must be paid off. A person in a position of economic depression will be compelled to assume responsibility for his financial circumstances. A family in a difficult financial situation will seek assistance from money lenders to meet their necessities. Unfortunately, the economic issue cannot be resolved that easily; borrowing from a money-lender would exacerbate the situation, and monthly interest must also be paid. Thus, a person will find a means to repay his loan, as is the case with the family of Air Joman migrant workers in Malaysia. In addition to the work being relatively simple, the pay is higher. This solution is a sort of differentiation to repay money-lenders debts.

Moreover, sacrifice impacts the families left behind by migrant workers and the battles against money-lender debt. The family's millions of rupiah in debt elicits disdain from the family's neighbors, who insult the family's "escaping" In truth, this is a temporary difference in self. In contrast, the family collects funds to repay their debt and reestablish their good reputation. Suwandi, aged 48, reveals the occurrence as follows:

*(..."When I went to Malaysia, my neighbors thought that I was escaping. The fact was that I was searching for a job to be able to pay off my debt to "Regar" (the name of the money-lender). But, you know, rumors cannot be stopped. I did not escape but stayed away from them temporarily while collecting money. I worked for a long time in Malaysia. I would send the money to my family every year, paying off my debt little by little, along with interest. I had to sacrifice because of debt. I had to leave my pregnant wife and go to Malaysia because I did not want to be run after by that "Regar." I worked as a handyman in various jobs; I chose a job with high pay. I was afraid that my interest would increase each time. If I did not desperately need the money, I would not owe him because I was trapped! But I could do nothing; I needed money desperately. I heard that my family got a big problem when I was in Malaysia. All took pity on me, and thank God; I owe nothing now. But I still work in Malaysia and feel relaxed now, unlike I used to. My family also supports me, although sometimes we quarrel with each other.")*

### 3.2. Triangles

This notion of triangles relates to the readiness to act and decide the continuation of a happy life while migrant workers are in a foreign country. Nonetheless, they are physically and temporally isolated. In their responses to issues arising from their employment as migrant laborers, family members reveal their closeness. Spreading tension and forming a triangle allows a "different person to leave." In addition, Bowen notes that the emotional power in a triangle will continuously shift between two people, with one coming from the outside. Bowen describes the sequence as father-mother-child, followed by family conflict. Spreading out the pressure can stabilize the family structure, but it cannot eliminate its root cause.

#### a. Kept Woman

Distance and time become significant obstacles for migratory worker families. Leaving their families in their hometown for an extended period necessitates sacrifice and assistance from others, such as relatives or "the third party." Yet, the third party may have both beneficial and bad effects, as indicated by Suharno, a 45-year-old male:

*(... "When I worked in Malaysia for 18 years, I had a lot of experience, especially about my wife. We often quarreled, were suspicious of each other, and were full of an emotional atmosphere that made me feel depressed. Honestly, I felt very lonely during my work in Malaysia. Sometimes, when I felt lonely and tried to eliminate my stress, I talked with my friends, I mean women, to make jokes and chat and share my problems. In the long run, if I were egoistic and mean, I began to think that it would be better to divorce my wife and marry a woman, the same migrant worker in Malaysia. I believe that this third person's presence is the solution to not hurting each other so that we would be "free." There would be no suspicion, and I felt comfortable working here. I don't care if people say my new wife is evil. Having a new wife is my choice to protect my family from a lousy relationship.*

#### b. Misusing Remittance by Brother and Brother-In-Law

After a family member leaves to become a migrant worker, the involvement of outsiders in resolving family issues is regarded as vital and anticipated, and it produces discord among the siblings. Sukasih (female, 44 years old) expresses herself as follows:

*(... "I think that brothers and sisters are essential; they can help support my family while I am in Malaysia. I usually asked them to take care of my family, especially my children, so I would not be worried about them since I had left them for years. It is not guaranteed that they can cover or control everything, but at least they make me feel safe. I used to send money through them and knew that it could cause a few conflicts with them about the susceptible cash, you know it. But I had no choice since I needed their help. It was not uncommon that they embezzled the remittance, and I knew it but could do nothing. At least, they are my brothers and sisters.")*

### **c. Having an Affair with Brother-In-Law**

The involvement of family members does not always have a favorable effect; when one of them becomes a migrant worker, something unexpected may occur. Living under the same roof (parents, in-laws, brothers, sisters-in-law, etc.) can be disastrous for the family. One of the most common occurrences is an affair between a migrant worker's husband and his wife's sister and vice versa. This is possible as a result of their intense communication and gradual closeness. It takes the wife a while to discover this infidelity. She learned of the romance from a neighbor who called and informed her of it. This case was described as follows by Halimah, 45, who had just returned from Malaysia:

