

A Study on the Social and Psychological Status of Primary School Children of Employed Migrant Mothers

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Abstract

The study has focused on two facets of the status of primary school children who were being temporarily deserted by their mothers to work abroad. These two facets are the social status and the psychological status. The study has attempted to compare the social and psychological status of the above mentioned children with that of the children living with working mothers and the children living with non-working mothers. The sample of the study consists of 54 children of migrant mothers employed overseas, 54 children of employed mothers in Sri Lanka and 54 children of unemployed mothers in Sri Lanka. These children were selected from Grade 3, 4 and 5 classes in six Sinhala medium type 1C Schools in the Borella Education Division. In addition, a sample of 44 caregivers of children of migrant mothers included in the sample was also studied. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used in the study. Data were collected using classroom child observations, interviews and socio metric tests. The data revealed that social and psychological status of the majority of children of migrant mothers was considerably lower than that of their counterparts. The interviews with the caregivers revealed that care provided in relation to food and nutrition was satisfactory for the majority of children. However, educational support, provisions for play, leisure and safety were found to be relatively not satisfactory. The study has suggested that children should be consulted when providing care in the absence of their mothers. In addition, schools as nodes of support were also highlighted in the study. Moreover, the study emphasizes the need for intervention of the government at the level of policy making to ensure the right to survival of children of migrant mothers.

Introduction

Since the early part of the 20th century Sri Lankans have been migrating to various parts of the world in search of employment. Over the years there have been significant changes in the nature of employment sought, countries where jobs were looked for, numbers seeking jobs, and the gender composition of the population seeking foreign jobs.

During the early part of the 20th century, small groups of Sri Lankan Tamils migrated to Malaysia. From about the beginning of the 1960's, professionals, namely doctors, engineers, accountants, and university lecturers migrated to Western Europe, North America, and Australia and to the more developed countries in East and West Africa. They moved to gain higher wages and better standards of living.

However, the period commencing from mid seventies saw the emergence of new trends and patterns in migration from Sri Lanka for employment abroad. The most significant of these was the rapid increase in the number of women migrating to countries in the Middle-East seeking jobs as unskilled domestic workers or "house-maids". This situation has arisen due to several factors. On the one hand there was a big demand for both skilled and unskilled labour in these countries. In some of the Middle-Eastern countries such as Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the per capita income rose several times from what it was at the start of the decade, as a result of the increase in the price of oil exported to the rest of the world. The accompanying economic boom in many countries of the Middle East led to the initiation of economic and social development programmes in a massive way. This necessitated different types of labour and expertise from other countries.

On the other hand, during the early 1970's economic growth was very slow in Sri Lanka; avenues of employment were extremely limited.

The unemployment rate was increasing and official sources of data reported that almost 19 percent of the total labour force was unemployed around 1975. It was also revealed that the rate of increase of female unemployment exceeded that of male unemployment.

It is reported that the increasing demand for labour in the Middle East in the late seventies saw Sri Lanka becoming the country to export women as domestic workers without any restriction. The following years saw a rapid increase in female migration and a great willingness on the part of Sri Lankan women to go to the Middle East despite the traditional value system that does not favour female migration for work abroad.

Migration of married women with children has had both positive and negative impact on the national economy as well as the family units. On the positive side it has contributed to better conditions of living and in certain instances, to investment in education and housing. On the negative side social costs especially neglect of family and children are considered to be the most marked (CENWOR, 1998).

There is widespread recognition that these children show isolated, aggressive abnormal behavior patterns, dropping out of school, taking drugs and becoming subject to physical and mental abuse, which makes them maladjusted. Educational, social and psychological status of these children is considered to be at a low level. Most of the children do not perform well in their educational activities. Thus, they are reported to be aggressive and quarrelsome and tend to disturb other children in the classroom.

Although there is general observation and widespread recognition that maternal deprivation due to migration has adversely affected the development of the young children left behind, we do not have sufficient empirical evidence on the social and psychological status of such children. The present research seeks to address this problem. Most specifically this study seeks to assess the status of social and psychological development of primary school children aged 7-10 years, of mothers employed for more than one year in Middle East countries. In order to determine whether maternal deprivation had affected these children adversely, it was necessary to compare their development with that of children living with their mothers. Hence, this study investigated the state of development of children living with their mothers, with those whose mothers have left for foreign employment.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the status of social and psychological development of primary school children of the age range 7-10 years, whose mothers are employed overseas, in relation to children who are living with their mothers in Sri Lanka. This study would also determine how mother's migration affect on the social and psychological status of these primary school children.

