

Social work and referral services in enhancing migrant health services: A conceptual paper

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Abstract

Health is central to sustainable development agenda, It considers health as an indicator of 'people-centred, rights-based, inclusive, and equitable development' (UN, 2015). Referral role of social worker gains utmost importance while dealing with vulnerable population. Referral services indicate any services that can help the intended beneficiaries in obtaining information about needed services available for them. It plays a crucial part in imparting information to migrants in the host region. They help in improving awareness about the service, facilitate service delivery mechanism and enhance self determination. They act as bridge for connecting migrant to services deemed exclusively for them thereby being able to avoid health risk and also preventing potential threat to public health.

Keywords: Migrant Health, Referral Forum, Service Delivery, Referral Services

Introduction

Migration has become a social, economic and universal phenomenon and

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is considered to be multi-dimensional in modern time. It is found to have significant impact on socio-economic development of a region or a country such as its population size, age structure and labour market. It can be seen as a result of the social, economic and regional imbalances among countries. It has resulted in worldwide process of urbanization and industrialization leading to increasing gap between rural and urban areas thus causing the collapse of rural livelihood in many parts of the world. Global pattern of migratory movement is determined by various factors such as poverty, demographic, natural calamities, better economic opportunities, political chaos and other numerous socio-economic and cultural changes.

The total global migrant population that is the international migrants are estimated at 214 million people that is, about 3% of world population while the internal migrants are estimated at 740 million by Human Development Report 2016, on Human Mobility and Development the major factor for this increase in migrants could be attributed to urbanisation. Urbanisation has led to increase in flow of people to cities, it was reported that in the year 2000 the urban population has risen to 73.9% and 40.5% from 30% and 9.1% in the year 1900 in the developed world and developing world respectively.

Internal migration where one does not cross any national border referred to as the largest migration in the world. Migration is a social a phenomena which is influenced by both underdevelopment as well as development. Data from the 2011 census indicate that the states with lower level of development like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa have witnessed higher volume and rate of female out-migration whereas states with higher level of development like Maharashtra and Delhi have received more in-migration. Poverty and prosperity can both be viewed as responsible for inducing migration. While poverty can be the major reason attributed for migration in developing countries, posterity can be the reason for migration in developed countries. According to Deshingkar and Anderson developing countries like India, migration should be looked at as a strategy to adopt as a routine livelihood and not simply as a mere response to the shocks. (Deshingkar & Anderson, 2004)

Referral services are used to enhance the link between people in need and the human services that can help them and to provide them with help in planning the human services through investigating the usefulness of the information. Referral services become an important part of service delivery. Referral services can be referred to as any services that can help the intended beneficiaries in obtaining information about the needed services available for them. Referral involves putting people in touch with services that have the resources to help them achieve their goals which is not only about handing out a number but also about the responsibility for bringing the person and the service together. Referring is indicative of working as part of a team to best meet all that person's needs.

Health has always proved to be a problem for the migrant workers since most of the countries have formulated nationalised schemes based on the place of residence. For example, China's national policy has entitled schemes based on locality. It states for an individual to enjoy certain rights such as the free education and access to social welfare one must have household registration. Since for the migrants from the rural area the household registration is not easily transferable to urban they are forced to pay for their medical services in cities and are not provided public medical insurance and assistance programme away from their residential area. (Peng, Changet.al, 2010)

Social security and social networks play a crucial part in migrant workers life. The International Labour Organization (ILO) recognizes social security as a basic human need. The study by Denzil Fernandes explores ways in which social networks of self employed and casual labourers evolve to be an informal social security system that address the needs of the migrants. The social networks becomes part of the social capital, it ranges from loosely knit less cohesive ones to very close-knit highly cohesive networks thus becoming a source of social security for them (Fernandes, 2011).

Migration and Health

Migrants especially those with inadequate host language skills face sev-

eral barriers in maintaining their health in their adopted countries. Hence the need to understand the factors that influence health-seeking behaviour of migrants becomes necessary to intervene for positive behaviour change. The study in Qatar revealed that there is a lack of insufficient information for the migrants about their lifestyle, medical conditions, health risks, injury, and rights privilege in relation to legal working condition and health services in the host country. Therefore it plays an important role in determining the health status, lifestyle condition, working-related problems, accidents and access to health-care facilities by Indian migrants. The migrant often are left with no choice but to continue with their prevailing health conditions until it get worsen (Bener, 2017).

Benach et.al (2009) investigated on a significant number of scientific literatures to understand health consequences of migrant workers. Their research has uncovered the fact on how migrating workers are often employed in hazardous jobs where they suffer from illnesses, face serious abuse and exploitation (Benach et.al,2009). In the paper entitled “Adaptations to a new World: Experience of Bangladeshi in Japan”, the researcher collected information from the respondents living and working in Japan on their socio-economic adjustability. The researcher has found that the migrants were facing problems in health and medical care and that the medical benefits were inaccessible for many added with the employers even refusing to bear their medical expense of the migrant employee who were sick or who met with accident. The research found that medical facilities were completely neglected for the Bangladeshis working in Japan (Mahmood, Raisul A., 1994).In the paper titled “Utilisation of Hospital Services in Italy: A Comparative Analysis of Immigrant and Italian Citizens” the research examined the hospital utilization of the immigrants. The study found that the rate of hospital use is lower in the case immigrants as compared to natives (Baglio et.al, 2010). The article on “Good Practice in Health Care for immigrants”, where the medical professionals working with migrant population in 16 countries were identified and interviewed. They found that the lack of familiarity with the health care

system is one of the prime reasons for people not availing health care services (Priebe et al., 2011).

