

CHAPTER III

Background of Rakhine Migrant Factory Workers

In this chapter the background of the Rakhine migrant workers is mainly explained. This includes both their life in their place of origin, in Yangon and their living conditions at the Haling Tharyar Township in Yangon.

3.1 Overview of the Rakhine Migrant Factory Workers

The first Rakhine migrant that the researcher interviewed was Nyi Nyi. He is a 21 year old Rakhine migrant from Pyin Shey village, Minbya township. There are six people in his family and he is the youngest. His parents are farmers but they are considered a middle income family. Sometimes he worked in the paddy fields together with his family but he did not work full time because his brothers and sisters also worked with his parents. He attended high school but he failed at grade 11 so he left school. He migrated to China for work. But he was not happy there, so he moved to Lashio where he worked as a casual laborer. Although he worked at Lashio with his uncle, he did not regularly earn sufficient money so he migrated to Yangon where his brother-in-law lived in order to get a better job with a more regular income. He was able to get a job at the Store section in the studied factory with the help of his brother-in-law's friend. After working one year, he was promoted to a supervisor.

Another migrant's story is Zarchi. She is a 28 year old migrant worker from Moe Shwe Gone village, Taunggoke township. Her parents are poor farmers in Rakhine and she is the eldest in her family. She did not work while in Rakhine because she was a student at that time. She passed her matriculation exam in Rakhine but was unable to attend university in Rakhine as she needed to earn money to attend university. So she migrated to Yangon not only to earn money but also to attend distance education at a university. At first she lived at Thakayta township in Yangon with her male cousin.

* All the participant names are pseudonym

Later she move to Shwe Pyi Thar township where she got a job in a garment factory. But that factory did not allow her to attend university so she move to the studied factory. She is the only migrant interviewed who was able to finish her education while working at the factory.

A third migrant interviewed called Soe Soe is a 26 year old girl from Ma Kyee Myaing village, Gwa township. Her parents are inland fisherman and regraded as quite poor. She left her school when she was young because she is the eldest in her family and needed to help her father with his fishing. She just can read and write. When her siblings have grow up and her father cannot catch fish as usual, she migrated to Yangon to support her family financially. Her aunty supported her financially with her migration. She lived in a Rakhine monastery temporary when she first arrived Yangon. She later moved to a hostel after she got a job at a cold store factory in the Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone. She worked a few month there and then resigned from her job because her whole body smelled like fish, even if she did not go into the factory. Later she transferred to this studied factory.

The fourth migrant interviewee was Mu Mu. She is a 32 year old female from Kalartan village, Kyauk Phyu township. She has a degree from Sittwe University. After she got her degree she worked as a school teacher in her village school however, she was not a government appointed school teacher, being only appointed by the villagers. As a village teacher her salary was very low. As her parents are poor farmers and cannot earn enough money she therefore migrated to Yangon in order to work in private enterprises as a clerk. Unfortunately she did not get this kind of employment even though she searched for about three months. Later, she got a job at the packing section as a labourer in the studied factory. After five years working in Yangon, she married a Rakhine who also lives in Yangon.

Another migrant who participated in the interviews was Ko Ko. He is a 23 year old man from Achar Lay village, Ann township. While sometimes he worked as a fisherman with his family he did not have a regular job in Rakhine. He migrated to Malaysia to earn more money and worked in a plywood factory in Malaysia for about

three years. He enjoyed this work and was able to transfer money to his family on a monthly basis. However, his life become insecure when threatened by Muslims after community violence between Rakhine and Muslim in Myanmar. So he left Malaysia and went back to Myanmar, but not to his village. He instead looked for a job in Yangon were he found one in the store section in this studied factory. After three years in Yangon he married a Lahu girl who had migrated from Shan State.

The sixth participant in the study was Thu Thu. She is a 25 year old girl from Ohn Taw village, Kyauk Phyu township. There are five family members and she is the oldest in her family. She left school when she was young in order to help her parents both with household chores and cultivation in the paddy farm. She migrated to Yangon unexpectedly to help her grand-mother who was sick in Yangon. She did not go back to Rakhine after her grand-mother recovered as she stayed at her uncle's home with her grand-mother and looked for a job. Later, she got a job at the Quality Control section in this studied factory. When she settled down in Yangon, she helped her brother to migrate to Yangon.

