

Filipinos and Care Work in the United Kingdom

Synopsis

Migrant labour plays a crucial role in the provision of care services to the elderly. This study investigates the living and working conditions of Filipino migrant carers both professionally and those who are informally skilled. It examines and compares the nature of the caring and employment relationship in the NHS, in private care homes, and in private households. Research involves in depth interviews with migrant carers, and stakeholders in the UK, and agencies and other third parties in the Philippines.

Background

As the UK population ages, the numbers of those requiring health and personal care is set to increase. At the same time, the number of young people able to do this work is declining. Thus the UK care sector shortage, mean that the UK is likely to be increasingly reliant on migrant labour. This is already noticeable with regard to nurses. In 2003, 13,000 overseas nationals registered with the nursing and Midwifery Council. However, while particular arrangements exist to attract migrant nurses, the channels of entry for those who are more informally skilled are extremely limited. This does not mean that the demand for care workers is not being met by migrants – but rather that their immigration status varies.

Filipinos make up the largest and most visible group of internationally recruited nurses in the UK (5,600, or almost half of those registered with the NMC in 2003). They also figure prominently in private care homes and in the provision of care in private households. While there are many other nationalities contributing to care, in a sector which in some aspects (most notably private households) is segmented by ‘race’ and nationality with many possible immigration statuses, we have chosen to focus on Filipino nationals.

Aims and Objectives

This research engages with both theory and policy. Theoretically we explore the consequences of commodification of personal care, and how this relates to, and differs from, the professionalizing of care. The study also provides empirical data and analysis of use to trades unions, carers organizations and employers, who must disentangle extremely complex employment and personal relations. It also aims to contribute to policy development in the areas of social care and immigration. Research questions include:

1. What is the impact of site of employment, job duties and nature of employment relations on the carer/care user relationship;
2. Impact of the above on the migrants’ experiences of life and employment in the UK;
3. How do institutes such as the state, recruitment agencies, employers and the academe facilitate the flow of Filipino workers to different sites of care?;
4. What implications does immigration policy and practice have on Filipino migrant carers in the UK? In particular how does the state defined concept of “ethical recruitment” work out in practice?

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk



Methods

Several studies exist examining the movement of health workers from the developing to the developed world, with a few focusing specifically on migration from the Philippines to the UK. These studies tend to rely largely on macro-logical, quantitative data. In contrast, COMPAS employs a qualitative-based methodology, which, coupled with the widely available data on health care migration, will help substantiate conceptual gaps in the current literature where qualitative analysis is scant. Initial data was gathered through in-depth interviews with nurses, care workers, and domestic workers using a semi-structured interview schedule. Many interviewees were accessed through two information seminars in March and April 2005, in which speakers presented information useful to nurses and other work permit holders. These were attended by potential interviewees, many of whom agreed to participate in our study. Domestic workers have also been accessed through agencies and community organizations. Recruitment agencies and policy makers have also been interviewed.

Fieldwork was conducted in the Philippines in 2004. Links were established between COMPAS and Philippine based organizations, individuals and institutions concerned with Philippine labour export. These included the National Institute of Health, the University of the Philippines College of nursing, the Scalabrini Migration Center, and recruitment agencies.

Initial findings

- The Philippines has long specialized in labor export, but the recent demand for nursing and care work in the developed world has resulted in a rapid and drastic restructuring in academic and private institutions focused on careers in health care, a shift in the nature of the labor market, and a rapid state response, which has included the drafting of a state to state agreement overseeing the recruitment of care workers to the UK.
- Many care workers enter the UK via other countries, highlighting the role and reach of multinational recruitment agencies. Care workers from Singapore and the Middle East may enter the UK on student visas, although their private employers usually assign them much more than the 20 hours of work that is specified in their visas.
- Nurses in the private sector report more difficulty in applying for registration than those in the public sector. Some noted that their employers seemed discouraging and unhelpful when it comes to registration.
- Regulatory conditions differ between public and private care providers with considerable impact on working conditions of migrants.
- Reported shortage of care assistants in the independent sector and limited channels of entry.

Work in Progress

In-depth interviews conducted by trained interviewers with nurses, care assistants and domestic workers, recruitment agencies, policy makers, and employers to be completed by December 2005. Initial interview coding has been done using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. The written analysis phase of the research, begins in January 2006. A webpage devoted to this project, carrying updated information for interview participants, organizations, interested parties, and fellow researchers, is available at www.compas.ox.ac.uk/research/care_workers.shtml. A one-year assessment of the project, which discusses the research methods and observations in greater detail, and provides a full bibliography and appendix of interviews gathered is also now available.

Planned output: Final report for the Economic and Social Research Council, policy and practitioner summary, seminars, academic and non-academic publications.

Researchers Dr. Bridget Anderson and Lourdes Gordolan

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council

Timetable: October 2004 to October 2007

Contact

Lourdes Gordolan, Tel. (01865) 274711. Email: lourdes.gordolan@compas.ox.ac.uk