

The impact of migration on the marital relations and personal development: with reference five villages in Walallawita Regional Secretary Division, Matugama

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Abstract

The family is the smallest unit in the society and it faces a large number of problems. In the current social set up, one of the major problems that a family encounters is finance. In finding solutions to financial problems, many poor householders resort to foreign employment. According to sociological findings, foreign migration creates many adverse sociological and psychological consequences. In this study, the researcher tried to find out the impact of migration on the marital relations.

Miriswatta, Pahala Hewessa, Lihiniyawa, Kumbadoowa and Pelawatta in Walallawita were selected as the study location as there were many migrant workers in the area. Fifty samples were selected. The reports of Divisional Secretary Office and Grama Niladhari officers helped in selecting this sample. Forty husbands who have migrant wives and ten wives who have migrant husbands were included. Questionnaires were used to collect data.

Out of the total sample, 64% migrant workers work in Middle East countries while the remaining 36% in other countries like Korea, Singapore and Maldives. Saudi Arabia was selected by most of female migrant workers. It is more than 75%. 92% migrant workers are working as housemaids. Most of them are female. Remigration can be identified in this selected sample. 72% migrant workers have migrated more than once.

A large number of problems can be identified in these families. The major target of these migrant workers is to build a new house. But 90% migrant workers could not reach it. Many husbands were addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. Alcohol was used by 80% husbands daily. 60% of men and women who migrated did not approve this. They were in the view that the migration is not the best way to earn money. 76% percents of parents (who have migrant father or mother) have faced a lot of problems with their children. Many fathers have faced difficulties in feeding, protecting and solving problems of their children. According to the ideas of the sample, children who have migrant parents in the Middle East may have less personality than other children. 64% agreement can be identified from the sample about the negative personal

development of children because of their parental migration. There could be more than 75% agreement by the sample about the high possibility of family problems because of migration. Both set of analyzed data reveal that the migration for foreign employment has directly affected not only the marital relations, but also their children's personal development.

Key words: *Family, Migration, Marital relations, Personal development*

Introduction

It has been recognized in the recent past, that the 'Family' being the basic unit of the society becomes an important element in the migration process. Migration has become the concern of all in some form or another, and it means concern rather than simply interest, because the understanding of migration and how to take advantage of it, live with it and manage it. Migration has not kept pace with the growth of the phenomenon and the complexity of its linkages with other issues (Tapinos, 85, 1995).

The definition of family is also an issue that has yet to be elucidated in the migration literature. Even accepting that the nuclear family, composed of a married couple and their children is the standard with respect to which other extent families are to be considered as "units" when their members live in different countries.(Zlotnik, 254, 1995) To obviate the problem, the term 'household' is often used in migration research to denote the group of people that, although separated by migration, are nevertheless linked by direct economic ties, such as those associated with the flow of remittances (www.unicef.org). The current trends, patterns and changes in migration are related sectors such as labor migration, permanent migration irregular migration and tourism for the recent years.

Table 01: Departures for Foreign Employment (2000 – 2010)

Year	Male		Female		Total
		%		%	
2000	59793	32.82	122395	67.18	182 188
2001	59804	32.5	124200	67.5	184 007
2002	70522	34.61	133251	65.39	203 773
2003	74508	35.51	135338	64.49	209 846
2004	80699	37.59	134010	62.41	214 709
2005	93896	40.6	137394	59.4	231 290
2006	90170	44.65	11778	55.35	201 948

2007	103476	47.37	114983	52.63	218 459
2008	128232	51.19	122267	48.81	250 499
2009	119381	48.31	127745	51.69	247 126
2010	135502	50.86	130943	49.14	266 445

Source: Annual Reports of SLBFE - 2010

In this study, labor migration and specially; the women's migration as domestic workers was studied. The need of income to improve family well-being is perhaps the most important reason compelling women to find employments overseas. Although there is a long history of migration of female workers on employments abroad, the general view is that woman's contribution either as migrant workers or workers employed locally is the notion that women are not economic actors. Due to these reasons women themselves undervalue their economic activities. It is not surprising to find that, when questioned about the reasons for migrating; most women stressed their family roles.

