

A STUDY ON THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF LABOUR MIGRATION ON LIFE OF WOMAN

SINDHU GYAWALI

GYAWALISINDHU@GMAIL.COM

Received: August 29, 2022; Revised & Accepted: September 25, 2022

Copyright: Gyawali (2022)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the social impact of labour migration on life of woman. The views presented in this paper are based on my research about the quality of life of the women left behind conducted in 2020. Here I argue that labour migration has tremendous social cost. Labour migration has positively contributed to our national economy but we are not cognizant of the challenges faced by Nepalese woman whose husband has migrated outside. Though the labour migration has improved the standard of living of woman and the family left behind, their quality of life is deteriorating. Their feeling of loneliness, frustration, extra burdening and anxiety has escalated.

KEYWORDS: *labour migration, globalisation, quality of life, woman left behind, social impact etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Labour migration is the most manifested form of globalization. Our every events are wrapped within the actions that are part of global politics, global economy and global culture. Globalization—the integration of the world economy—has ebbed and flowed over the twentieth century. There is the varying flows of goods, people, and capital around the world (Temin 1999). We live in a world where no incidents can be secret, where Choices have increased, knowledge is more accessible, and the world has become closer, implying globalization is rampant.

Globalization has contributed to the growth of international migration, mainly through revolutionary changes in information technology, breakthrough in transportation, emergence of free market societies, modern education, and technological advancement. International migration has thus become a popular practice throughout the world today. Migration is thus a shift from a place of residence to another place for some length of time or permanently including different types of voluntary movements. It has great impact on economic, social, cultural and psychological life of people .

Migration, is a displacement set in motion by the same economic relations that engender relative population surplus. Worker migration is one crucial way for capital to consume labour power most effectively (History Task Force 1979).

Under capitalism population becomes population for capital. The capitalist mode has as its fundamental premise the dispossession of the majority of the population of the instruments and means of production. This majority is transformed into wage labour force, that is, a human mass defined not by its need for subsistence but by its production of capital. Population movements therefore cannot be understood as simple geographic transfers, but as the circulation of labour power according to the exigencies of capital accumulation (History Task Force 1979). The international division of labour that emerges from capitalist investment by one country in the economy of another thus occurs within the process of commodity production and may involve the successive and multiple participation of nationally different working classes (History Task Force 1979). Labour Migration is thus a consequences of large scale and long term processes such as globalization, capitalism, democracy, class and other macro structures and processes.

Globalisation has accelerated the pace of international migration, unprecedentedly in recent years. Migration is both national and international phenomena as nations are engulfed within the world system models. In the last two decades Nepal has experienced a dramatic growth in international migration, to foreign countries such as America, Germany, Britain, Canada, Japan, Qatar, Arab, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries including India (International Organization for Migration and International Agency for Source Country Information 2017).

As Nepal has urbanized and transitioned economically as well as politically in recent years, it has experienced a rising volume of both internal and international migration. Migration within Nepal is generally attributed to poverty, an unequal distribution of income, geographic variation in labor demand, and food insecurity, with the relative importance of these factors varying by age, sex, education, and occupational skill (KC 2003) (Quoted by Pratikshya Bohra and Douglas S. Massey 2009).

Migration is thus a multidimensional phenomenon and its causes are varied. The social impact of labour migration is a serious subject to ponder about.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I have reviewed the pertinent literature related to globalization, labour migration and quality of woman's life.

Globalization implies a higher plan of organization once at which discrete national entities are themselves dissolving so that all major political and economic decisions will ultimately be transmitted globally. This new world sees the death of geography, and in particular, the demise of nation state" (Stalker 2000:2). Globalization is closely associated with the turn towards neo-liberal economic strategies. One defining feature of neo-liberalism is labour market liberalization (Tat Yan Kong 2006). Migration is the most manifested form of globalization. Migration, is a natural consequence of economic globalization and market penetration across national boundaries (Wallerstein 1974).

At its best, migration can be a rewarding experience that is made in the interest of the household welfare. Female Headship may have positive aspects. FHHs are likely to be less constrained by patriarchal authority at the domestic level and female heads may experience greater self-esteem, more personal freedom, and more flexibility to take on paid work, enhanced control over finances and a reduction or absence of physical and emotional abuse. Female heads may be empowered in that they are more able to further their personal interests and the wellbeing of their dependents (Yabiku 2006).

But in most cases moving to another country and being separated from one's immediate family takes place at considerable emotional cost (Emilio, Cordero and Bainvel 2007). The concept of wellbeing is gaining popularity in the study of quality of life and cultural significance of living.

