

TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERING: SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM ASIA

Swarna Ukwatta and Graeme Hugo

An increasing number of female migrants in Asia are mothering their children from a distance. They leave their children behind with other family members in the countries of origin to take advantage of the labour market opportunities in other countries within and outside the Asian region. While they usually make arrangements to accommodate the spatial and temporal separation forced by migration, this poses challenges to the mother who migrate and especially to their children left behind. The issue of children left behind by migrant mothers has attracted growing attention from policy makers in Sri Lanka due to the increasing number of female migrants working abroad especially as domestic workers. However, the social and emotional ramifications of mothering from a geographical distance and how mothers cope are inadequately investigated in Sri Lanka. This article examines the impact of migration of mothers on children and how these women are mothering from a distance, drawing upon various studies of transnational mothering in Asia. Also, it highlights the notion of the “light of the home abroad” to better understand this issue in the context of Sri Lanka and emphasizes the need for more investigation into various aspects of transnational mothering. In addition, some of the policy implications are discussed.