

# A Study About The Social Implication Of The International Labor Migration In Sri Lanka

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## **Abstract.**

The study attempts to understand the issue of parent seeking migratory work through a sociological analysis. Migration plays an important role in the population dynamic of a country. There are two types of migration: Internal and International migration. This research is mainly focused on international labour migration. After introducing the open economic system in Sri Lanka in 1977 a large number of consisting both men and women migrated to take up jobs in the Middle Eastern countries, on the other hand the numbers migrating to Italy in search of employment also increased. Under the survey and case study methods data were collected by questionnaire, direct interview and the observation. Families of parents in Sri Lanka engaged in foreign employment are faced with more negative consequences than positive consequences.

**Keywords:** Labour migration, Population dynamics, International migration, foreign employment.

## **Introduction**

Human migration is a critical process which determines the socio-economic status of a certain country. It can be defined as a key component which affects the population size, growth and distribution except mortality and fertility. Actually, the impact to population growth and distribution from migrations is a proportionate one, indifferent to the influence of the fertility-mortality factors. In Social Sciences, the word 'migrations' is used to describe the geographical movement of a person or a group of people from one place to another.

In a study about the fluctuations of a population, it's convenient to be based on three important factors. They are Fertility, Mortality and Migrations. As Zelinsky remarks, even though fertility and mortality can be calculated and statistically expressed, migrations can't be defined in such an ease (Zelinsky: 1971; P 233). Moving from one geographical area to another is defined as Migrations and the worldwide human migrations can be identified in two fundamental patterns (Ghosh; 1993; P 328).

1. Internal Migration
2. International Migration

Internal migration is the movement of people to settle in another location permanently or temporarily, performed between the administrative regions within the national borders of a certain country which brings a change to its population structure (Hussan: 2005). The movement of people across the international boundaries is International migration. According to United Nations, due to various socio-economic reasons 180 million people which is about 3% of the world population relocate to a different country from

where they were born (United Nations: 2002). International migration has become an important factor for population growth as the population of some countries has rapidly increased as a result of international migrations.

The movement of a person from one place to another within the home country or to a different country with an intention of a job is defined as Labour Migration by the International Organization for Migration (IOM: 2008). Therefore, Labour Migration causes the displacement of valuable human resources from one country to another. This is a process which depends on various attraction-repulsion factors. Collins Encyclopedia identifies, Migrant worker is a person who travels from one place to another to provide the labour (Collins World Encyclopedia: 2005; p 599). In the initial stages, labour migration was based on Brain Drain. Brain drain is a result of numerous factors. The Push factors such as the reduction of the domestic income, ethnic conflicts, insufficient facilities for education and research, unemployment, not getting promoted in the job and the uncertainty about the future, and also the Pull factors like attractive salaries, a higher quality of life and proper facilities for education and research had directly influenced the brain drain from the developing countries to the developed (Ghosh: 1993; p 330-331).

The self-sustaining agricultural economy of the traditional Sri Lankan society was dismantled as a result of colonialization. After the rural community was deprived of their land ownership and the demolishing of agriculture, the villagers sought alternative modes of income via migrating out from their villages. As a result of this phenomenon the open economic model was introduced in 1977 and it fostered a drastic expansion in international relations. Since the beginning of 1980s a large number of men and women migrated to West Asia for foreign employment. It's obvious that these international labour migrations had resulted in certain repercussions in the Sri Lankan family structure.

### **Research Problem**

The wellbeing of a family is a continuous process which depends on the inter relations between the parents and children. Those can be weakened through the inability for the family to live together which is an essential structural component, due to the international migration of a family member. Thereby the research problem addressed in this research is "How does the parents' foreign employment affect the functioning and the well-being of a family?"

### **Hypotheses**

- The negative impact to the family structure caused by the parents' foreign employment is greater than its positive effects.
- A family which is already running under threat will face a significant risk of splitting up due to foreign employment.

### **Research Objective and Targets**

- The main objective of this study is to comprehend the effect of foreign employment for the family structure.
- Identifying the impact of international labour migration linked with foreign employment experienced by the members of a family and proposing necessary measures that can be taken to minimize the negative consequences for the aforementioned family members can be identified as the supplementary targets of the research.

