

# **UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES FACED BY MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Prof. S. T. Hettige, University of Colombo  
Evangeline S. Ekanayake, Consultant  
Ramani Jayasundere, Consultant  
Anula Rathnayake, University of Colombo  
Pushparani Figurado, University of Colombo

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## Executive Summary

In 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MFEPW) commissioned a Background Paper to facilitate a better understanding of psychosocial issues faced by Sri Lankan migrant workers and their families at all stages of the labour migration cycle. The Ministry aimed at addressing the diverse psychosocial issues in labour migration and at remedying the negative impacts on the wellbeing of migrant workers and their families.

The objective of this Background Paper is to examine the nature of the specific psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families in the process of labour migration and to provide in-depth information which will enable stakeholders to work towards better psychosocial support for labour migrants and their families. The preparation of this Background Paper was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Among the plethora of issues surrounding labour migration, are those that impact on the psychological health and wellbeing and the social integrity of individual migrant workers and their families. The psychosocial effects on well being are of particular importance given its potentially debilitating impact on the rapidly expanding community of migrant workers in Sri Lanka and thus on Sri Lankan society in general. It is with this understanding that this Background Paper endeavours to study the issues that arise at the different stages of migration, namely pre-migration, in-service, return and reintegration or re-migration.

This Paper looks at existing literature about all aspects of labour migration in Sri Lanka, gathers views of stakeholders and key informants through discussions and consultations, qualitative in-depth interviews with migrants and their families, and examines services currently available to migrants and families who encounter numerous hardships and psychosocial difficulties. The paper does not strive to quantify the psychosocial problems migrants and their families are facing but rather to provide a picture of the complex nature of the issues which require a comprehensive, multi-sectoral response.

The Paper looks at the different psychosocial issues that prompt / trigger labour migration, and also consequently the psychosocial issues that are caused by labour migration. Each stage of the labour migration cycle, pre-migration, in-service and return and reintegration has been considered, noting the specific problems and issues migrant workers and families face at each stage. The Paper also examines the difficulties of the different members of the labour migrant community be they spouses/partners, children, primary caregivers other than spouses, extended family and the migrant worker him / herself.

Pre-migration psychosocial issues include the many reasons related to social and psychological wellbeing for which migration is considered in the first place. Though labour migration is spoken of, seen and referred to mostly as an economically driven phenomenon or option for economic development, it is evident that financial reasons are not the only factors that trigger migration. Often under the guise of economic need there are factors such as difficult family situations, abusive relationships, pressures from society and other painful experiences from which migrant workers seek to get away.

However, looking at the experiences of returning migrant workers who migrated in order to just get away or due to difficulties other than mere financial ones, it is evident that after a stint away many of the problems which prompted them to leave still remain unsolved or have even become compounded in their absence.

The manner in which preparations for migration is carried out has a profound effect on the way the family responds and later copes with the departure of the migrant. Migrant workers often have little or no guidance prior to making the decision and while implementing it. Only when the migrant worker officially registers with the Sri Lankan Bureau for Foreign Employment (SLBFE) will she or he attend a training, during which some of these areas are covered. However, this training is for those that have already made the decision and are getting ready to leave.

In-service experiences of migrant workers and their families left behind captured in this paper demonstrate how a negative migration experience can lead to anxiety and severe stress reactions.

Families back home struggle through a plethora of difficulties. The issues faced and the adjustments to be made by the spouse are many. It is maybe not surprising but all the more alarming that husbands left behind often disengage from the family or take to substance abuse. If the remaining spouse is female, she faces heightened pressure from society as a single woman, details of which are highlighted in this Paper.

Another issue is the impact of migration on older family members or extended family that step in as caregivers in the absence of the one or both parents. Frequently, older parents of migrant women take on a significant role as primary caregiver to the children of their migrant daughters and sons. The Paper identifies and explains a range of issues including the inability to cope with the pressures of raising young children, self-neglect and the strain of managing finances sent by children employed overseas for the care of the grand-children.. The Paper speaks of the many who report unbearable stress and strain with this new unexpected heavy load to bear in the evening of their lives.

The Paper confirms the findings of previous studies of the debilitating impact that the departure of a parent for labour migration has on the children. Field data gathered for this Paper shows that children are not a part of the decision making process, nor are they prepared adequately for the impending departure of the parent resulting in diverse negative psychological reactions of children. The Paper also traces a multitude of issues ranging from loss of parental love and emotional nearness during formative years, stunting of educational and skill development to behaviour problems.

For the final stage of the migration cycle, return and reintegration, the Paper concludes that even if a migrant worker has had a good experience and is returning on a positive note, she/he could still encounter difficulties in readjusting to a life back in the home country and community. These difficulties include resentment of the spouse, damaged relationships with children and the inability to fit into his/her former life.

The study finally discusses recommendations to address psychosocial issues of migrants under three broad areas: integrated and coordinated strategy/interventions at local level, capacity building at household level and a disaggregated approach to service provision.

The Paper finally concludes that “the richness and cultural value of a society can often be judged not in the way it flaunts its strengths but in the manner it tends its vulnerability. This broken, troubled and vulnerable community of labour migrant workers have through, and in spite of their hideous life choices and conditions, contributed the highest levels of foreign exchange to the coffers of our country. Increased effective investment in protecting, strengthening and fortifying the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of this community is not an option but an imperative move for the health and wellbeing of the entire nation.”

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## Preface

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Migration of Sri Lankans for temporary employment abroad has been increasing steadily over the last three decades. It is estimated that over 1.5 million Sri Lankans are employed in the Middle East, East Asia and Europe today. Though initially more women than men migrated for employment overseas, in more recent years, the number of male migrants has increased and today, just over 50% of the migrant workers are male. The main motivation for migration has been for earning higher incomes that would enable migrants and their families to have more resources for not only day to day consumption but also longer term investments in children's education, housing, land and small enterprises.

Increasing labour migration has also meant increasing remittances by workers employed abroad. While most migrants send part of their earnings home on a regular basis, the total amount of such remittances has accounted to an increasing proportion of the country's export earnings. In 2010, remittances accounted for 49.6% of the total export earnings, thereby helping to bridge the widening trade gap of the country, which stood at US\$ 5205 million in the same year (Annual Report 2010, Ministry of Finance and Planning Sri Lanka).

The impact of labour migration on unemployment has also been considerable. Though many of the migrant workers would have been employed before migration, a considerable number would have been unemployed at the time of migration. So, the overall impact no doubt has been to reduce unemployment in the country. Today, unemployment rate in Sri Lanka is just below 6% of the labour force (Central Bank, 2011).

Thus the economic benefits of migration to both the country and the migrant families have been substantial. Many migrant families have better material constitutions of life as a result of their earnings abroad. On the other hand, such benefits at times come with a social cost. It is the recognition of this fact that persuaded successive governments to take measures to minimize adverse effects of migration. While the establishment of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) in 1985 to manage and regulate the movement of migrant workers was a major step in the above direction, various services, interventions and programs that have been built around the SLBFE over the years have been aimed at addressing various issues of labour migration. Moreover, international agencies, donors and civil society organizations have also played a significant role in supporting the Sri Lankan government to address social and psychological issues faced by migrants and their families. While researchers, both local and foreign have carried out various studies to highlight both positive and negative outcomes of labour migration; some civil society organizations have implemented various projects at a community level to help migrant families to cope with problems arising from migration.

With the continuing expansion of the community of migrant workers, and, in spite of various measures taken to safeguard the interests of migrants and their families, one would also expect certain negative outcomes of migration to persist. In this regard, the psychosocial problems faced by some migrant families deserve greater attention. While only a small proportion of the families face severe psychosocial distress, more families may be affected by psychosocial problems to varying degrees. Those who are affected need to be identified and assisted so that they could cope with such issues better.

Migration is not the only factor that contributes to psychosocial problems in Sri Lanka. Yet, the focus of the present paper has been on migration and its psychosocial impact. Given the large proportion of the migrant population in the country, it is reasonable to pay special attention to migrant families. Moreover, the study has shown how migration of an adult family member particularly one with small children, generates stress that some families are ill equipped to cope with. Some migrants also face difficulties in host countries leading to stress affecting the well being of migrants and their families.

Hence, the main recommendation of the present study is to formulate and implement a multi-sectoral intervention program to assist migrants and their families to cope better with various psycho-social issues. The migrants and their families, who make a significant contribution to the country through their sacrifices and hard work, deserve such support. A society that benefits from the labour of migrant workers has an obligation to support such an endeavour.

## Introduction

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Temporary migration of Sri Lankans for contractual employment overseas emerged as a major socio-economic phenomenon following the liberalization of the country's economy in the late 1970s. Initially a few thousand Sri Lankans migrated to the Middle East and elsewhere for short-term employment. Soon, however, the numbers increased steadily, drawing the attention of the government to various issues involved in labour migration.

The enactment of legislation, (the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act) by Parliament in 1985 leading to the establishment of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), was the first major attempt by the state to regulate and streamline the process of labour migration. Increasing demand for skilled and non-skilled labour in the Middle East and elsewhere coincided with a growing readiness on the part of many Sri Lankans to find foreign employment and led to an unprecedented increase in the volume of migrant workers. What was also significant in the 1980s and 90s was the increasing feminization of the migrant labour force. Many women began to migrate for temporary employment, particularly as domestic workers. Media reports and field studies at that time highlighted the negative social and psychological effects of female migration, leading to a moral outcry. The latter compelled the government in the mid-1990s to appoint a Presidential Task Force to look into the social costs of female migration and to take measures towards reducing such costs. Following the recommendations of the Presidential Task Force, several significant measures were taken to address some of the pressing issues.

Despite persisting social costs of labour migration, particularly those associated with the migration of mothers with small children, the exodus continued unabated leading to a multiplicity of psychosocial problems, both for migrants as well as the families left behind. At a national level, the increasing remittance volume sent by migrant workers continued to provide a major part of much needed foreign exchange earnings for the country. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of migrant worker families depended on the individual remittances for their day-to-day needs, as well as for housing and school education. In spite of various attempts by numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations to address issues of migration, many migrant workers and their families continue to suffer from abuse, exploitation, neglect and marginalization, often without access to support services to cope with the resultant trauma, distress and helplessness.

While the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has recognized the need for ensuring safe migration and reducing social costs by adopting a comprehensive National Labour Migration Policy in 2009, the latter does not provide adequate safeguards to minimize or ameliorate various psycho-social problems emanating from migration. As is well known, labour migration in particular female migration opens up various possibilities for abuse, exploitation, discrimination, neglect, deprivation etc, throughout the migration cycle ranging from pre-departure to return and reintegration. It is therefore, necessary to address issues at all stages of the migration process, in order to minimize psychosocial problems faced by migrants and their families.

Today, there is a clear official recognition of the significant contribution that migrant workers make to national development. Moreover the adoption of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy by GoSL in 2009 is a clear expression of official recognition of the right to safe and secure passage for all migrants. On the other hand, such official recognition needs to be accompanied by measures aimed at dealing with problems and difficulties faced by migrants and their families. This is particularly so in view of the stated objectives of the National Migration Policy namely,

- a) Develop a long term vision for the role of labour migration,
- b) Enhance the benefits of labour migration on the economy, society and the migrant worker and their families and minimize its negative impact, and
- c) Work towards the fulfilment and protection of all human and labour rights

The necessity to address psychosocial problems faced by migrants and their families arises from a situation where the migration of one or more members of a family for an extended period of time may at times lead to the violation of the rights of migrants and their family members and the deprivation of some of their basic needs.

Such violations and deprivations can lead to various psychosocial problems. The severity of these problems can vary across families depending on diverse circumstances such as age, gender, civil status, occupational status, family composition and individual history of the migrant worker, duration and destination of migration as well as the nature of employment and employer abroad. The variations of circumstances often necessitate a casework approach. In other words, there are often no readymade solutions applicable across all migrant families.

While the implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy, in particular the action proposal thereof, to safeguard the interests and rights of migrant workers and their families would minimize negative impact, more specific measures are required to complement and extend the provision of the above policy.

Another important issue is the capacity of migrants and families to seek assistance from institutions when they are faced with a serious problem. Often marginalized migrant worker families are not aware of available sources of support or have no access to such sources. As a result, they may continue to suffer in silence, often leading to more severe consequences.

The problems that migrants may face even prior to their departure for employment can have a cascading effect on later stages. Some migrants face problems throughout the migration cycle leading to severe trauma and hardships that in turn have an adverse impact on their families left behind. On the other hand, problems encountered by family members left behind also affect migrant workers resident abroad. For instance, children who experience various problems become a source of distress and cause anxieties for migrant mothers residing in foreign countries. The loss of contact, even temporarily, between the migrant worker and family due to various circumstances, is a major source of anxiety for both parties and hinders their normal social and psychological functioning. In some cases, migrants lose contact for long periods of time with severe consequences for small children.

What is also noteworthy is that psychosocial problems often do not exist in isolation of other problems. For instance, long-term indebtedness caused by non-payment of wages or exploitation or cheating by agents, can lead to severe financial distress for migrant families with serious psychosocial consequences. Psychosocial problems cannot be examined in isolation of the wider aspects of the migration process. As will be discussed later, this has significant implications for policy and programmatic interventions.

As noted before, labour migration is a mass socio-economic phenomenon-involving hundreds of thousands of families scattered across the country. Many of the psychosocial problems faced by migrants and families are highly personal and often remain confined to their families. Though several problems at times spill over into the wider community, and even become public knowledge via the mass media or through institutional intervention, they generally persist as personal miseries that the affected person lives with. Nevertheless, given the huge numbers of individuals and families involved, these are not just personal miseries and their wider societal impact cannot be over estimated.

It is against the above context that this Background Paper has the following objectives<sup>1</sup>:

1. Reviewing the existing knowledge on psycho-social problems faced by migrants and their families
2. Gathering qualitative data to enrich our understanding of psycho-social issues
3. Mapping and assessing available services for migrant workers and their families
4. Making recommendations for policy innovations and programmatic interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Terms of Reference for this Background paper are annexed.

## The terms “Psychosocial” and “Wellbeing”

For the purposes outlined in this paper, our understanding of the term “psychosocial” is guided by the definitions in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM 1V Revised. American Psychiatric Association)

- *The term Psychosocial is used to underscore the dynamic connection between the psychological and the social realms of human experience.*
- *Psychological aspects are those that affect thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and memory, learning ability, perceptions and understanding.*
- *Social aspects refer to the effects on relationships, traditions, culture and values, family and community, also extending to the economic realm and its effects on status and social networks.*
- *The emphasis on psychosocial also aims to ensure that family and community are fully integrated in assessing needs.*

However, to capture the breadth and depth of the domains that involve wellbeing and to understand their interconnectedness we also embellish our understanding of psychosocial wellbeing drawing from the Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Interventions (PADHI) frame work<sup>2</sup>.

The PADHI framework elaborates the aspects of life involved in the psychosocial domain as directly connected to a person’s wellbeing:

*“Wellbeing can refer to a positive state of being. It often refers to a person’s overall sense of health and wellness; it can also refer to a person’s feelings of happiness or general satisfaction with his/her quality of life; it also points to the experience of contentment and fulfillment with one’s life circumstances. Wellbeing is said to be experienced when a person’s individual, relational, and collective needs are fulfilled” (Prilleltensky 2005).*

The study therefore in effect examines the impact of migration on the wellbeing of migrants and their families as described above. It is in fact towards achieving these very aspects of satisfaction, quality of life both individually and collectively as a family that most people migrate.

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<sup>2</sup> A Tool a Guide and a Framework, PADHI, SPARC, University of Colombo, 2006



# Chapter- 1

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## 1.1 Methodology

The Background Paper on “Understanding Psychosocial issues faced by Migrant Workers and their Families” is based on information and empirical data gathered from a literature review spanning nearly 30 years from 1983 to 2012, a review of policy commitments and statements, a mapping of services available for migrant workers and their families, and views gathered from migrant workers and their families at stakeholder workshops, in Focus Group Discussions and by documenting case studies.

The Background Paper takes the commitments of the National Labour Migration Policy as a starting point. It takes into consideration the contents of the National Policy in relation to provisions for strengthening psychosocial support for migrant workers and their families. The Background Paper further analyses the psychosocial challenges faced by migrant workers and their families, and the psychosocial services currently available for migrants and their families throughout the migration cycle (pre-departure, In-service and return and reintegration). The Background Paper further aims at identifying gaps to arrive at practical solutions and interventions at different levels.

The methodology for gathering information and empirical data comprised several components:

1. A literature review which perused related literature providing information on psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers as well as other broader writings on migration for labour, through which specific information was gathered relating to psycho-social issues.
2. A content analysis of existing policies and legal and regulatory frameworks that addressed migrant worker issues.
3. Stakeholder consultations to solicit the views of stakeholders such as various relevant state institutions, migrant service organizations and non-governmental organizations.
4. A Service Mapping exercise that involved a mapping and analysis of agencies, institutions and programmes that provides various services to migrant workers and their families.
5. Empirical data from field based Focus Group Discussions and documenting of case studies of migrant workers and their families.

As is evident from the above, this Background Paper draws together evidence from both secondary as well as primary sources. Though a vast volume of secondary information can be drawn from various sources, it was felt that real life data drawn from a cross section of migrant workers and their families would be critical to the understanding of psychosocial issues of migration and formulating appropriate policy responses to mitigate these issues.

### i. Literature Review

A number of small as well as detailed studies have been conducted in Sri Lanka about the social implications of migration. As a first step, a literature review of the social implications of migration and about psycho-social well-being and mental health of migrants and their families, and the existing frameworks to address these needs was mapped and literature related to the quality of the services was reviewed.

The literature review covers many published and unpublished documents dating back to 1983. The literature deals with issues and problems, specially the effects of migration on society, family, children and the individual. Under the main objectives of the Background Paper, attention was given to areas such as the social impact of migration, psychosocial effects on migrant workers and their families, special issues faced by female migrant workers, working conditions of Sri Lankan workers in the Gulf region, and positive and negative aspects of migration from the point of view of the family unit and society<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> A complete bibliography is included in this Background paper.

Content Analysis formed a component of the literature review and included a mapping and gap analysis of the existing legal and policy framework to address psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families at each stage of the migration cycle.

## ii. Stakeholder Consultations

A Stakeholder Consultation was held at the commencement of preparing the Background Paper to elicit the views of a cross section of stakeholders on various issues pertaining to the different stages of the labour migration cycle in Sri Lanka. The stakeholders included government institutions, civil society representatives, academia and funding agencies. In order to facilitate the above process, participants were divided into four groups each being assigned a particular stage of the migration cycle, namely; pre-migration, in-service, families left behind and return and reintegration. An effort was made to ensure adequate representation of diverse stakeholders.

Each group was given guidelines as to how the discussions should be conducted and results of their deliberations presented at a plenary session. Since the stakeholders came from diverse institutional backgrounds, they were expected to make use of their diverse and extensive experience to identify and discuss issues, services available, the gaps that exist and their ideas for solving them for the benefit of migrants and their families<sup>4</sup>.

## iii. Service Mapping

A mapping of services available for migrant workers and their families was carried out to identify the range of existing services, as well as gaps in services, and the awareness and perception of such services among migrant workers and their families.

The perspectives of service providers were also actively garnered and interviews were conducted with government ministries, other government entities, UN agencies and international donors, international organizations, national organizations and civil society actors, and NGOs working on migrant issues.

Interviews and informal discussions with service providers generated a comprehensive view of the trends, causes, and impacts of migration. Interacting with people from different walks of life helped to assess different perspectives on labour migration.

## iv. Empirical Data

Qualitative field research was carried out in the form of Focus Group Discussions, key informant interviews and documentation of case studies of migrant workers and their families. The main aim of gathering field data was to ascertain information particularly about the access to services and the efficiency of the existing services to the needs of the migrants.

The field work was conducted in seven (7) districts. Four districts were areas where projects for migrant workers already existed, implemented by Helvetas and supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. They were Galle, Gampaha, Ampara and Nuweraeliya. Three additional districts were also selected in which interventions targeting migrant workers were not known of. These districts were Kurunegala, Colombo and Puttalam. In the target districts the following villages were selected:

District	Villages
Gampaha	Ranpokunugama, Maha Imbula
Galle	Koggala, Dewata, Kathaluwa
Ampara	Hingurana, Sainthamaruthu, Kalmunai
Nuweraeliya	Dickoya, Binnoya, Welioya
Colombo	Rajagiriya
Kurunegala	Alawwa, Kuliypitiya
Puttalam	Chilaw

Contact with groups, families and individuals were initiated through the SDC funded Helvetas project for safe migration in collaboration with Helvetas' field partner, the Migrant Services Centre (MSC).

<sup>4</sup> A summary of the outcome of the stakeholder consultation is annexed to this Background Paper

MSC introduced the groups and MSC field coordinators were present. MSC has a group of befrienders which has been trained to offer basic psychosocial support to migrants. These befrienders were also present in the FGDs.

### **a. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

A total of 10 FGDs were conducted in a number of selected areas. At least one FGD was conducted in each village and FGD participants were selected with the support of community leaders and community organisations. FGDs were held in common spaces such as community centres, temples, churches, school buildings and houses.

The key questions that were examined in the FGDs were as follows:

- What are the different problems faced by people migrating for work?
- Who or what services/institutions/departments/organizations exist currently to help them if and when they face difficulties?
- How effective are these services? What improvements can be done? What do you want to suggest to the government regarding addressing the problems of migrant workers?

### **b. Key Informant Interviews**

To supplement the focus group discussion information, 15 key informant interviews were also conducted. The interviews were done in the districts of Colombo (3), Kurunegala (6) and Puttalam (6). Those that were interviewed included Divisional Secretaries, Grama Niladaris, Child Rights Promotion Officers, Human Resource Officers, priests, school principals, community leaders (who participate in the Catholic children's education and awareness programmes and family awareness programmes). The interviews were held in religious institutions, offices and homes. As officials in host countries dealing directly with in-service migrants were difficult to access, the team interviewed a member of a Non-Government Organisation dedicated to the welfare of migrants, Mrs. Delrine Embuldeniya of the Migrant Worker Welfare Association in Bahrain.<sup>5</sup>

### **c. Case Studies**

Forty-one case studies were documented through in-depth interviews. The selection of respondents was done with the support of community leaders and community organisations.

The questions explored in the in-depth interviews were:

- Migrant workers - key issues faced, how they were managed and the outcomes while in service
- Migrant workers – key issues faced in reintegration
- Families - how the experience affected men, women, children and the elderly

In-depth interview method was the main data collection tool. Migrant workers and families were selected by using the snowball sampling method. Twenty in-depth interviews with migrant families (all family members or several members or individuals participated time to time) were done in Kurunegala (8), Puttalam (8) and Colombo (4). Among the respondents were families, comprising wives and children, families with grand parents and children, families with parents only, families with returnees, families with members who were planning to migrate, and families with newly married couples. Each interview took approximately two hours including the introduction of the research and the researcher.

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<sup>5</sup> A list of key informant interviews held is annexed to this Background Paper.

## **1.2 Ethical Considerations**

All interviews dealt with events, situations and memories of migrants whom were sometimes unpleasant and difficult. On many occasions in all districts, respondents were emotionally moved, and showed outward emotions (crying) recalling their negative experiences or their regrets and disappointments.

On such occasions, the researchers were equipped to provide emotional support to help respondents deal with their traumatic memories while the interviews were going on. This was done by using the researcher's psychosocial knowledge and included the following:

- Mobilisers also accompanied interviewers in Galle, Gampaha, Ampara and Nuweraeliya and befrienders from the SDC funded Helvetas project to which any distressed respondents were referred for further support.
- Where continued distress and difficulties requiring professional care were noted, the interviewer with mental health training discussed with the area mobilizers which services were most appropriate for this respondent and actions for further support were planned.

## **1.3 Limitations**

The main purpose of this Background Paper is to understand complex psychosocial problems of migrant workers and their families. The literature available on issues faced by migrant workers and their families already provides an extensive picture of the psychosocial issues faced by these workers and their families at every stage of the migration process. In researching, the Research Team delved extensively into existing literature. The empirical data from the field was gathered to validate the information in the literature and not as a representation of national level psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families. Therefore, the sample of respondents in this Background Paper is not a representative sample of migrant workers and their families. This report is based on information gathered from a purposive group of informants.

In gathering information from families left behind, a definite decision was made not to elicit information from children, as the time and resource allocation did not lend to the development of appropriate data collection techniques for interviewing children with due care and diligence. To remedy this, young adults were interviewed to gather information from their childhoods.

Some other practical limitations were that considerable time was consumed in gathering information due to distress caused to respondents, at times privacy could not be assured to respondents to divulge sensitive information and also at times approaching respondents through the intervention of an NGO meant an expectation of material benefits from the NGO that the Team could not fulfil.

## Chapter- 2

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### Literature on issues of labour migration with a psychosocial impact on migrant workers and their families

This chapter traces literature from 1983 to 2012, identifying diverse issues of a psychosocial nature in the migration process. The early writing identifies problems that have been addressed and remedied over the years primarily by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment supplemented by the work of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare under the implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy as well as other government institutions, civil society organisations and other stake holders. As the span of the literature review includes literature of nearly three decades, some issues have undoubtedly been addressed and have little relevance to the study at hand. However, such literature is included in this Background Paper in order to trace the development of problems in migration and to identify problems and issues that continue to exist.

In the extensive body of literature available in Sri Lanka on temporary labour migration, the study of psychosocial issues of migrant workers and their families has not been the focus of singular research studies. However, many studies on migration, migrant workers and the impact of labour migration include myriad issues that can be classified as psychosocial. These issues arise at the three main stages of migration, pre-departure, in-service and return/re-integration, and impact the workers themselves as well as their immediate and extended families (Dias & Jayasundere 2004). Much of the research has focused on the impact of female labour migration and there is no social discourse on the impact of labour migration on male migrant workers and the absence of male migrant workers on their families. Further, available literature has focused on the impact of migration of low skilled and semi skilled workers and not those at professional level.

The migrant labour force is considered a vital part of Sri Lanka's labour force, in terms of participation as well as contribution to the national economy. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) estimates Sri Lanka's current migrant population to be 1.8 million. Each year, the number of migrants leaving the country increases, and in the last five years over 200,000 people have left the shores of the country annually in search of work. Roughly 2.8% of the country's labour force migrates annually. The number of dependents accounts for 1/3 of the country's population and their remittances figure as the top net foreign exchange earning source in the country. In 2011 these workers contributed over US\$ 4.1 billion to the economy<sup>6</sup>. Sri Lanka has proved to be a country, which depends heavily on international labour migration as a means of economic and social sustenance, and the country looks to promoting migration for labour as one of its priorities.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MFEPW) as stated in its 2011 Performance Statement *"The utility function of the Ministry has, so far, been to maximize remittances and reduce unemployment. Sri Lanka succeeded magnificently. Remittances are her highest foreign exchange earner, migrant workers contributing 33% of her total foreign income. Sri Lanka's annual increase of the labour force is estimated at 135,000. Since there is an annual labour migration of 225, 000, labour migration not only absorbs the net increase, but also mops up a further 100,000. The household effect of remittances has elevated 1.7 million above the poverty line, and the expenditure incurred by the recipients has multiplier effects, further reducing poverty. Remittances form 8% of Sri Lanka's GDP. Migrant labour remittances are a major reason why Sri Lanka heads South Asia in the Human Development Index."* Further, the document states that private remittances for the year 2009 were 382,801 Million Rupees.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MFEPW) 2011 Performance Statement

<sup>7</sup> ibid

## 2.1 The Profile of Sri Lankan Migrant Workers

The latest available statistics on Sri Lanka's labour migration population show that in 2009 there were 266,445 departures of migrant workers. Of the total departure, 46% were housemaids and unskilled workers comprised 20%. 2% were semi skilled, 24% skilled and only 6.4% comprised all categories of professional, middle level, clerical and related positions.<sup>8</sup>

Of the total departures in 2010, 49.1% were female and of the female workers 86% were housemaids.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the feminization of the migrant labour force that is a unique character in Sri Lanka's migrant labour force by and large continues.

A 2006 study found that the Sri Lankan female migrant worker is between the ages of 25 and 44 years of age; 75% of 108,514 women who find employment as housemaids were within this age category (Kottegoda 2006). The majority are mothers of very young children. Most of them are also in the childbearing age and they have left behind growing families, sometimes very young or newborn infants. (Fernando 1989). The low educational status of the women were indicative that for other than domestic service or unskilled labour they were not qualified nor for any other type of work in Sri Lanka (Fernando 1989, Korale 1986).

It is in this background that the national policy strives to move Sri Lanka's migrant workers from low skilled employment to skilled and professional employment. In addition to this commitment in the National Labour Migration Policy, the government in 2011 stressed "the need to promote and improve the image of Sri Lanka as a source country that provides high calibre professional and technical and skilled personnel in specialized fields such as nursing, nautical services, accountancy, IT, banking & engineering has been clearly envisioned. The thrust of this policy is to increase the migration for skilled employment rather than unskilled and female domestic workers. This policy has resulted in the reduction of female domestic workers to 42.4% of the total migration flow in 2010 from the 70% level in 1995, which can be considered a positive achievement (MFEPW Performance 2011).

