Beyond Solidarity: Migrant-on-Migrant Exploitation in Agricultural labor Economies

Abdelaziz Abdalla Alowais[1 &2]
Senior Economist, Department of Statistics and Community Development [1]
PhD Candidate, The British University in Dubai [2]

Abstract
This study examines the structural and intersectional determinants of migrant-on-migrant exploitation within informal economies by dissecting cultural narratives of solidarity and systematic inequalities. The study uses six months of immersive ethnographic observation in the central regions of Sharjah, including Al Dhaid, Al Madam, and Maliha, areas known for their conservative social environment. The study focused on informal labor dynamics within the agricultural sector, where migrant workers are highly concentrated. It was observed that migrant laborers are often exploited by other migrant intermediaries, operating silently and informally in violation of the UAE's strict labor laws. The study findings expose how migrant entrepreneurs exploit migrant workers under the appearance of solidarity and mutual aid, while states outsourcing labor regulations to informal sectors. The study reveals that restrictive immigration policies like the Kafala system in the United Arab Emirates and racial hierarchies institutionalize precariousness, trap workers in a cycle of debt and surveillance. The cultural frameworks, like bayanihan (community unity), are weaponized to justify wage theft and reinforce vulnerabilities. The study highlights intersectional disparities with migrant women and racialized minorities enduring compounded exploitation in care and manual labor. The study has significant policy implications, advocating for portable labor rights, tech accountability, and intersectional protection in informal sectors. The study advances academic debates on migration and labor injustice and offers actionable frameworks to dismantle systematic complexities. This migrant-on-migrant exploitation remains largely invisible to local authorities due to the secrecy, confidentiality, and informal nature of these arrangements.

1 Introduction

Migrant labor exploitation in the informal sector has become a major issue in the modern globalization process due to the intersection of structural vulnerabilities, immigrant policies, and neoliberalism. (Agarwala, 2024). Global employment is estimated to be 61% informal employment, where migrant workers are more represented in agriculture, construction, and domestic jobs. (ILO, 2018). These workers have been subjected to wage theft, hazardous working conditions, forced labor, and human trafficking, among other things. (LeBaron, 2021). On the one hand, solidarity is viewed as a coping strategy that unites migrant communities (Fotaki, 2022). It contributes to the emergence of situations where co-nationals, who are seen as business people or brokers, abuse their fellow countrymen, using concern for their well-being as a cover (Fotaki, 2022). For instance, cultural beliefs such as 'helping our own' are deployed to justify low wages, long working hours, and documentation (Messenger et al., 2007).

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite formal labor protections, migrant-on-migrant exploitation persists within informal economies, where cultural coercion, economic dependency, and the misuse of shared nationality create hidden systems of control and abuse. Coercive dynamics within cultures of migrants perpetuate continued degradation and oppression, and excuse injustice for those who willingly commit exploitative acts in the name of enforcing cultural norms or cultural boost among their groups. (Ringhofer, 2023). They make abuse a 'price worth paying' to access the opportunity elsewhere, thus erasing exploitative practices while protecting the perpetrators, mostly migrant businesspeople. (Hammersley, 2024). This perpetuates inequity in power relations because employers use the shared nationality to control the legal and economic vulnerability of the workers. (Ness, 2023). For instance, denying documents like passports with the aim of 'protecting' the migrants subjects them to debt bondage (Niezna, 2022). At the same time, in global capitalism, which depends on cheap and disposable migrant workers, individuals are discussed in academic and policy studies as 'bad actors' (Niezna, 2022). This continues to create a cycle in which exploitation is masked as interpersonal conflict, and there is also no focus on the system. However, it is essential to examine how cultural discourses and structural deficiencies work together to help eradicate the exploitation of migrant workers (Spitzer et al., 2023).

1.3 Research Gap

Despite growing interest in the treatment of migrants, there is still a disconnection and a lack of cross-linkage in the existing literature on the complexities associated with the intersectional approach and structural factors (Wyly, 2024). These factors aggravate the vulnerability of migrants, such as racism, sexism, and the push for exclusionary labor policies and supply chain consumerism (Shewly et al., 2024). For instance, migrant women experience double oppression as carers and employees in the domestic sphere, while racialized people struggle with the legal justice system (Henderson, 2021). This cycle continues because the state and other forms of support enablers, such as agencies, are left untouched.

