

Husband's international labour migration and change of wives' position among left behind family

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Introduction

The migration of the population can be identified as a very important component in the demographic background of the country. The migration of a person is time bounded and varies from country to country depending on the socio - economic causes and consequences of the country. International migration is an important phenomenon in the global migration process. In particular, the socio - economic problems of the origin countries are directed to migrate to another country for labour. The current state policy in Sri Lanka regarding the labour migration opens up premises for a large number of persons to migrate for labour crossing the international boundaries. Since the late 1970's a favourable condition for international labour migration has prevailed in Sri Lanka and during that period male labour migration has marked an increasing trend. Even though during the latter part of 1980 decade, female predominance could be seen in terms of labour migration in Sri Lanka, during the latter part of 1980 decade in the current situation once again the male labour migration has become a dominant factor. One major characteristic that could be identified is the majority of the male migrants to be married. (ILO, 2013).

Labour migration leads to significant changes in origin areas. The separation of migrants from the family unit, whether it is nuclear or extended, has profound implications for family organization and for individual family members. Also, there is a relationship between men's labour migration and the changing position of women who stay behind. Instead of men leaving the home for the workplace and returning each day, men's labour migration, especially when it involves crossing international borders, often leads men to leave their wives, children, and extended families for long time. During the absence of their husbands, women tend to take on very different roles with regards to household works. These new roles may be accompanied by an increased authority in spending, decision-making in economic matters, and freedom of movement-dimensions that have typically been used to define women's autonomy (Ghuman et al, 2003).

Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between husband's International labour migration and change of wives' position among left behind family.

Methodology

The study is mainly based on the primary data collected from the Kochchikade North Grama Niladhari Division which has been randomly selected from the Colombo District Divisional Secretariat to carry out the research easily. This sample has been selected on purposive sampling which comes under non-random sampling method. A sample of the study has been 103 spouses, whose husbands have migrated to a foreign destination for labour. These respondents were selected using the snowball sampling method. Data collection has been done using both primary and secondary data collection methods. The mixed methodology has been used in collecting data. Structured questionnaires used to be collected quantitative data while informal interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data.

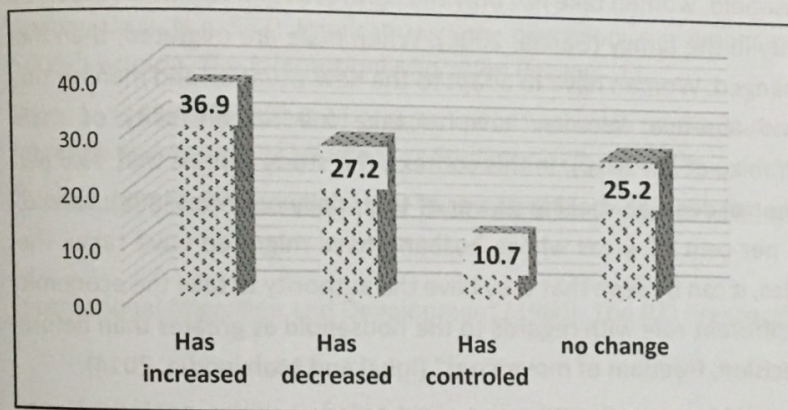
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These informal interviews analysed in - depth to prepare the background needed to induce conclusions. The secondary data were obtained from the Department of Census and Statistics, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS using univariate and bivariate analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis focusing on the main themes based on the objectives of the study.

Results and discussion

The results of the study unfold the impact of the male labour migration on women's position. This study examined the relationship between men's international labour migration and the position of women who stay behind. When the male member of the family migrated from outside of their family, the role of the female member is being changed; they enjoyed more autonomy of the household level (Yabiku et al, 2010). In the absence of the husband in the household, women became the main household of the family. This study shows that 69.9 per cent of the household became female-headed household due to husband's migration. According to findings, 66.9 per cent of wives whose husbands have migrated have increased their autonomy. "A woman begins to communicate with a wider network and institutions, unlike prior to her husband's migration" (Gulati, 1993).

Figure 01: Changes of social relationships of wives due to husband's labour migration



Source: Field Survey, 2017

N = 103

It could be revealed through the figure 01 that, 36.9 per cent of wives have increased their social relationships. According to this study, it can be proved that women who remain in the sending community while their husbands are away have reported higher autonomy, independence, and more social relationships. "Among the left behind women have greater autonomy at home, these are in nuclear families compare to these are in extended families" (Yabiku et al., 2010). When it comes to type of the family, in this study it can be seen 57 nuclear families and 46 extended families. Accordingly, it is revealed that, in the nuclear families, 79.7 per cent of wives have increased their autonomy but, in the extended families, 20.3 per cent of wives have increased their autonomy. It can be identified that the effects of men's labour migration on women's position also depends on the types of family.

Table 1 : The effect of husband's labor migration on the wives' position

The effect of husband labor migration on the wives' position	Frequency	Percentage
Increase responsibilities	85	82.5
Increase decision - making power	47	45.6
Increase autonomy	69	66.9
Increase workload	60	58.3
Take economic decision of the family	92	89.4
Spending money without control	46	44.7
Engage external marital affairs	22	21.4
Source: Field Survey, 2017	N = 421	

*Include multiple responses

The table 01 revealed that, 85.2 per cent of wives have enhanced their responsibility in the family. In the absence of husband in the household, women take not only the control over household resources but also enhance their responsibility in the family (Garcia, 2006). When male are migrated, then the headship of the nuclear families changed. Women have to adapt to the new situation and manage the household tasks in their husband absence. Women have to take full responsibility of their husbands' tasks, duties and roles (Yabiku et al., 2010). In this context, the study reveals that 45.6 per cent of wives have the ability to control decision-making power of their daily activities in household. Also according to this study, 89.4 per cent of wives whose husband have migrated have taken the economic decision of the family. Also, it can be seen that they have the authority to take the economic decision. "Women have to take a different role with regards to the household as greater than before authority in spending economic decision, freedom of movement" (Iqbal and Mohyuddin, 2014).

This study found that due to the absence of their husbands, there are some negative impact. According to this study 44.7 per cent of wives have spent money without any control as well as 21.4 per cent wives have engaged external marital affairs due to their unlimited freedom. Further, many wives feel anxieties, miseries, and various socio-economic problems due to absence of their husband.

Table 2: The effect of husband's labor migration on the wives' position due to the type of household

The effect of husband labor migration on the wives' position	Nuclear Family ((%	Extended Family (%)
Increase responsibilities	92.2	35.8
Increase decision - making power	74.4	25.6
Increase autonomy	79.7	20.3
Source: Field Survey, 2017	N	= 201

*Include multiple responses

When it comes to type of the family it can be seen that higher authority in nuclear families compared with extended families. According to table 02 when compared with extended families 92.2 per cent wives have increased their responsibilities as well as 79.7 per cent wives have increased their autonomy in nuclear families. It could be revealed through the studies that, only 25.6 per cent wives who are in extended families have increased their decision – making power. According to Yabiku's study (2010), he found that Among the left behind women have greater decision making power at home, these are in nuclear families compare to these are in joint families. Prior literature shows that, in some settings, extended family members may have greater control over resident wives upon their husbands' migration (Abadan-Unat 1977; De Haan 1997). This control may be exercised by other males or a mother-in-law (Brink 1991; Desai and Banerji,2008)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be identified that the husband's international labour migration has positively related to the autonomy of the left behind women. On the domestic front, women have become the head of the household and have increased their autonomy, decision making, movement of freedom and their responsibility. But when it comes to type of the family it can be seen higher authority in nuclear families.

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