Another participant in the study group was Ei Ei. She is a 22 year old girl from Min Gan village, Sittwe township. There are four people in her family. Her parents are farmers. She worked in the farm with her parents as she was the youngest child, she also attended school while living in her village. She passed her matriculation exam in Rakhine but did not attend university in Rakhine as she had a quarrel with her father over this. She then migrated to Yangon and stayed at a cousin's home. She was able to get a job in the Sewing section in the studied factory. After working eight months in the factory, she was promoted to a supervisor. She cannot attend university in Yangon because her household registration is in Rakhine.

The eighth participant that was interviewed as part of the study was Phyo Phyo, an 18 year old girl from Minbya township. She is single and feels her education is very limited as having just reached primary level. She is the youngest person among the study group participants. Her parents are farmers and have 4 acres of paddy farms. She did not want to work on the farm as a farmer because she knows the life of farmers so

she migrated to Yangon with the help of her friends from her village who work in Yangon. Before migrating to Yangon, she understood that factory workers receive higher salaries than farmers. She got a job at the Assembly section in this studied factory. She learnt sewing in the factory from seniors while working.

The ninth and last Rakhine migrant factory worker that was interviewed is Thandar. She is a 24 year old girl from Yar Tan village, Pauktaw township. Both of her parents are farmers in her village. She did not work when she was in Rakhine but helped her parents with household chores. She is uneducated but can read and write. She migrated to Yangon with the help of her friends from her village. When she arrived in Yangon, she worked in a tea shop as a dishwasher. At the tea shop she can earn very little money so she changed her job. It took about two months to get another job which she did at the factory. She faced many problems in migrating to Yangon before she could settle down in her new environment. One of her struggles was creating good relationships with her colleagues.

3.2 Socioeconomic background of the Rakhine migrant

There is great variation in the ages of the respondents. The youngest is 18 and the oldest is 32. The respondents commented that the average age of the Rakhine migrant factory workers is about 25 with most of them leaving their place of origin around the age of 20. As a result most of the respondents are single with only three being married. Among the three married people; one male from Ann township (Ko Ko) and one female from Kyauk Phyu township (Mu Mu) married people from different ethnic backgrounds who had also migrated to Yangon.

As stated in the previous chapter the migrant factory workers in the studied factory have to work approximately eleven (11) hours a day, six (6) days a week for a sixty six (66) hour working week so most of their time is spent in the factory. People in the factory seem like their family members and they have a very good relationship with each other. They have very few friends who live outside the factory because they come back home late at night, go to work early in the morning, have very few holidays and

days off. The days off are usually taken up with domestic activities such as cleaning house, washing clothes and doing other households chores so even during their days off they are normally very busy. However, as they are Rakhine Buddhists they go to the Rakhine monastery and join the Rakhine community in Yangon if they have any free time. In Rakhine, when they were young their parents took them to the monastery for spiritual reasons but in Yangon, they go with their friends but this is a very rare opportunity for them.

All the respondents stated they would like to settle down, get married and raise their children in Yangon. They plan to go back to Rakhine only for short visits if they have enough money because they do not think that Rakhine will develop enough to provide them with proper jobs within their lifetime. Most of the Rakhine migrant workers face many challenges and obstacles in Yangon. They need to make new friends when coming to Yangon, learn new job relevant skills and understand how to live in such a big city as Yangon. Some migrants do go back to Rakhine. However, in Rakhine they faced more difficulties than in Yangon so they came back to Yangon again. They manage to survive in Yangon because they earn money.

As one of the female respondent from Pauktaw township, Thandar said:

“ I resigned my job and went back to Rakhine when I faced a lot of problems in Yangon, I missed my family and friends in Rakhine so very much. However at the village I lived there only a few days and came back to Yangon because all the people around my age, including my friends and playmates had already migrated to somewhere else, so I felt very lonely at my village. I could not find a job and life was more difficult there, so I encouraged myself and came back to Yangon again.”

Before migrating to Yangon their work backgrounds in Rakhine was as fish farmers, paddy farmers, seasonal workers and doing households chores so they do not have factory job relevant skills and knowledge before they come to work in the factory. All of the study's respondents had to start their job as normal daily wages labourers. They had to learn the nature of factory jobs, there rules and regulations. For this reason,

it is difficult for the participants to get a promotion in the studied factory. Only two Rakhine migrant factory workers in this study reached supervisor level, with the rest being normal wage labourers although they have been working for many years. The participants mentioned that there are very few Rakhine migrants who get a supervisor position.

In terms of the education level of the participants, only two are under-graduates, two reached high school level, two attained middle school level and the remaining three achieved primary level. On the basis of this, it can be said that the majority of the Rakhine migrant factory workers have very limited education.