Taking an example from Nepal's eastern terai, Horn Nath Gartaula, Leontine Visser and Anke Niehof contribute to our understanding of objective and subjective wellbeing by exploring the perceptions of women left behind by out-migrating husbands on their quality of life. They have used both qualitative and quantitative research methods and focussed on the life stories of the four women left behind by their migrant husbands. Complementing by quantitative data obtained from a survey among 277 households, their report shows that additional income from remittances has increased the objective wellbeing of the women left behind, but it may not have increased their subjective wellbeing. Hence, it is concluded that improved objective wellbeing of a woman does not necessarily translate into her (improved) subjective wellbeing. The subjective experiences are rather complex, multi-faceted and context specific depending on the family situation, socio-cultural disposition and prior economic situation of the actors involved (Gartaula, Visser and Niehof 2012).

Therefore, migration increases the risk for family breakdown, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress. The emotional impact is not just limited to the migrants themselves, but also to the family left. The feelings of rejection, abandonment and loss follow the women left behind, and cannot be compensated by the material gifts and remittances sent from abroad.

The migration literature mostly focus on either the conditions in the areas of destination or on the migrants themselves and their economic contributions to their home country, disregarding the socio-cultural dimensions of their moving out that are equally important in migration research (Sharma 2008). However, scholars have recently started to explore the dynamics of the people left behind within the framework of 'migration. Labour migration has significant impact on life of families left behind.

Current trends in labour migration of Nepal

Current trends in migration reveal that, there is extensive out-migration of youths to foreign land. The migration studies in Nepal reveals that,

"Formal labour migration started in Nepal around the nineteenth century with the induction of Nepali soldiers to the colonial British army. Between 1961 and 2001, the migrant to population ratio hovered around 3.4 per cent and was almost entirely driven by migration to India. Notably, migration beyond India is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before 1980 the numbers were small and directed to destinations like the UK, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), Singapore and Brunei. It was only in the 1980s, partially in response to the demand created by the oil boom in the 1970s that Nepalese started to migrate to other destinations for work. Foreign migration became easier after the adoption of economic liberalization policies in the context of restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990 and international travel was made easier and more systematic(International Organization for Migration and International Agency for Source Country Information 2017).

In the mid-1990s, the Government of Nepal (GoN) allowed private recruitment agencies to recruit workers to a selected set of countries, mostly in the Persian Gulf and a few others like Malaysia, Japan and RoK, after obtaining clearance from the Ministry of Labour/These factors led way to the surge in migrant outflow from Nepal in the 2000s, and this trend is set to continue (IOM et al. 2017)

Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility states that:

"Starting with a headcount in the census of 1942, the Nepali state has been collecting statistical data on population mobility in national censuses for the last seven decades. (Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility 2011). Government statistics show that about three per cent of the Nepalese live abroad (CBS 2001); many of them are labour migrants. Out-migration in Nepal is mostly transnational: 77 per cent migrate to India and 15 per cent to the Gulf countries (CBS 2001). Male out-migration has not only contributed to the national economy, but it has also affected the people remaining back home (CBS 2004).

A defining characteristics of labour migration since the early 2000s has been an unprecedented increase in the volume of workers headed to GULF Corporation Council (GCC) Countries and Malaysia for temporary employment. In the last decade since 2008/2009, the Department of Foreign Employment(DOFE) has issued over 4 million labour approvals to Nepali workers. In

1993/1994, the number of labour approvals issued by the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) was just 3,605. A decade later, in 2003/2004, it reached 106,660 and in 2013/14, it peaked at 519,638. Since 2013/2014, however, the volume of annual outmigration has been decreasing and reached 354,098 and 236,208 in 2017/18 and 2018/19 respectively (Nepal labour Migration Report 2020).

Migration helps in increasing economic growth through remittances. Nepal ranks fourth in the world in terms of the contribution of remittances to GDP, according to a report launched by Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, with support from IOM, the UN Migration Agency, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and The Asia Foundation. "*Labour Migration for Employment – A Status Report for Nepal: 2015/16 – 2016/17*". The volume of financial remittance has significantly increased in the recent past, from 2.54 billion USD in 2010/11 to 8.79 billion USD in 2018/19. (Nepal labour Migration Report 2020)

Labour Migration presents both opportunities and challenges to a large volume of Nepali youth. The oil-driven growth in the GCC economies and labour shortages in East and Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Japan and South Korea have increased employment opportunities for Nepali workers. Furthermore, coupled with advances in transportation and telecommunications, mobility has become cheaper and more convenient. The gains of labour migration via financial and social remittances are apparent and reflected in better living standards in Nepal. (Nepal labour Migration Report 2020)