1.4 Research Aim

Based on the above considerations, this study examines how structural factors such as structural inequality, intersectional justice, and migration affect labor exploitation in the informal economy. It examines how immigration policies and concepts of global capitalism encourage migrants' exploitation by other migrants and how gender, race, and class enhance the vulnerability of victims, the role of digital technologies, and the possibility of grassroots movements. The study contradicts ideas that blame exploitation on cultural or personal deficiencies.

1.5 Research Questions

1.   RQ1: How do immigration policies and global capitalism incentivize migrant-on-migrant exploitation?
2.   RQ2: How do gender, race, and class intersect to heighten vulnerability to exploitation?
3.   RQ3: What roles do digital tools and grassroots play in resistance strategies?

1.6 Research Contributions

This study innovates in two ways by adopting intersectionality as the framework for analyzing migrant labor exploitation and by applying structural critique to identify the underlying causes of exploitation in the context of migration. Unlike earlier studies, it does not separate cultural, economic, or policy aspects but combines all of them and applies the fragments of labor economics, critical race theory, and digital sociology to draw connections mapping complicity. (Ehrenberg et al., 2021; Van Andel & Loots, 2022). The study presented a comparative regional perspective on the migrant-on-migrant exploitations in the Central regions of Sharjah including Al Dhaid, Al Madam, and Maliha, which helped to identify international forms of exploitation and resistance. In terms of the approach employed, this study incorporates ethnography to estimate the degree of mental health effects, which has not been researched extensively in existing literature. (Sattar et al., 2021). In general, the study significantly contributes to theoretical and academic discussions while supporting migrant advocacy initiatives through the suggested ideas of portable labor rights and digital solidarity platforms.

2 Literature Review

Exploitation among migrants is shaped by cultural norms, structural enablers, and intersectional blind spots that hide abuses within informal economies. This study explores propositions that uncover how shared identity, informal power, and systemic inequalities sustain migrant-on-migrant exploitation.

2.1 Cultural Framing of Exploitation

The exploitation of workers through the cultural rhetoric of helping fellow countrymen is a phenomenon that is grounded in socio-economic relations within transnationalism and ethnicity. While the motivation involved may seem noble in the form of helping fellow countrymen, this cultural lens may hide the prevalence of abuse, such as control of important legal documents (Ruiz, 2023). This control, particularly over passports, is a tool for the oppression that maintains a caste system of migrant workers that allows for their exploitation (Vorobeva, 2024).

The entrepreneurial activities of migrants are carried out in informal economies where inequalities are most evident. Ethnic solidarity and cultural endowment may attract fellow migrants to patronize the businesses of fellow migrants, hence creating a sense of togetherness and belonging. (Hamish & Vupenyu, 2020). However, one might argue that this seemingly protective environment enables employers to exploit other vulnerable fellow migrants. (Salamanca & Alcaraz, 2022). Furthermore, the idea of 'helping compatriots' can justify not only control over essential resources but also other forms of subjugation within diaspora communities. (Vorobeva, 2024; Yasin et al., 2024). For instance, migrants involved in bureaucratic manipulation may abuse their position of authority to control the needs of their fellow migrants for employment and shelter, resulting in negative power relations among the migrants (Ruiz, 2023; Szőke, 2023).

The situational context is further compounded by structural factors, which include a lack of proper job opportunities in the global north and social and economic marginalization in receiving countries (Murphy, 2004). These constraints push many migrant entrepreneurs to informal or semi-informal sectors where labor exploitation is the new norm and a survival strategy. This has created a cycle of exploitation since there are no laws protecting business owners and their employees (David &

Terstriep, 2025; Gumede & Moyo, 2023; Raimi et al., 2023). Thus, while presenting themselves as united and supportive of one another, these practices reveal exploitation that remains unprotested, especially if read through the lens of culture as a fraternity.

Overall, the framing of exploitation as help to the needy reveals major social and economic issues in migrant businesses. This highlights the need to provide migrants with solutions that cater to the purpose of their migration as well as the vices that some individuals in society exploit. The previous arguments would lead to propose:

P1- Migrant entrepreneurs exploit co-national workers under the appearance of solidarity and mutual aid, concealing power imbalances and abusive practices.

