

# **Migrant Housemaids from Ratnapura District working in the Middle-East: The Socio-Economic Impact of the migrant phenomenon on both Family and Society**

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## **Abstract**

Female migrant labor has been a reality since the early 1980's. For many such women, married or single, often better educated than their husbands . migration for work related purposes brings a positive hope of success as a housemaid earns \$100/month in average (Eelens & Schampers, 2008)when employed overseas. Nevertheless, many Migrant Housemaids (MH) become vulnerable to discrimination, abuse and violence in their host countries. In spite of the manifestation of high economic gains, many women suffer and make a negative impact on both family and society. Further, the societal image of migrant female workers is low because of stories of misconduct by some previous MH (Eelens & Schampers, 2008).

This study is a comparative analysis of positive and negative impact of female migrant laborers on themselves and their families. This study was basically a quantitative analysis, and families of Middle – East - employed housemaids (N=100) were selected from Godakawela DS Division. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting family units. Questionnaire and informal interview method were employed to collect the primary data. The conclusion reveals that positives of seemingly high income have been undermined by the failure of children in school performance, high morbidity rates and lifestyle of conspicuous consumption that leads to minimal savings. The analysis supports the hypothesis that the demerits of MH undermine the merits in terms of economic earnings.

**Key Words:** Migrant Housemaids. Children. Family. Remittance Management.

## **Introduction**

During the 1970s, the typical profile of a migrant was that of a male breadwinner. Since the early 1980s, increasing numbers of women, often better educated than men, single as well as married, have started moving on their

own to take up jobs in the Middle East. However, women's opportunities to migrate legally have been more limited than for men in most countries (Chammartin, 2003).

While Sri Lankan women have been known to have the highest literacy rates and highest levels of health care access in South Asia, they have experienced many forms of gender-based violence and gender inequality, including discrimination in economic spheres (HRW, 2007). These manifestations of women's unequal status in Sri Lanka are linked to women's decisions to migrate. Gender inequality manifests itself in labor force participation and earning power. In 2006, Sri Lankan women's labor force participation was 36%, about half the participation rate of men (68%) (CBSL, 2006). Female unemployment rate has been more than double that of men's for over three decades. Clearly, Sri Lankan women earn at the lower end of the wage spectrum (ADB, 2006). Thus Migration for employment grew rapidly after the decisions were taken at the Non Aligned Conference in 1976 to grant more job opportunities that are available in the Middle East region to Asian countries (SLBFE, 2006).

As a nation, we have become dependent on migrant remittances. Total migrant remittances in 2007 would have paid for the equivalent of 20% of all imported goods and services. We would have needed nearly 150% of net textile and garment exports to replace migrant remittances. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment is the government agency responsible for promoting, regulating and protecting the migrant workforce. Sri Lanka has the highest portion of female to male migrant workers in Asia. Women accounted for 63% of migrant workers, or 913,000, of which 711,000 (78%) were employed as housemaids (SLBFE, 2008).

There are four reasons for Sri Lankans to opt for migrant employment. First, the economy is not generating adequate opportunities that meet the aspirations and financial needs of the labor force. This may be linked to regional disparities in economic activity. Second, the ongoing conflict stifled economic activity in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Third, owing to the uncertainty about Sri Lanka's future arising from the ongoing conflict, professionals continue to emigrate. Fourth, ironically, successive governments have actively followed a policy of promoting migration for employment to raise foreign exchange and reduce unemployment.

Meanwhile, worker attitudes towards local jobs are influenced by perceptions of social status, not just the earning potential. Over 700,000 migrants work as housemaids; yet, local demand for housemaids exceeds supply, as they are perceived to have low social status locally (SLBFE, 2008). Similarly, sedentary jobs in Sri Lanka, even at low levels, are perceived as having

higher social status than manual ones. Migrant workers incur certain costs that would not apply to local employment. According to the SLBFE website, depending on the country of employment, currently a migrant worker would have to pay between Rs.70, 000 and Rs.200, 000 for visas, agents' commissions, work permits, registration, legal and other fees towards recruitment in addition to airfare (SLBFE, 2008).

- According to the former Assistant Governor and Director of Statistics of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, MH (Migrant Housemaids) and their families incur the country non- monetary costs. First, the children of MH are unsupervised, neglected and sometimes even physically or sexually abused by relatives. Second, spouses of migrant workers turn to alcohol, drug abuse and alternate sex partners. Third, some MH undergoing a drastic transition from their rural lifestyles to the new work environment are unable to re-adjust on their return, thereby leading to varied psychological and social problems. Fourth, some MH face traumatic experiences of physical and sexual harassment or nonpayment of their wages in their places of employment or even deportation at costs to the individual or state. Fifth, MH seeking employment outside of authorized and regulated channels have been deceived by unregistered employment agents.

