

# The Influence of Labour Migration on the Family Institution in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research to study of the influences caused by the international labour migration imposed on the institution of the family. International migration is the migration from one political boundary to another political boundary. When an individual leaves his home town with the expectation of finding employment is another location or even another country, this can be defined as labour migration. After introducing the open economy in 1977 in Sri Lanka, a large number of consisting of 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. The research problem of this study was what is the impact of parents in migratory foreign employment to the function of the family institution? They hypothesis was families of parents engaged in foreign employment are faced with more negative consequences over power positive consequences within the family institution. The main aim of the study was the understand the impact of foreign employment within the family institution. There had been plenty of research done on Middle Eastern families in Sri Lanka but research done on Italian migrant families had been limited to some extent. So this the significance of the study. In this research the research methods used for collection and assimilation of data were observation, questionnaire, Interview and case studies. There are 22 districts in Sri Lanka. Puttalam district is one of the 22 existing districts in Sri Lanka. Labour migration can be seen mostly in the Puttalam district. This area is being the most prominent one in this respect. So Puttalam district is the area under review for this study. A random sample consisting of 400 migrant workers employed in the Middle East and Italy were selected from Puttalam district. In conclusion of this research was families of parents in foreign employment are faced with more negative links than positive links.

**Keywords:** labour migration, open economy, family institution, foreign employment, negative links, and positive links.

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## Introduction

Population migration is a process which directly affects a country's socio economic status. This article hopes to understand the issue of parents seeking migratory work through a sociological analysis. Population migration is a process which directly affects a country's socio-economic status. Apart from mortality and fertility, the main component which affects the overall growth and distribution of a population is migration. More than mortality and

fertility, migration is a process which can be seen as one of the main factors for a country's population expansion and distribution. Unlike mortality and fertility, it is difficult to quantify the number of times a person would move within his/her lifetime. Studying the broad topic of migration is constantly met with problems and setbacks because of this reason. Similarly migration amongst certain groups of people are seen as important while reasons for migration among another set of people are seen as unimportant.

Migration plays an important role in the population dynamics of a country migration is shifting the home and not the house. In the context of migration there are two processes emigration and immigration. Emigration refers to going out of a country, while immigration refers to coming in a country. Thus emigration reduces population of a country and immigration increases of population.

The movement of people either individually or in groups from one geographical location to another in order to work or to settle permanently is known as migration in the context of sociology (Dictionary of Social Sciences: 1964, pp 428-429). Population migration makes changes in a country's demand for labour, natural resources, job opportunities, education, and health care sectors. (ESCAP: 1976, p 45) According to these conditions, population migration causes changes within the socio-economic strata in a country. While population migration represents positive changes in the development and welfare of a particular country it also contributes towards horizontal social mobility.

While the movement of people from one geographical location to another is known as population migration, in order to present this situation in a more descriptive manner, inter geographical changes which affect a person's original place of residence.

Even at the beginning of human civilization, history shows us that population migration was an integral part of human development and evolution. Most often than not, these population migrations have given rise to the establishment of new civilizations while causing a decline in the original civilization. Therefore it is very clear that population migration and human social institution are two factors which are closely intertwined. As a result, population migration will cause a range of socio-economic changes in any society.

The movement of people from one geographical location to another is known as population migration, while the movement of people throughout the world can be divided as follows:

- 1) Internal migration
- 2) External/International Migration (Ghosh: 1993, p328)

International migration is the movement of people across international territorial boundaries. According to the United Nations report on migration, 3% of the world population which is 180 million people have left their country of birth to migrate to other countries for social economic and cultural reasons. International labour migration has two distinct forms. One is the migration of skilled labourer's also known as skilled drain and unskilled migration. Brain migration is defined as when trained professionals with higher education and professional qualifications migrating for better prospects.

Those without professional qualifications and experience and education are unskilled labourers who migrate to foreign countries for better prospects. (International Migration Outlook Sri Lanka: 2008, pp. 15-16) Patterns of international migration can be identified as follows:

- 1) Migration from a developed country to a developed country
- 2) Migration from a developed country to a developing country
- 3) Migration from a developing country to a developed country
- 4) Migration from a developing country to a developing country (Silva: 2004, p 166)

Although Sri Lankans have been migrating to other lands from ancient times, it is in the recent past with the open economy government of 1977 that ties with foreign nations were further strengthened. In the first half of the 80s a significant number consisting of both men and women migrated to take up jobs in western Asia. After 1977, a much wider international labour migration sector opened up for Sri Lankans seeking alternate employment outside of the country of their birth.

