

IMPACT OF PARENTAL MIGRATION ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM SRI LANKA

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Abstract

International labour migration has been one of the key sources of employment generation and foreign exchange earnings for Sri Lanka since early 1980s. A sizable share of the total migrants fall into the 25-44 age-group and their migration may have implications on education and protection of children left behind. This study aimed at examining the impact of parental migration on children left behind. By employing a mixed method, this study collected quantitative data by administering a questionnaire for a sample of randomly selected households and key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were conducted in collecting qualitative data. Both descriptive and regression analyses were employed in data analysis and results obtained from the above techniques were further enriched by incorporating insights from key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. Insights from the descriptive analysis, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews highlighted some suggestive evidence that children in migrant households face difficulties with their school attendance and performance compared to children in non-migrant households. Aiming at strengthening the above findings, this study employed a logistic regression framework in examining the effect of migration on educational performance where the dependent variable was self-assessment on performance at school-level test. A number of explanatory variables were introduced in order to control household level factors affecting educational performance. The results clearly indicated that migration status has no effect on educational achievement. Nevertheless, the researchers found strong statistical evidence to suggest that educational performance is lower among children whose mother has migrated. In other words, probability is high that children households of mother being a migrant to perform poorly in tests conducted at school-level. Mothers get involved through a number of ways to improve children's educational achievements and their absence at home negatively affects children's educational performance. It is imperative that policy makers pay urgent attention to mitigate the above impacts.

Keywords: Labour Migration, Children Left-behind, Education, Logit Model, Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

Migration can be defined as movement of people from their roots to other locations, whether it is inside or outside the country. Increasingly, migration has become a global phenomenon, concerted with the functioning of the global capital market, with global trade in goods and services, flow of investment, and the quality of life in different parts of the world. Over the last few decades, the pace of international migration has increased considerably, playing an important role in shaping and reshaping the demographic features of countries and determining the pace of their economic growth and development². In Sri Lanka, during the last few decades, the number of migrants increased rapidly due to both demand and supply factors. In 2018, around 1.5 million Sri Lankans migrated for various purposes and one out of every seven migrants seek employment opportunities. In Sri Lanka, the share of the females in total labour migration has remained relatively higher than that of the male until around 2009³. Several factors such as general improvement in economic conditions, changes in government policy on female labour migration, and higher demand for Sri Lanka's male workers abroad resulted in an increase of the share of males in total out-migration⁴.

These imply that a sizable number of migrants are parents and they left behind children when migrating for work. Although parental migration often brings higher income potentially more economic resources for children's education and health investment, lack of parental care may have adverse effects on children who are left-behind. The net effect of parental migration depends on the relative magnitude of the two effects and it is largely an empirical issue. In the context of developing countries, it is imperative to identify the effect of parental migration on children's education, partly due to the fact that many developing countries have identified international labour migration as one of the major avenues of reducing domestic unemployment and enhancing the living standards of general masses and any negative effects may lead to a vicious cycle. In particular, low human capital formation among children left-behind could lead to another round of labour migration thereby perpetuating the society as a whole. Moreover, factors such as demographic transition - from extensive family structure to intensive family structure-, absence of a public funded well-functioning child protection system, wide-spread crime involving children, and an increasing individual-centric social formation may increase the vulnerability towards low human capital formation among children left-behind.

² The United Nations (UN) estimates that the number of international migrants reached at 272 million in 2018, representing about 3 per cent of the world's population. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010). Between 2000 and 2018, the number of migrants originating from middle-income countries increased faster than those from the other income categories.

³ For instance, female migrants accounted for 73 per cent in 1995 and this share, though declined over the years, continues to remain high (50 per cent in 2018) to this date.

⁴ In 2014, government of Sri Lanka makes it compulsory to submit a family background report when a married female intend to migrate for work. Around 55 per cent of total female migrants fall into the age category of 25-44, the childbearing age group. Similarly, around 65 per cent of total male migrant fall into the age group of 25-44.

Research objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of parental migration on children's education. Specifically, this study attempted to (a) examine how the 'study environment' experienced by a child in a migrant household differ from that of one in the non-migrant household (b) evaluate the impact of parental migration on children's school performance, and (c) evaluate whether the impact differs on the basis of who migrated for work.

The section two discusses both theoretical and empirical literature on the impact of parental migration of educational performance of children left behind while a discussion on methodology is presented in section three. Section four presents and discusses results derived from both descriptive and regression analyses while the last section makes some concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18. It was ratified by many countries including Sri Lanka, to protect children from economic and sexual exploitation, violence, and other forms of abuse and to enhance the rights of children to education, health care, and a decent standard of living. These rights could be grouped into four categories namely; *survival rights, development rights, protection rights, and participation rights*. The study adopts the right based approach in examining the effect of parental migration on children's education, one of the pivotal rights. According to theoretical insights in Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology, the family (the household) plays a key role in guaranteeing child rights that come under the above four sub-categories. Incentives, in various forms such as instructions, rewards, care, love, kindness, and punishments, given by family members shape the personality and the development. The absence of parent (either one or both) may create a vacuum at household level thereby leading to violate some social negatives. A number of sociological perspectives (theories) guide the present study. Those theoretical models attempt to explain theoretical underpinning related to what are children learning and how do they learn? When do children develop emotional capabilities similar to adults? How do children process information? How do childhood experiences affect personality development?