In addition, there are long term economic costs to the country. It causes labor shortage from the perspective of its own development in both skilled and unskilled categories. Sri Lankan migrant workers lack organizational mechanisms and support services, unlike the Filipino NGOs which provide services such as legal assistance, counseling, temporary shelter, financial and material assistance to those who are ill or have visa problems (Weerakoon, 1998).

Embassies of their motherlands in South Asian countries are not proactive enough to deal with the problems faced by migrant laborers and in most cases these embassies are ill equipped to handle complaints due to the lack of adequate manpower and resources from their home countries (Gurung, 2000).

The UN Convention protects migrants through the whole migration of process. These phases include decision-making, pre-departure migration preparation, transit and employment at destination country, and return/reintegration. The UN Convention was adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December, 1990 and entered into force on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2003, after ratification by 20 countries. Presently 37 states have ratified the Convention and 15 states are signatories. Except for Sri Lanka, none of the other South Asian countries has ratified the Convention (Haque, 2007).

However, most of the MH find it difficult to reach their main objectives. This study specifically aims to find out the recent trends related to socio-economic status of MH and their families before and after the migration. Also, it examines the changes of lifestyle of MH and whether they have achieved all objectives at the migration. There is a considerable body of literature that discusses the lives of Migrant Laborers prior to the migration. However, this literature has largely ignored the socio-economic behavior of MH after arrival.

## **Concepts and Theory**

### **Migrant Labour**

During the post - war period “contract migration” has been the dominant and most dynamic form of international labor migration. This phenomenon has become important increasingly within Asia only since the mid-1970s when the “Oil boom” began to generate dramatic economic transformations in oil exporting Arab countries (Athukorala, 1990).

Domestic work is one of the only occupations where legal migration of women workers has been recognized to be necessary in the Middle East. These countries receive thousands of women migrants for domestic work every year and their numbers are increasing in importance when compared to numbers of male migrants (Chammartin, 2003) The ILO has been concerned with the plight of domestic workers for many decades. In 1965 the ILO’s General Conference adopted the “Resolution concerning the Conditions of Employment of Domestic Workers” (ILO, 1965).

Some of the main issues the ILO has been interested in identifying are; hours of work, wages, workload and rest periods, social security coverage, contractual conditions and abuse.

Sending and receiving countries must enact legislation to safeguard the rights of MH in their own countries. Unless sending countries recognize the status of domestic workers within their own national boundaries, it is difficult for them to lobby for humane conditions of work for their citizens in the receiving countries (Goonsekere , 1994).

Another ILO study was completed in 2001 and was entitled MH in UAE. The case of female domestic workers provides first-hand case study data to an Information guide on preventing exploitation and abuse of women migrant workers (ILO, 2001).

Pyle (2006) argues that the transnational migration of women to perform caring labor is only one side of the picture. To fully understand the reality of

who is accessing care in the global political economy, we must take a broader perspective and examine the flip side of these flows. The flip side has two key dimensions. First, Pyle examines the level of care the women migrating experience by surveying the existing literature on their living and working conditions abroad. She finds that most experience deficiencies in their situations that are physically and emotionally stressful and unhealthy.

They are discriminated against for many reasons: race, nationality, class, religion, perceived morality or gender. Room for discrimination is enhanced due to the fact that some of them are undocumented or trafficked workers. Pyle (2006) provides many creative ways they can resist abuse, although in positions of unequal power.

Next, Pyle (2006) also looks at the level of care these transnational migrants' families experience in their absence. While they may be better off economically, their emotional care is more problematic. Many women transnational migrants are in contradictory positions – expected to earn money and be responsible for their families at the same time. However, their families experience care deficits (Pyle, 2006).

### **Remittance Management**

Remittances are probably the most visible aspect of the economic transactions made by MH. World Bank in its *Global Economic Prospects* (World Bank, 2006) stated that the officially recorded remittances worldwide have reached US\$ 232 billion in 2005, more than double the amount of foreign aid to developing countries for that year. Despite the emphasis on remittances sent from developed countries to developing countries, there is also a significant South - South transfer. In the UN publication catalogue (UN, 2006) UN Secretary General Kofi Annan suggested that about one third of global migrants have moved from one developing country to another. The report advocates policies which stimulate the potential for migration to benefit all parties involved-receiving and sending countries and the migrant families themselves (UN, 2006). This report has been criticized by Human Rights Watch for its focus on development rather than the local enforceable rights of migrants.