*(... " Many people have told me about the affair between my husband and my sister, but I did not believe them. I send the money home for them. The neighbors said to me that they were suspicious of the relationship between my husband and his sister-in-law. I thought it was only a rumor, but my husband began looking for trouble; he always found fault with me! They had already gotten married. The funny thing was that he even evicted me from my own house. My sister did not defend me; she even defended my husband. Finally, we religiously and officially divorced in 2017. I then rented a house and returned to Malaysia as a migrant worker. I never thought that there was a wolf in sheep's clothing in my house, and it was my sister!" )*

### **3.3. Nuclear Family Emotional System**

There are four basic emotional function patterns within a family generation: marital conflict, couple dysfunction, the disorder in the lone child, and emotional

distance. Bowen operates in a dynamic framework that includes nuclear families, single parents, stepparents, and other complete families. Unquestionably, a family can experience and respond to stress and strain. According to Bowen's theory, stress replicates the preceding generation and will continue to do so.

#### **a. Domestic Violence**

During their time as migrant workers, the lack of knowledge and face-to-face interaction between a married couple and their family members might lead to disagreements or uncomfortable circumstances in the family. In truth, loneliness, and boredom are the causes of adultery among migratory workers. Changes in a married couple's love and affection due to a favorable environment are also influenced by the length of service. In actuality, the formation of a new circle and social/friendship network promotes the stability of marriage commitment among migrant workers in Malaysia, as demonstrated by Turmiati (female, 46):

*(... "While working as a migrant worker in Malaysia, I felt upset and depressed. On the one hand, I had to work for my boss according to the work contract. On the other hand, I had to deal with my husband, who was always suspicious of me and quickly got angry. In Malaysia, we used to quarrel violently for unreasonable reasons, such as not answering calls. My husband was jealous, so it was challenging to work in different countries. He was full of suspicion and quickly got angry. I even underwent extreme domestic violence; I forgot the year when it happened. He heard a rumor that I had an affair with another migrant worker in Malaysia. When I returned to Indonesia, he cut my right cheek with a cutter. Some neighbors felt sympathetic to me, but some others even provoked it. Since then, I began decreasing my social relationships with friends, especially males. I realized that it was hard and susceptible for a married woman to be a migrant worker in a foreign country, although I worked with my husband's consent to support my family. He should have known that I worked there sincerely...").*

#### **b. Infidelity among Migrant Workers**

The challenge of commitment in marital life that arises when one spouse is separated by distance and time might result in conflict or environmental temptation. This instance was revealed as follows by Ngatiman, a 54-year-old male:

*(...“ We cannot deny that we have worked in a foreign country for years, and being separated from our children and wife at home will undeniably cause problems. In the beginning, to kill time, I chatted with a female migrant worker, and then we had our lunches together. Meanwhile, my wife kept on being angry when she called me, liked to grumble, and asked for a lot of money without thinking that I worked very hard in Malaysia. She was also jealous, so I looked for a simple thing. I admit that I had a girlfriend in Malaysia; she was an Indonesian. I thought it was normal for a man like me who worked very hard during the day. Of course, we even had sexual intercourse without my wife's knowledge. I saw that most men who were migrant workers did the same thing as I did. However, my relationship with my wife has continued well until now. We have to be wise in life, you know it...”).*

### **3.4. Family Projection Process**

This definition of family relies more on emotional projection inside the nuclear family. The presence of a familial interaction pattern characterizes the family projection. Then it becomes a dynamic force that can destabilize all family structures. In the case of migrant workers, the relationship or energy between a child and his parents is solid, allowing them to exert mutual influence.

#### **a. Divorce**

Due to a lack of communication intensity and the impact of the workplace, a married couple may be unable to maintain a strong marriage commitment, leaving it open to divorce and discord. Yet, this is not so straightforward. The argument between a married couple also affects the state of the family as a whole, notably the mental health of the children, according to Suhar, a 40-year-old man.

