

The Cement Factory Workers, Nepal



This project involved studying cement factory workers' everyday lives and circumstances. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in a cement plant of Province 3 in Nepal. There were around 200 workers engaged in different cement mills at the factory. The data collection involved conducting ethnographic interviews, doing participant observation, medicine mapping, questionnaires, and using audio-visual aids such as photography, GPS logging, and voice recordings.

Though the factory was fully automated the main raw material used in the cement production was limestone which was excavated in nearby hills, causing damage to the environment and neighboring villages.

Preliminary findings.

Locals vs. migrant workers: Most permanent workers were locals whereas production workers were from different states of Nepal and India. Migrant workers were hired through different social networks. The factory promised to employ villagers who were relocated when the cement factory was constructed. In the past, clashes between the locals and the factory management arose due to dust and air pollution.



Provisions: The factory provided accommodation for workers. An on-site first aid clinic provided medicines for minor work-related injuries and to monitor their blood pressure/diabetes. A canteen served vegetarian food for higher officials and permanent staff, who also benefitted from a bus service. The production workers worked for 12 hours with a 45-minutes lunch break. Protective equipment such as helmets were hardly worn by the workers. The turnover of migrant workers was high because of the lack of benefits for this category.



Medicine mapping: The locals preferred to carry medicine home from the factory first aid clinic for emergency use. Only a few antibiotics were prescribed by health worker in the first aid clinic. The most common complaints of illness were throat infection, allergy, seasonal flu, and cough, perceived to be caused by the constant exposure to cement dust. Minor injuries like cuts and burns were reported by the workers. Within a radius of two km from the factory clinic, there were two pharmacies and a Primary Health Clinic in the village. Both local and migrant workers preferred to visit these pharmacies for any kind of illness or injury.

Antibiotics were commonly dispensed by all healthcare providers included in the study. Over-the-counter sales of antibiotics, painkillers, and anti-acidic medicines were common. Private and public health care provision was often overlapping with the same providers operating in both sectors.