Though Nepal has experienced considerable changes through migration in demography and social relationship in households, quality of life of women whose husband are migrated, has not been a systematic subject of inquiry in Nepal. Literature on migration reveals that additional income from remittance has enhanced the standard of living of the women but it may not increase their standard of life and their wellbeing. Yet these gains might come at substantial social costs to the migrants and their families. Happiness (or well-being) does not increase with financial stability only. While their husbands earn a living by working abroad, their wives are engaged in running the family and the household back home. They are facing many problems such as feeling loneliness, helplessness, frustration, increased household and social burdening. The feelings of frustration and stress cannot be compensated by the material gifts and remittances sent from abroad. I want to explore the quality of life of those women whose husbands has migrated for employment.

I have here examined the problems faced by woman, living lonely at home, after the migration of their husbands for job opportunities. Migration has been the leading phenomenon to tremendous social cost of Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design. The paper described the personal experiences of women of Syawalibazar, Bharatpur whose husband has migrated. This study was based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected by in depth case study

methods. The secondary data sources included the various Population Census data sets and other published material from government sources. So the major tools of research were: semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and case studies.

FINDINGS

Feeling of anxiety, frustrations and loneliness.

No matter what economic gains women received from their migrated husband that gain is nominal when compared to the feeling of anxiety, frustration, loneliness and stress they had in their lives. Each woman I interviewed wanted to stay with their husband either in their native place or foreign land. They said life becomes really difficult when one gets separated from their husband.

The case presented below reveals the severity of frustrations of a woman left behind.

Saradha's husband had migrated to Korea five years ago. She had one mentally retarded daughter of 12 years old. Saradha had to always keep close eyes to her daughter otherwise she may go undressed. She used to soil her beddings tearing the diaper. During the menstruation period she refused to wear sanitary pads and if forcedly used she used to throw it in trash can and stain everywhere with blood. She never went to social gatherings as her daughter was ridiculed when she made her underwear wet. She often burst into tears feeling disheartened to see her daughter struck at one place, while her younger son who was 10 years old was studying in boarding school. She said standard of life has increased after her husband went to Korea. Before this her son used to go to government school. She had a mud-home to stay but now she had built her own concrete home with all basic amenities required. But this has not added any satisfaction to her life. Saradha felt frustrated and burdened looking after kids by herself and taking all the responsibilities. She said raising a special child needs special attention and good parenting as well. She missed her husband. If he were with her, she would have someone to understand the pain she had in everyday life. He used to encourage her when they were together. She used to talk about her frustrations, confusions and concerns with him. She was taking the medicines of depression for two years. Her other family members, friends and relatives did not know this because it is taken as a matter of shame and guilt. She was handling everything alone, trapped in the abyss of loneliness.

In my opinion, only a happy mother can raise happy kids. The kids raised in a happy environment have good emotional wellbeing and can spread positivity to the society. The pain of loneliness and frustrations are so deep that they cannot be overcome easily. This feeling of loneliness and anxiety are not personal problems. They are social problems and are to be addressed accordingly.

C. Wright Mills reasoned that private troubles like being unemployed and migrating to other countries, having marital difficulties, or feeling purposeless or depressed can be purely personal in nature. They can be addressed as personal and psychological problems. However, if private troubles are widely shared with others, they indicate that there is a common social problem that has its source in the way social life is structured. At this level, the issues are not adequately understood as simply private troubles. They are best addressed as public issues that require a collective response to resolve.

Mills defined sociological imagination as how individuals understand their own and others' pasts in relation to history and social structure. It is the capacity to see an individual's private troubles in the context of the broader social processes that structure them. This enables the sociologist to examine what Mills called "personal troubles of milieu" as "public issues of social structure," and vice versa (Mills, 2005)

So this personal predicament of anxiety is historically and structurally constituted. Mills said not only the individual and society are related but the exploration between family and economy, citizens and state, consumer and market, etc is essential. (Mishra, 2009). We need thus need a collective response to resolve such feeling of anxiety and depression.

Addition of Responsibility

It is no doubt that, women, after marriage, enter into new way of life and have to bear certain responsibilities. After marriage, women have to follow the marital norms and marital discipline which makes her more responsible towards the whole family. Her role gets changed from daughter to daughter in law, wife and mother. But a woman whose husband has migrated has an addition of responsibility. She has to play the role of both father and mother to her children. She is expected to not only bring up her children in family but supply their needs, preserve the tradition and culture of family and perform some social duties. During this study it was found that women were in charge of all the family matters like cooking, doing animal husbandry, working in field, looking after the family, maintaining family expenditures and participating in communal activities. So they had the experience of difficulties in balancing the double role.

