

## Impacts of Parental Migration on Children Left Behind

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### **Abstract**

*Globally, migration has been a common phenomenon. Migration has impacts on global, regional, national, local and household's level. Migration has both positive and negative effects, and it depends upon government policies, culture of community and household's behavior. This article aims to describe the impacts of parental migration on children left behind and it is based on secondary sources of information. Remittances has contributed to improve education and health status of children left behind but at the same time loneliness, and physiological problems are being common negative impacts to children left behind of migrant family. Both positive and negative impacts to children left behind are briefly discussed based on available literature.*

**Key Words:** Children left behind, remittances, labour migration, wellbeing, education and health

### **Introduction**

Migration can be understood as parents' solution to the plight of family poverty and unemployment. Often, parents migrate to provide their children with a better future. However despite the economic bonus that migration is seen to provide, the psychosocial costs are large and could violate a child's right to development, survival and education. These children are also often "left out" of social policy planning.

Migration is considered as a form of socio-economic behavior. Scholars came to acknowledge that in recent decades the rate of women migration for work has increased equaled to men, although in the past women were seen as the passive followers of males migrating for work. Children are the main reason behind their parents' decision to migrate for work, as a consequence of the lack of employment opportunities in their home countries. After all, migration was defined by Gailbraith as the "oldest action against poverty" (Gailbraith, 1979). But parents are not always aware that their migration decision will have strong negative impact on their children who are left behind it means at home, such as school drop-out. There is a causal effect of parental migration on children's educational attainment, especially when the mother is the one migrating for work, leaving her children back home with their father (Antman, 2012). Mothers are the ones that mainly deal with the care and education of the children, thus having the central position in terms of emotional capital So, children's educational outcomes may differ depending on who is the migrant parent and who is the one who stays at home with children (Bertha Sănduleasa, 2015)

What is the impact of parental migration on the life satisfaction of children and adolescents left behind? Do these remittance-related expenses on education, health, food, and toys have any impact

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on the life satisfaction of children and adolescents? The discourse on migration and development recognizes that migration can help migrants and their families to improve their living standards and well-being (Cortina, 2014).

In recent years, researchers and policy makers have become increasingly interested in the effects of migration and remittances on the development of communities of origin in developing countries. While a number of studies have shown that migration can benefit home communities and left-behind family members by increasing household income, thus lifting liquidity constraints on investment, less is known about how migration and remittances affect the educational performance of the children who remain in the source communities.

The movement of persons from one state to another, or within their own country of residence for the various purposes of employment is termed as labor migration (IOM, 2011). Depending on the duration of stay, migration can be classified as short-term or temporary migration, or long-term or permanent migration. Short-term migration is defined as the person moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least 3 months but less than 12 months whereas permanent migration describes a person who never returns to his or her place of origin, or long-term if a person moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least 12 months (UN, 2016). Migration can be international (movement from one country to another), internal (movement within a country), and transnational regarding spatial variability (movement from one nation-state to another live their lives across borders). The impact of migration often results in fragmented families, where children are separated from their parents over extended periods of time, an issue prevalent in both internal and international migration.

Migration is considered as an important coping mechanism for the poor people. For the population as a whole, the effects of labor migration are mostly negative, and there is a strong relationship between the income and non-income dimensions of inequality. Non-income inequality includes inequality in skills, education, opportunities, happiness, and health. Children are especially vulnerable to these non-income inequalities. According to the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (EGPRSP), the poverty incidence for all age groups of children is higher on average than it is among adult residents of the Republic. The poverty level among children in 2002 reached 45.2 percent. The more children there are in a family, the higher the risk of its being included in the category of the poor. Poverty is especially widespread among children in rural areas (50 percent) due to the large family size and relatively low incomes of rural households. Children are affected by migration when they are left behind by one or both migrating parents, migrating with parents (or born abroad), or migrating alone. The impact of migration on children and adolescents must be seen in the broader context of poverty and conflict, and within the perspectives of vulnerability and resilience, gender relations and children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects every child, regardless of nationality or immigration status. States have obligations to respect the provisions of the Convention in their policies and actions toward each and every child within their jurisdiction. These provisions include the right to citizenship, physical integrity, health, and education as well as the right to be free from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers reaffirms these rights set forth in the CRC. Policies should protect children's rights by enhancing access to the potential benefits created by migration, while also providing protection for those who are vulnerable to its negatives consequences. Effective migration policies need to be accompanied by additional investments in health, education, and social protection to address the risks faced by left behind children and adolescents or those who are migrating (CRIC, 2008).

## **Objectives**

Migration process shape the opportunities, attitudes, and behavior of individuals and families. The impacts of parental migration on children left behind is one of the new areas of the research in the field of population, more specifically in the field of migration. The objective of this article is to introduce the impacts of parental migration on their children left behind from the perspectives of origin of migrants.