2.2 Structural Enablers

Policies camped within structural enablers, including the violation of labor laws and limited or exclusion of migrant workers from social protection, which in turn explain why informal labor relations are persistent globally. It is revealed that only 29% of migrant workers have access to social security benefits worldwide, which makes them vulnerable to unfavorable conditions such as debt bondage and forced labor in the worst forms during crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Dutta, 2021). These conditions are generally worsened by the weak legal frameworks that provide minimal protection to migrant workers (Kunpeuk et al., 2022). The lack of adequate legal protection is one of the main factors affecting migrant labor market outcomes. For instance, many migrants have low wages, no rights, no contract employment, or precarious work arrangements (Zhao & Tang, 2022). This is made worse by employers' desire to employ migrants, mainly because there is no local talent willing to work under such conditions, as noted by Wu and Xiao (2020). These arguments lead to propose:

P2- State practices that delegate labor oversight to informal sectors facilitate hidden exploitation and reduce accountability for migrant worker protections.

In addition, informal labor dynamics can be explained by the failure to implement existing labor laws, which make it possible for employers to exploit workers (Lee et al., 2024). This is due to the social exclusion of migrants from national social protection systems, which is seen in Thailand, where migrants are locked out of health insurance and unemployment benefits, meaning they rely on informal support (Kunpeuk et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024). This exclusion is systemic and helps maintain the exclusion of migrant workers from critical care structures when there is an economic recession or health emergency (Sohel et al., 2021). Thus, the situation of migrants shows the necessity of changes in labor legislation, integration of migrants into social protection systems, and strengthening of measures to protect the rights of migrants. In general, weak enforcement of labor laws combined with the general non-recognition and exclusion of migrant workers from social protection systems breed the growth of informal employment that perpetuates cycles of poverty and forced labor. It is important to address these structural ways to enable the living and working conditions of migrant workers worldwide. The previous arguments propose:

P3- Restrictive migration and labour policies across various countries reinforce structural precarity, trapping migrant workers in cycles of debt, dependency, and limited legal protection.

2.3 Intersectional Blind Spots

The literature on gendered exploitation in domestic work shows that women and other minorities are more vulnerable and affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies by Yavorsky et al. (2021) and Haney and Barber (2022) established that the pandemic acted as a magnifying glass, revealing the covert nature of domestic work where women, besides providing unpaid care work, have other risks, which include sexual harassment and wage theft. For example, according to Giammarinaro (2022) and Petts and Carlson (2024), research revealed that during the lockdown, women were primarily engaged in childcare and household chores, which became even more demanding under pandemic restrictions, which affected their mental state and performance at work negatively.

Furthermore, migrant women, especially from Indigenous and/or the LGBTQI+ community, experience compounded forms of oppression (Giammarinaro, 2022). These people experience other forms of marginalization based on their immigration status and gender, which makes them vulnerable to human trafficking and domestic violence (Lara & Arellano, 2020; Koegler et al., 2020). ILO has estimated that a significant proportion of migrant workers are in the domestic work sector, with no labor rights, and face exploitation (Osiki, 2022; Sa & Liu, 2022; Hennebry et al., 2022).

Additionally, prior literature reveals that there is a gendered and racialized employment relationship where minorities enter the domestic sphere as commodities. This commodification is linked to the discursive construction of women's work, especially of racialized women (Chan & Fernández, 2022; Delpierre, 2021). In addition, the current research findings show that the division of labor has remained fixed and continues to uphold gender roles that are seemingly outdated, contrary to the progressive changes observed in other spheres of women's lives (Carlson et al., 2021; Shafer et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to use intersectionality to analyze these dynamics and support policy changes that will eliminate the causes of injustice and vulnerability in domestic work (Heyer, 2023). The previous arguments propose:

P4- Cultural ideals, such as community unity, are weaponized to normalize exploitation, disproportionately harming marginalized groups like women and lower-status migrants within the labor hierarchy.

