

Impact of parental migration on children's education: Evidence from Sri Lanka

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Introduction

During the last three decades, international labour migration has been one of the key economic forces in developing countries. Sri Lanka is not an exception. It is estimated that over two million Sri Lankan workers are in abroad and over 80 percent of them are married men and women (SLBFE, 2015). Parental migration leaves children behind and they are mostly looked after by husband/spouse, close family members, and neighbors. Parental migration could affect childhood development through a number of channels; education is one of such channels. Theory argues that the impact of parental migration on children's education could be either positive or negative (Brayant, 2008). Migrated parent(s) usually remit a part of the earnings to family members to cover their expenses such as food, clothing, education, and health. On the other hand, parental migration could negatively affect children's education due to lack of parental supervision and assistance for education, burden of house activities, and the psychological cost associated. Few studies have investigated direct and indirect effects of parental migration on children's education in Sri Lanka (Hettige, 1999; Perera & Jampaklay, 2014). However, empirical evidence on the impact of parental migration on children's education remains inconclusive. There are some methodological limitations in previous studies related to Sri Lanka. One of the main limitations in the most previous studies is that they rarely attempted at assessing the educational performance of children in migrant-households against that of the children in non-migrant households. The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of parental migration on children's education. Specifically, this study attempts to (a) examine how does the 'study environment' experienced by a child in a migrant household differ from that of in the non-migrant household (c) evaluate the impact on children's school performance.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed-method where it collects and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative information in achieving the set objectives. This study conducted a detailed descriptive data analysis a Logistic Regression

analysis. Following Logit model was estimated in investigating the impact of parental migration on educational performance;

$$y_i = X\beta + Z\gamma + \alpha D + u_i \quad (1)$$

In equation (1), y_i denotes the dependent variable that takes 1 if a student ranks his/her educational performance as 'average or above average' and otherwise zero (if a student ranks his/her educational performance as 'below the average')²⁵. Matrix X includes variables representing students' after school engagements, family background, and school quality while Z contains variables related to migration status. Matrix D contains district dummy variables and u_i is the usual error term. β , γ , and α are parameter vectors.

Quantitative data were collected through a primary survey administered at household level in selected Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in Batticoloa, Kurunagala, and Nuwaraeliya districts²⁶. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews in the same DS divisions. In each district, household survey was administered for 150 migrant households and 50 non-migrant households. Selection of DS divisions and GN divisions was done after consulting officers of Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment attached to DS Secretariat. A number of information areas was covered by the household survey; namely, demography, socio-economic background, family background, school attendance, homework engagement, children's perceptions, attending to tuition, school performance, and school dropouts. The study interviewed children (between 10-18 years) in both migrant and non-migrant households.

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected children (around 25 in each district) in migrant households and key public officials such as principals and Divisional Secretaries in selected DS divisions where household survey was administered. Finally, cases were selected for the in-depth interviews using a matrix that captures the heterogeneity.

Results and discussion

Analyzing the impact of migration on the education of children left behind is complicated by the fact that this impact may depend on various factors, such as

²⁵ During the survey, students were asked to rank their educational performance and five levels of performance were offered to them as excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor.

²⁶ These three districts were among the top migrants sending districts in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the districts were selected based on the composition on the ethnicity. In terms of ethnicity, Kurunagala is largely a Sinhala dominated district while Nuwaraeliya is an Indian Tamil dominated district. Batticoloa represents Sri Lankan Tamil and Muslim community. Similarly, a majority of migrants of districts are unskilled (including housemaids) or semi-skilled.

the child's gender, age of the child at the time of parent's migration, number of siblings and family structure, educational level of migrating parent, and parent left behind, as well as level of urbanization of the migrant's community.

The survey collected information on children's involvement in various 'housework' such as washing clothes, washing dishes, cooking meals, attending ill, hew/cut/chop, go shopping, plough, weed, and looking after domestic animals. It was found that majority of children in both migrant and non-migrant households do involve in one or more of domestic activities during the weekends and/or after-school. More importantly, children in migrant's households are engaged more in 'housework' than that of the children in non-migrant households. In other words, some children in migrant households bear a greater burden related 'housework' thereby resulting less hours for studies. When mother has migrated, children were engaged more in 'housework' than when another member of the house hold has migrated. For instance, around 40 percent of total children in mother-migrated households have to cook while this number is around 28 percent in father-migrated households. This reflects that absence of parent(s), due to migration, has caused children to forego a sizable amount of hours to housekeeping. Similarly, the survey collected information on what children mostly do during after-school time period. Accordingly, over 72 percent of total children in non-migrant households are engaged in academic work (homework, reading, revision, attending tuition) compared while the corresponding figures in families with migrants is 47 percent. Around 40 percent of children in migrant's households 'watch TV/Listen Music' and 'play with friends' during the after-school period while corresponding values in families with non-migrants is just 21 percent. Due to lack of supervision and assistance for children of families with migrants are engaged in activities which have little relevant to studies. In other words, in some households, migration has created an environment which is not conducive for studies.