## 2.2 Psychosocial issues of migrant workers, children left behind, care givers of children, elderly parents and other family members

Within the wider discussion on phenomenal foreign exchange earnings and improved living standards, there has been constant discussion over the last three decades on the negative impacts of labour migration; both on the migrant workers themselves as well as on the families left behind.

The MFEPW recognizes this and a 2011 statement emphasizes that *"even though a large outflow of unskilled male and domestic female workers contributed to earn the much needed foreign exchange to our country, this also had a negative impact on the broad image of Sri Lanka as a country sending mostly house maids and unskilled workers. Apart from the many problems faced by few of the female domestic workers, another detrimental aspect of the migration of large number of mothers with young children was the psychosocial impact on the children left behind. These issues have been identified by the government as needing priority attention by taking counter measures for the protection of children left behind and to increase the outflow of professional, technical, middle management and skilled manpower so that Sri Lanka can harness the true potential of its intelligent and educated human resource, thus reducing dependence on the earnings of female domestic workers."* (MFEPW Performance 2011)

Literature spanning over a period of nearly three decades has highlighted many issues faced by migrant workers and their families that can be classified as psychosocial issues. It must be noted here that there is a dearth of studies on positive psychosocial impacts, despite a large number of anecdotal information on positive impacts of labour migration not only in economic terms documented in national statistics but also in terms of mental and social wellbeing.

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<sup>8</sup> Annual Statistical Report of Foreign Employment SLBFE 2010

<sup>9</sup> MFEPW Performance 2011

## 2.3 Psychosocial Issues at Pre-departure Stage

### a. Reasons for Migrating

The bulk of the literature identifies the primary reason for migration to be economic; due to poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity to earn an income. However, in addition there are many other reasons identified. All these have psychosocial implications.

In 1989, a study published by the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) sets out a range of reasons for labour migration stating that the increase in female migrant labour as housemaids and as unskilled and semi-skilled factory workers was due to socio-economic factors such as female unemployment, poverty, as well as a means of escape from domestic problems such as alcohol addiction among male family members. This study further states that those in the poorest strata of Sri Lankan society were encouraged to migrate for work due to the immense difference between wages they would earn being employed at home and the wages offered by employment overseas (Samarasinghe 1989). Migrants in the early stages wished to use migration as an avenue of upward social mobility (Hettige, 1988a).

One of the few studies that have looked specifically at psychosocial issues (specifically of children left behind but touching on migrant workers themselves) is the 1989 study by Fernando on the physical, psychological and social impact on children. The study identifies several reasons for migration stating that the dominant motivating factor is economic. It states that the low rates of payment in Sri Lanka for domestic workers and the relatively higher rates paid overseas motivates women to seek employment as housemaids. A related reason the study sees is the possibility for the housemaid to save her whole pay while in overseas service as well as acquire clothes, extra payments, and gifts. Other contributing factors linked to the household economy are that husbands are often unemployed, the stigma of working as a domestic servant in Sri Lanka, and the success stories related by returning workers.

These findings are supplemented by a number of studies, which identify other reasons given by housemaids for seeking employment abroad. Some are reasons of choice such as job dissatisfaction and preference for foreign jobs over employment available in the country. Others are issues such as to ensure better education opportunities for children, to build a house, and generally for self-improvement that the workers could not have done without the foreign earnings. Some migrated to escape from problems at home including domestic violence and alcohol addiction of the spouse (Human Rights Watch 2007, Kottegoda 2006, International Organization for Migration. 2003, Yapa 1995, Fernando 1989, Schampers & Ellens 1986).

Fernando (1989) highlights the mental stress on women caused by low levels of family income. Due to lack of proper employment of the husband (head of the household and chief income earner), spiralling costs of living that left some families able only to have one meal a day, and the hopelessness of the future of the children pushed women towards migration. "*The women bore the mental burden of all this. The urge to find a means of escape was a ray of hope. The reasons that men urged them to go were also tied up with this hopeless picture*". While some women wanted money '*just to live*' others yearned for more; to buy land and build a house, pay off loans, collect dowries for daughters, to buy jewellery, a solid almira (wardrobe). Fernando further states that '*children's education*' was a mere phrase for the migrant workers who had no idea of what type of education nor had any plans on how to ensure this education for their children.

Yapa's 1995 study on "The Decision Making Process of International Labour Migration with special reference to the Sri Lankan Housemaid" based on a sample of 100 women, comes to an interesting conclusion that the decision by women to migrate for employment to foreign countries was very much an individual and personal one. Yapa states that none of the women in the study indicated that they had decided to migrate solely because others compelled them to or by other factors surrounding them. Although these were very much the deciding factors, their ultimate decision was based on their own conviction of the need to migrate.

Writing about non-economic motivations, Kottegoda states that the desire to get away from abusive relationships at home was a subsidiary factor in some instances which motivated women to migrate overseas for extended periods of time. But she concludes that "*overall, one of the driving forces for women to migrate overseas for employment has been the need to better their households and themselves economically and socially*" (Kottegoda 2006).

Dias and Jayasundere (2000) explored for the first time in literature of labour migration the motivating factors for men to migrate for employment. The conclusion was similar with the strongest forces to leave being economic wellbeing and the lack of lucrative employment opportunities for young men between the ages of 20 and 35.

### **b. Making the decision to migrate**

The taking of the actual decision also has implications for both the migrant worker and the family to be left behind. Kottegoda (2006) writes that women do not take the decision lightly and in the majority of cases the prospect of leaving is discussed with spouse and adult family members and their help is sought to find overseas employment. Kottegoda writes that for married women the process of decision-making begins with discussions with their spouses. Often, initial reaction of spouses is one of reluctance to assume household and family responsibilities. Kottegoda further states that in general their families support women's endeavours, most commonly by her own and also by the extended family including her in-laws.

Once the initial decision is made, the family and extended family networks become an important support system. Kottegoda states that most often initial travel investment is heavily dependent on resources obtained through the extended family networks and quotes Yapa pointing out, *"in this process (of deciding to migrate) the extended family of the migrant plays an equally important role as that of the immediate family of the migrant. The migrant worker depends heavily on the family networks for emotional support and care of children. The family has an interest in the migration of one of its members and hence lends a helping hand to the migrant to overcome constraints of child care"* (Kottegoda 2006).

This extensive support in finances, material assistance and promises of support during the time the migrant worker is away seems to strengthen the family relationships as stated by Kottegoda (2006) quoting Gamburd (2002) as *"...the extended family played a crucial role in facilitating migration by providing childcare, financing agency fees, finding jobs in the Middle East (West Asia) for female migrants and seeing the family through crises at home...in general migration seemed to strengthen extended family relationships, not weaken or endanger them."*

### **c. Preparing to migrate**

Once the decision to migrate is made, literature looks at the preparation process. Studies have identified the next step being the search for a foreign employment agency and the amassing of money needed to cover all the expenses. (Kottegoda 2006). Although there is no official charging of fees from women migrating to low skilled work, except the payment for insurance cover, migration for employment requires finances to cover costs of preparation. Studies show that the indebtedness associated with migration starts at pre-departure stage where pawning personal jewellery, borrowing and pawning jewellery of family members and taking of loans from moneylenders happens. This also has an implication on the urgency to find work as well as remittance management in the future. (Kottegoda 2006, Cenwor 2002, Instraw 2000, Yapa 1995). 2012 anecdotal information states that while women low skilled workers are not charged a fee and that in fact, employment agencies provide money to prospective migrant workers to cover pre departure expenses. This, however, is not substantiated with regulations or documented practices by employment agents.

Fernando in 1989 found that most migrants were reluctant to divulge what kind of money was given to various people involved; agents, middlemen, own contacts overseas, agents in the receiving countries. Expenses – cost of processing travel documents, travel to Colombo and subsistence, travel to airport, expenses connected to making arrangements at home – someone may be coming to take charge of the children. The decision to migrate for employment is often not a well thought out strategic decision. Because these workers need to find money to fund the migration urgently the only means of finding money is by borrowing. "Here the loan sharks move in". Borrowing is done on high interest rates and often the income of the first three months is spent on settling loans and debts incurred at home. Many women were reluctant to speak about the cost incurred and the answer was that they had forgotten.



One of the most stressful issues in the pre-departure stage for migrant workers is the financing of the travel. Fernando (1989) stated that the method of obtaining employment abroad varied. Generally only 30% of the recruitment is done by registered agencies. Others “*go on their own*”. I.e. through a contact already employed in a foreign country, usually a sister, mother or a neighbour. Others go through unregistered agencies or agents of these agencies.

Literature also shows that the majority of domestic workers do not have enough money to meet the initial costs of working overseas. They are unable to pay the agent in cash and thus mortgaged properties, borrowed money from banks or from money lenders at very high interest rates. Agents and sub-agents overcharge prospective women migrants for migration-related services or documents, causing domestic workers to incur significant but avoidable debt that they struggle to repay throughout their employment period (Human Rights Watch 2007).

Agents and sub-agents deceive prospective domestic workers about the nature and conditions of work they will perform, their wages, and the country in which they will be employed, exposing women migrants to the risk of exploitation and trafficking (Human Rights Watch 2007).

Medical testing is another area that causes several problems. Prospective migrant domestic workers undergo pre-departure medical testing, often without their informed consent or access to the test results. Labour agents at times forced them to take long-term contraception to prevent pregnancy during employment. They were not informed about what tests were being performed, and none received pre or post-test counselling (Human Rights Watch 2007). Sri Lankan women adhere to cultural norms that ensure respect for bodily integrity and privacy. In this context especially when a female migrant worker is not informed, and it is perceived to be embarrassing and degrading to have to submit to an unexpected body examination (CARAM ASIA 2007). Women who test positive for pregnancy are not allowed to migrate. However, according to Human Rights Watch (2007) and CARAM ASIA (2005), migrant domestic workers are sometimes administered a long-term contraceptive injection to prevent pregnancy, without their consent or knowledge and sometimes under coercion during mandatory pre-departure medical tests. Further, an inadequate preparation at the pre-departure stage of migration could contribute to HIV vulnerability, and this condition is further aggravated in host countries by inadequate or unhelpful policies and laws, conflicts of societal norms and values, and inadequate availability/access to supportive programmes and services (United Nations Development Programme 2008).

The preparing of migrant workers for overseas employment is done in a systematic manner by the government. This, however, targets only those registered with the SLBFE and in that too, the first time migrants. Those who migrate via personal contacts or are repeat migrants by and large do not receive pre-departure training although the SLBFE has a scheme of providing refresher training for repeat migrant workers who register themselves with the SLBFE.

A Desk Review as background for the development of the National Labour Migration Policy (2008) confirmed many forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse that migrant workers face while preparing to migrate. These include issues in the process of recruitment and at the immediate pre-departure stage. Specifically these issues are illegal recruitment and trafficking, excessive fees for placement and documents, cheating and extortion by agencies and brokers, non-existent jobs, inappropriate and expensive training programmes, being locked up by recruiters, abuses in “training centres”, not being sent abroad at all, falsification of worker’s identity, and lack of information on terms and conditions of employment.

## **2.4 Psychosocial Issues at In-service Stage**

Literature on issues faced by migrant workers while in service is based on complaints made by workers and these have severe psychosocial implications. In 2009, the SLBFE recorded complaints that amounted to 5% of the number in service, and 77.8% of these complaints were received from female workers. While this is most probably an under estimation due to various reasons, given the large number of workers involved, this amounts to a very large number of cases.

The main categories of complaints as recorded by the SLBFE are breach of employment contract (24.3%), non-payment of agreed wages (17%), lack of communication (13.4%), harassment –

physical and sexual (12.8%), sickness (8.7%), not sent back after completion of contract (3.9%), death – natural (2.1%), premature termination (1.5%) and stranded without employment (0.9%).

Fernando in 1989 wrote that many of the complaints at the time stemmed from the most important aspect of the work, which is the employer-employee relationship.

However, Fernando states that many returnees did not provide clear answers on how well or badly they were treated. The analysis of 'well' or 'ill' were based on many things; homesickness, longing for children, loneliness combined with attitudes of employers. Some felt they were not treated well at the beginning but well afterwards. Some said they felt better once the homesickness got better and everything seemed more pleasant.

Ruhunage in 2010, states that the major share of the complaints by female workers was about non-payment of wages.

Lack of communication with families at home was also a significant complaint although Ruhunage states that that the complaints in this category was 23% in 2006 and were brought down to 11% in 2010, due to recent successful measures taken by the authorities in addressing the issue such as requiring the employer sponsors to facilitate communication links between the workers and their families. The studies note that the women migrant domestic workers' isolation comprised of no telephone access and control over correspondence or non-permission to receive mail, as well as social isolation from other domestic workers or friends (ILO 2004).

In terms of the inability to speak the language of the employer, Fernando states "*workers did not feel hampered by the lack of language ability. All were able to pick up the language as if we were working for a foreign family here in Sri Lanka*". However, there were instances where workers stated "*a smattering of the language would have made it easy especially during the first few months*".

Physical and sexual harassment is the other major type of complaint from female domestic workers who are regarded as most vulnerable to such exploitation. Forceful employment even after completion of contract period, being stranded without jobs and breaching of different terms of the contract by employers (more related to males' complaints) are also seen among the regular complaints received by SLBFE from the migrant workers.

*Literature states that workers face pervasive workplace abuses, work in an unregulated environment and in isolated conditions, without access to information or support networks and are at significant risk of exploitation, refusal to provide the fare home on completion of a contract, confiscation of passports and physical and sexual assaults at the hands of employers, ill treatment by employers, long hours of work, excessive workloads and underemployment of wages, Apart from that, as a result workers are totally unprepared for the cultural shock that await them in a country which is altogether different in language, religion, people food, customs level of development, climate , in almost everything. The studies say that the emotional trauma workers go through in leaving behind their families with little children make their attempts to adjust to the new environment and working conditions still more difficult."* (Law & Society Trust 2011, Human Rights Watch 2007, Weerapana 1992)

In some cases, employers or labour agents subject domestic workers to physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse or forced labour (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Sri Lankan consular officials often provide little or no assistance to domestic workers who approach them with cases of severe physical abuse, sexual abuse, unpaid wages or exploitative working conditions. (Human Rights Watch 2007)

Death during service is another issue of concern highlighted in literature. These deaths under suspicious circumstances of unskilled workers, mainly housemaids, who are not eligible for legal redress in terms of the laws of the host country, are merely filed as complaints and the perpetrators rarely brought to justice. This is also the case in allegations of rape or sexual abuse. There are no records of such abusive employers ever being investigated or prosecuted. In the case of sexual abuse, the women domestic workers face many social barriers and other constraints in reporting such incidents. The most common form of escape from situations of abuse and harassment is to run away from the scene of employment and seek refuge in the Embassy (Jayasundere & Dias 2004).

The Jayasundere & Dassanayake (2008) Desk Review of 62 pieces of writing compiled as background for the development of the National Labour Migration Policy in 2008 identified many forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse that migrant workers may face in the destination countries.

- Violation of employment contracts
- Incomplete employment contracts
- Contract between the recruitment agent/agency and the employer
- Hiring for non-existent jobs
- Clauses added to the employment contract between the employer and migrant worker
- Contract substitution
- Arbitrary termination of contracts
- Changes in tasks not in contract
- Illegal termination
- Sudden, unjust termination
- No place to stay before being sent home
- Absence of complaint and redress procedure
  
- Poor working and living conditions:
  - Very low wages
  - Unequal pay for work of equal value
  - Withholding of wages
  - Very long hours of work/work overload
  - Doing two or more jobs
  - No rest days or holidays
  - Inadequate food
  
- Limited freedom of movement
- Harassment and violence
  - Verbal abuse
  - Psychological abuse;
  - Physical abuse and violence;
  - Sexual harassment
  - Sexual violence and rape.
  
- Health and safety risks and lack of social protection/ social security coverage
- Forced labour and debt bondage

Lack of health care is also identified as a problem faced by migrant workers. The third most serious type of complaint was the health condition of workers. Some cases are illnesses contracted after arrival at the place of employment but some may be medical disorders experienced before migration but concealed during recruitment (Ruhunage 2012).

As domestic workers in the Middle East fall outside local labour laws (with the exception of Jordan), they are, in many instances, denied access to health care. Often their only access to such services is to pay for it themselves or through their employers who have to provide them residency permits (Human Rights Watch 2004). When a migrant is found to be HIV positive or has STIs in a host country he or she is treated like a criminal and isolated from human contact (CARAM ASIA 2007). When female domestic workers are sexually abused and become pregnant employers say that they blame that the workers have failed the medical test upon arrival, which results in deportation (CARAM ASIA 2007).

Certain literature touches on *coping mechanisms* adopted by workers while in service. Fernando (1989) describes how workers deal with the work stress: "*Natural coping mechanisms of migrant workers appear to have eased some tensions in the workplace.*" Fernando states that workers considered the relationship with the employer, especially the mistress as important. "*Most won her heart by being kind and affectionate to the children, learning rudiments of cooking and housework and keeping out of the master's way. Meeting and interacting with other Sri Lankans also made it better. To talk and discuss problems, help alleviate feelings of loneliness and then the employer began to*

*seem more human, kinder. Even the workload got bearable*". (Fernando 1989) All of the above writing highlights facts. However, only a small number of studies analyse the long-term psychosocial impact of the negative experiences.

## 2.5 Psychosocial Issues of Families Left Behind

Issues faced by the family left behind have been researched widely. . *"Families, however, are primary providers not only of material, but emotional support as well. Separation is a painful decision with important emotional costs both for those who move and for those left behind."* (Samarasinghe 1989)

According to Fernando (1989), migration involves a domestic upheaval, which most husbands and children cannot cope with. The bulk of available literature on the impact of migration by a parent on children is primarily on the migration of mothers and the negative impact on children. Little has been written on the impact on the spouse.

Fernando in 1989 wrote that the least information available with regard to labour migration is on the impact on children while the mother is away. *"The returned migrant had settled down and did not want to discuss what happened when she was away especially about things that she did not approve."*

Literature points out that the care of children was usually taken over by the mother or parents of the migrant woman. *"In some cases care givers were the parents of the spouse, his unmarried younger sister or her own sister. In some cases children were left in the care of close relatives of the woman"* (Fernando 1989).

Whatever the age of the child, every woman felt that the right arrangement was made. Fernando (1989) explains that *"If the child fell ill, near and dear ones looked after the child. Women migrant workers appear to have some sort of an understanding of the impact of their leaving on their children. Loneliness of the child and longing for the mother who was far away was clearly understood. Even after return, women were visibly moved when they talked about it. But they did not believe there could be ill effects especially when she sent money for their food and clothes, even toys and luxuries."*

The survey that was conducted portrays that the health of children was affected. No worker had returned because a child was sick but then no one in the house informed the mother when the child was sick. There were very few serious illnesses. Many under-five year olds' had no growth monitoring cards and had not visited the family health clinic during the mother's absence. However, this has not been a practice when the mother was at home either. Most were immunized completely or partly.

Migrant children were often neglected. Because of this neglect, children were at times in bad health. Maternal separation and inadequate care arrangements during the migration of the mother seriously affected personality development of the children that are left behind for a period of about two years and more. The deprivation of maternal love, affection, care and security was compounded in certain cases through the neglect or lack of awareness of the father or foster-care (Samaranayake 2006). Negative behaviour in children after the departure of the mother was reported, including loss of appetite, weight loss, and speech impairment. Amongst young children, thumb sucking, emotional displays in the form of temper tantrums, destructive behaviour, refusal to go to school, and in the older age groups problems such as truancy, stealing, smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction and delinquency were observed (Weerapana 1992). Some health related issues in children were reported in a mix of behavioural disorders and chronic manifestations of illnesses and growth delays. They include delayed speaking, dysentery, worm infestations, chronic poor eaters, temper tantrums, and chronic ear aches. Interviews with doctors' state that families of migrant workers tend to spend a lot of money on medical care. Many visited doctors with trivial complaints or minor accidents. In younger children, doctors reported malnourishment and skin infection due to unsanitary conditions (Fernando 1989).

Some commented on stammering when the mother spoke to the child, enhanced affection for the grandmother continuing long after the mother's return, turning towards father for everything, not recognizing the mother, sullenness towards the mother, not speaking to the mother, not wanting toys and gifts she brought for them, insolent, disobedient, defiant. Some children had left school, while some became used too excessive spending. (Fernando 1989)

Even where children showed no outward signs of neglect, women migrant workers comment that their children were not happy. *"They were well clothed and fed but they were not happy"* (Fernando 1989).

Some studies have demonstrated that the principal risks were associated with the father. There were complaints of incest and physical abuse. Alcoholism and other vices affected care giving and also depleted family coffers (Samaranayake 2006). The long-term absence of the mother enhanced the vulnerability of the girl child for sexual abuse by adult males within the family. It is important to note here that 50% of all incest cases investigated were from families where the mother was working in the Middle East (Silva, Herath, Athukorala 2002, Hettige, 1990).

The absence of the mother was not the only reason for poor attendance and performance in education (Samarasinghe 1989). The education levels of the father were generally lower than that of the migrant mother (Save the Children 2006). The lower education levels of the father compared with the lower levels of time spent with children on education related activities indicates that the absence of the mother has a significant effect on the children's education (Save the children 2006).

Especially children in the lower grades seemed to be seriously affected by the absence of the mother (Schampers & Ellens 1986). Because of the psychological stress caused by the parental absence, teachers, complained about a lack of discipline, more playfulness, high absenteeism, stubbornness, and unruly behaviour (Schampers & Ellens 1986). Migrant children had more facilities available such as books, pens, pencils etc. In general migrant-parents seemed to spend more money on education than non-migrants. While the material benefits of migration were positive, the socio-psychological costs were clearly visible on the other side (Schampers & Ellens 1986). Gamburd explained that Sri Lankan migrant's mothers redefined how they loved their children. Instead of emotional support, they provided material support with hopes that family members would pick up the emotional sustenance. They offered nurturing to Middle Eastern children (for pay) while providing material benefits to their own offspring (for love).

Studies demonstrated that the school environment had also failed the children who needed its support most, victims of sexual abuse being condemned and ill treated by teachers and class mates and other studies showed the adversity faced by poor students (Samaranayake 2006). More children dropped out of school, as they grew older. In families affected by negative paternal behaviour, the education of children suffered (Samaranayake 2006).

In terms of bonds between migrant mothers and their older children, migrant workers related how these bonds had changed forever. Many older girl children had grown up and had boyfriends. They had neglected their schoolwork. They were disobedient towards their father. Many male children had less affection towards their younger siblings, had dropped out of school and were working in their teens (Save the children 2006 & Fernando 1989, Hettige, 1991).

Literature also commented on the traditional roles of mothers and fathers and how children responded to them in the absence of the mother. In the absence of the mother some fathers and children moved to the home of parents or parents-in-law, while more often parents or parents-in-law moved into the house of their children, sometimes together with their unmarried children. This has led to an increase in extended family ties where quarrels between children of the migrant workers and those of the relatives with whom they were living were noticeable but not serious. Migrant workers also related how children were more comfortable with female relatives in attending to their daily needs, than with their fathers.

Few men were ready to take over household chores considering these as burdensome. The extended family was expected to take over the role of looking into the domestic needs such as childcare and nutrition of the 'mother-less' family. The reported increase in cases of incest and child abuse nationally is often attributed and blamed on the decision by women to migrate overseas. There is no serious public questioning or discussion of shared 'morally correct' parental responsibilities towards children (Kottegoda 2006).

Some study findings indicated that even the best caregivers did not replace the love, attention and proximity of the mother. According to one study 77% of the children felt lonely due to the absence of the mother (Save the children 2006). Some mothers at times were compelled to take the drastic decision of leaving infant children in the midst of lactation. Through their ignorance or the compulsion to accept employment they did not realize the need to lactate the infant gradually. The emotional

shock and deprivation experienced by such an infant could have had very serious consequences (Weerapana 1992).

Case studies have clearly indicated that, in many cases, housework had been made the responsibility of girl children. These children found a lack of support both in their housework and schoolwork due to maternal absence (Samaranayake 2006). The eldest girl in the family seemed to be at a considerable risk to give up schooling during the mother's absence. The changing roles within the household affected the distribution of responsibilities. Aside from household duties, children had to take care of younger sisters and brothers when their parents went abroad. Girl children felt lonelier than male children when friends talked about their mothers, and when they had sensitive problems to discuss (Schampers & Ellens 1986, Samarasinghe 1989).

Another issue concerns the care of the elderly who were left behind (Hasbullah & Morrison 2004). In terms of caregivers, literature illustrates that the primary caregivers often were fathers or close relatives of the children, and the majority of them grandmothers (Save the children 2006, Samaranayake 2006 & Kottegoda 2006). The migrant worker automatically reallocated all the tasks to these persons. No special arrangements for the care of the children were necessary for the children knew them since birth. (Samarasinghe 1989). Most caregivers had relatively low levels of education. The educational levels of caregivers were lower than the migrant mothers of whom more than 70% had gone beyond primary school, while only around 61% of caregivers had attained a similar level of education (Save the children 2006). More children living with older caregivers experienced emotional needs and inability to communicate with them. Children felt sad or unable to communicate with primary care givers who were over 60 years of age (Samarasinghe 1989).

Caregivers had difficulties in relation to dealing with health issues of children, financial problems and problems with difficult children, caregivers' own health problems and heavy workload (Samarasinghe 1989). They were not really interested in the mental and educational wellbeing of the children. Among urban poor the effect on education seemed to be more serious when the mother was absent than when the father was away (Schampers & Ellens 1986). Migrant parents and/or the caretakers were not really interested in education and their encouragement for schoolwork was lacking. As such there was no proper supervision after school time, migrant children were less punctual with their homework and study after school time (Schampers & Ellens 1986).

## **2.6 Psychosocial Issues at the Return and Reintegration Stage**

There is little in terms of literature on psychosocial impacts on the lives of migrant workers and their families upon return of the migrant worker. Except for statistical information on earnings, there is little research done on the positive impact of labour migration.

In 2010 migrant workers contributed 33% of the country's total foreign income. The household effect of remittances is reported to have elevated 1.7 million above the poverty line, and the expenditure incurred by the recipients has multiplier effects, further reducing poverty. Remittances form 8% of Sri Lanka's GDP: *"Migrant labour remittances are a major reason why Sri Lanka heads South Asia in the Human Development Index. Migrant workers are the economic heroes and heroines of Sri Lanka"* (MFEPW Performance 2011).

However, the stories in literature are not rosy in terms of migrant worker experiences upon return. Fernando (1989) stated that migrant workers felt their expectations were not met. They were not clear as to what happened to the money sent back home. *"People at home had not gambled or squandered it. It had been spent on 'plain eating'."*

Despite the heavy workload, missing families, longing for children left behind, even cruelty and mistreatment by employers, many wanted to go back to the destination countries. The overriding reason was money; money was easy in comparison with what could be earned at home. Among other reasons were the deteriorating conditions at home with the husband unemployed, addicted to liquor while children's needs were increasing (Fernando 1989).

Some, however, did not want to re-migrate because migration had not solved the problems. Others felt that children, especially girl children were mature and should not be left alone. Sickness, death

and new additions to the family and the feeling among women that they were growing old were also reasons for staying at home (Fernando 1989).

Literature showed that the most adverse social consequence of temporary labour migration was the impact on family life. The long absence from home, exposure to a totally different economic and social situation and cultural milieu, increased affluence of the migrating partner, and upward social mobility due to the migrant's improved social conditions had often a negative impact and contributed to upsetting family relationships. The studies also pointed to the negative consequences of the long separation of spouses and showed that the incidence of divorce among migrants was above average (Gunatilleke 1986). Many female migrant workers who returned did not want to remain with their husbands. This may be due to long separations, breakdowns in communication and trust, migrant worker's adultery and refusal by the migrant worker to be confined to a housewife's role (Law & Society Trust 2011).