The evidence surfaced regarding the status of the children of migrated mother's and the children those who left behind are mixed. Yet, so ingrained is the view that women are the main caretakers of their children and that they are primarily responsible for children's socialization, that even the women themselves have doubts about migration and are ready to accept the responsibility of their children(Dias,128,1989). Society's attitude towards migrant women does little to combat such prevalent views. In this study, the researcher examined the impact of parental migration among rural families and the apprehensive living patterns of children without the presence of father or mother. Studies also extended to assess the degree of socialization of both male and female children which could negatively affect due to the ill-effects of the marital relations of the nuclear family.

Objectives

The main objective

The main objective of this research is to analyze the changing role of male or female in migration and its effects on the marital relations and children's personal development in the family.

The secondary objectives

The secondary objectives of this research are to:

- a) Identify the importance of migration

- b) Analyze the past and present situation and trends of migration in Sri Lanka
- c) Examine the optimistic and pessimistic issues of migration
- d) Identify the effects of migration for the economy of Sri Lanka
- e) Identify the effects of migration on the family and the society as a whole
- f) Identify the controversies experienced by migrating women
- g) Suggest feasible solutions to migrate the negative impact

Methodology

Study location

Five traditional villages situated in the Walallavita Divisional Secretarial Division of Kalutara district were chosen and selected as the study location. The villages named Miriswatta, Pahala Hewessa, Lihiniyawa, Kumbadoowa and Pelawatta were selected accordingly due to the fact that a large number of migrant workers could be identified therein. The data confirmed that 180 persons have been migrated from these five villages in which the total population is reported to be 7068 persons.

Sample

A cross sectional study design with multi-stage random sampling was used. A total of fifty persons were surveyed. The selected sample of 50 migrants were represented by forty male spouses and ten female spouses as reported in the migration reports of divisional secretary's office and Grama Niladharies' offices. Socio – demographic and health status data were derived using standardized pre – validated instruments.

Data Collection

The research is fundamentally based on,

- a) Primary Sources

Information was collected partly by interviewing intellectuals from the relevant Govt. offices and also using a pre-determined questionnaire to obtain information from the sample consisted of single spouses whose married partners are employed abroad.

b) Secondary Sources

Required secondary information was gathered from relevant books, thesis, statutes, reports, internet, newspaper articles, magazines and periodicals.

Data Analysis

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to study about the association between the,

- Status of left behind spouses
- Children and their personal development

Limitations

- a) Sri Lanka is not the only country which is facing negative effects of employees' migration. Many Asian countries face terrible circumstances because of citizens' migration.
- b) Migration on foreign employment in Sri Lanka is a vast area to study. Because of the limited time available, the research topic had to be narrowed down to a limited area.
- c) Limited to examine migration in the Middle East and Asian Countries.

Results

Present Situation of Migration

Most of the foreign migrant workers favor migrating to the Middle Eastern Countries. Out of the total sample, 64% of workers were found migrated to Middle East countries. Only a limited number of workers were reported to be migrated to Asian, Europe or Western Countries on employment. The reason is lack of education and the restrictions in the European Countries. It is also seen that women have continued to accept overseas jobs as housemaids. 92% of the female workers migrated for the housemaid sector, while all other sectors remain at significant low level. It clearly shows that housemaid sector is the most preferred area of the female migrants, not even at present, but throughout the history.

Among the Middle East Countries, Saudi Arabia took the highest place and Kuwait is in the next position for migrant workers. Re-migration too, can be

identified in the sample. 72% of the migrant workers migrated more than once. 50% stay abroad more than two years. 07% are away for more than ten years. 73% of the Migrants were in the age group 29 – 38 years. Out of the sample, 69% of Migrants are married and responsible for children. Generally, it was found that the male or female workers leave behind 02 or 03 children when they migrate to overseas.