The impact of the change in study environment in some migrant households could be witnessed through children's perception on how parental migration has affected their studies as well as through educational performance. For instance, results revealed that around one-third of total children in migrant households are with the opinion that parental migration has affected negatively on their education. Moreover, the evidence suggested that enrollment to GCE A/L class remains relatively low among children in migrant households compared to that of in the non-migrant households. This implies that children in migrant households' dropout from school at lower grades due to number of reasons such as difficulties related to education, lack of supervision, assistance, care, parent's negligence, and amount of housework (house keeping).

This study examines the impact of parental migration on educational

performance using a Logistic regression. The results are reported in Table 1 (See Appendix). The survey gathered data on children's perception on their educational performance (achievement in test) compared to their peers. The perception is measured using five-category Likert Scale, namely *Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, and Very poor*. The dependent variable is a binary variable that is constructed using above information. It takes 1 if the perception is average or above and zero otherwise. The estimated results are reported in Model (1) through Model (6). The estimated coefficient of migration status (migrant household=1, otherwise=0) is not statistically significant (models 3 through 6). This result implies that on average, parental migration does not affect educational performance of children left-behind. However, descriptive data analysis showed that children in mother migrant households face less conducive environment for studies compared to that of the other households. Hence, the models 4 through 6 were introduced a dummy variable that takes 1 for mother migrant households and otherwise zero. The estimated coefficient of this dummy is negative and statically significant in all three models. This implies that probability of achieving better educational performance is negatively affected due to mother migration. In other words, educational performance of children whose mother is the migrant was relatively low.

As mentioned earlier, the impact of parental migration on children's education is determined by a combination of several factors thereby making it harder to come out with a single answer. Table 2 in the Appendix) is produced using results obtained through household survey, in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, and key informant discussions. The matrix indicates that the various impact of parental migration on children's education.

Conclusion

Findings suggest that impact of parental migration on children's education is substantial, particularly, when the mother is migrant. The impact on education depends on several factors such as who migrated and living environment (guardian capacity, close relatives' support). The impact matrix will be useful in determining required intervention in minimizing the impact of parental migration on education.

Keywords: *Children left-behind, education, labour migration, Logit Model.*

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Appendices

Table 1 Impact of Parental Migration on Children's Education

	Dependent Variable: Self-Assessment on Performance in Tests at School (1=Average or Above; 0=Below Average)					
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)
Constant	0.342** (0.179)	-0.204 (0.347)	-0.089 (0.411)	-0.164 (0.417)	-0.149 (0.427)	-0.097 (0.430)
Housework engagement (number of tasks involved)	0.136** *	0.145** *	0.141** *	-0.126** (0.047)	-0.117** (0.048)	-0.109** (0.048)
After school activities (1= engaged mostly in education activities; 0=otherwise)	0.708** *	0.671** *	0.646** *	0.600** *	0.612** *	0.600** *
Number of siblings		0.168** (0.083)	0.164** (0.08)3	0.171** (0.084)	0.188** (0.086)	0.174** (0.086)
Education of head of household (1=secondary and above, 0=less than secondary)		0.091 (0.076)	0.087 (0.076)	0.104 (0.078)	0.049 (0.079)	0.042 (0.088)
Migration status (1=migrant household, 0=non-migrant household)			-0.119 (0.230)	0.317 (0.263)	0.243 (0.268)	0.243 (0.270)
Mother migrant household (1= mother migrant household, 0=otherwise)				0.772** *	0.773** *	0.839** *
Distance to school (in KM)				(0.215)	(0.219)	(0.236)
					0.082** (0.039)	0.085** (0.039)
District effects						No
Log likelihood value	-359.68	-341.027	-340.89	-334.30	-321.46	-322.08
No of observations	546	520	520	520	509	509
Pseudo R ²	0.033	0.038	0.039	0.057	0.070	0.68

Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses while ** and *** indicate that the estimated coefficients are statistically significant at 0.05 and 0.01 respectively.

Table 2 Effect of parental migration on children's education

Living Environment and Maturity of the left-behind children	Who Migrated		
	Mother	Father	Both parents
Guardian capacity strong, Relatives support strong, teenage			
Guardian capacity strong, relative's support less than teenage (<13)			
Guardian capacity weak, relatives' support strong, teenage			
Guardian capacity weak, relatives' support strong, less than teenage (<13)			
Guardian capacity strong, relatives' support weak, teenage			
Guardian capacity strong, relatives' support weak, less than teenage (<13)			
Guardian capacity weak, relatives' support weak, teenage			
Guardian capacity weak, relatives' support weak, less than teenage child (<13)			

Impact Levels

	Slight impact
	Less impact
	Moderate impact
	Sizeable impact
	Severe impact