

# Overseas Migration of Women and Socio-economic Impact on Women and Their Families in Rural Sri Lanka

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.11.08.2021.p11617

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.11.08.2021.p11617>

**Abstract-** Foreign earning from overseas migrant workers is the second largest source of foreign earnings in Sri Lanka which has been the main factor that has driven the attention of the government towards the foreign employment migrants. However, there is a growing concern with the socio economic impact on women and their families. Hence, investigations are required on both economic and social impacts of female migration. Previous research on the impact of migration in Sri Lanka has focused mainly on economic impacts while the social impacts have attracted little research attention. Hence, this study seeks to contribute in this latter area. The study found that women who returned to their homes after working abroad have achieved relatively unequal social and economic advancement. Moreover, it indicated that although the length of time and salary received were important, the final results had been inconsistent unequal. One of the primary determinants of success was the influence of social and economic behavior of the family members at the pre-departure and post departure period. These have directly affected the success or failure of the individuals and their families. Extension field work was done in Maho DS Division in Kurunegala and qualitative data was collected using interview technique in the main. Field notes and extensive interview notes were coded and classified manually for the use in the analysis.

**Index Terms-** women migration, foreign employment, socio-economic impact, rural women

## I. INTRODUCTION

The growing body of evidence on migration shows that it is in large part related to the broader global economic, social, political and technological transformations that are affecting a wide range in every country of the world. In the past three decades international migration has been rapidly increasing in the world. The prospects of higher wages and accessible employment opportunities have resulted in a significant increase in the number of people leaving the subregion in recent years. Significantly important and interesting studies have been made on Sri Lankan labour migration to overseas countries, which have remained at an increasing trend over the last three decades. Various research organizations, institutions as well as individual researchers have studied and analyzed this trend both at macro and micro levels by using a variety of approaches. Most of the studies at macro level

have been used (Asian Development Bank 201; UNFPA, 2006; UNFPA and IOM, 2006) to analyze data on the importance of migration as a means of foreign exchange earnings and alternative solutions provided for poverty alleviation and to solve the unemployment problem. Most of these studies have attempted to examine the contribution made by foreign earnings towards improving the economic conditions of the family, community and the national economy (SLBFE, 2009). Some of the micro level studies have pointed out that particularly for the women, the family and the community women's migration is important both from the economic and socio-cultural aspect (Gamburd, 2003; Gunathilaka, 1995; Wanninayaka, 2000; De Silva, 2010; Pinnawala, 2009;Ukwatta, 2010).

Migration from Sri Lanka to other countries has played an important role in gross national production of the government, which has been the main factor that has driven the attention of the government towards the foreign employment migrants. It is estimated that U.S. \$ 6.8 billion have been earned annually (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), 2015). More than one million Sri Lankans are employed in the Middle East alone, while another 600,000 are employed in other countries, including Europe. Particularly increasing numbers of women have been employed as domestic workers overseas over the last three decades (SLBFE, 2009; Kageyama, 2008; Gamburd, 2003). In the past few decades, globalization and market liberalization have influenced the increase in the number of women in the labour force and the nature of their employment, both national and international. Consequently, female unskilled laborers received a big demand in overseas employment. These unskilled laborers are from the lowest socioeconomic strata in the country. The socio-economic status of Sri Lankan women has improved over the past few decades (DC&S, 2007; Ukwatta, 2005).

The open economy reforms in Sri Lanka coincided with large scale migration flows from Asian countries including Sri Lanka to the Middle East region generated by the Gulf oil boom of the early 1970s. Global mobility for employment has also increased enhancing the ability of women in providing significant economic contributions to the country and their families (SLBFE 2009; Shaw 2008a). According to the estimation of Sri Lanka Bureau for Foreign Employment (SLBFE), the female migrant work force was 1,020,155 at the end of year 2007. The percentage of female migrants had grown from 24% to 75% between the year 1986 and 1997 and 85% of migrants are housemaids (SLBFE, 2009). As a result, the traditional role of women has changed

obviously over the years (De Silva, 2006). However, increasing numbers of women who have entered the international labour market as domestic workers are from low-income families and have low levels of education (SLBFE, 2009; Gamburd, 2005). The changing socio-economic status of women contributes to the changes in their traditional roles. According to some scholars there are several reasons for this stable increase of Sri Lankan female migration for work in these countries (Sumulong and Zhai, 2008; Dias and Jayasundere, 2004a): improvement in the social status of women in labour exporting families; the high unemployment rate of women and the lack of employment opportunities for women with less skills in Sri Lanka; and the increasing participation of women in the labour market in both Sri Lanka and destination countries.

On the other hand, the economic deprivation in the rural sector of Sri Lanka, which is a result of the collapse of the agricultural sector in the last two decades, has been relieved to a great extent because of overseas employment in the gulf countries (Fernando, 1998). Migration data for 1970 up to 1990s shows that migration from agricultural districts has superseded the figures of migration from Colombo and other urban and peri-urban districts. This indicates clearly that middle East migration is a phenomenon that affects the rural areas and rural families to a larger extent. As a result, it is more likely that a female member of low-income families will have more inclination to migrate than a male member of the family. Moreover, the improvements in the demographic and socio-economic status of women in Sri Lanka have motivated them to find employment opportunities in the local and international labour market over the past few decades (Ukwatta, 2005).