A female migrant factory workers from Taunggoke, Zarchi commented that;

“Most of the Rakhine people are uneducated not because the people do not want to study but because the government does not support education. In Rakhine, it is difficult to access school because school is very far away and difficult to reach. People cannot afford to pay school fees. Even if there is a school, there are not enough teachers so the village has to appoint someone from the village as a teacher to fulfill teacher requirements.”

Additionally she added that:

“ The primary school was not far away from my village so I could easily go there when I was young but the middle school was far away from my village. I had to take a ferry too cross the stream. It was so dangerous in the raining season. The majority of people could not afford it and did not allow their children to go. Therefore many people in my village could not join the middle school. On the other hand parents do not know the importance of education and do not support it very much. I also did not want to study when I was young. Fortunately, I could finish my education.”

A survey in which 235 Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone were interviewed about their educational level showed that just less than half of them went middle school (48%), while 21% went to primary school and 23% attended high school. Only 6% got a degree whereas the remaining 2% have never been to formal school.

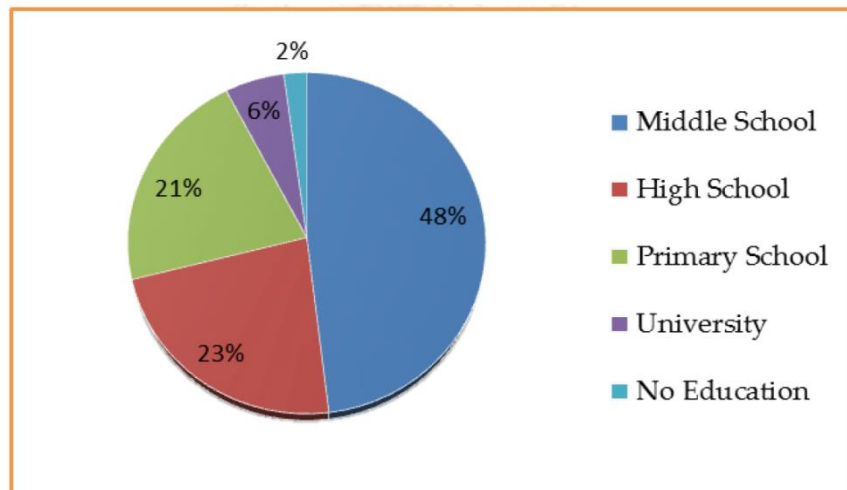


Figure 3.1 Education status of the Rakhine migrant factory workers

Source: Myint Maung Tun, 2014

The Rakhine migrant factory workers' parents are poor people who are working in aquaculture and the agriculture sectors in the remote areas of Rakhine. Four of the respondents' parents are farmers during the rainy season and at other times of the year work in seasonal jobs such as carpenters, fishermen and general labourers. Where they live in Rakhine the water is brackish so it is salty during the summer and hot season which is why they are unable to cultivate their farms the whole year. Two of the respondents parents are fishermen who catch fish with a small boat, while the other three parents are farmers who own three or four acres of paddy farm in Rakhine.

From the interviews with the Rakhine migrant factory workers, the two male migrants first destination was not Yangon. They went first to China and Malaysia. However, there was a lot of social and economic problems there so they changed their minds and went to Yangon instead. For the female respondents, their first destination

was Yangon because they did not dare to migrate abroad because their safety is very low and they are unable to communicate in a foreign language. In addition they do not have enough financial capacity to migrate to an overseas country so they migrated internally in Myanmar.

Working at the studied factory was not the first job for all the respondents. As mentioned earlier the two male migrants had overseas work experience. Nyi Nyi, one of the migrants from Minbya township migrated to Yunnan province in China together with 10 other people from his village and near by villages. With the help of an agent who came to their village and guaranteed that they would get a construction site job in China paying at least 80 Yuan (13 USD) per day if each person paid him 400,000 Kyats (400 USD) as an agent fee. However they did not get the promised job and after spending a month in jail as illegal immigrants they came back to their village empty handed.

Ko Ko, the male migrant from Ann township went to Malaysia to work in a plywood factory in 2009. Everything worked well there until 2012 but after the Rakhine and Muslim conflict in Rakhine, the Rakhine migrants life in Malaysia became insecure and was threatened by local Muslims. In Malaysia, there were two migrant groups from Myanmar; Muslim people and Buddhists from different parts of Myanmar, including Rakhine. In the conflict in Rakhine State many Muslims have been killed. As a result in Malaysia Buddhists from Myanmar, especially Rakhine, became the targets for discrimination or were killed by Muslims in Malaysia as revenge of Muslim killings in Rakhine. To avoid this risk, Ko Ko came back to Yangon.

