

Negotiating Religiosity in a Secular Society: A Study of Indonesian Muslim Female Migrant Workers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This study examined how Indonesian Muslim female migrant workers in Hong Kong, the majority of whom work in the domestic sector, negotiate their religiosity in a secular society. As a method of investigation, qualitative exploratory research was used. Observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data with eight Indonesian Muslim female workers in Hong Kong. The findings show that: 1) despite workplace restrictions, these workers adhered to their religious rites; 2) they utilized the most viable solutions to enable them to conduct their job obligations that were incompatible with their religion; 3) they established halaqas [religious study groups] in several mosques throughout Hong Kong and met regularly; and 4) the migrant workers gained strength from their faith, while the religious study groups greatly assisted them in overcoming and resolving life's challenges. The researchers concluded that while it is critical for many workers to live according to their religion, many employers are unaware of their employees' religion and religious values. There should be better dialogue and agreement on how workers and employers can negotiate their rights and obligations. In response to the study's findings, several recommendations are made.

Keywords

Belief; domestic labor; faith; migrant worker; modernity; religiosity; religious identity

Introduction

Migrant workers are a valuable resource for a state and are repeatedly alluded to by the government as a nation's 'economic heroes' (Gibson et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2002; Setyawati, 2013). Lack of opportunity, economic, political, and environmental crises, and shifting populations (aged and young) lead to rising labor migration (Global Migration Group, 2017). Migrant workers benefit both the country of origin and the host country. Nathan (2014) conducted studies in the United States, Europe, and other nations and reported that skilled migrants help the host country's economy in both output and consumption. According to research in China, not just skilled workers but unskilled migrant laborers significantly contribute to the construction industry's sustainable development (Ye et al., 2019). When an economy has excellent access to financial markets, migration benefits all income groups and age groups (Razin et al., 2002).

Empirical evidence supports the existence of a significant positive relationship between migrant workers' remittances and the economic growth of their country of origin, as demonstrated in studies conducted in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Azam, 2015); Korea (Tehseen Jawaid & Raza, 2012); Romania (NITA, 2018); Nigeria (Oluwafemi & Ayandibu, 2014); Ghana (Adams & Cuecuecha, 2013); and Indonesia (Mas'udah, 2020). Remittances have grown in importance as a source of external financing for developing countries (Martinez et al., 2015; United Nations, 2011). These remittances account for 40% to 50% of the gross domestic product of these countries (United Nations, 2011).

However, both the countries of origin and destination countries frequently disregard migrant worker protection rights in pursuit of economic gains (Setyawati, 2013). The absence of coordination between origin and host nations limits the portability of migrants' social rights. Even though migrant workers offer vital labor to their host countries, these migrants face marginalizing discourses and policies (Taha et al., 2015). Some of the migrant workers are even struggling to secure food for themselves and their families (Quandt et al., 2004); face numerous migration-related stressors that may harm their mental health (Noor & Shaker, 2017); and confront racism and discrimination from social care services, employers, and native-born care workers (Stevens et al., 2012). Moreover, many females and irregular migrant workers lack or have inadequate social security coverage (van Ginneken, 2013).

The International Labor Organization reported an estimated 164 million migrant workers worldwide in 2017. Of these workers, 41.6% were female, and 8% were between 15 and 24 years of age (International Labour Organization, 2018). These migrant workers are primarily employed in precarious, low-status, or low-wage occupations, undeclared employment, and in an informal economy (Fouskas, 2019). The 2013 report showed that 11.5 million migrant workers worked in the domestic sector (International Labour Organization, 2015).

The current study

In this study, we looked into the lives of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. Researchers gathered information on how female Indonesian Muslim migrant workers manage to practice their faith while remaining professional at work.

The growing demand for low-paid female workers in this particular receiving community (particularly in the domestic sector) encouraged primarily female migration (Parreñas, 2000).

Indonesian women are among the many women who work as domestic workers abroad, and approximately two-thirds come from places with higher-than-average poverty rates (The World Bank, 2017). They work to provide for their family. Many female migrant workers had never left their village before moving abroad. Also, 19% of female domestic employees who travel to industrialized nations had prior paid work experience.

In contrast, 67% of men said they had paid work experience before relocating (The World Bank, 2017). Given their inexperience, these women must quickly adjust to keep their employment and send money back home. They are at risk since they work in the informal sector, have inadequate education, and do not speak the language of the receiving country. The fact that many workers are unauthorized laborers adds to the bad encounters. We can understand the contradictory thoughts and unease these female migrant workers may suffer due to their inability to exercise their faith. Their rights must be respected as they rise to economic prominence.

This study of Indonesian Muslim female workers shows how Islam has become a way of life for many devotees. People from religiously intensive countries may struggle to 'fit in' within a more secular environment, especially if they work as domestic helpers. The study shows the people's religious dynamics, encounters with new cultures, social adjustment, and the support they need. This study also suggests improvements that both employers and workers might make to maintain both parties' rights. The study also suggests ways to defend workers' rights, particularly religious rights.

The study context

Over 9 million Indonesians now work abroad, representing nearly 7% of the total labor force of the country (The World Bank, 2017). Indonesian migrant workers primarily work in ASEAN countries, the Middle East, and other Asian countries (Bank of Indonesia, 2021). However, data for 2021 suggest a drop in Indonesian migrant workers in all regions (ASEAN, Middle East, Africa, America, Europe, and Australia), but an increase in Asian nations other than ASEAN nations, particularly Taiwan and Hong Kong. Most Indonesian migrant workers prefer to work in countries with a similar religion and culture, such as Malaysia, which shares a language with Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia, where Muslims are the majority. In recent years, most migrant workers have chosen a host country based more on economic factors than related backgrounds. Since Taiwan and Hong Kong pay better, more people choose to work in these countries.

Monthly statistics released by the Center for Data and Information, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Placement and Protection Agency, feature information on the migrant workers' occupation, gender, and place of origin (BMP2MI, 2021). In February 2021, 4,234 Indonesian migrant workers were placed for work. They were spread across 15 countries, with Hong Kong hosting the most migrant workers in that month, up to 3,173 people (see Figure 1). The majority of Indonesian migrant workers (3,357) worked as domestic workers, while others continued to work in the informal sector, including construction workers (see Figure 2). The majority of migrant workers placed in February 2021 were women (see Figure 3). The education of most migrant workers is junior high and senior high school graduates (many of whom are only elementary school graduates) (see Figure 4).