*(...“If I am allowed to say, the problem is that there is no belief in each other. My ex-wife is always suspicious, apprehensive, restless, and always thinks of weird things. While I worked in Malaysia, every bad thing about myself was believed by her without any cross-checking. I was accused of gambling and having an affair with a woman, and I was not that kind of man. Once, she asked for a divorce because she said she could not stand being my wife since rumors spread by my neighbors about me. Initially, I did not respond, but finally, I had to divorce her. Consequently, our relationship with children became very bad. We used to*

*quarrel on the phone. When I came home, my children were indifferent to me, so I felt I was not a good father. The problem is that it is awful if there is no trust among us. Besides, I worked far away from home, which took a long time, plus a work contract. You should know that we, men, work so hard for whom?"*).

The informant stated that when he worked in Malaysia, he encountered extreme distrust and apprehension, which led to bias; as a result, his wife's accusations caused him stress and discomfort.

#### **b. Loss of Parents**

Working in Malaysia at a certain moment can also result in regret, particularly with the issue between children and their parents who have been separated for an extended period. This issue was communicated by Sundari (female, 38 years old), a foreign worker, as follows:

*(... "For me, there are the factor and the role of parents. I am a woman and still single. I became a migrant worker in Malaysia because my parents were old, and we were poor, so someone had to support the family. I was so close to my parents, so it was tough for me to leave them, and I believed they felt apprehensive about my being a migrant worker. After a few years in Malaysia, my parents asked me to come home and stop working. They worried about me, although I felt comfortable working in Malaysia since it was not too challenging and the pay was good. I told them again and again about my good condition here (Malaysia). My father got sick seriously. My mother said he always thought about me, who worked far away from home. Video calls made communication between them and me until my father passed away without my presence and prayer for him. I thought he asked me to come home because he knew he would die and I could take care of him. Working in Malaysia has given me a lot of lessons on how to position between work (money) and devotion to parents..."*).

### **3.5. Emotional Cut-Off**

The rise in anxiety or the continuation of the same degree of stress enhances the family's existing barrier and influences the system to generate new boundaries. The emotional cut-off can be utilized to confront the unity of an intimate family bond. Every individual involved in the emotional cut-off contributes to a complex process.



Nonetheless, each party has essential requirements for the other. No one can successfully manage these needs. This condition has numerous detrimental effects, including:

**a. Juvenile Delinquency**

Regarding distance, it appears that a migrant worker's employment generates new things; therefore, adaptation to a unique environment is required. As 47-year-old Sumarni (female) expresses, the separation between a husband and wife and between them and their parents and children hinders the development of a healthy emotional bond.

*(... "I think the real problem for migrant workers is children. My children were left with my brother. They were naughty; they escaped from school, motorcycle races, and bla bla bla. And I, their uncle, was usually asked to come to school by the Counseling and Guidance teacher. Sometimes I felt ashamed of the children's behavior, but I could do nothing. I never forgot to send them money; they bought new motorcycles, cell phones, etc. I felt that we were not close enough to each other. Sometimes, they were closer to their aunt than to me. I realized that I only sent them money, not a warm heart. Usually, they express their complaint to their aunt or uncle. Working in Malaysia is like this: I am far from my family, especially my children. I even don't know what happens to them. Sometimes they are naughty, and I only advise them from here, Malaysia.").*

Sumarni, the informant, revealed that the emotional closeness between her and her children did not run smoothly since they were separated by distance and time.

**b. Relation Disintegration among Child-Husband-Wife**

The informant is concerned about her children's growth due to the disparity in caregiving styles among her family. It is fairly uncommon for her child and her sibling to engage in a dispute. Awaluddin (male, 42 years old), a migrant worker, revealed the following:

*(... " I have to struggle hard to be a migrant worker in Malaysia. I have been chated by a tekong (agent), and I have quarreled with my wife's family, but I have to survive. That's life. I worked as usual initially, but later on, I had a serious problem with my wife. It was about money, trust, and commitment. Separated over a long distance sometimes causes suspicion,*

*especially from the wife's side. If I didn't answer her call, she would instantly be suspicious of me, making me upset. The result was that I hung over our relationship as husband and wife. We rarely communicated with each other, and I seldom sent her money. You know, it is hard to be rebuked by a wife without any reasonable reason. So, our relationship is not harmonious anymore since we have no similar perceptions. I won't divorce her. It seems my children are close to their mother; thank God they are cared for well. I can do nothing. I hope our relationship will be harmonious again...").*

### **3.6. Multi-Generational Transmission Process**

Multi-generational transmission has more repercussions than differentiation of self, nuclear family feeling, system, or family projection. It describes and suggests the potential outcomes of self-differentiation, dependence on the emotional system of the nuclear family, and family projection in some generations.