The specific objectives of the study are,

1. To assess the status of social and psychological development of primary school children of the age range 7 to 10 years, of mothers employed overseas, relative to that of children living with their mothers.
2. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the status of social and psychological development of children of migrant mothers in comparison to children living with their mothers.
3. To make suggestions for ensuring favourable social and psychological development of primary school children of the age range 7 to 10 years, of Sri Lankan mothers employed overseas.

Methodology

This study is carried out with two main objectives, namely to determine the status of social and psychological development of primary school children in the age range of 7 to 10 years, of migrant working mothers in comparison with children of the same age range of working and non-working mothers in Sri Lanka and to discover the status of childcare of children of migrant mothers.

The general design of the study comprised both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data on the status of development were gathered from a sample of children and data on status of childcare was obtained from a sample of caretakers. Records of observations of student behavior maintained by the class teachers and the researcher as well as independent comments made by caretakers about the conduct of children under their care, constituted the main sources of qualitative data.

Geographical location of this study was the Borella Educational Division of the Colombo Education Zone. The sample of students consisted of three groups – children of migrant mothers, children of working mothers in Sri Lanka and children of non-working mothers in Sri Lanka. Each group comprised 54 children chosen from grades 3, 4 and 5; studying in 6 Sinhala medium type 1C schools in Borella Educational Division of the Colombo Education Zone, making a total of 162. The sample of caretakers included 54 persons who took care of the 54 children whose mothers were employed overseas. The researcher and class teachers observed the entire sample of children. The class teachers were given necessary instructions for observation, by the researcher. Although there were 54 caretakers in the sample it was possible to hold interviews with only 44 of them.

In the conduct of the study three instruments were developed and tested by the researcher, namely; Observation schedule (to determine status of social and physical development of children), Interview schedule (to obtain responses of caretaker Socio-Metric test (to find out about the social status of children in the classroom setting) The instrument used for assessing the status of development was an observation rating scale consisting of 48 items, covering 5 different aspects of social and psychological development of children. Total score is 192. This also included an item to elicit observer's independent comments on the behaviour of each child observed. An Interview Schedule was used for collection of data from the caretakers, about the condition of childcare functions performed by them. This also contained several items designed to obtain caretaker's views on the behaviour of children under their care. A Socio-Metric test was designed to identify each child's choices of his/her classmate partner whom he/she preferred to sit beside him/her.

This instrument also included an item designed to elicit a written response to a question that was expected to reveal each child's social and psychological disposition.

As mentioned earlier this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Status of social and psychological development was analyzed on the basis of scores awarded to each child by the researcher and the teachers using the observation rating scale. Status of childcare too was

analyzed on the basis of scores awarded to responses made by the caretakers at the interview. Qualitative data gathered were subjected to qualitative analyses aimed at identifying major developmental characteristics of the three groups of children.

Socio-Metric test was administered to all the children in the classes. But only the responses of children who belong to the sample, were considered for analysis. However, the responses of grade 3 and 4 children were rather invalid as they had Difficulty in writing and also, in understanding questionnaires. Hence these responses were not considered for the analysis. Socio Metric data were represented through 6 socio-grams, drawn in respect of the Grade 5 class from which the sample of students was drawn.

Literature Review

Migrant mothers differ from the locally employed mothers in that they are physically away from the child for long periods at a time-usually over one year. Although the phenomena of migration of women to West Asia for employment is fairly recent, there is a considerable amount of published work relating to migration of women in Sri Lanka. Most of the literature on the above subject is based on migrant women in general. There are few ethnographical studies as well. Existing literature on the subject of migrant mothers, of Sri Lanka and their children is reviewed in the following section with the objective of getting a better insight into the problems addressed in the present study.

Majority of research on migrant labour in Sri Lanka encompasses all categories of labour and focuses on issues such as remittances from abroad and the macro level impact of migration on the local economy. (Soysa; 1981, Korale; 1983, Kodituwakku; 1983, Rodrigo; 1995, Eelens et al 1992, De Silva et al 1995).