The functionalist view of socialization theory, pronounces socialization as older generations pass culture on to younger generation (Mackie, 2002). This model assumes that a child is passive, children must be shaped to fit in, and cultural transmission insures survival. In this respect, parents play a key role in molding children who fit well onto existing socio-economic, political and cultural set up. Social learning perspective, developed by Vygotsky (2004) argues children interpret, organize, and use information from their environment. Each family provides a useful environment at the early age of any child in social learning where they learn basics which make the foundation for greater association with the rest of the society. This model assumes that child development occurs in discrete stages and a child must accomplish one stage successfully before moving onto the next. Parental migration may affect the social learning of children left behind due to improper family environment and as a result violation of child rights could take place.

The interactionist perspective, developed by George and Edwards (1989) argued that children develop identity in response to interaction with others. This approach assumes that a child is an active agent and identity is based on children's perceptions of others' perceptions of them. Absence of parents due to migration may affect children through losing interaction with closest ones thereby affecting the rights. The interpretive reproduction perspective, modeled by William (1997), argued that children negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other. One of the important assumptions of this perspective is that children influence adults in addition to being influenced by them. Hence, parental interaction is essential in shaping the childhood and protecting child rights. The ecological perspective, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1986), maintains child develops competence within a social network. On this respect, family in collaboration with schools make an important contribution to protect child rights. The critical perspectives, developed by Thorne (1987) and James, et. al. (1998) argued children resist domination both actively and passively. This model assumed that children are active agents and adults have more power than children and use it to control and dominate them. Moreover, it is assumed that like other oppressed groups, children will resist domination. Thus, interaction with adults (mainly parents) mold the child and maintain child rights. In addition, psychological theory of behaviorism, emphasizes the role of reward and punishment play in children' learning process (Delprato & Midgley, 2002). This theory assumes the child is passive and adults could shape the children. It could be assumed that children in families with migrant parents may receive such reward and punishment at sub-optimal level thereby affecting their rights. Theoretical perspectives mentioned above shed light on the relationship between the family and childhood where family in general and in particular parents play a critical role in shaping the behavior and they are instruments in guaranteeing child rights including rights to education.

The existing literature has highlighted the various channels through which parental migration can affect the human capital development of children left-behind (Dustman and Glitz, 2011). On the one hand, parents increase their earnings through migration and remittance can ease the household budget constraint and thereby increase household spending on education and reduce child labor. This theoretical prediction has been empirically supported by studies on the effect of remittances on children left-behind in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Philippine (Cox Edward & Ureta, 2003; Adams & Cuecuecha, 2013; Alcaraz, Chiquiar, & Salcedo, 2012; Yang, 2008). On the other hand, parental migration inherently leads to parental absence from home, which can have negative effects on children left-behind through channels such as the loss of local earnings, the lack of parenting inputs for educational activities, and the psychological cost associated with family separation. Moreover, parental migration also increases the migration prospects of children and can induce more or less educational investment in children depending on the difference in the rates of return to human capital between the migration destination and the place of origin.

Recently, there is a growing empirical literature that examines the effects of parental migration on educational performance of children left-behind, focusing mainly on the dimensions of time allocations and schooling attainment (Antman,

2012; Zhao, et. al., 2014; Lu, 2014; Nguyen, 2016; Li, et. al., 2017; Bai, et. al, 2018; Liang and Sun, 2020; Luo, 2020) . Antman (2012), for example, found that a Mexican father's migration to the U.S. decreased study hours and increased work hours for children left-behind. By examining the impact of parental migration on left-behind children's education across migration streams (internal vs. international), Lu (2014) found that children left behind by international migrant parent are worse off in educational attainment than those living with both parents. Moreover, it was found that the impact of internal migration also remain negative in some cases, though to a lesser extent compared to international migration. Nguyen (2016) examined the impact of parental migration on educational performance of left-behind children in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam. The authors concluded that although parental migration helps families increase per capita consumption, it does not improve health and cognitive ability of children. Luo (2020) also found similar results for rural China. Accordingly, the author found that direct effect of migration as well as the indirect effect remain negative⁵.

Zhao et. al., (2014) discussed the impact of within country parental migration on children's educational performance in rural China. The authors found that math score obtained by 4th and 5th grade students declined by around 15-60 per cent if the student belongs to a parent migrant household. More importantly, it was found that children in households with mother having migrated experienced a relatively higher negative effect compared to that of the households of father having migrated. Similar findings were made by Li, et. al., (2017) where it was found that parental migration has a negative and significant impact on the academic performance of Junior high school students.