A person with the expectation of employment moves from geographical location to another or move from the country of his birth to another country can be classified as a migrant worker. (International Migration Outlook: 2008-2009, p15). The direct result of labour migration is that the most valuable human resource is relocated from one country to another. The Collins World Encyclopaedia defines labour migrant as someone who relocates from one geographical area to another with the intention of supplying labour.

(Collins World Encyclopaedia: 2005: p.599) According to this definition, in the early 80s statistics show that large numbers of Sri Lankans gravitated towards the oil rich western Asian countries in search of employment, many of them were unskilled labourers.

### **Research Problem**

The economic motive is the dominant motive for migration. People migrate in search of better living. The search for better economic opportunities has been the dominant motive for international migration. In 1980's statistics show the large number of Sri Lankan gravitated towards the Middle Eastern countries in search of employment. After introducing the open economy in 1977 in Sri Lanka large number of consisting both men and women migrated to Middle Eastern countries, on the other hand the numbers migrating to Italy in search of employment also increased. There for the research problem of this study is 'What is the impact of parents in migratory foreign employment to function of the family institution?'

### **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis was 'families of parents engaged in foreign employment are faced with more negative consequences than positive consequences.'

### **Objective of the research**

The main objective of this research is to find out the family members of these unskilled labour migrants are influenced and affected by the prolonged absence of their family members and examination of what problems and situation had to be faced by the labour migratory Sri Lankan family. The other objectives are to understand the nature of changes which impact families which are affected by international migration for foreign employment and to identify negative consequences reducing strategies to guide families which depend on foreign employment.

### **Research Methodology**

Foreign employment of parents and its effects on the family has been seen through a functionalist approach as a research methodology with the use of quantitative data from the survey method the data analysis was performed.

The data acquired for research can be classified into two main categories. They are primary data and secondary data (Kothari, 1999, P177). Direct interview methods, Observations and Participatory observation method were used to obtain primary data. Books, magazines, research articles census data statistics department and immigration and emigration department data, central bank reports and reports from Puttalam divisional secretariat were used as secondary data.

Data can be further categorized according to their nature as qualitative data and quantitative data (Sarantacos, 1988,P26) with parents living and working abroad the process of children's socialization has been affected, the rise of extra marital relationships have been used as qualitative data. Such data using various situations has been analysed for this study.

### Limitations of the research

The international labour migrants are spread throughout the island and they are mostly found in Uva province, Western province, North Central province and Central province. It is not possible to study the labour migrants throughout all provinces for this reason selected to study the labour migrants in Puttalam district in North Central province.

### Research area and Sample

Puttalam district is the area under review for this study. Out of the sixteen secretariat divisions within the Puttalam district, three secretariat divisions have been selected they are Wennappuwa, Dankotuwa and Arachchikattuwa secretariat areas.

A simple random sample was selected for this study to represent the study population. A random sample consisting of 400 migrant workers employed in the Middle East and Italy were selected from the divisional secretariat area.

### Data Analysis

In order to analyse the influence of parents being migrant workers to the family institution, a sample area in Puttalam District was selected. This district has the families of migrant workers living in the Middle East as well as Italy and out of which 400 families were selected for this study.

Table 1 is an indicator of the 400 respondents who are living and working abroad currently.

**Table 1. Family Member Working Abroad**

Person living abroad	Numbers	Percentage
Husband	165	41.3%
Wife	187	46.8%
Husband and wife both	43	10.7%
Parents and children	05	1.2%
Total	400	100%
Survey data 2015		

In this study sample, more women have migrated seeking employment and majority of them work in the Middle East as house maids.

**Table 2. Country of employment**

Country employed in	Number	Percentage
Middle East	175	43.8%
Italy	159	39.8%
Korea	11	2.7%
Cyprus	48	12.0%
Other	07	1.7%
Total	400	100%
<b>Survey data 2015</b>		

While the wives migrated towards the Middle East, majority of husbands migrated to Italy in search of employment. It was interesting to note the age at which the sample group entered marriage, the following table will explore further on the marriage age of husbands.