Figure 1: The Host Countries for the Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in February 2021

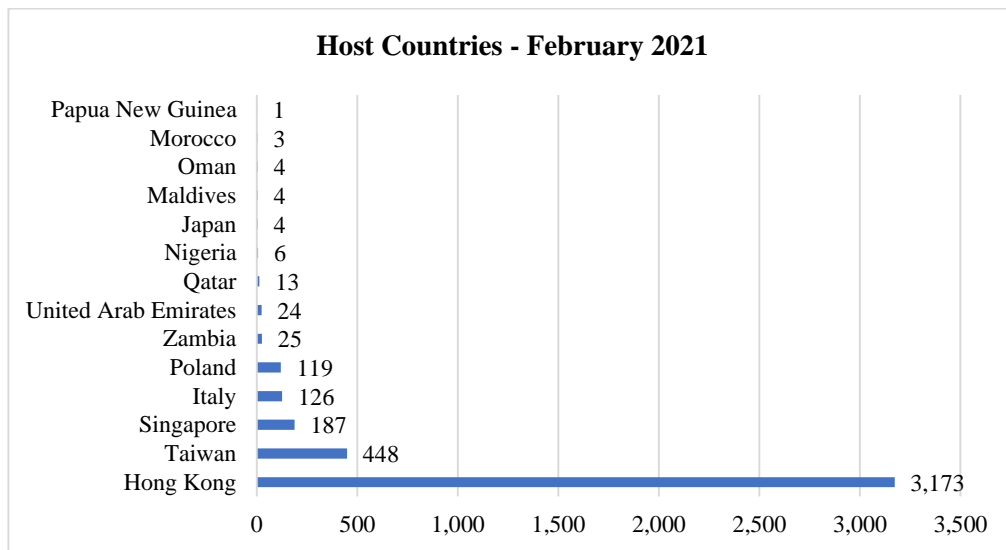


Figure 2: Types and Sectors of Work in Which Indonesian Migrant Workers Employed in February 2021

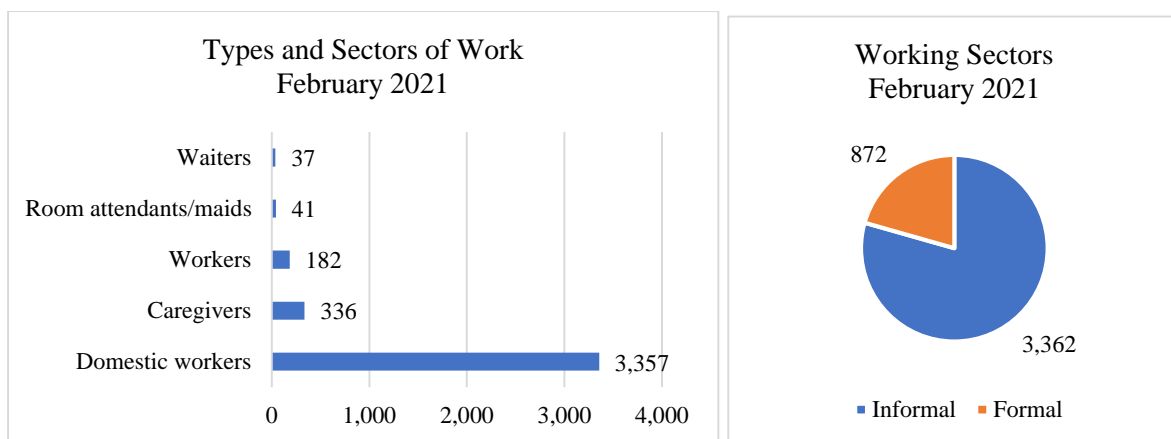


Figure 3: Gender of Indonesian Migrant Workers Employed in February 2021

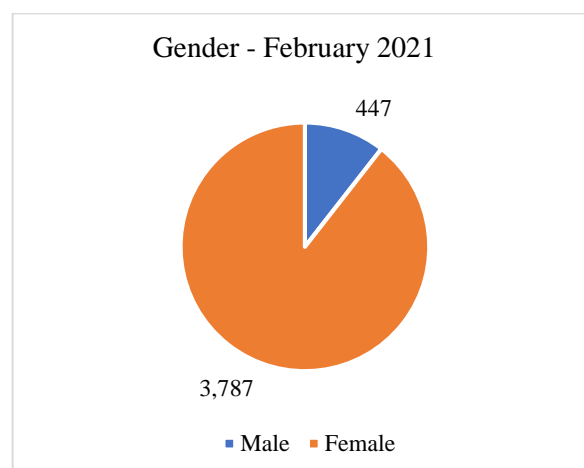
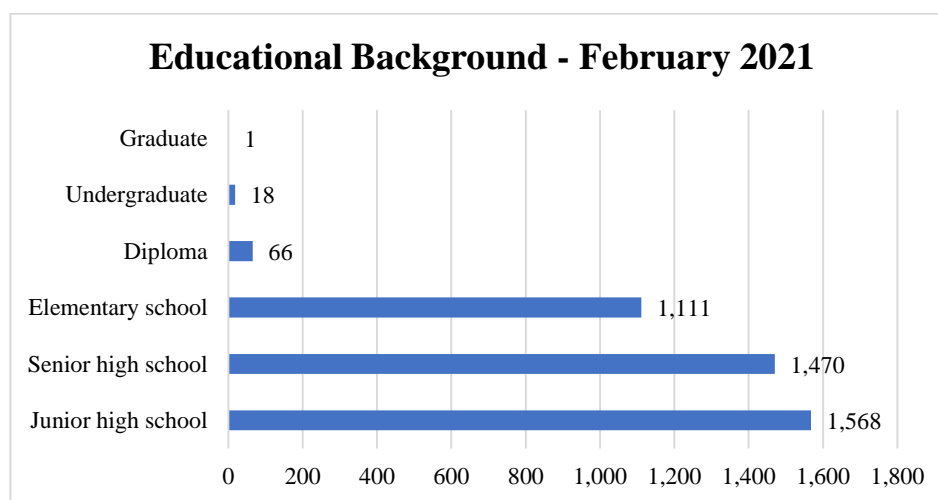


Figure 4: Educational Background of Indonesian Migrant Workers Employed in February 2021



The impact of Indonesian labor migration on the economy of the nation is enormous. The World Bank (2017) reported that in 2016 migrant workers sent home about IDR 118 trillion (US\$ 8.9 billion). Indonesian migrant workers earn up to six times more than they would in Indonesia. Indonesian migrant laborers' remittances help alleviate poverty by 28% (Adams & Cuecuecha, 2013). Remittances help migrant workers, and their families improve their long-term livelihoods. Around 40% of migrant households channel their remittance income into education, 15% into business capital, and over 20% into savings accounts (The World Bank, 2017).