Through the data provided showcasing the request for referral services availed by public from clinical social workers in the state of Massachusetts as that from 163 requests in 1983-1984 to that of 826 requests in 1989-1990 and the 692 requests 1990-1991 show examines the value of the private practice referral service in not only providing assistance to clients and therapists but also in enhancing the recognition by the general public of social work as a profession well qualified to provide treatment for people experiencing personal, emotional, and family life problems. Thus also successful program required staffing by an experienced social worker with strong clinical skills, who possessed skills including listening empathetically, handling resistance, clarifying, addressing and assessing mental health status, and determining therapeutic needs for the client. These skills are essential as it helps to validate the client's concerns for reaching for help, to calm fears, and to build trust in the forthcoming referral process. (Jane K. Thompson et.al, 1993)

Referral Forum, Social Work and Migration

The importance of referrals and the role they play in addressing certain issues in society has been validated by many studies. The need for referrals does not merely limit itself to the process of obtaining information about a service but in availing and also exploring. According to Alice Ullmann and Gene G. Kassebaum (1961), their study focussed on examining the reasons for referrals by the social work and the need for different referral according to various criteria. A medical social worker along with the primary function of providing direct service to patients also carries out many other functions since social worker is considered to be part of the interdisciplinary team, both in giving medical care and in research. Another study conducted to assess the need for a potential telephone program component imparting information on social service resources among high risk youth who received approximately 1 year earlier, the Project towards No Drug Abuse (i.e., TND) a classroom-based

program indicated that the youth had a strong desire to receive resource and referral information on vocational, transportation, educational, recreational, and mental health and drug counselling. (Steve Sussman et al., 2008).

The article, Predictors of referral uptake in children with disabilities in Bangladesh Exploring barriers as a first step to improving referral provision (R. C. Nesbitt et al., 2012), a study explored the barriers in providing referral services in the context of children with disabilities in Bangladesh where it was inferred that making services available for the children does not merely guarantee its use. The study by Randhir Auluck and Paul Iles, (1991) conducted to examine the influence of working relation between antenatal clinic nurse and hospital social worker on providing social worker referrals lead to the inference that the lack of information and awareness on the role of social worker during motherhood as well the dysfunctional relation between the staff lead to the lower referral rates. This study indicates as to how important it is to establish the role of social worker in each field especially as a referral service provider. The importance of referral staffs in providing services through empathizing with their situations is examined in the article by Janice Baker and Paul Proett (1983) where they have brought in the emergence of child referral service in Peninsula Hospital and Medical Centre, Burlingame from the year 1980 and the role of referral services in retaining the employees.

Study among migrants and non-migrants in Vietnam found that there were lower levels of health care utilization among migrants than non-migrants with the lowest levels of utilization reported among seasonal migrants (Le et al., 2015). Studies in Germany and France revealed that close living conditions, social exclusion, language barriers, lack of knowledge about the healthcare system, and lack of access to the health system can increase the risk of being infected with tuberculosis. And that the unskilled and low-level migrants were at a higher risk to contract Tuberculosis than the non-migrant population (Carballo & Nerurkar, 2001). Therefore to address the issues of migrants health there needs to be studies focussing on understanding the everyday problems of the migrant, health problems faced by them, their living

conditions and to examine the government laws towards migrant workers health and hygiene (Chatterjee, 2016).

By examining the studies from various realms it brings us to the need for referral to be important pathway to fill the existing gap in services provided and the services availed. Thus improving the existing model and creating forums for organisation be it government, non- governmental, voluntary organisations etc to make available the information about the various services undertaken becomes important so is the role of professionals in doing so. The referral service is cost effective because it maximizes the use of existing services and programs and is easier to set up and administer, and it gives the clients choices and better opportunities.

Significance of Referral Forums in enhancing Migrant Health

A society plunged with schemes and services all set to cater its varied population yet never able to reach its intended beneficiaries, it is here the need for referral service in facilitating human services comes into action. The people themselves are unaware of very services and schemes that are made exclusively for them. Therefore in need for a platform where the needs of the people meet the resources or rather the resources find its targeted beneficiaries and achieve its full potential.