In this context it is worthwhile focusing on the rural sector women of the migrant labour, which is the focal area of the present study. The study specifically looks at the socio-economic conditions of the families of the returnee women from overseas migration over a period of 4-5 years from 2009. Previous studies (Ukwatta, 2010) show that returnees were at variance with regard to the overall socio-economic benefits that they have accrued. Migrant families are influenced economically and socially through both monetary and social remittances (Ghosh, 2008; Hugo and Ukwatta, 2008; Hugo, 2002). They improve the living conditions of migrant families as well by enhancing the ability to purchase family housing, lands, household consumer durables, etc.

The impacts of migration of women workers on families have become a major concern of researchers in Sri Lanka as well as many other Asian countries (Shaw, 2008a; Gamburd, 2000; Hugo, 1994; Wanninayake, 2000). Some scholars have exposed that migration of women abroad brings positive changes for migrants, their families and their country as well (UNFPA, 2006; UNFPA and IOM 2006). For example, Gamburd, (2000) found that Sri Lankan women have perceived migration as successful and beneficial. Another group of researchers have indicated that migrants and their families can bring about both positive and negative impacts equally (UNFPA, and IOM, 2006).

The government has recognized the importance of migrants' contribution to their families and to the country's economy, and implemented a number of programmes to facilitate foreign employment (Lasagabaster et al., 2005). However, the recognition of women's economic contribution to the country's economy and to the households is being offset to some extent by

a growing concern of the social costs that migration involves. In recent times Sri Lankan media has given wide publicity to violence and trauma experienced by female overseas migrant workers from Sri Lanka, particularly in countries in the Gulf region. The widely publicized tragic stories of persons, depressed living and working conditions of women abroad, abuses of women migrants, especially the physical and sexual harassments have evoked strong sentiments in Sri Lanka (Rodrigo, 1999; Eelens, 1995).

Therefore, there is a need to find options that could minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts of migration. However, further investigations are required on both economic and social impacts of female migration. Previous research on the impact of migration in Sri Lanka has focused mainly on economic impacts while the social impacts have attracted little research attention. Hence, this study seeks to contribute to in this area. It is apparent that the benefits acquired through economic gains have had varied impact on the community and family of the Middle East returnee. The economic benefits and social cost however were not systematically analyzed in the studies mentioned, although some references were made to an overall improvement. The economic benefits however, were in conflict with the socio cultural changes that followed as revealed in the studies that were reviewed.

In this context, the present study focuses on the following problem. Why is there a wide variation in socio-economic impact on the family and the community of the returnee women when a massive increase in the economic sphere of the villages and households of the returnees has taken place? To understand this dilemma, the present study seeks to explain why there is a positive impact on some returnee families while some others have a negative impact. It is assumed in this study that failures and successes are widely reflected in the socio-behavioral variables than in the variables that are associated with the economy of foreign employment.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study has primarily adopted a qualitative approach to analyze factors. Miller and Rasco (2004) mention the important limitations associated with simply conventional quantitative methodologies in an attempt to understand the variety of cultural and social contexts associated with migration related issues. The use of a qualitative approach may be important in order to adequately understand the "full richness and complexity" of the migration experience (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). Qualitative researchers are debatably more vigilant in explicating their perceptions. The reader is directed to more in-depth discussions on some of the more common perceptions of qualitative re-search, which mainly relates to research on migration such as narrative analysis and qualitative research (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Therefore, a qualitative research design is more appropriate in this study to analyze participants' points of view on socio-behavioral factors of their migration.

In gathering data for this study qualitative information was given more attention than for quantitative information. Thus case studies, direct observation methods, interviews as well as key informant interviews were used to gather data. The aim was to obtain socio-economic and behavioral data pertaining to the

respondents and their families as well as conditions that prevailed at the Pre – departure and post – arrival stages related to foreign employment. This study aimed to explore some of the unobserved phenomena related to women’s migration, and also to identify ways and means to solve some of the problems associated with women’s migration. Also some of the traditional kinship patterns have been changing and they appear to be gradually fading away in the complicated and continuously changing social contexts. Gathering qualitative data will be treated as a matter of special importance. Particularly the qualitative data is expected to yield both the negative and positive patterns of change in the social and economic conditions. These data are expected to be helpful to ascertain the success or failure achieved by the respondents.

This study was conducted with a sample of sixteen (12 including two key informants) for long interviews. In the selection of these respondents, the “Snow balling technique” was used, to ensure that respondents from diverse circumstances would be selected for the study. Data was recorded while obtaining the background data as well as throughout the data gathering process. The respondents' impressions and ideas about the conditions before and after foreign employment were recorded. The thematic method was used to analyze qualitative data. Secondary sources have been used to help interpret the primary data. For secondary data, the study has used published materials such as books, book chapters, research papers, journal articles, research reports, newspaper articles, and Internet resources.