Working overseas might be risky at times. Reports of mistreatment against Indonesian migrant workers have led to a consensus that their protection is inadequate. Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong experience severe working conditions and are often exploited (Allmark & Wahyudi, 2019). Many migrant workers are unskilled, uneducated, and uninsured. They are also prone to physical and emotional abuse. They confront several problems while living abroad. Sadly, they are frequently subjected to torture and ill-treatment. The BMP2MI crisis center reported 9,377 cases from 2017 to 2019 involving Indonesian migrant workers (BMP2MI, 2020). In 2017 only, 4,475 cases were recorded with the following details: 311 cases of migrant workers wishing to be returned, 271 unpaid cases, 205 cases of failing to get a work placement, 193 cases of overstaying, 193 cases of employment termination before the contract expired, 186 cases of illness, 129 lost contact cases, 129 placement or employment not subject to work contractual obligations, 68 trafficking cases, 65 cases of undocumented migrants, 65 cases of wage deductions beyond provisions, and 695 other (Hanifah, 2020).

The difficulty of performing religious rituals during work hours is not mentioned but is a common problem among migrant workers. In a country where Islam is a minority and is often misunderstood, migrant workers in Hong Kong find it difficult to exercise their faith; some employers do not question this and permit it, while others oppose it. The researchers wanted to deeper comprehend the issue of how Indonesian Muslim migrant workers in Hong Kong keep their religious commitments.

Theoretical framework

Most Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong are Muslim, and most originate from East Java (BMP2MI, 2021), a region known for its devout Muslim population. Since they were living in a completely different environment, the question of how these migrant workers would negotiate their religiosity in a pluralistic and secular Hong Kong arose.

Religiosity encompasses the multiple aspects associated with particular beliefs and engagement of such viewpoints; it is not solely about religious attendance (Hill et al., 2000). Religious characteristics such as private devotion (prayer) and existential certainty are critical components of this trait (Ellison, 1991). Benson et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of evaluating religiosity as a complex and multifaceted concept that includes subjective, cognitive, behavioral, and social and cultural components. Glock and Stark (1970) characterized religiosity in five dimensions: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential religiosity. Allport and Ross (1967) defined religiosity in two fundamental ways: intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsically motivated individuals use religion to further their interests or status. On the other hand, the individuals who possess intrinsic religiosity live their faith and primarily view it as a means to an end. These individuals internalize their faith's entire doctrine, discover their ultimate reason for living in religion, and align their wants with their religious convictions. In this study, the migrant workers' religiosity is defined as their strong belief in the Islamic faith, which permeates every aspect of their lives.

Given the paper's focus on female Muslim migrant workers, it is necessary to identify their characteristics. The status of Muslim women varies as per the many Muslim groups, each with its own set of attitudes and considerations towards women. Western public opinion, in general, disregards this diversity and is influenced mainly by ingrained beliefs that Islam is a monolithic religion that dominates every aspect of its followers' lives (El-Solh & Mabro, 2020). Around 12% of Muslims worldwide are Arabs. Indonesia has more Muslims than all Arab countries combined. However, Islam is inextricably linked to the Arab world, as the Quran was initially written in Arabic, and Islam's holiest places are located in the Middle East (Sechzer, 2004).

Java is home to about half of Indonesia's Muslim population. Because of this, Javanese culture affected a large number of Indonesian Muslim identities, including that of Muslim women. As Islam in the country evolved, the identities of the Javanese shifted as well. Until the Islamic resurgence in the 1980s, most Javanese adhered to a spiritualistic synthesis of Javanese traditions and normative Islam (Geertz, 1964; Rahiem & Rahim, 2021). Many Javanese were negligent in their observance of Islam's pillars, which included daily prayers, the annual fast, and the payment of religious alms (Smith-Hefner, 2007). Islam's revival was also highlighted by the widespread adoption of the *jilbab* [headcover worn by Indonesian Muslim women]. The headcover has a specific connotation that transcends religiosity; instead, it has been a manifestation of identity politics in opposition to former President Suharto's harsh policy toward political Islam and the Java-centric social construction of defeated womanhood (Dewi, 2012).

Indonesian Muslim women enjoy extraordinary autonomy. Many of them leave their homes to improve their and their families living conditions by working as migrant workers abroad. Now, the *hijab* [veil] has evolved into a symbol of modern Muslim women's identity, a tool that enables women to feel secure while living alone and participating actively in various

public areas, as well as a sign of society's continuous growth (Beta, 2014). Indonesian Islam is a tolerant, syncretic social and religious structure that is flexible and adaptive, with a moderate approach to faith and worship (Flynn, 1999). Indonesian Muslim migrant workers, with their Indonesian Islamic principles, are typically more versatile and able to adapt to new environments. Concerning the hijab, which has become a symbol of Muslim women's identity, Indonesian Muslim women are free to choose whether or not to wear veils. While some migrant workers wore veils with their employers' consent, many decided not to or were unable to do so while on the job. They should have sufficient freedom to practice their beliefs, pray, fast, dress in conformity to their faith, and perform other religious rites in any manner they choose, even at work, as negotiated and put into their contract.

Methods

In this study, the researchers employed exploratory qualitative research as a method of inquiry. Qualitative analysis is a practical way to investigate the complexity of the situation that is hard to ascertain using quantitative methods (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Maxwell, 2009; Strauss, 1987). The dynamic phenomena investigated were the perspectives and experiences of Indonesian female migrant workers, mostly domestic workers, in negotiating their religious lives in Hong Kong.

Data collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observation of Indonesian female migrant workers' halaqas [Islamic study groups]. A purposive sample strategy was utilized to recruit individuals. The sample criteria chosen for sample participants were female Indonesian Muslim migrant workers who had worked in Hong Kong for at least five years and were keen to share their ideas and experiences.