### **Data and Methods**

This article is based on secondary sources of information which are relevant to accomplish this paper.

### **Overview of Migration and Children Left Behind**

A review by Bryant (2005) focusing on three Southeast Asian countries estimated that, there were three to six million children in the Philippines left behind by parents working overseas, approximately one million such children in Indonesia, and half a million in Thailand. Enormous immigration flows from Latin America to the United States also resulted in great challenges of the left behind families. Nobles (2013) reported that more than 20% of children in Mexico experience a father's migration by the age of 15 yrs. A UNICEF (2007) report suggested that in Ecuador, between 1990 and 2005, the number of LBC has risen from 17,000 to 218,000. Eastern Europe is another high outmigration area, both from within and outside of the European Union, to the Western high-income countries. In Romania, a study (Botezat& Pfeiffer, 2014) reported an estimated 350,000 children (over 8%of the child population) were living in a migrant family, and nearly 400,000 children had at some point one or both parents working abroad. In Moldova, it was estimated that 22 *per cent* of all children aged 0-14 had one or both parents abroad (UNICEF, 2011). Despite a lack of reports from African countries on the number of LBC, the scale of migration to western countries and within the continent or the country has also been significant. The World Bank's (2016) report indicated that international migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa totaled 23.2 million, of whom 26 *per cent* were living in OECD countries and 65.6 *per cent* were living within the region, which inevitably lead to a large number of children left behind at home. While overseas migration is now a common phenomenon in many parts of the world, it is possible that even more people are migrating within their own countries, primarily from rural to urban areas. More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas (United Nations, 2014), not least due to the rapid urbanization in Asia and Africa. In China, uneven socioeconomic development is encouraging migration flows to the cities for better job opportunities; the massive rural-urban migration has driven the number of children left behind in rural China up to 61 million, accounting for 38 *per cent* of children in rural areas and 22 *per cent* of all children in the country. An estimated 29 million LBC live with neither parent, and over 2 million live alone (Zhao, 2017).

Out of 858,000 migrants for the year 2000, 590,420 were women mostly out on low-skilled or semi-skilled work. Of these women, around 75 *per cent* are married, with around 90% of them having children. Save the Children's motivation for the research study Left Behind, Left Out rested on the potentially significant number of children that could be affected by this phenomenon (up to one million on a rough estimate) and the negative impacts of migration on children suggested by previous research on the subject. Remittances from Middle East employment (where most of these women are) brought in 61 *per cent* of total remittances and 22 *per cent* of total foreign exchange earned during 2002. The Sri Lankan State has the legal and moral obligation to ensure the welfare of children of migrants. Yet the study indicates how policymakers are not adequately addressing problems of these migrant families. Save the Children wishes to stress that a study on the absence of mothers and their impact on children's lives, should, in no way, promote restrictive migration policies for women. Instead, while acknowledging women's rights to choice of employment, and a

right to migration, the impact on children left behind should be considered more deeply at a policy level. The study was conducted using a random sample of 1,200 households of mothers who had migrated overseas for employment and had been absent from their families for over six months at the time of study in the two districts with the highest incidences of female migration Colombo and Kurunegala. The representative study sample comprised 1.5 *per cent* of the total number of female labour migrants with children in the two districts. In addition to the household sample, the study included a sample survey of 200 children from each of the two districts (total of 400 children) representing the three main age groups (below 5 years, 6-14 years and 15-17 years). The study also included 200 families in the Colombo district where mothers were working in Sri Lanka (100) and mothers were not working (100) both groups being in the same socio-economic background as that of migrant mothers. At the time of the mother's departure, nearly half of the children (48.8%) were less than six years of age. Nearly one third of children in this age group (33.5%) were less than three years of age. This is a critically formative stage of development when adequate physical and emotional nurturance is essential for the future growth of the child. This is also an age when most would not have been able to comprehend what was happening, and if they did, were probably unable to cope with the event. Only 25.9 *per cent* of primary caregivers (PCGs) were fathers. Most PCGs were close relatives of the children with nearly three fourths being female, the majority of them grandmothers. Most caregivers had relatively low levels of education with 9.8 *per cent* having a secondary education without O/Levels and 0.9 *per cent* having a primary education; 7.9 *per cent* did not have any education at all while 17 *per cent* had passed the GCE O-level and 0.9 *per cent* the GCE A-level. The educational levels of PCGs were lower than the migrant mothers of whom more than 70 *per cent* had gone beyond primary education and more while only around 61% of caregivers had attained a similar level of education. (Save the Children, 2000).

