

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CONFRONTED BY THE MIGRANTS IN A SEMI URBAN AREA

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1. Introduction

The amount of population growth and distribution in the urban sectors are high due to the natural increase of urban population, the rapid immigration from the rural area, and the expansion of city boundaries to add more rural population (United Nations, 1980). As elsewhere in South Asia, Sri Lanka's cities appear unattractive to potential migrants from rural areas that are not so much because of poor urban living conditions as because of the country's impressive progress in achieving spatial equity between rural and urban areas in the provision of basic public services and living standards (World Bank, 2015). However, after the end of the civil war, a high amount of internal migrants were identified around the country. Therefore, the density and distribution of the city population become widespread. Rural-urban migration is the principal component of the rapid and unplanned growth of towns and cities in developing countries (Mumtaz, 2012).

Even though, numerous positive elements could be identified due to the rural to urban migration such as low wages human resources, rural economic development through migrant workers, etc. some negative sequences need to be discussed. The development of cities and social interaction should be on a healthy track but, the social behavior of the community changed in a flash due to a great deal of population reciprocal actions. Hence, this study was conducted to identify social problems of the migrated population in Wattala Grama Niladhari Division (GND). By identifying those issues, the proper recommendation can be made for the better direction to the relevant authorities. The following questions signified to conduct the research.

- What is the socio-economic impact of migration in Wattala?
- What are the fundamental social problems faced by the migrants?
- What caused the migrant to move out from their native place?

Many researchers in developing nations tend to identify the environmental problems of urbanization. The rapid urban growth occurring in developing countries today is mostly spontaneous and causes create many environmental problems that demand urgent attention (Uduporuwa & Lasantha, 2017). Still,

there is a vacuum of space to identify the social problems of migrants towards the developed areas. Therefore, this study exposed the social behavioral changes and problems confronted by the migrants with clear pieces of evidence in Wattala. The findings may be useful for the urban resource management implication practices and policymakers.

The primary objective of this research is,

- Identifying social and economic struggles of the migrants.

The supportive objectives are to,

- Expose the reasons for the migration towards Wattala.
- Suggesting proper solutions to mitigate such negative impacts and enhance the social well-being of the migrants.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in Wattala, which is a rapidly urbanizing and famous settlement area near the capital city of Sri Lanka. The selected GN division was one among 46 Grama Niladhari Divisions of the Wattala Divisional Secretariat (DS) division. Located in the Gampaha district of the western province. The total population of the GN is 3,176.

From the study area, 100 migrants were selected for the questionnaire survey. A purposive sampling method was used to select the migrant participants. Relevant data was gathered from the structured questionnaire method. In addition to that, a key informant interview was also conducted with the Grama Niladhari officer of Wattala GN division who is considered to be adequately knowledgeable in the study area. Moreover, field observations and informal interviews were conducted by the researcher for the extra verification of the social and economic conditions of the migrated community. Both primary and secondary data were used. Especially primary data have been played a vital role in empirical data collection.

2.1 Data Analysis

The collected data via a questionnaire were analysed with the aid of Microsoft Excel. Google form was used for the questionnaire survey due to the prevailing pandemic. Descriptive statistics methods were used for the qualitative analysis of the data which were gathered through informal interviews and observation. This research is blended with both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Information from gathered data is represented with tables, graphs, and charts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Identified reasons and causes for the migration towards Wattala

Based on the Divisional secretariat report and questionnaire survey held among the population, the following information has been gathered regarding their nativity and migration.

Following the questionnaire survey, most of the respondents indicated that they have recently moved to Wattala. 44.21% said that they were living in Wattala for 5 to 10 years. And 75% of them said that they are currently living in rental households. The participants migrated towards Wattala for various expectations and reasons such as Education – 35%, job opportunities – 46%, marriage – 7%, family problems – 17%, standard of living – 23%. Most of them have been moved due to the lack of job opportunities at their native place nor a job which suits their education.

Migrated community state that some push factors caused them to move to Wattala. Push factors are: Not owning a house in their home town – 35%, Couldn't find a suitable job opportunity – 52%, poverty – 23%, lack of higher education facilities – 35%, lack of health care – 27%, and low standard of living – 15%. Most people from estates and far from the capital city had moved to this study area. Since the study area is located near to the capital city Colombo, it attracts more migrants.

3.2 Social Problems of migrants

According to the interviews given by the GN officer of the Wattala Grama Niladhari division, the study area has so many spatial changes such as lands fragmentation, vegetation removal, and landfilling due to the development activities and newly developed settlements. At the same time, the limitation of services ought to be expanded due to the crowded population. "Each year the permanent resident amount is increasing highly due to rural-urban migration," said the GN officer and therefore, the area has some problems in the housing facilities, sanitization, drainage, garbage disposal, and waste management.

Instead of living a healthy and wealthy life, now the urban dwellers are suffering from various issues as of the questionnaire survey conducted among the migrants.

Table 1. Identified social problems of migrants

Problems faced by the migrants	Survey Participants (100)
Social negligence among the native population	46%
Couldn't fit into a common social hierarchy	62%
Living in a crowded street and stressful life	37%

Living in a polluted surrounding environment (water bodies, land)	39%
Poor sanitization facilities	23%
Experienced in any crime activities	24%
Mental and Physical health problems	32%

Since the migrants couldn't purchase a permeant house in the study area, they face a lot of administration and service struggles: couldn't get a GN certificate without registering - 36%, couldn't get any facilities given by the government for the people in Wattala – 18%, have to visit the native place to obtain any letters or to do any administration works – 48%.

3.3 Economic Problems of migrants

Table 2. Identified economic problems of migrants

Problems faced by the migrants	Percentage
Low wages jobs and low salaries	78%
Goods being expensive	52%
High amount of utility bills	32%
Temporary works and Unemployment	49%
Rental housing struggles	68%
Living in slums due to lack of income	24%
Couldn't afford a house nor land due to the high value	72%

The main reasons for the economic problem are the low income and expensive goods and lands. Therefore, it is obvious that low-income migrants are highly affected due to the structure of this semi-urban area.

3.4 Suggestions to enhance the social well-being of the migrants.

The migrant community suffers without permanent accommodation and therefore, providing properly planned housing schemes for the migrated population will support their self-development. The elderly migrants suffer from mental distress issues. Hence, Providing more social and health-related facilities and sanitary facilities could help them. Giving awareness to the urban and rural people regarding the wellbeing and standard of living in both places could reduce the uneven migration. At the same time providing health, sanitisation, education, and other services equally in both urban and

rural places. Making new job opportunities in rural places could reduce the migration from villages.

4. Conclusion

The recent developments and rapid migration from rural to urban seemingly creating socio-economic problems among the migrant community in Sri Lanka. Under the findings of the research, the fundamental socio-economic problems have been identified and solutions were suggested. The urban development is pretty decent and the number of large urban cities is increasing. Therefore, services and infrastructure facilities are unevenly distributed in rural and urban areas, which is accelerating the migrants from rural to urban. This is a preliminary study which is only focusing the confronted social and economic problems of the migrants in Wattala. Therefore, Taking proper mitigation measures and amending rules and regulations will help the area to be developed healthily with a massive population. Since the study is confined to the Wattala GN division, further studies can be conducted broadly in a wide area. This study will provide a path for future researchers to identify further profound issues related to rural-urban migration.

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