Soe Soe, one of the female migrant from Gwa township, who got married to a Burmese man, worked in a cold store factory as soon as she arrived in Yangon. At the cold store factory she had to work very long hours in an unhealthy working environment. She did not want to work because her body smelt like fish even if she did not go into the factory. So she resigned from her job and sold vegetables as a street vendor but Yangon has heavy rain and extreme hot weather. Therefore she had to stop working. She then changed her job and worked as a labourer in the studied factory.

Mu Mu, a thirty two (32) year old girl from Kyauk Phyu township worked as a teacher at the village school but was not a government appointed teacher. She was appointed by the village. In some remote areas of Rakhine where there is a school but not enough teachers the village appoints a villager who has under-graduate studies as a school teacher. The salary for the teacher given by villagers is very low and as the villagers are poor it is impossible to ask for a higher salary. She knows she does not have a good future in her village so she came to Yangon in order to earn more money.

Zarchi, one of the under-graduate migrants from Taunggoke township did not work when she lived in Rakhine because she was a student but when she arrived in Yangon she worked for one year in a garment factory in Shwe Pyi Thar township. The factory does not provide transportation and did not allow her to attend university. So she left that factory and joined the studied factory's Quality Control section as a labourer because the factory provides leave without pay for study. She got her degree while working in the studied factory. Another two female participants worked at a construction site as general workers with their relatives but could not get a permanent job. As a result, they did not get a regular income which made it difficult for them to survive in Yangon so they changed jobs. Socioeconomic background of the migrant workers can be see in the below table.

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Table 3.1 Job and education background of the participant

N o.	Place of origin	Male/ Female	Education	Working Section	Experience at factory	Position at Factory	Income in YGN (Average)
1.	Nyi Nyi	M	High	Store	2 Years	Supervisor	130 USD
2.	Ko Ko	M	Middle	Cutting	3 Years	Labour	100 USD
3.	Thu Thu	F	Middle	QC	3 Years	Labour	100 USD
4.	Ei Ei	F	High	Sewing	1 Year	Supervisor	130 USD
5.	Zarchi	F	undergraduate	QC	8 Years	Labour	100 USD
6.	Mu Mu	F	undergraduate	Packing	8 Years	Labour	100 USD
7.	Soe Soe	F	Primary	Cleaning	1 Year	Labour	100 USD
8.	Phyo Phyo	F	Primary	Assembly	2 Years	Labour	100 USD
9.	Thandar	F	Primary	Assembly	3 Year	Labour	100 USD

The participants at the studied factory earn approximately 100,000 Kyat (100 USD) per month for normal labourers and 130,000 Kyats (130 USD) for supervisors including bonus and allowances. Wages and salary do not depend on their educational level but is directly linked with their job skills and of the length of service in the factory. Although those studied changed their jobs, their income remains very low and they have very few days off. This is in the context of prices in Yangon which skyrocket day after day. Therefore, they have to manage their small income to cover the expenses that they are not able to avoid. Additionally, all of the participants have lived in Yangon for more than two years with the majority of them having been employed in the studied factory for less than three years. Only two respondents out of nine had eight years working experience in the studied factory.

3.3 Causes to leave native place

In general, the scarcity of employment opportunities, community violence between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Bengali, a desire not to work in agriculture and aquaculture sectors as a farmer and natural disasters in the region push the Rakhine to migrate to Yangon. Most of the reasons given by Rakhine workers were very similar with the main reason given to migrate being the scarcity of employment opportunities in Rakhine and the willingness to work in Yangon.

Ko Ko, a male migrant worker from Ann township said that;

“I am youngest in my family. I do not have a regular job at my village. In the raining season, I worked in the paddy field with my father but we cannot work the whole year around as our village farms are located in the brackish water area. The rest of the season, I was unemployed. The job opportunities in my village are wholly dependent on seasonal crops. If there was a job as a general labourer I did it but that job could not support me to get a regular income so I depended on my parents. I played football at the evening with my friends. I used to quarrel and fight very often when I played football so my parents assisted me to go to Malaysia where my brother works. So I left my village to go to Malaysia in 2008.”

Soe Soe, a Female Migrant worker from Gwa township said that;

“When I was in Rakhine, I helped my father with fishing. In the past, we caught plenty of fish but then we did not catch as many as in the past. When it rains very heavily we cannot go fishing. And then my younger brothers and sisters grow up and more money is needed for their education. I wanted to support them to continue their education and want to give money to my parents. Therefore, I migrated to Yangon to look for a better job and earn money.”