A number of previous studies have looked into the effect of parental migration on human capital formation in the context of Sri Lanka (Hettige, 1999; Gumbard, 2008; Jampaklay, 2006; Lakshman, Perera & Sangasumana, 2015; Perera & Jampaklay, 2014). The authors examined the effect of parental migration on various components of human capital formation, namely on educational performance and/or health related aspects such as nutrition. The findings of these studies are inconclusive. Therefore, the sign and the size of the overall effect of parental migration on the education of children left-behind is a priori unclear and remains an empirical question. In the context of Sri Lanka, as far as the author knows, none of the studies had examined the educational performance of left-behind children in comparative sense, namely comparing against a comparable group of students from non-migrant families.

⁵ The direct effect refers to parental accompaniment whereas the indirect effects refers to with study time and income.

3. Methodology

This study collected both qualitative and quantitative primary data from a sample of households which contained both migrant households as well as non-migrant households⁶. First, taking into account the district-level migration flow and ethnic concentration, three administrative districts were selected out of the 25 districts in the country. Second, from each selected district, the Divisional Secretariat (DS) division reporting the highest migrant flow in 2018 was selected for the study. Third, five Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions were selected randomly from each selected DS division. Finally, the household questionnaire was administered at household level in each selected GN division. The sample consisted of 450 migrant households and 150 non-migrant households in the selected districts⁷. Electoral lists maintained at GN level and the lists containing migrant household information at divisional secretariat office were utilized in drawing households for the sample. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected children (25 in each district) in migrant households and key public officials such as school principals, teachers, officers responsible for migrants at divisional secretariat office, and Divisional Secretaries). A special attention was given to the heterogeneity that exist among left-behind children when selecting individuals for the in-depth interviews.

A number of information areas were covered by the household survey; namely, demography, socio-economic background, family background, school attendance, homework engagement, children's perceptions, attending to tuition, school performance, and school dropouts. The study interviewed children (between 10-18 years) in both migrant and non-migrant households.

This study aimed at employing both descriptive and regression analyses in examining the impact of parental migration on educational performance of children left-behind. Insights of key informant interviews and in-depth interviews will be blended along with the findings from the above analyses. Following Logit model was estimated in investigating the impact of parental migration on educational performance;

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

In equation 1, y_i denotes the dependent variable that takes 1 if a student ranks his/her educational performance as 'average or above average' and otherwise zero (if a student ranks his/her educational performance as 'below the average')⁸. Matrix X includes variables representing students' after school engagements, family background, and school quality while Z contains variables related to migration status. Matrix D contains district dummy variables and u_i is the usual error term. β , γ , and α are parameter vectors.

⁶ A migrant household is one that has at least one or both parents abroad for work at the time of the survey and the current period of migration started six months prior to the survey was conducted.

⁷ In each selected DS division, 150 migrants and 50 non-migrant households were selected from the five GN divisions belonging to the respective DS division.

⁸ During the survey, students were asked to rank their educational performance and five levels of performance were offered to them as excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor.

4. Results and Discussion

Characteristics of household survey

Table 1 reports data on age distribution of household members by migrant and non-migrant households in the sample. It is interesting to note that the share of relatively small children (less than 10 years) is higher in migrant households than that in non-migrant households for all districts except for Nuwara Eliya. Key informant discussions revealed that economic burden is one of the main factors that forced household members to migrate even if they have to leave behind small children. However, this pattern is not visible for other age-groups.

Table 1: Age distribution: migrant households vs. non migrant household

Age group	Kurunegala		Nuwara Eliya		Batticaloa	
	Non-Migration HH	Migration HH	Non-Migration HH	Migration HH	Non-Migration HH	Migration HH
<=10	10.0	14.3	19.5	16.4	10.8	17.8
11-20	38.9	29.5	29.5	32.1	40.4	32.8
21-30	2.8	7.6	6.3	7.5	6.3	9.8
31-40	23.2	24.0	24.7	22.6	25.6	22.9
41-50	19.9	14.7	9.5	14.6	11.7	10.4
51-60	2.8	6.4	6.8	2.5	3.1	3.9
>=60	2.4	3.5	3.7	4.2	2.2	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on household survey

According to our sample, in Nuwara Eliya district, ‘mother-migrated’ households accounts for around 80 per cent of total migrant households in the district whereas this figure is around 34 per cent and 59 per cent in Batticaloa and Kurunegala districts respectively. In contrast, share of ‘father-migrated’ households accounts for around half of the total migrant households in Batticaloa. The ‘both-parents’ migrated households are relatively high both in Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya districts.

Over 94 per cent of total migrants of our sample are in Middle East and around 60 per cent of them could be categorized as housemaids. In most cases, these migrants may visit the family once in two years. Majority of migrated fathers and mothers (over 70 per cent) have obtained less than secondary level of education while there are around 5-8 per cent of total migrated fathers and mothers who have not schooled at all. In terms of age, average age of migrated parents is 40 years while around 5-8 per cent of migrated parents in mid 20s. Nearly 94 per cent of total migrants remit money to their households. Those that do not send assistance are either migrated in recent months or migrated some years ago but do not keep regular contact, apparently disintegrated from the households. The survey found that fewer number of mothers as well as fathers keep less contact and do not send money or other assistance on regular basis due to limited association with the family members⁹. Over

⁹ In some cases, migrated mothers or fathers informed the family members about financial difficulties such as not receiving monthly wage as a reason for not remitting money to the household members.