Halaqa activities were examined in the following mosques and Islamic centers: the Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre, and the Ammar Mosque and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Center in Wan Chai. These two locations were chosen because religious activities in these two locations were primarily organized by Muslim women migrant workers in collaboration with mosque administrators.

The second primary source of information was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants provided insights into important topics that researchers unfamiliar with their social and cultural structures would not have thought of (Kozleski, 2017). The researchers interpreted the migrant workers' responses by looking at what they said and the social contexts in which they had expressed it.

Participants

Researchers attempted to recruit study participants from various backgrounds; however, six of the eight migrant workers interviewed were from East Java, one from Central Java, and one from West Java. This bias replicates the origins of the majority of the migrant workers who work in Hong Kong and originated from East Java (see Figure 5). Furthermore, Muridah, the researchers' first point of contact, was from Malang, East Java, and she referred some other

migrant workers from East Java to be interviewed. Domestic workers made up the entire sample. Yet, despite this, they differed in terms of age and their length of stay in Hong Kong (see Table 1 below).

Figure 5: Provinces of Origin of Indonesian Migrant Workers Employed in February 2021

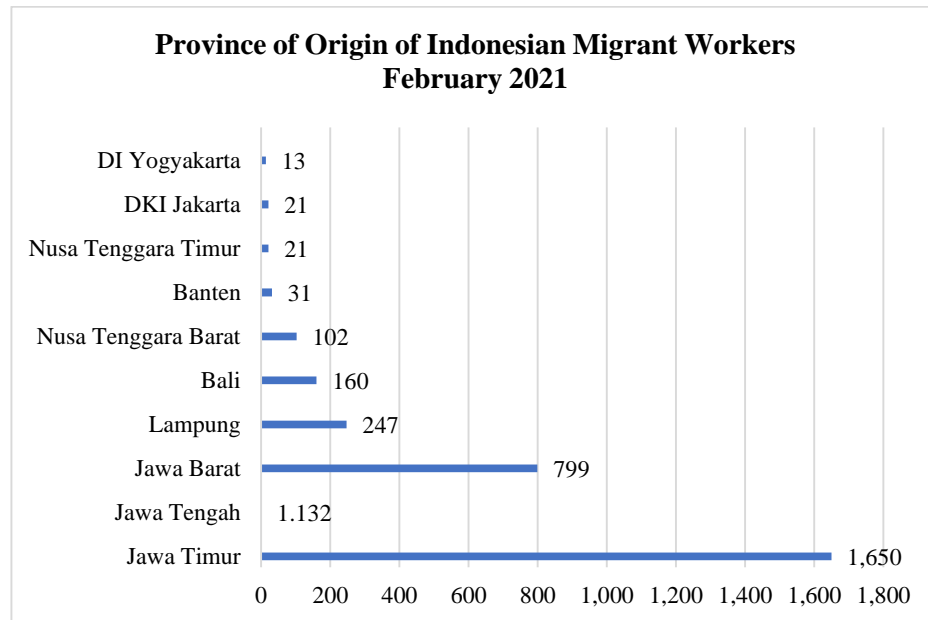


Table 1: Summary of the Participants of the Study

No	Pseudonyms	Age	Origin	Year started working	Occupation
1.	Titi	29	Ponorogo, East Java	2010	Domestic worker
2.	Laila	28	Madiun, East Java	2012	Domestic worker
3.	Munawarah	30	Sukabumi, West Java	2012	Domestic worker
4.	Hartanti	32	Jombang, East Java	2010	Domestic worker
5.	Diah	30	Blitar, East Java	2011	Domestic worker
6.	Muridah	36	Malang, East Java	2000	Domestic worker
7.	Ngatmini	29	Blitar, East Java	2013	Domestic worker
8.	Dewi	24	Indramayu, Central Java	2014	Domestic worker

The researchers were prepared to interview more people, but after interviewing these eight migrant workers and discovering the consistency in their responses, the researchers concluded that the data was already saturated. This practice is aligned with Saunders et al.'s (2016) definition of saturation as a sufficient consistency of the participant's responses to the research question and framework.

Data analysis and rigor

To procure ethical clearance for the research, the research design and data collection protocols were submitted and then confirmed and agreed upon in July 2018 by the Center for Research and Publication UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (No: PUSLITPEN-LP2M).

To ensure fairness in the interview, iterative questioning, proper debriefing sessions, reassurance to speak honestly, information on the study's voluntary nature, and the freedom to withdraw at any time were used. Participants were informed of the study's involvement and objective from the start and signed consent forms. Furthermore, the identity of the participants has been anonymized, through the use of pseudonyms, in order to allow the participants to talk openly.

Each migrant worker was interviewed in Bahasa Indonesian for 40-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. During the interviews, the researchers took notes that were also analyzed. The analyses and transcripts were written in Indonesian. A native English speaker who has lived in Indonesia for over ten years and is familiar with its social contexts translated the interview extracts included in this publication.