Past research indicated that some spouses squandered overseas remittances brought in by migrant workers. In some instances, families left behind tended to depend almost entirely on money remitted by female migrants, while spouses often kept away from productive work or spent their earning on wasteful items such as alcohol (Hettige, 1990). A range of studies confirmed that money was not spent intelligently, was misused and wasted (Samarasinghe 1989, Weerapana 1992). An SLBFE study of two districts found that 40% of the migrant's remittances were spent on alcohol and tobacco (Save the children 2006). Households with a migrant mother had a higher proportion of fathers who smoked or drank or who were drug addicts (Save the children 2006). In 1991, Kottegoda noted:

*“By migrating to West Asia, women often become the main income contributors to their households for at least the duration of their stay abroad. However, the fact by itself does not give a woman control over her earnings, particularly where the spouse or other family members have misused remittances. The only way in which a woman can maintain control over her income is either by sending only a part of her earnings back, or opening a savings account in her own name which cannot be handled by anyone else.”*

In 2006, however, the situation had to a certain degree changed according to Kottegoda: *“Unlike in the initial phases of migration where women tended to send all their remittances back home to their spouses, women are now more strategic in their planning for management of their earnings. While consultations are held with most family members regarding the decision to migrate, the prospective migrants make their own assessment as to whom they would remit their earnings. Mostly, they decide to remit either the whole or part of their earnings to their own mothers, sisters or even in-laws (mother or sister); this is particularly the case where remittances from an initial stint of working overseas had not brought the expected financial benefits. There is also a growing tendency for migrant women to open bank accounts in their own names and remit monies directly so that they have an assured sum of money waiting for them on their return.”*

## **2.7 Service Provision**

In order to meet the diverse needs created by labour migration, Sri Lanka has a number of institutions that address migrant worker issues. The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MFEPW) is dedicated solely to migration issues and the SLBFE comes under the purview of the Ministry. In addition, there are a large number of government institutions which address issues of labour migration, namely the Ministries of Labour, External Affairs, Women's Empowerment and Child Development, and Health as well as the Department of Police, the National Child Protection Authority, the National Committee on Women, Probation Officers, Women Development Officers and Grama Niladaris working at village level. In the private sector, licensed recruitment agencies, NGOs, Trade Unions and other civil society groups address migrant worker issues and provide some services.

### **2.6.1 Psychosocial Issues and Service Providers**

The diagram below attempts to summarise psychosocial issues that have impacted migrant workers and their families'. As well as and the responses by stakeholders. The matrix contains information from Dias and Jayasundere (2002) and Ruhunage and Kottegoda (2011).

<b>Services provided for psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers</b>		
<b>Migration stage</b>	<b>Psychosocial issue</b>	<b>Services documented in literature</b>
Pre-departure	Problems of recruitment: agents and Sub-agents	Registration with SLBFE
	Decision making to migrate	SLBFE 'Pre-departure training programme' for female domestic workers - Family Day
	Preparing to migrate	SLBFE 'Pre-departure training programme' for female domestic workers Migrant Service Centre information to prospective migrant workers to prepare them for migration and also raise awareness of illegal practices and other hardships that they can face
In-service	Physical and sexual harassment and abuse at workplace	Information provided at 'Pre-departure training programme' Services offered at Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions in destination countries Sahana Piyasa on arrival in Sri Lanka The Migrant Service Centre provides an advisory and counselling service at its office close to Colombo, on diverse issues ranging from social and behavioural problems in children, nutrition deficiencies and medical problems in children, educational difficulties, abuse by adults and stresses on the importance of leaving the home in responsible hands.
	Violation of contracts and abuse of contractual obligations	Contracts signed prior to departure Services offered at Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions in destination countries Services offered by SLBFE Conciliation Division
	Lack of communication at the workplace	Language skills training and other orientations provided by SLBFE
	Lack of communication with home and family	Information provided at 'Pre-departure training programme'
	Isolation and loneliness	Information provided at 'Pre-departure training programme'
	Health issues	Information provided at 'Pre-departure training programme'
	Permanent disability	Services offered at Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions in destination countries Insurance on registration with SLBFE
	Death	Services offered at Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions in destination countries Insurance on registration with SLBFE
	Loss of education	Scholarships for children excelling in



		studies
	Remittance management	SLBFE Pre-departure training programme on how to remit earnings
Return and Reintegration	Migrant workers forcibly repatriated, sick, injured or without money	Migrant Assistance Centre (MAC) at Seeduwa by the SLBFE within close proximity to the Airport is an innovative measure to help the returnee in numerous crisis situations on being forcibly repatriated, sick, injured or without money
	Income generation upon return	Small scale loans from state banks, private banks and non-governmental organisations
	Migrant workers in distress over marital issues and children's issues	General service providers such as Women In Need, Sahanaya, church based organizations.

## 2.6.2 Assessment of Services to Address Migrant Community's Psychosocial Issues

Assessment of services to address specific psychosocial issues is sparse in the literature available. However, general assessments have been made of issues that can have a psychosocial bearing on migrant workers and their families. Assessments of 'pre-departure training programmes' for female domestic workers are one example.

A joint assessment done by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the SLBFE (2008) of the pre-departure training programmes for female domestic workers, highlights gaps in the current system. One, which has direct implications on the wellbeing of migrant workers, is the lack of time spent on 'safe migration' issues as well as providing an understanding of rights.

Dias & Jayasundere (2004) found pre-departure training programmes appreciated by prospective migrant workers. *"Most prospective migrants viewed the training programme conducted by the SLBFE as useful and regretted that some workers did not appreciate the efforts of the trainers."* The study further states that migrant workers found the information on the expected role at the scene of the employment as most useful. *"The 'tips' on protecting themselves not only from 'electric shocks' but also from sexual demands of their employers as well as countrymen were appreciated. They remembered the anecdotes related by their instructors. Many had kept copies noted and were seen to be carrying the exercise books at the airport."*

This study, Jayasundere & Dias (2004) also provides information on migrant workers' assessment of government initiatives, initiatives by non-government organizations and agencies and makes suggestions for future interventions. Although dated (the information is over 10 years old having been gathered and analysed in 2004), the information adds to the sparse collection of material. Some pertinent issues highlighted in this study are as follows:

- With regard to the payment of registration fees many migrant workers are unenthusiastic about the payment of the required registration fee due to lack of finance at the pre-departure stage but are of the view that registration is a good and necessary measure to ensure the safety of workers. Workers are also aware and appreciative of the benefits that accompany registration that they see as going beyond the guarantee of State responsibility.
- The insurance schemes, the payment of the embarkation tax of Rs. 1000 and the assistance to families such as scholarships are appreciated and accessed by most workers. Even repeat migrants who avoid registration with the SLBFE by reaching host countries through personal contacts opt to insure themselves under the Jathika Suraksha Overseas Employment Insurance scheme.
- Despite the government's initiatives on model contracts, ensuring of minimum wage, and regulatory procedures set in place to govern recruitment agencies; workers have little concern over these issues and therefore pay little attention to them.

- Support and counselling for victims of exploitation: the Government's initiatives to bring redress to the exploited and abused, focuses on crisis intervention rather than on long term measures for social and economic integration.
- In addition to the regular repatriation of abused housemaids from Embassy premises and the safe house in Kuwait, the SLBFE has to utilize monies from the Welfare Fund of the SLBFE for this purpose to cover the high costs of repatriation.
- The sustained advocacy, for the government to offer a better deal for abused migrant workers has resulted in a series of progressive measures to ensure the safe return home of the worker. In the event of the migrant wanting to stay back, the government intervenes to renegotiate a contract with the assistance of the Embassy Welfare Officers.
- The establishment of the Migrant Assistance Centre (MAC) at Seeduwa by the SLBFE within close proximity to the airport is an innovative measure to help the returnee in numerous crisis situations on being forcibly repatriated, sick, and injured or without money. The staff at the MAC is constantly faced with complex problems for which solutions are found with patience, ingenuity and collaboration with other government colleagues.
- Migrant groups, other than those aligned to MAC were unaware of any private initiatives for returnees.
- When asked for suggestions, they found it difficult to imagine the type of programme that private organizations would be willing to support, to address their problems such as unemployment, poor income, inability to obtain credit on low interest and to find financial support for training in new fields such as computers, repair of electronic equipment and other higher technical skills. Such training was available only on the payment of fees, which they could not afford.
- The female returnees, who had received small loans ranging from Rs. 5000 to 15,000, were appreciative of the interest taken by the Migrant Associations but felt that these small loans could never uplift their families from poverty. They realized that private organizations could not embark on extensive reintegration programmes due to lack of resources.

According to the Dias & Jayasundere (2004) study, *“while acknowledging the recent initiatives of the government to protect migrant workers especially women from going into exploitative situations, both male and female returnees felt that the Sri Lankan government authorities could be more assertive in negotiating with host countries on worker’s rights for a minimum wage and more conducive work conditions. Male workers had found living conditions in labour camps appalling and they had suffered many hardships during the summer months in the Middle East. They did not wish to be categorized at the level of a Bangladeshi or Pakistani worker who tolerated such harsh living conditions. The Sri Lankan housemaid who was advertised as the cheapest in the market had portrayed a false image detrimental to the workers. They could not overcome this low status image since the government authorities had failed to negotiate for a higher minimum wage.”*

It is clear from the above literature review that specific literature on psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families is incorporated into writings on general issues confronting this segment of the population. It is also clear that the majority of these ‘general issues’ have some sort of psychosocial implication on the workers and their families.

Fernando (1989) states, “Migration out of the country involves a domestic upheaval which most husbands and children cannot cope with. The phenomenon of the mother going out of the home and the country for as long as two, three and sometimes four years is a strange phenomenon and one that can drastically change the lives of the family. The absence can have a serious impact on the home and a serious reversal of roles within the family. The impact is greatest on young children and on the home and has all pervasive repercussions – economic, social, psychological and physical”.

The literature cited above deals with diverse psychosocial issues (problems and grievances) faced by migrant workers and their families. The dearth of recent literature is a limitation here in that literature enabling comment on how gaps have been addressed over the years, from the late 1980s, to now is scarce.

## Chapter- 3

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### **Migrant workers and families speak about key issues for their wellbeing**

The discussion in the previous chapter on psychosocial and other issues faced by migrant workers and their families was based on a review of available literature on the subject. This chapter, on the other hand, is based on primary data collected by the research team through a series of qualitative case studies, key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

As outlined in the introduction wellbeing refers to an overall sense of health and wellness, a person's feelings of happiness or general satisfaction with his/her quality of life and the experience of contentment and fulfillment with one's life circumstances (PADHI 2006). Wellbeing is also said to be experienced when a person's individual, relational, and collective needs are fulfilled" (Prilleltensky 2005).

This chapter presents real life stories of people who due to some form of dissatisfaction, distress or dire need attempted to regain their wellbeing by migrating for labour. The stories highlight the complexity and the variety of impact on the life of migrants and their families. It is the objective of this chapter to draw lessons from real life stories, acknowledging the potential for positive impact of labour migration, while learning how we can mitigate the difficulties and areas of vulnerability still prevalent in the labour migration cycle.

Most migrants opt for labour migration to reach financial stability. However, the experience of labour migration can and does provide more benefits than financial stability. Maturity and growth in confidence and social status, broadening of perspective and strengthening of resilience are also benefits both male and female migrants return home with. These can be the results of the experience of independent living, exposure to different cultures, financial independence and achievements and the change in status of becoming the breadwinner of the family and the reason for the family's progress.

These non-financial achievements and benefits of migration such as personal development can enhance the quality of life for the migrant and provide better skilled, stronger citizens back in Sri Lanka after their return. It is with a view to enhance and sustain such positive impacts that the MEFPW provide support services such as pre-migration training. While we acknowledge the range of positive psychosocial influences labour migration has potential for, this chapter will focus on some of the negative experiences in order to arrive at recommendations for policies and practices that can avert or mitigate such noxious impacts.

This chapter therefore highlights a range of typical problems faced by migrants, which potentially can cause significant psychological distress, social disintegration and general dysfunction.

### **3.1 Psychosocial Issues at Pre-Migration Stage**

From the very instance of deciding to migrate for employment, prospective migrant workers and their families are faced with a multitude of issues.

#### **a) *The decision to migrate***

For the majority of migrant workers, the decision to migrate is largely driven by economic need. A range of complex financial and material needs and other difficulties impinge on their ability to earn an adequate income at home. Although financial and material in nature, these needs generate psychological distress. For many migrant workers, due to their generally low level of education and an already meagre job market, there are very few viable options for income generation to solve economic problems. Many state that there is little money available despite working long and difficult hours. There is also uncertainty with no job security at the low skilled levels of work they do. This is exacerbated by their needs and expectations, such as, building a house and educating their children for which they see no possibility on their earnings at home. It is the financial insecurity, uncertainty and fear about the future, the frustration of seeing no way out, feeling helpless and trapped in

situations, that cause some times unmanageable levels of distress which drive people to resort to desperate measures. Neluka's case (Box 4) is an example of a woman being caught in a desperate financial situation with an infant to take care of, while her husband, a casual labourer is unable to provide for them any more as he has sustained injuries after a fall at work. She has no means of feeding her family and decides to go overseas for work leaving her infant and husband behind.

The migration experience of individuals who return to build their houses and furnish them with electronic equipment and other symbols of prosperity, gives prospective migrants a message that there is wealth in this work experience. The vulnerability to dangers and risks that this option entails, however, are not as visible and are often ignored in favour of the material benefits the prospect offers.

As the case of Ramani (Box 1) illustrates, some young people decide to go, not because they are necessarily in a bad financial situation but because they see their village friends go and they see the glitter of the goods their families acquire, they see the houses being built on migrant wages and they are attracted to the possibility of prosperity.

**Box – 01**

Ramani is a 25 year old single woman from a village in the south and everyone in and around her village works for the industries in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ). They are mostly comfortable financially and have a house and a steady income. Some of the women also work in the thriving hotel industry in the district. Lately, however, some agencies have been recruiting women from their factory to send them to garment factories in Kuwait and other parts of the Middle East. *“My sister and I wondered about going. It seemed like a good chance to go and see another country. Our mother was very unhappy with the idea. But because many girls were buying bags and tickets and planning to go...and many people in the village thought it was their only chance to go out and see the world... I also thought I will apply and see. When I got it, I went. I did not think too much about any of the things that could happen...”*

It was not poverty that prompted Ramani and her sister to leave, but a desire to “ see the world” and gain from an experience of being away and coming back financially and socially stronger like others in the village who had gone before.

However, the story of Fazna (Box 2) below illustrates that some migrant workers opt to leave due to other reasons which have more direct psychosocial causes.

**Box - 02**

Fazna and Razia are sisters both in their early and mid 20s. Living close to each other in a tightly knit Muslim village of little houses along the eastern coast they are both married and unhappy in their circumstances. Fazna has two young sons, Imtiaz and Nawaz (box 13), Razia also has two toddlers. Fazna decides to separate from her husband. Though her family is unhappy with this move as it is not generally acceptable in her culture, she gets a divorce. She has plans for a new relationship but it is strongly opposed and criticised by her family who forbid her to have any new alliances. Fazna, however, will not be persuaded. The people in the village begin to speak badly about her. She is soon called “a woman of bad character” and Fazna makes a plan. She tells Razia to look after her sons while she migrates for work. She goes to an agency and gets herself a job in Kuwait. She offers Razia her house to live in when she is gone. Razia moves in to her sister's house with her sister's sons and her own children. After her departure, Fazna soon severs all connections with her family and is not heard from again. *“I think she must have started a new family somewhere”* says Razia. *“She always wanted to... but I can't say this to her sons...”* It is now 8 years since Fazna left, 5 years since the last contact.

The above case as well as the case described in Box 3 below is illustrative of many stories from the field. Women wish to free themselves from family pressures and responsibilities; some women we encountered wished to escape from abusive relationships, or from the grief of failed relationships.

**Box - 03**

Champika (25) is worried about her best friend Thakshila (25) who has left to the Middle East some

months ago and from whom she has not heard in a long while. They have both grown up in the same coastal village in the south. *“I told her so many times not to go. We all told her. But she was afraid of Kapila Aiya, her ex-boy friend”* and she told me... *“If I don’t go one of these days I will either go crazy or he will kill me...”* Kapila and Thakshila ended their love affair some time ago because he was pressurizing and controlling her so much. Life became intolerable for Thakshila after the break up as she was stalked, abused and threatened by Kapila who was unwilling to let her go. *“He is a very influential man in the village and Thakshila’s family was powerless to stop him.”* Finally when he began to threaten even her family and loved ones Thakshila secretly came to Colombo, went to an agency and got herself a job in the Middle East. *“We hope she is well. None of us were able to help her here, so she went.”*

The salient feature observed is that people encountering such issues do not seek to resolve them in the long run or cannot find support to address their situation. Counselling services are either unavailable or are not commonly accessed by women encountered during the field study. There seemed to be a tendency to get away from difficult situations only to return to the same problematic relational/family situations they left behind or even more complicated ones.

Migrant returnees often gain insight and deeper understanding of issues and a mature perspective of life having experienced migration. Here one of them speaks about other reasons that encourage workers to leave for foreign employment.

*“People go abroad due to social expectations like for weddings and dowries and jewellery and houses. We should educate the people about such things and let them see that we don’t have to compete for these things, the more important things are to have your family safe and not expect to own things we can’t afford.”* - At a Focus Group Discussion in Sainthamarithu, Ampara.

Many migrant workers interviewed make the decision to leave, thinking of it as an individual decision and as their contribution to the financial solution for their family’s problems. Sometimes, this decision is not made after consultation with spouses and extended family who will take on the role of caregiver for the children left behind. When the decision is not made jointly with the spouse or collectively with the family, the process becomes complicated. Some spouses are unaware of the decision until it is made, or much later until plans are solidly underway. There are occasions when spouses merely stumble upon the plans and are not even told directly. In such situations roles and responsibilities of the absent parent are rarely discussed and evolve only after the departure.

The quality of marriages and relationships also affects the manner in which the decision to leave take place. The remaining spouse can feel either overwhelmed with the weight of the responsibilities suddenly thrust upon him/her or resentful because he/she was not part of the decision or both. He/she may interpret this decision as abandonment or as a move towards infidelity or as a loss of commitment on the part of the partner. Since the overt or stated reason is for financial benefit and therefore for the sake of the family, the remaining spouse cannot reasonably complain, but has to accept the decision leading to a long term residual resentment which can erode the marriage. The case of Thayalini and Theleepan (Box 23) demonstrates that though the move can bring economic gain, the marriage relationship itself can come under severe pressure.

This dual nature of the impact of migration of having some gains in one aspect of life while concurrently creating losses in other aspects is a prominent feature of labour migration. Many migrants speak of or demonstrate certain gains such as financial and social development while for instance the integrity of relationships and families, or sometimes their physical and mental health may at the same time be seriously compromised.

In some instances the move by a wife, to take on the role of the provider, can make the husband feel inadequate and redundant, as he is unable to negotiate this reversal of roles. The propensity for husbands of migrant wives to become alcoholic and disengaged leaves room to believe that such spouses may struggle finding their role as provider being challenged resulting in the higher incidence of alcoholism we see among them (Samaranayake 2002).

**Box - 04**

Neluka is a 25-year-old woman, married with a toddler of less than a year old. She has returned 6

months ago after a brief 2-month period in Saudi Arabia. Before she left she and her husband were finding it impossible to make ends meet. He was a casual labourer and it was becoming very difficult for him to find work. Then he fell off a scaffold one day and was unable to continue working. Neluka had just had a baby that year and the infant was just 10 months old at the time of her departure, and the family needs were impossible to bear.

*"I decided to go abroad and the first time I went through a relative. They said they would help me to go because we were in great difficulty. I didn't tell my husband because I knew he would feel bad. He would not let me go, but he was also unable to do anything for us. If I told anyone they would try to stop me, but they would not have any solutions for me either. So I made all the plans to go and I left the baby with my mother... It was so hard to think of leaving the baby; I didn't want to talk about it because if I did people would convince me not to go. They would be sad or angry and then when I see them sad I too would change my mind and we will be stuck in our problems. That is why I went without telling him.*

Three issues emerge here. First that a mother of such a young baby considered going in the first place without recourse to any other option, Second, that she actually carried this out, despite rules and guidelines clearly spelled out by the SLBFE, that mothers of children under 5 years are not allowed to migrate. Thirdly that she did this without consultation. Sitting on the only available plastic chair in Neluka's wattle and daubed hut hearing her story, it was evident to us that desperation can make a mother ignore even the obvious need of her infant for her nearness and circumvent the rule of law (no doubt aided and abated by unscrupulous agents). Professional guidance, counselling and comprehensive training are all-available to a prospective migrant who has made the decision already. But for women such as Neluka, such guidance services before the decision is made are imperative and can avert the damage and distress such as Neluka's.

Prospective migrants often do not resort to discussing their decision or making it jointly because they feel that others might object to or stop their plans and prevent them from leaving. Some of them also struggle emotionally with leaving family behind and feel that if they think about and talk about the decision with others they might succumb to their feelings and decide not to go themselves.

When there is agreement about the decision and there is evidence of a plan and a division of responsibilities, the children too feel more secure in the situation and feel confident that there is someone stable available and willing to be there for them.

### **b) Preparation of Children**

It is a well documented fact that the departure of a parent for long term employment is felt most keenly and impacts most profoundly on the children (Save the Children 2006, Silva Herath, Atukorale 2002). This is also emphasised in the pre-departure training of the SLBFE. Yet in the decision making process, the preparation of children for the departure and absence of the migrating parent does not appear to be given any importance. Children appear hardly ever to be consulted or in some cases are not even informed when the mother or father leave for extended periods of time.

One of the main issues expressed in the stories of young adults interviewed about their experiences as children was that children were not informed or aware of the parent's migration.

#### **Box - 05**

Rehana is a 20-year-old single woman living with her family in a town close to the city. She has recently started her first job as a shop assistant in a pharmacy. She has successfully completed her A/LS in Commerce and awaits her results while working in this shop. She comes from a Muslim family but has been educated in Sinhala and is a confident communicator. She is thinking of starting her own family soon, but hesitates. She recalls the time when she was between 6 – 9 years old and her mother left to the Middle East, leaving her and her two brothers behind with an aunt. She recalls this as a very difficult period probably the most difficult period of her life.

*"I do not remember why she left; I don't remember being told anything about why mother was going. I remember the way she packed and how I thought she was leaving us for good. No one told us anything. I just watched her packing.*

*Then they told us that we will be going to live with my aunt and cousins. My father took me there but he didn't stay with us. He came now and then to see us. I remember my aunt complaining about us to him. I had a feeling of heaviness and sadness all the time. I kept wondering where my mother was and whether I would see her again. When I cried my aunt said my mother would bring me toys. I remember being forced to go to school. I did not want to go at all. I thought others would ask me about my mother and I felt very bad about not having her. I felt all other children had their mothers and I didn't. This made me feel very bad. So I didn't want to go. I went because my aunt said that if I didn't go my mother would be angry and not come back home. I remember being very resentful that my cousins had their mother. I watched other children with parents very closely..."*

*"When I was young I only remembered feeling sad all the time and not wanting to do anything at all. But after she came back and we got back to normal I remember feeling angry that they both left us and put us away for these years. I still don't know why exactly they did that. Maybe they had problems. It's only now that I think maybe they had problems. Now I can think like that. But then I really didn't know and I still remember feeling so bad (upset)."*

Many adults opt for making secret plans and slipping away and concede only to giving some scant last minute disclosure of their plans to the children with weak promises of returning with toys and chocolates. This gap in the understanding of the child can leave the child bewildered, confused, and very distressed having only his or her own interpretations for why his/her mother has left. As in the case of children whose parents separate or who die or leave for one reason or another, it is common for children to think they are somehow responsible for this departure (*Young Children's' Appraisal of Parental Conflict: Journal of Family Psychology 2006 Vol. 20*).

This interpretation generally centres on self-blame. Children commonly think that the mother has gone because she does not love him/her to because he/she is bad. This and other interpretations which the child makes of the departure of his/her mother, can leave the child with a confused sense of false guilt which is difficult to articulate and which, coupled with the actual absence and loss, can easily drive the child to distress, despair, attention seeking destructive behaviour, depression and a host of other negative consequences. In some cases, however, these negative impacts are mitigated or ameliorated, by the presence of a wider supportive family network of uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. In some situations of extended family life, all children are taken care of by all the adults and the absence of a parent may not have as great an impact as it would on children in a nuclear family or a fragmented or dysfunctional family.

The feelings expressed by children on the absence of the mother or the fathers were similar. Children of migrant males spoke of the absence of the father as heart wrenchingly as did children of migrant mothers. "*A family is not complete when one parent is away*", said two sons of a migrant father.

It is significant that, in many cases, parents who intend leaving their children behind think of their physical and educational needs but hardly ever of their emotional needs. Even if they did think of them, there is no mention or evidence of trying to provide for these needs. Commonly migrating mothers would make sure a female takes charge of her children to feed them and see that they go to school. There is no cognizance and even if so, no articulation of the child's need for closeness and love, for someone to talk to and share struggles with, the need for guidance, consolation, encouragement, of affirmation warmth and emotional security. Field data indicates that these "soft" emotional requirements are not considered important for the wellbeing and normal development of the child. In fact it may be the case that the emphasis is more on merely "being" and not on wellbeing.

### **c) Institutional Issues**

Discussions with returnee migrant workers and families of migrant workers show that there are institutional issues which exacerbate an already difficult departure. The returnee migrant workers who participated in the interviews were those who had gone about five years back and thus spoke of the situation at the time of their departure. Their experiences are different to and worse in some ways than those who leave currently. Many spoke of irregular recruitment practices that have undoubtedly placed stress on the migrant worker making him/her more vulnerable to abuse, confusion, exacerbating fear and a sense of helplessness. These practices were reported at the point of departure in Sri Lanka as well as in destination countries and are examples of weak or nonexistent procedures/ protocol, which cause distress or seriously impede psychological health and wellbeing

both of the migrant and his/her family. Some changes in policies and procedures are evident which have no doubt helped to make migration safer than it was and less distressing for all concerned. However, many still circumvent the law and the official channels and their experiences exact a high social cost on themselves their family and society at large.

#### **d) *Lack of Information and Documentation***

Among the issues mentioned by interviewees, was not receiving necessary documents and information. Migrant workers complained that they were not provided with contracts or employment agreements and thus, had no idea of the type or terms and conditions of the employment. Some who were given contracts said that the place they were sent to was different to the one in the contract. Many said they did not receive the wage stated on the contract and that various unstipulated deductions were made from their agreed wage and most did not understand why those deductions were made. Some were not given clear information about the employer. In some contracts, the addresses and phone numbers on the given paper were incorrect, causing great distress to family members who were then unable to make contact or keep in touch with their loved one (FGD Galle Koggala, FGD Ranpokunugama, FGD Hatton, FGD Ampara).

Migrant workers also complained about visas. It appears that the visa was stamped only for one month and it was at the employer's discretion that the visa was extended. Most workers are unaware of this (key informant interview with Ms. Delrine Embuldeniya, Office bearer Migrant Worker Protection Society Bahrain). All of these administrative procedures resulted in much undue and avoidable mental stress, worry and anxiety, frustration, and a host of negative emotions which affected not only the wellbeing of the family and migrant worker but also the performance of the worker at his/her work place.

The lack of information causes problems not only at the point of departure but also once the workers are in the country of employment. The main reason for this appears to be that workers are not aware of the type of information they should receive or what they need to find out, due to lack of understanding of the gravity of the venture undertaken.

#### **e) *Debt and Financial Difficulty***

Even though some migrants decided to migrate to ease financial strain, the decision put some workers into even greater debt and financial difficulty as the family incurred financial losses (taking loans, using up family savings, pawning property or jewellery, mortgaging lands and houses). Such financial strain naturally added to the mental stress and strain placing more demands on the coping skills of migrants and families, who may or may not have been able to deal effectively with such issues. Many responded to overwhelming stress (where the cause be financial as mentioned here) or any other- by avoidance behaviours such as alcohol consumption while some became prone to violence and abuse due to the inability to cope with multiple stress.

Migrant workers were often prey to fraudulent agencies that cheated them in many ways, such as demanding huge sums of money and promising jobs but abandoning the prospective migrant after money was received. Many interviewees spoke of agents extracting large amounts of money from them to secure employment as well as misleading, cheating and financial exploitation by sub-agents and agents (FGD Galle Dewata, FGD Galle Kathaluwa and FGD Ampara Hingurana). Apart from the legal issues involved here, falling prey to such exploitation also results in a variety of negative and destructive emotions and pain of mind. Being made a victim to such unscrupulous people in authority of one sort or another, could leave the person feeling helpless more angry, resentful, lacking in confidence and unduly dependant. Thus, acquiring a victim-mindset would only render him/her further vulnerable to other types of abuse as well. Experiencing all this at the very outset of a new employment opportunity will most certainly affect the quality of the work the migrant is able to supply.

#### **f) *Other abuses by recruiters***

Field discussions constantly brought up the more serious allegations of harassment and abuse (verbal, physical and sexual) that primarily women underwent in the process of securing foreign employment. These complaints ranged from cheating and misleading, bribery, sexual harassment,



sexual abuse to trafficking by both sub-agents and agents. Members of the Hingurana FGD referred to incidents they have seen happen to their peers::

*“When people go through agents they are badly cheated. If it is a woman she can also be badly abused. They can even harm her physically (sexually) and then she can’t speak about it or get help because it is a shame. So her family will not complain and some families even reject their wives after such abuse even when the wife is not at fault”- FGD at Hingurana Ampara.*

The incidents of physical violence and sexual abuse, during the pre-departure stage are well documented and widely accepted. When a woman is abused by the very people who she goes to for help, and by her own countrymen, she bears along with all the other psychological impacts, an additional sense of being unable to even trust her own people and those who bear responsibility for her, heightening her feeling of helplessness and vulnerability. She may as a way of coping, justify what happens and rationalize it to a point where she places herself at further risk of such abuses continuing along her migrant journey.