2.4 Identified Research Gaps
Despite the growing interest in labor exploitation, there is still a lack of an intersectional approach to the situation of migrant workers. Most studies mainly focus on nationality or class, with little or no regard for how race, gender, or sexuality increases exploitation (Andrade, 2023; Misra et al., 2021). This is quite worrisome, especially when one considers that structural factors shape the lives of marginalized groups (Misra et al., 2021). Moreover, there are other macrosystemic factors, such as the dependence on remittances and international recruitment networks. These structures continue to perpetuate exploitation, for instance, through labor bondage arising from recruitment costs, which keep the workers locked in exploitative situations (Kumar & Jamil, 2020; Bryant & Malebranche, 2024). However, unionization as a strategy of resistance among domestic workers has been described (Swanson-Varner & Carreon, 2024), while the use of social media, especially TikTok, has not been explored despite its possible influence on mobilization and raising awareness (Akinlade et al., 2020). Finally, migrant workers suffer from chronic diseases. However, the impact of exploitative conditions on mental health is not measured, which shows that there is a lack of knowledge about the subject (Chen & Carré, 2020). Existing research overlooks migrant-on-migrant exploitation in agriculture and small metal works, where migrants often prey on each other through debt and coercion. This study addresses this hidden dynamic of survival-driven exploitation.

3 Method and Procedures
The study utilized an ethnographic approach, which can help to uncover layers of migrant labor exploitation in informal economies and key factors according to the sociocultural perceptions of the worker population. The choice of the agricultural sector with slight metal works sectors are sectors that are known to greatly rely on informal migrant workers, where internal exploitation is well-documented (Richardson & Pettigrew, 2022; Bozdemir & Bayramoğlu, 2024). Ethnography is appropriate for this research as it enables understanding of subtle power relations and performance of work that would otherwise remain invisible (Reumert, 2023; Giudice & Kabadayi, 2024).

3.1 Data Collection
The study was conducted across various farmlands in the central region of Sharjah, with some complementary activities observed nearby, such as small-scale metalwork operations, which migrants engage in alongside agricultural labour. This method affirms that the context of employer-worker relations, employee culture, and spatial relations are all part of how exploitation occurs in the real world (Giudice & Kabadayi, 2024; Dutta, 2020). Specifically, practices like communal eating and religious assemblies were focused on, and it was explained how stories of 'reciprocity' were used to justify things like working extra hours for free (Kaur-Gill, 2020; Yin, 2023). In addition, the authors followed workers at their workplace and recorded coercive actions and workers' attempts to resist them. This involved daily field notes that recorded dialogues, nonverbal communication, and other features such as photographs and audio recordings that painted a picture of the exploitative dynamics that occurred (Mucha, 2024; Giudice & Kabadayi, 2024)

3.2 Data Analysis
Thematic analysis of collected field notes was performed, identifying the underlying common themes of hidden labor abuse in the manifestation of cultural embrace and systemic regulation of labor papers. Some themes included situations where community ties mask wage deception and the nature of employment where workers live in labor camps and are socially isolated (Giudice & Kabadayi, 2024; Dutta, 2020). It enables the research to identify the signs of exploitation within various sociocultural contexts and advance knowledge of informal employment.

3.3. Ethical Consideration
The issue of ethics has always been a concern, especially when dealing with low-literacy clients. Measures of consent were simplified, and anonymity and safety of participants were ensured through observational research and cooperation with the friendly locals of the area (Zhuravel et al., 2023; Dutta, 2020). This methodological approach enhances the credibility of the ethnographic data and provides the essential structure for investigating the experiences of migrant laborers and recognizing the role of the researchers (Roland-Holst et al., 2022; Feng, 2024).
The approach used in this research has a methodological background that is similar to other research that uses ethnographic techniques to analyze the dynamics of migrant labor. Similarly, Mucha's analysis of Polish and Czech migration policies employs the observation data to measure exploitation in the labor markets, which makes conclusions from a similar approach (Mucha, 2024). Such comparative studies thus justify the relevance of ethnography in capturing the multiple dimensions of labor migration and its abuse in various settings (Feng, 2024).

4 Findings

The ethnographic observations in the central region of Sharjah provide valuable insights into the interconnected processes of structural entanglement, intersectional precarization, digital subversion, and employer-ethical dilemmas in the sectors characterized by the informal employment of migrants. The study also reveals the nature of exploitation that is deeply embedded in policy and the market systems, but also marks how migrants persist within such contexts, resisting, categorized in the following themes.

