

Evidence of the paradoxical effect of social network support: a study among Filipino domestic workers in China

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Abstract

Labor migrants are at an increased risk for poor mental health. Post-migration stressors contribute significantly to this risk. Social network supports are vitally important to protect health but little is known about the role of social network supports among labor migrants. The current study evaluated the role of migration stressors on poor mental health among Filipino female domestic workers (FDW) and whether family and friend social network support (SNS) modified this relationship. Data were collected from 261 FDWs in Macau, China from May to September 2013. Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to test for direct and moderating effects of social networks on psychological distress. Post-migration stress was associated with increased anxiety, depression, somatization, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. SNS from family was not associated with the four psychological symptoms nor did it modify the association between stress and these symptoms. SNS from friends was positively associated with these symptoms, and significantly moderated the relationship between stress and these symptoms. Counterintuitive to the known buffering effects of SNS, greater SNS was associated with greater psychological symptoms among FDWs exposed to post-migration stressors. The present findings suggest that reliance on SNS to cope with post-migration stressors may worsen psychological distress.

Keywords: Social Network Support, Migration Stress, Mental Health, Filipino, Female Domestic Workers