Survey on Children 2011 (SOC), which is a joint project of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Philippine National Statistics Office (NSO), for the child of migrant indicator, child welfare outcomes, and other control variables (socioeconomic characteristics of children and households). SOC gathers information about children to better understand their activities, labor force participation, and working conditions in the Philippines. A total of 27,348 households were included in this survey with a sample of 70,707 children; about 3,234 of these children (4.6%) have migrant parents. Left-behind children were also less likely (by about 1%) to have poor grades and more likely (by about 9%) to have good study habits. Out of the 70,707 children, only about 354 (0.5%) were perceived to be sickly or temperamental, with the rates slightly higher on average for children of non-migrant parents than for children of migrant parents. (Pajaron, 2018).

The DID (Difference-in-Difference) analysis revealed that the mental health condition of the children left behind from parental out migration are negatively affected when controlling for other factors. Specifically, the MHT (Mental Health Test) and SASC (Social Anxiety Scale for Children) scores of left behind children increased by 1.43 and 0.32 respectively (both significant at the 1 % level whereas SES (Self Esteem Scale) scores decreased by 0.17 (significant at the 10% level. It means the mental health conditions of children in New Migrant households were worsened compared to the Never Migrant households in the period between the baseline and end line surveys (Rozelle, 2016).

### **Findings and Discussions**

Parental migration it has both negative and positive influence on the education, physical and psychological development of children, especially in developing countries like ours. In most of the developed countries, the term "left behind-children" is used to describe those children who fall behind in well-being, mainly relating to material well-being, education and health. To clarify, in this thesis, "left behind children"(LBC) refers to children who experience prolonged separation

from their migrant worker parent(s). The number of LBC is high in many low-and middle-income countries, where an increasing number of parents have joined the global movement of workers responding to labor shortages in wealthier regions (Graham & Jordan, 2011). For instance, overseas working, including a large number of female migrant workers, is particularly common in some Southeast Asian countries (Zhao, 2017). Graham and Jordan (2011) found, after examining migration data from several Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines, that there were no significant differences between the psychological well-being of children of migrant parents and children of nonmigrant parents. Migration may affect the psychological and physical health of left-behind children in two opposing ways: decreased time allotted by parents for maintaining their children's health, which may have an adverse effect, and augmented household income through remittances, which may have a positive effect.

### **Positive Impacts of Parental Migration**

Deciding whether to leave their offspring in the home country can be a voluntary or unavoidable choice for migrating parents. At times, this choice is made because the remittances of migrant parents provide the children with a better lifestyle. In other cases, it is due to the risks and dangers of travel (Stark, 1985). The prevalence of children of migrant parents left in the home country affects many developing countries and may become more widespread due to the world-wide financial crisis and migratory labor trends. Parental absence due to migration is also a double edged sword. On the one hand, remittances help to increase the family's spending power, which results in increased educational outlay, a decrease in child labour and improved living standard.

The positive impact of parental migration on academic achievement of children left at home may be surprising. However, they are in line with findings from other countries. Macours and Vakis (2010), using data for preschool children, find evidence that mother's migration has a positive effect on their children's cognitive outcomes, the driving force of this effect being the increased family income following migration. Arguillas and Williams (2010) provide evidence that having a migrant mother increases the years of schooling of children left home in the Philippines. Yang (2008) also shows that children from migrant households experience better schooling outcomes. The effects of remittances of migrated parents seem to outweigh the detrimental effects of living in a migrant family, and grades improve. Children may be more motivated to learn, knowing that parents have gone abroad to work in order to provide them additional material and educational resources. Another explanation could be related to the attitude of teachers of these children. Knowing their family situation, teachers could be more tolerant and kind to children from migrant households, trying in a way to compensate for the negative effects of parental migration by avoiding to additionally "punishing" them, by giving them lower marks. Other studies show that missing the main adult caregiver may be harmful for school achievement, although they measure different outcomes. Giannelli and Mangiavacchi (2010) find evidence for Albania that the absence of the father following migration has a negative impact on school attendance, the effect being higher for girls than for boys. Also, McKenzie and Rapoport (2011) find that living in migrant households lowers the probability for children to finish a high school.

For the past four decades, there has been a growth in the number of Filipino migrant workers who are leaving the country in search of better job opportunities and higher income. The IOM reports that, of 2011, the number of Filipino migrants had reached about 10.5 million people working in about two hundred other countries placing the Philippines among the top countries in the world in the export of labor. According to the IOM (2013), 53 *per cent* of the total numbers are temporary or irregular migrants, meaning they have families back home that depend on their income. These

temporary migrants, known as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), have often been credited for facilitating the growth of the Philippine economy over the past years. The government has recently been making efforts to promote labor exports and increase the length of overseas contract working periods, causing migrants to spend even more time abroad. Migration may affect the psychological and physical health of left-behind children in two opposing ways: decreased time allotted by parents for maintaining their children's health, which may have an adverse effect.