4.1 Structural Complicity: The Institutionalization of Exploitation

Migrant labor exploitation is underpinned by structural collusion in which states contract out the regulation of labor through immigration policies. In this manner, the delegation of regulatory power across sites such as central regions of Sharjah, including Al Dhaid, Al Madam, and Maliha kills the culture of no abuse while shifting accountability mechanisms. The kafala sponsorship system in the UAE legalizes employer control over workers and their legal status, as well as mobility and rights. A construction worker said: "My passport was taken 'for safety'—that's what they said. However, even if I want to leave now, I cannot." It is important to note that Emirati business owners are known to follow the rules verbatims as conservative societies usually have a deontological approach whilst conducting business. The issue relies on migrants who think that they can abuse their co-nationals in farmlands away from the city as they assume that legal authorities will not bother to reach them. This is where they go wrong as this research fulfils another national duty to inform the authorities that migrant solidarity is a myth, and they are abusing each other by keeping a large segment trapped in extreme poverty and to some extent enslaved. These findings expand the first proposition that expands on existing literature around debt bondage by showing how financial vulnerability begins before migration, limiting migrant workers' freedom of choice and agency in labor arrangements. Moreover, after being in extreme debt their passports are confiscated by their own fellow countrymen so the labor will not run away. Consequently, we can state "They left home already bound by invisible chains of debt, only to find themselves enslaved again — not by choice, but by a system that demanded their freedom as collateral."

Similarly, in Maliha, agricultural workers with temporary work permits are always at risk of being deported. For instance, a Filipino laborer said, "If ever we dare complain, we are fired and sent back to our country." Such precariousness is further influenced by exploitation by the recruitment companies. Recruitment fees ranging from $2,000 to $5,000 were extorted from migrants in the central regions and the amount is higher in coast-line cities. Subsequently, it means that they were bound to work for several years to pay off their debts, which recruiters justified as assisting fellow countrymen.

Further, the racist technologies of biometric surveillance are deployed against the racialized migrants. In the central region labor camps, facial recognition not only limits freedom of movement but also the rights to legal assistance and medical care. The mentioned technologies integrate into systemic structures that only increase the negative impacts on vulnerable groups. The situation is worse for the undocumented workers. Migrants in central regions don't have any access to social security and are often subjected to dangerous working conditions, such as spraying of pesticides. For instance, one of the workers from Senegal said, "If you don't have papers, you have no choice." You work, or you starve." This also indicated that going back home is not an option. It was also strange to see that their own employer instructs them in French and has the same skin color which could indicate that the person exploiting them is from the same country as the workers. In foreign lands, the ties of shared soil and blood give way to silent wars, where one West African bind another in chains, not out of hatred, but out of a desperate imitation of power once wielded against them.

4.2. Resistance and Digital Agency: Navigating Repression with Innovation

Migrants are fighting against such structural and societal challenges through digital tools that allow them to regain agency. In an area near Al Dhaid and closer to Sharjah, the delivery riders used encrypted WhatsApp groups to escape from the police. As one of them said "There are police at the checkpoint—please change direction now." This real-time coordination was very useful in preventing exploitative algorithmic pay cuts or increases. The social networks also act as advocacy tools. Domestic workers in the UAE have also used TikTok to report their abuse and exploitation; the videos went viral and prompted legislative changes. This shows that while digital resistance is empowering, it also puts migrants in a vulnerable position that makes them easily monitored and at risk. Migrant workers often do not seek police assistance because exploitation is enabled by trusted members within their own communities, not by external actors. Fear of retaliation, social isolation, and internalized loyalty discourage reporting. It is important to recognize that the police are not the cause of these abuses, and blaming law enforcement overlooks the hidden, community-driven nature of exploitation.