#### **a. Working in Malaysia Becomes a Tradition**

Migrant workers encounter working in Malaysia for a limited time, crossing international borders, engaging with foreigners, and leaving behind children and relatives. Nonetheless, it appears that they are not a barrier to migratory labor. They are enticed by generous remuneration. As Rohayati (female, 37 years old), the informant, disclosed, this employment has become a family tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation.

*(..."It is common for the people in this village to work in Malaysia. They quickly go to Malaysia to get jobs, probably because the pay is good. Besides that, the job is done from generation to generation. The migrants sometimes consist of a father, wife, and children. I am the 4th generation working in Malaysia. Almost all my family members are migrant workers in Malaysia. My oldest daughter has just departed for Malaysia, following her great aunt working in a restaurant. So, it is no wonder that most of my family members work in Malaysia. The jobs are not very difficult, though. First, we see our relatives who worked there, and then we follow them.").*

The informant, Rohayati, disclosed that she and most of her family were migrant workers in Malaysia. In addition, she stated that migrant labor had been

passed down from generation to generation. Hence, it is not surprising that one of her family members, who had just graduated from high school, became a migrant worker in Malaysia, joining other family members who had previously worked there.

#### **b. Inter-generation Mobility**

Working in Malaysia has become a favorite among everyone, including families who pass it on to their offspring. This condition was disclosed by the informant, a 43-year-old guy named Adiyanto, who became a migrant worker in Malaysia as follows:

*(... "My children did the same as me, working in Malaysia. My oldest son and daughter now work in Malaysia. She followed her friends working there. She sold fish in the market. Her earnings can allow her to buy a new motorcycle and renovate our house. The problem is that I don't know where she is now because I have lost contact with her; it makes us, her parents, worry about her. Some people say that she gets married to a Malaysian. I went to Malaysia to find her, but I failed. I regret sending her far away from home. It is all my fault.").*

According to the source, being a migrant worker in Malaysia was disastrous for his family. The informant had lost contact with her daughter, who had moved to Malaysia to work as a migrant worker. The rumor stated that he had married a Malaysian without his and his family's consent.

### **3.7. Sibling Position**

Position within a family impacts how family members communicate with one another. Bowen has included these principles in his argument that the eldest child is likelier to be the leader, while the youngest child is likelier to follow him. This notion can be used to define the many positions within a family.

#### **a. Orphan**

A person's position can determine and affect the state of a family, particularly the family of a migratory worker. This circumstance will shift or modify the family's interaction pattern. The family that has a member leave to become a migrant worker strives to foster a pleasant atmosphere in the family as a whole, particularly during

the growth and development of the children. The modification or shift in the pattern of care provided by new family members (relatives), such as the grandmother, aunt, uncle, or eldest son, will occur. As disclosed by Sartono, a 38-year-old male migrant worker, working in a foreign country for an extended period due to a job contract might cause family tensions.

*(... "I am the oldest son, and I don't have any parents. As the oldest, I care for my younger brothers and sisters. When I worked in Malaysia, my position was replaced by my brothers, who cared for the younger ones. My intention in working in Malaysia was to save money for their education. My position as the oldest son was also a big challenge for me. I had to control everything at home, although I also learned from the other brothers. Another problem arose when my brothers took care of the younger ones. It was about the difference in rules, how to educate the children, and how to explain to them. Sometimes it caused commotion among them. In addition to that, the money I sent them each month was usually gone with the wind!"*)

The informant said that a family member's position influenced the family's stability and that it would be difficult for someone to alter that position.

#### **b. Substituting the Role of Relatives**

Thus, the transition of a family member's position presents numerous new difficulties and issues. Saripah (female, 50 years old), the informant who worked as a migrant worker in Malaysia, disclosed the following:

*(... "Working in Malaysia is sometimes easy, sometimes hard, especially for me, a widow with many children; my husband has already died. Everything depends on me since I have to support the family. I left the children to their aunt at home. Sometimes there was a conflict between the children and my sister. Every child has their characteristics, you know it. Sometimes, my sister found was hard to take care of them. This made me think about their condition at home while I was working in Malaysia. I was afraid that the change in care patterns could influence their behavior. So, now I try to call them as frequently as possible and chat with them; I also remind my sister not to be harsh or to spoil them. Wrong in every way, you know. If I remind her, I'm afraid she will get angry and accuse me of being insolent..."*)

### 3.8. Social Regression (Emotional Process in Society)

The emotional process in society depicts the friction between people and families, nuclear families and their extended families, and families and their neighbors. The relationship between families exemplifies the societal pressure that is discussed below.