The livelihood of women, their families, and their communities depend on labor migration and remittances. Such a large migration stream, operating both in international and local contexts also inevitably affects concepts of money, work and family structure (Gamburd, 2005). A central issue regarding the impact of contract migration on labor exporting countries is whether or not migrant remittances help to strengthen the local economy in terms of productive investment. The housemaids spend mostly to meet their basic

consumer needs. Thus, it appears that the pattern of consumption of returning migrants is mostly dictated by their initial economic background (Athukorala, 1990). This consumption may be considered as investment in human capital to the extent that it improves the health and the productive efficiency of the recipients (Chandavarkar, 1980).

MH earn about US\$100 a month, a wage that has held steady for the past twenty years. They send their remittances to their families, who often use the money for daily consumption. Most families hope to save enough money to buy land and build a house (Gamburd, 2003).

It is interesting to note that, compared to other labor exporting countries in the region, migrant remittance seems to be less oriented to consumption Sri Lanka (44%). Studies conducted in Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Thailand have placed APC (the average propensity to consumption of remittances in the range of 55 to 80 % (ILO, 2001).

The heavy emphasis on housing is understandable because such investment is instrumental in improving the social status of the family, which is the dominant motive behind the emigration decision. Furthermore, in an inflationary economic environment, this is generally a good long term investment.

In 2007, migrant workers remitted about Rs.277, 000 million (US\$ 2,502 million) to Sri Lanka (SLBFE, 2007). This provided, on average, 1, 45 million households with an additional Rs. 16,000 monthly. As a nation we have become dependent on migrant remittances. The latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2006/07 (DCS,2008) recorded that housing stock and access to utilities, such as electricity, gas, telephones, safe water and sanitation, had improved further and that the poverty headcount had declined from 23% to 15% of the population since 2002 (HIES,2006/2007) (DCS,2008) . Migrant remittances would have contributed substantially to family incomes and their improvements in the living standards.

Siddqui (2007) mentioned that in Nepal, there are data that indicate there was substantial reduction in poverty despite the internal conflict. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and the Census data show a drastic improvement in the socio-economic indicators such as infant mortality, life expectancy, maternal mortality and health services. One of the key factors responsible for improving the status of the people was remittances coming from abroad.

Looking only at the geographical distribution of migrants within their own country and the household distribution of remittances will not provide the full picture on the poverty reduction in the context of the with “remittances

hypotheses". Sri Lanka's experiences illustrate that even though a large number of migrants going abroad are from the richest districts, and not the poorer ones, poverty reduction has taken place. In the case of Sri Lanka, 27% of the migrants were found to be from the Western province, which produces over 50% of the GDP of the country (DCS, 2008). Monaragala district where the poverty indices are the worst has only 1 % of migrant workers. There are only 15% of migrants from the entire North and Eastern provinces (Ranasinghe, 2007).

Athukorala (1990) identified that MH save 96% of their earnings and almost all of the savings are remitted home. The workers of low occupational status usually tend to endure poor living conditions in the country of employment and sustain a high savings rate. Their desire to improve their economic status may be stronger than of those belonging to higher income brackets.

According to Athukorala (1986), the Self- Employment Program for returned migrants was introduced by the Research and Development Division of the Ministry of Labor in December, 1981. This program is referred to as ML-MB Program (Ministry of Labor – Merchant Bank Program). The aim of this program is to assist returning migrants who have substantial cash reserves to establish themselves as small scale entrepreneurs. The first joint venture workers' company, Made Food Ltd, was opened in February, 1985. Shortly thereafter, it ran into difficulties due to a lack of prior experience. Returning migrants belonging to skilled or unskilled categories are always left out because of their limited savings, inadequate formal education and obvious preference for investment in cottage industries (Athukorala, 1990).

Sri Lanka, like most sending countries, barely concerns itself with the reintegration of the returnees, except for a skills development programme for the returnees of the GULF crisis. There are no social integration programmes either (Francisco, 1994).

## **Methodology**

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. A sample of 100 current MH was subjected to the study. The 18 GS divisions were selected using simple random sampling method out of 44 GS divisions of the Godakawela DS division. The actual number of MH in these GS divisions was 166. 100 MH were selected proportionately representing about 60 % of the WMH of the 18 GS divisions of Godakawela Divisional Secretariat. These are women who have worked

in any Middle –Eastern country as MH and returned to Sri Lanka after completing their contracts or due to some other reasons.

The primary data collection was carried out through a self–interviewed questionnaire. There was also a need to visit and identify activities of a 15 day Training programme of SLFEB at Godakawelwa. That training programme was specially formulated to develop the level of MH to Middle-East Countries. The main source of secondary data was Annual Statistical Reports of SLFEB and Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The Main Objective of this study is to examine the Socio–Economic Impact of the migrant phenomenon on both Family and Society.