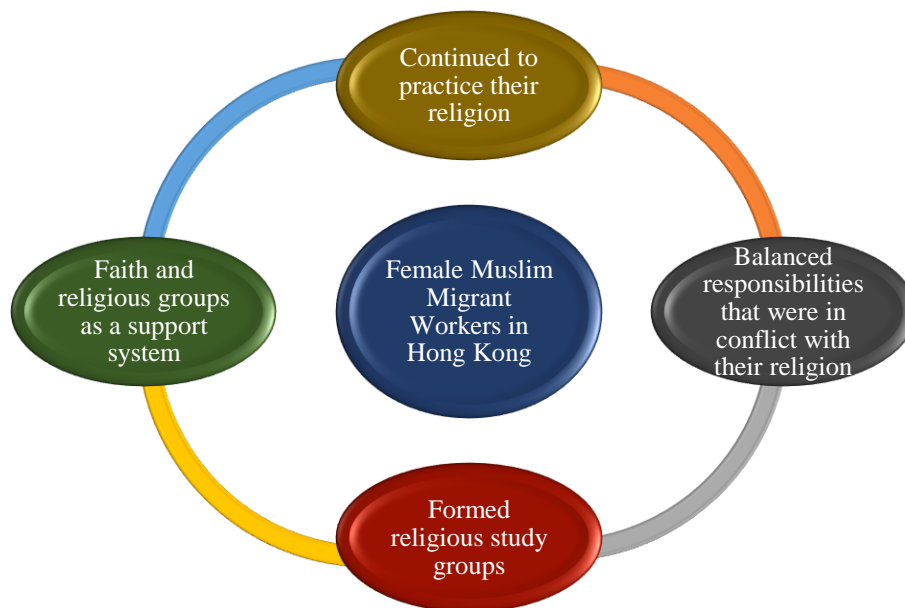
The researchers used thematic analysis to elicit insights and experiences from the Indonesian female migrant workers about negotiating religious practices in Hong Kong. Thematic analysis is a flexible technique for analyzing and documenting qualitative interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The concepts were codified, classified, and rectified into themes. The following steps were taken: first, each researcher read the interview transcripts and memos to obtain a greater sense of the entire interview. Second, each researcher generated deductive and inductive coding across the entire dataset using units of meaning. Then, each researcher categorized all of the related codes. Later in the process, the researchers discussed, compared, and contrasted their definitions. Then, they examined potential themes, defined them, and assigned names to the themes. The themes included a summary explanation of the findings derived from the data analysis. Themes were considered significant if they were consistently identified in the data or reflected an essential aspect of the research question (Graff et al., 2018).

The researchers discussed the study's trustworthiness using several of Shenton's measures (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was determined by comparing the findings of previous research to the results of the study. Transferability was accomplished by including extensive background information about both the analysis and the researcher's stance. An overview of the study's design, data gathering, and analysis ensured its reliability. Confirmability was ensured through the triangulation of the data source.

Results

How do Indonesian Muslim female migrant workers negotiate their religious lives while working in Hong Kong? The data reveals: 1) despite their employers' restrictions, Muslim female migrant workers continued to practice their religion; 2) they devised the most useful solutions for carrying out work duties that were incompatible with their religion; 3) they formed a halaqa in several mosques across Hong Kong and met regularly; 4) migrant workers drew strength from their faith, and religious study groups aided them enormously in overcoming and resolving life's difficulties. (see Figure 6)

Figure 6: Results of the Study



Continuing to practice religion even though it is prohibited

Carrying out religious orders, such as five-time daily prayers, is fundamental for devout Muslims, so workers often make efforts to worship while at work. However, not all employers allow their employees to worship. Many workers received threats that they would be fired if they continued to conduct worship sessions while working. According to Titi, a 29-year-old migrant worker from Ponorogo, East Java, she received the following warning: “When I first arrived, my employer's family told me bluntly that I would not be permitted to pray in their home. They threatened to terminate my contract if I ever prayed or fasted.”

Laila, a 28-year-old Muslim woman from Madiun, East Java, was also barred from practicing her faith: “My employer forbade me from praying in the house, not even in my room at night. She explained that it was because she disliked the idea of me praying.”

Employers ban workers from worshipping during work hours for many reasons. Diah, a migrant worker from Blitar, East Java, who has been in Hong Kong for eight years, claimed the employer was concerned about worshipping interfering with her work. Her boss once saw her praying for *Dhuhr* [midday prayer], but after Diah explained the value of *salat* [prayer] to her, as a result, he let her pray during work hours.

I was very constrained from praying in my employer's house because we obviously have different faiths. My boss is a devout Christian. My boss found me once praying during the Dhuhr prayer and reprimanded me to not do this at his home again. “I hired you here not to pray but to work,” he explained. He told me once more, “You may pray as much as you want at night instead.” I attempted to respond to this by posing questions such as, “who provides you with food and who provides you with life in this world? I only pray for a few minutes.” Thankfully, he then realized how

important praying was to me and never stopped me from praying again. (Diah).

Diah's employer approved her worshipping, but Diah says she must carefully manage her prayer time so that her boss does not think she is doing her job improperly.

"I prayed in a hidden place, especially during mid-day prayer, while for the afternoon prayer, I could do it more freely because the majority of household work had already been complete by this time. It wasn't easy, but I tried to make praying a vital part of my Muslim duties." (Diah).

Compared to Diah, who has difficulty performing midday and afternoon Prayer, Munawarah found it easy to perform all her prayers except for the sunset prayer because she had to prepare dinner. So, she worked around this issue by combining the *Maghrib* [sunset] and *Isha* [night] prayers. During Ramadan, her employer allowed Munawarah to fast.

At home, I have no severe constraints in performing five times daily prayers. For Fajr [early morning prayer], I do it earlier while my boss is still sleeping. For Dhuhr and Ashr [afternoon prayers], I am able to do it freely since my boss is not at home. Only during Maghrib, I find it difficult since it is the time for preparing dinner. Therefore, I do both Maghrib and Isha at one time. While fasting during Ramadhan, my boss allowed me to do so, which I really appreciate. (Siti Munawarah)

Murida agreed with Munawarah that when it was impossible for them to worship, they used Islamic religious teaching of flexibility. For instance, by combining two prayers at the same time.

"We should be smart about time management; for example, we can combine two prayers at the same time. We can arrange the time; for example, the Dhuhr prayer and Ashr prayer are combined and performed simultaneously due to the workload at that time. We can therefore plan our time following our employer's working hours." (Muridah)

The migrant workers stressed that not all employers disallowed religious duties. Some employers even allowed staff to work while wearing a headscarf. Whereas Ngatmini had religious freedom with her prior boss, she did not have it with her present boss. Ngatmini said she had to keep worshipping, generally in secret.

I have two different stories about how I managed to pray during the work shift. I've worked for two different families. My first boss let me pray and wear a headscarf at home. As a result, I had no trouble implementing daily religious rituals. However, following that, I am currently working with a boss who forbids me from praying. As a result, I try to find an effective alternative and a positive solution for dealing with such constraints. (Ngatmini)

Hartanti, from Jombang, East Java, has been living in Hong Kong for eight years. She underlined the necessity of obeying religious orders and prioritizing them when accepting a job. Hartanti said she never missed a prayer. Hartanti spent four years in Singapore before

moving to Hong Kong. Hartanti believes that requesting this provision be included in her work contract is one method to ensure her freedom of worship.

