



Problems Need to be Concerned Regarding the Life and Employment of Female Migrant Workers at the Construction Site of Himlam Project, Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract: *The issue of improving the material and spiritual life for workers always attracts attention of governments around the world. It is also an interesting research topic for researchers and scholars. This paper aims at analyzing the situation and problems need to be concerned regarding the material and spiritual life of female migrant workers at the construction site of Himlam project in Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.*

Keywords: *problems, life, employment, female migrant workers, construction site*

1. INTRODUCTION

The cause of industrialization and modernization of our country has obtained great achievements in recent years. Along with the rapid urbanization process, the transition from agriculture to an industrial and service economy has led to the existence and growth of many urban areas, industrial parks and export processing zones. On the other hand, rural-urban income disparity and surplus agricultural labor are the indispensable causes of the mass migration of people from rural to urban areas to live and work in urban areas and industrial parks.

Ho Chi Minh City has become the most dynamic city in the country in terms of economic development. With favorable socioeconomic conditions, in recent years, 70% of the city dwellers have been migrant workers working in enterprises, export processing zones and industrial parks. This is a huge labor force including female workers from other provinces and cities who have moved to the city to make a living. This process has led to profound impacts on the socioeconomic development of Ho Chi Minh City. The life of migrant workers on construction sites, especially for female workers, are facing many difficulties. Most of them have relatively low income, low awareness, lack of education, communication skills, and disadvantages in meeting entertainment and stress-relieving needs. This is a specific, seasonal and heavy job, labor, mostly working outdoors.

The issue of material and spiritual life of workers (e.g., the life of female workers on Him Lam construction site in Ho Chi Minh City) always attracts attention of all nations in the world. Resolving this issue well has both economic significance and profound human values. This is a very big problem that needs to be fully and properly evaluated to propose effective solutions.

Him Lam Kenh Te project is invested by Him Lam Trading Co., Ltd. The project is located in front of North-South Highway, near Kenh Te Bridge, in Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City. It is only 3 km from Ben Thanh market and 1 km from Phu My Hung new urban area, located on the intersection of main roads such as Nguyen Van Linh avenue, Nguyen Thi Thap street, Khanh Hoi street, Le Van Luong street, thereby linking districts 1, 4, 7, Binh Chanh and Nha Be district. Currently, the construction site of Himlam project in Tan Hung ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, has a total of 317 workers working on the site, including 133 female and 184 male; 224 workers are married and 93 are unmarried; 74 people are permanent residents in Ho Chi Minh City and 234 people living outside the city; About 91 people are educated below primary school level and 226 people with secondary school level. Currently, the life of the majority of workers is still difficult, some urgent

issues of the working class (housing in industrial parks, income, social insurance, cultural activities, child care facilities ...) have not been solved in time.

The Party and State have issued many guidelines and policies to pay attention to workers. The qualifications and skills of workers are gradually improved, their industrial manners are gradually getting in order. Incomes of employees have been gradually improved. Employee incomes have been gradually improved. Particularly for female workers, gender equality issues in labor, employment and social life have been concerned. Party guidelines and the State policies and law, action plans of departments, branches, unions, units and enterprises attached the importance of implementing the law on gender equality and the Resolution 11/NQ-TW of the Politburo on women's work during the period of stepping up industrialization and modernization of the country.

However, the life of the majority of workers is still difficult, a number of pressing issues of the working class (housing in industrial parks, income, social insurance, cultural activities, child care facilities ...) ¹ have not been resolved in time. Through the research and surveys of the author about the life and employment of workers in general and female workers in particular, this paper will analyze the situation and problems that need to be concerned with the life of female workers at the construction site of Himlam project, Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City

2. PROBLEMS NEED TO BE CONCERNED

First, in regard to the employment and income of female migrant workers

Construction enterprises in Himlam project tend to use simple, low-skilled, and untrained labor. This is an opportunity for workers, especially female workers, who migrate from rural areas to the cities to find work. However, the situation that workers are only recruited at a certain age and fired after a certain working time has been a painful problem today. In the whole country, the average age of young workers, under 25 years old accounted for 43.4%, from 26 to 35 years old accounted for 34.7%, from 36 to 45 years old accounted for 14%. The length of service under 1 year accounts for 6.9%, from 1 to 5 years accounts for 30.6%, from 6 to 10 years accounts for 16.4%, from 11 to 15 years accounts for 10.5%, from 16 to 20 years accounts for 16.8%, from 21 to 25 years accounts for 13.3%, and more than 25 years accounts for only 5.5% ². At Himlam site alone, the majority of female workers are young, from 18 to 24 years old and most of them are under 35 years old. The enterprises on the Himlam sites are construction enterprises, so they do not require high skills. There is no big difference in skills between long-term workers and new workers. Working at the construction site requires high pressure on accuracy, high degree of intension and good health. The female workers are often responsible for assisting the main workers. Their work is repetitive, mechanical, and overtime which has serious impacts on their health. Female migrant workers have less time working in the enterprises than local workers so the number of years of experience is also lower and it is difficult for them to get a stable job than others. The salary of workers in enterprises is low. Wages of workers in enterprises are still low, the minimum wage does not meet the minimum living standards of workers (in 2015, it only reached 78-83%) ³. According to a survey of the Institute of Workers and Trade Unions in 2017: the average basic salary (working full-time) of employees is 4,480,000 VND per month. The average income (excluding supporting for shift meals) is 5,453,000 VND per month ⁴. The monthly salary of workers working at Himlam construction site usually accounts for about 90 - 94% of the total income (depending on the group of workers). From 6 to 10% of the worker's income is their housing support and travel expenses. The regular expenditure of migrant workers is always higher than that of local labor because they have to spend much money for housing, and transportation. Besides, they have to send money back home to support their families.