Different people have different reasons to leave their place of origin. One of the respondents left her village to study higher education in Yangon whereas some leave to earn more money.

Zarchi, a Female migrant from Taunggoke township respond that;

“ My family cannot support me to attend university but I would like to continue my education. To attend university I need money and have to work but in Rakhine I could not do both (working and studying) at the same time so I came to Yangon to attend university while working.”

The younger generation (son and daughter of fisher/farmers in Rakhine) do not want to work on their parents farms. They realize that farmers live a poor life and want to work and live in the city rather than a rural area.

Phyo Phyo, a female migrant worker from Minbya township said that;

“ My parents own 4 acres of paddy farms in my village. My older brothers and uncle are helping my parents in the farms. My parents inherited these farms from my grandparents. My parents and grandparents worked in this farm generation after generation but we live modestly. Some years, the weather brings droughts and floods. At that time, my family loses all its investment. For the next crop, we have to borrow money. In the next season, we have to pay back. We are in a vicious circle. All farmers are always very poor. It is very dirty work and in the sun. The women in the field have dark skin and are uneducated so my parents do not want me to work in the field. I also do not want to work in the field. I never imagined myself as a farmer. I always wanted to work in the city. When my cousin's-sister who lives in Yangon came to my village and told me of the opportunities in Yangon I migrated to Yangon with her to work in 2010.”

Thu Thu, a twenty five (25) year old woman from Kyauk Phyu township said that she left her village to assist her grand-mother whose health was not good and who was living in her uncle's home in Yangon. After her grand-mother recovered, she did not go back to Rakhine. She migrated to Yangon unexpectedly. In this study, the majority of the Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone left their place of origin to migrate to Yangon not because of civil war or internal displacement, but to search for better opportunities and to promote their life by working at Yangon.

3.4 Social networks in the migration process

In the context of Myanmar, there is a huge gap between rural and urban in the term of socioeconomic status and diversity of ethnic groups between one region and another. It is not easy for people who have lived in remote areas of Rakhine to migrate to Yangon. However, their social networks support them to reach Yangon safely. No matter how poor they are and number of challenges they have had to face the support of their social network both in their place of origin and relatives in Yangon have assisted them to migrate (Myint Maung Tun, 2014).

Nowadays, there are approximately 500,000 people in Yangon from different parts of Rakhine State and at least more than one third of this total population is believed to be working as manual workers. With regard to migration from Rakhine, the role of agents or brokers is significant to places like the jade mines in Kachin State or overseas where labour demands are always high and incentives in terms of high wages exist.

Often the brokers themselves are mostly members of a particular village and former workers who have had a long working experience in a foreign destination. They sometimes wait to get the expected number of people in villages. The recruiters always tell the villagers about the the possibility of finding jobs, the higher wages, and the ease in passing the border to work. If someone from the village wants to leave to work in another country, he or she has to contact these recruiters and may need to pay certain amounts of money in advance in some cases (Myint Maung Tun, 2014).

However, in the case of the Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar, none of the migrants contacted brokers or agents for their migration. For the participants in this study their social networks were strong enough to rely on for their migration to Yangon.

Table 3.2 The person who support migrants to reach Yangon

No	Participant	Male/ Female	Age	Who bring migrant to Yangon
1.	Nyi Nyi	Male	21	Brother-in-law
2.	Ko Ko	Male	23	Sister
3.	Thu Thu	Female	25	Grand-mother
4.	Ei Ei	Female	22	Cousin-sister
5.	Zarchi	Female	28	Cousin-sister
6.	Mu Mu	Female	32	Friend
7.	Soe Soe	Female	26	Aunty from mother side
8.	Phyo Phyo	Female	18	Friend/ Neighbor
9.	Thandar	Female	24	Friend

Those who want to work in Yangon contacted their friends, family members or relatives who were already working and living in Yangon in order to find out about employment opportunities, accommodation and other information about Yangon to reduce the risks of their migration. When they got enough information from their social networks they prepared and made arrangements for their migration. They do not need to worry about job information, accommodation and trip as their family and friends supplied this information and assistance.