**Table 1 : Demographic characteristics of the participant ( Returnee women from Middle East- Foreign employment)**

Index	Age (years)	Level of Education (Last passed class)	Marital status	Members of the family	Foreign employment	Period of employment
1-	40	Grade 7	Married	5	Housemaid	3 years
2+	55	Grade 9	Widow	6	Housemaid	4 years
3-	43	Grade 8	Married	4	Housemaid	2 years
4-	40	Grade 6	Married	5	Housemaid	4 years
5-	30	Grade 10	Married	4	Housemaid	2 years
6+	44	Grade 7	Married	4	Housemaid	4years
7-	34	GCE.O/L	Married	2	Housemaid	4 years
8+	42	Grade 10	Married	4	Housemaid	2 years
9+	40	Grade 8	Married	2	Housemaid	6 years
10+	25	GCE.O/L	Unmarried	4	Garment	4years
11+	40	Grade 7	Married	5	Housemaid	5years
12-	46	Grade5	Married	5	Housemaid	3 years

Field work for this study was done in ‘Maho’ Divisional Secretary Division in Kurunagala district in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. This is a rural area within the dry Zone. It comprises 68 Grama Niladhari Divisions covering 204 villages and the total population in Mario DS division is 60315. The population includes 3 ethnic groups namely Sinhala-Tamil and Muslim. However Sinhalese population is 95.5% while the Muslim population is 03.52% and 0.8 Tamils. Hence, the sample of the study mainly consisted of Sinhalese women. The main source of livelihood of the majority of the population is farming (more than 80%), including paddy cultivation and *chena* cultivation. Home gardening is also somewhat important for the local population, and coconut is cultivated in the home gardens. Coconut is cultivated as a commercial crop only to a relatively small extent. A few individuals are engaged in different occupations to earn an income. A few of them are in the middle-class including clerks, teachers and member of armed forces. Although more than 80% of the population in the village depend or farming to earn their livelihood, their daily routine has not improved. The basic challenges they confront are constructing of reasonably good dwellings, shortage of water, drought as well as satisfying their day-to-day consumption needs. To solve these problems people adopt various methods. The villagers have focused their attention to earn money from sources beyond the village boundary since economic prospects within the village are scarce.

Overseas work is the second most important source of employment in this community. The relative importance of foreign employment (mostly domestic work in the Middle East) among women in this community is mainly due to lack of alternative employment. Lacking educational qualifications and social contacts with powerful people in society and as members of a hereditarily disadvantaged community, they have limited avenues for making any headway in their lives. Overseas migration for work as housemaids is pursued also as a means of escaping social and economic problems.

**Brief History of Sri Lankan Women Migration**

Sri Lanka became a major labour exporting country of the South Asian region only in the 1970s with the economic development in the Middle Eastern region that accompanied the oil price increase. Constant movement of people within and across national boundaries is a key feature of the contemporary era of globalization (Appadurai, 2001). Sri Lanka is no exception to this global pattern. Nearly 23 percent of the Sri Lankan workforce is currently employed abroad, mostly in contractual labour and domestic work in the Middle Eastern region. Sri Lankan migrant workers, however, are spread out all over the world, including South Korea, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Italy, Cyprus, Seychelles, Nigeria and many other countries. Sri Lanka has seen a country with increasing numbers of women who are employed as domestic workers overseas over the last four decades (Sri Lanka

Bureau of Foreign Employment -SLBFE, 2013; Gamburd , 2003; Ukwattha, 2010; Wanninayake, 2001).

In 2009 remittances from overseas employment contributed to nearly 8 percent of GDP and were the leading source of foreign exchange in Sri Lanka, overshadowing foreign aid, Foreign Direct Investments and export incomes (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), 1997-2014). This highlights the significance of overseas employment as a source of employment on the one hand and as a source of foreign exchange for the Sri Lankan economy on the other. In addition, a range of Sri Lankans including students who are willing to study abroad, men and women who are keen to find employment overseas and those who seek to migrate to foreign destinations as legal migrants, refugees or even as illegal migrants indicate the growing significance of international migration for Sri Lankans.

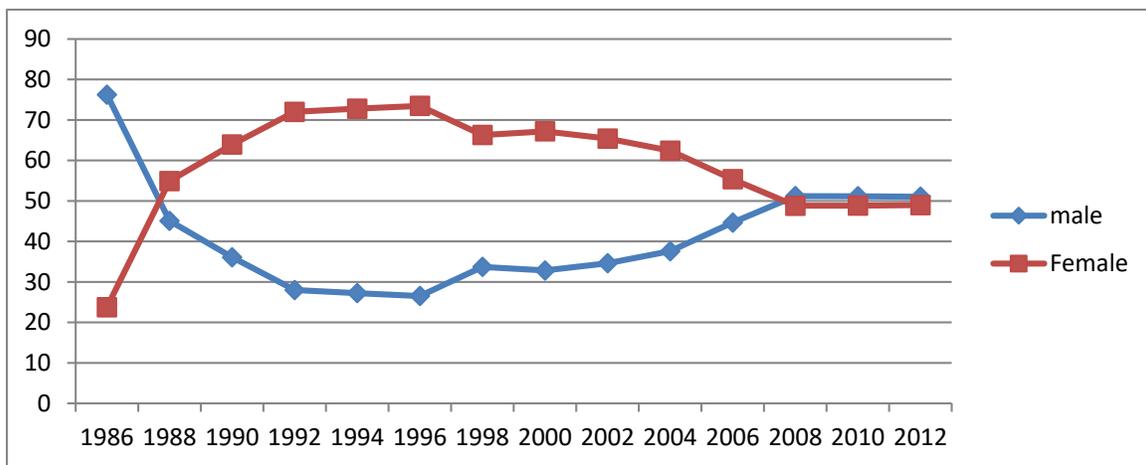
Several criteria such as gender, age, wealth owned by the household, urban/ rural differentiation, civil status, education,

nature of employment, ethnicity and caste may influence the decision to go abroad for employment (). However, at present remittances by women working abroad makes a significant contribution to the country's economy. This change could inevitably be linked to changes on the society, culture and political changes.