In a survey of Muslim women, Fernando (1989) has shown that 80% percent of the unskilled labour migrants comprised housemaids and the majority were from poor homes. Gunathilaka (1991) found out that in terms of economic well being and human development migration has brought benefits to a significant proportion of the migrants. Hettige (1992) in his study of migrant women's

families in a Muslim village in Anuradhapura District has revealed that women have initiated the process of breaking out of the poverty conditions.

Fernando's (1989) findings regarding Muslim women reveals that about 10% of the migrant women's parents-in-law looked after the children and this seems to confirm the observation that the extended family is more common among the Muslims. Hettige (1990) observes that the conventional household authority structure gives a somewhat high status to the wife. This is articulated in such spheres as decisions on children's education and medicament and control over children. This opportunity is however lost to the migrant women, and their children.

The impact of migration of women on the household and family received the most attention in several studies. These studies have produced considerable evidence of the adverse effects of migration of mothers in child development. The presence or absence of the mother has emerged as a critical factor in its impact on the household and family. When married women migrate, the children grow in motherless homes.

Jayasekera (1984) discusses the plight of young children left by migrant women and the ill effects on the development of these children both physically and psychologically. The writer not only deals with the negative aspects on children being left, but also the mental strain and stress of the mothers who leave them behind for employment overseas. The writer feels that organizations should step into keep a protective stage on these children and appeals to all migrant mothers not to leave children under one year and not to be away for long periods, for this can have a detrimental impact on the youth. These observations throw light on the negative aspect of migration of mothers for both the migrant and her children.

A Case study by Dias (1983) on the impact of migration on the family left behind, is enlightening. This study is based on both male and female migration to the Middle East for employment. The writer found that though temporary disruption of family relationships was expected as a result of migration of one parent with the hope of a better tomorrow, the reality was that the amounts remitted was not sufficient for an immediate transformation in their life styles.

Fernando (1989) noted that children and husbands moved to in-laws or grand parent's houses, thus abandoning one's own house or else grandparents or in-laws, moved in, thus, strengthening extended family ties.

Cumaratunga (1990) in a survey of a small sample of 30 migrant women noted that the socialization of these children in the absence of the mothers can create problems such as a decline in school performance and an increase in the dropout rates. Deviant behaviors of children, truancy and anti-social associations have also been reported. The concern is with the care of the children left behind.

Dias (1983) also states that in terms of family structures left behind, close-knit family entities were not seen in the majority of the single parent families, caused by the death of a partner or due to matrimonial disputes. Further family relationships were at risk when households were left in charge of fathers.

Samarasinghe (1989) cited by Dias (2001) on the psycho-social implications of Middle East migration on the family left behind, noted that the effects of separation on the development of the child were not clearly visible and the primary caretakers during the women's absence, coped reasonably well with the task of looking after the children.

Fernando (1989) revealed a myriad of serious negative consequences on children of migrant mothers' and that it is clear that the mothers going away for a long period of time had adverse impact on the children. The negative impact on children ranges from lack of care and neglect to physical and mental abuse. Soysa and Fernando (1986) also reported that maternal employment locally gave an economic advantage to the family by offsetting the deficiencies in childcare arrangements due to the temporary absence of the mother during the day. Soyza and De Mel (1986) looked at the problems of migrant mothers, by probing into records or admissions to the Children's Hospital (Colombo). They found a higher incidence of moderate and severe malnutrition among children of this category as compared with other admissions.

In a study on the influence of the mothers' employment status on childcare, health and development, Athauda (1994) compared three groups of

comparable age and sex of pre-school children, children of mothers employed as housemaids in the middle-East, children whose mothers were in comparable occupations locally and those whose mothers were not employed. The writer found that a comparatively high proportion of children whose mothers were employed in the Middle East had illness episodes, abnormal behaviour patterns, and were prone to more home accidents, lower quality care, unconducive home environments and inadequate stimulation. She reported that children of mothers employed in the Middle East had a lower health status compared to children of mothers employed locally, or those whose mothers were not employed. Cooray (1995) also found that there is a higher incidence of illnesses and home accidents among the children of migrant mothers, and that a good proportion of children of migrant women perform badly at school.

However, Yapa (1995) who analyzed the leaving of young children by mothers in a selected sample representative of all districts in Sri Lanka, concludes that the majority of mothers left young children only on being assured that the child would be properly cared or and in case of 50% of the migrant workers in the sample, the immediate or extended family provided care for children left behind.

