

MIGRATION OF SRI LANKAN FEMALES AS DOMESTIC WORKERS OVERSEAS AND THE CHILDREN LEFT- BEHIND

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Transnational families with absent mothers for a significant part of the growing up of their children have become increasingly common in Sri Lanka over the past few decades because of the increasing involvement of women in overseas employment as domestic workers. They brings not only economic benefits to their families and the Sri Lankan economy but also social costs to their families. While they usually make arrangements to accommodate the spatial separation forced by migration, their migration poses many challenges to themselves and to their children left behind. Recently, the issue of the children left behind by migrant mothers has attracted growing attention from policy makers in Sri Lanka. While the impact these migrations have been intensively studied from a number of perspectives in countries like the Philippines, it remains under- researched in Sri Lanka. This paper reports on a field survey of 400 Sri Lankan families where the mother has gone to work in a foreign country as a domestic worker as well as detailed qualitative work with key stakeholders. The first part of this paper explains the methodology used for the study and how there has been a steep increase in the numbers of Sri Lankan women moving to the Middle East or to high income Asian countries as contract domestic workers. It then examines the characteristics of the migrants and their families, the impact of their migration on children and arrangements made by them for taking care of the children while they are away. Finally, the paper explores some of the policy implications.