### New Trends of International Labour Migration

Past mid 1980s is the increasing period of women migrating as domestic workers from Sri Lanka to other countries. The migration of male labour to the Middle East began in 1976, with female migration beginning about half a decade later. Therefore, male departures were higher than female departures in the earlier years. Since the middle of the 1980s, females outpaced male migrants and reached more than 73 per cent during the 1990s(SLBFE, 2015).

**Figure 1. Departure for Foreign employment by Gender in year 1986-2012**

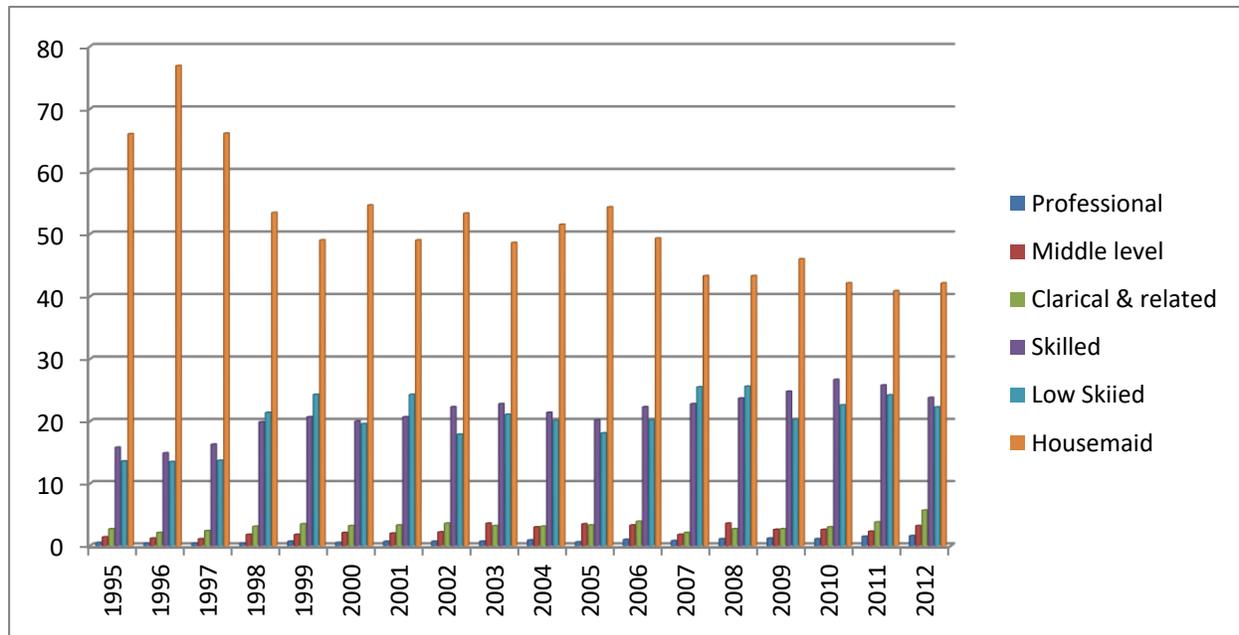


Source: SLBFE, 2015

When the departures for foreign employment are considered from 1995 onwards, it is seen that the share of females, have gradually declined from 73 to 49 percent in 2012. However,

the female migration for domestic work maintained a higher percentage during this period.

Figure 2. Comparison housemaid and other field of workers 2015



Source: SLBFE, 2015

In 1996, more than 78 percent of the total female departures for foreign employment consisted of housemaids. The percentage declined steadily to 42 percent in 2012 because of some restrictions imposed by the government of Sri Lanka. However, the female migration for employment is creating many changes in the society, the woman's family as well as the woman.

### Feminization of Labour Migration

Feminization of international labor migration is a global trend. The percentage of women in the migrant population (both permanent immigrants and temporary migrants) has been increasing in the postwar period, and now women comprise the majority of international migrants. In the recent past, globalization and open economy have influenced the increase in the number of women in the labour force and the nature of their employment, both internal and external. Consequently, female unskilled laborers received a big demand to overseas employment. These unskilled laborers are from the lowest socioeconomic strata in the country. According to Zlotnik (1998), the number of female migrants across the world increased by 63% — from 35 million to 57 million — between 1965 and 1990, an increase 8% higher than that of male migrants.

Sri Lankan women are obtaining more qualifications, increasingly participating in the labour market, and are contributing to the development of the economy and their own household. However, a significant gender imbalance still exists in Sri Lanka as many of the Sri Lankan women are accessing the less prestigious and low-income jobs and the majority are engaged in agricultural work (De Silva, 2006; Jayaweera, 1991). While there are dissimilarities in the existing social and economic structure, the majority of females have the opportunity to migrate overseas as unskilled workers and they are mainly from low socioeconomic settings (De Silva 2009; Gamburd 2000). The rising cost of living has adversely affected women, not only in the lowest