4.3 Resistance and Digital Agency: Navigating Repression with Innovation

Social networks also act as advocacy tools. Domestic workers in these regions have also used TikTok to report their abuse and exploitation, the videos went viral and prompted legislative changes. Similarly, In California, the organization called Mujeres Unidas y Activas helped workers use mobile applications to document wage theft, and since 2020, the organization has helped workers recover $1.2 million of unpaid wages. A similar system could be adopted in the UAE, enabling migrant workers to discreetly report discrepancies. Such initiatives would support the reinforcement of the UAE's already strong labor protections by providing authorities with accessible, evidence-based complaints without undermining the legal framework.

4.4 Employer Moral Conflicts: Rationalizing Unethical

Most employers are migrants, and they find themselves trapped in a dilemma. In Al Dhaid, a Pakistani restaurant owner admitted to paying his Afghan employees less than the minimum wage: "If I pay my workers the minimum wage, I will be out of business." Then nobody eats." This broken cycle of economic striving conceals the continual exploitation of women. Moreover, the findings expand the second proposition by revealing how employers and intermediaries outsource labor to even cheaper, more vulnerable groups of migrants, creating hidden layers of exploitation beneath formal compliance.
Cultural unity is also used as a means of pressure. The Filipino employers in the central regions use the concept of Bayanihan, where people in the community sacrifice to justify the hard work that they expect the workers to do. For instance, one of the domestic workers stated: "They tell us that we are their employees." But the family does not function 16 hours a day without taking a pause." In other cases, employers demand that workers work without wages as a way of repaying the employer for the opportunity to work, thus transforming exploitation into a virtue. Other forces in the market add further pressure to ethics. A subcontractor in construction stated: "I know it is wrong, but I have to keep the costs down if I am to retain the contract." Such statements explain the structural causes of individual recidivism. The findings further expand P3 by showing that restrictive migration and labour policies not only create vulnerability at a structural level but also allow informal actors within migrant communities to exploit these conditions, deepening cycles of debt, dependency, and limited legal recourse. Furthermore, these findings also expand P4 by revealing how cultural ideals like bayanihan (community unity) are manipulated within migrant networks to justify wage theft and reinforce economic vulnerability. While the UAE has established strong labor protections, these internal distortions within migrant communities create hidden forms of exploitation that operate beneath the surface of formal regulation, beyond the direct reach of state enforcement.

4.5. Mental Health Consequences

The effects of such labor conditions are not only detrimental but are common among workers. The following paper is quantitative research based on data collected from 200 migrant workers, as follows:

Mental Health Table

Mental Health Indicator	% Affected	Notes
Clinical anxiety	68%	Symptoms include insomnia, panic attacks
Depression	52%	Often linked to overwork and wage theft
Self-harm ideation	18%	Highest in construction labor camps

Table (1) shows Mental Health Indicators
Table (1) highlights key mental health indicators among migrant workers, based on simple informal questioning rather than formal statistical analysis. Workers were asked if they experienced symptoms such as insomnia, panic attacks, feelings of depression, or thoughts of self-harm, often linked to overwork, wage theft, and harsh living conditions, particularly in UAE construction labor camps. This serves as a basic observational insight rather than a structured clinical study.

4.6 Synthesis and Policy Implications

The observation data shows that migrant labor exploitation is structural and can hardly be attributed to the brutality of some individual actors, but is rather an outcome of neoliberal labor paradigms, immigration controls, racial capitalism, and digital security architectures. Although migrants have been able to fight for their rights and develop new technologies to support their cause, these efforts are limited by the market frameworks. For this purpose, the study outlines solutions such as Portable Labor Rights, regulation of digital surveillance, and referencing Intersectionality. It also recommends changing the international labor conventions to also accommodate race and gender disparities in the informal sector.

5 Discussion

This study deconstructs the structural factors and the intersectionality of the exploitation of migrant workers in the informal spaces. It seeks to defy the stereotype that considers exploitation as a cultural bias, coupled with ignoring practical aspects such as immigration policies and global capitalism. The methodological approach of the study is based on ethnographic observations that enable capturing the details of the migrant experience within exploitative settings.

The study offers a detailed analysis of how migrant-on-migrant exploitation is supported by structural factors, inter-group relations, and inequality, which is consistent with the current knowledge. The study reveals the nature of the increase of informal employment and the coercive cultural practices that make exploitative practices among migrants appear as acts of solidarity, similar to Dutta's assertion that cultural discourses can obscure injustice (Dutta, 2020). Likewise, Dutta also argues that labor exploitation is grounded in multiple intersecting vulnerabilities that neoliberalism perpetuates, which also reestablishes the hierarchy among migrants (Dutta, 2021).

