

PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SRI LANKAN WOMEN SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES AS HOUSEMAIDS.

HGI Amarabandu¹ and ST Kaththriarachchi²

^{1,2}Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

¹*iroshaamarabandu90@gmail.com*

Abstract- Sri Lanka is known to export female migrant workers as housemaids. Increasing evidence shows this phenomenon leads to abuse of migrant females in host countries and adversities to their children at home.

This study was carried out among 200 Sri Lankan women seeking foreign employment as house maids at the Foreign Employment Bureau. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analysed using SPSS 16 version. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Majority (44%) consists of 30-39 years and 72% were Sinhalese. Only 15.5% completed secondary education. Married proportion was 60%. Husband's income was less than LKR 10,000 in 77% and 98.9% husbands had some form of substance abuse. Majority said they seek foreign employment to fulfil financial requirement but 30% said the reason for going abroad was harassments by husband and relatives. Of 123 children of these women, 87 (71%) were below 20 years and were not economically active.

As a whole sample women seeking foreign employment as housemaids have poor education, income. Where as in married sample, majority had dependent children and suffered substance abuse of their husbands. Hence interventions should focus on strengthening these women and husbands to be employed locally.

Keywords- Females, psycho-social factors, Middle East countries

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is one of the largest labour exporting countries in South Asia.[1] Middle East (ME) is the main destination for labour migration in Sri Lanka with over 93 percent of the country's labour flowing into the Middle Eastern region. Currently foreign labour market is mainly dominated by female house maids to Middle East countries. [7] The challengeable lives experienced by the Sri Lankan women migrants to ME countries are seen and heard through media. In some instances, female domestic maid abuse manifests through multiple pathways, including physical, financial, verbal, emotional abuse and neglect.[8]

At home, due to absence of motherly care these migrant women's families and especially children are vulnerable to issues such as neglect, violence and abuse. [4]

Most often stated goal of the female migrant workers is earning money to buy a plot of land and to build a house in Sri Lanka to improve family socio-economic status. Achieving their stated But whether their stated intent is questionable, hence we embarked on this research to analyse socio-economic profiles of female migrant workers to ME in order to estimate their true need of securing employment in ME countries.

Though there are several studies on impact on their children and family members due to female migration none of those studies explore the specifically on female

migrant worker's psycho social factors. Therefore this study is unique, because this research is an attempt to identify psycho-social factors associated with continued female migration to Middle East countries (ME) despite the increasing evidence reported on the adverse effects.

A. General objective

To describe psycho-social factors associated with Sri Lankan women seeking employment in ME countries as housemaids.

B. Specific objectives

To assess socio-economic and demographic factors of Sri Lankan women seeking employment in ME countries as housemaids.

To assess reasons for seeking employment in ME countries as housemaids.

To assess expectations of the women who seek employment in ME.

II. METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 200 Sri Lankan women seeking employment in the ME countries as housemaids who were attending to the Foreign Employment Bureau (FEB), Colombo for a period of six months.

The ideal study sample is whole Sri Lankan women who leave the country for foreign employments. As it is impossible here we selected sample population from women who attend to FEB during 6 months. Hence, we used convenient sample population for our study. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Review committee of Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to administering the questionnaires explaining the study by using information sheet and informed consent form. Questionnaire was administered to the subjects who consent to participate to the study without causing any disturbance to their activities.

Collected data was analysed by using SPSS windows version 16.0. Results were presented using descriptive statistics including percentages and graphical methods.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to describe the factors associated with migration of female workers to ME countries. A sample of women, in the age group of 22-63 years was studied. Study sample consisted of 200 participants with largest proportion (43.5%) being in the 30-39 years age group, followed by those aged 40-49 years. Majority of study participants were of Sinhalese ethnicity (71.5%) and were married (60%).

The education level of the study sample was poor. Half of the study sample (43.5%) studied up to General Certificate Examination Ordinary Level (G.C.E.O/L) and only 15.5% passed the examination. Only 9.5% of study sample passed General Certificate Examination Advanced Level (G.C.E.A/L) and none has received tertiary education. The poor education coupled with limited employable skills, limits their choice of employment in the host countries. The skills they have stated as they are competent were cooking (93%) and housekeeping (76.5%), which enable them to seek employment as house maids in ME countries where their services are sought.

Table 1. Age distribution of study sample.

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
20-29 years	38	19%
30-39 years	87	43.5%
40-49 years	63	31.5%
50-59 years	11	5.5%
>60 years	1	0.5%
Total	200	100%

Considering the married proportion (60% of the study sample), a ½ of the husbands (49.2%) had education up to grade 5 or no school attendance at all. Only 13.5% had passed G.C.E.O/L or G.C.E.A/L. This male education level of the families is remarkably lower than their female counterparts. This discrepancy is a notable observation as women of the households with higher education level than females may be a contributory factor for women to seek

Table 2. Ethnicity of the study sample.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentages
Sinhala	143	71.5%
Tamil	47	23.5%
Muslim	10	5%
Total	200	100%

Table 3. Marital status of the study sample.