income groups, but also in the middle class, creating a wide gap between the poor and rich. The poor economic growth and diminished labour in the agricultural sector created a surplus labour in rural communities (De Silva 2009). Therefore, women have had to find job opportunities outside the agricultural labour market. The most significant development found in the service sector is the emigration of women in low-income families for employment as domestic workers to the Middle East countries and to some other Southeast Asian countries (Ukwatta, 2010; Wanninayake, 2000). These female workers make a major contribution to the increase in family income as well in the country's foreign exchange earnings.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the transformations in global social, economic and political processes, the global migration system has been changed over the last century (IMI, 2006; Skeldon, 2003b). The transformation of the global migration system has lifted new challenges for scholars bringing them to investigate the recent complexities of global migration. However, as some scholars argue that transformation and the recent complicated situations are being poorly dealt with by the existing migration theories such as classical, push-pull, liberal, neo-liberal theories etc (IMI, 2006; Massey et al., 1998). However, the global migrations transformations are classified into four inter related fields: growing complexities, migration transitions, diverse communities and transnational lives, and policy environment, which include gendered and transnational perspective of migration (Ukwatta, 2010).

Migrant workers' remittances have expanded in the last few decades with the increase of the departures for foreign employment, and have made direct and indirect contributions to the national and household income (Shaw, 2008a; Rodrigo, 1999).

It is estimated that between 1991 and 2006, the departures for foreign employment increased by an average of 6 per cent annually, and over the same period the contribution of formal remittances to GDP also increased from 4.0 to 9.7 per cent (Shaw, 2008a). Therefore, as one of the national poverty alleviation policies, the government of Sri Lanka has promoted foreign employment during the last few decades (Kageyama, 2008). With encouraging policies that facilitate foreign employment and the increasing demand for unskilled labour within and outside Asia, it has dramatically increased since the beginning of the 1980s.

Sri Lankan women are obtaining more opportunities to participate in the labour market, and are contributing to the improvement of the economy and their own family. However, domestic workers belong to one of the vulnerable groups among migrants (Gamburd, 2005; Piper, 2005; Chammartin, 2004a). Despite the expansions in the socio-economic status of women that have resulted in an increasing involvement in internal and external labour markets, employment opportunities for women with unskilled levels and low-income are still limited. Therefore, migrating as domestic workers has become the only decision available to them. Therefore, women's contribution is visible not only to the country's economy but also for the survival and upgrading the living condition of their families.

Migrant families are influenced economically and socially through both socio-economic remittances (Ghosh, 2008; Hugo and Ukwatta, 2008). Economic remittances increase the household income of migrant families. They improve the living conditions of migrant families as well by enhancing the ability to purchase family housing, lands, household consumer items, etc. Social remittances, the transfer of ideas, information, knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviour patterns, identities, and cultures (Clawen, 2002; Hugo, 1995), change the life styles of migrants and their families.

In addition, migrant women gain more experience during the period they work abroad. Life styles, customs, languages, food patterns, religious affiliations, behavioural patterns, and cultures between these two families are usually different. Therefore, the ideas, attitudes, behaviours, life styles as well as the expenditure patterns of migrants readily change when they adapt to a completely different environment while working abroad. Changing with socioeconomic remittances, migrants and their family members change not only to the influences of 'the newly acquired money, goods, ideas, and innovations transmitted back to home' (Hugo, 1994, p.15), but also to the absence of the women can change the gendered roles of migrant women as well as other family members at home. It can also create several issues in their socio behavioral patterns at home such as family disruptions, changes in the behaviors of children, discontinuation of children's education, drug addiction, alcoholism by the husbands of migrants, etc. However, the impacts of migration and adjustments to economic and social remittances depend on several factors including the areas of residence in Sri Lanka. This paper explains the importance of these factors affecting the success and failures of returnee women from overseas employment.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data gathered in this study reveals, that some of the returning overseas domestic workers and their families have

been able to successfully achieve their socio-economic advancement objectives, and there are some families who have not achieved substantial changes in their socio economic status as a result of earnings in foreign employment, while a few families have failed in terms of achieving any success. Consequently, the impacts of migration of Sri Lankan returnee women from foreign employment can be both positive and negative. Some data shows that migration can have positive impacts on the family well-being when it helps to increase migrants household income, savings and investments, build houses or improve the condition of the houses, buy lands or household consumer durables, reduce debt burden, and improve daily consumption. It can have negative impacts on the family economy if the period that the migrant worked abroad is short; the migrant had accumulated debts, the family members at home had misused migrants' remittances, migrants' husbands stopped working with the migration of their spouses, etc. Similarly, migration can have both positive and negative impacts socially.

Social impacts can be positive, when there is an increasing involvement of women in decision making, especially in financial matters and household activities, improvement in the skills of the migrant, personal development, improvement in the social status of the family, improvement in children's education, and the changes in gender roles. Migration can have negative impacts on families if the marriages of the migrants are disrupted due to migration or they lose their recognition in the family or their children.

#### Impact of Economic Remittances

The main reason for migration is obviously the economic benefit of the family. Many countries recognize that migrant women gain to sustain their families' back home while contributing to the country's economy (Hugo and Ukwatta, 2008). Sri Lankan Government recognizes overseas remittances as the backbone of the country's economy (Gunatilleke, 1992; Hugo, 2005b). However, it has become difficult to assess the impact of remittances on Sri Lankan households because of the lack of inclusive and correct data, limited research on assessing the remittance impact on migrant households (Shaw, 2008a). Some qualitative micro studies have shown a different picture regarding their economic remittances with women's socio-cultural and behavioral factors. Sri Lankan migrant women have economic hardships because of their unemployment before departure, low prestigious and low-income jobs of the migrants' husbands, and low monthly household income. Ukwatta (2010) found that almost three quarters of women (72.3 per cent) had not worked before migrating overseas. Dias and Jayasundere (2004a) also found that the majority of Sri Lankan women have not been employed prior to their migration. These factors imply that the majority of them had not been directly contributing to the family income before their migration.