Tara Devi in my study opened a cosmetic shop from the little savings she had. She said they had some loan they borrowed while sending husband to Bahrain. So, it was difficult to maintain everyday expenditures with only husband's income. She put all her effort to provide the basic needs of bed and bread to the family and maintain familial and social relationships. She said she was tired and stressed by handling everything by herself. Ayusha added, it was hard to manage home during sickness and pregnancy. She was 4 months pregnant and she had to work hard at that time. She had to finish all the household chores alone even in such condition. Therefore an overload of responsibility had been an experience of women left behind.

Central Role in Decision Making

Female Headship may have positive aspects. FHHs are likely to be less constrained by patriarchal authority at the domestic level and female heads may experience greater self-

esteem, more personal freedom, and more flexibility to take on paid work and enhanced control over finances. Female heads may be empowered in that they are more able to further their personal interests and the wellbeing of their dependents (Yabiku 2006).

As Yakibu analysed, Women in my research were more confident, bold and empowered. They enjoyed the right to freedom, mobility and were able to make certain decisions on their own. It was all Purna Maya's decision that was implemented in her family. She decided the school for the son, things to buy for home and all other affairs. She borrowed the money to her friend without the consent of her husband and family members. With the interest of that money, she bought a mobile for herself.

When woman are socially and economically empowered, they will be forward in matters of decision making. They will enjoy certain autonomy. This was a positive impact of labour migration on the life of woman left behind. After all role and position of any individual in the family- society affects his/her familial-social experience of living.

Humiliation

The family in which a female finds her emotional identity is her native home in which she was born. After marriage, she is viewed as an outsider. The relationships of a woman with her in-laws are traditionally fraught with tension while in native home she is generally surrounded with love, care and affection.

Humiliation was a common experience for woman whose husband has migrated. After husband got migrated most of the women find their identity being eroded. Moreover, a daughter in law was expected to do all the hardest work in home. It was not easy to sacrifice the culture of one's native home and adjust according to the culture of the husband's home. Moreover when husband got migrated, a wife was critically watched and controlled. My respondents shared, identity and dignity meant a lot to them. It was humiliating for them when there was no respect and support in family.

My one respondents shared that, If she came home late due to some urgency, she got misbehaved and cross- questioned in various ways. One of my respondent, Laxmidivi shared, "My in-laws never tolerated me. They abused me with vulgar words if I talked with any neighbours, friends or relatives who are male. They always saw me with doubts and suspicion which feels humiliating".

The notion of male superiority, male domination and male control of women's behaviour is embedded in cultural beliefs and is supported by social institutions such as education, law, religion and custom. The old notion that wife is the property of husband and husband has full authority over wife and Good wife should be obedient to husband and his family still lingers in custom and in law. Even in absence of husband woman are expected to be cultured, loyal at husband's home. Moreover cultural attitudes and religious beliefs support humiliation, abuses as a husband and his family's prerogative to 'discipline' his wife.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

When husband were migrated outside, their wife were more prone to sexual harassment. My respondents said that sexual harassment was very common but they hesitated to speak due to honour of the family and prestige. The issue of honour for the patriarchal family discouraged women from speaking up about the abuses they face in their real life. As women have internalized the notion that “they are symbols of family and community’s honour; and that they are responsible for maintaining that honour, laws may come, may even be enforced, but as long as this internalization cannot be shaken and uprooted, Violence against woman will remain. This notion has become so ingrained that breaking the barriers of silence becomes extremely difficult even when the social and political climates are more favourable” (WOREC 2009: 20).

My one respondent’s story reveal the pain of sexual harassment.

Purnima’s husband was drunkard. He used to hit her frequently. She was so frightened of her husband that the sound of his footsteps would make her body go stiff and she would start sweating profusely. Moreover due to family prestige she did not want such issues to be out. After few years of marriage her husband went Qatar to earn money. She had only one daughter of three years old.. Her brother in law knew that Purnima was scared of her husband and would not share anything to him. He often used to visit her place of stay and sexually abuse her. She visited women cell to seek help only when the sexual violence crossed its limits. Purnima was tortured more for visiting women’s cell and for the down fall of their prestige. She said that her in laws came to her native home and threatened her for divorce. Even her father scolded her for reporting her sexual abuse.

My key informants told that, sexual abuse was reportedly rare, but possibly underreported. Stigma associated with sexual abuse is offered as reasons for this. Perpetrators cast evil eyes on woman when they are alone, which intensifies their possibility of being sexually abused.