90 per cent of migrated mothers/fathers directly remit money to household members on monthly basis and the remitted money is mostly utilized for financing consumption expenditures such as food, clothes, education, health, and investing in improving housing conditions. Children very often keep contacting migrated parents in all districts.

Parental migration and schooling

More than 90 per cent of interviewed children (both migrant and non-migrant households) are currently schooling. From the total sample of three districts, around 8 per cent of school-going age children in non-migrant households and 6 per cent of school-going age children in migrant households do not school at present. Compared to the other two districts, a sizable number of school-going students in Batticaloa district do not school at present (see Table 2). For instance, 15 per cent of total non-migrant household children and 9 per cent of migrant household children do not school at present in Batticaloa. It is reasonable to guess that ‘war’ related factors may have some influence on this situation¹⁰.

Table 2: School attendance

	Kurunegala		Nuwara Eliya		Batticaloa		Total	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Yes	96.0	96.3	92.5	94.6	85.4	91.4	91.3	94.0
No	4.0	3.7	7.5	5.4	14.6	8.6	8.7	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: NM=non-migrant and M=migrant

Source: Based on household survey

A majority of school going children attend public schools in all three districts. In In Nuwara Eliya district, around 13 per cent of school-going children attend semi-government schools. As revealed during the in-depth interviews, some mother migrants get their children admitted to semi-government schools where hostel facilities are available so that children receive better education and protection during their absence. Most of these schools are Christian/Catholic schools. A small percentage of children attend private schools. In most cases, children attend schools located in nearby village or city. There is clear evidence that in Kurunegala and Nuwara Eliya, a higher percentage of schooling children in migrant households attend schools located in other villages or city (see Table 3). In other words, children in migrant households attend schools located far away compared to children in non-migrant households in these two districts. However, in Batticaloa district, a greater percentage of children in non-migrant households attend schools that are located in other villages/cities. The in-depth interviews revealed that migrant households are in

¹⁰ Batticaloa district was heavily affected by the civil war that lasted around 30 years. It is possible, that relatively low schooling may associate with war-related factors such as loss of family members, disruption of early childhood education, and lack of interest due to prolonged absence from schools.

a better position to bear the additional travelling costs due to sending children to schools away from their own village/city. If it is assumed that schools located in remote cities provide better education, one could argue that children in migrant households access quality education due to their parents financing additional costs.

Table 3: Place of schooling

Where school	Kurunegala		Nuwara Eliya		Batticaloa		Total	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Living village/City	75.0	48.9	67.6	58.6	70.7	85.7	71.4	64.7
Other village/City	25.0	51.1	32.4	41.4	29.3	14.3	28.6	35.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: NM=non-migrant and M=migrant

Source: Based on household survey

Walking is the main mode of travelling for a majority of children in both migrant and non-migrant households in Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa districts while public transport becomes the main mode of travelling for school children in Kurunegala district. However, a sizable percentage of children in migrant households travel to school by their household owned vehicles. In Kurunegala district, around 20-30 per cent of school-going children travel to schools by private school vans. Although in-depth interviews revealed many cases where children in migrant households travel to school by school vans data in household survey do not show that picture. Instead, it could be seen that around 20 per cent of total children in migrant households travel to school by household owned vehicles, mostly by bikes and three-wheels.

Parents migration and educational difficulties

The household survey collected information related to educational difficulties experienced by school-going children in migrant households. In addition, questions were posed during the in-depth interviews to both school-going children as well as to teachers/principals regarding difficulties faced by school-going children of migrant households. In this context, focus was mainly on children's difficulties in carrying out homework and preparing for examinations. The household survey based results are reported in Table 4. Accordingly, children reported difficulties related to education after mother/father migrated¹¹. In Kurunegala district, around 18 per cent of children in migrated households reported difficulties with respect to education even when mother/father or both were in Sri Lanka (before migration) and this number increased to 40 per cent after their father/mother or both migrated (see Table 4). Similarly, in Nuwara Eliya district, around 7 per cent of children in migrated households reported difficulties with respect to education even when mother/father or both were in Sri Lanka (before migration) and this number increased to 29 per cent

¹¹ Education related to difficulties mainly refer to difficulties in carrying out home-work and preparing for examinations.

after their father/mother or both migrated. In Batticaloa district, around 18 per cent of children in migrated households reported difficulties with respect to education even when mother/father or both were in Sri Lanka (before migration) and this number increased to 54 per cent after their father/mother or both migrated. These results imply that absence of mother/father or both has had some impact on education related activities. In-depth interviews revealed that children faced several difficulties in carrying out education related activities due to absence of mother/father or both. The main among them is the absence of support for homework and preparation for examinations.