Religion is important to me. As a result, during my interview, prior to signing the contract, I always inquire about the rules or agreement for performing prayers. If they allow me to do so, I agree to work with them; otherwise, I refuse. This is critical, and it is my top priority. When I sign a contract, there should be an agreement in the clause that allows me to do so, and I can therefore sue if the agreement is later violated. (Hartanti)

Negotiating religious rights before signing a contract, according to Hartanti, is critical. When signing a contract of agreement, each migrant worker should keep this in mind. As a result, employers cannot arbitrarily prohibit employees from worshipping.

Everybody should have a clear contract that guarantees the right to perform religious duties. Every boss with whom I made a contract agreed to it. There was, in fact, even agreement on the length of prayer and the manner in which it should be performed; it takes less than 15 minutes. As a result, I informed my friends that it is critical that it be stated in the contract. (Hartanti)

Balanced responsibilities that conflicted with religion

These migrant workers also explained how to perform work tasks that contradicted with Islamic *Sharia* [religious law], such as direct contact with pork and subsequently preparing it, which is one of Islam's primary forbidden foods. When forced to do so as part of their domestic chores, they must find a compromise. Munawarah talked about resolving this matter.

I cook pork almost every day. When I go to pray, I clean my hands with soap, even though I did not come into direct contact with it because I suspect there is a trace of pork. I wash my hands several times with water and once with powder. It's not enough for me to simply clean it with water. (Siti Munawarah)

It is difficult for a devout Muslim like Munawarah to commit an act that is forbidden by religion. She revealed that this was a perplexing situation. So, she tried to persuade herself that she was doing a job, and that she did not eat the pork. She also stated that she used her own cooking utensils to ensure that her food was free of pork.

"I only perform my responsibilities as a housemaid at home. According to Islamic teachings, pork is haram [forbidden], so I don't eat it when I cook it for my non-Muslim employers. When I cook for myself, I use my own kitchen utensils to avoid cross-contamination with those that have been used to cook pork previously." (Munawarah)

Creating a religious support group

Migrant laborers often get one to two days off every week. They use their day off to establish religious learning circles, or halaqas, among other activities. The researcher observed halaqa

sites. Halaqa is usually performed in parks, mosques, or hired gathering places. Hong Kong's government does not forbid migrant workers from partaking in these weekly events, provided they do not litter or cause a nuisance. Following migrant workers' days off, two to three groups usually congregate in one location.

When the researchers went to the mosques of Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Center at Wan Chai on a Sunday morning, they found migrant workers engaged in religious learning circle activities. They began with *Dhuha* prayer [sunnah or voluntary morning prayer after sunrise] at 9 a.m., followed by Qur'an reading or religious learning. The learning circle lasted until 3 p.m., with a brief intermission at 12:30 p.m. for Dhuhr prayer and lunch.

Diah was appointed leader of a group in the Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Center in Wan Chai. Her term was two years. Her group meets every Sunday morning and has 30-50 members. Members are urged to wear the group's uniform, a bright blue long dress and a white headscarf, but might also wear something similar. Diah believes that religious learning circles help migrant workers learn more about their faith. A cleric is asked to teach Islam or lead a religious discussion. Migrant employees can ask questions about Islam that they do not understand.

Participating in halaqa is beneficial for both social engagement and religious knowledge. Members can share their experiences and ask questions if they are having difficulties so that we can help to find a better solution. The study of religious teachings can protect us from the free lifestyle that is popular here. Some of my coworkers are currently living such a lifestyle, which is an inappropriate way of passing the time. In this group, we have a religious teacher, such as Ustadz [teacher] Muhaimin, who is available to teach us religious injunctions about rituals and social interactions on a regular basis. He is a religious officer who was sent to Hong Kong by a Malaysian religious organization to work as a religious guide. He does, however, mix with the Indonesian society because he is originally from Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. His congregation eagerly awaits his lectures due to his broad and moderate religious knowledge.
(Diah)

The discussions at this religious teaching circle covered themes including worship, purification, prayer procedures like combining two prayers, reading the Quran, and other matters concerning Hong Kong workers. Ammar Wan Chai has three groups with varying activity days. Each group stays connected and together arranges large-scale group recitation events. Members of the group are expected to contribute, decide on halaqa matters, and participate in other social activities.

The researchers went to the Ammar Wan Chai Mosque on another day, where another study group gathered. This group is led by Muridah, chosen by the migrant workers for her long service in Hong Kong (15 years). Muridah's study group wears a blue and white outfit. They meet every Friday at 10 a.m. at the Ammar Wan Chai Mosque. The group activity begins with a *Dhuha* prayer and then an Islamic studies discussion. Besides that, this study group also organizes cultural arts activities like *Qasida* [an Islamic song done at religious holidays, performed while playing the tambourine]. Their activities are similar to religious learning circles in Indonesia and are significantly inspired by cultural traditions.

Each religious learning circle group has its own uniform, consisting of long Muslim clothes and a head covering. The members still reveal their faces, hands, and even wrists, as in Muslim Indonesian dress. Most uniform colors are white and black, blue, beige, or other muted colors. They may not wear headscarves at work because of employer restrictions, but they do so during study group events.

Religious faith and religious support groups as a source of strength

Being a Muslim and following Islamic teachings in daily life is very important to these Muslim female migrant workers. Munawarah said, "Life is perceived to be more meaningful as it searches for God's will and finds wellbeing in social life." Munawarah went on to say that she values more of her religion in Hong Kong.

Since I arrived in Hong Kong, Islam has remained in my heart. I'm still praying and reading the Quran regularly. To preserve and strengthen my faith, I participate in religious studies at the Ammar Wan Chai Mosque. My ritual activities are improving as my understanding of Islam grows. Our religious teachers teach and guide us to become more pious and closer to God through prayer. (Munawarah)

Diah sees the benefits of the Hong Kong lifestyle, such as being disciplined and punctual, which influences her perspective and understanding of life. She realizes that she should not only pursue endless materialistic happiness but also prepare for the afterlife. Her life has become more balanced as a result of her prayers.

"Just as our bosses expect us to work properly and on time, we are also trained to do so in prayer. Praying is very important to me because it creates a balance between mundane and eternal matters. After all, the pursuit of materialism is endless. As a result, praying in any circumstance is critical." (Diah)

The religious learning circle allows the migrant employees to meet other Indonesian Muslim female workers. Ngatmini said there are around 70 groups distributed across Hong Kong's regions. The weekly meetings bond the members. They periodically welcome Indonesian celebrities, artists, and preachers to share their experiences. Ngatmini further indicated that the organization had generated funds for religious, social, and halaqa activities and donations for those in need.