Second, in regard to working conditions and the implementation of welfare regimes and policies for female migrant workers at Himlam construction site.

Attention has been paid to ensure labor safety and sanitation, fire prevention, and improvement of working conditions and environment for workers. The awareness of employers and employees in enforcing regulations on occupational safety and sanitation has been significantly raised. Accidents at work have decreased. However, occupational diseases have not been paid much attention. In general, specific regulations on female workers have not been enforced in construction enterprises at Himlam site at present. Female workers still have to be in charge of heavy work in construction enterprises.

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The periodic health examination and annual obstetric examination for them have not been implemented seriously. The maternity regime and the stipulation that female employees have 30 minutes off per day during menstruation, 60 minutes while nursing children under 12 months of age have not been implemented well. In the collective labor agreement of some enterprises, there are provisions that are more beneficial for female workers than the current law such as supporting pregnant women, women raising children under 36 months of age; setting up a lactation room for female workers who take care of children; supporting them on holidays, new year and visiting them when they are off sick or maternity. However, the percentage of collective labor agreements with regulations that are more beneficial for female workers compared to the law is still low. Long-overdue social insurance and health insurance debt affect the payment of sickness, maternity benefits and closing social insurance books for employees. The quality of periodic health examination and obstetric examination is not good. In some cases, when the owner of businesses run away, many pregnant female workers who have paid social insurance cannot receive any benefits. Policies for female employees and preferential policies for enterprises that employ many female workers have not been strictly implemented. Some businesses are not fully aware of their responsibilities and do not care about the life of workers, especially female workers. They have not supported the cost of childcare and preschools for female workers having children in the age of kindergarten.

What should be done to ensure employment and life for female workers like the people working at the construction site of Himlam project when they become older, and difficult to find a new job after finishing their job in the construction site is a hard question. This poses a big challenge for mobilizing the responsibility of the State, society, community, enterprises and the responsibility of the workers themselves. This also shows that the effectiveness, practicality, sustainability of employment and social welfare policies for female workers have not been fully focused, and they need to be further concerned.

Third, in regard to housing and cultural houses for workers at the construction site

Housing for workers has not been well addressed. The State has issued many policies, attracting capital to socialize housing investment for workers and low-income people. In the 2010-2015 period, localities registered 110 housing projects for workers, in which 27 projects were started, 9 projects were completed. The proportion of workers having houses built by businesses and industrial parks increased by 10.3% compared to 10 years ago. The issue of cramped, unsanitary, and unsafe housing has been resolved. The rate of workers feeling frustrated with housing problem has decreased 40% compared to 10 years ago⁵. Some enterprises have paid attention to invest in building or renting houses for workers. Vietnam General Confederation of Labor has proposed the schema on building institutions for trade union organizations in industrial zones and export processing zones and they have been approved by the government. This is a favorable condition to take better care of laborers but it has only been initially implemented, so it has not met the housing needs of workers in the industrial zones. Currently, about 55% of workers in concentrated industrial zones have to rent accommodation, an increase of 3.3% compared to 2010. However, it is a paradox that workers on Himlam site are still in temporary rooms.



Image of workers' house on Himlam construction site

Source: *the survey of the author*

The temporary housing of workers at Himlam construction site is due to the fact that the project will only last for 10 years; so they cannot make permanent houses. In addition, these workers can stay in

private rented houses or shared houses. Due to low income of the workers, most of rented houses are cheap with poor quality. The condition of sanitation, electricity and water supply are not guaranteed. Therefore, workers do not have enough conditions to rest and relax to regenerate their labor after a hard working day. However, with rental houses of enterprises, the requirements on time and strict regulations do not conform to the inherent freedom of migrant workers, therefore, they do not attract workers to live in.

