



Social
Policy and
Ageing
Research
Centre



A New World of Welfare? A Study of Migrant Workers' Experiences and Understandings of Social Security.

Presented by Virpi Timonen

At the National Europe Centre
Australian National University
3 August 2007

Project carried out by Virpi Timonen and Martha Doyle at the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC), Trinity College Dublin, in association with the MILES project funded by NORFACE.

Outline of Presentation

- Background
 - Aims
 - Significance of research
 - Methods
 - Sample
 - Strengths and Limitations
 - Discussion of findings
 - Concluding remarks
-

Background

- (Virtually) full-employment economy
- Increased demand for care services
- Shortage of ‘native Irish’ ‘social care’ workers
- Third-highest net migration rate in the EU
- Public / political concern over exploitation of migrant workers
- To date only limited (and arguably negative) adjustment of health, immigration and social policy

Aims: to gain insight into...

- A. migrant care workers' **experiences** of the Irish welfare state
- B. migrant care workers' subjective **understandings** of 'social security'
- C. what do these workers **expect** and aspire to by way of their future social security?
- D. What are their **attitudes** towards the welfare state?

BOTH to explore these subjective understandings and meanings in their own right AND to engage in theory-building.

Significance of research

- Care workers: level of social protection
 - Care recipients and social care system:
nature of care work –
quality/price/availability of care
 - System(s) of social protection: the impact
of more/less people who are
entitled/claiming/in favour of benefits in
short/medium/long term
-

Methods

- Very little pre-existing information – Exploratory study
 - Subject matter not easily quantifiable, no sampling frame
 - Opt for qualitative methods

 - Initially decided against using employer gate-keepers
 - To combat over-dependence on one network respondents accessed via 20+ migrant organisations
 - When this and networking supplies dried out, adopted the employer route.

 - Interview schedule - open-ended questions, interviewer probing (semi-structured)
 - Audio-recorded subject to interviewee's consent
-

Analysis

Framework Approach (Pope, Ziebland and Mays)

- 1) *Familiarisation* immersion in the raw data
 - 2) *Identifying a thematic framework* identifying all the key issues, concepts, and themes by which the data can be examined and referenced
 - 3) *Indexing* applying the thematic framework or index systematically to all the data in textual form
 - 4) *Charting* rearranging the data according to the appropriate part of the thematic framework to which they relate, and forming charts
 - 5) *Mapping and interpretation* using the charts to define concepts, map the range and nature of phenomena, create typologies and find associations between themes with a view to providing explanations for the findings.
-

Purposively across...

Three sectors

- Formal institutional
- Formal domiciliary
- Informal domiciliary

Four regions

- Africa; Asia; Europe: EU and non-EU

These two sources of variability expected to link into variability in the extent of **anchoring into 'standard social protections'**.

Sample

(Total N = 40)

Sector	Formal				Informal			
	32				8			
Region of origin	EU	Non-EU Europe	Asia	Africa	EU	Non-EU Europe	Asia	Africa
		10	1	11	10	1		6

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- First foray into a complex area
- Ability to generate hypotheses, further research questions
- Basis for further (qual and quant) research

Limitations

- No generalizability, uncertain transferability
 - Sensitive subject area - Social desirability at play
 - 'Multi-purpose' interviews
-

Discussion of findings

Organised around:

- Experiences
 - Understandings
 - Expectations
 - Attitudes
-

Experiences

- **Variation by legal status**
 - **Poor level of knowledge**
 - **Dissociation**
 - **Reluctance to take up**
 - **Central role of employers**
 - **(Work) contacts helping to negotiate access**
-

Experiences: Variation by legal status

Refugee status:

‘they were giving us money for food...paying our rent...my husband...decided we should stop taking the money, because...you realise it is good for you to work...so we just decided one day when I had my last baby, let’s stop this money, and see if we can [manage]’

Extensive experience of provisions which generally considered good – upon ‘graduating’ from welfare dependence to work, less contact with social protection system, different types of provisions (e.g. attempt to access affordable housing)

Experiences: Variation by Legal Status

Work Permit:

‘I don’t know if I’m [eligible]...now that I’m unemployed, do I get something, do I have to apply for that?’