### **3.2 Psychosocial issues of migrants during the In-service stage**

#### **a) Exploitation, harassment and abuse**

The majority of workers complained of a range of abuses from verbal (scolding and bad language, threats and intimidation) to physical abuse (beatings, pushing, burning) and attempted and actual sexual abuse by employers.

*“The master of my house wanted to enjoy sexual pleasures with me and because I resisted he took me away, even unknown to the lady of the house and dumped me in the Embassy. I went through untold suffering for 2 months and 17 days” - FGD Hingurana, Ampara.*

#### **Box – 06**

Chelvathy was 23 when she decided to leave to the Middle East for work. She had married two years before and had a baby of 18 months at the time of her departure. She left with the consent of her husband and family. But it was not clear why exactly she decided to go. The sub-agent in the village had organized a job and a ticket for her to go to Saudi Arabia.

*“When I went they did not tell me where I will be sent. We had to wait a long while till someone came to get us. I was very scared. Finally when they came I was taken to a house. From the very first day, I was unable to stay there. The master of the house and also the older son were always trying to do things to me. I was scared to say anything or do anything. I didn’t know how to stop them. I knew I was just not able to stay there. I always remembered my baby and my family and cried a lot. They got angry with me that I was not working and I was also not willing to do what the master said. I told them to call the agent that I wanted to go home. They were very angry and shouted. When the agent came, and I told him I couldn’t stay there he slapped me in front of them and took me away to a place. There were two floors. The ground floor was an office and on the top there were rooms. There were many other girls including Sri Lankan girls like me. Some were very upset and some were sick. But they did not allow me to stay there. They took me to a room at the back. There was another man there who started questioning me. I told him the truth about why I was not able to stay in the house. I said that the master of the house and the son were trying to do sexual things to me. Until then he had been good to me and he even gave me a bottle of water to drink. When I said this, he changed. He started to use bad words on me and asked me to come to him. When I refused, he started scolding me. He was trying to scare me to go to him. When I didn’t move he came near me and grabbed me but I screamed and ran. He said I can scream all I like that no one would bother with a woman like me. I was terrified. I managed to run down stairs and to a room where there were other females. Then he stopped chasing me. They told me to stay with them and not to go where he was because he was a bad man. Some of the girls there said they too had had similar experiences in their homes and had come here. They said the agency people regularly beat them kicked and slapped them, called them names and threatened them. They were all there to be sent to other homes or sent home. I pleaded to be sent home saying I had a little baby. Because I*

*was still within the first 3 months of my employment I was given a ticket and sent back to Sri Lanka.*

Experienced migrant returnees mention the fact that often the way to protect one's self as a female worker from sexual abuse at the hands of the male employer is to be very clear about one's boundaries of what one will and will not do. *"if you clearly show them you don't like it most often they will not bother you, but there are others who will still think you are being paid to do whatever they want"* ( Hingurane FDG). The pre-migration training programme is very clear in teaching how sexual harassment can be dealt with. However, some migrants manage to circumvent this training, pay for certification of attendance, or simply go through private channels which do not require training certification. Even if they have had the pre-migration training younger migrants could sometimes find it hard to resist such sexual overtures by employers and other sexual opportunists, as these younger migrants may be unable to distinguish these overtures from responsible relationships due to their own needs for comfort and belonging.

### **b) Support Systems and Services in Destination Countries**

Migrant returnees in FGDs mentioned the need for more support services on arrival in the host country. The availability of support and help when needed can be correlated with how much an event or situation affects a person negatively. Migrant workers, who faced numerous difficulties and hardships in-service, had limited options for help and also had difficulty reaching the few options available to them. Most of the migrant workers faced many problems in addressing their issues with Sri Lankan Embassies in destination countries. This they mentioned was due to not knowing how to contact the embassies, embassies being too far away from the place of work etc. Workers stated that there was no one to explain to them the procedures of the new country, the terms of employment and the rules and laws in an understandable language upon arrival.

Some migrant workers also complained of being detained by the police with no understanding of the crime they committed. A majority of the migrant workers did not have access to lawyers. They claimed that there is no authoritative voice from the government on behalf of the migrants who faced a problem in the destination countries. Some migrant workers mentioned the assistance they received when they turned to the embassies in their difficulties. Others complained that embassies were neither cooperative nor helpful when migrants turned to them for help. They complained that embassy officials took the side of the employers. These situations can push a vulnerable migrant worker whose coping abilities are already strained to experiencing despair, helplessness and hopelessness. Extreme measures which are violent towards self and others can be considered by such a person, when it seems that there is no help or way out.

Factors eroding the psychological health of migrants are not confined to the abusive and traumatic alone. Legal and administrative issues such as working conditions can also, and with equal impact, affect migrants. **Excessive work load was a common complaint.** Both men and women spoke of the heavy and unmanageable workload and long working hours. Most of the migrant workers had to work for more than one household and for more than 12 hours a day. Workers complained of **not getting sufficient food** and sometimes of having been given leftovers and inadequate quantity and quality:

*"We are sometimes not given to eat properly. Sometimes they give us a morning meal but no food at night and sometimes only the leftovers or old stale food. They don't let us speak with other Sri Lankans or go and meet any one from our own home country. Sometimes we have to work for more than one family. There is so much work that it's impossible to do it in 24 hours so we don't get proper sleep. If we complain we get slapped or scolded. I had to look after 2 houses and one was a house with 3 stories".* FGD Hingurana, Ampara.

Contractual agreements stipulate the conditions under which migrants should work. The reality, however, may be quite different to what had been agreed upon. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the conditions under which migrants work may address some of the causes for continued and compounded distress, poor wellbeing and poor performance.

Being ill prepared or trained for what one has to do, can also make a worker feel inadequate, anxious and a failure even before he/she starts. Lack of training for the job or a mismatch between skills, prior

experience and the job now at hand, can make failure almost inevitable. This is seen more in the work that men do.

*“He is very unhappy. He is not used to construction work and says it is very hard. He is also afraid because the conditions are hazardous, and many people get injured while working. Muzamil has to help mix and pour concrete. The number of working hours is very high. There have been accidents and he is afraid” - Razia whose husband Muzamil was a fisherman in Ampara and is now working in Saudi Arabia.*

*“Many Sri Lankans in Saudi Arabia are treated like animals. They are even called animals by some of the Saudi people - “Sri Lankee Haiwaan” (Sri Lankan animal) and “Sri Lankee Maskeena” (Sri Lankan beggar). Some of them have to work both day and night and do not get sleep. Some have to work inside animal pens and become sick. Some are not given fresh food but only old stale food and they get sick because they don’t eat stale food and they fall ill by not eating. Some live in prison like circumstances” - FGD Koggala, Galle.*

### **c) Religious and Cultural Constraints**

In addition to physical and sexual harm, harassment and abuse at the hands of employers include barriers to follow their own religion and harassment due to unfamiliarity of the language.

*“I used to get scolded very badly and treated badly because I did not want to use the head scarf. I used to get headaches whenever I wore it and get a sort of wheeze but if I didn’t they would scold me badly.” - FGD Hingurana, Ampara*

Especially in Middle East countries, employers exhibited some discomfort with religions which are non-theistic and involve Idols. Hence, Buddhism and Hinduism were viewed with some aversion. Buddhist migrant workers constantly complained of feeling that they were especially disliked for their faith. Some migrant workers were encouraged by their agents to tell their employers that they were Christian or Muslim as Christian and Muslim migrant workers were given time to go to church on Fridays. With the purpose of taking that leave on Friday and minimizing the harassments by the employers, many migrant workers claimed to be Christian and appeared to go to Church. As a result some migrant workers converted from Buddhism to Christianity.

#### **Box – 07**

Sujatha is a 47-year-old Sinhala migrant worker from Kurunegala with two adult sons. Her husband has also been abroad for two years and returned due to non-payment of salaries. Sujatha and her family members live in their own half built house, engaging in the same employment from before their migration (farming and mason work). The elder son is employed and the younger son is still studying.

Sujatha migrated to earn money to complete the building of her house. But, she has not been paid a salary in her first few months. She had escaped from the first house to the Embassy. Subsequently she found another house and worked there for two years. She sent money to her husband. But, he saved nothing and did not complete the house. This compelled her to migrate again and this time she sent the money to her sister who was able to save.

When Sujatha worked in the second house, she came to know that the employers did not allow the employees to follow their religion, especially Buddhism: *“Actually, I wanted to have some relief from work and that is why I pretended that I was a Christian. That is why I went to church at first. But I was Buddhist before my departure.*

*So, when I went to the church every Friday, I met some Sri Lankan Christian people and I decided to change my religion later because I really started to adopt the faith”. By now Sujatha and her family members are Christians and very dedicated followers of their church.*

While coercion is not always the case in conversions, as seen in the story of Sujatha, there are migrant workers who have been told by agents to classify themselves as Christians to stand a better chance of being employed by Muslim employers who are more comfortable with another theistic belief

akin to their own. Even though this decision to refer to one's self as Christian is made by the migrant herself with some benefit in mind, her own decision can cause her distress if she feels she has compromised her personal religious/cultural identity, and core beliefs for the sake of work. She may encounter emotional and spiritual dissonance, loss of spiritual support and an important part of her identity.

Other migrant workers claim they change faith superficially to suit the need, but remain faithful within their hearts, and are able to negotiate this manoeuvre with little or no distress, knowing it is for a purpose and for a limited period of time. The need to have to do this cosmetic change to be even considered for employment, however, can compromise the psychosocial integrity and wellbeing of a migrant.

#### **d) Falsification of Passports and Travel Documents**

An issue that came up in two interviews and two FGDs was the falsification of passports and travel documents. From the recollections of our interview partners, it seemed that especially women's, names, ages, ages of children and religions and other details were changed to create new passports to make the migrant appear more employable. The worker agreed to these changes. *"The sub-agents tell us to lie and we lie ... about our age, religion, children..."*- FGD Binnoya, Hatton.

#### **e) Avenues for Maintaining Important Relationships**

For migrant workers who struggle in numerous ways, one of the few positive and good things in their lives is their families and loved ones. Maintaining contact with loved ones became one of the most important and powerful motivating sources of personal strength and inspiration at work. Often, a person could bear with untold suffering for the sake of loved ones and did this willingly. But when such connections and relationships were threatened, not nurtured or severed it could be highly distressing and damaging emotionally.

##### **Box – 08**

Chandaraleka is a 47-year-old female and married with 4 young daughters. She and her husband agreed together that she would go to Lebanon for 3 years as her husband Ariyawansa lost his job when the factory he worked for closed down. While she was in Lebanon the war broke out. Her family was very distressed. *"My husband was very upset when the war broke out and the family I worked for had to move houses and I was never sure when I could call again and what would happen. He wanted me to come home but I wasn't even able to discuss that with the family I worked for, as they were so worried and upset and moving house here and there. I also hadn't earned much. We suffered a lot during the war in Lebanon. I never told anyone because they were already so worried about me. I was not able to send letters home. Every time I gave the boss letters to post he would forget and keep them. One day I managed to get through a call and I was told that my husband was sick. Then my sister-in-law came on the line and she told me that Ariyawansa was so upset about not hearing from me that he had thought I had died or given up on the family and he had tried to kill himself. Friends helped him through that time but he became an alcoholic and developed heart trouble. I was so disgusted with life and angry with my boss for not posting my letters. I left the place and managed to go to Saudi Arabia. This too was a very bad place. They didn't give us food and no communication was allowed. Finally I went through the Saudi "open camp" for migrant workers and came back home.* Chandraleka is the President of the Migrant Worker Association in her village.

#### **f) Separation from Family and Lack of Communication**

Lack of communication between the migrant worker and the family back home has several dimensions. Migrant workers spoke of not having been allowed to have any contact with their families at home, while their families spoke of not having had any contact with the migrant worker due to reasons unknown to them.

*"I used to write regularly to my husband and children and was wondering why I never heard from them. Then months later I got to know that my husband was very*

*sick due to drinking heavily and he was trying to kill himself because he hadn't heard from me. I was very upset. So I shouted at the master of the house asking him what happened to all the letters that I gave him to post. He had forgotten or thrown them away."*- FGD Hingunara, Ampara

In recognition of the importance of communication and family ties the MFEPW has addressed this issue by its recent decision to provide all departing migrants with a SIM card for their mobile phones. In addition these are SIM cards that can be locally recharged. This is in response to the complaints by in-service migrants that they are unable to go out to recharge their phones and to maintain contact with families. This is an example of one issue which caused great distress being creatively and effectively managed with a single decision that provided a means to enhance communication reduce distress and protect family ties and relationships. Mr. Nissanka N. Wijeratne Secretary MFEPW provided this information to the research team at a review of this report, July 2012)

Leelawathi's story below shows more areas in which contractual agreements on terms and conditions of workers can significantly impinge on their health and welling. Leelawathi and other members of a FGD in Ampara spoke about instances where they were not allowed to go home even when a family member was seriously sick.

**Box – 09**

Leelawathi says she got a good home and was working well. They liked her so much because she spoke Arabic and looked after the children well. But when she wanted to come home they didn't let her come. Her husband fell ill and she asked to come home but they did not let her go. She became very upset and angry and demanded to go back, but still they were delaying letting her go. Finally her husband died. Leelawathi was so upset she said she would kill herself. Then they got her a ticket and sent her home. By the time she came home the rituals were finished. She feels she worked all that long and even built a house but she wasn't able to do the most important thing. She felt hopeless was distressed. She felt she had done so much for other children and another family but had lost her own. Her children too had found their own lives so she went back on a different contract. But she was unable to work and unhappy. She returned shortly after and is now back in Sri Lanka looking after her grand children - FGD Hingurana, Ampara

This is an example of how diverse the migration experience can be and how most often it involves positive gains and losses at the same time. Leelawathi clearly was having a good experience with good employers and had also saved and built a house. She had probably achieved what she went out to achieve but by a very sad twist of fate she lost her husband before she could get to him in his illness and it appears she had also missed out on the lives of her children. Economic progress for Leelawathi did not bring satisfaction and wellbeing.

**g) Emotional and Sexual Vulnerability of Women Migrants**

Some migrant returnees' spoke openly of the 'bad reputation' female domestic workers from Sri Lanka had earned in certain countries.

*"Sometimes people work in places that are just like a jail. They can't come out or be free, they can only speak through the windows so sometimes when they get a chance to be free they just go crazy and use that chance to get involved with men and then they get into difficulties. There is no one for them to speak to or to advise them. Some of them are very young when they come so bad people lure them or they can't cope with all the difficulties. We have lived through those stages and we can now manage our lives but we feel sad when seeing so many young women "going astray" and getting their lives messed up."* - FGD Dewata, Galle.

Members of another FGD in Galle said:

*"There is no freedom for men and women to be together. The laws are very strict about being with a man who is not your husband. I don't know how they managed to get pregnant so those who get pregnant must be doing it in toilets. It is such a risk there as they will kill you if they find out you have been with a person who you are not married to. Some of our young girls come over and they don't realise these*

*things. Some of them do realise but they are lonely and don't think far. Many Sri Lankan women have alliances with Bangladeshi or Indian men in spite of the very strict laws." - FGD Koggala.*

#### **Box – 10**

Anoja is a woman of 27 years and she is married to Sujith who was supportive of her going to Saudi Arabia. They live in a housing scheme north of Colombo among many other migrant families. Anoja left to Saudi Arabia wanting to earn for their house and to ease the burden on Sujith. He only agreed to her going because she was to go through a known party to work for a Sri Lankan Sinhalese man and his Muslim wife who are residents and does business there.

Anoja starts speaking to us, but breaks down even before she can say her second sentence. She is a tall slender woman with a fair complexion. It is now 5 months since she returned. She cries as if the experience had just happened. We acknowledge her difficulty to speak and give her a choice of whether to continue or not and allow for time. She composes herself and seems determined to speak. *"Because we knew them and he was Sri Lankan I felt safe and confident to go. Sujith didn't like it from the start but he didn't stop me. I just wanted to go for a year or two and get some extra money for our house so all the burden wouldn't be on him. When I got there, things were very different than I had expected. He was a terrible man. They took my phone away. They didn't allow me any calls home. I was very distressed. They scolded me almost all the time. They spoke to me in very bad Sinhala language if I ever asked for anything or wanted anything. I was not able to eat or sleep. I can't bear to think of it..."* She breaks down again and is unable to continue.

Anoja is a member of the Local Migrant Worker Association. The befriender of the association is also present, as she has been supporting Anoja. The befriender speaks about her. She came home and was so distressed that at first she didn't even speak. She didn't tell us what happened. She would not even tell her husband. Anoja comes in at this point. *"He wasn't happy with my going. He was so angry when I came back like this. I was not able to talk to him and I didn't even want to be with him. But he has been patient with me. I can't bear to think about it now..."*

Anoja's level of distress and what details she has managed to tell us are not compatible. We realise there is more to her bitter experience than she can bear to share with us. But she came back 7 months after a very difficult time. The other members of the association say she still hasn't become the same Anoja she has been.

Some returning migrant workers say they have heard of many Sri Lankan migrant women who are touted for sexual services by their agency and being taken to brothels. Members of the Koggala FGD spoke of the way women are brought in to the sex industry ostensibly without their knowing it, by agents. Trafficking for prostitution is another issue returnee workers spoke about.

*"There are brothels in which women from Sri Lanka work. Some of them do not know that they are being brought to a brothel. Some of them have no other way as they may have escaped from a difficult home or may have got into trouble with the law... so when they are brought to a brothel even if they don't like it some of them think there's no option. Some women escape and go to the police. The police help but sometimes the police are also involved. In one reported case, the owner gives tea with milk and sugar to the girls every night and there's something in the tea that makes them forget everything." - FGD Koggala, Galle*

This is demonstrated in the second of the stories told us by Daisy Nona below:

#### **Box – 11**

Daisy Nona is 58 and a migrant returnee who has spent a total of 5 years away. She has had a good migration experience and returned to her own home. She has given her daughter in marriage and is now a happy grandmother. Daisy, however, speaks of some of her experiences in Saudi Arabia with still fresh horror. Daisy is very proud that she was able to "rescue" two Sri Lankan girls from difficult circumstances in her time away. She tells us her story.

*"I was lucky and blessed to have a good home to work in. While I was there I used to see a woman in the next building. She was at the kitchen window daily looking down. I knew she was a Sri Lankan*

*and I learnt her name was Nelun, and I tried to speak to her. She cried when I spoke to her. She told me "they won't let me out they won't let me speak home and the lady slaps me all the time. They don't give me to eat much as well. I want to go home." I felt so bad for Nelun and helpless. I used to put some food in a bag and tie it to the garbage bag of her house when I went to put our garbage out, so she will take it. One day I heard someone running up the stairs shouting "Daisy Akka, Daisy Akka to our house and the bell rang and when I opened it was Nelun. She was bleeding. She had a cut on her hand. She said the lady of the house had hit her. I called my madam immediately. She is a good lady. So she asked her to wait with us till we called the Police. She was kind to her.*

In the mean time I called the Sri Lankan Embassy and told them about her and asked them to come immediately and rescue her. I also got help to call her family and she spoke to them. She was taken to the Embassy and then after some time she was sent back. She still writes to me thanking me.

Daisy's second story is about another Sri Lankan girl who she met in the Embassy when she went to visit Nelun. *"Nelun had to wait 3 weeks for her papers to be made to go home. During that time, my madam let me visit her. When I went to visit, I was shocked at the state of many of the other women I saw there. They lived in impossible conditions. I can't bear to think about it even now because I feel bad that I am here happy and safe and who knows may be some of them are still in that hell. But I console myself that I was at least able to get Nelun out and also one other girl I spoke to who was there.*

She was Jameela from Puttlam. She was a Muslim woman and had come to work in a Muslim house. But when she reached here she was taken to different houses and ended up in one, which was run by another Sri Lankan woman of the same community. The woman running this house spoke Sinhala. There were many girls there. Jameela told me that the girls were all very silent and some were scared. They didn't tell her much. In the evenings some of them were called and sent away in cars. They came back in the mornings. Jameela thinks they were given something to drink, which made them forget what happened to them. She was very scared. She realized she would also be expected to provide sexual services like the other girls. She began to cry as she told me how she ran away, without even her passport or clothes, jumping from over a gate and injuring her leg.

She was taken to the Police by someone who saw her running and limping on the road and then brought to the Embassy. But they were not successful in tracing her agents nor her employer and she did not have any money to go back home. She was also not able to contact her home as she had run away leaving her numbers and papers behind. She was desperate and said she felt like killing herself. She had been stuck in the Embassy for 7 months and had lost hope.

I told her we would find her home folks and call them. She gave me some addresses and together with another Sri Lankan friend we managed to trace her home and called them. We told them to get some help to get her home. She began to have hope. Soon we heard that her family had contacted the Bureau and managed to get her back.

Daisy says: I couldn't sleep for days after my visit to see Nelun and having heard the story of Jameela. I knew there were hundreds more young girls who could have been my daughters with terrible experiences. I only console myself because I was able to help two of them.

Many speak of grossly abusive, demeaning and disrespectful treatment at the hands of agents in the destination countries.

*"The agencies have a sort of "sale "of us women. They keep us all there in a room and have a day when people can come and pick us and bid for us and bargain. The older and more experienced you are the higher your price. They hit us if we don't smile and talk properly. They threaten us. The beautiful ones and those who smile nicely and talk well bring in more money. It's like we are cattle, how can our country allow this to happen to us? We did not come here expecting to be sold and treated like this. We came to work decently because we have families to feed at home"*  
FGD, Dewata, Galle

### **h) The Embassy Shelters**

Migrant workers reported that Embassies do not always seem to know how to help them. There were instances when migrant workers felt that both the agency staff and even the embassy staff seemed to take the side of the employers. It has not been possible to verify these claims with the embassies; however, this was a recurring theme among the FDGs and personal stories of the migrant returnees. Though it is difficult to generalize from the anecdotal evidence coming from a few respondents, this is an issue that deserves some attention.

Some spoke of embassies and said:

*“The situation in the embassy is like hell. I (a participant) found about 25 pregnant mothers, 3 with children and many with broken limbs. I stayed together with 475 girls and women. There was no room to sleep or eat; we had to sleep bent in to each other. Everyone was living in fear and shock because two women had died and there were rumours about their ghosts. The girl who died was also pregnant and had killed herself by cutting her stomach open. Her sister who was also there saw this and also killed herself by hanging. The event and stories of these girls frightened us. Many women go crazy in there. They scream at night and abuse each other. Most can’t leave because there is no money to get a ticket.”- FGD, Dewata, Galle*

*“In host countries the embassy helps us some times. But it depends on who is on duty and whether or not you are lucky to get a kind and good officer. Sometimes they also scold us as if we were criminals”. FGD Hingurana, Ampara*

The story of Daisy also alluded to these same conditions when she reported what she saw in the embassy: *“When I went to visit, I was shocked at the state of many of the other women I saw there. They lived in impossible conditions. I can’t bear to think about it even now because I feel bad that I am here happy and safe and who knows may be some of them are still in that hell”* (Box 11).

### **i) Social Isolation**

In addition to being away from home, migrant women workers were often confined to a household with little or no contact with the outside world. With no opportunity to meet and engage socially especially with people from their own home country, workers were unable to form useful and supportive networks for themselves, with which they might have overcome the inevitable homesickness and impact of the separation from families. For a migrant worker who is unaccustomed to the new culture and way of life and who has never been away from home, the ability to express oneself freely in one’s own language, to be affirmed and supported by those of one’s culture who also share similar experiences is a very potent source of support. This would help the migrants to integrate faster and more successfully. Denying migrant workers these useful linkages and freedom can stifle them and heighten loneliness and isolation. These in turn can negatively impact on the quality of life and of the service the migrant provides.

It is understood that employers in host countries often deny Sri Lankan workers the freedom to engage socially because they foresee distractions and other complications which do also take place. However, the benefits of social engagement need to be considered and formal opportunities created within professional boundaries to provide for safe and beneficial engagement.

Sending regular financial support back to the family appears to be just as important for the family as regular contact with the migrant worker. There was tremendous stress experienced by families at home, especially by caregivers when the regular income that they were used to, stopped.

Another issue that emerged was the safe transfer of finances and the responsible usage of hard earned foreign exchange. The failure to send money to a responsible person who was able to manage the money properly was also one of the problems that migrant workers faced. Most of the married migrant workers especially women sent their money to their husbands, some of who were alcohol abusers. They most often spend this money on alcohol, other substances and food.



**Box – 12**

Maryamma is the primary caregiver to her migrant daughter's children. Speaking of her daughter Maryamma said:

*"For the past 3 months she has stopped sending money. She has also not contacted as often. She used to call every day but in the past 16 days she has dropped out of contact and there is no news from her at all".*

Maryamma and the children have been in great distress. They have been waiting every day for news of her daughter/their mother but not heard anything. There is no income any more to feed the children. Maryamma feels desperate and feels she has been abandoned for the second time with dependent children on her hands. She is worried for the wellbeing of her daughter, wondering if anything has happened to her. But her anxieties about her daughter are overshadowed by her anxiety about how she is to care for the children. She is visibly upset and angry that she is once again financially destitute.

The children have become increasingly distressed. They have been refusing to go to school lately for fear that they will miss their mothers call. Maryamma says she has had to scold them and threaten them to get them to go to school. Twice during the interview the phone rings in the kitchen. The elder girl leaps up and runs to the kitchen when the phone rings and grabs it. Maryamma holds her head in her hands and sighs

The impact on children when there is no communication with the parents (primarily the mother) is acutely visible. Caregivers spoke of children falling ill when there was no regular contact with the family. Zainab Umma, a 47-year-old mother of 3 children and a member of the FGD in Sainthumaruthu said:

*"I left my three children with my sisters and mother and left. The youngest was 5. My family kept calling me from the first week on saying that the youngest would not stop crying. They said she had not stopped crying for days and was not eating and sleeping. I thought she will be alright in a few days, but they kept calling me saying my youngest would not stop crying. I had to come back home after just 2 months"*

The story of Neluka (Box 4) also demonstrated how a migrant mother had to return on the medical advice of doctors, who diagnosed her infant daughter as clinically depressed due to her absence.

Other respondents and FGD members when referring to children left behind spoke of two things which made caring for remaining children difficult. They were the child's difficult behaviour after the parent left and the child's frequent illness.

For some spouses and children regular contact may not mean reassurance. Some workers placed undue burden on children: *"He sometimes speaks to us on the phone and tells us to look after our mother. We have to do a lot of work in the house and for ourselves unlike children who have both parents"* sons of Naima Jannath whose husband is away aged 14 and 19 (Box 18).

Others placed undue burden on spouses. Raziya for example described it as follows:

*"My husband was not paid for the first two months. I had to pay back the loans and people were beginning to scold me. Every day I would say to them, please give me a few more days the money will come, my husband has already gone, he will send me money, I will pay you back. I can't tell my husband all these problems because he is having his own difficulties. He says he has 10 hours work a day of heavy labour. He is finding it very difficult. Everything he sends home is spent on the day-to-day expenses. He earns about 20'000 and I find it impossible to save any money. So if he comes back home prematurely because of his difficulties, we will not be able to pay off the debts and not be able to live..."*

Razia and her husband have regular communication though he seemed unaware of what she had to face: *"He calls every day. He tells me all his problems, but I don't tell him mine. He speaks to the children sometimes but sometimes he doesn't because it makes him very sad and upset, because he cannot give them what they want."*

The case of Dayawathi (Box 13) is a sad demonstration of how it is possible for migration to improve the financial situation while also depleting and eroding personal relationships. Dayawathi did not refer to her husband in much of her story. She relentlessly pursued her desire to get her own home and in fact she even bought land and built a house for each of her three sons. But ironically she had a strained relationship with them.

#### **Box – 13**

Dayawathi first left to Saudi Arabia when her sons were 5, 7 and 10 years old. At the time her husband was a labourer and they lived in a rented room. She worked intermittently on 2 and 3 year contracts for over 8 years, coming and going periodically. Currently she looks after her grand children for her two married sons while also negotiating a marriage for her youngest son and finishing up a 3<sup>rd</sup> house she has built for him. She has built 4 houses in total from her earnings as a migrant worker. Dayawathi is a member of the local Migrant Worker Association and is regarded as successful and active member who helps and advises other prospective migrants.