The Specific Objectives of this study were:

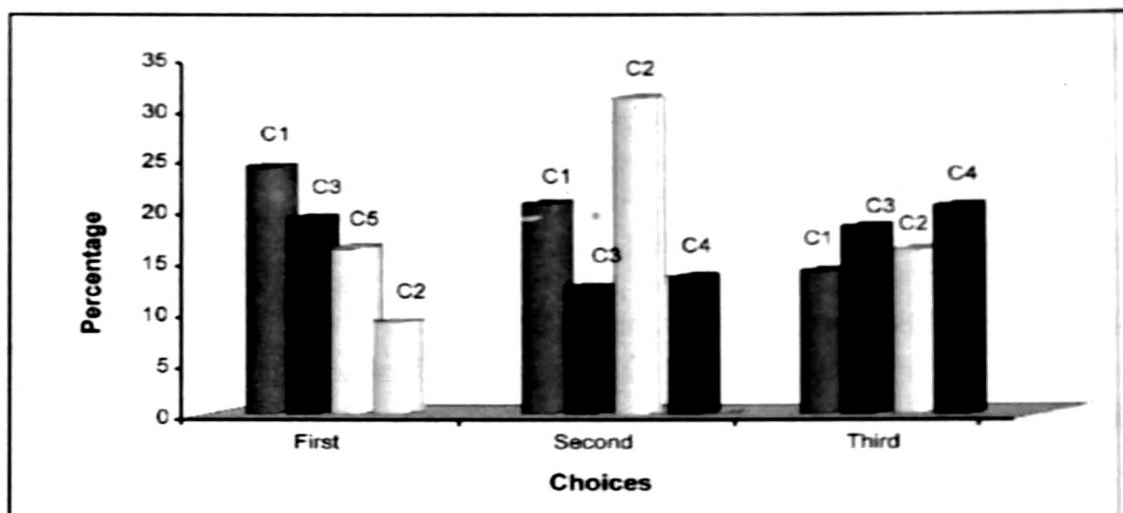
- \* To examine the most and the least influential reasons for Migrant Housemaids (MH)
- \* To understand the socio-economic status of MH prior/ after the arrival .
- \* To identify the changes of lifestyle following the migrant labor
- \* To check whether they have achieved all objectives post migration.

### **Results and Discussion**

The above mentioned objectives were taken into consideration with the analysis of the questionnaires of employed on the families of MH (N=100). These families were selected from Godakawela DS Division where the second highest rates of female migrant housemaids were reported within Ratnapura district (SLBFE, 2006). Almost all MH find employment through brokers and recruitment agencies and some of them rely on friends and relatives who have abroad. These brokers and recruitment agencies charge a large fee which is often borrowed at 15-30 % of interest.

This study attempted to find out the most and the least influential reasons for the migration of MH. Figure 1 shows that the highest influential reason was high household expenditure ( 24.2%). The Second highest reason was housing costs (19.2% ) . Third highest reason for MH migration was for a high income (16.2%). The least influential reason, was giving a better education to their children (9%). Although education is free in Sri Lanka, many women said that local employment options were insufficient to cover the education-related costs for their school-age children. These costs include the cost of stationery, clothing and transportation costs. Approximately a sum of Rs. 4,000.00-10000.00 becomes the average cost for a term.





C1	High household expenditure
C2	Education costs of children
C3	Expenditure for construction of Houses
C4	To have higher a living standard
C5	To earn a high income

Figure 1: The most and the least influential reasons for being employed as MH  
Source: Field Research Data

In case of consumer durables, most of the MH are quite satisfied with the achievements. The actual percentages of respondents who possessed such consumer durable are reported by the MH are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of those who possessed home appliances at pre-departure and post-migration

Home appliances	Pre-Departure (%)	Post- Migration (%)	Increase (%)
Furniture	24.8	65.3	40.5
Jewellery	12.2	77.8	65.6
Televisions	17.2	68.8	51.6
Refrigerators	2.2	28.6	26.4
Sewing Machines	15.6	34.4	18.8
Land Telephones	2.3	38.2	35.9
Mobile phones	2.2	44.6	42.4
Electric Fans	3.4	31.5	28.1
Gas Cookers	2.3	25.3	23
Cassette Recorders	6.7	56	49.3
Video/VCD	2.3	31.4	29.1