Soe Soe, a female migrant from Gwa township respond that;

“Before I came to Yangon, I had contact with my aunty from my mother’s side who lives in Yangon. Her home is too narrow so she could not provide me accommodation but she requested that one of the Rakhine monasteries in Hlaing Tharyar provide accommodation for me. I stayed in the Rakhine monastery for about three months during that time I was looking for a job. There are many Rakhine who live

temporarily in a monastery like me. By living in the monastery, I do not need to care about food and shelter. I can get it free with the gratitude of the Rakhine Monks. When I got a job, I donate 15,000 Kyats (15 UDSD) per month to the head monk. When I get a job, I transfer to a hostel.”

Some migrant workers not only get accommodation and job information but also get financial support for their migration. It assists people to be more comfortable with their migration.

Thandar, a migrant worker from Pauktaw township explained that;

When I was in Rakhine, I helped my parents at their farm. My friend who works in a Yangon factory came back to the village in the water festival holidays and suggested that I migrate to Yangon with her. I made a quick decision and followed her. I do not have enough money at that time, but she lent me money for my transportation costs. Then I stayed at her room while I was looking for a job .”

Migrants can find a job with their social network supports. Later on, migrants can settle down in Yangon and may call new migrants from Rakhine. And then they build patron - client relationships in Yangon to support each other. Social networks play an important role for people migrating from Rakhine to Yangon.

3.5 Hunting for a job in Yangon

Although there are a variety of reasons to migrate to Yangon, one of the main reasons is to get a job and earn money. As soon as migrants leave their place of origin, they have to spend money so it is important for migrants to find a job before the money they bring has gone. However it is very challenging for Rakhine migrant workers to find a job in Yangon within a short period of time because the majority of them have limited education and do not have the relevant job skills. The majority of migrants help their parents at there work in the place of origin. They do not have a full time job there. To get a job is not an easy task even for local graduated persons in Yangon because of

job scarcity in Yangon as well. No wonder it is difficult for migrants to get a job in Yangon.

Sometimes they do not get a job until all their money has gone. and their social network then supports them. It is very important for migrants to get a job in time. Those who do not get proper support such as job information, accommodation and food from their social network members in Yangon are often unable to find a job and have to leave Yangon soon after they arrive. Migrants who get support from their social network members can get a job more quickly. Those who have strong social networks, can stay in Yangon to search for a job even if they do not get a job in a short time.

Thandar, a female migrant worker from Pauktaw township said that;

“I came to Yangon in 2008, three days after I arrived Yangon, I got a job in a tea shop as a dishwasher with the help of my uncle. All my hands became white and the whole body got dirty during the few week working as a dishwasher. I cannot work any more as a dishwasher so I changed my job to a waitress at the same tea shop. I worked only two months there as I could not work any longer. Then, I searched for a new job with the help of my close friends. Later, I got a job in a food production factory in Shwe Pyi Thar. The salary was very low, the factory did not provide transportation and I had to work a lot of overtime so I quit this job again. Finally, I got a job in the shoe factory (studied site) as a normal labourer in the assembly section with the help of my uncle who requested the factory manage to appoint me. I have been working for three years in the factory. I spent only a few months searching for a job after resigning from the food production factory.”

Mu Mu, a migrant worker from Kyauk Phyu township added that;

“As soon as I arrived, I did not know how to find a job. I spent around three months job hunting. The money that I had went very quickly. I got very worried, lost confidence and was about to go back to my village. Then I got job information from my younger cousin's-sister's friend who is working in the factory. I applied for it and very soon the factory

phoned me for an interview. I was scared to do another interview, and I did not know how to get there but my cousin's-sister's friend supported me with everything. So I got a job in the packing section.”

Another barrier the Rakhine migrant workers experience in getting a job in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone is not having a National Registration Card (NRC). In Rakhine, some people do not have National Registration Cards (NRC) because they live in a remote area of Rakhine and they think they do not need one, while some migrants have lost it because of disasters, community violence and internal displacement. This makes it difficult for them not only to get a job in Yangon, but to migrate from Rakhine to Yangon. When migrants come to Yangon, they have to cross more than three immigration check points. Also to work in a factory, a Labour Registration Card is required. These are issued through application at the Labour Exchange office if they have a National Registration Card. The National Registration Card (NRC) is therefore essential for Rakhine migrant workers to obtain employment. However, Rakhine migrant factory workers borrow cards from their friends, family members and relatives who are very similar to them. They may need to claim that this is their identity card in front of an immigration officer or an employment interviewer as it cannot be traced in a computer system because it does not have a bar code and is just a piece of paper.