*"I left my children with my husband's sister and his mother. I used to pack my bag and leave without looking back because they cried initially. I used to tell my husband to take them away to the town when I had to leave. There were no phones at that time so we couldn't talk much. I used to come back when the contracts ended and I used to go again. As they grew older my sons didn't come to me when I came home. Sometimes the second son hid away when I came. They took the toys and played but they were not close to me anymore. I used to cry a lot even then. But I didn't know what to do.*

*When they grew older and when I came back they never paid any attention to me. I started to build houses for them and gave them in marriage well. But especially my second son was always in a rage, he never could speak without shouting and fighting. I cannot understand why. He has been married now for some years and lives behind our house. His wife often comes running to our house because he fights with her. Sometimes I wonder what happened to him, and if he is even unable to stay married because I left him.*

*I went because of them. I earned and saved and now I am spending all I have on them. Now I am building the 4<sup>th</sup> house and each of them have a house. The last one's wedding is to be held soon. But I can't understand why my sons are so distant and angry all the time, especially the second one. The third one was refusing to get married. He is now 30 and I finished building his house before I made a place for us but he still didn't want to get married. Finally he agreed 3 months ago. I have done everything for them what more can I do..?" Dayawathi cries...*

### **3.3 Psychosocial Issues of Families Left Behind**

It is undoubted that labour migration can have a profoundly debilitating impact on children and families left behind. This is largely due to the lack of proper planning for the sustained, holistic and effective care of the child and the lack of emotional and intellectual preparation of the child. As was described above the child may find it hard to understand the departure of the parent. In addition the child is potentially vulnerable due to issues such as the lack of regular and meaningful communication, the impact of the absence of the migrating parent and a plethora of abuses which the child can become exposed to. The child is now merely being supervised by a guardian who is often neither very skilled nor motivated to do so.

Some children like the two brothers Imtiaz and Nawaz also experience the loss or abandonment of both parents. They are the nephews of Razia we have met in Box 2.

#### **Box - 14**

Imtiaz and Nawaz have been abandoned by both parents at a very early age and have grown up virtually by themselves with some limited support from an over burdened and mostly unwilling aunt Razia (Box 2). Imtiaz is 20 years old and the younger brother of Nawaz who is 21. The house they live in belonged to their mother but has now been mortgaged to the bank. They have grown up since they were small with their grandparents and aunt Razia. They have not known their father. Imtiaz is the more willing of the two young men to engage in conversation.

He speaks to us but is visibly upset by the subject of discussion and unsure but still seems like he wants to talk.

*"Our mother has been away for 4 years this time says Imtiaz, referring to the current period of his mother's departure. We have not heard from her. Even before that she left us when we were small. She has now been away for almost 8 years. We have never wanted her to go and even now would like her to come back. But we don't know where she is and no one seems to know".*

Nawaz cuts into the conversation.

*"There is no one for us. She left us alone. She never looked after us. Even when she was here, she didn't listen to what we said. When she left she didn't even tell us she was going. Even after leaving she didn't speak to us for 3 months. Then she sent 50,000. After that, she never spoke again." Imtiaz says: "I think that is the reason our grandfather died"*

Both boys look very angry and very upset. Imtiaz looks like he might cry. He is shaky and sighs deeply. Nawaz is more angry than upset. He too is shaky but it seems more with rage. He repeats himself *"There is no one for us. I have to do everything for myself. Our aunt does not even feed us. She has told us "if you bring something I will make it for you, if you don't, I don't have anything to give you. I am alone. There's no one for me."* We ask them how they feel about both being in the same situation and if they helped each other. They seem uncomfortable and do not seem to have a sense of belonging or of closeness. .

Imtiaz has found himself a job as a labourer on a construction site. He has to carry cement. *"I have been doing this job but have stopped recently because I am sick. I have chest problems"* He is slim and tall but looks weak for his age. *"I don't think I can work because I am sick"*. He says and looks very beaten down. He has been to school up to grade 6. Nawaz is wearing a very striking shirt which he has tucked in and wears a belt as well. He looks smart and active, moves fast and is articulate, but is very angry. He seems to resent even speaking about his mother. He is terse with the interviewers *"You will come and speak and go today. I have to live my life tomorrow. Can you bring my mother back? What do you know of the situation we are in? No one can help me. There is no one for me"*.

Nawaz has been to school up to grade 10 but didn't sit the O/Ls. Although he can read and write he has a labourer job. He says *"I tried to find my mother. I went to the agency and tried to get some information. But the agent says he does not know anything about where my mother is. I even threatened to take him to the police or file a case. But he didn't care at all. I have no one to help me. We had a fridge; one day a lady came and said my aunt owed her money and she just took the fridge away. Nawaz is almost shaking with anger. He looks at a very large TV that is on the side board. It is covered with dust and is too large for the small room. "One of these days we will lose this as well I guess"*

*"Our mother has mortgaged this house to the bank. It has to be redeemed. One time my aunt pawned the deeds of this house for 100,000 and another time my mother got 25'000 for herself and 25'000 for another lady by mortgaging this house. Now we have to redeem this house. I started paying Sampath Bank 15'000 a month to redeem this house. Now I can't find enough money to do that. The bank manager is also looking for me".*

When asked what they would like to do in their futures if they had the opportunity both said they wanted to go abroad. Nawaz says *"I want to go and earn and spend"*. We ask him about saving for his future. *"Why save?"* he says *"For whom? I have no one. I don't have any desire at all to save for the future, not even to marry. Even if I fall there is no one there for me. Right from my birth I have not got any love why would I want to live and develop myself? Anyway my problems are my problems. There is no one for me. I didn't create these problems, they were given to me"*

Abandonment by both parents as experienced by Imtiaz and Nawaz in the East was mirrored by the experience of Palitha on the West coast in Puttalam; his parents also left him and started lives of their own overseas.

#### **Box - 15**

Palitha is a 16-year-old boy from Puttalam and has studied up to year 9 and dropped out. He is currently living with his 60-year-old grandparents and 12-year-old younger brother. Palitha's parents are both in Italy. While his mother has been in Italy for 2 years, his father has been there for 8 years. At the beginning, the father had financially supported them, but, he had not helped them since 2008 and he is believed to be having another marriage over in Italy.

Palitha's mother has been staying with her brother. Gradually, Palitha's behaviour has changed. After he came to know that his father had another marriage and even has a child by this marriage he became violent not only at home but also towards his father's parents. Palitha completely refused to go school and stopped listening to anyone. His grandparents are very worried. Recently, he had gone to a garment factory to work but after two months, he stopped it and started to loiter. Now, he is influencing his mother to take him to Italy too.

Palitha also explains how he feels about his parents' *"Now, I feel loneliness and worry. I like to live with father and mother. When my father did fishing, we were all happy. After he went to Italy, we lost everything. If father was here doing fishing, we would never have these problems"*.

### **a) Migrating Fathers**

Though in a majority of Sri Lankan families the mother is the primary caregiver and plays a stronger role in raising the child and providing the emotional, educational support and nurture, the role of the father is significant. The impact of an extended absence of father and husband is not studied extensively but data from the field speaks of negative impacts on children and wives. It is evident in many households where the father/husband was the migrant that the mother and children experienced specific difficulties. Muslim households in eastern Sri Lanka advocated for sending males rather than females for labour migration:

*"We don't send our women now. This is a new change. We have realized that this is not good for the family. The mosque also says not to send the women. More men are going now. They can manage the difficulties and the children don't suffer as much. We think it is better for unmarried young men to go and come back. We don't want to send our women any more."* - A village leader in the FGD Kalmunai, Sainthamaruthu.

The children seemed to have a continued sense of general emotional wellbeing and stability as their mother continued her role as primary caregiver. However, there were times when she became easily overburdened due to the absence of her husband and with no one else to share the load and this additional stress affected the way she managed and dealt with the children.

*"I don't go out much now. I never go to family functions without him. It is strange to go without the children's father. Others might think bad things of me. When I need something I call my brother and they come and do whatever has to be done. My father buys the things for the house. I can manage, but sometimes the children are so unruly they don't listen to me at all, now unlike earlier. I can't tell anyone else to check the children. I don't want them to become a nuisance to anyone. He speaks over the phone to them, but they forget, they are small. I can't help screaming at them."* - Female Member Sainthamaruthu FGD.

Children whose fathers were away sometimes lacked a firm disciplinary hand, and the mother tended to be more lax in discipline either because she tried to compensate for her children not having their father around or because she was overburdened and did not have the energy to be as firm as she would have been, if he was there to share the burden of child rearing. The biggest impact seemed to be that the child felt that he/she was different from other children because he/she lacked a father. The village and community tended to look at and speak about a woman whose husband was away and her children in a particularly negative manner. In some cases such societal pressure affected the children more than the actual absence of the father.

In some homes where the father had played a strong role, interacting regularly with his children, encouraging their school activities, advising, guiding, playing, speaking with them warmly and teaching them, the absence of the father was felt much more keenly and children suffered emotionally.

**Box - 16**

Naima Jannath is 45, married with two sons who are 14 and 19. Her husband has been away in Riyadh for the past 7 years.

*"It was impossible for us to pay our loans and live. So he and I discussed and he decided to leave. It has been more difficult than I can say. I had to raise these boys by myself, as if I was a widow. I had to be so very careful about what happens to them all the time as they don't have a father who can speak to them and advise them".*

Naima's elder son has gone out to work selling the mats she weaves. Her younger son Naufer is at home with her. Naufer says: *"It was very difficult for us when he first left because we had not been separated from him at all. I felt very sad but now am used to it. Other children looked at us differently, as if something was wrong with us. They all had their parents and we had only our mother. We always compared ourselves to other children. Their fathers come back home in the evening and they can be with their fathers, ours does not come back home. Sometimes he speaks over the phone, he tells us to look after our mother. We had to do a lot of work in the house and for ourselves unlike children who have both parents. Sometimes it seems nice when we get things like T-shirts and pens and food. But we always feel something is wrong something is missing. I can never agree to any mother or father going away and leaving their children. My brother also says this. I know we need the money but I would like him to be here with us.*

**b) Special Vulnerabilities of Wives**

In some instances wives become the target of criticism, marginalization and vicious gossip and exploitation among villagers when the husband is away.

One female member of an FGD spoke to us alone on condition she would not be identified. She shared her anxious secret about the powerful males in the community who tried to take advantage of her being single and economically vulnerable.

*"I know they speak badly about me even when I go to the shops. There is nothing I can do about it I only hope my husband doesn't get to know and think there is any truth to it. I have been finding it very hard. The elections were coming and there was this candidate who came house to house asking for our votes. They came with a gang of men. They asked who else lives here and they got to know my husband was away. Then he asked me if I had any problems and what he could do to help me. I thought he was being helpful so I said the electricity had been cut for a week since I was unable to pay the bill. The children could not even study properly. So I said my husband's money was delayed and I couldn't pay the bills. He said that he would get that fixed. Then he gave me his card and asked me to call him whenever I wanted. I got the electricity back the next day. But with it he started calling me and asking if he could come to my house in the evenings. I knew what he wanted so I kept making excuses saying the children were around. He then started sending people to speak to me and ask me to see him. I became afraid. They scolded me for refusing him. They even threatened me. They would call me at night and use filthy language. He is a powerful man and I am so afraid, I don't know what to do. I am only praying my husband will not get to know about this, he is out there earning for us."*

Others share stories of people encroaching on the land of some single mothers with property.

K. Vijeyalakshmi from Kalmunai: *"We lived happily with our neighbours all these years. The moment he left they started messing with the fence, cutting branches into our land and putting their dirt on our side. I think they just want to pick a fight. They are trying to push back our fence knowing he isn't here."*

When their husbands are away, women found it difficult to go out alone without male accompaniment by father or brother. Two female respondents in the eastern province, one in the western province and an FGD also in the eastern province, mentioned the difficulty of having to raise children alone, answering the numerous questions children asked about their father. They also mentioned being targeted much more often when husbands are away. They faced increased vulnerability to sexual

harassment, gossip, threats and even cheating. Wives left behind also spoke of the burden to repay loans taken by the husbands to fund the trip abroad, made especially difficult in instances where remittances were delayed or never came.

### **c) Special Vulnerabilities of Husbands**

Discussions with members of the FGD in Gampaha, Ranpokunugama highlighted their concerns on the impact of a wife's migration on her husband. They were particularly thoughtful about husbands becoming dependant on the wives' income and perceiving to have lost his role within the family as the provider and perhaps protector. Members recall examples of such husbands who drained the family of the new resources and prevented the growth and development the wife tried to achieve with her migration.

*"We know of some who just stopped working after their wives went and stayed at home eating off her earnings" (FGD Ranpokunugama).*

This dependence sometimes reduced the self worth and esteem of the husband who was likely to withdraw from even the family duties which he was capable of doing and which the family needed him to continue to perform. It was very likely then that the husband left behind unless ready to play a complementary role would become a financial and social burden to the family.

There were also examples of families that managed to negotiate the decision to migrate in a far more positive and healthy manner. Some migrants discussed their needs and options together, made the decision together, planned who would take on which part of the responsibilities and also how they would maintain contact. This made spouses feel equally a part of the decision and therefore equally responsible for managing the outcomes. These spouses were able to take on the changes in their roles and responsibilities and to manage the children and the new money that came in wisely.

#### **Box – 17**

Kusum is 56 and a migrant returnee who has been intermittently away between the years 1998-2011. She is an office bearer of the Migrant Worker Association of her village and an active member of a project for the development of migrant worker's lives. Reginald her husband is self employed as a real estate agent and has taken care of the house. They have two children now aged 22 and 19. *"I have been very blessed to have a husband like Reginald. He was always very supportive of me and we always discussed our discussions and problems together. I never felt alone in it. Even after I went he always went to the shop and called me weekly even if I didn't call. He would advise me when I was upset about anything and it was he who built the house with the money I sent and made sure the children were ok, though his mother also came to live in our house to help with them. I feel sad when I see how other families like ours break up so often unnecessarily, and am so grateful we managed. I was able to turn to him even with my problems with the employers. I don't know what I would have done in some instances if I couldn't have spoken with him"*

### **d) Marital Issues between Migrants and their Spouses**

Field data indicated many instances of broken marriages due to the infidelity of one or the other spouse. Classically a husband waited for his wife's return but his wife kept postponing return and sending less and less money home resulting in a tremendous strain on the relationship, until he finally realized that she was no longer committed to the marriage and that she would not return to him. The same was true of wives who waited interminably for the return of husbands who found the distance and loneliness too much to take and started new relationships in the destination country. In most of these cases, the straying spouse never really told the truth and asked to be released from the relationship, but instead kept the remaining spouse hoping and waiting for years. Many of them simply severed ties with husband and children/wife and children, and also with people in the home community. Some of these workers never returned home while their children and families awaited their return hopefully for years. The reasons for this are complex. Inability to cope with changes and to sustain relationships over time and distance, often lead to the fragmentation of families, the very families migrant workers went overseas to sustain.

*“Sometimes migrant workers both women and men who go abroad stay away for long periods and they are tempted to start families there as well because they are lonely. Then everyone gets in a mess. Men are more prone to this because they have the freedom and they feel very alone. Women have to stay inside anyway. Their families in Sri Lanka are helpless” - FGD Sammanthurai.*

**Box – 18**

Thiyagarajah is the 47 year old husband of a migrant worker. His wife originally went for 2 years but has been refusing to return and has been away for 6 years. He lives in Hatton-Binnoya.

Thiyagarajah is a security guard of a popular tea estate. He is well spoken, clean and smartly dressed and is looked up to in the community as a responsible and reliable man. He lives with his two teenage sons who he has been raising alone over the past 6 years since his wife Ruby Malar left for work to Dubai. Thiyagarajah and Ruby had discussed the move and agreed that she would go to save up for their son's education and for the house they had started to construct. Thiyagarajah agreed to look after the boys himself and even got a transfer to a nearby estate so he can spend more time looking after their boys. *“I wake up at 4 am and cook our food and feed the boys. Then I get them ready for school and take them to the road before I leave to work. They wait after school for me at their aunts and I pick them up on my way back from work. Then we do things together, they also help me with the chickens and the household work. We had decided that their education was the most important thing. That is why she left. But after two years passed, she said she had got a really good home and she would like to stay a bit longer and collect more money. She said she was doing it so I don't have to work so hard. So I let her. Then another two years passed. She was not calling as often as before. She told me everything was fine and that she didn't want to waste money on phone calls as every little should be saved. After 4 years I told her again that she should now come home. I told her I had managed to do most of the work in the house with the money she sent and that the boys were getting big and needed more care. I didn't like leaving them alone all day after school as they were now getting to be young men. She said she will come after the Eid break (Muslim festival) then she said she will come after New Year, and then she said tickets were expensive and she will wait for the off season. In the mean time, my own brother died. I am very close to him. I was finding it difficult to look after the boys. I also found it more and more difficult to go to work. Now I have told her she really has to come back. I don't know when. She hasn't yet given me a word”.*

Thiyagarajah is a member of the Migrant Worker Association. He is accompanied by the befriender of the association. The befriender who knows Thiyagarajah for many years is seen looking solemn and shaking her head slowly while listening to Thiyagarajah. Later she seeks private time to add a post script to his story. She tells us: *“we don't know how to tell Thiyagarajah this. It is very sad. We have known for some time that his wife has started another relationship with a Sri Lankan man in Dubai. She sends money for her sons, but what we have been told is that she has no intention of coming back home or to him. We are wondering how to tell him. He doesn't know...”*

At times, due to loneliness, some spouses formed alliances at home that challenged social norms and practices. Sivanesan looked after his own children as well as those of his wife's sister and thus encouraged his wife to stay on in employment and to send money home.

**Box - 19**

Sivanesan (48) is a shop owner and lives on an estate. He has relationships with two women (sisters) at the same time and says that he is 'married' to both which is not a common practice given his ethnicity and religion. One woman is working in Saudi Arabia while the other lives with him. He has 5 children from both women. He lives in Hatton-Dickoya.

Sivanesan takes us into his tea kiosk and behind it to his house. *“I bought this shop and now I run it from my home”* he says proudly. His home is different from the other houses in the colony of plantation line room homes. His is painted and sports cement walls and a floor. We pass many children and see a woman too in the back room hastily getting us plastic chairs from the neighbour's house. We greet them all but the woman is reluctant to come forward to speak.

*“She can't speak much”* explains Sivanesan. *“I will answer your questions she doesn't know Sinhala anyway”*. We assure him it will be possible for her to speak in Tamil and she doesn't need to speak in Sinhala but Sivanesan is clearly uncomfortable about us speaking to this lady in the back room. So we engage with the children.

There are 5 of them. They say they all live in this house. They say they are all brothers and sisters, this is their Appa. He has a shop and the older ones help him with the shop. And where is Amma..? Some of the children say Amma went to Kuwait. She won't come for some more time. Some say Amma is at the back making some tea for us now. The lady in the back room surfaces with a tray of tea cups. *"Your house is so well looked after"* we try, *"this is a great picture, who is it? That's my sister. She is in Kuwait"* she says before vanishing again in to the back room.

**e) Elderly caregivers of children left behind**

Maryamma, T. Margaret, and Wijeyalakshmi are all grandmothers between the ages of 55 and 70. They are members of the FGD in Hatton who gathered to talk about issues faced by migrants and their families.

Margaret gets up to leave almost at the start of our discussion. *"I said I can only stay for 10 minutes. The children are at my sister's and she can't control them. I need to go quickly"* We ask her to speak first, about her experience as a mother of a migrant. *"My daughter has left the children and gone. Life is hard. She has gone to earn for all of us. I have to help her. These children are not like our children. They do not listen to anyone or anything. The youngest one broke his teeth yesterday and it's still bleeding. I don't know what they will do at any moment. I must go"* Others comment in agreement and sympathy as she leaves prematurely. One member of the group waits till she leaves and adds, *"yes those children are naughty, yesterday I saw Margaret amma chasing them down the road with a stick"* and every one laughs.

In a group in Ranpokunugama Somawathi mentions a similar sentiment.

*"I have this pain in my knee for over a month. There is no time to get it attended to. I have wanted to go to the native doctor but I have no time for myself at all. Even to go to the temple or to see any one. I wake up with the children in my mind and the whole day it's their needs. My son is in Kuwait and his wife is in Colombo working in a factory. They send me money but I don't even have time to spend it. They also have no time even to call and ask about the children. The children ask for their parents I don't know what to say sometimes. I wonder sometimes if they will ever come home. I worry that I will become sick. Then what will happen to the children?"*

There are situations where both grandmother and grandchild are in need of care. Grandparents find it difficult to care for children physically, as well as in ensuring their mental and spiritual wellbeing. Many such caregivers complain that adolescent children do not listen to them, their advice or instructions, and 'do as they wish'. This is especially so in boys. On the other hand, grandparents lose their freedom and time for leisure and rest in their old age and have to limit time and energy spent on spiritual activities.

Elderly caregivers complain of feeling helpless and overwhelmed. They also complain of not having the energy or strength to *"run behind their grandchildren"*. They say that the children are naughtier than the children whose parents are present and are difficult to discipline. *"I don't have time to sleep or do the things I want"*

Yet, all this is said not grudgingly but as if there were no other options and they were duty bound to help their children earn a better living so that the next generation will be better off than they have been.

There are no formal external support systems to help the children of migrant workers or their caregivers. Families of migrant workers as well as returnee workers are critical of the support provided by schools for children. They speak of the isolation faced by children in school where there are no special programmes to address specific issues faced by children of absent parents. Available counselling services are described as reactive, offering services only to those who come to them and not proactive, as needed by children of migrant workers who themselves often do not understand the traumas they are faced with.



### 3.4 Psychosocial issues at the Return and Reintegration Stage

Return to the homeland, whether it is after a successful or an unsuccessful stint of working in a foreign land entails diverse psychosocial implications. Many migrant workers slip back into their old lives and manage the changes well, while for some coping with the changes is difficult.

#### a) *Changes in Status and Power Dynamics in Returnees' Families*

The experience of leaving one's country and its familiar secure boundaries, and learning to fend for oneself, making independent decisions, managing stressful situations and growing in confidence is a real and common positive experience for many migrant workers, both male and female. Many migrant workers return stronger individuals both for their personality development as for their economic growth and financial power. This can result in changes in status and power dynamics within the families they left some times affecting the smooth reintegration into the family.

Those who are stronger in character and better trained or prepared, thrive when they leave and become capable of managing their own lives and finances. The newfound power to make decisions and the financial freedom and new authority induced a sense of self worth and independence. Many workers, especially women, had not experienced this before; having lived sheltered lives under the authority of their fathers, brother and husbands. Having experienced and seen how they themselves were able to earn and contribute to the family income and the countries coffers changed their self-concept and self-worth. It also changed their expectations in life and raised their personal benchmarks of wellbeing and contentment. Their needs and expectations also grew in sophistication.

This was a potentially positive and desirable experience but was not without the detrimental impact on the family and marriage dynamic. While some women, who had such positive life changing experiences, returned and found acceptance and a smooth reintegration with families that were proud of them and allowed them a different space and position in the family, others had great difficulty reintegrating precisely for these reasons.

For those who faced problems in return and reintegrating into their old lives, some problems seemed less complex than others. *"When we come back, our houses and villages seem dirty. We get angry and impatient with our people". - FGD Kathaluwa, Galle.*

While for others the issues were more complex. Some husbands were unable to cope with the new status and independence of their wives. Some wives were wholly unsatisfied with their husbands, families and communities upon return.

#### **Box - 20**

Thayalini is a 45-year-old female migrant returnee, who is married to Thileepan 48 and they live in a fishing village in the East in a house that Thayalini has built recently with her earnings of 6 years in Kuwait. Thayalini and Thileepan have 2 children, Suthajini aged 16 and Ketheesh aged 18.

Thileepan and Thayalini both agreed on her move to go abroad, as Thileepan damaged his boat in the floods and was finding it extremely difficult to earn enough for the family. They agreed to have his mother and sister come and lives with them and to provide for them while they helped Thileepan to look after the children. They also agreed to keep in touch regularly and they took a loan from the fish Mudalali to purchase a phone. They managed very well for two years.

Thayalini was fortunate to get a good home to work in. They were foreigners who paid her regularly and gave her an extra months wage for the festivals. She sent just enough money home for the needs, but saved all the rest. She helped Thileepan buy a new boat. She helped her mother-in-law and sister-in-law by regularly sending money for the children and also for their own needs. When her contract was renewed Thileepan was not so much in favour of this extension but Thayalini had won the favour of her employers and she was thinking of saving enough to build the house and also for a dowry when her daughter was old enough to marry. So she extended her stay. The whole family was doing well. They all praised Thayalini. Even Thileepan's mother and sister praised her. But her

husband was not so happy.

Thayalini looks back at the time she was away: *"We were doing well, so I wanted to make a bit more and finish the house and save for the future. He wasn't happy with my staying on. He said we have enough now and wanted me to come back. I knew we now also had a responsibility to look after his mother and sister. They had helped us so much. So I wanted to stay on a bit longer. My employer was very good to me. They gave me clothes for the children and helped me post parcels to my home. They let me use the phone once a week and took me all over where ever they went. I was also sent to town once a week in the car to buy the things. I felt very happy and satisfied. I couldn't understand why Thileepan was getting so upset and unhappy lately. He had no reason to be. I sent him money regularly and spoke to him every week, sometimes twice a week. I was not having any affairs or anything and he knew that, so I just couldn't understand why he seemed to be getting angry with me more often. When I came back I was disappointed. He seemed so weak and quiet. Not like the strong man I married. He hardly spoke and dressed badly in dirty baniyans and old slippers. I was embarrassed to go to town with him. To be honest even though I was looking forward to getting back to him, he had changed so badly I didn't feel like being with him much. This upset him also. I told him to dress nicely and he got very upset with me and shouted at me. 'So I am not good enough for you any more am I? Why? Do you want fair Arabs now?'*

*I was really shocked when I heard this because we had never had any problems of affairs between us ever. We always spoke openly. But when I dressed up to go out somewhere and wore my jewellery and my clothes which I brought with me, he was never happy and would say sarcastic things like 'you are not 16 anymore to dress like that' or 'my friends would think I am out with a tart with all this jewellery' - I screamed back at him, after being so faithful I didn't need to hear such things. We have been fighting a lot lately. My daughter says 'I thought things will be happier when you come back but all we have is fights. I don't want a dowry I don't want to get married...' Thileepan also stays away at sea longer now when he goes fishing".*

Once again we encounter the fact that the labour migration experience has dual impacts, positive and negative and this often side by side. This demands more complex interventions, which encourage the positive impacts while clearly identifying and adopting policies and practices to mitigate the negative ones. Just like in the cases of Leelawathie and Dayawathi (box 15) we see clear development at personal and financial levels but a tragic deterioration and loss of the family bonds and relationships.

### **b) Long Term Impact of Parental Absence on Children**

Children faced many challenges as a result of the long years of separation from a parent despite the parent returning for good after successful employment that benefitted the whole family. Children were deeply affected by the discord between the parents who have now developed different lives (see Box 20).

Children also appeared bitter and resentful towards the returning parent. Some children did not know how to react to the returning parent.

*"As they grew older my sons didn't come to me when I came home. Sometimes the second son hid away when I came. They took the toys and played but they were not close to me anymore. I used to cry a lot even then. But I didn't know what to do.*

*When they grew older and when I came back they never paid any attention to me. I started to build houses for them and give them in marriage well. But especially my second son was always in a rage, he never could speak without shouting and fighting. I cannot understand why. He has been married now for some years and lives behind our house. His wife often comes running to our house because he fights with her. Sometimes I wonder what happened to him, and if he is even unable to stay married because I left him. I went because of them. I earned and saved and now I am spending all I have on them. I am now building the 4<sup>th</sup> house. Each of them has a house. The last ones' wedding is to be in Feb 2012. But I can't understand why my sons are so distant and angry all the time, especially the second. The third one was refusing to get married. He is now 30. I finished building his house before I made a place for us but he still didn't want to get married. Finally*

*he agreed 3 months ago. I have done everything for them what more can I do.” (The story of Dayawathi box13)*

When the time away was unsuccessful or a traumatic, the return was made further difficult.

*“Now I live with my daughter-in-law and son. The village people think that I am mad and they laugh at me. They don’t believe my story. My daughter-in-law thinks something is wrong with me. I still remember all the things and feel afraid when I think about them. Only Miss Dinusha believed my story and listened to me. I told her everything. She comes to speak with me. Now even my daughter-in-law is better towards me.”* Gunawathi speaking of the trauma faced upon return.

The trauma when the migrant worker did not return at all was the most serious with long term negative impacts on families and children as described in Box 16:

Nawaz said: *“I want to go and earn and spend”*. When asked about saving for his future, he says *“why save? for whom? I have no one. I don’t have any desire at all to save for the future, not even to marry. Even if I fall there is no one there for me. Right from my birth I have not got any love. Why would I want to live and develop myself? Any way my problems are my problems. There is no one for me. I didn’t create these problems, they were given to me”* (The story of Imtiaz and Nazaw box 14)

### **c) Mental Health Service Users among Returning Migrant Workers**

Key informant interviews with mental health professionals in the provinces indicated that a significant number of returning migrant workers were in need of mental health services on their arrival back to the country.