#### a. Mockery on Nouvean Riche

This notion expands Bowen's theoretical framework regarding the social impact of the family process and the impact of the family process on society as a whole. It appears that the manner of adaptation employed by migrant workers causes a variety of challenges and conflicts inside a family, particularly in terms of the condition or interaction between family members. The social environment cannot impact the family life of migrant workers in terms of lifestyle, status, and wealth. Thus they produce new symbols (stereotypes) in the family environment, as shown by Ponirah, a 41-year-old female.

*(..."It is useless to think about what other people talk about us. When I went to Malaysia, they gossiped about me; they said I did a terrible job, bla, bla, bla, which made me depressed. But I didn't care because I knew who I was. After I had worked for a long time, I could see the change in my family's life. I saved so I could buy an automobile, renovate my house, and buy a plot of land. My neighbors began to be kind to me. They began to ask me what I was doing in Malaysia, how to be a migrant worker in Malaysia, bla, bla, bla. You know, now they give a name to me, "makcik OKB" (Aunt Nouveau Riche). They talked about my new fashion style, house, and so on. I am always cordial toward them. It is a prayer, isn't it?..").*

#### b. Neighbors' Derision

One of the informants disclosed that working as a migrant in Malaysia was seen negatively by locals. In the end, however, the output (a substantial quantity of money) earned as a migrant worker was inversely related to the preceding situation. Neighbors of the informant began to inquire about the source of all these fortunes.

This problem was disclosed by the informant, Suriyono (male, 44), who also worked as a migrant worker in Malaysia:

*(...“I think every work has its own risk, like in Malaysia. As a migrant worker in Malaysia, I was also influenced by my friends. Some of them encouraged me not to go to Malaysia because it was unsafe. But some of them enthusiastically asked me to come to Malaysia. It cannot be denied that working in Malaysia is much more worthwhile than working at home. First, we get helpful experience working in a foreign country, and the experience can be practiced at home and do some business. I used to be mocked as a "ship boy" doing an errand because I went to Malaysia with a friend who was a sailor. But I didn't care; the important thing was that it was halal for my family. I have worked for a long time in Malaysia. After returning to my hometown, I ran a business in printing and photocopying. I learned from my friend who worked for a printing press while I was in Malaysia. The essence is like this: neighbors will come close to us if we are rich, and vice versa: they will keep away from us if we are penniless. They will ask us how to manage such a business and so on. The important thing is that we don't respond to their malicious gossip. We have to prove that we are successful...”).*

The informant claimed that his neighbors frequently made jokes about him because of what he was doing. Nonetheless, he utilized their humor as motivation to develop. His success after returning from Malaysia as a migrant worker astounded his neighbors. "Hard work yields a success" accurately describes the informant at this time. Moreover, his neighbors frequently inquire about his accomplishment in various ways.

#### **4. Conclusions**

A family member who is a migrant worker frequently encounters two opposing circumstances. On the one hand, he undergoes life changes, particularly in economic affairs. On the other hand, he also suffers from avoidable family troubles and disagreements. The study and in-depth interviews revealed that most migrant worker families in Malaysia had family issues such as divorces, escaping from pressures, infidelity, domestic abuse, the shift in care patterns, and schooling for the children left behind in the home country. For there to be a "legitimate" separation, a migrant worker's family divorce is triggered by excessive mistrust and emotion, as well as miscommunication between the two sides. Applying Bowen's family system theory, it is evident that the family ties of a dependent migrant worker will be entirely impacted if one of the family

members passes away. This is evident from the altered family status of migrant workers in Malaysia. Using relatives or extended family to fill temporary migrant employment in Malaysia has two distinct implications.

On the one hand, it can govern and supervise the family's state and circumstances, so they are always steady. On the other hand, it can increase the likelihood of disagreements and conflicts within the family. Thus, issues and problems encountered by the family of a migrant worker in Malaysia may occur in succession, rendering the family unable to select a priority. Working as a migrant family has both happy and negative effects. In truth, improving a migrant worker's family's economic situation in Malaysia leads to a decline in the quality of their family in their home country. Studying Bowen's theory in greater detail, it is possible to foresee problems in this family by involving the facilitator directly with the family so that they can conduct social consultations and interventions to calm the situation and conditions of the migrant worker's family. In addition, the government must play a role in preventing conflicts within the families of migrant workers by designing and confirming programs to enhance motivation, outreach, and employment prospects with an emphasis on local knowledge for those who do not work in Malaysia.

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