Phyo Phyo, a female migrant from Minbya township shared her experience that;

“ When I come to Yangon for a job. I requested and brought my sister's National Registration Card (NRC) as we are similar. I showed it when I crossed immigration check points. If someone who does not have a National Registration Card has to pay 3000 Kyats (3 USD) as a fine at each check point but it can be negotiated with immigration officers. I used it also when I applied for a Labour Registration Card from the Ministry of Labour and apply for a job in the studied factory as well. I know it is important for a citizen but I could not afford to apply for one when I was at my village in Rakhine. I intend to do so in the coming water festival break.”

The Administration and Human Resources Manager from the factory comment that'

“ When I appoint the labourers, I do not depend so much on their National Registration Card. I know some of the people tell me lies and show fake identity cards. I believe that they do not want to use other people’s names and identity cards when they apply for a job but they can not afford to apply for it. I understand the situation of migrant workers who come from rural areas because I am also one of the migrants from Mon state. I just pay attention on their physical and mental ability and whether they can work in the factory or not.”

A person can apply for a job at the factory if he/she has a national registration card which proves he/she is over the age of sixteen, one passport photo, a police certificate, a ward certificate (a certificate which shows he/she lives in the particular ward in order to prove there address), a Labour Registration Card from the Labour Exchange office at the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, lives near by Hlaing Tharyar township, is strong enough to do hard work in the factory and has a curriculum vitae.

Some of the Rakhine migrant workers do not have enough qualifications to meet the requirements of the studied factory in order to work in the factory. However their social network supports them to get a job easily. Without their social network, they would find it very difficult to find a job. To those who have strong social networks in Yangon they get a job soon after they arrive, but for those who do not have strong networks take time to get job.

3.6 Migrant’s living conditions in Yangon

Given the nature of the factory job, people need to work full time and live nearby to the factory. So people living in or near Hlaing Tharyar get more opportunities to get a job in the factories as there are many industrial zones there. All the Rakhine migrant factory workers in the study live in Hlaing Tharyar township because the

studied factory only appoints labourers who live there. The Rakhine migrant factory workers themselves want to live in Hlaing Tharyar township not only to have the option of living in the township but also to save on transportation costs.

As there are many industrial zones around Hlaing Tharyar, most people living in that area are usually workers and other internal migrants from various part of Myanmar and not local people. With regards to accommodation, although it is not a problem for the locals, it is challenging for the migrants. When the country opened up, more enterprises came to invest in the Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone. This resulted in land prices climbing higher day after day especially in Hlaing Tharyar township because of the industrial zones. Land prices, a room and house rental charges are very high for migrant workers. All the respondents answered that the living costs in Yangon provide challenges for them.

When migrants started arriving in Yangon, they used to live with those who supported them to migrate there because they could not afford to pay room or house rental charges by themselves. Among the respondents, only one respondent from Gwa township did not live with a person who supported her to migrate to Yangon because her aunt who supported her to come to Yangon only had a very small home. Instead she lived at the Rakhine monastery with the help of her aunt. The majority of migrants now no longer stay with those who initially supported them to migrate to Yangon for many reasons including; changing their house when they get a job to another location, or they pay less or if they want to live with other people.

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Table 3.3 type of accommodation of the migrant workers

No.	Participant	Male/ Female	Marital Status	Type of Accommodation
1.	Nyi Nyi	Male	Single	Hostel
2.	Ko Ko	Male	Married	Hostel
3.	Thu Thu	Female	Single	Share house with friends
4.	Ei Ei	Female	Single	Live at relatives home
5.	Zarchi	Female	Single	Live at relatives home
6.	Mu Mu	Female	Married	Hostel
7.	Soe Soe	Female	Married	Share house with family
8.	Phyo Phyo	Female	Single	Hostel
9.	Thandar	Female	Single	Share house with friends

Four of the respondents live in a hostel while two live in share house with friends, another female migrant from Gwa township lives in a shared house/room with family members, and migrants from Sittwe and Taunggoke live at their relatives home. Although land prices are highest and the cost of accommodation is increasing, none of the Rakhine respondents live in a Monastery or in a squatter's house and none live alone in a hostel or share house. All the respondent live together with their friends or colleagues to reduce the living cost.

Nowadays, technology is very readily available. Houses are made of concrete and brick to protect against natural disaster, however, most of the hostels and share houses in Hlaing Tharyar are made of bamboo, wood and thatch which have high fire risks. The majority of the Rakhine migrant workers are living in crowded and tiny houses because they cannot afford to rent a house or a room by themselves in a hostel. Ventilation in the houses is not good. There are around four or five Rakhine migrant people live in a 100 square foot house.