Table 4: Parent migration and educational difficulties at school

Before parent(s) migration				
	Kurunegala	Nuwara Eliya	Batticaloa	Total
Yes	18.4	7.4	27.0	17.7
No	81.6	92.6	73.0	82.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
After parent(s) migration				
	Kurunegala	Nuwara Eliya	Batticaloa	Total
Yes	40.0	29.1	53.7	35.0
No	60.0	70.9	46.3	65.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on household survey

In this regard, it is useful to examine children's perception on parents' attitude towards their education, specifically school performance. Parents' attitude towards children's education is one of the key determinants of children's success in education. In most cases, children may perform poorly if they feel that their parents do not care about their performance at school. During the in-depth interviews with children, parents, and teachers/principals, it was revealed that some parents pay greater attention on children's education by assisting directly and/or sending for tuition classes. This behavior is common among migrant households where father is the migrator. Table 5 summarizes household survey results related to how children perceive parents' attitude towards their education before and after the mother, father, or both migrated. In Kurunegala district, around 1 per cent of children perceived that their parents 'do not care about education' even when the parents were around them (before migration). Now (after migration), around 4 per cent of total children in migrant households perceived that their migrated parent as well as remaining members (mother/father/grandparents) do not care about their education. In Nuwara Eliya district, around 9 per cent of total children felt that their parents 'do not care about education' even before his/her mother/father/both migrated (before migration). Now (after migration), around 17 per cent of total children felt their parents 'do not care about education'. On the other hand, in Kurunegala, around 68 per cent of total children responded that their parents were concerned about the educational performance and often kept contact with teachers before parent(s) migrated. However, the percentage of children who still (after migration) feel that their parents are concerned about education and often keep contact with teachers dropped to 57

indicating some children increasingly feel isolated. Hence, the main message of the above findings is that a sizable portion of children in migrated households feel that their educational activities were moderately affected due to absence of parents (migrated mother/father/or both). In this regard, lack of physical support and care may work as barrier for childhood development including learning. During the in-depth interviews, it was revealed that absence of mothers has had greater impact on educational performance of some children, specially children in kindergarten and less than primary. Moreover, some children do not get cleaned well and were not made available with home-made food due to absence of their mothers. Lack of proper cleanliness and hygiene sometimes causes children to get sick very often.

Table 5: Children's perception on parents' attitude toward his/her education
Parent's attitude education (before migration)

	Nuwara			Total
	Kurunegala	Eliya	Batticaloa	
They do not care at all	0.7	8.8	23.0	11.2
Only care about examination marks	8.1	20.3	17.1	15.4
Concerned about school performance but never in contact with the teachers	21.3	27.7	15.8	21.6
Concerned about school performance and often in contact with the teachers	68.4	39.2	38.2	47.9
Do not know	1.5	4.1	5.9	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Parent's attitude toward education (after migration)

	Nuwara			Total
	Kurunegala	Eliya	Batticaloa	
They do not care at all	4.4	16.9	23.0	15.1
Only care about examination marks	5.9	22.3	15.8	14.9
Concerned about school performance but never in contact with the teachers	27.2	31.1	18.4	25.5
Concerned about my school performance and often in contact with the teachers	56.6	27.0	34.2	38.8
Do not know	5.9	2.7	8.6	5.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on household survey

Parental migration and school dropout

School dropout is relatively prominent among children in migrant households compared to non-migrant households in all districts. In most cases, children in migrant households tend to leave school after GCE Ordinary Level (O/L). A number of interesting facts relating to school dropouts and poor school attendance emerged during in-depth interviews with children and teachers/principals. Teachers and principals mentioned that poor school attendance is prominent among children in migrant households. Moreover, it is reported that some children in migrant households do not show sufficient interest in education. Due to these reasons, school performance with respect to some children in migrant households is relatively poor resulting in school dropout at national exams such as GCE Ordinary Level. In line with the findings of our in-depth interviews, in the household survey, 'being weak in

education' and 'exam failures' have been cited as the main reasons for leaving schools by school leavers in migrant households in Kurunegala and Nuwara Eliya districts while poverty and being weak in education are the two mostly cited reasons for school leaving in Batticaloa district (see Table 6). Even through there is weak evidence to suggest that mother/father or both have migrated has had an impact of school drop-out in our household survey, in-depth interview and key informant interviews provided overwhelming evidence to suggest that to a greater extent school dropout among children in migrant household is largely due to the absence of father/mother or both at the household. In-depth interviews also captured some cases of leaving school in all three districts. Lack of attention from the father/guardian often leads to dropping out from school. It was observed that children in migrant households receive assistance and encouragement for education when they live in an extended family where relatives of the migrant(s) take care of educational activities. In those cases, children in migrant households actually benefit through a number of ways.