Dr. Judy Jeyakumar, Medical Officer at the Psychiatric Unit Kalmunai Base Hospital Kalmunai, stated: *“When a worker is diagnosed as having some mental disorder the hospital there (in the host country) sends them back to Sri Lanka. There are no referral notes most times. Sometimes they arrive in the country and are directly taken to the psychiatric hospital in Angoda, and from there they direct them to the district hospitals. We have had 13 patients who are migrants who have returned with mental health problems over the past 4-6 months.”*

Professionals estimated that many migrants who returned with psychological distress or other issues did not come for medical treatment and did not get access to services but simply went back to their villages and do as best they could. If symptoms worsened or persisted their families might take them for services. It is only when a migrant worker was manifesting obvious symptoms and had significant impairment in functionality that he/she was identified and referred directly from the airport to the medical services. It was very likely that most who suffered trauma and other acute stress related symptoms did not find their way to the mainstream mental health services. They then returned to their homes and communities and were likely to also have to face all of the adjustment difficulties discussed above together with their mental health condition.

While in-service, Sri Lankan migrant workers who were taken to hospital with emotional or mental health difficulties for attempting suicide or other injurious behaviour often did not have any one to speak or to obtain translation. They did not have the benefit of discussing their problems in their own language or getting therapy or treatment in an understandable language. There are some private organizations like the Migrant Worker Support Foundation<sup>10</sup>, which have voluntarily assisted migrant workers in desperate situations, including those who have mental health problems either due to traumatic or extremely stressful conditions or due to a history of mental health issues prior to migration, which are then exacerbated by the experience.

The need for professionally planned case management of mental health patients from among the migrant community is hitherto an unaddressed need. Given the high propensity of distress and mental health risk factors entailed in labour migration, procedures and protocol need to be urgently put in place both for the prevention, protection and care of migrant workers vulnerable to mental health illness.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Delrine Embuldeniya of the Migrant Worker Support Foundation

### 3.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has examined the manner in which the labour migration cycle affects the psychosocial wellbeing of migrant workers and their families. It acknowledges the great potential for the experience of migration to be positive and beneficial and can lead to personal growth and financial enhancement. The personal stories and field data have demonstrated that impacts of migration can be at the very same time positive at one level while being detrimental at another level.

The chapter therefore has focused on different psychosocial issues that prompt/ trigger labour migration as well as those that are caused by labour migration. It examines the issues prevalent in each stage of the cycle and the difficulties experienced by the different members of the labour migrant community be they spouses/partners, children, primary caregivers, extended family and the migrant worker him/her self. This is done in order to enhance our understanding of needs and address the prevailing gaps with a view to mitigate the debilitating impacts of migration while encouraging the positive ones.

**Pre-migration** psychosocial issues include the many reasons related to social and psychological wellbeing, which lead to migration in the first place. Though labour migration is spoken off as an economically driven phenomenon it is evident that financial reasons are not the only factors that trigger it. Often under the guise of economic need there are factors such as difficult family situations, abusive relationships, pressures from society, failures and painful experiences, from which migrant workers seek to get away.

However, looking at the experiences of returning migrant workers who went in order to get away or out of difficulties other than mere financial ones, after a stint away it is evident that many of the problems because of which they left still remain unsolved or have even become compounded in their absence. It is left for us to ascertain why those considering labour migration as a means of getting away from social, emotional or relational problems largely do not consider getting help from professionals as an option to working out these problems. All possible reasons for this lack of usage need to be addressed, be it the lack of such services, or the poor quality of the same or the unfamiliarity with the idea of accessing services that can help one resolve personal problems.

Furthermore, the actual decision making process involved, the manner in which preparations are made, are seen to have a profound effect on the way the family responds and later copes with the departure of the migrant. Migrant workers often have little or no guidance at all, *prior* to making the decision and implementing it. Considering why they want to go, whether or not they actually need to go, how best to engage their families in this decision making, how to prepare families and significant others, how to protect their interest, relationships, and personal integrity right from the pre-migration phase to the reintegration phase, are all areas that need to be thought through. Migrant workers currently have hardly any access to counselling services at this stage.

It is clear that migrants leaving during recent years have had better support systems and more information and have not been as helpless and vulnerable as those in the past. These support systems have undoubtedly reduced the number of unfortunate incidents. However, difficulties of an institutional, legal or administrative nature still remain and add further stress and strain on the prospective labour migrant. This is particularly true of those who do not go through official channels. The lack of correct information and guidance, the risk of being financially embezzled, legally exploited, misled and abused in many ways by agents, sub-agents, travel agents, and authorities at both ends of their journey places the labour migrant at great risk of psychological distress. Whether or not the migrant leaves through the correct channels the consequences are borne by him/her self, and also by Sri Lankan society at large. This makes it imperative that gaps are identified and addressed.

The mandatory SLBFE training for domestic workers is for those that have already made the decision and are now about to leave the country. Those who return and re-migrate are not required to undergo training even though newer issues and upgraded resources may be shared with them. It is likely therefore that all the migrants who could benefit greatly from it do not receive the benefit of a well designed and high quality training.

**In-service** experiences of migrant workers and their families left behind demonstrate the devastating impact the migration experience can sometimes have on the individual and on a family system. This is why the MFEPW has a set of policies and procedures already, which identify some of these problems. Limiting the age of a migrant, not permitting mothers of children under 5 to leave, having stipulated requirements for the treatment of migrants and latterly, the provision of SIM cards for communication with family back home are some of the examples of protective guidelines and provisions.

The fact, however, is that negative experiences continue to be encountered by migrants. Migrant workers suffer from anxiety and various stress reaction as a result of being separated from loved ones, not being able to interact socially, not being able to communicate adequately and express oneself freely even to resolve problems; having to negotiate a very different cultural context with minimal training and exposure, in some cases not being able to worship the way they are used to, being subjected to harassment, verbal physical and sexual abuse, and not having adequate knowledge or resources to resolve problems with employers and with family members back home are some issues which have reduced in intensity and frequency over the years but still remain. All of this places a tremendous demand on the coping resources of the migrant which are often already under severe strain even before migration. Migrant workers with histories of mental health conditions often succumb as we have learned from the mental health professionals who provided services to returning migrant workers<sup>11</sup>. Those with no known family history too can exhibit signs of stress-related mental health conditions and of extreme distress due to the unbearable multiple pressures.

Families back home also struggle through a plethora of difficulties as we have seen. The male spouse must adjust to many changes. The absence of the wife and the resulting emotional and social pressure, the added responsibilities of caring for the children which he may or may not take on, the perceived loss of his own status with the improved financial status of his wife, the changes in family dynamics and power balances with the extended family stepping in to help raise the children and the loneliness, are just some of these. Having female members of extended family taking on the role caring for the children may bring some relief but may also mean that what is left of the father's role as caregiver is often taken over by others. The message he receives may be that he is incapable, untrustworthy, or simply redundant. Interventions addressing these emerging needs of male spouses left behind are crucial if families are to remain intact and a growing population of such spouses is to be meaningfully engaged and prevented from becoming disengaged self-destructive liabilities to society.

The wife left behind too faces heightened pressure from society as a woman unaccompanied by her husband. She may more easily become a target of malicious talk in the community, or unsolicited inappropriate sexual advances from males. She may find raising the children single handily very demanding and find herself at the mercy of people exploiting her, encroaching on her land, making unfair demands on her, cheating and threatening her due to the fact that there is no male around for protection. She may also struggle with her own loneliness, fears of abandonment and disconnection with her husband. She may have additional burdens of loans and a house to manage on a foreign wage that may be delayed or never come. If a spouse - whether male or female - were not adequately consulted for the decision to migrate, this leads to problems in the marriage that will inevitably be under pressure through the long term distance between the partners.

Another emerging issue is the impact on older family members or extended family that steps in as caregivers in the absence of one or both parents. We see active and very positive engagement of extended families stepping in to cover for the migrant in his/her absence. Looking closer, however, we see frequently older parents of migrant women taking on a significant role as primary caregiver to the children of their migrant daughters and sons. Many of these older women seem willing to help out as they consider it their duty to support their children, who in turn, financially support them. Many of these older caregivers, however, are between 60-85 years and have little energy for young children, have many physical ailments, disabilities and limitations, no resources of their own, little power and less authority with children. Many complained of not having any time left for themselves and their personal needs and felt totally overwhelmed by their responsibilities. The grand children are often more disturbed than children who live with their parents and may act out their confusion, anger, frustration and fears in reaction to the departure of their parents. Often elderly caregivers depend solely on the income promised by their migrant offspring and when the inevitable delays occur in finances getting through to them from overseas, this grandparent bears the entire strain of having to

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with the MOMH Dr. Judy Mental Health Unit of the Kalmunai Base Hospital

make ends meet with no income of her own, in order to keep the children and herself going. This being a fairly recently identified phenomenon means that support structures, policies and practices need to be put in place for the protection and wellbeing of elderly care givers of children left behind.

As has been indicated in other studies<sup>12</sup>, our field data also demonstrated that the departure of a parent for labour migration can have a significant impact on their children. There does not seem to be a culture of preparing children for this move or recognizing their right to know, let alone involving them in any decision making and preparation. Furthermore, if there is preparation it would cover safety (having a female family member move in to care), education (making sure someone took the child to school) and food needs (making sure someone feeds the child). However, the child's emotional needs are largely unconsidered. Given that many husbands take to alcohol and withdraw from their fatherly duties perhaps due to their own inability to cope with the change means the child is also likely to be deprived of the fathers meaningful engagement in his/her life. Children can experience this as a second loss of parental love and emotional nearness during formative years. Many children of migrant workers experience the move to migrate as a fracturing of the family. They could feel they are different and disadvantaged in comparison to other children with parents, some may be confused about the reason for the departure and even blame themselves, some may not know about the future, when the parent will return or whether at all, causing them great distress. Their daily routine may change when a new caregiver from the extended family takes over. Some older female children have to take on more responsibilities at the departure of their mothers; some may even become sexually vulnerable to male family members and friends.

**Returning and reintegrating** is the final stage of the migration cycle and entails its own set of psychosocial issues. If a migrant worker has had a good experience and is returning on a positive note she/he could still encounter difficulties in readjusting to life back in the home country and community. She may now be accustomed to a new sense of freedom and an elevated status, which could make her the envy of family and friends. She could face the resentment of her spouse who may perceive her as the more powerful partner in the marriage. She may (depending on how she left and how she managed to maintain relationships with her children) also encounter resentment, anger or even bitterness and disengagement of the children she left behind. Some returning migrant workers will have missed a significant part of the growing up years of their children who will find it hard to relate to their returning parent. This may be particularly painful and leave her with a sense of complete failure and helplessness in losing her significant relationships after such sacrifice and possibly in spite of significant financial gains. Having now become used to an elevated better life style she may become disenchanted with life in her village and community. This may also extend to disenchantment with her husband who in all likelihood will have remained the same while she developed herself overseas, and who may even have deteriorated in her absence. Returning migrant workers also may struggle with their new realities and have to come to terms with things that have changed and happened, which they were never told about while they were away. The infidelity of a spouse or distancing of children, being cheated of finances sent home, illness or death of loved ones, the deterioration of the home are some difficult and demoralizing situations awaiting returning migrants which can put pressure on them and complicate a smooth reintegration.

If the migrant originally left due to difficulties he/she was unable to cope with in the first place, many of those difficulties are very likely to remain on his/her return. Some of them may even have got more complex during his/her time away. Some migrant workers may have had negative experiences during the in-service period and may carry psychological scars, which may impede her smooth adjustment and successful functioning on her return. Entire migrant communities and society need to become aware of these issues so they can learn to accommodate positive changes in their family members and adjust to change themselves instead of seeking a status quo which will demand the denial and reversal of hard won gains.

Guidance and counselling services for migrant workers and families could mitigate as well as address the majority of these surfacing issues described above. Though a few counselling services do exist, they seem to be unfamiliar to migrants and hard to access. These services need to be available but also proactive in reaching high risk communities and offering awareness, preventive interventions and supportive services thereafter. Such services need to reach right down to the village level if they are to impact the migrant communities effectively.

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<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, 2008

Proactive awareness raising of all the above issues that are likely to be encountered in all of the different stages of the migration cycle is necessary as a means of prevention. Systematic, targeted education of spouses, guidance and materials for the preparation of children, provision and protection for elderly parents who undertake the care of children and extended family of migrants is imperative. The need for professional and competent guidance and counselling and other support services cannot be understated. What needs further exploring is to examine how such services can be made more efficient and effective in targeting and reaching migrant communities and how service providers can deal effectively and can be more proactive as migrants and their families do not tend to seek services themselves. It is in the interest of all, the migrants, their families and the foreign employment industry to ensure that adequate guidance and counselling is afforded to prospective migrants in order that they may make informed choices, protect their families and present more suitably for employment.

The richness and cultural value of a society can often be judged not in the way it flaunts its strengths but in the manner it tends to its vulnerable. This is why the MFEPW has in the first instance sought to study the psychosocial impacts of labour migration in depth in order that the ever expanding labour migrant community will not only be the highest foreign exchange earner for the country but a strong skilled and well resources population enriching Sri-Lanka.

## Chapter- 4

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### Policy and Legal Commitments for Better Protection of the Psychosocial Wellbeing of Migrant Workers and their Families

This chapter looks at international and national instruments aimed at protecting and ensuring the welfare and empowerment of migrant workers and their families. The National Labour Migration Policy is analysed to understand its commitments to addressing psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families. Further the chapter looks at commitments in other policy documents and laws in Sri Lanka addressing the issue. It identifies gaps in the policy documents in order to provide recommendations.

In Sri Lanka there are a number of international and national instruments aimed at protecting and ensuring the welfare and empowerment of migrant workers and their families. These are as follows:

1. Ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and their Families.
2. The Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy (2009)
3. The policy commitment of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare
4. The Citizen's Charter of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare
5. The Sri Lanka Human Rights Action Plan 2011
6. The Sri Lanka Migrant Health Policy
7. The National Human Resource and Employment Policy for Sri Lanka (First Draft)
8. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act

1. Specific commitments to addressing psychosocial issues:

- International Convention on the Protection of all Migrant Workers and their Families
- Article 8-56 on Human Rights and other rights of all migrant workers and members of their families including
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom from torture
- Access to information on rights
- Ensuring of protection of the unity of families of migrant workers
- Articles 64-71 on promotion of sound, equitable, humane and lawful conditions for migrant workers

2. Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy (2009)

- The policy broadly recognizes the State's role in protecting and empowering migrant workers and their families in all three stages of the migration process; *pre-departure* (from decision-making to training to preparation for migration); *in-service* (workers in employment and families left behind) and *return and reintegration* (with consideration for reintegration, acceptance and appreciation). The State also has a firm commitment to safeguard the vulnerable children of migrant workers.

- The policy addresses the State obligation to prevent abusive practices and promote decent and productive work for men and women migrants in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Further, it recognizes that migrant workers are entitled to a variety of rights: fundamental human rights, migrant specific rights, and labour rights in the workplace as articulated in the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration and international instruments. It also recognizes violations of rights that take place beyond its borders and that there is a shared



responsibility between source, transit and destination countries in protecting the rights of migrant workers.

• The Policy makes special mention of psychosocial issues as *“Migrant workers, particularly in the low-skilled category, suffer from psychological issues due to the isolation, cultural shock and alienation, which can make them vulnerable to diverse problems, such as emotional and sexual exploitation, and lower productivity. Migrant workers, particularly in the low-skilled category, are largely unaware of the need for psychological preparation for labour. In order to prepare workers for this, prospective migrant workers must receive adequate psychological preparation for migration.”*

3. Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare
  - The vision of the Ministry is to be the leading policy maker and implementer to create gainful foreign employment opportunities, whilst protecting the rights of migrant workers and ensuring their welfare and protection.
  - The Performance Statement of the Ministry for 2010 identifies and commits to the welfare of migrant workers. It also recognizes the negative impacts of labour migration, including negative psychosocial impacts on workers and the families that are left behind.
4. The Citizen’s Charter of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (2011)
  - The Citizen’s Charter outlines the Ministry’s role and commitment towards extending an efficient, courteous and humane service to all stakeholders. The Ministry will thus endeavour to commit itself towards its citizens in respect of standard of service, non discrimination, easy accessibility, courtesy, expeditious delivery, transparency and providing a platform for the dissemination of related information and consultation without bias or favour.
5. The Sri Lanka Human Rights Action Plan 2011  
The special section of Migrant Workers commits to (among others):
  - \* Implementation of National Policy
  - \* Protection of migrant workers from exploitation
  - \* Increase awareness on migrant worker exploitation and trafficking
  - \* Increasing awareness of migrant workers regarding exploitation, trafficking and forms of redress
  - \* Ensure the protection of migrant labour overseas
  - \* Prevention of violation of employment conditions
  - \* Provide medical and psychological assistance to victims of trafficking and exploited migrant workers and also provision assistance to ensure their rights, rehabilitation, redress and compensation
6. The Sri Lanka Migrant Health Policy  
This Policy applies to inbound workers only. The Ministry of Health is currently developing a separate Health Policy for out bound Migrant Workers.
7. The National Human Resource and Employment Policy for Sri Lanka (First Draft - 2011)  
Reinforces the commitments made in the National Policy as Sri Lankan migrant workers have to be protected while securing them human dignity and minimizing the social cost of migration with effective welfare measures
8. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act  
Vision is “to undertake welfare and protection measures for Sri Lankans employed outside Sri Lanka and their left behind family members”.

## Gap analysis of policy and legal commitments

Current policy/legal provisions	Status of current policy	Gaps
<b>National Labour Migration Policy - Governance of migration process</b>		
Strengthening of legal and institutional framework to safeguard the rights of migrant workers.	Amendments to SLBFE Act in the process. Reviews being done of diplomatic processes, grievance mechanisms addressing migrant worker issues.	Currently processes at design and review stage, concrete action has not been identified.
Transforming low skilled workers to skilled workers to minimise exploitation and abuse.	Examining the possibilities of providing skilled employment. Attempts to facilitate country specific, job specific and company specific vocational and orientation training to meet the requirements of skilled employment.	Skilled employment opportunities are yet to increase. Demand remains for low skilled workers.
Addressing malpractices of sub-agents and agents.	Blacklisting of agents continue Proposed new legislation is expected to address regularizing of agents. Current process of registering sub-agents in the SLBFE Review undertaken to look at more ethical recruitment.	Malpractices, especially by sub-agents continue. Lack of awareness among prospective migrant workers as well as willingness to fall prey to illicit recruiters.
<b>National Labour Migration Policy - Protection and Empowerment of Migrant Workers and their Families</b>		
<b>Pre-departure</b>		
State will establish minimum requirements to qualify for migrant workers: literacy, minimum age, suitability for selected work categories.	On 14.02.2011 the Ministry increased the minimum age of migrant domestic workers from 18 to 21 years, as part of a plan to ensure better protection and to develop a higher-skilled Sri Lankan overseas labour force.	Research findings show that many migrant workers do not adhere to the above policy. They provide false statements and documents with the help of agencies, and sub-agents and leave even if they are unsuited. Often problems occur in host countries when minimum requirements are not met.
State understands that migrant labour is a voluntary decision and a right enjoyed by all citizens. It shall assist men and women in the decision making process to migrate for employment.	SLBFE reports that this is being implemented indirectly through the pre-migration training and the Family Day.	The attitude among the service providers is that it is the migrant worker's responsibility and service providers do not have the right to interfere in the decision.  There is a plan to provide guidance and counselling pre-departure. However, migrants do not know how to access this service and have not been able to find trained staff that can provide this service. Most migrants who leave have not benefitted from guidance and counselling in the decision making process. There is a dearth of trained counsellors Island wide: there is less than one counsellor per DS division at present. This is grossly inadequate to meet the

		needs of migrant workers.
State shall undertake measure to prevent dissemination of misleading information.		Some agents publish news paper adverts giving inaccurate information which lure people on false messages. There is no close monitoring by the authorities.
Preparation for migration: will give utmost priority to prevent illegal recruitment, fraud exploitation or abuse of migrant workers.	SLBFE reports that this is being implemented through the licensing division which handles the services.	The black listed names of the fraudulent agents and those that are not approved are not displayed and not disseminated for the public, hence fraudulent activities and abuse of migrant workers continues to take place in many parts of the country.
Tangible measures to ensure better conditions for migrant workers without impinging on rights and bearing in mind the intense competition existing between labour sending countries.	Labour attachés are tasked to improve the conditions and ensure the rights and standards.	<p>It is clear that there aren't an adequate number of personnel to look into the welfare of the migrants who have problems and difficulties.</p> <p>Those deployed are also in need of sensitization and training in order to build the capacity of existing staff to enable them to handle complex issues.</p> <p>Staff who are tasked with welfare need a system of monitoring and supervision and quality control to maintain accountability and this will best be achieved by assigning a set number of cases to each officer. Adequate resource provision is critical for their work but this has not been attended to.</p> <p>Performance appraisal should be linked with promotion and career prospects.</p>
State shall upgrade the existing training course in order to ensure competency, protection and capacity of workers to handle situations.	Country specific and is being implemented.	<p>Many migrants still have difficulties even after training has been attended.</p> <p>Migrants who go unofficially and without training do not have the benefit of the training. Many people go in this manner.</p>
All migrant workers shall be prepared for travel and employment as a responsibility primarily assumed by the State.		The official stance on migrants who have gone unofficially without registering is that they are committing an offense. This stance makes such migrants to become further marginalised and harder to reach. There is a need to establish a system to reach out to them.
State shall take responsibility for conducting of medical tests in the pre-departure stage. all health testing will be carried out by professionally qualified	This is being done and regulated and a course about these tests is also offered in the training course. HIV awareness is being raised.	There are government and private institutions (GAMCA/GCC) that have been given authority to conduct medical tests. However, complaints of abuses, malpractices breaking of privacy and confidentiality rules continue to be received. There is no system to

medical persons accepted by the State. Workers dignity, awareness, privacy and confidentiality of tests shall be of primary importance.		track and prosecute those responsible.
<b>In-service</b>		
Shall address the need for counselling on the psychosocial aspects of labour migration, pre-departure counselling and to provide support while in-service.	The provisions in the policy for counsellors and 60 welfare officers are not in evidence on the field as yet.	Given the propensity for abuse and the regularity with which cases are reported, it has to be concluded that pre-migration guidance on prevention of abuse is wholly inadequate.  Information and data received in the survey indicated the dire need for a larger stronger cadre of professionally trained counsellors and welfare officers to deal with In-service migrant issues.
Shall provide a mechanism for protection of migrant workers from abuse and exploitation.		Field data indicates that in spite of the existing policy there is wide spread abuse and exploitation at every stage of the migration cycle, ranging from pre-departure to reintegration, possibly due to inadequate surveillance at different stages.
Sri Lankan embassies in host countries shall have a well defined system to be in contact with all migrant workers in each country. Offices in Sri Lankan diplomatic missions, particularly labour sections shall have the special capacity to handle grievance procedures of migrant workers and to work towards their protection and welfare.	This is to be implemented in the future through the establishment of Migrant Worker Resource centres throughout host countries.	Plans have not yet been implemented.
State shall formulate a policy framework as part of the National labour Migration policy for the protection of children of Migrant Workers.	At present there is a scholarship programme for children of migrant workers and programmes in schools focusing on children who have problems including children of migrants.	In many situations children's interests are not taken into account either by migrants themselves or by the relevant institutions. As a result children of all ages are adversely affected by the absence of one or both parents for varying periods of time. Moreover children themselves have had no say in the decision making process, children are not prepared to face the situation arising out of migration of the parent.  The programmes in schools should be evaluated for their effectiveness

		and necessary additional measures to allow focusing on emotional needs of children with absent parents should be included /strengthened.
<b>Return and reintegration</b>		
State shall develop and implement a comprehensive return and reintegration plan for migrant workers	This is yet to be implemented and is at the stage of discussion with financial institutions.	Returning migrants have no alternatives to support their many needs and thus become helpless once the migration cycle is completed. They have no recourse to support for the psychosocial impact of their stay away and any negative experiences and no specific support for a smooth and effective reintegration into their families and communities, often leaving them struggling with many financial, social and psychological issues.
State shall recognise role of civil society organisations and trade unions, in assisting returning migrant workers and their families in the reintegration process.	The coordination of such civil society movements, trade unions, NGOs and government departments, needs to be implemented strongly.	Returnees and families do not have access to a proper system of support and guidance. Though some organisations and departments offer some limited assistance in certain aspects but no streamlined and comprehensive system is available.
State shall duly recognise the contribution made by migrant workers and facilitate their return and reintegration with opportunities for skills transfer, productive employment and conflict free social integration.	There is at the moment no mechanism for reintegration for all migrants as yet, but there are plans for the future. Other organisations, however, which are restricted to particular areas, have adhoc programmes for migrant returnees.	Existing programmes are mostly carried out by NGOS and CBOS and are not sustainable in the long term. Some have offered loan schemes for self employment, seeds for agriculture, and help with animal husbandry and other small industries. These are all short term ventures and not for all returnees Island wide. Being informally done these ventures lack a firm foundation, lack access to markets. They are also geared more towards traditional industries. The migrant workers, who have been used by now to a different system of earning, prefer an easier way to earn more and these methods seem lacking in lustre.

## Chapter- 5

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### Psychosocial Support Services for Migrant Workers and Their Families

This chapter provides a brief view of government and non-governmental institutions that provide services, including services to address psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families. The chapter recognises the extensive support services available for migrant workers at the different levels in the migration process and does not attempt to be a comprehensive study of all services provided by the government and non-government institutions but highlights those that directly address psychosocial issues.

There are both government and non-governmental institutions that provide services, including services to address psychosocial issues faced by migrant workers and their families. These institutions perform different functions relating to migrant labour, and face many difficulties when implementing activities in Sri Lanka and host countries.

The main service provider that focuses exclusively on migrant workers and their families is the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE). The SLBFE provides a range of regulatory, protection and welfare services ranging from the registration and regularization of departing workers to regularizing of employment agencies. The SLBFE is the primary agency that looks into protection issues of migrant workers while in-service. While supporting the departure of low skilled workers, the SLBFE's policy approach is to reduce low skilled workers leaving the country and increase the outflow of professional, technical, middle management and skilled manpower. The SLBFE also provides pre-departure training programmes for female domestic workers and orientation programmes for other low skilled workers and provides welfare services to migrant workers and their families, including loans for covering pre-departure expenses, insurance schemes for the benefit of migrant workers and scholarship schemes for children of registered migrant workers. The SLBFE also conducts diverse information dissemination campaigns on safe migration.

The SLBFE operates Regional Centres in Anuradhapura, Badulla, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matara, Ratnapura and Vavuniya. These Centres provide information to prospective workers on employment opportunities and procedures for registration and training. They also provide assistance to workers and families facing problems during preparation for migration, in-service and on return.

In addition, the SLBFE has a Conciliation Division at head office level in Colombo, which handles complaints and grievances of migrant workers and their families. Two managers under the direct supervision of a Deputy General Manager (DGM) run the Division with a cadre of 16 'Conciliation Officers' and a support staff of whom a majority are female officers.

The Division maintains close links with Sri Lanka missions' overseas, relevant Ministries and, local recruitment agencies, which help in the grievance addressing process. There are Conciliation Officers placed in every SLBFE Regional Centre who attend to grievances including those of a psychosocial nature, at regional level. In addition the SLBFE has a newly established hotline (1919) to facilitate the migrant workers to lodge complaints and to make inquiries regarding different services it offers.

In terms of addressing psychosocial issues in the process of migration, the SLBFE's concentration is not on par with its other services. The main service provided by the Sahana Piyasa Welfare Service Centre is located near the Katunayake International Airport, to assist migrant workers who fall in to trouble due to various issues and hardships and return back to Sri Lanka. In addition, where deployed SLBFE officers in the Conciliation Division and at the Regional Centres provide support services to minimize mental distress faced by workers and their families largely in the manner of befriender services. This is due to the lack of training in providing counselling services. The SLBFE also addresses issues of a psychosocial nature in an in depth manner in the pre departure training programmes for domestic workers. Here the migrant workers are engaged to identify and address psychosocial issues of handling problems while in service, upon return and also on the arrangements made at home with the family left behind. These issues are also addressed, to a lesser extent in terms of time allocations, in the pre-departure orientation programme introduced in 2009 for low skilled male migrant workers.

The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MFEPW) also provides a number of services to workers and their families. At policy level, the MFEPW is responsible for implementing all provisions in the National Policy on Labour Migration. Stemming from this obligation, the MFEPW looks into protection and welfare issues of both the worker and the families including children.

The Ministry of Labour Relations and Manpower is another service provider in the placing of Labour Attachés in Sri Lanka's Foreign Missions in destination countries. These Labour Attachés attend to migrant worker grievances including labour disputes, breach of contract including non-payment of salaries, run away workers, cases of physical and sexual abuse, and the provision of safe house facilities to workers. In terms of providing support services to handle psychosocial issues, however, these Labour Attachés receive no specific training or orientation.

The Counselling Department of the Ministry of Social Services looks at providing counselling services for all those in need, under its mission of improving the mental health of all Sri Lankans needing support. This is done through the provision of services including counselling and awareness rising, training of counsellors and professionalizing services. The Department has 82 counsellors placed at Divisional Secretariats around the country. This covers 25% of the Divisional Secretariat Divisions. These counsellors provide services on request and all services are provided free of charge. However, these Counsellors do not deal directly with migrant worker issues, but handle issues brought to them by migrant workers and their families as part of their routine duties.