Phyo Phyo, a female migrant from Minbya township said that;

“One of the biggest challenges for us in Yangon is accommodation. When I arrived in Yangon, I lived together with my friends from my village and another

three people in a room at the hostel. The room is so tiny that I cannot roll when we sleep. Ventilation is not good. I used a common toilet and bathroom at the hostel. I get up early to use the bathroom. Otherwise, I will be late to the office because of the queuing to use the bathroom.”

Thandar, a female migrant from Pauktaw township added that;

I lived in a share house with my colleagues, the house is so small. There is nothing inside in the house; no room and no facility. It is just like a small hall. But I have to contribute 30,000 Ks (30 USD) per month. With this amount, I can rent a big house in my village.

The majority of migrant workers housing are just small bamboo or wooden huts. It does not have facilities such as television, radio, water heater, bed, table, air-conditioner, refrigerator, fan and furniture. Houses for Rakhine migrant workers are just for sleeping. Even if it is just for sleeping with many people in a crowded room, migrants have to spend one third of their salary for accommodation in Yangon. The study found out that all the participants live at a small wooden or bamboo hut in sub-streets of Hlaing Tharyar township. Living conditions of Rakhine migrant factory workers are miserable.

3.7 Ethnic relationship in the factory

As this study mentions, the majority of labourers are Burmese (about 790 people), with approximately one-fourth (320) of the people are from Rakhine and a few other ethnic people; Mon -50, Korean -20, Shan-25, Chin-10, Ah Kha-17, Lahu-23 and Lisu-5 in the factory. It can be said that a variety of ethnic people are working in the factory.

Factory manager of the study factory commented on that;

“Most of the factory workers are migrants, all have the same situation, working closely in a section with the same people they meet almost everyday. So there is no relationship problems based

on ethnicity but they may have relationship problems individually. On the other hand, there is a rule in the factory that if there is a quarrel those involved in the conflict will be fired.”

However, some of the Rakhine migrant factory workers responded that they are discriminated against by their Burmese supervisors although they do not have any problems with other people.

Ei Ei, a female migrant from Sittwe township explained about that;

“Burmese supervisors do not favour us Rakhine. It is difficult for us to get leave and/or a promotion. If we, Rakhine people make a mistake they scolded us for the whole day but if a Burmese makes a mistake or requests leave they get a favorable response from the supervisors. Even among the labourers, some of them do not use our name when we communicate. They call us Rakhine. There are very few people who can reach supervisor level among the Rakhine migrants although some are working here for a long time ago.”

Nevertheless, some of the Rakhine migrant factory workers answered differently. Nyi Nyi, a male migrant from Minbya township who is a supervisor at the studied factory responded that;

“I do not think there is a problem with regard to ethnicity. In the factory, many different ethnic people are working together almost everyday very closely at a section. I am Rakhine. I reached supervisor level. I have a very good relationship with supervisors, colleagues and other ethnic people. I think in having relationships ethnicity is not an important factor but helping and understanding each other is important.”

It can not be concluded that there is discrimination and problems in relationships based on ethnicity among the factory workers. However, the study found out that some of the Rakhine migrants feel that they are being discriminated against because of their ethnicity however, other do not feel they are being discriminated against.

3.8 Summary

The majority of migrant workers' parents are paddy farmers or fish farmers in rural Rakhine. Most of the migrants worked in the farm with their parents and did not have a full time job. Most of the migrants left their place of origin to get a job in Yangon and to earn more money. Only two of those interviewed had different reasons, one left to continue her education while working in Yangon and the other left Rakhine temporarily to take care of her grandmother but she did not return to Rakhine when her grandmother recovered.

While there are agents if they want to migrate to an overseas country, rural females tend to migrate to Yangon as it is safer and easier. This study also found that the majority of the migrants from Rakhine can not afford to pay agents fees so they do not have capacity to migrate internationally. The exception was two male migrants.

When migrating to Yangon they do not need to use agents to help as they receive support in the form of financial, accommodation and information from close friends and relatives. They were also able to get a job in the studied factory with their networks support. Many of the respondents reported that they could not have migrated and got a job in the factory without their social network support.

They migrated to look for a job and better opportunities but they have to work many hours for little money in the factory. Besides, they do not have job relevant skills when they arrive for factory work, so many of them have to work as a normal wage labourers. Among Rakhine migrants only a few people have reached supervisor level. Moreover, the money they earn largely goes on living expenses, with shared (crowded) accommodation taking 30% of their income. Although they migrated to Yangon for better opportunities they face a lot of challenges and are fearful for their safety in Yangon.