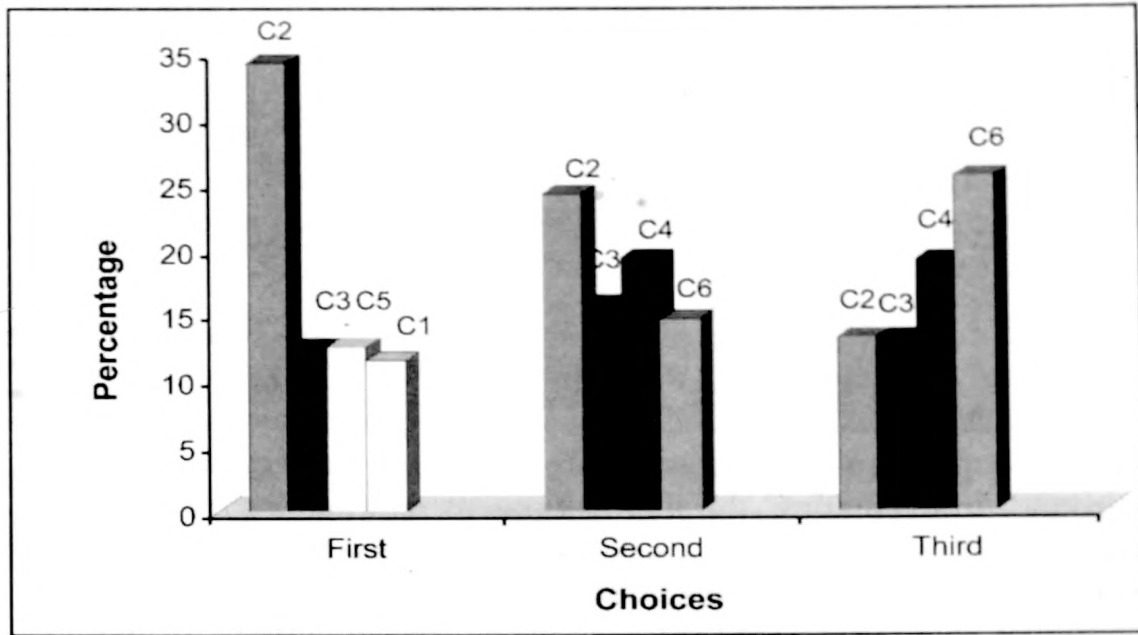
Source: Field Research Data (2009)

Table 1 summarizes the achievement levels of the consumer durables after migration. The highest percentage of appliances seem to have purchased by MH are as follows: jewellery (65.6%), television (51.6%), cassette player (49.3%), mobile phones (42.4%) and furniture (40.5%). Athukorala (1990) emphasized that remittances are mostly spent on ostentatious consumption and unproductive investment which do not contribute directly to the process of economic development.

Figure 2 shows that the first reason for inability to save was related to sending money to members of the family (34.1%). MH spend mostly to meet their basic consumer needs. Thus, it appears that the pattern of consumption of return migrants is mostly dictated by their initial economic background. In evaluating the implications of remittances for economic development, it is important to guard against the fallacy of treating heavy consumption orientation in the expenditure pattern of workers in low occupational categories (MH) as necessarily unproductive (Athukorala, 1990).

The second and third highest reasons were associated with sending money to the take care of illnesses of family members and for the construction of houses and purchasing property. The fourth reason for leaving the Middle Eastern countries had to do with premature termination of contract (11.4%).

The study highlighted some of the changes that had taken place in their life style during their employment in the Middle East.



C1	Premature termination of contract
C2	Family expenditure
C3	Illnesses of family members
C4	Payment of debts
C5	House construction and purchasing property
C6	Purchase of jewellery

Figure 2: The Reasons for Inability to save through the Middle East Employment. Source: Field Research Data (2009)