Perera (1997) also revealed ill effects on young children of migration of mothers. According to Perera, children's education being disrupted, through drugs, watching pornographic cinema and gambling are some of the social problems created among children as a result of migration of mother.

Dias (2001) found that childcare arrangements of the majority of married migrant women were satisfactory and the negative consequences were due to lack of care, negligence and physical and mental abuse as a result of family disorganization that existed before the departure of the woman.

Coufal (2003) highlighted that mother's migration negatively impacted on children particularly in relation to education, nutrition, health care and protection Coufal and Hoole (2003) identified how mother's migration affected children and husbands by selecting one thousand families of migrant mothers from Kurunegala and Colombo districts .They found that children of migrant mothers tended to have less supervision at home, less likely to succeeded in

school, experience emotional and behavioral problems, and were more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse.

In the light of theoretical information and empirical studies reviewed it could be seen that most theorists as well as researchers have attempted to describe and examine the importance of the mother's figure in physical, social, psychological and educational development of children. Literary evidence has emphatically indicated that the impact of migration of mothers on child development is very strong. The literature also revealed to a great extent that the separation or migration of the mother has a negative impact on a child's overall development.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Status of Social and Psychological Development

Table 1 presents a statistical analysis of four aspects of social development and of psychological development as well as the composite mean social and psychological development scores as reported by school teachers of 162 children, of migrant employed mothers and of non migrant employed and non migrant non-employed mothers.

Table 1 Status of Social and Psychological Development of Primary School Children by Employment Status of their Mothers Teacher Observations

Aspect of Development	Highest Possible Score	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant non-employed Mothers N = 54	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Peer Relations	36	17.4 (48.3%)	5.9	20.2 (55.5%)	6.9	22.1 (61.3%)	7.0
Social Behaviour	72	35.4 (49.1%)	12.4	43.6 (60.5%)	12.6	45.2 (62.7%)	10.2
Teacher Relations	24	14.8 (41.1%)	4.4	16.0 (44.4%)	4.1	18.0 (50.0%)	3.5
Langage Usage	24	14.5 (60.4%)	4.5	16.7 (69.5%)	4.3	17.1 (71.2%)	3.6
Psychological Status	36	19.7 (54.7%)	7.4	25.8 (71.6%)	6.3	23.6 (65.5%)	6.0
Overall Social and Psychological development	192	101.9 (53.0%)	26.6	122.5 (63.8%)	27.6	126.2 (65.7%)	22.7

Note: Figures within brackets represent awarded scores, expressed as a percentage of highest possible score for each aspect of development.

Table 2 Status of Social and Psychological Development of Primary School Children by Employment Status of their Mothers - Researcher Observations

Aspect of Development	Highest Possible Score	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant non-employed Mothers N = 54	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Peer Relations	36	16.5 (45.8%)	5.2	19.4 (53.6%)	6.8	22.8 (63.3%)	7.4
Social Behaviour	72	34.3 (47.6%)	12.0	43.8 (60.8%)	12.4	46.3 (64.3%)	9.7
Teacher Relations	24	14.1 (39.1%)	3.8	16.3 (45.2%)	4.0	18.0 (50.0%)	3.8
Language Usage	24	14.2 (59.2%)	4.3	17.2 (71.7%)	3.8	17.8 (74.2%)	3.5
Psychological Status	36	19.2 (53.3%)	6.9	24.9 (69.2%)	5.8	24.6 (68.3%)	6.1
Overall Social and Psychological Development	192	98.5 (51.3%)	25.4	121.6 (63.3%)	26.8	129.5 (67.4%)	21.5

Peer Relations

As shown in Table 1 and 2 the observations of teachers as well as that of the researcher, in respect of each aspect of social and psychological development as well as the composite social and psychological development reflect an identical pattern. Thus, It is evident that the status of peer relations is lowest and hence the poorest in respect of children of migrant employed mothers, as compared with children of non-migrant employed mothers and also of children of non-migrant non-employed mothers.

Fairly high standard deviations of these scores indicate considerably high individual variability within all these 3 groups.

When analyzing each item in respect of peer relations it is evident that majority of the children (90.7%) of migrant mothers do not like to play with children of the same age, do not help classmates, do not share books and other equipment

in the classroom situations; they are not intimate with peers, and their Leadership skills were almost nil.