Table 02: Female Departures as Housemaids by Middle East Country (2006-2010)

Country	Year									
	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%	2010	%
Saudi Arabia	35319	35.42	32180	32.19	35180	32.6	42852	37.7	35159	31.09
U.S.E.	12575	13.01	13539	13.23	13184	12.22	11801	10.38	11331	10.02
Kuwait	27219	27.3	32128	31.39	35458	32.85	31.361	27.59	36024	31.86
Lebanon	6672	6.69	6569	6.42	4500	4.26	5472	4.31	5539	4.9
Qatar	4442	4.45	4046	3.95	4578	4.24	6205	5.46	7784	6.88
Jordan	4833	4.85	3920	3.81	6072	5.63	5345	4.7	4929	4.36
Baharain	2740	2.75	3151	3.08	2575	2.48	3504	3.08	4690	4.15
Cyprus	2181	2.19	2612	2.55	2274	2.11	2425	3.13	2286	2.02
Oman	1739	1.74	1892	1.85	2184	2.02	2805	2.47	3188	2.82

Source: Annual Reports of SLBFE - 2010

Reasons for Migration

According to state driven information, there are 23% of very poor citizens out of the total population or 77% of poor out of total village population and 2,100,000 in number live with the support of Government sponsored poverty alleviation programmes namely; “Samurdhi or Divineguma” (Annual Reports of Central Bank). Undoubtedly, all those who migrated are intended to uplift their family conditions and also to elevate their social status within the society.

There are several influential factors compelling low income earners to look for overseas jobs as follows, despite profuse challenges to be faced.

- Spouse is unemployed hence the income derived by the bread-winner is insufficient to manage the essentials.
- Spouse does not support the family.
- Spouse is dead, divorced or separated.
- Incapacity to meet the needs of children including higher education.

Migration is a decision that impacts the welfare of the household, the home community, and in the end the whole economy in various ways. The welfare implications of migration on the origin country are most often, though not always, sizable and positive. The main channel through which migration alleviates poverty increase incomes from remittances the workers earn. Besides poverty centered prospects the migrants focus on a number of goals such as;

- ✳ To build a new house.
- ✳ To manage domestic expenses while setting off borrowings.
- ✳ To provide better education for children.
- ✳ To build up a good future for the family.

Nevertheless, the research findings provide evidence that 90% migrant workers could not attain their goals, mainly due to the inappropriate usage of income they earn. Also it can be revealed that 24% migrant workers do not send any remittance to their families. More than 90% families found that the portions of remittance they receive from their spouses are not sufficient at all to cover their expenses.

Spouse left behind

The sample data confirms that out of the total migrants, 80% were male spouses and the balance 20% were female spouses left behind. There are families headed by Female households and found that they manage their families even better than those families managed by male households. In the majority of the cases, husbands have vacated their wives. On the contrary, there are families left with male spouses creating enormous amount of hardships for children mainly due to the absence of mother's love and warmth. Male spouses of such families should take the whole responsibility of the family. Evidently, some of the fathers do not like to take this family responsibility, because of the stress. This situation has generally led the isolated husbands to tryout alternative solutions in use of liquor, cigarettes and harmful drugs to remedy the aftermath of both mental and physical problems. Therefore migrant family spouses were shown to have higher levels of smoking and alcohol usage. 80% husbands of the sample used alcohol daily and more than 60% male spouses used cigarettes as part of their daily routine.

Prevalence of depression was higher among male spouses in the left behind families. According to the observation in the research, it was possible to

identify that the spouse of the migrant worker has a less than average quality of life in all domains with mental health less than physical health.

Impact of children without inclusive love and care of parents

Though employing in a destination country is a solution to several unresolved problems, in most cases, such initiatives create repercussions due to the separation from one's immediate family that produces considerable emotional cost. Especially the migration of either parents or mothers in particular increases the risk for family instability, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress. The emotional impact is not just limited to the migrants themselves, but also the Children when they are left behind by one or both migrating parents. The impact of migration on children and adolescents must be seen in the broader context of poverty and conflict, and within the perspective of vulnerability and resilience, gender relations and children's right (UNICEF-UNDP survey, 2006). Around one million Sri Lankan children are left behind by their mothers who migrate in search of work (Save the Children, 2006).

According to the research results, children left behind have more psychological and behavioral issues. In the study sample, 64% children of migrating families were left behind without their mother or father with only the caregiver to look after them.

Association of emotional, hyper activity, conduct problems and having any psychiatric diagnosis was strongest in children from these migrant families. Specially, the evidences regarding the effects of the mother's migration on the children is important. Because women are the main caretakers of their children and they are primarily responsible for their children's socialization. According to the research, labor migration has negative effects on the educational performances of the children of the respective families.