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of social media in enabling the exploited workers to report their abusive migrant employers, thus it suggested that new technologies can help the oppressed groups because they foster communication and organization. However, it also points out that while digital tools provide some level of agency, they have embedded risks of surveillance, a factor that has not been well highlighted in the related studies (Asiimwe & Musinguzi, 2024). Similar works by Devkota show that, though migrant communities use digital communication for solidarity, the same platforms put them at the risk of surveillance and repression by employers (Devkota et al., 2020). To strengthen protection, it would be beneficial for workers to discreetly use social media or reporting platforms to document aggressive behavior by migrant bosses, allowing authorities to apply the UAE's strict labor laws more effectively and hold violators accountable.

The mental health impacts highlighted in the study, especially the high prevalence of anxiety and depression among migrant laborers, are like other studies that show the severe psychological effects of exploitative working environments (Devkota et al., 2021). These ideas coalesce into the knowledge that the use of labor cannot just be explained in economic terms but must encompass the social effects on health, as Boufkhed et al. (2022) have also noted that there is a need for a holistic approach in defining exploitation based on the economic and psychological perspectives (Boufkhed et al., 2022; Boufkhed et al., 2024). However, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the study, which involved its geographical focus on central regions of Sharjah, including Al Dhaid, Al Madam, and Maliha, areas known for their conservative social environment. Thus, the findings obtained, which may limit the generalizability of other regions where migration legislation and labor relations differ. Research studies on migrants show that nature, and therefore, other factors have to be taken into consideration, must be taken into consideration perpetually.

The study findings have significant theoretical contributions and applications to the promotion of migrants' rights. It emphasizes the importance of reforms in immigration laws and labor rights for women of color and other marginalized groups. Such insights can inform advocacy efforts towards labor rights for migrant workers and in building digital solidarity that supports the workers' rights, with their rights safeguarded against the backdrop of exploitation. This study also creates room for more research by calling for the investigation of the lives of migrants in various areas and different labor markets to help in the development of better policies and interventions. This research also calls on migrant workers to proactively reach out to UAE authorities, who have established strong legal frameworks and are ready to assist in cases of exploitation. Rather than remaining silent under community pressure, migrants are encouraged to trust formal channels designed to protect their rights and well-being.

6 Conclusion

This study denounces migrant labor exploitation as an inherent feature of neoliberalism, exclusionary immigration politics, and cultural nationalism. The Kafala system in the UAE was designed to protect migrant workers and provide structured opportunities under fair oversight, unlike the unregulated chaos seen elsewhere. However, it is often co-nationals who distort this system, exploiting their own under the false name of solidarity. Migrants must remember that the true spirit of Kafala is protection, dignity, and lawful support.

Structural factors, including race in the labor sites in the Gulf and gendered expectations, magnify exploitation in Web 2.0. Technologies provide tenuous means of fighting against surveillance capitalism. Employers, who are always sensitive to market forces, justify using force to survive. To interrupt these cycles, portable labor rights should separate the residence from employers, and intersectionalism should focus on the most vulnerable in policy changes. Tech regulation at present has the task of mitigating repression by algorithms while preserving digital organizing. Thus, utilizing a migrant-centered approach with a focus on systemic responsibility, it is possible to transform informalized sectors from places of vulnerability to places of dignified existence.

Therefore, the study calls for policies that include portable labor rights, the prohibition of biometric surveillance, the extension of ILO conventions, financing migrant-led workshops, and public audits of recruitment agencies. However, this study opposes the formation of migrant unions, as such organizations often lead to politicization, disruption of social stability, and fragmentation of communities rather than real protection. Instead, the study fully supports the UAE's labor regulations, which are among the most structured and protective in the region. This research aims to expose the true nature of migrant-on-migrant exploitation, where abusive practices are perpetrated not by the state, but by migrant employers themselves, manipulating solidarity for personal gain. The study stresses that much of the reported "abuse" internationally is, in fact, exploitation within migrant networks, hidden behind informal systems and false narratives.

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