In the case of Maho DS division majority of the selected women have not been employed prior to their migration but they worked as housemaid in their own house without any payment. Very few of them worked as *cooley work* (daily labour work) and engaged in self-employment like backyard poultry farming to earn money for the survival of their family. This suggests that the majority of them 75% had not been directly contributing to the family income before their migration, and therefore, migration has

offered them a chance to improve the economic circumstances of their family. However, Women's ability to contribute to the monthly expenses of the household has increased as a result of migration.

Some of the key informants interviews show that after several years of migration migrants there were considerable changes which can be seen in the village. Construction of new houses, use of luxury items, purchase of land and vehicles, starting new enterprises as well as drug addiction, divorces, break down of families, an increase in the number of school drop outs were experienced. There were mainly social and economic changes in the village. Some of the families showed their positive changes with their expectations and some of them showed their negative results with their expectations as well.

The selected parts of the long interviews are represented in narrative form with some editing. The narratives are presented in a way to highlight women's actual voice. Narratives were then explained and analyzed to contextualize and give answers to main research questions.

### **Pre-departure; Reasons for Migration**

According to returnees, there were different reasons for seeking foreign employment and they can be ordered into distinct categories. Some of the respondents stated that there was a major reason for that decision, while some others attributed several reasons. Out of the 12 respondents, ten (83.3%) stressed that the major reason was their poverty. They pointed out that particularly economic hardships including very low incomes of their families induced them to earn some money by working abroad. 'Leela' is one of central figures in a long interview that I did and she said that;

'After the sudden death of my husband I couldn't properly manage our livelihood with my old mother and three children. We had a small paddy land and additionally our home land. But we couldn't properly work there without my husband and the only job I had was the daily labour (*cooley*) work. It was not enough to continue our livelihood and children's education. Then I decided like one of my relatives in Kurunegala to migrate to Dubai. I had to borrow some money from my classificatory sister who was already working abroad to pay for the employment agency and also mortgaged our small paddy land what I inherited from my husband' (Int.2).

Leela is a returnee woman who worked as a housemaid in Dubai who was 57 years old at the time of this study. She lost her husband due to a snake bite when she was 32 years old. She has a son and two daughters. At the time her husband's death her son was 14 years old and two daughters were 12 and 8 years respectively. Leela's mother who was an elderly woman too was living with them. They had limited assets. They made a living from a small farm land her husband had inherited. After his death life became extremely difficult for the entire family. She was the eldest daughter in her family with two sisters and one brother who all respected her and saw her as a source of help and advice when they had difficulties. However, Leela had faced many difficulties when she struggled to continue her life with other four members of the family.

'We had severe economic hardships. My parents were unemployed. They did not own any land. Their income was earned

either by working as labourers or selling alcohol. I helped them in those activities whenever I could' (Int.12).

'My husband was a temporary employee in a workshop. He did not have a regular income. We hardly had an income sufficient for food and children's education' (Int.3).

All the above quotations show that a majority of migrant women come from low-income families and have lower levels of education, which inhibits their possibilities of entering into the local labour market. Even if they are employed in Sri Lanka, their wages are low, and their families live in poverty. They need money to improve the economic and social well-being of their families. Since they find no other alternatives to earn money in Sri Lanka, they take the decision to migrate. Therefore, the reason for their migration is mainly monetary. These economic reasons include poverty, limited employment opportunities for them to work in Sri Lanka, unavailability of permanent jobs for their husbands, repayment of debts, buying a land, building a house, and family obligations. Non-economic reasons such as providing better education and health for their children and recovering husband's illness or death were reported as main reasons of some of the families. Although the provision of education for their children was the main reason for migration only for a small number of families, it is one of the reasons reported by more than half of the families.

### **Family income**

The impacts of migration and adjustments to financial and social remittances depend on several factors including the areas of residence in Sri Lanka, their ethnic group, marital status, salaries abroad, and the duration the migrant women work abroad (Shaw 2008a; Eelens 1995). In the area of 'Maho' majority of migrant women have economic hardships because of their unemployment before departure, low prestigious and low-income jobs of the migrants' husbands, and low monthly household income from their agricultural work. Most probably husband's income may stop as she migrated from the family. Sometimes the husband has to look after their children and other domestic work since the woman was absent in the family. Some key respondents said that some of husbands have given up their regular income (daily labor work etc) because of their wives work abroad and they think that they can earn enough money from women foreign employment. However, the result is that they have to spend two thirds of the income for their maintenance of the family.

For these types of families money earned by the migrant woman is the main source of income for daily expenses. It does not mean that other migrant women in the study do not save money and invest for their future benefits. Without directly contributing to the monthly income, these women contribute to the family income through their savings and investments. These differences can be seen among the women who return several years after work (more than two years). It was reported that migrants support their families financially by not only working abroad but also by working in Sri Lanka after their return, since 22.1 per cent of the returned migrants had started to work in Sri Lanka after their migration according to survey of Ukwatta (Ukwatta, 2010). They usually engage with their family matters and maintain the livelihood of their family even after return from overseas. Second part of the respondents' interviews said that how economic capital

manages through changing their socio behavioral pattern within the family using their social capacity.