Further, the researcher observed that out of 54 children of migrant mothers, 3 children have had no friends in the classroom. They were rejected by the peers, because of their untidy, wicked, and unfriendly activities.

In fact according to information collected by administering the Socio Metric test it was confirmed that children whose mothers are working abroad show lower peer relationship abilities among other children in the classroom. This was seen in two out of the six Grade 5 classes where the Socio Metric test was administered. However in relation to the data gathered it appears that one special child whose mother is working abroad is popular with peers. She has performed well in classroom work and other activities. She has been assisted by an aunt.

Social Behaviour

Taking into consideration the data analyzed in Table 1 and 2 it is evident that the status of social behaviour in respect of children of migrant employed mothers is relatively poor when compared with children of non migrant employed mothers and also, children of non migrant non-employed mothers. It could be noted that the mean score expressed as a percentage of the highest possible score for this aspect of development for the first group of children for social behaviour, is only 49.1%, and 47.6% respectively indicating a fairly low level of development.

Most of these children do not appear to co-operate with other classmates so that they quarrel with their peers, never excuse themselves when they make mistakes, hardly abide by classroom rules and do not like to work with other children. Further most of these children of migrant mothers remained isolated, they exhibited aggressive behaviour and did not have leadership qualities. However, it was observed that nearly 90% of children of migrant mothers sought help from teachers and peers even when not necessary.

The researcher observed that 6 out of 18 children of migrant mothers in Grade 3 cried in the classroom. They tore other's books and did not keep their books tidy and neat. The researcher also observed that 50 (92.6%) out of 54 children of migrant mothers were dressed in untidy uniforms.

Furthermore, only 3 males from the 28 male children (5.5% from the total number) of migrant mothers participated in co-curricular activities and individual sports activities conducted by the school. eg: running, high jump. Other children of migrant mothers do not appear to have participated in school sports activities.

Teacher Relations

Taking into consideration the data analyzed in Table 1 and 2 it could be stated that the status of teacher relations is lowest in respect of children of migrant employed mothers, as compared with children of non migrant employed mothers and children of non migrant non-employed mothers. This is confirmed through observations of the teachers as well as by observations of the researcher.

According to the data it was highlighted that 80% of the children of migrant mothers do not listen to teachers, do not do the work which the teacher has given in the classroom. Further, it was also noted that the children of migrant mothers were not obedient to the teacher. They do not listen to teacher's advice and they do not properly attend to homework and daily class work that the teachers had given.

However, there was one exception. The researcher observed that a girl whose mother was abroad for more than seven years was very close to her class teacher and also won more love and attention from the teacher.

It has been pointed out by Kotalawala (1996) that the children of middle childhood spend a large part of their day in the company of peers and teachers and therefore school teachers extend a dominant influence on the development of these children. However, the absence of a positive relationship with peers and teachers among a considerable percentage of

children (80%) of migrant mothers as evident through data in the study, explains that relations with peers and teachers could not have contributed positively to maintain a desirable status of social and psychological development of children of migrant mothers.

Language Usage

The data presented in Table 1 and 2 reveal that the status of language usage in the classroom situation by children of migrant employed mothers is relatively low when compared with children of non-migrant employed mothers and children of non-migrant non-employed mothers.

It was observed by both teachers and the researcher that a majority (64%) of children of migrant mothers speak filthy words with classmates when they express their aggressive feelings. Most of the children of migrant mothers do not have good communication skills when they answer the questions posed by the teacher in the classroom. They do not address the teacher respectfully. The researcher often observed that majority of girls silently look down when being addressed by the teacher.

Psychological Status

When considering the data in Table 1 & 2, it was evident that the status of psychological development of children of migrant mothers was also very low, when compared to the other two groups of children.

It was observed by the researcher that the children of migrant mothers are quick to anger and fight with classmates when they are faced with any problem. These children behaved (most of the time) as if they were frightened of someone.

One female child whose mother was abroad and who was being looked after by an old grandmother had the habit of tearing books. According to her teacher, she had even torn the books of her classmates. The researcher also observed this child tearing her own Grade 3 mathematics workbook in the classroom.