Marital status	Frequency	Percentages
Unmarried	51	25.5%
Married	120	60.0%
Widowed	23	11.5%
Divorced	6	3.0%
Total	200	100%

employment in ME countries to fulfil their aspirations beyond their opportunities at home.

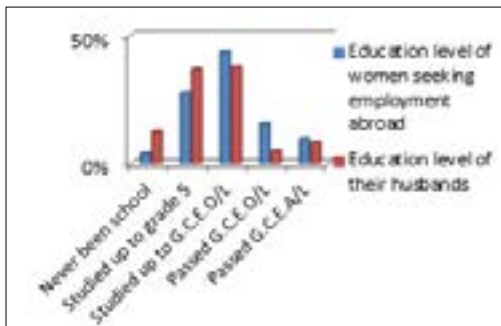


Figure1. Comparison between women and their husband's level of education.

Socio-economic data revealed that only 41% of the participants were previously employed and of them majority (47.6%) were garment factory workers at skilled labour category. About 61% of participants had monthly income less than LKR 10,000, of which nearly half had an income between LKR 2000- 4999. About 1/4 of their husbands were unemployed and most of the husbands (77%) had reported a monthly income of less than Rs.10,000. But almost all the (99.9%) husbands had some form of substance abuse, of them 75% were

spending LKR 500-1500 per day to maintain these habits. Their expenditure for substance use was more than their monthly income and most probably they were engaged in some form of illegal activities to earn money to spend on their habits.

Out of the 60% women who were married, 12.5% claim their relationship with their husbands was very poor whereas 30.8% said that they had excellent relationship. Majority (99.5%) said they seek employment in ME to fulfil financial requirement and 33% admitted that the reason for going abroad was harassments by husband and relatives. This finding is noteworthy, as in Sri Lankan culture it is usually divulging such information is discouraged as women are supposed to keep family secrets to prevent bringing disgrace to their families. This gender specific phenomenon is overcome by 1/5 of the study sample which is an encouraging observation.

Considering stated reasons for seeking foreign employment in ME countries as house maids, majority confirmed stated reason as economic needs and 1/3 stated stigma attached to similar employment in home country lead them to take the decision to go abroad. This is noteworthy in analysing as attitude for women to engage in house maid work in home country is very different and lead to stigma compared to their similar work in ME countries. If these attitudes can be changed, more women will continue to nurture their families while working and fulfilling their aspirations.

Table 4. The reasons these women to go abroad as housemaids.

Reason for going abroad	Number	Percentage
Economical needs Unable to get a suitable	191	99.5%
job in the country	39	19.5%
Harassments by husband	15	7.5%
Harassments by relatives and friends	25	12.5%
Influence from employment agents	11	5.5%
Influence from previous migrants	13	6.5%
Local stig0mata associated with housekeeping in Sri Lanka	69	34.5%
Other reasons	47	23.5%

Nearly all of the women had been previously employed in the ME countries and their preference to seek re-employment in ME countries is suggestive of perceived higher level of socio-economic status and other benefits of going abroad such as freedom, escape from abusive relationships and adverse psycho-social circumstances. This is a remarkable finding as new entrants are minimal in the study sample indicating a decreasing trend to choose foreign employment in ME countries as an option for economic, psycho-social and other needs.

It is evident from this study that women seek employment in ME countries are previously employed in ME countries, majority are married and had lower income in home country. Majority were not able to complete their school education, and married proportion had suffered due to substance misuse habit of their husbands, who had low income and poorer education level than women. Additional perceived benefits of working abroad include status attached to working abroad compared to similar work in home country. Increasing trend of previously employed women only seeking employment in ME countries is a trend, possibly due to knowledge on adversities women have to face in host countries, adversities of their children have to face in home country due to lack of motherly care can be postulated but other reasons need to be studied like employment opportunities in booming industry in home country.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is evident from this study that women seek employment in Middle East, mainly for economic and security reasons although there were lot of consequences were rising up. The women seeking employment in Middle East countries have poor education, income and in married sample had expenditure of house hold income due to substance abuse of husbands. Hence interventions should focus on strengthening these women and husbands to be employed locally.

As South Asian country, the mother is the most important person in the family who keeps the family together and nurses the growing children. However, owing to economic and few other reasons, family had to experience mothers' absence due to that most of the family violent activities and other corruptions are increasing in the society.

Therefore the government should take necessary steps to initiate programs to prevent unhealthy habits of husbands by promoting them to contribute to family economy and security. At the same time the women should be given chances to follow employable skills and it will be helpful to seek employment within the country, without disturbing the family unit.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful to the women who seeking employment in ME countries as housemaids at Foreign Employment Bureau for their co-operation to complete the study. In addition to that we like to thank Ethical Review committee of Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

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