### **Significance of the study**

Despite that international labour migrations from Sri Lanka to foreign countries had conducted from past, it's evident that it didn't cause a direct influence for the sustainability of the family structure. In the traditional Sri Lankan society, a family member or a couple being foreign employed didn't cause a considerable effect for the remainder because of the sizable group of active relatives

which were present in the old days. But the relatives of the modern family are not as much in depth or rooted with past. Even though various scholars in recent history looked into the unskilled labour migrations to West Asia, the labour migrations from Sri Lanka to Italy haven't been into consideration. Therefore, studying the implications for the remaining family members, caused by skilled and unskilled workers getting migrated to West Asia and Italy from Sri Lanka, is a timely requirement.

### **Research Methodology**

As Sociology inspects the social behavior of the human collective, the laboratory for a Sociologist is the Society. Experiments of natural Sciences are conducted inside laboratories while a Sociologist through empirical research examines the society and arrive into certain conclusions (Goode & Hatt: 1952; p 05). According to Best and Khan, a Research can be considered as a process which is well organized and methodological, conducted with an utmost effort and assessed using the scientific method (Best & Khan: 1993; p 20).

Data can be classified into two categories according to their nature. They are Quantitative and Qualitative data (Sarantkos: 1998; p 25). Both Quantitative and Qualitative data were utilized for this research. Quantitative data was used when collecting data such as the number of foreign labour emigrants as men and women, nature of the occupation, number of families, income, expenditure, savings and the age groups. While in collecting data such as the attitude of the wife or the husband about foreign employment, the impact on the socialization process of children caused by the foreign migration of parents, the tendency to develop extramarital affairs, Quantitative data was used. Direct interviews, observation and questionnaires were the data collection techniques used in this research.

### **The Field of Research and the Research Sample**

The study which focused on the way the family structure getting affected by the foreign employment of parents, was conducted by selecting Puttalam District which is an administrative district in Sri Lanka, as its research field. The prime reason for that was the higher percentage of foreign labour emigrants in Puttalam district when compared to the other districts in the country. Wennappuwa divisional secretariat was identified as the area with the highest number of labour migrants from Sri Lanka to Italy. Due to the major scale labour emigrations from this area, Wennappuwa is named as "Little Italy" by the fellow Sri Lankans. Wennappuwa secretariat division records the highest number of foreign employees in the Puttalam district. Apart from Wennappuwa, there are a lesser number of labour emigrants to Italy and Middle-East recorded from Dankotuwa and Arachchikattuwa areas. By considering the number of the foreign employees and representing Wennappuwa, Dankotuwa and Arachchikattuwa areas, a sample of 400 families was selected for this research.

### **Data Analysis**

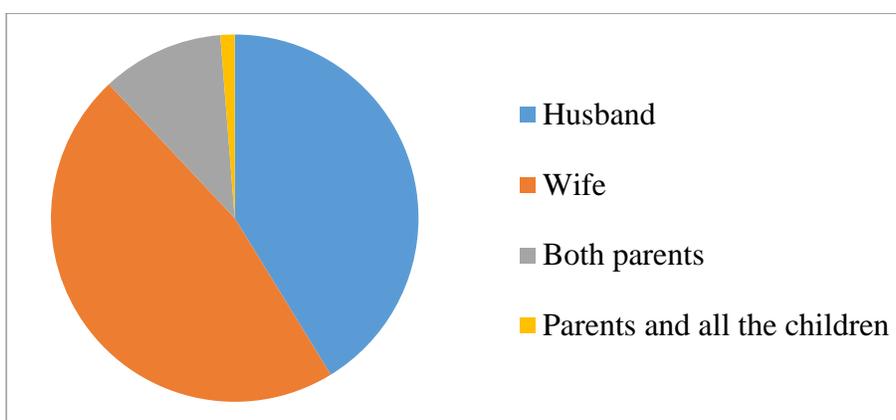
When analyzing the data collected in this research which inspected about the impact on the family from the foreign emigration of parents, the migrated families of the total sample within the research field are as follows.

Table 01: Foreign migrated families

Person/s migrated	Amount	Percentage
Husband	165	41.3
Wife	187	46.8
Both parents	43	10.7
Parents and all the children	5	1.2
Total	400	100

Source: field research data 2015.

Chart 01: Foreign migrated families



Source: field research data 2015

According to the table 1, majority of the foreign emigrants are wives. When the mother, father or both parents are foreign employed, the dependents of that occupation are living in Sri Lanka. These are the family members who are currently living in Sri Lanka while being dependent on the occupations of foreign emigrants.