It is noted that 75% of the children of migrant mothers needed help for class work from teachers and children in the neighborhood. For instance when the teacher explained and requested them to do an exercise in the classroom they asked again and again what the teacher wanted them to do. As observed by the researcher, nearly 60% of the children of migrant mothers had the habit of loitering in the classroom when the teacher was teaching. This researcher observed that these children often use this behavior as a ploy to gain direct attention of the teacher. The researcher noted that almost 50% of these children argued with their teacher. When a weakness is pointed out by the teacher they quickly defend themselves. The researcher also observed that quite a number of (nearly 88%) the children of migrant mothers have not attended to their homework. When the teacher inquired they justified their action by giving convincing reasons. The reasons given by these children and their expressions showed that they think others must understand their situation. They seem to demand sympathy from others.

Overall Status of Social and Psychological Development

The above tables 1 and 2 reveal that the mean score representing the status of overall development is relatively low (101.9 or 53%) of the highest possible score of children of migrant employed mothers compared with children of non migrant employed mothers where the mean score is 122.2 or 63.8% of the highest possible score; While children of non migrant non-employed mothers have gained the highest mean score of 126.2 or 65.7% of the highest possible score. This shows that children of non-employed non-migrant mothers have attained the highest average overall development. It also shows that the overall social and psychological development of children of migrant employed mothers is the lowest in comparison to that of the other two groups.

In addition to the observations made in the observation schedule, the researcher recorded predominant characteristics of behaviour (verbal and non verbal) of children of all three categories included in the sample during classroom observations.

Differences in the Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Children of Non-migrant Employed Mothers Living in Sri Lanka

Table 1.3 indicates means and standard deviations of the scores given by teachers for different aspects of development of the two groups of children, and the results of t tests. It is observed that the scores gained by children of migrant working mothers for each of the aspects of development as well as for overall development are lower than the scores gained by the children of working mothers living with them in Sri Lanka. The differences are relatively high in respect of psychological status and social behaviour difference in respect of teacher relations is rather low. It may also be noted that all differences other than that of teacher relations are statistically significant at 1% level.

Table 3 Differences in the Status of Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Children of Non-migrant Employed Mothers - Teacher Observations

Aspect of Development	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		t value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Peer Relations	17.4 (48.3%)	5.9	20.2 (55.5%)	6.9	-2.7	**
Social Behaviour	35.4 (49.1%)	12.4	43.6 (60.5%)	12.6	-3.4	**
Teacher Relations	14.8 (41.1%)	4.4	16.0 (44.4%)	4.1	-1.4	NS
Language Usage	14.5 (60.4%)	4.5	16.7 (69.5%)	4.3	-2.6	**
Psychological Status	19.7 (54.7%)	7.4	25.8 (71.6%)	6.3	-4.5	**
Overall Social & Psychological Development	101.9 (53.9%)	26.6	122.5 (63.8%)	27.6	-3.9	**

* p < .05 ** p < .01 NS – Not Significant

Table 4 reports means and standard deviations of the scores given by the researcher for different aspects of development of the two groups of children. It may be observed that the scores gained by children of migrant working mothers for each of the aspects of development as well as for overall development are lower than those gained by the children of working mothers living with them in Sri Lanka. Differences are relatively high in respect of psychological status, social behaviour and language usage. The difference is rather low in respect of teacher relations. However it should be noted that all differences are statistically significant at 1% level.

Table 4 Differences in the Status of Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Non-Migrant Employed Mothers: Researcher Observations

Aspect of Development	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		t value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Peer Relations	16.5 (45.8%)	5.2	19.3 (53.6%)	6.7	-2.3	**
Social Behaviour	34.3 (47.6%)	12.0	43.8 (60.8%)	12.4	-4.0	**
Teacher Relations	14.1 (39.1%)	3.8	16.3 (45.2%)	4.0	-2.8	**
Language Usage	14.2 (59.2%)	4.3	17.2 (71.7%)	3.8	-3.8	**
Psychological Status	19.2 (53.3%)	6.9	24.9 (69.2%)	5.8	-4.5	**
Overall Social and Psychological Development	98.5 (51.3%)	25.4	121.6 (63.3%)	26.8	-4.5	**

* p < .05 ** p < .01 NS – Not Significant

Differences in the Status of Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Children of Non-employed Mothers Living with them in Sri Lanka

Table 5 reports mean and standard deviations of the scores given by teachers for different aspects of development of the two groups of children, and the results of t tests. It may be observed that the scores gained by children of migrant working mothers for all aspects of development as well as for overall development are lower than those gained by the children of non-working mothers living in Sri Lanka. Differences are relatively high in respect of social behaviour and peer relations. Difference in respect of teacher relations is relatively low. It may also be noted that all differences are statistically significant at 1% level.