The Ministry of Justice does not provide services directly to migrant workers but handles policy and legislation formulation on issues stemming from the National Labour Migration Policy. The Legal Aid Commission, which comes under the Ministry of Justice, provides free legal aid under a special programme for migrant workers.

Another government service provider is the Department of Probation and Childcare Services, which focuses on the protection of all unprotected children and those in conflict with the law including the children of migrant workers. Probation Officers under this department are placed at divisional secretariat level and are able to look into matters pertaining to the children of migrant workers if brought to their notice.

Similarly the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs, has Women Development Officers attached to the Women's Bureau placed at divisional level and although not specifically mandated, issues faced by migrant workers, primarily women workers come within their purview. The Ministry itself looks at the rights of migrant workers and makes a policy commitment to safeguard the rights of migrant women workers in the National Plan of Action on Women.

The Psychosocial Facilitation and Counselling Department of the Ministry of Education provides psychosocial support and interventions through trained teachers appointed to government schools. These teachers currently in a few schools focus on providing counselling services to students, identifying and supporting special needs and where there is a requirement, directs students to psychiatric services.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRC) conducts educational and special programmes to raise awareness on migrant worker rights. The HRC has a special committee to look into the rights of women migrant workers, works with the government, make recommendations with the government, and networks with NGOs and other services providers.

There are several non-governmental organizations, which focus specifically on providing services to migrant workers, primarily low, and semi skilled workers.

The Migrant Service Centre (MSC) organizes migrant workers and prospective workers at community level into Migrant Worker Associations. As part of its services, MSC educates workers on their rights and helps raise a joint voice on behalf of migrant worker rights. MSC also mobilizes the families of migrant workers, provides information and free pre-departure orientation to workers and their families. To assist returnee migrants to reintegrate effectively, MSC facilitates self employment programmes, remittance management training, as well as welfare support including help for psychosocial issues. MSC also provides services, addresses grievances, provides legal advice and links to government institutions.

Action Network for Migrants (ACTFORM) is a network of NGOs working on migrant worker issues. The main aim of ACTFORM is to promote the rights of Sri Lankan migrant workers. ACTFORM works with smaller organizations that organize migrant workers into village level Migrant Worker Associations and provide services including welfare, legal and counselling services to migrant workers and their families. ACTFORM operates as an advocacy body representing its members.

Caritas Sri Lanka SEDEC is a faith-based organization that provides services to migrant workers and their families. At pre-departure level Caritas provides pre-departure orientations, guidance on safe migration, and information and guidance for families left behind including duties of spouses and guardians left behind. Caritas also promotes contracts in local languages and raises awareness on trafficking. During service, Caritas provides assistance to workers in troubled situations, and carries out advocacy campaigns for more secure rights and working conditions for workers.

In return and reintegration, Caritas provides psychosocial counselling support services for physically and sexually abused returnees, spiritual guidance, as well as self employment assistance and livelihood programmes including financial support for self employment activities.

The Sewalanka Foundation (SF) conducts a one-year livelihood project for communities in Matara and Ambalantota in the Southern Province, with the aim of reducing people leaving for low skilled foreign employment to Middle Eastern countries. In addition to livelihoods support, the project provides psychosocial support services.

Under the safe migration project funded by SDC, HELVETAS Swiss Interco-operation is engaged with migrant workers and their families in the Karadeniya divisional secretariat in the Galle district. While migrants and their families are provided with psychosocial support, those who need further assistance are given direct counseling through a clinical psychologist. Helvetas is also working towards building capacities of grass-root level migrant communities and establishing a multi-sectorial psychosocial coordination network in Karadeniya to bring more viable services to the migrant families.

Community Development Services (CDS) provides information to migrant workers on health related issues, employment rights, addresses issues of violence and harassment and provides training to Migrant Worker Associations to address issues faced by returnee migrant workers, facilitates network building among returnee migrant workers, sets up migrant resource centres (in Ambalantota, Matara and Galle) and provides space for returnee workers to talk about abuses and other grave issues faced by them during the process of migration and refers those needing psychological support to relevant authorities.

### ***The Gaps***

The main gap in SLBFE services is the lack of presence at divisional secretariat level. It is clear that migrant workers, especially those seeking low skilled and semi skilled employment are from economically and socially deprived segments of society and are often unable to access or unaware of services offered at district or regional level. The lack of services at Divisional level prevents those in need of such services from accessing them. It is clear that services are needed not only at Divisional level but at the level of Grama Niladhari Divisions.

However, the SLBFE carries out periodic village to village awareness raising activities by which Special Informative Programmes are conducted by divisional secretariats for migrant workers, their family members and the general public, on the importance of foreign employment and its related topics. One of the main subjects of discussion is the warning issued to the public against the many fraudulent foreign employment agencies that are in operation at present.

Furthermore, it has been studied<sup>13</sup> that the *“capacities of the Bureau’s officers to fully implement this service need scrutiny. Whether the officers in the SLBFE Conciliation Division are equipped with necessary skills in complaint management, is questionable as most of these officers are not specialists in the subject area but are drawn from the general administrative cadre. The Bureau’s early administrative reports (1990s) reveal that the SLBFE used to employ legal officers as Conciliation Officers in order to effectively undertake complaint management. This staffing policy*

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<sup>13</sup> Ruhunage L.K. and Kottegoda, 2011



seems to have changed later as a result of which today there is not a single officer with legal background in the division”.

Staff strength is also an issue of concern. The Ruhunage Kottegoda study<sup>14</sup> comments “the effectiveness of the handling of migrant worker complaints is further undermined by the inadequacy of the staff strength of the Conciliation Div. to cope with the daily volume of complaints. The Complaint Registration Unit, the first stop for a daily average of 150 complainants is staffed by just 03 officers without an immediate supervising officer of at least Assistant Manager capacity to guide their work. At the same time, the central Conciliation Division, to which all the complaints are channelled, has 13 Conciliation Officers with two Managers and two Assistant Managers which is considered an insufficient cadre. The respondents of the recruitment agencies who were interviewed for this study felt that the Division must be strengthened by the deployment of at least an additional 5-6 qualified officers, if the complaints management service was to meet the demand. The Foreign Relations Unit-1 is also reported to be suffering from staff shortfalls in the handling of complaints which are mostly of a legal nature and channelled there from the Complaint Registration Unit.”

While recognizing the gap that exists in SLBFE services not reaching village level, it is important to note the existing government structure that is strong at divisional and grama niladhari level all over Sri Lanka. At divisional level, a range of government officers led by the Divisional Secretary provides services. These officers include Probation Officers, Child Protection Officers, Women Development Officers, and divisional secretariat based Counselling Assistant to Mental Health. The Grama Niladhari who works at village level, as well as the Police department, responds to migrant worker grievances when the need arises.

The gap here is that there is no specific mandate given to any officers at divisional or Grama Niladhari level to focus on migrant employment issues faced by migrant workers and their families left behind. This lack of focus extends to school authorities and hospital services, which are strong at village level but do not have a clear focus on migrant worker issues; any mandate, strategic awareness and information or training.

In terms of services provided by non-governmental and faith based organizations, a number of organizations work at village level focusing either specifically on migrant worker issues or integrating migrant worker issues into their general service provisions issues. However, all villages are not provided with these services.

The availability of services for migrant workers and their families is not demand driven. The supply of services is based on perceived needs based on information about migrant workers and their families at all stages of the migration process, research, and stories and situations faced by workers and their families. The lack of demand could be attributed to the workers and their families themselves not having an awareness of the gravity of issues faced by them or where they should seek help when faced with a problem or ‘taking these issues for granted’ as being part and parcel of migrating for employment. This lack of demand can also be attributed to the fact that at village level there appears to be no tradition or practice of discussing psychosocial problems faced by people be it due to migration for employment or due to any other reason and raising psychosocial issues often carries a stigma of unsoundness of mind.

In an environment of a considerable supply of services by government and non-government sector, one mid-term solution to bridge the gap is to find a way of bridging people in need with available services. When one compares demand for and access to services by people at community level when it comes to other types of services, the need for awareness raising from a rights perspective is clearly visible. Considering immunization services or child protection issues, one sees the effectiveness of such service provisions in terms of comprehensively reaching target groups. In such cases these services have not only encouraged people to access them practically, but also raised awareness to the point that people become vigilant, consider the issues as community issues and their demands as a fulfilment of rights.

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<sup>14</sup> ibid

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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### Conclusions

All issues relating to the process of migration discussed in the present paper have psychosocial implications. While some are overt psychosocial issues and can be easily identified, others are more subtle, yet impacting equally the wellbeing of migrant workers and the families of migrant workers.

At the **pre-departure stage** of a migrant worker's employment cycle, migrant workers face difficulties and psychosocial issues well before they leave the country. These issues include broadly the following:

- Relational issues which are diverse and depend on marital status, age, and sex of the migrant worker.
- Familial issues relating to the composition of the family and the status of the migrant worker within the family.
- Decision making issues on a variety of issues including the decision to leave, care of family and children, plans for remittance management etc.
- Institutional issues including lack of information, guidance and supervision by public officials.
- Economic and financial issues including the low economic status of the family which leads to migration, financing of travel, and resulting debts.
- Abuse related issues including domestic violence leading to migration to abuse in the process of migration at pre-departure stage at the hands of agents and sub-agents.
- Exploitation by agents and sub-agents at times leading to trafficking.
- Health issues such as health assessments and counselling to prepare for migration.
- Child protection issues including making hasty arrangements for child protection or lack of any arrangements for child protection, not preparing children for the absence of the parent, not informing children of the migration that impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of the children and the migrant worker.

The services provided by the government and civil society organizations at pre-departure stage are accessed by only some prospective migrant workers and it is felt that there are considerable gaps in the services available to address issues faced by prospective migrants. It is felt that present institutional arrangements, particularly at local level are inadequate and there is little institutional coordination. There is also lack of awareness due to the scarcity of information on available services. In terms of the most serious psychosocial implications, the real gap exists in the lack of information, support or counselling available to people prior to making a decision to migrate.

Issues facing **in-service migrant workers** cause physical and psychological problems:

- Not all migrant workers face serious problems in the host country.
- Issues vary across jobs, employers, country, and type of migrant worker.
- Issues faced by male and female migrants are different.
- The most common problems faced are related to the contract; from the conditions of the contract not being honoured, to exploitative work conditions, forced labour, and non-payment of wages.
- Although the government of Sri Lanka has signed MOUs with many host countries, there is no ground level inspection of work places and therefore, ground realities are often not keeping with accepted standards.
- The issues that cause serious psychosocial problems are sexual exploitation, physical and verbal abuse, long hours of work, loss of employment and abandonment, at times leading to loss of migrant worker status, and prostitution. Some female migrants having lost their jobs turn to prostitution as a way of earning an income. They are naturally vulnerable to exploitative situations as well as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Regular communication between migrant workers resident abroad and their families left behind, is an important factor for the psychosocial well being of both migrants as well as their family members. Loss of communication due to various circumstances can create

considerable anxiety among them. During the period of employment many workers are able to maintain contact with their families back home but the level of contact, ability to respond to emergencies at home, and freedom to respond to problems at home differ and cause mental stress on migrant workers. Some, however, are unable to maintain contact with their families at home causing extreme stress.

Services in host countries to address diverse problems faced by migrant workers are grossly inadequate. The absence of an updated data base on migrant workers is a major obstacle for service providers as well as authorities. Migrant workers residing and working in different conditions do not often have any access to information and services. For instance, the Ombudsman Service established by the SLFEB is not known to many migrant workers. The lack of awareness of the labour migrant is a major factor affecting the working condition of many migrant workers. Though many migrants use formal channels such as banks to transfer money to their families, some migrants are still ignorant and send money through informal channels. Information and guidance to prospective migrant workers can encourage them to use formal channels of money transfer.

The issues of the **families left behind** varies widely depending on various factors such as the age, gender, marital status of the family, composition of the family, socio-economic status of the family, role of the spouse, arrangements made for child care and protection, etc. The nature and composition of families left behind are diverse. Family units such as, single parent, female headed, migration of one spouse or both, nuclear, extended, extreme poverty-stricken and families having outside caregivers, face numerous issues that have grave psychosocial implications. Already broken or disorganized families face more serious issues, particularly with regard to protection and well being of children and women.

These distinctions need to be taken into account in addressing the issues.

- Different family members face different issues, depending on their circumstances. In this regard, the following categories are important: infants, pre-school children, girl children, adolescents, school children, particularly vulnerable children like those left behind with unreliable caregivers, children left behind with fathers addicted to substances, children left with elderly caregivers and single parents are without adequate social support and economic resources.
- These different categories face different problems that need focused attention.

Available services are not specifically targeted to each and every one of the above categories of family members. Available support is fragmented and does not adapt to the needs of family members. i.e. the scholarship support given by the SLBFE does not pay attention to other needs of school children. The services delivered by different agencies are not coordinated at any level. i.e. health, education, financial aid and counselling. Some migrant families cannot maintain contact with the migrant workers employed abroad either due to communication problems or break up of communication channels, leading to severe distress for some members of the family left behind. Non-remittance of money at times leaves the family left behind in serious economic hardship.

**Returning Migrants** face another series of psychosocial problems. Readjustment to local conditions is a challenge for some migrants due to various circumstances. Firstly, they find it difficult to live on the lower incomes they earn at home as they often get used to a higher standard of living in the host country. This is particularly for those returnees who come back with no savings at all. Some return to Sri Lanka to find that the money they sent home has been exhausted. Some returnee migrants find that their family circumstances have changed so much that they find it difficult to fit into the new situation. An important issue that some returning migrants face is their poor health status. This may be due to injuries caused by abuse or poor working conditions in host countries, over work, poor eating habits or bad nutrition, lack of rest and relaxation, extreme stress and lack of support systems.

## Recommendations

The Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy includes provisions to address a range of issues connected with the migration cycle. If this existing policy is fully implemented, many issues at home and at the workplace could be minimized.

However, specific psychosocial issues are not addressed adequately in the National Policy. Thus, it is essential to develop a complementary policy framework to address psychosocial issues that adversely affect the well-being of migrants and their families **as a Sub Policy on Psychosocial Issues faced by Migrant Workers**. This sub policy should be an extension of the National Migration Policy. The National Policy creates the space and mandate for this extension.

Many psychosocial issues need to be addressed at a community level, both by the State and by non-state institutions. These initiatives must be fully resourced with adequate outreach in order for migrant workers and their families to be aware of and access these services to minimize the negative impacts of the psychosocial problems faced. Further, there must be institutional coordination at the local level with existing local institutions and organizations to make these services and systems effective.

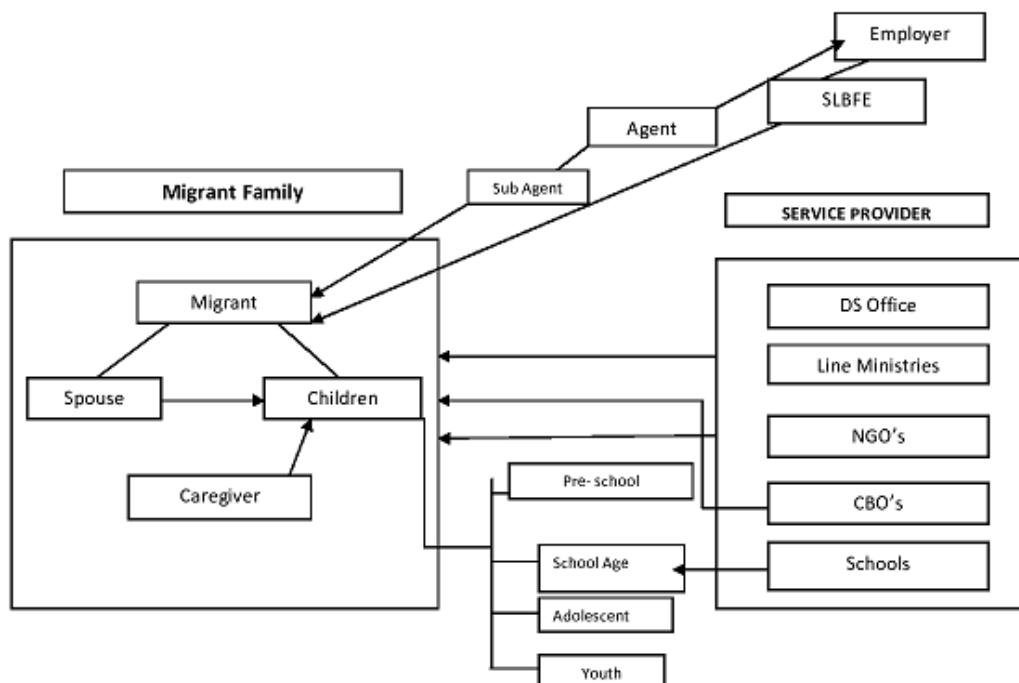
Based on the primary and secondary data gathered from diverse sources of information, including state institutions, non-government organizations as well as migrant workers and their families, and also by looking at the present state of implementation of existing policy, it is clear that there is a need for a new approach to address the problems faced by migrant workers and their families.

The Sub Policy will stem from the international and national commitments made in the National Labour Migration Policy. It will focus specifically on psychosocial issues faced at the three stages of migration; pre-departure, In-service and return and reintegration and will focus on the psychosocial needs of migrant workers and their families left behind.

The conceptual approach to the Sub Policy will be based on a strengthened system of support for migrant workers and their families as depicted below:

## Migrant Family and Institutional Context

Diagram 1- Migrant Family and Institutional Context



The above diagram indicates the wider institutional context within which migrant workers and their family members are embedded. Moreover, it indicates the diversity of the target population that needs to be addressed through various interventions. For instance, children of migrant worker families are different in terms of their gender, age and other socio-psychological background and therefore have diverse needs. The Diagram also distinguishes between the spouse and the caregiver as they are often two different individuals. It is against this background that an integrated yet disaggregated approach to addressing diverse psychosocial issues, is recommended

The Sub Policy should have 3 main components.

1. An integrated and coordinated intervention strategy at local level
2. Capacity building at house hold level
3. Disaggregated approach to service provision

### **1) An Integrated and Coordinated Intervention Strategy at the Local Level**

A local level coordinated approach to service delivery characterized by inter-ministerial collaboration is imperative, if labour migration issues are to be effectively managed.

The service mapping exercise conducted indicates that many stakeholders conduct various programmes at different levels for migrant workers, but that these programmes lack cohesion and coordination and are not adequately streamlined. Stronger monitoring mechanisms and accountability structures need to be in place and stringently adhered to.

Providing services to migrant workers and families can best be done by a streamlined casework approach. This will help to target and follow up needs on a case-by-case basis and will draw in the expertise of various professionals as needed. This system is distinctive in that it requires the service

provider to reach out to the client in the community, instead of the client needing to seek out the service provider, which has proven ineffective.

Where there are insufficient professionals/officials especially in the area of psychosocial care and counselling, cadre positions need to be created urgently.

Where resources are lacking for the creation and maintenance of larger cadres, bi-lateral cooperation needs to be explored. On the other hand, given the massive economic contribution of migrant workers, it is only reasonable to expect the state to make adequate financial provisions to address the psychosocial problems that adversely affect the well being of a sizable segment of the country's population.

Examples of activities that can be implemented:

- a. Establish a system of coordination and remedial action monitored at Divisional Secretariat (DS) level.
- b. Set up Hotlines at DS level, which can be accessed by any member of the public at local level.

For the casework approach:

- a. Establish a comprehensive database of migrant worker families at DS level (which has to be regularly updated).
- b. Assign migrant worker/family caseloads to social workers/counsellors at DS level.
- c. The above counsellors, and other officials at the DS Office including social workers, women development officers and child rights promotion officers must conduct home visits. Regular visits are needed, however, the frequency should be decided on the specific needs.
- d. Identify vulnerable families and children from the above database and provide services to spouses and children as well as returnee migrant workers to address psychosocial issues and needs.
- e. Establish a system of recording, monitoring, follow up, evaluation and feedback at DS level which feeds into a central database and documentation system at the SLBFE.

## **2) *Capacity Building at Household Level***

### **a) For families left behind**

Special programmes for the empowerment of members of families left behind need to be designed and implemented at local (community/divisional) level to strengthen families of migrant workers especially spouses, children of different ages and care givers such as parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives and friends of the migrant worker. These programmes will facilitate awareness and help people themselves to identify psychosocial issues, and provide skills needed to mitigate the impact of these issues.

- General awareness needs to be provided for all migrant worker families on basic issues relating to safe migration and prevention of psychosocial problems related to migration. General awareness can be widely disseminated using popular mass media such as tele-dramas that reach communities. Other media such as street theatre, cartoons, short TV messages, attractive banners, and advertisements in popular tabloids can have a powerful impact in changing attitudes and educating migrant worker families.
- Vulnerable groups among migrant worker family members need to have specific programmes tailor made. These programmes have to be relevant to the structure and composition of each family and address their specific needs and vulnerabilities. This needs to also be done for members of the family according to their ages, sex, and role in the family. Spouses in particular need to have comprehensive support and incentives to stay engaged and cope with the impact of the migration of the spouse. Clubs and societies which will provide opportunities for personal development, skills enhancement and importantly, provide psychosocial support to help the spouses with their demanding role within the family are a useful way of strengthening the spouse that stays behind.

- A prominent need observed within migrant worker families, which has to be addressed urgently, is the wellbeing and strengthening of the caregivers. This has been largely neglected and needs to have a stronger focus both for the wellbeing of the caregiver him/herself and also for the wellbeing of the child/children who is in her/his care. Access to counselling and guidance, which will help ease the stress, levels and provide psychosocial support to severely overburdened caregivers needs to be provided. Opportunities to obtain training, awareness and skills for this demanding role are also needed. Both home visits as well as monthly meetings where all caregivers can come together to meet each other for shared learning and support is advocated.
- Children's specific vulnerabilities according to their age, sex and situation need to guide the design of special programmes. Such programmes need to be conducted through the guidance and counselling units of schools, addressed in Sundays schools and other religious programmes, and introduced through CBOs and NGOs at village level in youth and children's clubs. Special materials in child friendly attractive forms or interactive media, competitions should be created to speak powerfully to children of migrant workers. The content of these programmes must be well defined in an action plan annexed to the Sub Policy.

#### **b) For migrant workers at all stages of the cycle of migration**

- Programmes providing support to migrant workers to address gaps and problems at all stages of the migration cycle need to be design and implemented. These programmes need to be carried out at local level and should complement the interventions at national level and address the long-standing gap in migration related services. A system at local level, which fits into the existing administrative structure in the country, would be most effective and will not require any significant institutional changes.
- In pre-migration, provision of information as well as one on one support to prospective migrant workers is essential to help such workers and their families to identify and respond to high risk situations, self protection issues, communication issues and to develop problem solving skills to address these issues and to seek help where help is available.
- In-service migrant workers need to be prepared for all the above at pre-migration level. They also need to be made aware of worker rights, laws of the country of destination, cultural sensitivities and of dealing with emotional difficulties of being away and alone, maintaining long distant communication with family as well as dealing with abusive and exploitative situations.
- At the return and reintegration stage, and possibly in remigration, there is a range of services that are needed to deal with psychosocial issues. It is essential to have clinical/therapeutic interventions targeting those who have faced abuse, traumatic situations or any sort of crisis situations while in-service. There must also be befriender services for those who are dealing with minor problems and issues (the need for someone to talk to) on return and reintegration. There must be special programmes for single mothers who have returned from service with children or pregnancies, to assist them in preparing to deal with social responses to their situation, developing healthy and positive attitudes to their role of motherhood and their child. There should be counselling and support in integrating children of such single mothers into mainstream education and society, this may include family/systems counselling.
- There should also be counseling and guidance for returnees who intend re-migration with a view to having them explore their experiences and past learning, to prevent re-migration as a means of escape and avoidance of psychosocial issues that can be and need to be managed.

#### **3) Disaggregated Approach to Service Provision**

While emphasizing service provision originating at divisional level to serve people at village level, it is important to ensure that specific distinct categories of services are provided, instead of lumping various services together.

In addressing psychosocial needs, focus has to be on remedial services ranging from counselling to mental health support services, on raising awareness and information dissemination and on creating

community support networks linked to local level government and non-government service provision that strengthens the migrant workers and their families during the cycle of migration.

While it is necessary to establish an administrative mechanism at the DS level to coordinate various services targeting care givers, children of different ages, spouses and returned migrants, such a mechanism needs to be fully integrated with relevant institutions at national, regional and district levels (i.e. MFEPW and SLBFE, District Secretariats etc).

What is equally important is the need to establish an effective outreach of various interventions aimed at ameliorating various psychosocial problems faced by migrant workers and their family members. This is critical as the needs and requirements of each individual migrant worker family are different and the services need to be adapted to suit such diversity. Hence the emphasis here on a casework approach to support services that can address divergent issues facing migrant family members.

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that the current support programmes targeting migrant worker families be reviewed and evaluated with a view to enhancing them in order to respond to psychosocial issues more effectively. Finding more effective and efficient ways to address psychosocial problems is imperative not only in the light of the pervasive and serious nature of persisting issues but also given the national importance of labour migration in the country at large.