‘Because we are not Irish, they cannot pay for our pension, when I was having my interview, they told me, its up to me to save my pension and really we can’t complain about it, because we are not Irish...we will work until we feel tired, and then ...I think I must go back home’

Contrast this very limited knowledge/experience with more extensive experience among e.g. those who entered country as asylum seekers.

Experiences: Poor knowledge

- ‘I am five years here and I still know very little about this’
 - ‘Because I didn’t have any communication skills, how would I know anything, especially about welfare’
 - ‘But we don’t get a lot of knowledge, we don’t know how it applies to us as we don’t have any experience with it’
 - ‘Maybe I should find something about the law. I’m a single mother so maybe there is something [in addition to child benefit].’
-

Experiences: Dissociation

- ‘You see all this [entitlements to benefits], I don’t really know that. I just work and I don’t understand how they do the things. I don’t know anything about it. Maybe I will. Yeah, I’ve never thought about it at all. Me, I’m just working.’
-

Experiences: Reluctance to take up

- ‘I have been six years here, I haven’t taken any sick days, but I didn’t take them because I wasn’t sick, [but rather] because I knew if I don’t work, I would be short of money...it doesn’t matter how you feel, you need to work...’
-

Experiences: central role of employers

- ‘In 2002 one of the representatives from the bank came to the nursing home to talk about pensions, but the matron refused them...so we don’t know what it’s all about, later on we realised it is very important as far as security is concerned’.
- ‘I have a phobia of going to see them [social welfare officials]...Because the very first time that I go...I needed very badly a financial assistance...I don’t get even a single cent.... [employer had not paid social security contributions]

These employers acting as ‘blocking’ agents.

Experiences: (Work) contacts

‘I slipped [while working in the client’s home] and it gets my back. I have to wait for two years to get an operation...it was someone, a friend [another ‘employer’ whose shirts respondent used to iron once a week] and he took care...wants to help me because he had pity on me. And he approaches his friend [a hospital doctor] for if they could help me in my condition’.

Understandings

- A. Collective (transnational) security (greater concern than individualistic/entitlement-based security)**
 - B. Investing in assets, (children's) future**
 - C. Saving**
 - D. Planning for adversity**
 - E. Recourse to services in country of origin**
 - F. Insouciance**
-

Collective (Transnational) Security

- [Y]ou are thinking about [three] families, yourself and your family and your husbands family’
- ‘That is why I work a lot, because...if I don’t give [my female relatives] anything, nobody will...now my mom is no longer alive I have to do this’

**Common among people from outside EU,
much less common for people from EU
(need to confirm)**

Understandings: Investing in assets

‘[I have] lots of private savings...we came from such a society [former communist country] where if you will not help yourself nobody will help...you may not eat but you will save...we do not save in banks...mostly people are buying real estate. [owns three apartments in Lithuania]

‘I came here to get an apartment in Poland..... It took two years to buy the apartment,. I wont get a job with the same wages when I go home it will be a lot lower, but I don’t mind, I will feel a lot more secure since I will have my own apartment and some savings, I don’t mind working for €200 per month’.

Understandings: Investing in future (children)

- ‘I’m planning to stay here for as long as I’m still able to work, cause even though my children are already finished [education], I have my brother and sisters’ children, that I would like to support and help.. [eventually] I can go back home...they can support me’
-

Understandings: Savings

- ‘[I] have lots of private savings [for securing against inability to work]...’
- ‘ I can stay here for ten years, so I can still save [for my retirement]’
- ‘So that’s why I’m here, I’m saving for my retirement.’
- ‘[M]ost of [us] are happy here in Ireland [because] we can save more’.
- To save money we share accommodation...it’s easy to share, one big room, three women [working shifts] can share’

This theme could perhaps be subsumed under a broader theme that also takes in ‘investments’ (assets, education)

Understandings: Planning, Insouciance

Need to plan:

- ‘You need to...plan for your sick days...for example once every three months.’