Table 5 Differences in the Status of Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Non-migrant Un-employed Mothers: Teacher Observations

Aspect of Development	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Non-employed Mothers N = 54		t value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Peer Relations	17.4 (48.3%)	5.9	22.1 (61.3%)	7.0	-3.7	**
Social Behaviour	35.4 (49.1%)	12.4	45.2 (62.7%)	10.2	-4.4	**
Teacher Relations	14.8 (41.1%)	4.4	18.0 (50.0%)	3.5	-4.0	**
Language Usage	14.5 (60.4%)	4.5	17.1 (71.2%)	3.6	-3.2	**
Psychological Status	19.7 (54.7%)	7.4	23.6 (65.5%)	6.0	-3.0	**
Overall Social & Psychological Development	101.9 (53.0%)	26.6	126.2 (65.7%)	22.7	-5.0	**

* p < .05 ** p < .01 NS – Not Significant

Table 6 reports means and standard deviations of the scores given by the researcher for different aspects of development of the two groups of children, and the results of t tests. It may be observed that the scores gained by children of migrant working mothers for separate aspects of development as well as for overall development are lower than those gained by the children of non-working mothers living with them in Sri Lanka. The differences in scores on almost every aspect of development are also greater than those discussed earlier. Differences are relatively high in respect of peer relations, social behaviour, psychological status and language usage. Difference in respect of teacher relations is relatively low. It may also be noted that all differences are statistically significant at 1%.

Table 6 Differences in the Status of Social and Psychological Development of Children of Migrant Employed Mothers and Non-migrant Non- employed Mothers: Researcher Observations

Aspect of Development	Migrant Employed Mothers N = 54		Non-Migrant Non-employed Mothers N = 54		t value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Peer Relations	16.5 (45.8%)	5.2	22.8 (63.3%)	7.4	-5.8	**
Social Behaviour	34.3 (47.6%)	12.0	46.3 (64.3%)	9.7	-5.6	**
Teacher Relations	14.1 (39.1%)	3.8	18.0 (50.0%)	3.8	-5.2	**
Language Usage	14.2 (59.2%)	4.3	17.8 (74.2%)	3.5	-4.7	**
Psychological Status	19.2 (53.3%)	6.9	24.4 (68.3%)	6.1	-4.0	**
Overall Social & Psychological Development	98.5 (51.3%)	25.4	129.5 (67.4%)	21.5	-6.8	**

* p < .05 ** p < .01 NS – Not Significant

Conclusions and Recommendations

Suggestions of this study can be discussed at three levels

- 1 Family level
- 2 School level
- 3 Government level

Family Level

It is important that parents are cautious about their duties and responsibilities towards their children. This could make the mothers who plan to migrate from Sri Lanka for a long period, to think twice when making a decision to migrate and leave their children at home. Mothers can arrange a guardian to ensure suitable childcare arrangements, education support system and management of the home prior to her departure. Further, the findings of the study suggest the need to enhance consciousness among fathers about the impact of mothers' absence, and how it could affect the children. Fathers need to be made aware of the importance of paying more attention to the growth and development of their children. Proper counseling should be provided to fathers to cope up with the duties and responsibilities of a single parent and the anxiety created by the separation of the partner. The responsibility of providing such guidance and counseling could be taken by the Ministry of Child Development and Women Affairs.

This study revealed that children have their own ideas about their mothers deserting them in search of greener pastures. Therefore, it is suggested that migrant mothers should consult the view of their children, if they are leaving them with caretakers. Home and Community Care Project in Thailand can be cited as a very successful project which takes the views of children when providing care (Early Childhood matters, 2005).

School Level

Schools as modes of support for vulnerable children had been highlighted in research carried out in South Africa (Bower; 2005). Sri Lankan schools also can be used as modes of support for children of migrant mothers. However, a

mechanism should be adopted by relevant authorities to increase the role of schools in supporting these children, in the following ways.