Policies for migrant integration can help reduce migrant health disparities. The study by Margherita Giannoniet.alexamine the impact of migrant integration policies on health inequalities during the latest economic crisis in Europe. The study found that the socio economic and political situation of the country also proves to be a negative influence on health. It was found to have a negative effect on self-reported health status, limiting long-standing illnesses, and self-reported chronic illness in foreign people living in European countries. (Giannoniet.al, 2016). A. H. M. Zehadul Karim & Nurazzura Mohamad Diah have concluded that the rights to health care of foreign workers are often ignored as there are no agreement to cater to the health care issues of the workers between Bangladesh and Malaysia. They have found that due to

this very reason they do not benefit from the system. They have recommended for the government to provide better health care facility for the workers at the initial time of arrival to support and promote well being (H. M. Zehadul Karim & Mohamad Diah, 2015).

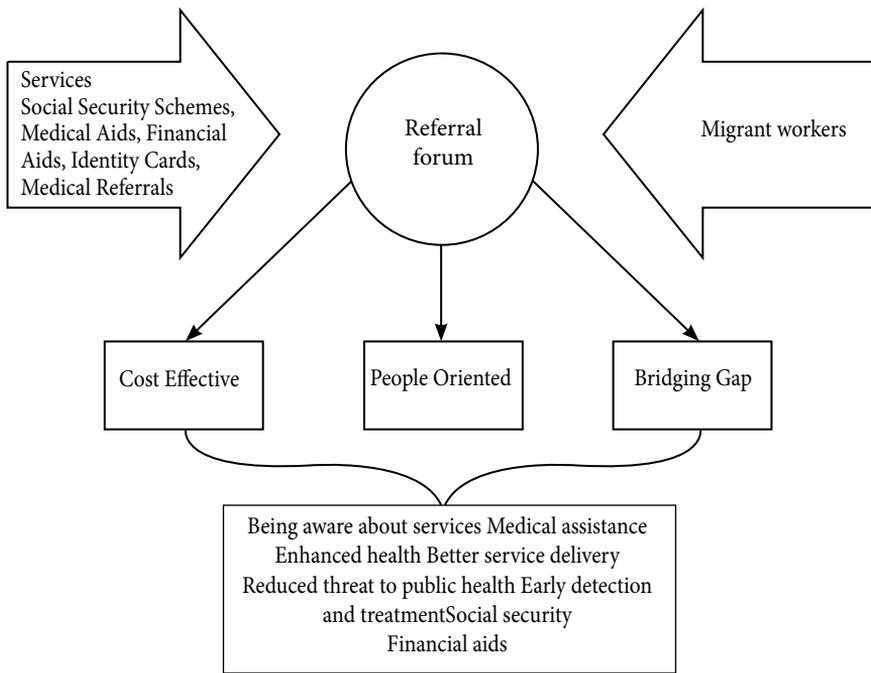
The need for a common forum that address the services available for the varied population based on their respective concerns and the use of such forums as a focal point for disseminating information and making use of such information to receive services that are ultimately meant for them. Thus able to better evaluate the services available and also the impact of such services on the targeted beneficiaries can be better assessed.

Referral Forum for Migrant Health: a Conceptual framework

Health care utilisation becomes an important factor in determining the health care related action taken by the migrants. It also reveals the need for integrated migrant policies in the host region/countries health system so to promote health seeking among migrants. Figure 1 represents a conceptual framework for proposed referral forum for imparting migrant services. As shown in the figure most often the migrant are faced with barriers and challenges that prevent them from using health services such as financial constraints, lack of health insurance, socio cultural norms, language, lack of legal status and so on. The referral forums would have information regarding the services available for the people provided by varied agencies such as, government departments, non profit organisations, nongovernmental organisation, private organisations and other voluntary organisations. Thus becoming a common point where the people in need meet the appropriate resources needed to address that concern. The professional will provide information regarding the place detailed information on the services, the criteria for availing the services, where the services are provided and the official personal to be contacted. This enhances the service delivery mechanism thereby able to bridge the gap between service implementation and delivery. Since the services are based on client's issues and concern it is highly a person oriented. It is cost effective

since it could work in line with existing departments and could be established in places/ institutions which cater to a large client population such as hospitals; educational intuitions etc. This would help to create a channel through which the services introduced to cater to varied needs and concerns will reach its intended beneficiaries.

Figure 1. indicating the Linkage between referral forum and migrant health



Conclusion

The prime intention of Information and Referral services is to help link people with needed services by identifying their needs, helping them find the most appropriate services to meet their needs, and linking them to the most appropriate service providers. There may be times where one can find themselves in situations where they may not be aware of an appropriate or ongoing service to be approached probably because of the lack of awareness

of the same or due to the absence of a societal forum per say. One may not be equipped with right skills and resources to tackle a difficult situation it is then that one need to make use of the services made available exclusively for the benefit of the society. By being able to be referred to someone or certain services or organisations who can cater to that particular issue will provide us with the opportunity in effectively meeting our need and thus helping us in moving a step closer to resolve the issue. Referral programs can help people to selectively acquire required prospects and to retain it longer at a reduced cost. A referral made should be monitored closely to see if it is effective at identifying and providing needed prospects to its beneficiaries. Every referral made should be aimed at improving the person's quality of life and opportunities for increased independence.

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