Table 6: Reasons for leaving school

Reasons	Kurunegala		Nuwara Eliya		Batticaloa		Total	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Due to long distance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	0.0	3.8
Poverty (lack of income)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.9	38.5	25.0	19.2
Being weak in education	0.0	20.0	0.0	50.0	42.9	23.1	25.0	30.8
Exam failures	0.0	80.0	0.0	12.5	0.0	7.7	0.0	23.1
Lack of support from the family	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	14.3	7.7	8.3	7.7
Other	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.4	16.7	7.7
Not responded	0.0	0.0	100.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: NM=non-migrant and M=migrant

Source: Based on household survey

The evidence suggests that, among school leavers, children in migrant households have schooled less years compared to those of non-migrant households. Out of the total sample, around 26 per cent of total school leavers have just received less than 10 years of education.

Effect of parental migration on educational performance

Even though school attendance related data are collected, the cross-verification with teachers, principals and key informants indicated the records obtained from school-going kids are less reliable. During the in-depth interviews and key informant discussions, it was found that school attendance among some children in migrant households is relatively poor compared to children in migrant households. According to teachers, there are a number of factors affecting this situation. Among them, lack of support (in terms of preparing food, clothes, etc.) and attention (for homework, attending to parent meetings, etc.) have cited as mostly affected factors. Some fathers

in migrant households do not attend class-room meetings and their children find it difficult to face teachers and peers when their parent do not attend important events such as class room meetings. As a consequence, those children tend to skip school on days on which those events are held.

Table 7: Effect of father/mother/both migration on children's education

	Kurunegala	Nuwara Eliya	Batticaloa	Total
Negatively affected	31.6	33.1	34.9	33.3
Not affected	68.4	54.7	65.1	62.6
Not responded	0.0	12.2	0.0	4.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on household survey

Household survey asked about school-going children's perception about whether the parent migration affected their educational performance (see Table 7). In this regard, attention was paid on whether their school performance (measured in terms of marks obtained, teachers' appreciation etc.) was affected due to the absence of parents. Accordingly, around two-third of children believe that their mother/father or both migration have affected their education. This fact was further reaffirmed by the teachers/principals and key informants. It is also interesting to note that over 60 per cent of children in migrant households maintained that the migration has had no impact on their education. It does not necessarily mean that those students perform better in terms of education.

Key informant discussions as well as in-depth interviews revealed that school going children in migrant families are often responsible for attending to various house work, partly because either the mother/father or both are absent at home. Moreover, children in migrant households are more often engaged in leisure activities largely due to the absence of supervision from their parents. The household survey data revealed that a significant share of children in migrant households spent time playing with friends, watching television, engaging in economic activities compared to children in non-migrant households (see Table 8). Around 14 per cent of children in migrant households engage in economic activities in Batticaloa district. Lack of attention from parents (due to migration) may be one of the reasons for engaging in activities not related to education. Overall, over 72 per cent of children in non-migrant households mostly engage in homework compared to 47 per cent of total children in migrant households. This is a clear indication that children tend to engage in activities not directly relating to education during the post-school time period. Lack of direction and attention of parents could be one of the reasons for pushing children in migrant households to engage in activities not directly related to education. For instance, 21 per cent of children in migrant households watch television after-school whereas this number is around 12 per cent in non-migrant households. Moreover, it was found, during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, that children in migrant households do not listen (or obey) to their guardians, in particular, when they live with grandparents. Similarly, some school-going children in migrant households have to play the role of a baby sitter when they have younger sisters/brothers. In some cases, children in migrant households engage in household activities as well. For

instance, around 8 per cent of children in migrant households engage in house work (such as washing clothes, collecting fuel wood, cleaning kitchen items etc.) compared to 3 per cent of children in migrant households. Children in mother migrated and both parent migrated households, mostly engage in house work (except education related activities). For instance, 72 per cent of children in total mother migrated households engage in washing clothes while this number is around 60 per cent in father and both parents migrated households. Similarly, 39 per cent of total mother and both parents migrated households engage in cooking whereas this number is around 28 for father migrated households. Around 20 per cent of total children in mother migrated households and 36 per cent of total children in both parent migrated households report that the amount of housework has increased after mother/both parents migrated. Children in father and both parents migrated households often receive chances to meet friends while children in mother migrated households do not receive it. For instance, 35 per cent of children in father migrated households and 39 per cent of both parent migrated households meet friends more often while only 26 per cent of children in mother migrated households receive this chance. Hence, the heavy workload born by children in mother migrated (as well as both parents migrated) households may have a negative impact on children's educational performance.