Table 2: Family members living in Sri Lanka who are dependent on foreign emigrants

Dependents	Amount	Percentage (%)
Husband	172	19.7
Wife	165	18.9
Children	356	40.7
Parents of emigrants	172	19.7
Siblings	5	0.5
Relatives	5	0.5
Total	875	100

Source: field research data 2015

Table 2. reveals the information about the family members living in Sri Lanka who are dependent on the foreign emigrants. In this the participants for the research had the chance to involve in a multiple response method. It highlights the fact that most dependents are children. When considering the population of foreign migrants according to their ages, this is how the husbands and wives within the sample belonged to the respective age groups.

Table 3: The Age groups of the sample

Age group	Husband		Wife	
	Amount	Percentage (%)	Amount	Percentage (%)
Below 20 years	3	0.75	20	5
21 - 30 years	67	16.75	134	33.5
31 - 40 years	202	50.5	152	38
41 - 50 years	104	20	83	20.75
51 - 60 years	13	3.25	3	0.75
Above 50 years	2	0.5	1	0.25
Not mentioned	9	2.25	7	1.75
Total	400	100 (94)	400	100

Source: field research data 2015

According to the table 3, when considering the ages of husbands and wives in the sample of 400 families the majority of them belonged to the 31 - 40 years age category.

Not only the positive but the negative implications of foreign migration of mother or/and father was evident. The ill-effects experienced by children due to the foreign employment of their parents are presented herewith.

Table 04: Negative effects on children caused by the foreign migrant parents.

negative effect caused by the foreign migration of the parents	Amount	Percentage (%)
Not receiving adequate food	81	8.9
Facing health issues	111	12.1
Dropping out from education	99	10.8
Drug addiction	48	5.3
Stubbornness	221	24.2
Becoming violent	127	13.9
Wasting money	56	6.1
Being psychologically affected	106	11.6
Sexual abused	65	7.1
Total	914	100

Source: field research data 2015

When collecting data about the harmful effects experienced it was openly presented enabling multiple response for the respondents. In certain situations, the impact of foreign migration of parents has been a positive one too.

Table 05: The Positive effects on children caused by the foreign migrant parents.

Positive effect caused by the foreign migration of the parents	Amount	Percentage (%)
Having a luxurious life	101	20.5
Adequate money for expenses	83	16.8
Receiving modern commodities	120	24.3
Ability to buy a vehicle	31	6.3
Capability to enroll in educational courses	22	4.5
Receiving fashionable clothes	136	27.6
Total	493	100

Source: field research data 2015.

It should be emphasized that the positive effects were mostly experienced by the children in the families of the foreign labour migrants to Italy. Father getting migrated has resulted in numerous detrimental effects for the role of the mother. Problems such as getting involved in extramarital affairs, negligence of children, facing social reproach, infidelity in public, getting divorced, were identified from the sample. Similarly, wives getting foreign migrated has caused negative influences among the husbands. Problems identified within the sample were getting addicted to drugs, involving in extramarital affairs, wasting the money sent by the foreign employed wife, pawning the household commodities and getting involved in child abuse.

Sri Lankan international labour migrations are causing negative effects for the family structure. But the benefits for the family structure due to foreign employment can also be referred.

Table 06: Benefits for the family due to the foreign migration of the husband or wife.

Benefits for the family due to the foreign migration of the husband or wife	Amount	Percentage (%)
Building a house	138	17.8
Good education for children	118	15.1
A wealth through savings	85	10.9
Fulfilling responsibilities of parents and siblings	69	8.8
Buying a Vehicle	65	8.3
No benefits received	475	100 60.9

Source: field research data 2015.

When analyzing the data on the benefits of foreign migration, it's evident that most of emigrants were interested in building a house. Even though 138 participants had related that they succeeded in that, most of the houses could be seen as partially completed when observed. It should be specially mentioned that the labour migrants to Italy has succeeded in building highly luxurious houses. However, when analyzing the data obtained from the research, it's palpably clear that the negative effects caused by the foreign labour migration of parents is substantially higher than its positive impact.

### **Conclusion**

The study under review out of 400 hundred families which depend on Sri Lankan labour migrants, more mothers are working abroad than fathers. most number of mothers are employed in the middle East while fathers have migrated to Italy for employment Although Italian migrants had a stronger life style, their families had collapsed due to an extra martial affair. Children mainly going on to become delinquents and drug addicts when mothers migrate for work there is a negative impact when it comes to the children's socialization process and labour migrants who are migrated to middle Eastern countries has not helped in alleviating poverty.

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