The needs of children are 'Basic physical care, Affection, Security and Independence to take responsibilities (Sutton, 85, 2000). But children left behind do not have enough chances to achieve these needs, because of the absence of parental presence. Therefore migration has an impact on the early cognitive development of the affected children. It may be directly affected for the personal development of the children. In addition, parental absence also may impact on family life affecting educational attainment of the children. Observations revealed in line with the selected sample, that the children performed worse in schools and tended to have social problems, especially of those whose mothers' happened to be migrated.

Discussion

The meaning of Migration is a physical movement by humans from one area to another, such as from one country to another. It can be for domicile or can be for foreign employment. In this syndicate, the main objective is to discuss about the migration of Sri Lankans and how it influences the family with specific focus on marital relations and children's personal development. In this respect, the reason for migration, how it affects the Sri Lankan economy, the ongoing fact of migrant workers and how it influences not only the family but also the society, have been discussed. Because migration affects not only the migrants themselves but also their family members' even if they remain in the country of their origin.

Sri Lanka is a country which already has a number of foreign employees. The increase in female migration in Sri Lanka is attributed to a number of factors. The International Labor Organization convention on Migration for Employment 1949, (No. 97) in its Article 11, states: "migrant for employment means a person who migrates from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his own account and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant for employment"(www.migrationobserver.ox.ac.uk). International labor migration from Sri Lanka has increased more than tenfold in the last two decades. Until the advent of the open economy in 1977, women were only responsible for caring for the children and binding the family together, but with the advent of the open economy in 1977, women also became a source of flowing income to the family. Among most of the choices, migration for foreign employment becomes one of the most popular choices, due to many reasons. The reasons that stimulate people to migrate are numerous and operate in complex and interactive ways at individual, family and socio-economic levels. The dissemination of information and lower transport costs facilitate increased labor mobility and the creation of transitional communities. Workers move to find better employment opportunities and working conditions. While wage differentials are an important incentive, access to higher levels of health and education services, more personal security and generally better life conditions can also be important elements affecting the decision to work abroad.

The reasons for migration are noted as being due to lack of access to regular and substantial income and the inability to bear the rising cost of living. In addition, some of the major aspirations of the migrant men and women were to build houses, collect money for business and to educate their children. But there are a large number of problems that can be identified in this scenario.

Among the specific problems of the women that force them to migrate are; high indebtedness, domestic violence and the alcohol addiction of spouses. All members of the family should live together. When they live together they can solve their problems by discussing with each other. Then they can take the most suitable decisions for the betterment of their living. When the husband or the wife migrates abroad to solve their economic problems, it is unavoidable that unexpected problems can emerge within families.

Information of the impact of migration on marital relationships is doubly important given the reported high rates of marital conflicts, divorce and intimate partner violence in newcomer communities. Gender relations and gender hierarchies determine the gender specific impact of migration. Women remaining behind when their spouses migrate may find themselves co-residing with other male relatives who may restrict their activities outside home. In many instances, women left behind in the country of origin must undertake income generating activities to compensate for the income lost by the departed male relatives if the latter do not send remittances on a regular basis. Adding financial responsibilities to the other responsibilities that women have such as child-rearing, can lead to stress but can also provide women the opportunity of gaining autonomy and experiences in decision making (Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations, 2011).

Children of the families of which mothers have migrated get through only primary education except a few of them who get chances to take secondary education or higher education. On the other hand, children do not enjoy sufficient protection as before. Fathers in most of these families do not take required extent of responsibilities of the children. Instead they spend on addicted bad habits such as erratic behavior, abdicated drugs, womanizing and smuggling. Therefore they cannot fulfill the children's needs. Children can fall into unethical or unlawful behavior without the guidance of parents. The family unit itself can become dysfunctional without the presence of the breadwinner thereby affecting the coherence within family members.

On the other hand, when the migrant person returns to the village after a long period of time he or she feels isolated from the rest of the community. In such instances they have to face appalling situation not only in the family but also in the society.

In summary, this study provides preliminary evidences on how children in Walallawita, Kalutara district happened to be a vulnerable group also having

engaged in higher scale of unhealthy behaviors without love and care of the parents. The migration of spouses appears to have a greater influence on the remaining spouses and children due to deteriorated family bondage, mental and physical insecurity. The findings of the research have implications for improving preventive policies and programmes to promote healthy and sound social behavior and improved harmony among the left behind spouses and children in Sri Lanka and other developing countries which face similar migration issues.

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