Most of these construction enterprises focus only on construction, paying little attention to the needs of living, entertainment improving working conditions, and health care for their workers. There hardly exists any facilities for cultural, arts and sport activities of workers on the construction site, if not, most of facilities are built by organizations or individuals to earn benefits, therefore, they are mostly reserved for people with high income and workers cannot afford to enjoy them regularly. The place for cultural activities of community and collective activities for workers has not been improved. This can be a potential cause of the workers' pressing issues. Conditions for arranging time for workers to participate in recreation and entertainment are still very limited. Only a few construction enterprises have volleyball courts for workers or organize internal sports festivals, games and cultural activities on the anniversaries of the enterprise or holidays, New Year celebrations. For some reasons, the workers themselves do not care or participate in community activities. The above reality shows that the material and spiritual life of workers in enterprises still faces many difficulties.

Fourthly, in regard to kindergarten for the workers' children

In 2005, the Prime Minister proclaimed the Decree 09/CT-TTg on promoting the implementation of solutions to solve preschool problems in industrial zones. This reaffirms the State's determination to address pressing issues in industrial zones, including kindergartens and preschools. To implement the State's policy on socializing education private preschool education has developed rapidly in cities, towns, densely populated areas and industrial zones. Family child care service usually takes care of young children (under 18 months), have flexible daycare, suitable for shift work of workers and have low fee is growing fast, meeting part of the needs of sending children whose parents are workers in industrial zones. Construction site workers (especially young female workers) are in great need of sending children to kindergartens. According to the survey in 2019, about 70.7% of female workers at Himlam construction site have children under 6 years old and need to send children to kindergartens (the subjects are workers with household registration in small provinces). Only about 19% of families of Himlam construction workers send their children to public preschools, the rest have to send their children to private kindergartens or family child care service. The management of kindergartens for workers' children is still inadequate. Most of the construction businesses currently do not have a plan on housing construction, kindergartens, infrastructure and cultural and social institutions to serve workers.

Currently in District 7, public preschools are overcrowded, rarely accepting young children (under 36 months old), due to lack of facilities and teachers. Private preschools with high quality have high fee while the workers' salary is low, they cannot afford to send their children there. These schools are also very limited in accepting children under 36 months of age, especially children under 18 months of age because of low profits, high requirements for skills to care for children, and high risks. Public preschools arrange the time for picking up and returning children that are not suitable for the working hours of workers at the Himlam construction site.

The facilities of family child care service are limited. They often turn people's houses into a nursery, so classrooms are cramped, lack of light and they do not have playground for children, lack of hygienic toilets, lack of teaching and learning facilities, etc. In some unlicensed groups and classes, babysitters do not have professional qualifications as prescribed; they lack of childcare and education skills, thereby potentially many unsafe risks for children. A number of children violence incidents occurred in unlicensed family child care services and the victims were the children of workers in industrial zones in general and Himlam construction site in particular, which caused frustration in social public opinion and psychological insecurity among parents.

Fifthly, in regard to marriage, family and reproductive health care for workers.

Activities to support the building of a prosperous, progressive, happy family and reproductive health care for workers in industrial zones in general and construction enterprises at Himlam construction site in particular have not been interested and conducted by trade union organizations and leaders of

businesses. At the construction site, there is no enterprise that has organized an obstetric examination for female workers, installed a lactation room at the company, and issued regulations on prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace. There is no enterprise organizing forums to propaganda about domestic violence prevention, organizing mass weddings or supporting loans for economic development of the family, organizing caring on the occasion of traditional New Year, organizing summer camps or commending and rewarding the workers. Because female workers often have to work overtime, for married one, it is difficult for them to take care of children, while young unmarried workers are less likely to have time meeting opposite sex. Due to young age, living away from family, lack of affection, awareness, understanding of social issues, especially lack of life skills, workers are easily affected by external factors which can easily lead to cohabitation or unsafe abortions, etc. while the living conditions and their ability to access to health services are still very low.

Improving the efficiency of reproductive health care for workers in industrial zones in general and Himlam construction site in particular still faces many challenges, especially the quality of reproductive health care services and planning family is still limited. There is a lack of counseling and reproductive health services for workers at the construction site. In addition to functions and responsibilities of the health sector, there is a lack of concern and support from employers, especially the lack of adequate and timely guidance from relevant levels and sectors. The reproductive health care for workers is a part of the general reproductive health care of the locality according to the state administrative organization system, so it can only meet the needs of local people while the health care for migrant workers, especially female workers working in industrial zones have not been given adequate attention.

3. CONCLUSION

The above situation shows that there are still many issues that need to be addressed to further improve the quality of life and employment of female workers in industrial zones and especially on Himlam construction site at present. The Party and State should continue paying attention to direct the implementation of issues of gender in the guidelines and plans for socio-economic development in legal documents targeted towards substantive gender equality in labor, employment and social life in order to continue fulfilling the goals of gender equality and for the development of women in the spirit of Resolution 11-NQ/TW of the Politburo on women work in the period of stepping up industrialization and modernization of the country.

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