Another story came from Muridah, who described her activities in the mosque with the group. They meet every Friday to recite the Quran and discuss various Islamic topics. Muridah considered the time she spent in the study group to be well spent. She explained, "Rather than wasting time playing, we should gather here to improve our Islamic knowledge and share our experiences, relieve boredom after work or relieve longing for the family."

They benefit from religious activities or Islamic study in mosques. Diah said she preferred studying the Quran and participating in religious events to free lifestyle activities like karaoke, pubs, and nightclubs. Her faith grew, and she became more diligent in worship. In Hong Kong, she prays on time; in Indonesia, not so. Her work ethic in Hong Kong encourages her to value time and pray on time. "In Hong Kong, I feel like my religiosity is growing stronger.

I have become more disciplined in my prayer life. I used to put off praying until the last minute. Here, I understand the value of time.” (Diah)

Discussion

Religion is central to Muslim identity (Hassan, 2007; Oppong, 2013; Rahiem, 2018; Rahiem et al., 2017; Schlosser et al., 2009); religion is developed into a potent source of personal identification and collective association (Peek, 2005); and religion and belief play a significant role in Indonesians’ daily lives and are an integral part of both an individual’s and a nation’s identity (Colbran, 2010; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1999). The Five Pillars of Islam are five basic and necessary activities that all Muslims must undertake and are considered the complete ritual structure of the Islamic religion (Hitchcock, 2005). The Five Pillars of Islam are: 1) *shahadat* [the profession of faith], 2) *salat* [prayer], 3) *zakat* [almsgiving], 4) *siyam* [fasting], and 5) *hajj* [pilgrimage] (Colledge, 1999). Muslim prayer is five times daily to increase physical and mental alertness, attention, and recreation (Syed, 2003). Muslim prayer involves several bodily postures and meaningful ‘mantras’ recited during each pose (Ridzwan et al., 2011). Every healthy adult Muslim must fast for thirty or thirty-one days from dawn to dusk during Ramadhan. Fasting usually lasts 13–15 hours each day, with free access to meals before and after (Ahmed, 2000). Praying and fasting occur during working hours; however, not all employers allow these practices. It is difficult for devoted Muslims to ignore their religious commitments because their employers are unaware of Islamic rites and traditions.

Indonesian Muslim female migrant workers interviewed in Hong Kong for this study stated that they continued to practice their religion differently and under various circumstances. Despite living thousands of miles from their homeland, the female migrant workers maintained their Muslim identities, felt obligated to practice their faith, and expressed a desire to continue doing so. They testified that their conviction grew stronger as they lived in a non-Muslim society. Their understanding of Islam has grown while working away from home. Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) investigated how religion was articulated in the domestic space of the immigrant Muslims in America. They concluded that daily rituals and regular observances had been thoughtfully incorporated into the everyday life of the immigrant Muslim. These activities bring religion to life and make it meaningful.

While the immigrants studied by Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) came with their families, lived in their own homes, and were free to perform religious duties, these domestic workers lived in their employers’ homes, and many workers had to confront their bosses about praying at work. They highly value praying – *salat* and fasting – *siyam* during Ramadhan and believe that it is mandatory. They were concerned about being prohibited from praying in the homes of their employers. *Salat* and *siyam* are two of several activities classified as *ibadat* [the rites and practices of worship] and are considered the most important traditions. Most Muslims would agree that regardless of their level of conformity, all Muslims must regularly perform the *salat* (Bowen, 1989). *Salat* is an act of remembrance and humility; the person who prays becomes the one who presides (Winchester, 2008). *Salat* and *siyam* are two fundamental aspects of worship that are typically introduced to children. As *salat* and *siyam* were instilled in children from an early age, for many, being unable to perform these two forms of worship is tantamount to losing their faith.

Some migrant workers were aware of their need for prayer and negotiated it with their employers before signing the contract. As a result, they had more considerable discretion to

carry out their religious duties. Meanwhile, some workers were unaware and had to explain and confront their employers when they were prohibited from praying at the workplace. Some employers have threatened to terminate workers' contracts if they continue to pray and fast at home. Employers require Indonesian workers to comply with local work ethics and lifestyle standards rather than recognize domestic helpers' culture and religion (Ho, 2015). Home care aides work in an isolated setting with little supervision and guidance, making them more susceptible to abuse and exploitation (Green & Ayalon, 2018). As a result, they were more vulnerable to worker rights violations and emotional abuse. For these migrant workers, not being able to perform basic religious rituals must be extremely distressing and challenging.

As defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), religious freedom includes the right to pray. Individuals have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to possess, adopt, maintain, or change religion or belief (Joseph & Castan, 2013). Externally, this right means that everyone has the freedom to teach, practice, worship, and observe their religion or belief alone or in a community with others, in private or public. All migrant workers should be informed of their rights and comprehend their contracts of employment. They should talk with their employers about how they might fulfill religious commitments while working. Many employers were unfamiliar with Islam and misunderstood its rituals. Fear for their workers' health owing to all-day fasting, the assumption that praying would take a long time, and those who considered praying as harmful religious fanaticism and even extremism were detected.

As per the 2011 Hong Kong Population Census, Hong Kong's total population was just over 7 million, with 93.6% of the population being of Chinese ethnic origin (Ho, 2015). The most popular religions among ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong are Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (Constable, 2010). The remaining 6.4% of the total population was non-Chinese ethnic groups, with Indonesians and Filipinos being the two largest groups. Indonesian domestic workers began outnumbering their Filipino counterparts in 2009, becoming Hong Kong's largest non-Chinese population. In the 2000s, the influx of Indonesian Muslim domestic helpers to Hong Kong fueled the growth of the Muslim population, which reached 270,000 in 2012 (Ho, 2015). Despite this, Islam remains novel and foreign to most Hong Kong natives; therefore, further dialogue is necessary to understand whom they employ and who continually lives in their homes. Once this understanding is gained, both parties can agree on thoughtful adaptation and adjustment, encouraging mutual respect and greater communication, allowing a better working relationship to flourish.

