

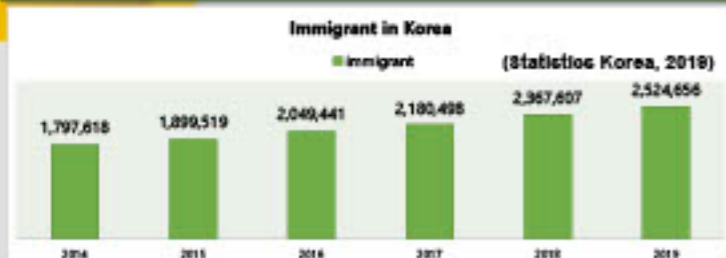


# Health literacy and experience in migrant workers during the pandemic in Korea: a content analysis approach

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## BACKGROUND



- Migrant workers are susceptible to the direct or indirect impacts of COVID-19 more than native workers, due to cultural differences, linguistic barriers, and exclusion of protections provided by policies.
- In a pandemic situation, individuals should be literate, so as to navigate health information and services, make appropriate decisions, and practice healthy and preventive behaviors in their everyday life. Health literacy is considered a significant determinant of the health status of individuals and groups (Institute of Medicine, 2004). There is little research on health literacy of migrant workers in Korea.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study describes health literacy and healthcare experiences of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. We present evidence to understand the experiences and needs of migrant workers.

## METHODS

- Design:** Qualitative research
- Participants:** Migrant workers in Korea
  - Eligibility criteria: work experience or currently working via the Employment Permit System (E-9), who speak Korean or English, who signed the informed consent to participate in this study.
- Data collection:** Data were collected from interviews of 40 minutes to 1 hour in length using a semi-constructed questionnaire, conducted from July 20 to September 13, 2020. All interviews were recorded as digital audio files which were then transcribed verbatim.

## Table 1. Sample questionnaires

### Changed work and personal life due to COVID-19

- Q1. Please feel free to tell us what has changed in your life
- Q2. How safe do you think you are from COVID-19?

### Access to and use of health information

- Q1. Describe how you usually receive health information, and what kind of contents you are
- Q2. Please tell us how you are getting information on COVID-19, and how you are using it for your own safety.
- Q3. Please feel free to tell us about your experience of using medical care services in South Korea.

### Understanding and evaluation of information

- Q1. Do you think that you can usually understand everything well when you hear health-related information you need, go to the hospital, or meet with a medical professional?
- Q2. Do you understand information on COVID-19 well, and do you think you are using it properly?
- Q3. How do you think your status as a migrant worker in South Korea has affected your access to health information, and the utilization of health care services?

- Analysis:** All interviews were recorded and analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method.
- Ethical consideration:** Informed consented, as approved by the Institutional Review Board of Y University (IRB No. YNC IRB/202006-15).

## RESULTS

Table 2. General Characteristics of the Participants (N= 12)

No	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Period of residency in Korea (yrs)	Educational Level(yrs)	Occupation
1	36	Nepal	Male	8	High School (10)	Unskilled
2	48	Nepal	Male	8	College (12)	Unskilled
3	35	Nepal	Male	3	High School (10)	Unskilled
4	34	Nepal	Male	3	Master (16)	Unskilled
5	26	Nepal	Male	3	Master (16)	Unskilled
6	42	Nepal	Male	10	High School (10)	Semi-skilled
7	33	Sri Lanka	Male	9	College (12)	Skilled Engineer
8	32	Sri Lanka	Male	8	High School (10)	Unskilled
9	30	Sri Lanka	Male	7	University (16)	Unskilled
10	27	Cambodia	Female	6	Middle School (9)	Unskilled
11	28	Cambodia	Female	7	High School (10)	Unskilled
12	34	Bangladesh	Male	10	College (10)	Skilled Engineer

The analysis resulted in four main themes based on the data from migrant workers' perspectives: 1) access to and obtaining health information; 2) navigating the health delivery system; 3) interactions with health care providers; 4) safety in the workplace. The majority of immigrant workers had limited health literacy to obtain health information and navigate the Korean health care system. Additionally, a communication gap exists between immigrant workers and health care providers because of language barriers. Moreover, safety in the workplace depends on the ownership of the company. However, we found a lack of regulation and policy at an organizational level in the companies where the migrants worked.

Table 3. Theme and Category of the Study

Theme	Category
Access to and obtaining health information	Lack of health information & health care service
	Problem in reading health information
	Lack of resource & network Time constraints
Navigating the health delivery system	Limited understanding of health care system
	Lack of interpretation service
Interactions with health care providers	Poor communication with health care providers
	Lack of communication aid Lack of trust
	Lack of owner's awareness about health and safety Barriers communication Lack of regulation about safety

## CONCLUSIONS

Immigrant workers with limited health literacy skills and language abilities face numerous risks during pandemic outbreaks. This study suggests that there is a necessity to enhance health literacy at the individual level and establish a health literate environment at the organizational level. Besides, it also found that it is important to develop various strategies to improve health literacy programs for migrant workers, health providers, and workplace health managers.

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