

Children's perceptions on their parent's migration for foreign employment

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Migration of men and women in search of foreign employment is a popular economic activity in Sri Lanka. A large number of migrant mothers and fathers leave their children at home, transferring their care giving responsibilities to another person. Therefore a group of children in the Sri Lankan society have been deprived of the vital role of one parent in the context of labour migration. This particular study attempted to identify the perceptions of some of those children regarding their parent's migration. Three Grama Niladhari Divisions, viz., Matotagama, Nakuttiya and Kadaweediya having high proportions of male and female migrants in Matara Divisional Secretariat Division in Matara District was selected as the field setting for this study. Main respondents were children between the ages of 12 and 18. Returnee migrant parent, spouse of the migrant and the primary caregiver were also taken as supportive respondents. 30 households which had a migrant with children ages from 12 to 18 were selected as the sample. Primary data collection was done through an interviewer administered questionnaire, in-depth interviews and observation. Nearly 93.3% of the migrant mothers and 73.3% of migrant fathers had migrated more than once leaving their family behind. Almost 80% of mothers and 46.7% of fathers had stayed longer than seven years away from their children. In all three areas, children felt the absence of their mother more than that of their father. The reason was that, in the absence of a majority of migrant fathers (86.7%), the children's mother was the primary caregiver whereas in the case of mother's migration, only two fathers were identified as primary caregivers. The study also revealed that although the migrant parent could easily fulfill the material needs of the children through money, the fulfillment of their emotional needs were not that easy.

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