### **Negatives Impacts of Parental Migration**

Parental migration has a negative impact on children's and adolescents' life satisfaction compared to children and adolescents whose parents live with them and have never migrated. Children left behind may also experience depression and feelings of abandonment at different stages, which can have significant negative behavioral consequences for children transitioning to adolescence. Adolescents whose parents have migrated often experience difficulties in social relations, which can lead to isolation from the mainstream of society in favor of small groups of peers that share similar experiences, limiting social interaction and development.

The children left behind may have to deal with age-inappropriate responsibilities, such as fulfilling roles of parent to junior family members in the absence of the parents, feelings of anxiety, loneliness and other psychological problems which may result in compromised academic achievement and a spectrum of other behavioral and developmental issues. Dreby (2011) reports that children left behind, despite missing their parent(s) may be advantaged because their environments and caring systems are better in the home countries. A Honduran trans-national family study by Schmalzbauer (2004) highlights feelings of adolescents left behind, finding that those who do not migrate are spared the stress of having to adapt to new cultures, but experience heightened levels of stress, depression and conflicting feelings resulting from separation. These findings are mirrored in similar studies carried out in other parts of the world (UNICEF, 2007).

China's rapid development and urbanization has induced large numbers of rural residents to migrate from their homes in the countryside to urban areas in search of higher wages. As a consequence, it is estimated that more than 60 million children in rural China are left behind and live with relatives, typically their paternal grandparents. These children are called Left Behind Children (or LBCs). There are concerns about the potential negative effects of parental migration on the academic performance of the LBCs that could be due to the absence of parental care.

When a child's parents work in the city away from home, their remittances can increase the household's income and provide more resources and that this can lead to better academic performance. Hence, the net impact of out-migration on the academic performance of LBCs is unclear. (Yu Bai, 2014)

Recent studies have shown that parental migration often leads to the deterioration of the physical and psychological health of left-behind children. For example, in Sri Lanka, parental migration resulted in children's increased vulnerability to malnutrition and mental, emotional, psychiatric, and hyperactive disorders (Wickramage et al. 2015). In Romania, left-behind children were more likely to get sick and suffer from depression, especially in rural areas (Botezat and Pfeiffer 2014). In the Caribbean, children are more likely to display a wide array of emotional and psychological problems, including low self-esteem, increased anger and violence, lack of trust in relationships, and depression (Bakker et al. 2009).

Battistella and Conaco (1998) found that parental migration, particularly maternal migration, adversely affected the welfare of children, such as their emotional health. Smeekens, Stroebe, and Abakoumkin (2012) also found that parental migration was associated with a negative impact on

the physical and emotional condition of left-behind children. Some studies have shown that parental migration often leads to the deterioration of the physical and psychological health of left-behind children. For example, in Sri Lanka, parental migration resulted in children's increased vulnerability to malnutrition and mental, emotional, psychiatric, and hyperactive disorders (Wickramage et al. 2015). In Romania, left-behind children were more likely to get sick and suffer from depression, especially in rural areas (Botezat and Pfeiffer 2014). In the Caribbean, children are more likely to display a wide array of emotional and psychological problems, including low self-esteem, increased anger and violence, lack of trust in relationships, and depression (Bakker et al. 2009).

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The relationship between these components is complex. For instance, while our approach focuses on the impact of the migration experience on outcomes for children, and assumes that this is mediated by individual, household and societal characteristics, these characteristics also influence the type of migration undertaken. Similarly, outcomes for children are influenced by household characteristics, but, in turn, influence the household.

### Conclusions

Effect on the left behind children's social behavior and health status depend on the gender of their migrant parent or if both parents get migrated. According to Battistella and Conaco, if mother is not migrant in the family then there won't be negative impact on the children left behind. It has been found that children those whose mothers are migrant feel lonely, angry, unloved, afraid and worried compared with those children of non-migrant. The history of mother's earlier migration had a significant, independent association with the mental health of children left behind. It has been proved left behind children mothers with the history of migration experience had more mental health problems than the children whose mothers did not have migration history after the child was born. The reasons of negative impact on psychological health of the children left behind may be due to that these children may not have received better care from the care giver in the absence of their mother.

Various difficulties were encountered by the children left behind because of the absence of their parents in their early life. However, mixed data were noted among left behind children regarding psychological adjustment. On the one hand, some studies revealed that children left behind were likely to suffer from huge range of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, loneliness and may also have low quality of life along with low level of satisfaction and poor academic performance as well as exhibit problem of behavior. On the other hand, some studies suggested that there were no any differences in certain aspects such as problematic behavior, school satisfaction, and happiness between left behind children and children living with their parents.

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