### Post migration Situation; Impact of Social Remittances

‘I saw my employer seeking to recruit another domestic worker in order to cope with the additional work generated in this house. Just I quickly asked him about my sister who agrees to join here to work, and he agreed without hesitation. I contacted my sister *Pathma* arranged to bring her down within one month. I was much relieved after my sister joined here because we could discuss personal problems and managed to share my duties with my sister. Later I had the chance to bring my younger sister to work relatives of our employer living on the upper floor and then after 4 years I could bring my son and daughter to work there. I came back to Sri Lanka after my mother died and managed everything here for my extended family members’ wellbeing without going back abroad’(int.2).

The social network among the migrant workers from the same family served as a mutual support mechanism not only in daily life but also in their dealings with the employer families. Kinship networks play a significant and a multifaceted role in identifying openings for overseas employment, dissemination of information, job placement, and mutual support in the work place, prevention of potential abuses in the work place, management of remittances and prevention of potential abuse of funds, substance abuse and neglect of household responsibilities by husbands staying behind. Kinship networks among migrant women provide a protective shield for female migrants as evident in the case of advances on *Champa* (*Leela*’s daughter) by her employer’s son, which was effectively averted by the operation of her kinship network in the work place. This may be one mechanism that serves to safeguard women workers in such social networks from the kind of abuses of migrant workers widely reported in the press. Compared to overseas work arranged by employment agencies notorious for various malpractices, overseas work arranged through kinship networks of the workers themselves appear to be much safer and perhaps socially and emotionally more desirable for the workers. This itself is an important finding that must be recognized by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment and other government and international agencies seeking to promote the welfare and safety of migrant workers.

On the other hand, the family structure and size can be seen as a negative impact on migrated woman and on her family. The findings of this study revealed that the economically better off and successful families were of small size (*Shaw 2008a*). Especially when the number of dependents in a family is less, it paves way for success, although this appears to be a generalized assumption. The lesser the number of dependents in a family the Middle East returnees economic status tended to be satisfactory. *Susila* was forty six years returnee woman from Lebanon to Sri Lanka said that;

Whatever money I received, I sent in to my husband. However, we couldn’t save money during my three year period of work in Lebanon. By husband gave up his daily basis work. He said that he will look after our children because we had not here any our people. However, during that period he addicted to drink alcohol with his two of friends. My elder daughter and two sons did not continue schooling. Husband always ask to send money for daily expenses. Even we couldn’t to build up part of our house.

When I came back here I brought a TV and cloths for my children and other relatives (int. 1).

Above quotation has given by *Susila*, who had not satisfied for her three year journey and worked as housemaid in Lebanon. She expressed she couldn’t achieve their aims what they expected of her journey. As usual migrant families used the money sent by migrants for multiple purposes. Among them, daily consumption is important. In addition, these families used these remittances for children’s education, children’s health, and repaying debts. Repaying debts is a grave issue that hinders their economic development. In addition, the lack of knowledge in finance management of husbands is also an issue to be taken into account. Although *Susila* earned significant amount of money she and her family couldn’t manage them. Husband couldn’t continue his job and addicted alcohol and children did not continue their studies, and they use money for unproductive items did not save money and even couldn’t invest at least to build their house. Although she has brought considerable proportion of the economic remittances she couldn’t bring and maintain social remittances. Hence the behavior pattern of the family members was mainly effect to maintain their social benefit of the family.

However, different picture was given by the some cases in *Maho* about the above assumption. It appears that there is direct relationship between the number of dependents in a family and the relatives.

‘Eventually I came to Sri Lanka permanently after my mother died and after that I arranged for my own children to join Middle East while my two sisters working there. My son *Piyal* who was a driver and who was married went to the same household where I worked, as a driver. My sisters who were working in Dubai helped him acquire this job. Then I used my accumulated earnings to complete the building of my new house and to help my grandchildren while starting money lending in the area. I received some of the money remitted my family members working in Dubai sometimes I used that money for money lending where necessary’ (Int.2).

[Success or failure in improving the economic status was different from that of the same effect due to family size.] In a nuclear family where the children’s mother had gone abroad, the husband had to attend to domestic chores and take care of the family. Here, a question can be raised as to whether the husband can perform these tasks adequately. Normally male’s (husband) major role is to provide income for the family, through engaging in economically beneficial activities. If and when a father has to look after the house and take care of children, he may not have an opportunity to go for work or engage in economically productive activities. This can lead to a substantial loss for the family in terms of earnings and savings. Thus there may be a need to work for additional sources of income or resources. In the case of *Leela* in her extended family, she looked after grandchildren while starting money lending in the area and also closely monitored the activities of the husbands and children of two sisters who were still working in Dubai, sometimes causing their resentment in the process.

*Leela*’s case study shows the importance of family and kinship networks on labour migration particularly with regard to women, which emerges as a significant factor. As a grandmother *Leela* took care of the children in addition to serving on the aunt for her sister’s children. Such support and help further strengthened their kinship relationships. The importance of

kinship relationships again emerges with regard to saving money, investment and consumption and financial management. When Leela migrated for foreign employment, the family members had not directly contributed for handling her remittances. The family members were involved only in consumption. So she had to engage in savings by herself. However, she was able to lay a foundation for her house, and buy some tools with her savings. However, it appears that she had to prepare a background to reach long term benefits for their extended family.