Table 8: After school activities

	Kurunegala		Nuwara Eliya		Batticaloa		Total	
	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M
Do homework/ reading/ revision	72.0	46.3	90.0	48.6	58.3	48.0	72.5	47.7
Play with some friends	14.0	20.6	2.5	22.3	8.3	13.2	8.7	18.6
Watch TV/Listen music	14.0	27.9	7.5	23.0	14.6	13.2	12.3	21.1
Surf internet	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	2.1	1.3	0.7	.9
Do housework	0.0	3.7	0.0	4.1	8.3	14.5	2.9	7.6
Engage in an economic activity	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	6.3	9.2	2.2	3.4
Other	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.7	0.7	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on household survey

As an indirect measure of children's educational performance, household questionnaire asked children to grade their educational performance. According to their own ranking, children in migrant households tend to perform poorly in education compared to their counterparts in non-migrant households. For instance, around 10 per cent of children feel that they perform poorly whereas only 2 per cent of children in non-migrant households feel they perform poorly in education. It is interesting to note that around 19 per cent of total students in non-migrant households feel that they do their studies excellently whereas only 8 per cent of total children in migrant households feel in the similar way.

Household questionnaire as well as in-depth interviews focused on obtaining information related to how students in migrant households feel about their educational performance after their parents migrated. Accordingly, around 16 per

cent of total school-going children in migrant households feel that their school performance is worse than before. In Nuwara Eliya district, this figure stands somewhere around 22 per cent. At the same time, it is important to note that there are around 12 per cent of total school-going children who feel that they actually experienced somewhat better performance after their parents migrated. Similarly, around two-third of children in migrant households feel that their school performance did not change after the migration. Hence, evidence against the hypothesis that education is affected due to parent migration is not overwhelming. It is important to mention that, as discussed elsewhere, some children in migrant households actually perform better than previously due to the support they receive from close relatives as well as due to their admission to tuition classes. Parent(s)' migration has made it possible to attend tuition classes which were not possible due to lack of financial capacity. It was revealed that, during in-depth interviews and key informant discussions, children living with close relatives actually perform well in education due to the support and the supervision of the extended family members.

School performance is poorer when the length of the migration is longer. For instance, 18 per cent of children reported that their education performance is worse than before in households where the mother/father or both migrated less than 3 years while this number is 24 per cent and 26 per cent for households whether mother/father or both parents have migrated, respectively, 3-5 years and more than 5 years. When rounds of mother migration increases, children's educational performance become poorer. For instance 15 per cent of children in mother migrant households reported that their educational performance is worse than before (when the mother is in Sri Lanka) and this number increased to 20 per cent and 22 per cent for children whose mothers have migrated round 2 and 3 respectively. Education level of migrant mother, father, or both parents do not affect the educational performance of children. This might be partly due to the fact that most migrant parents report low educational performance.

Regression analysis

The above analysis shed some light on the impact of parental migration on educational performance of children left-behind. In order to further strengthen the findings, a logistic regression framework, as outlined in the methodology section, was employed in looking at the determinants of students' educational performance. The survey gathered data on children's perception on their educational performance (achievement in test) compared to their peers. The perception was measured using five-category Likert Scale, namely *Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, and Very poor*. The dependent variable is a binary variable that is constructed using above information. It takes 1 if the perception is average or above and zero otherwise. As per theory and empirical findings, a number of external and internal factors affect students' educational performance (Nisar, et. al., 2017; Betts et. al., 2014; Betts, et. al., 2003). The external factors include household-level factors such as level of income, parents' education levels and occupations, level of siblings' education, quality of school attended, and whether or not students receive extra educational support such as tuition. Internal, factors such as students' commitment and attitude towards educational activities, school attendance, past performance, and biological

factors affect the performance. The regression analysis make use of some explanatory variables focusing more on family environment related aspects such as no of siblings, parent's education levels, after-school activities, and level of engagement with household activities. Some of the variables such as household income was not considered partly due to the fact that the survey was administered among children and their capacity to divulge information on household income remains low. Both migrant and non-migrant households are in the same vicinity and socio-economic status are mostly similar. Improvement in income, due to migration, could be captured in the model through the binary variable.

The estimated results are reported in the model (1) through the model (6) in Table 9. As expected in theory and in consistence with the empirical findings, the amount of time allocated on housework (in terms of number of tasks involved) has a negative impact on educational achievement. The estimated coefficient of housework engagement is negative (-0.109) and significant at the conventional level of significance in model (6). An increase in number of housework implies that children allocate more after-school time as well as time during holidays for non-educational household activities. As a result, time left for studies and leisure becomes limited and, in a competitive learning environment, those students perform poorer compared to the students who engage less in housework. The estimated coefficient of after school activities is positive and statistically significant in the model (1) through the model (6). In other words, educational performance is better among students who mostly engage in educational activities during the after-school time period. Broadly speaking, students could utilize their after-school and holiday time for three purposes, namely for education, leisure, and housework. Students who use time for housework mostly have limited time for education and leisure. Those who engage less in housework could utilize their time for education and leisure. Students both in migrant and non-migrant households could achieve better educational outcomes provided students use more time on educational activities.

The estimated results suggest that the household head's education level has no effect on children's educational outcomes. The existing literature clearly provides evidence, both theory and empirics, that parent education level make a sizable influence of children's educational achievement (Nisar, et. al., 2017; Betts et. al., 2014; Betts, et. al., 2003). The absence of evidence may be due to few factors, namely (a) less variation in household heads' education levels and (b) relatively low level of education among household heads both in migrant and non-migrant household heads.