It is society which turns males and females into masculine and feminine beings. Popular culture, news media, and advertising all reinforce all the cultural attitudes and contribute to the objectification and commodification of women. Battering, sexual abuse and verbal abuses are commonplace in feature films and television shows. Yet when women are assaulted, or sexually abused, studies show that the perpetrators are treated more leniently in society. One of my respondent Roshna was staying in her native home due to the instances of sexual abuses by her one distant relative whose house was just attached to Roshna’s house.

The case of Roshna reveals the screams of sexual abuse.

Roshna said it was more than three years that she was staying in her native home. Her husband was in Japan. She had no job to do and she did not want to be the burden of her native home. She would be happy to stay with her husband's family. She was ready to work hard, day and night like a maid in that house if they permitted her to stay in her house peacefully. She said after the instances of sexual abuse and her staying in native home, her husband was ignoring her. She was in a confused state of mind what to do next. She said she did not know what her life has in store for her,

Such story of sexual abuses are very painful to hear. The social cost of labour migration cannot be compensated by any economic gains.

CONCLUSIONS

Labour migration is a part of broader global process. Nepal is also operating within the capitalist system in terms of labour, capital, commodities or finance, so the rate of labour migration is increasing rapidly. It has contributed significantly to national economy but it has tremendous social cost which should not be ignored. My case-studies reveal that, no matter what the economic benefits women got, they face some extent of anxiety when their husband are migrated outside the country. Thus these gains might come at substantial social costs to the migrants and their families. While their husbands earn a living by working hard abroad, their wives are engaged in running the family and the household back home. They are facing many problems such as feeling of loneliness, helplessness, frustration, sexual abuses and extraburdening.

Despite the positive effects on her autonomy, a woman's quality of life is deteriorating. Except the economic stability, labour migration impedes other fundamental rights of woman such as their right to quality life, to health, to security and dignity. For the temptation for financial gains, it is thus not wise to deteriorate the quality of woman left behind.

REFERENCES

- Bohora, Pratikshya and Douglas S. Massey. 2009. "Processes of Internal and International Migration from Chitwan, Nepal". *The International Migration Review*. Vol. 43(3) New York: Sage Publications Retrieve December 12, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20681723>
- Central Bureau of Statistics. 2004. *Nepal living standard survey 2003/04: Statistical report*. Vol. 2. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, National Planning Commission, Government.

Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (NJMR)

Vol. 5, No. 4, September 2022. Pages: 41-51

ISSN: 2645-8470 (Print), ISSN: 2705-4691 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v5i4.49778>

- Central Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *National population census 2011*. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal.
- D’Emilio, A.L., B. Cordero, B. Bainvel. 2007. *The Impact of International Migration: Children Left Behind in Selected Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Division of Policy and Planning, United Nations Children’s Fund.
- Gartaula, HomNath. 2012. "Socio-Cultural Dispositions and Wellbeing of the Women Left Behind: A Case of Migrant Households in Nepal". *Social Indicators Research*. Vol. 108 (3): 401-420. Retrieve November, 20, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23260295>
- History Task Force, 1979. "A theoretical approach to the migration of workers". *Labour Migration under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*. New York. 2:33-66.
- Kong, Tat Yan. 2006. "Labour and Globalization: Locating the Northeast Asian Newly Industrializing Countries". *Review of International Political Economy*. Vol. 13 (1): 103-128. Retrieve December 21, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25124063>.
- Mishra, Chaitanya. 2009 ".Making Research Sociological." *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology of Nepal*. Vol 3: 1-18.
- Mills, C.Wright .2005. "In the Spirit of Sociology: A Reader". *The Sociological Imagination*. India :Pearson Education. Inc.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security. 2020. *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2020*.
- Sharma, J. R. 2008. "Practices of male labor migration from the hills of Nepal to India in development discourses: Which discourses: Which pathology?". *Gender, Technology and Development*. Vol. 12(3):303-323.
- Stalker, Peter. 2000. "Workers without Frontiers". *The Impact of Globalization on International Migration*.
- T. Yabiku, Scott & Agadjanian, Victor and Sevoyan, Arusyak. 2010. "Husbands' labour migration and wives' autonomy, Mozambique". *Population studies*. 64 (3):293-306. Doi:10.1080/00324728.2010.510200.
- Temin, Peter. 1999. Globalization. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*. Vol. 15 (4): 76-89. Retrieve on December 21, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23607035>.
- Wallerstein, I. 1974. *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World economy in the sixteenth Century*. New York:Academic Press.
- WOREC.2009. *WOREC ANNUAL REPORT 2008*. WOREC.
- World Labour Report, International Labour Organization, Geneva, (pp. 132).