- Keep/maintain special records regarding these children. For example records of attendance, health conditions, educational performance, extracurricular activities and special problems could be maintained
- Schools can counsel these children through school counseling to service and help reduce social and psychological trauma and depression created by their mothers' migration. It is suggested that sports activities, field trips, guided social service work, competitions (essay and art) etc can be organized to develop a positive self esteem in these children.
- Schools can identify the teachers who can build up a rapport with these children. They could be given the responsibility to guide these children and encourage them to talk about their problems
- Schools can educate the caretakers about the needs of these children and help them to adopt strategies to provide quality childcare.

These measures will help to improve the social and psychological status of children.

Government Level

Article 18 of the Child Rights Convention states,

"For the purpose guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present convention, State Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions facilities and services for the care of children".

Since Sri Lankan Government has ratified the Convention it is the prime duty of the Government to take appropriate measures to uphold this article. The Government and the Sri Lankan society also have a moral obligation to provide what is stated in Article 18 for these children whose mothers' contribution of foreign exchange is invaluable to this country. It has been identified that there

are more than 200,000 children of migrant parents studying in Sri Lankan schools. Therefore, it is the duty of the Ministry of Education (MOE);

- To prepare a special programme for these children of migrant mothers.
- To provide opportunities to educate the principals and teachers about the existing problems.
- To establish counseling centers at school level
- To encourage Principals to organize seminars for these children on subject such as guidance and counseling, both at provincial and national levels
- To guide Social Services Department along with the Education Department to create educational programs to suit the children of migrant mothers
- To organize seminars for migrant mothers before their departure regarding childcare arrangements, caretakers, how to educate their children and how to balance their earning and expenditure by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.
- To organize seminars for caretakers in relation to physical and mental needs of children, by the Department of Social Services.
- To organize workshops for Teachers, Teacher Educators, Educational Officers and Principals about the existing problems in relation to children of migrant mothers by the National Institute of Education (NIE).

This study also highlights several practical implications. The study was designed to find out the social and psychological status of primary school children between the 7 to 10 years of migrant mothers. The findings will help not only migrant mothers' families but also the primary school teachers, school principals, education authorities, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and Government and Non-government Organizations that work with children.

This study will promote a better understanding about the nature of children of migrant mothers. Most of the problems related to psychological and social

status of these children have been highlighted in this study. If the teachers understood clearly the child's family background and the environment, had the skill to use appropriate strategies to deal with these problems, children of migrant mothers could be brought up to face challenges and be good citizens of the society.

One purpose of the study is to guide the primary school teachers and motivate them to pay more attention to children of migrant mothers and their education. Migrant mothers' children may come from problem-based home situations and having an understanding of such children, can help teachers to find solutions to those problems. When young children are deprived of love and attention especially from their own mother, they turn to the class teacher. Therefore, these findings will help the teachers to understand social and psychological background of children of migrant mothers. They also can pay special attention to the achievement levels of these children, and can provide this information to the father or guardian of children of migrant mothers.

Knowledge gained through this study will also encourage to adopt non-traditional methods for teachers to identify through experience to support children of migrant mothers. School principals can prepare special reports about children of migrant mothers, their family environment and maintain records about their general conduct and behaviour. A data base management system could be built up, to provide information whenever necessary. Schools can organize programmes for children of migrant mothers to build up their self esteem. These children should be encouraged to engage in co-curricular activities in the school. Schools can also provide counseling for fathers of these children to cope up with the problems they encounter. Schools also can arrange special care for these children with the support of the community. It would be a productive effort to organize awareness raising programmes for families of migrant mothers, community and the caretakers either by schools or Social Service Department in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations. Schools and community organizations may organize special projects to look after these neglected children and entrust them to a substitute mother/teacher.

Findings of the study will help the policy makers to apply innovative methods to support children of migrant mothers. They have to concentrate on the impact of migrations mothers on the psychological and social status of children especially in the middle childhood. This study could motivate them to consider new plans of action for the welfare and education of these children and explore alternative avenues to employ mothers within the country.

Sri Lankan government can be persuaded to examine a cost benefit analysis or conduct research studies to ascertain the real impact of migration of mothers on Sri Lankan society and to review its policy towards exporting female labour to the Middle East. In early 1990s Indian government prohibited migration of female housemaids to gulf countries on the basis of the knowledge and suggestions made through research studies.

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