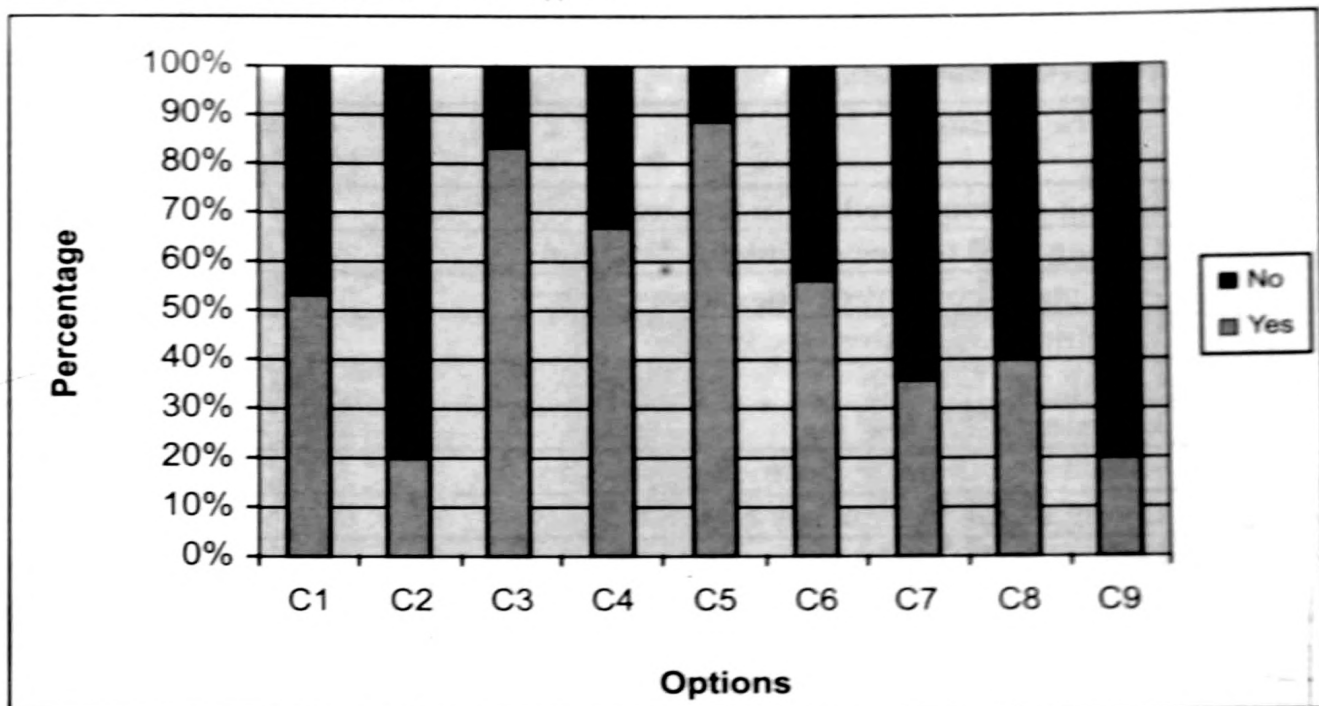
Table 2 summarizes that most of the MH got used to the Middle –Eastern climatic condition and sacrificed their lives for earning money. Their most productive experience was the gaining of knowledge in the electrical home kitchen appliances. A higher number of MH got used to the Arabic language and traditions. A few of them experienced separation or death of their husbands. The study also checked the benefits from their foreign employment as housemaids.

**Table 2: Important Adaptations made by MH.**

<b>The Change</b>	<b>Agreed (% out of total)</b>
Living without freedom or free time	84
Getting used to a new climatic condition	98
Full time employment for earning money	94.7
Loneliness away from the family	98.9
Living in a camp	2.2
Experiences living jail	2.2
Knowledge in using electrical appliances	99
Living alone, without any entertainments	84.9
Getting used to Arabic language and traditions	97.9
Separation of husband or death	12.6

Source: Field Research Data (2009)

Figure 3 shows that purchasing or repair a house was a major benefit considered by these MH. Only 53% have been cited as having achieved this benefit. When it comes to purchasing of a land, 20% benefited from this. 83% gained knowledge of the Arabic language and civilization. Sixty seven percent of MH improved their income level. The highest number of MH (89%) became experienced in foreign countries. Also 56% MH obtained a higher social status for their family members. At the same time, only 36% of the MH reported the higher health status by getting nutritious food. Only 40% of sample were able redeem their debts.



	Type of benefits
C1	Purchase /Repair a house
C2	Purchase a piece or part of land
C3	Gaining knowledge of the Arabic language and civilization
C4	Improving the income level
C5	Becoming experienced in foreign countries
C6	Attaining higher social status for their family members
C7	Improving health level through nutritious food
C8	Redemption of debts
C9	No special benefits

Figure 3: The benefits from their foreign employment as housemaids.  
Source: Field Research Data

Human Rights Watch (2007) also mentioned in their case studies nearly all the migrant domestic workers selected had cited financial necessity as a reason for their decision to migrate. Further, they highlighted the fact that they migrated to build a house, purchase some land, pay off family debts, escape from an abusive spouse, pay for education (related costs for their children) and pay for care of sick, unemployed, or elderly relatives.

However, 20% MH cited that they were able to get none of the above benefits. The study provided information on the average pattern of savings made by the returnees. These include cash sent to Sri Lanka, cash brought to Sri Lanka and consumer durables brought. The average monthly maximum amount of money received in terms of remittances was Rs.14,742.00. However, it is observed that 40% of the returnees were reluctant to comment on this aspect. For the question, "How much cash did

you bring with you?" the analysis found the minimum and maximum amounts; the minimum was Rs.5000.00 and the maximum amount was Rs.500,000.00. However, 14% of the respondents were reluctant to address this question.