The estimated coefficient of migration status (migrant household=1, otherwise=0) is not statistically significant in the model (3) through the model (6). The migration status variable captures both positive effects, such as more financial resources for education, as well as negative effects, such as lack of close parental supervision and support, on migrant household children's educational achievement compared to children in non-migrant households.

The result suggests that the net effect is not statistically meaningful. However, descriptive data analysis showed that children in households in which the mother has migrated face less conducive environment for studies compared to that of the other households. Hence, the models 4 through 6 introduced a dummy variable

that takes 1 for households with mothers having migrated and otherwise zero. The estimated coefficient of this dummy is negative (-0.839) and statically significant at 1 per cent level of significance in the model (3) through the model (6). Mothers influence children's education through a number of channels. According to Baker and Stevenson (1986), mothers influence children's educational achievements by encouraging children to engage in homework and school attendance, by contacting teachers and taking appropriate actions to improve performance, and by selecting suitable additional educational resources, such as tuition for difficult subjects. The absence of mothers at home, hence, could negatively affect children's educational performance. The findings of this research are consistent with previous literature on the effect of mother migration of educational performance of children left behind (Dissanayake, et. al., 2014). As a sample of school children in Gampha District, the authors found that school-level examination marks are lower for children whose mothers are abroad compared to other children. Perera and Rathnayaka (2013) and Save the Children (2006) found that children with absent mothers are also more likely to drop out of schools.

Table 9: Impact of parental migration on children's education

Dependent variable: self-assessment on performance in tests at school (1=average or above; 0=below average)						
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)
Constant	0.342** (0.179)	-0.204 (0.347)	-0.089 (0.411)	-0.164 (0.417)	-0.149 (0.427)	-0.097 (0.430)
Housework engagement (number of tasks involved)	-0.136*** (0.043)	-0.145*** (0.045)	-0.141*** (0.046)	-0.126** (0.047)	-0.117** (0.048)	-0.109** (0.048)
After school activities (1= engaged mostly in education activities; 0=otherwise)	0.708*** (0.178)	0.671*** (0.183)	0.646*** (0.189)	0.600*** (0.192)	0.612*** (0.195)	0.600*** (0.196)
Number of adult siblings	-	0.168** (0.083)	0.164** (0.083)	0.171** (0.084)	0.188** (0.086)	0.174** (0.086)
Education of head of household (1=secondary and above, 0=less than secondary)	-	0.091 (0.076)	0.087 (0.076)	0.104 (0.078)	0.049 (0.079)	0.042 (0.088)
Migration status (1=migrant household, 0=non-migrant household)	-	-	-0.119 (0.230)	0.317 (0.263)	0.243 (0.268)	0.243 (0.270)
Households with mother migrated (1= mother migrant household, 0=otherwise)	-	-	-	-0.772*** (0.215)	-0.773*** (0.219)	-0.839*** (0.236)
Distance to school (in KM)	-	-	-	-	0.082** (0.039)	0.085** (0.039)
District effects						No
Log likelihood value	-359.68	-341.027	-340.89	-334.30	-321.46	-322.08
No of observations	546	520	520	520	509	509
Pseudo R ²	0.033	0.038	0.039	0.057	0.070	0.070

Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses while ** and *** indicate that the estimated coefficients are statistically significant at 5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the impact of parental migration on children left behind. After considering the size of the migration flow and ethnic composition, a sample of households, covering both migrant and non-migrant households, was selected from three administrative districts in Sri Lanka. Household questionnaire, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were conducted in collecting relevant data for the study. Both descriptive and regression analyses were employed in data analysis and the results obtained from the above techniques were further enriched by in-cooperating insights from key informant interviews and in-depth interviews.

Insights from the descriptive analysis, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews highlighted some suggestive evidence that children in migrant households face difficulties with their school attendance and performance compared to children in non-migrant households. In particular, school drop-outs were higher among children whose either parent or both parents were abroad. Moreover, children in migrant households were overloaded with housework, including child caring, thereby having limited time for studies. A sizable share of children, in migrant households, was of the opinion that their educational performance was affected due to parental migration. These negatives were clearer among children whose mothers were abroad. In contrast, suggestive evidence indicated that some children in migrant households receive extra educational support, in terms of tuition, and attend schools located in major cities due to additional financial resources in the form for remittances received by migrant households.

Aiming at strengthening the above findings, this study employed a logistic regression framework in examining the effect of migration of educational performance where the dependent variable was self-assessment on performance at school-level tests. A number of explanatory variables were introduced in order to control household level factors affecting educational performance. The results clearly indicated that migration status has no effect on educational performance. Nevertheless, it was found that there are strong statistical evidence to suggest that educational performance is lower among children whose mother has migrated. In other words, probability is higher that children in households with mother having migrated to perform poorly at tests conducted at school-levels. Mothers get involved in a number of ways to improve children's educational achievement and their absence at home negatively affects children's educational performance.

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