**Table 3. Age of husband when entering matrimony**

Age of husband when entering matrimony	Numbers	Percentage
Age 18-20	102	25.5
Age 21-25	126	31.5
Age 26-30	133	33.3
Age 31-35	24	6.0
Age over 35	4	1.0
Other	10	2.5
Not stated	1	0.3
Total	400	100

In the study sample most number of husbands who belong to the 26-30 age group. Similarly large numbers have married within the age group of 18-20 and 21-25. Table 04 shows that the wives of these men have entered marriage at a much younger age than their husbands.

**Table 4. Age of wife when entering matrimony**

Age of wife when entering matrimony	Numbers	Percentage
Age 15-18	165	41.3
Age 19-25	150	37.5
Age 26-30	59	14.8
Age 31-35	8	2.0
Over 35	2	0.5
Other	16	4.0
Total	400	100
<b>Survey data 2015</b>		

In the study sample most number of wives belong to the 15-18 age group. Similarly the 19-25 age group represents 150 respondents in the study sample. According to this study it is clear that wives of husbands who are employed abroad have entered into matrimony at a very young age. There's a direct connection between the women who have married young and their level of education.

Both husbands and wives who are engaged in migrant work are seen as having a low level of education as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Level of Education**

Education Level	Husband		Wife	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Grade 1-5	15	3.7	23	5.8
Grade 6-8	64	16.0	51	12.7
Grade 9-10	106	26.5	119	29.7
O/L	154	36.6	146	36.5
A/L	56	14.0	52	13.0
Graduate Level	02	0.5	03	0.8
Post Graduate Level	00	0.0	00	0.0
Never went to school	12	3.0	06	1.5
Total	400	100.0	400	100.0

Most number of both husbands and wives have had their education up to Ordinary Level while the majority in the sample group have had their education up to grade 9-10. Further it is interesting to note that there are 12 husbands and 6 wives within the sample group who've never schooled at all. Given a backdrop such as this either the husband or wife or even both seeking employment abroad will have negative consequences in the long term to their individual families given their low education level.

The sample group of 400 families in the Puttlam District on which this study is based on focused on the Middle East and Italian migrant worker. While most women are employed in the Middle East, the male migrant workers are employed in Italy. If both husband and wife are employed abroad it would be to Italy and not the Middle East.

With this foreign employment of mothers, the common residence devoid of the mother's presence, the remaining members of the family, namely the father and children get into conflict situations. Most number of fathers who went abroad for employment, was to Italy.

Families of migrant workers in Italy possess a strong economic position while the income earner is able to bring about many benefits to the members of the family. However, sadly in the case of migrant workers to the Middle East in this study sample are suffering from extreme poverty and their employment abroad doesn't really change their situation after being employed as well.

## Conclusion

Apart from economic changes, both these groups face negative changes within the family as a consequence of migrant work abroad. Here are some of the problems female migrant workers face when they leave for employment abroad.

- ✓ The husband starts extra marital relationships, leaves spouse, divorce, living together within the family home with other women.
- ✓ Young children being molested by their own father or other male relatives in the family
- ✓ Children becoming juvenile delinquents, addicted to narcotic substances and alcohol as well as engaging in high risk illegal activities. They also attempt to receive sexual experience at a young age and go on to marry at a very young age.
- ✓ Husbands becoming addicted to alcohol and other narcotic substances as well as engaging in high risk illegal activities.



The Italian migrant workers in comparison has secured a strong economy which enables them to live a luxurious lifestyle through their employment abroad. They have been able to build large luxurious homes and has the capability to own separate vehicles for both husband and wife.

The husbands working abroad visits their families in Sri Lanka, once in six months, once a year or once in two years with this pattern there is a high probability of the spouses of such men often engage in extra marital relationships with other men. Among the negative changes include extra marital relationships, wasting money, frequently night clubs as well as moving away from responsibilities as a mother and wife. Children are used to wasting money and are quite violent and disruptive in school. Similarly the children of Italian migrant workers are also dependent on alcohol and narcotic substances, seeks unsuitable sexual contact and behaviours and to disregard the advice of parents and elders.

Therefore in conclusion there is no difference in terms of social stability within families of both Middle Eastern migrant workers and Italian migrant workers the negative consequences are much more than what an ordinary family would have to face.

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