The profile of MH is an important area of the study and covers the individual's socio-economic status. In this context, the age, educational level and marital status become important in providing an insight into their current status. It also indicates the ability of a MH to decide on matters vital in organizing the family life pattern. The profile, therefore, will be the framework by which the MHs' needs and behavior patterns are projected. It will also become an important indicator of the MH's ability to resettle and reintegrate once again in the home country.

The analysis shows that the majority of the MH were within the age bracket 26-33 years (47.8%). In the local scene, however, the majority of MH are in the economically productive age. 78.2 % of the sample falls into the age of 25 or less than 25 years and 26-33 years age cohorts. This high proportion will be making its demands on the national labor market unless they secure employment abroad.

In the study, the largest number of MH (46%) were Sinhalese and all were Buddhists, followed by the Tamil category with (42%) and 4% out of them were Christians. The Muslim group reported to be 12%. All the Tamils were from the estate sector and working for the tea or rubber plantation companies.

Seventy six point eight percent MH were married prior to departure. Out of those who had returned, the percentage of those married had increased to 81.1%. The "separated" category had increased by 4.7% and yet "widowed" and "divorced" have remained the same. The "never married" category decreased by 9.2%.

Of all MH, 30.3% had completed ordinary-level examination whereas 30.3% had completed year ten at school. It is significant that the majority of MH have had 1 to 5 years of schooling. Another significant feature is that 3% of MH had no formal education. Two percent (2%) had "Advanced Level" education. Human Rights Watch (2007) confirmed that although Sri Lanka has achieved the highest literacy rates in South Asia, gender inequality manifests itself in higher education (HRW, 2007).

The study revealed that the average amount spent for the migration is Rs 21,003. According to the SLBFE, the employers in the Middle-East send sufficient funds to recruiting agencies in Sri Lanka to be used for air fare and visa charges of MH. Accordingly, MH are currently not required to spend money for migration (SLBFE, 2007).

Twenty percent of MH had not received the agreed salary as mentioned in their agreements. When it comes to MH's employment status (prior to departure) the analysis reveals that 33% were employed in permanent positions and 15.4% were employed as casual employees.

Of the total number of MH, only 19.8% were able to obtain employment since their return. This difficulty may be due to the reason that all of them were housemaids in the Middle-East and they lacked qualifications and experience in particular skills. The Sri Lankan experience suggests that skill acquisition (human capital) through contract migration is not dependable. They are unable to find comparable occupations in Sri Lanka with an adequate salary. 29.7% of the MH were neither employed nor job oriented before migration. This percentage has increased up to 37.4% after the arrival. They are not willing to work but prefer stay as housewives. Unfortunately, the MH after migration find it difficult to adjust to the previous job.

Athukorala (1990) also mentioned the percentage that remains outside the labor market is the highest for housemaids (93%). The overwhelming majority of housemaids come from the so called non-labor market representatives of housewives and they remain as housewives once they return. It would help them to take care of their children and spouses by extending their emotional support.

The number of self-employment activities has increased after migration (up to 9.9%), a 3.3% increase. This is significant, as these MH have started their own economic activities such as small holder tea plantations and home-made food industry. Athukorala (1990) identified the "windfall" nature of remittances does not seem to have led to extravagant and conspicuous consumption as is widely alleged. Whatever money is left after meeting the basic needs of the families is inadequate for any worthwhile investment.

Of the sample 14.3% are not satisfied with the service of SLBFE. They cited that they get neither compensation nor proper service in the case of trouble abroad.

Of the total number of MH 38.7% had houses which were owned by tea/rubber plantation companies before the migration. But after migration this ownership has reduced to 31.5%.

Of the sample, the ownership for houses has increased up to 19.2%: by self and spouses, 13.7% and 5.5% respectively after migration.

Forty eight point seven percent MH at the point of migration left their children with their husbands and 21.2% MH decided to keep their babies for better security with their husbands and other guardians such as their mothers.

sisters or other relatives. The rest 30.1% of the MH kept their babies with their sisters, brothers, mothers and mother in laws.

Most of the MH left their babies. The study shows that the minimum age of the infant girl was six months and of the infant boy was three months old. the maximum age for female child and male child was 25 years. Athukorala (1990) explained that in the socio cultural context of a country like Sri Lanka, the migration decision of a female undoubtedly involves a heavy opportunity cost in terms of separation from the family and living in a separate culture.

