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Domestic workers overseas: mothering their children
Journal of Migration Research. Springer. Australia. 2010; 107-131.

Abstract

Sri Lanka is one of three countries in Asia, along with the Philippines and Indonesia, where women migrants comprise between 60 and 70% of legal migrants. These female migrants are mainly employed overseas as domestic workers. Since the 1980s, the out-migration of Sri Lankan females for employment abroad surpassed that of males and the major destination has been countries in the Middle East. The majority of these women are married and have at least one child. They leave their children in the care of other family members in their absence. While they usually make arrangements to accommodate the spatial separation forced by migration, their migration poses many challenges to themselves and their children left behind. Recently, the issue of children left behind by migrant mothers has attracted growing attention from policy makers in Sri Lanka. Since the social and emotional ramifications of mothering from a distance and how these mothers cope with them are inadequately investigated, this article uses data collected from a 2008 survey of 400 Sri Lankan female migrant families to examine the impacts of mothers' migration on how they are mothering their children from a distance, and how they perceive the effects on their children. The article concludes with some suggested policy recommendations.