(This can possibly be subsumed into same theme as ‘saving/investment’)

Insouciance:

- ‘I’m not worried about that...I’m thinking that I’m still strong’
-

Understandings: Services in C of O

‘...I don’t get sick in Ireland ‘cause its expensive, that’s my attitude and everything I need to do, I do at home [C of O], like teeth, because in Ireland, when they get sick I hear from my co-workers they wait for ages, they pay huge amounts, and it’s really bad’

Expectations

- (Not very high) hopes for improvement
 - Progression through work
 - Fatalism
 - Worry
 - Return home
-

Expectations: (Not very high) hopes for improvement

‘Oh no, we don’t go with that [pension]...with all the employers I had we didn’t discuss about the pension...how I wish I could do...how I wish I can get some like insurance for my future, but I’m just praying that maybe some day I will have that or I could do that.’

Expectations: Progression through work

‘And for me I’d like to you know find a proper job and use my diploma. But of course I understand I need to learn English, to be more confident. And I know I need maybe one year more’.

Desire to work in a more skilled capacity
(e.g. nurse); in public sector; higher salary

Expectations: Fatalism

‘I just hope that these things [sickness, disability, unemployment] won’t happen but it does happen so we are not in control of the condition or situation. No matter what we have to accept it, it is the fact.’

Worry regarding future

- ‘We just make ourselves as healthy as possible and have savings’ [but] ‘What will be the future in ten, fifteen years if I got sick, what would I get if I had an accident, these kind of things worry me, who are we going to call if there is an accident in our working place...who will support.’

- Proud independence
 - Resentment towards ‘abusers’
 - ‘The honest worker’ struggling
-

Attitudes: Proud Independence

‘The only benefit [tax credit] we [she and husband] get is mortgage interest relief’

‘My focus is that I have come to Ireland to contribute to the economy, so I am not interested in anything free, ‘cause when you start depending you can’t be free.’

Attitudes: Resentment of ‘abusers’

- ‘[Welfare is] making people more dependent on the government, for those who are not working they get more. People who are working are paying taxes and paying for their own things. There should be a limit, to make people to be responsible..’
 - ‘I am not racist, but you just don’t give money to the asylum seekers...They should earn money, and here you are, you are working hard, and you do your overtime, and you will only get a percentage of your overtime, so all the money goes to them’
-

Attitudes: ‘The honest worker’ struggling

- [L]ast year my four boys were sick, they had chicken pox, oh god, for one month I was taking them to the GP €200 for the four of them, all the medicines I had to buy, it’s really difficult...
 - [E]verybody is scared of going to work full-time...you can’t afford to pay your housing...and you can’t afford to feed your children, to pay the bills
-

Concluding remarks

- 1) Reliance on non-welfare state sources of security
 - 2) Highly 'commodified': reliance on waged employment, aspirations focused on work.
 - 3) For many, primacy of collective (transnational) security to individual security
 - 4) Poorly informed, reluctant/unable to access benefits, but many interested in improving this as long as does not lead to 'dependence'
 - 5) Harbour ambivalent views of the welfare state
-

Concluding remarks

Possible explanations of (variation in) these experiences/understandings/attitudes:

- legal/employment status
- expected duration of stay in country
- sector of employment
- the liberal welfare state? (migrant workers no different from the Irish?)

Concluding remarks

It can also be hypothesised that the long-term presence of large numbers of people who are **not properly anchored into**, and are **not supportive of (large parts of) the system of social protections**, can undermine the legitimacy and therefore the sustainability, of the welfare state.

Concluding remarks

Whether this matters at systemic level depends on:

- Length of stay in country
 - Numbers
 - Variability in rights/entitlements among migrants
 - Degree of divergence from the social rights of the 'natives'
 - Ability and willingness to become political actors (voters, groups etc.)
-