The study shows the minimum period of stay in the Middle East was three months and the maximum was 12 years. 4% of children were bad in health during their mothers' stay in the Middle-East. In most of the cases, these children were suffering from long term illnesses such as asthma.

## **Conclusion**

This study mainly aimed at finding out how the Socio-Economic Impact of the migrant phenomenon on both Family and Society. As a specific objective, the most and the least influential reasons for the migration of MH were noticed. The highest influential reason for MH migration was high household expenditure. The least influential reason was the hope of educating children.

The second objective was to understand the socio-economic status of MH prior/ after the arrival. Three percent of MH had no formal education. Only 2% had Advanced Level qualification. Next, this study examined the changes of lifestyle in relation to the families of MH after migration. In this case, it is very important to search whether they have achieved all objectives at the time of migration.

MH achieved some consumer durables after migration. Most of them brought Jewellery, televisions, cassette recorders, mobile phones and furniture. However, the above mentioned consumer durables were very often used for pawning purposes at their next migration. Thus, some MH have been partially successful changing their lifestyle whereas the majority have failed in this regard. The MH have excelled in handling kitchen appliances. The main reason for inability to save was in terms of sending money to members of the family for household consumption. The Training Department of the SLBFE has recently revised their training schedule in which they have introduced topics such as Remittance Management (SLBFE, 2008).

Most of the WMH got used to the Arabic language and traditions. A few of the MH had separated from their husbands or experienced the death of husband during their stay abroad.



The study also checked the benefits from their foreign employment as housemaids. Only a half of them had achieved housing benefit, only 20% purchased lands. More than a half of the MH improved their income level. However, 20% were not successful getting any benefits. Most of them had returned due to premature termination of contracts. The reasons for termination of contract were related to homesickness, illnesses, giving inaccurate information, for being away for a few months and scandal of the family or harassment by husband.

Finally, the economic achievements of MH facilitate the basic needs and barely addresses the income security and luxuries. Some of the MH left their babies, as young as 3 months at home. Women's long time absences disrupted widely accepted gendered attributions of parenting roles with fathers and female relations taking over the household tasks. A minority of children experienced bad health during their mothers' absence. An improved data base is needed at a national level and in Sri Lankan embassies in receiving countries. As the registration of MH is now compulsory additional information could be gathered from this exercise.

MH say that economic difficulties provoke migration and assess commitment to kin in financial terms. The government also benefits from remittances. Nevertheless, stakeholders (villagers, politicians, and the national media) worry about the social costs borne by children. The Sri Lankan government has considered banning the migration of women with children under the age of five.

Over the past quarter century, MH have succeeded in some of their goals. Currently, some of their children are going abroad to some other destinations, but with a new set of goals. This suggests that the efforts of migrant mothers to improve their children's lives will have an effect on global migration patterns in the future.

According to the (SLBFE, 2008) when the employees are in the host country, they should repay all charges such as air fare and visa charges to recruiting agencies in Sri Lanka. However, officers of the SLBFE have requested not to pay any charges to recruiting agencies.

Poor monitoring of labor recruiters has allowed unscrupulous labor agents and their unlicensed sub-agents to demand illegal, exorbitant fees from prospective migrant domestic workers, leaving them highly indebted. Labor agents have often deceived women about their conditions of employment, including the country where they will work and their salary. In mid-2007, the government instituted measures to provide migrant workers greater information about their employment contracts; the impact of these efforts is not yet clear. Once abroad, domestic workers face a wide range of abuses.

Sri Lankan consular officials often provide little or no assistance to domestic workers who approach them with cases of unpaid wages and abuse.

There is a need for policy formulation and implementation at national, regional and international levels to minimize and alleviate the problems of MH in the Asian region.

The self-employment opportunities has also improved in the area slightly after migration. They engage in activities such as small holder tea/rubber plantations and catering food items. The analysis confirms that the demerits of MH undermine the merits economic earnings.

Thus the findings give us the insight into the dysfunctional family structure of the MH population. Apparently, the MH are in pursuit of two objectives: (1) to improve the quality of life and (2) to gain in terms of economic returns. However, the present study seems to contradict (1) and only partially supports (2) Therefore, under the given circumstances, we can safely conclude that the government is justified in moving forward with the legislation to prevent mothers with children aged five and under from working overseas as migrant housemaids. Currently, the government is in the process of fine tuning the procedures using all of these documented experiences.

Since the present study is only representative of a cross- section of the district of Ratnapura (i.e. Godakawela Divisional Secretariat Division ), the findings should be interpreted with caution. Further research is needed to extend and clarify the present findings. It would be interesting to see if in fact the District of Kurunegala (i.e. where there is a high incidence of MH) would support the present investigation.

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