This case study indicates low kinship network relationships influence migrating women and the success of their families. Leela overcame many challenges through infusing effective kinship network relations in the location where her family members were employed. Through improving kinship network relationships Leela was able to achieve all family welfare security and wellbeing of children and proper use of earnings to lay the foundation for a successful living.

This characteristic was highly prevalent in Maho area. Nevertheless, in the cases of failure of the families, additional responsibilities were imposed on earning activities. In such instances the earnings of the Middle East employees had to be spent for expenses for the children and the husband. In addition whenever money had been borrowed for the women to travel abroad, the loan had to be repaid together with interest. All these expenses had to be met from her own earnings. This can lead to an inability to save funds for future investments. Economic remittances increase the household income of migrant families, their savings, and investments. It reveals that success or wellbeing of the family depends not only for on economic gain, but also their (family members) social behavioral pattern of the family members. They improve the living conditions of migrant families as well by enhancing the ability to purchase family housing, lands, household consumer durables, etc.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study has focused mainly on women overseas migration and its socio-economic impacts on women and their families in rural Sri Lanka. The study specifically looks at the socio-economic conditions of the families of the returnee women from overseas migration. It is assumed in this study that failures and successes are widely reflected in the socio-behavioral variables than in the variables that are associated with the economy of Middle East employment. The study explores the importance of these socio-behavioral factors through analyzing a case study related to several cases of migrated and returnee women in Maho DS division in Kurunegala District. It has drawn based upon a qualitative approach of women domestic workers who had returned to Sri Lanka. Qualitative data were collected using interview technique in the main. Field notes and extensive interview notes were coded and classified manually for the use in the analysis.

The migration of these women has become a major policy concern in recent years due to the growing concern about the major foreign gain to country. However, some of the micro level research showed that there are some issues faced by returnee women when their achievement is compared with their expectation. Moreover, the existing literature has indicated a need for further investigation on this issue. Furthermore the literature depicted that socio-

economic status of Sri Lankan women has improved over the past few decades (DC&S, 2007; Ukwatta, 2005). Internal and international mobility for employment has also increased enhancing the ability of women in providing significant economic contributions to the country and their families (SLBFE, 2009; Shaw, 2008a; Ukwatta, 2005). Consequently, the traditional role of women has changed noticeably over the years (De Silva, 2006). The study found that the financing of migration was one of the grave problems that women migrants face in the pre-departure situation. The problem was found to be higher in rural areas. A significant proportion of migrant woman depends on moneylenders in financing migration, and they provide loans at high interest rates compared to the interest rates charged by the banks. Although the government has introduced banking facilities to get loans at low interest rates, reasons such as the unavailability of property to keep as a security, lack of knowledge in banking procedures, and easy access to moneylenders appeared as barriers for them to get loans from banks.

There are several factors which make women migrate overseas; at origin and destination, as well as individual reasons, household and country level factors (Ghosh, 2009; Eversole, 2006) determine their migration. The migrant women of the study come from low-income families and have lower levels of education, and very less possibilities to enter the local labour market. Even if they are employed in Sri Lanka, their salaries are low, and their families live in poverty. They need money to improve the economic and social well-being of their families. As they find no other alternatives to earn money in Sri Lanka, they take the decision to migrate. Therefore, the reason for their migration is mainly economic. These economic reasons include poverty, limited employment opportunities for them to work in Sri Lanka, unavailability of permanent jobs for their husbands, repayment of debts, buying a land, building a house, and family obligations. Non-economic reasons such as providing better education and health for their children and recovering husband's illness were reported as main reasons only by a small proportion of families.

The migration of women has brought multiplier effects on their families, economic benefit being the first priority among them. The overwhelming evidence from the study is that migrant families gain a net economic benefit from migration since there is an increase in the household income, improvement in living conditions and daily consumption, an increase in the ability to invest in productive and non-productive items, and an increase in savings. While the transfer of social remittances in terms of ideas, attitudes, behaviours, and skills have changed the lifestyles of migrants and their families and the gendered roles of migrants and their family members, the separation of migrant women for longer periods have created several problems in migrant families. Hence the study demonstrated that?

In fact, the study found that the primary determinant of success or failure was the influence of social and economic behavior of the family members at the pre-departure and post departure period. The success of a family also depends to a great extent on mutual co-operation, good will, affection and solidarity. Moreover, the mutual co-operation between the woman and the members of her family had a significant influence. Particularly protection of the family members while the woman was away from

home and also avoiding alienation were desirable. It influences the economic behavior of the family members.

However, it is not possible to say that the impacts of migration on families are exclusively positive or negative. Social costs are more important than economic benefits, or economic benefits are more important than social costs since the study found mixed outcomes of positive as well as negative, social as well as economic impacts. If migrant women find economic benefits are more important than social costs, they will continue migrating. If they are more concerned about social costs, they may stop migrating. Although there are reported cases of negative social impacts of migration in this study, the social costs of migration would appear to have been covered up by its economic benefits, especially because the reason for their migration is mainly economic and they generally give priority to their economic needs.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank all, those who have supported in providing information, review comments and technical assistance extended to make this article success and specially the anonymous referees for their useful suggestions.

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