Over half of the Muslim population in Hong Kong consists of Indonesian Muslim women employed as contracted domestic helpers by families. They are a growing community that plays a vital role in the lives of numerous local families, particularly when it comes to caring for children and the elderly. Since 2008, Indonesian domestic helpers have surpassed Pakistani and Chinese Muslims as the largest Muslim population in Hong Kong and the largest ethnic community and foreign domestic workforce (Ho, 2015). They have encountered various difficulties, but their presence also alters the domestic and public space in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, regardless of their large numbers, Indonesian Muslim domestic helpers are still politically and socially marginalized and have a low socioeconomic status. The decision to work as a domestic worker in Hong Kong comes at a material and immaterial cost. Studies show that foreign domestic workers, both Filipino and Indonesian, are the most vulnerable groups in terms of social welfare, marital status, economic security, and having psychological distress (Lau et al., 2009).

Two-thirds of Indonesian female workers come from impoverished areas (The World Bank, 2017). The option to leave their villages and seek work abroad is seen as a way to improve their and their family's economic status. They are adaptive and willing to make many compromises to keep their jobs. The women in this research said they stopped praying and fasting when their bosses forced them to choose between their faith and their jobs. Participants also described difficulties executing acts they believed were forbidden by Islam. They would occasionally provide beer or wine after meals, cook using rum or sake, or clean, cook and serve pork. They battled Islamic principles and chose to be more pragmatic; they negotiated their values and grew more adaptable. They may perform their tasks as long as they do not consume prohibited or non-halal substances; we cannot appreciate their sacrifices to keep their jobs unless we understand their background.

Sunday is usually the weekly off-day for domestic workers in Hong Kong. It is common for them to spend hours in Hong Kong's public spaces, such as streets and parks, with other migrant workers from their nations (Chung et al., 2020). Muslim workers also congregate in mosques and form religious organizations. Religious sociologists have investigated the importance of religion in retaining group identity and solidarity, notably among immigrants (Ebaugh, 2003; Min & Kim, 2001). Hamid (2015) researched male Hindu Tamil migrant workers from India working in Singapore. During their day-offs, these Tamil migrant workers frequently gathered to experience homely feelings or a sense of belonging amongst themselves.

Nakonz and Shik (2009) conducted an ethnographic study on the plight of Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong and their religious coping strategies. One of the findings was that these Filipino migrant workers formed charismatic religious groups to promote their coping strategies. Religious activities held on Sundays in churches by the migrant workers' group served as an essential network of solidarity (Nakonz & Shik, 2009). Hirschman's study of immigrant communities in the United States of America demonstrated that churches and other religious groups play a critical role in community building and are a significant source of social and economic help for people in need (Hirschman, 2004). Religious institutions provide comfort and a sense of family for those away from home, spiritual strength for those who face daily hardships and loneliness, and a haven from the isolation associated with live-in household work (Lau et al., 2009). Constable (2010), who also conducted an ethnographic study of migrant workers in Hong Kong, concluded that these migrant workers viewed and engaged with religion in a variety of ways during their periods of migration by joining religious groups that replicated their ancestral religion for comfort, or experimented with new religions or denominations that appealed to them in the modern global context.

The women in this study portray those who seek solace in religious study groups. The religious groups fulfill the spiritual needs of migrant workers, and membership in a group provides numerous non-religious materials, psychological, and social benefits, including access to community networks, economic opportunities, educational resources, and peer trust and support (Peek, 2005).

Religious rituals, such as salat, empower practitioners by reaffirming their commitment to Islam and establishing membership in a community of believers, allowing religious Muslims to pursue novel and diverse interpretations of Islam (Henkel, 2005). Peek (2005) illustrated that when immigrants move from a society where they were a religious majority to one where they are a religious minority, they increase their religiosity. Peek investigated Hindus from India, Israeli Jews, Pakistani Muslims, and Vietnamese Buddhists who immigrated to the United States. Peek (2005) concluded that religion could play a more significant role in

immigrants' self-and group definitions than it did in their homelands, where religion was often taken for granted or played a minor role.

The eight migrant workers interviewed for this study revealed that their willingness and ability to compromise their religiosity to negotiate certain dilemmatic situations or religiously questionable tasks had become a critical factor in their advancement and achievement at work, which directly affects their economy and family welfare. The migrant workers emphasized that their adaptability should not be viewed as a threat to their identity; instead, it should be viewed as an asset. Therefore, religion can be used to maintain personal and social distinctiveness in a multicultural setting (Rayaprol, 1997). As religion is marginalized in pluralistic and secular communities, followers become more conscious of their traditions and frequently more determined to pass on their beliefs, values, and behaviors. Thus, religion continues to play a significant role in structuring the self's hierarchy of identities (Peek, 2005).

Conclusion

The study's migrant workers discussed balancing religious obligations with work responsibilities and how becoming more religious improved their attitude toward work and performance. Religious rituals have been shown to improve self-regulation (Koole et al., 2017), and religiosity is strongly associated with life satisfaction (Bergan & McConatha, 2001). Religious rituals and support groups assist the migrant workers in adjusting to life alone in a foreign country. The weekly day-off privilege has enabled migrant workers to connect with others from similar countries and faiths. It paved the way for the establishment of a religious study group. Given that Indonesian migrant workers account for the majority of Hong Kong's Muslim population, the Indonesian embassy could assist and support these groups by, for example, hiring moderate Islamic teachers. This practice may also help prevent groups from becoming radicalized if radical teachers are present.

These migrant workers should not be the only ones forced to make sacrifices in order to maintain the work agreement. Employers should not use migrant workers' fear of losing their jobs as an excuse to treat them arbitrarily, such as prohibiting them from worship. It is critical for both parties, employers and employees, to understand each other and clarify previously misunderstood points, articulate the workers' and employers' concerns, and have the work contract explicitly state the parties' rights and obligations. The contract will safeguard both parties' responsibilities and privileges. Additionally, both the host country and origin country's migration labor policies and programs must benefit all types of migrant workers by maximizing the benefits of migration while mitigating risks. This is best accomplished by professionalizing and modernizing the sector, ensuring that migrant workers earn more income and are better protected, regardless of the type of job or destination.

This study enrolled a small number of subjects and was conducted over a brief period. The researchers recommend further research that involves a larger sample size and employs qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the religiosity and adaptation of Indonesian female migrant workers in Hong Kong.

Author Contributions

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