### **National Level Policy Commitment**

While emphasizing the need for an integrated and coordinated intervention strategy at local level, the study has looked at wider policy level issues that directly and indirectly result in psychosocial problems faced by migrant workers and their families. These findings give rise to the following recommendations that need to be addressed at policy level:



Gaps identified in the study	Recommendations
<p>Research findings point out that many migrant workers do not know or adhere to the minimum requirements for prospective migrant workers to qualify for migrant work (literacy requirements, minimum age, suitability for selected work categories) laid down by the SLBFE. This results in the providing of false statements and documents with the help of employment agents and sub-agents and leaving for employment that is not suited to their qualifications. This results in problems in host countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate media coverage on the need for minimum standards and their value for protecting the interest and rights of migrant workers.</li> <li>• Adequate measures to prevent agents/sub-agents and other unscrupulous elements from sending unsuitable workers.</li> </ul>
<p>In making a decision to migrate for employment, the attitude among the service providers is that it is the migrant worker's responsibility and that service providers do not have the right to interfere in the decision. This relates to the policy commitment that while the State understands that migration for labour is a voluntary decision and a right enjoyed by all citizens, it shall assist men and women in the decision making process to migrate for employment.</p> <p>There is a plan to provide guidance and counselling pre-departure. However, migrant workers do not know how to access this service and have not been able to find trained staff that can provide this service. Most migrant workers who leave, have not benefitted from guidance and counselling in the decision making process. There is a dearth of trained counsellors Island wide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint trained counsellors through the Ministry of Social Services and appoint a minimum of one Counsellor to each Divisional Secretariat. The number of personnel deployed at the divisional level should be proportionate to the caseload in the relevant division.</li> <li>• Provide specialized training on issues related to migration to Counselling Assistants in the Counselling Divisions of the Ministry of Social Welfare and in some Divisional Secretariats as well to the new appointments mentioned in the above recommendation.</li> <li>• Provide facilities for Counsellors to reach communities and families to respond to individual needs.</li> </ul>
<p>Some employment agents publish news paper advertisements with inaccurate information which lure people on false messages of employment. This relates to the State's undertaking of measures to prevent dissemination of misleading information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and non-state parties should publicize and disseminate accurate information and give people a realistic picture of what to expect and how to prepare for labour migration: Target audiences should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ School leavers</li> <li>○ Members of women's groups</li> <li>○ Community leaders</li> <li>○ Parents and teachers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>The names of fraudulent employment agents blacklisted by the SLBFE are not made public and these fraudulent activities and abuse of migrant workers continues in many parts of the country. This relates to the State's commitment to give utmost priority to prevent illegal recruitment, fraud, exploitation or abuse of migrant workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide wide publicity regarding blacklisted employment agents making such information available to the general public.</li> <li>• Strengthen laws to apprehend and prosecute those engaged in fraudulent activities relating to labour migration.</li> </ul>

<p>It is clear that the number of personnel to look into the welfare and problems of migrant workers is inadequate. Those in-service are also in need of sensitization and training, in order to build capacity to enable them to handle complex issues. This relates to the policy commitment of ensuring better conditions for migrant workers without impinging on rights and bearing in mind the intense competition existing between labour sending countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take measures to recruit, train, sensitize and deploy an adequate number of personnel in host countries depending on the requirements.</li> <li>• Introduce systems of monitoring and supervision and quality control to maintain accountability and quality of services.</li> <li>• In addition, the personnel already deployed should take steps to mobilize NGOs and members of the Diaspora, to get involved in migrant rights and welfare activities.</li> <li>• Increase the cadre of Labour Attachés in Diplomatic Missions in destination countries.</li> <li>• Link performance appraisals of service provision to promotion and career prospects.</li> </ul>
<p>Many migrant workers face difficulties in performing work despite receiving pre-departure training. This further applies to those who leave unofficially and thus without the training available. This relates to the policy commitment that the State shall upgrade the existing training course in order to ensure competency, protection and capacity of workers to handle situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the pre-departure training by increasing the number of days; focus more on psychosocial issues like protection of personal relationships and protecting one's mental wellbeing as well as practical aspects of personal safety.</li> <li>• Put in place an effective system to track down migrants who leave unofficially and without training.</li> <li>• Track down, identify and follow up migrants who have gone illegally without official training.</li> <li>• In the host countries, prepare and offer a short term course covering essential subjects only for those who have migrated unofficially.</li> </ul>
<p>There are government and private institutions, which have been given authority to conduct medical tests on prospective migrant workers. There are complaints of abuses, malpractices, breaking of privacy and confidentiality rules at these institutions. This relates to the policy commitment that the State shall take responsibility for conducting of medical tests in the pre-departure stage by professionally qualified medical persons accepted by the State and while upholding worker dignity, privacy and confidentiality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate an independent monitoring mechanism to guide medical practice relating to migrant employment.</li> <li>• Provide specific clear and simple messages on the medical procedures and methods to all prospective migrant workers prior to medical testing, to make them aware of their rights, the right to be protected from abuses and to be afforded best practices in medical testing procedures.</li> <li>• Make pre-test counselling mandatory as well as post test counselling where necessary.</li> </ul>
<p>Given the propensity for abuse and the regularity with which cases are reported, it has to be concluded that pre-migration guidance on prevention of abuse is wholly inadequate. Information and data received in the survey indicate the need for a larger stronger cadre of professionally trained counsellors and welfare officers to deal with in service migrant issues. This relates to the policy commitment to address the need for counselling on the psychosocial aspects of labour migration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a specific cadre of trained counsellors to be available to in-service migrants to be accessed through the diplomatic missions in host countries. Such a cadre needs to be appointed in proportion to the percentage of migrant workers in each country.</li> <li>• Where financial resources are limited, bi-lateral agreements can be commissioned to meet such needs, or a higher percentage of remittances can be dedicated to the welfare of migrants.</li> <li>• Where approval/cooperation of the destination countries is required, stronger lobbying and diplomacy need to be employed to enable missions to be adequately staffed and funded.</li> <li>• Adopt a case approach for the management of all migrant workers who face problems, and systematize their monitoring.</li> </ul>
<p>Field data indicates that despite the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop specific awareness messages and disseminate</li> </ul>

<p>existing policy to provide a mechanism for protection of migrant workers from abuse and exploitation, there is wide spread abuse and exploitation at every stage of migration cycle due to inadequate surveillance at the different stages.</p>	<p>such through public media to general public as well as specifically to selected high risk audiences such as school leavers/drop out children/siblings of migrants, and returnees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide incentives to prospective migrants to register and leave formally, and provide public awareness on the benefits of registering.</li> <li>• Review existing training to emphasize and enhance sections dealing with rights, specific skills in self-protection, assertiveness training and effective communication skills.</li> </ul>
<p>In order to fulfil the policy commitment for Sri Lankan Embassies in host countries to have a well defined system to be in contact with all migrant workers in each country, and for Officers in Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions (particularly labour sections) to have the special capacity to handle grievance procedures of migrant worker and to work towards their protection and welfare.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The existing plans for comprehensive Migrant Worker Resource Centres to be implemented which will meet many of the needs of migrants for awareness, protection, training and wellbeing. The objectives and mission of the Resource Centres are directly in line with the wellbeing of migrant workers and can mitigate many of the problems now faced.</li> </ul>
<p>It is found that returning migrant workers have no recourse to support for their many needs and become helpless after their migration cycle is completed. They have no support to deal with the psychosocial impacts of their stay away and any negative experiences. There is also little specific support for the smooth and effective reintegration into their families and communities, often leaving them struggling with many financial, social and psychological issues. This relates to the policy commitment to develop and implement a comprehensive return and reintegration plan for migrant worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain an up-to-date database on returnee migrant workers with the support of the Department of Immigration and Emigration.</li> <li>• Establish a system whereby those intending to return or are due to return can be tracked and offered support in planning their return including attending to specific psychosocial issues.</li> <li>• On arrival, encourage all migrant workers and their families to attend a day of guidance and counselling on issues pertaining to reintegration. This guidance and counselling on reintegration needs to be provided in the form of a standardized programme/pack of information (including awareness and guidance to spouse, children, migrant workers and caregivers) on the changes to be expected with the arrival of the migrant worker. Government and NGO stakeholders can disseminate these programmes/packages.</li> </ul>
<p>It is found that returnee migrant workers and their families do not have access to a proper system of support and guidance, though some organizations and departments offer some limited assistance in certain aspects but no streamlined and comprehensive system is available. This can be connected to the policy commitment that the State shall recognize role of civil society organizations and trade unions in assisting returning migrant workers and their families in the reintegration process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create coordination whereby all those working for the wellbeing of migrants are brought together at regular monthly coordination meeting chaired by MFEPW and SLBFE officials at the DS level.</li> </ul>
<p>In many situations children's interests are not taken into account either by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a basic orientation and training on children's needs according to ages and sex, to all guardians.</li> </ul>

<p>migrant workers themselves or by service providers. As a result, children of all ages are adversely affected by the absence of one or both parents for varying periods of time. Moreover, children themselves have had no say in the decision making process and children are not prepared to face the situation arising out of migration of the parent. This relates directly to the policy commitment to formulate a policy framework for the protection of children of migrant workers.</p>	<p>These programmes should be at divisional level and can be conducted with the support of NGO stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a programme to assist guardians and care givers to perform their responsibilities or find options for them to cope with their responsibilities.</li> <li>• Explore possibilities of providing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes targeting vulnerable groups of families and care givers.</li> <li>• Develop a profile of caregivers in order to identify vulnerable groups incapable of providing care and protection for children left behind.</li> <li>• Enable a system to be in place to identify guardians/ caregivers who are unsuitable or unable to provide care.</li> </ul>
<p>Many reintegration support programmes are currently done by NGOs and CBOs. These include loan schemes, self-employment, seeds for agriculture, support for animal husbandry and small industries. However, these are not sustainable and long term and lack a strategic foundation. In the background that migrant workers on their return are used to a different system of earning, it is necessary to recognize the contribution made by these workers and to facilitate their return and reintegration with opportunities for skills transfer, productive employment and conflict free social integration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a structured and strategic national mechanism for reintegration and make it widely available to returnee workers. Provide options geared to the interests and capacities of the migrant workers taking into consideration local resources. This could include introduction of non-traditional industries and income generating opportunities, expansion of markets, loans schemes from banks and training.</li> </ul>

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## **List of Annexes**

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## **Annex – 1**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **Study on Psychosocial needs and services for labour migrants and their families**

##### **1. Background context**

In 2008, Sri Lanka adopted the only rights-based and holistic National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP) in South Asia with the aim of reducing obstacles to successful labour migration, as well as addressing a multitude of developmental, economic and social issues associated with labour migration. But in spite of the Government of Sri Lanka having already taken ambitious positive steps towards better governance and regulation of the labour migration process, there are a number of pressing concerns that require attention either in terms of policy guidance or on-the-ground intervention at different levels in order to enable migration in dignity, security and equity for Sri Lankan citizens.

While migration has positive impacts on the national economy and in many cases on the individual migrant and his or her family, the social costs for the migrants should not be overlooked. Temporary circular migration increases the risk of family disintegration, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress for migrants and their families. In addition, experience of exploitation and abuse can be traumatic and severely affect the psychosocial health of migrants. Psychosocial interventions with the aim to support migrants and their families and to strengthen resilience so that they can cope better with the various migration experiences must therefore form part of the support mechanisms for migrants and their families.

While the protection and empowerment component of the existing National Labour Migration Policy recognizes the importance of psychosocial well-being, the related challenges have been addressed only peripherally. The chapter on Protection and Empowerment of Migrants mentions that a counselling system should be established to prepare workers better for the situations in the future work environment. The policy further indicates that the Labour Sections of the Sri Lankan embassies in the destination countries “shall have the special capacity and ability to handle grievances’ of migrant workers and to work towards their protection and welfare in a proactive manner”. The action plan of the Policy refers to Resource Centres that shall be established and shall, among other services, offer counselling. For the last stage of the migration cycle, i.e. during return and reintegration, the Policy mentions no psychosocial services for migrant workers. However, in the part related to the protection of children of migrant workers the Policy indicates that children and care givers in distress must be supported through house visits and other services, including counselling.

The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion & Welfare has come to the conviction that the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families have to be given more consideration and the National Labour Migration Policy as well as the Action Plan to implement the Policy should be reviewed so as to make amendments that will ensure that the psychosocial health and well-being<sup>15</sup> of migrants and their families is well protected.

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<sup>15</sup> **What is psychosocial?**

For this project we understand “psychosocial” as referring to the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects, each continually inter-acting with and influencing the other.

“Psychological effects” of an experience is a short form to describe how the experience affects different levels of human functioning including cognitive (perceptions and memory as a basis for thoughts and learning), affective (emotions), and behavioural. “Social effects” pertain to altered relationships, family and community networks, and economic status.

It is often conceptually unclear how psychosocial health and mental health are related. In the course of developing a more specific policy response and action plan for improved psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families, clarifications will

## 2. Purpose of the consultancy

The purpose of this consultancy is to undertake a study with the aim of preparing recommendations:

- For an **addendum of policies and guidelines** to ensure a better protection of the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families
- Related to supporting migrants and their families through **improved services**.

This assignment is expected to review the National Labour Migration Policy in relation to the provisions for strengthening psychosocial support for migrants and their families and come up with recommendations for policy formulation and action. Further this assignment will review the psychosocial challenges faced by migrants and their families and the psychosocial provisions and services currently available for migrants and their families throughout the migration cycle, namely pre-departure, in-service in the destination countries, families left behind and return and reintegration. The resulting gaps shall be identified and practical solutions/interventions at different levels examined. Thus the assignment will accommodate the key questions which are part of this ToR. (Refer annexure 1). Further the concept document of this assignment is attached for further reference.

## 3. Scope of Services

- **Overall management of the project**
- **Study to identify key psychosocial issues of migrants and their families:** the study should include the following elements:
  - **Literature review:** A lot of smaller and bigger studies about the social implications of migration exist already in Sri Lanka. The first step will thus be a literature review of the social implications of migration, about psychosocial well-being and mental health of migrants and their families. In addition, the existing legal and policy framework to address these needs should be mapped and literature related to the quality of the services should be reviewed.
  - **Qualitative field research:** The existing literature will provide a good insight into the psychosocial key issues of migrants and their families. Required clarifications particularly about the access to services and the response of existing services to the needs of the migrants will be gathered through additional qualitative field review (i.e. focus group discussions and key informant interviews).
  - **Identification of gaps in relation to policy as well as in relation to provision of services:** Based on the field work and the literature review as well as the consultation with stakeholders the gaps will be identified. Particularly ILO should be consulted closely as their present work with the Ministry of Foreign Employment and Welfare includes policies and actions addressing psychosocial needs of migrants.
- **Stakeholder consultations:** Two consultations should be held, one at the beginning and one to discuss draft results and recommendations.
- **Recommendations:** The recommendations should be formulated with the intention to improve the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families and should thus include the policy level as well as the service provision level. A section of the recommendations should be specifically addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Employment and Welfare.
- **Report writing.**

## 4. Expected Result

At the end of the contract period, the consultant will provide a quality report on the study. The report includes a summary of not more than 10 pages plus recommendations related to for an **addendum of**

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have to be sought with stakeholders as to the overlap and inter-linkages between psychosocial services, social and mental health services.

**policies and guidelines** to ensure a better protection of the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families related to supporting migrants and their families through **improved services**.

**Outcome:** Recommendations for an addendum of policies and guidelines to ensure a better protection of the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families

**Key outputs**

- Identification of key psychosocial issues for migrants and their families
- Review of existing services and identification of gaps in the provision of psychosocial services
- Analysis of gaps in the legal and policy framework for the better protection of the psychosocial well-being of migrants and their families

**5. Time frame and detail work schedule**

The consultancy input is required for 43 person days within the period 15 August to 20 December 2011. The person days exclude the 20 days allocated for Ms. Evan Ekanayake for field work and participation in analysis and report writing as per requirement of the consultant. Key areas of task for the consultant and required days to accomplish tasks are provided in the table below.

**Table 1: Key areas of task for the consultants**

S.N.	Tasks	Level of effort	Deliverable	Remarks
A	<b>Literature review</b>	15 days	Section on literature review for the report	This includes literature mapping, review and write-up
B	<b>Stakeholder consultations</b>	3 days (including preparation)	2 consultation meetings	Relevant stakeholders from government and non-government sector
C	<b>Study design</b>	2 days	Guidelines for FGD and key informant interviews	
D	<b>Field work</b>	10 days	Section on field work	Qualitative field research carried out by consultants.  This includes analysis of data
E	<b>Formulation of recommendations</b>	3 days	Recommendation section	Based on study findings and stakeholder consultation.
F	<b>Findings &amp; Recommendations presented to the SLBFE &amp; Ministry of Foreign Employment</b>	1 day (including preparation)	Findings & Recommendations	
G	<b>Report writing</b>	10 days	Final report (as per	Includes both first draft and

			agreed table of content), summary and recommendations	final reporting
	<b>Total days of input</b>	<b>44</b>		

**Ps:** A detailed time frame will be developed in consultation with the Consultant

#### **6. Management of the study**

SPARC will be in charge of managing the project and will be led by Prof. S. Hettige. SPARK will submit the literature review and the study design to SDC for their feed-back and inputs. SDC will also participate in the stakeholder consultations. SDC Programme Advisor for Migration and Development will have periodical correspondence with the consultant with the purpose of providing necessary inputs and support, if and when necessary. For contractual matters, the consultant will coordinate with Mr. Benil Thavarasa, Senior Programme Officer of SDC Sri Lanka.

## **Key questions**

### **1. Psychosocial needs**

- What are the psychosocial key issues for male and female migrants before departure, in service and after return?
- What are the psychosocial key issues for children left behind?
- What are the psychosocial key issues for husbands/wives left behind?
- What are the psychosocial key issues for the elderly parents and other family members (eg: Differently able or with special needs)

### **2. Support provided according to existing policies**

- What rights to which services do migrants and their families have according to the existing policies (Labour Migration Policy; health, mental health, protection of children)
- Which already existing governmental and non-governmental services are supposed to address the particular needs of the migrants and their families and at which levels? (National, district, division and village).
- Are the migrants and their families aware of these services/provisions? If not, why are they not aware?
- Do they access the services when in need? If no, why?
- How do the services perceive migrants and their families and how do they respond to the needs of these families? (in terms of quality, adequacy, efficiency and accessibility)

### **3. Gaps**

- What psychosocial needs are not covered by existing available services?
- How do the families/migrants cope with their psychosocial issues in absence of support services?

### **4. Analysis of legal frameworks**

- Which policies/guidelines/action plans would need an addendum in order to fill the gaps?

## **Annex – 2**

### **Stakeholder Workshop Report**

First Stakeholder workshop was conducted in order to get the views of various stakeholders regarding various issues faced by migrant workers and their families throughout the migration cycle. The participants were divided into four groups and each group was asked to concentrate on one of the four stages of the migration cycle, namely, pre-departure, in-service, families left behind and return. Each group was given guidelines as to how the discussions should be conducted and results of their deliberations presented at the end. Since the stakeholders came from diverse institutional backgrounds, they were expected to make use of their diverse and extensive experience to identify and discuss issues, services available, the gaps that exist and their ideas for solving them for the benefit of migrants and their families. In this section, the summary of the outcome of the stakeholder workshop under four broad headings is presented.

#### **1. Pre-departure:**

Migrants begin to face difficulties and issues well before they even leave the country. These include the following:

- Relational: diverse and depend on marital status, age, gender,
- Familial: composition of the family and the status of the migrant
- Decision making: whether unilateral and collective
- Institutional: lack of guidance and supervision by public officials
- Economic/financial: debts, economic status of the family
- Abuse: Sexual abuse of female migrants
- Exploitation: Agents, sub-agents, trafficking,
- Risks: contractual arrangements, health status of the migrant, welfare of family left behind
- Health: possible health risks at work, health assessment, counselling
- Child protection: possibility of children left behind not having support and protection

Participants felt that there were considerable gaps in the services available to address issues faced by prospective migrants. Present institutional arrangements, particularly at local level are inadequate and there is little institutional coordination.

#### **2. Families Left Behind:**

All migrants naturally leave their families behind but the issues of the families left behind varies widely depending on various factors such as the age, gender, marital status of the family, composition of the family, socio-economic status of the family, role of the spouse, arrangements made for child care and protection, etc.

#### **3. Nature and composition of family:**

Single/female headed families, migration of one spouse or both, nuclear, extended, poverty stricken, availability of care givers, etc. affect the well being of families left behind. These distinctions need to be taken into account in addressing the issues.

Already broken or disorganized families face more serious issues, particularly with regard to protection and well being of children and women.

#### **4. Type of Family members:**

Different family members face different issues, depending on their circumstances. In this regard, following categories are important:

- Infants,
- Pre-school children
- Girl Child
- Adolescents/school children
- Vulnerable children, i.e. girl child left behind in the hands of unreliable care givers,
- Female spouse exposed to dangers of abuse
- Male spouse addicted to substances,
- Unemployed, dependent spouse
- Elderly care givers
- Single parent without adequate social support and economic resources



### **5. Institutional Services:**

Available services are not specifically targeted to each and every one of the above categories of family members. Available support is fragmented and does not adapt to the needs of family members. i.e. scholarship support given by SLBFE does not pay attention to other needs of school children. The services delivered by different agencies are not coordinated at any level. i.e. health, education, financial aid, counselling, etc. Some migrant families cannot maintain contact with the migrant workers employed abroad, either due to communication problems or break up of communication channels leading to severe distress for some members of the family left behind. Non remittance of money at times leaves the family left behind in serious economic hardship.

### **6. Issues facing In-service Migrant workers:**

Not all migrant workers face serious problems in the host country. Issues vary across jobs, employers, country, type of migrant, etc. But many face problems relating to their contract. i.e. the conditions of the contract not being honoured. Some housemaids face serious problems such as forced labour, non-payment of wages, sexual exploitation, physical and verbal abuse, long hours of work, loss of employment and abandonment, at times leading to loss of migrant worker status and prostitution.

Almost all migrant workers maintain regular contact with their families but this is not always easy due to various circumstances in the host country.

Existing services in host countries to address diverse problems faced by migrant workers

## **Annex – 3**

### **List of Key Informant Interviews**

Kurunegala, Colombo and Puttalam Districts

- a) Divisional Secretaries (GS)
- b) Grama Niladaris (GN)
- c) Child Rights Promotion Officers (CRPO)
- d) Human Resource Officers (HRO)
- e) Religious leaders
- f) School Principal/ school teachers
- g) Community leaders

## Annex – 4

### Focus Group Discussions (Locations and details of Participants)

<b>Puttalam</b>							
Age	Civil Status	Sex	Ethnicity Sinhala(S) Tamil(T) Muslim(M)	Religion Buddhist(B) Catholic(Ca) Christian(C) Islam (I)	Education Level	Occupation	Details re- migration
45	M	M	S	C	O/L	Businessman	Returnee
61	M	M	S	C	Yr 8	Former fisherman, now Unemployed	Father of migrated children
60	M	M	S	C	Yr 2	Fisherman	Father of migrated children
40	M	M	S	C	O/L	Businessman	Returnee
65	M	F	S	C	Yr 4	Housewife	Mother of Migrated children
53	M	M	S	C	Yr 5	Fisherman	Father of migrated children
52	M	F	S	C	Yr 10	Housewife	Mother of migrated children
63	M	M	S	C	A/L	Retired teacher	Father of migrated children
55	S	F	S	C	O/L	Community and religious work	Community leader
<b>Kurunegala</b>							
33	M	M	M	I	A/L	Tailor	Returnee
56	M	F	M	I	Yr 9	Housewife	Returnee
36	M	F	M	I	A/L	Housewife	Returnee
21	UM	F	M	I	A/L	Unemployed	Hope to migrate
55	M	M	S	C	Yr 9	Mason work	Returnee
47	M	F	S	C	Yr 2	Housewife	Returnee & hopes to re-migrate
58	Widow	F	S	C	Yr 8	Preparing meals packets	Returnee
61	Widow	F	S	C	Yr 8	Sewing garments	Returnee
28	M	F	S	C	Graduate	Unemployed	Returnee
48	UM	F	S	C	O/L	Religious Leader	Religious Leader

#### Ampara- Sainthamaruthu

1. Mr. Abdeen (58, male) Migrant worker in Saudi Arabia
2. Mr. Arun (30, male) Migrant worker in Saudi Arabia
3. Ms.Meela Jameela (45, female ) Migrant worker in Kuwait 5 years
4. Ms. Jalima (29, female) wife of Migrant worker who has been out for 9 years
5. Ms. Rifaya (26, female) wife of Migrant worker in Qatar 5 years
6. Ms. Umma Bebe (58, female) was a Migrant worker in the 90s for 2 years her sons are now Migrant workers
7. Mr. Niyaz (26, male) returned from Dubai after 2 years

#### Ampara -Hingurana

(All members of the Migrant Worker Association /Returnee Migrant workers and 2 wives of male Migrant worker)

1. Ms. Priyadari 26
2. Ms. Mangalika 35
3. Ms. Surangika 34
4. Ms, Leelawathi 57
5. Ms. RM somawathi 56
6. Ms. PD Kamani 38
7. Ms. Ranaseeli 53
8. Ms. Thilaka Kumari 38
9. Ms. KD Ramya Kumari
10. Mr. Jayalath Jayantha (Committee member)

**Hatton Binnoya**

1. Mr. T Sivano 60 (father of Migrant worker son)
2. Mr. Anandaraja 45 (husband and brother to Migrant worker wife and sister)
3. Ms. Parvathee 27 (wife of Migrant worker husband with 2 preschool children)
4. Ms.Selvamalar 37 (wife of Migrant worker with 2 children)
5. Ms. Poovaneswari 32 (returnee single woman)
6. Ms. Kanapathyamma 58 (grandmother and carer of 3 children of Migrant worker daughter)
7. Ms. Maryamma 60 (grandmother and primary carer for 2 children of Migrant worker daughter)
8. Ms. Regina 56 (returnee and primary carer for Migrant worker son's children)
9. Mr. Kanakaraja 48 (father of 2 Migrant worker children and community leader )
10. Mr. Perumal 27 (father of an infant, working in Colombo, wife considering migration)

**Annex – 5**  
**Family Interviews (Locations and details of Participants)**

<b>Colombo</b>							
Age	Civil Status	Sex	Ethnicity Sinhala(S) Tamil (T) Muslim (M)	Religion Buddhist(B) Catholic(Ca) Christian(C) Islam (I)	Education Level	Occupation	Details re-migration
47	Widow	F	Sinhala (S)	B	Not schooling	Preparing sweets, meals	Returnee
	Married	F	S	B	Yr 2	House wife	Returnee
75	Widow	F	Tamil	Ca	O/L	House wife	G/mother of G/children & daughter-in-law in abroad
56	Widow	F	S	B	Yr 5	House wife	G/mother of G/children & daughter-in abroad
<b>Puttalam</b>							
37	Married	F	S	Ca	A/L	Post master	Wife of a migrated husband
40	Married	F	S	Ca	O/L	House wife	Wife of a migrated husband
61	Married	M	S	Ca	Yr 8	Former Fisherman, but now UE	Father of Migrated children
63	Married	F	S	Ca	Yr 6	House wife	Mother of migrated children
60	Married	M	S	Ca	Yr 2	Fisherman	Father of migrated children
52	Married	F	S	Ca	Yr 10	House wife	Mother of migrated children
53	Married	M	S	Ca	Yr 5	Fisherman	Father of migrated children
63	Married	M	S	Ca	A/L	Retired teacher	Father of migrated children
<b>Kurunegala</b>							
33	Married	M	Muslim	I	A/L	Tailor	Returnee
56	Married	F	Muslim	I	Yr 9	House wife	Returnee

36	Married	F	Muslim	I	A/L	House wife	Returnee
50	Widow	F	Muslim	I	Yr 9	unemployed	Returnee
43	Married	F	Muslim	I	Yr 10	Preparing sweets	Returnee & hope to re-migrate
55	Married	M	S	C	Yr 9	Mason work	Returnee
47	Married	F	S	C	Yr 2	House wife	Returnee & hopes to re-migrate
58	Widow	F	S	C	Yr 8	Preparing meals packets	Returnee

## **Annex – 6**

### **Interview guidelines for in depth interviews**

#### **A. Pre-departure**

- 1) Basic information of the household
  - Residence (District, Province, AG office, village etc.
  - Informant's relationship to the family, his or her age, education, marital status, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and the income etc.
  - Same basic information of the other family members.
- 2) Reasons to decide to go abroad
  - Explain the reasons caused to go abroad in the past (if you have been abroad in the past only)
  - Explain the reasons caused to go abroad last time.
  - Problem solving skills/attempts (if your problems caused to go abroad) being in Sri Lanka
  - Your experience on the migrants (what kind of things you heard on them)
- 3) The sources from which you found information to go abroad (family members themselves, close relatives, friends, private agencies, government institutions and so on).
- 4) Decision making
  - How did you communicate the message which you had decided to go abroad?
  - The reaction from the family members (agreed or disagreed)
  - If someone agreed/disagreed, who and why
  - If family members disagreed, how did you solve those problems?
  - Final decision making by alone or as a family
  - Awareness on the salary, leave, and other facilities of the job to which you had planned to go
  - Did you sign to an agreement or bond with the agency/other institutions before you leave
- 5) Financial arrangement for going abroad
- 6) Procedure which you follow to go abroad
  - Individuals
  - Institutions
  - The support which you got from those individuals or institutions
- 7) Training and medical checkups
  - Interviews faced and by whom you were interviewed
  - Training which you obtained before the departure
  - From which institutions you obtained those trainings
  - From which institutions you did your medical checkups?
- 8) Alternatives/Pre arrangements for family responsibilities
  - Caring the parents, siblings, husband, children and so on.
  - Home activities, children's activities and so on.
  - Financial arrangement (sending money, saving money, investment money etc)
- 9) Support received from the family members for the above arrangements
  - Decision making
  - Pre-arrangements
  - In the meeting/visiting individuals/Institutions
  - In the departure
- 10) Problems
  - Problems faced in the decision making
  - Problems faced in the meeting /visiting individuals/institutions
  - Problems faced in the arrangements of the alternatives

- Problems faced in the departure
- In the airport, feelings on the departure

## **B. While in-service**

- 1) Nature of the welcome to the country
  - By whom, same place which they have informed/different place
- 2) Communication
  - Nature of the informing the family members about the arrival
  - While abroad, communication with the family members, with whom, what about, when
  - Communication with the people in the abroad
- 3) Duties in the abroad
  - Day to day activity
  - Difference between the activities which you expected and activities had to be done in abroad
- 4) Food, lodging and safety
  - Nature of the expected facilities and given facilities
- 5) Health facilities
  - Nature of the expected and given facilities
- 6) Availability of the Services / institutions
  - Nature of the access
  - Nature of the supportiveness in their problematic situations
  - Relationship with those institutions in the abroad
- 7) Relationship with the families in Sri Lanka
  - Communication patterns
  - With whom, for what kinds of matters
  - The way they handled the conflicts created in their families while they were there
- 8) Payment and Transferring money
  - Nature of the payment
  - How, to whom, for what, nature of the amount, time period
- 9) Nature of the collections
  - What kinds of items/goods collected while they were there
- 10). Time schedule/ agreement
- 10) Your feeling on the completion of the time and return
  - Plan of return
  - Ticket arrangement,
  - Awareness of the family members about the return
  - The way they returned the home
- 11) Problems
  - In the arrival
  - In the work place, day to day activities
  - Language /communication
  - In the access to the services/institutions
  - In the departure from the abroad and the airport
  - In the returning home



## **Annex – 7**

### **Focus Group Discussion protocol**

Basic information of the participants (age, occupation, education level, religion, race, employment before migration and after the return and so on)

#### **Group on pre-departure**

- Background issues/Relational issues (family issues....)
- Institutional issues (Whether the institutions are available.)
- Preparation (enough preparation, risk management.
- Employment transitions (skilled persons have to give up their job ...)
- Service available

#### **Migrants who are in-service**

- Employment (whether they got the advertised job .....
- What services are available? (For the migrants' issues, and families left behind including children, and so on).
- Relational factors and communication (with their own family, with the people in the place they worked).
- Care for women
- Cultural issues (language and foods
- Risk factors (deprivation...) Family left behind
- Employment issues (Can father go to his job,
- Health and education (of child, grandparents...)
- Risk management (safety child care, women care, child labour etc)
- Relationships
- Financial and legal management
- Institutional management
- Psychosocial impact of the loses

#### **Returnees**

- Employment issues
- Risks: on children, other family members
- Health issues (mental and physical)
- Institutional issues (taking the compensation, legal, insurance)
- Financial issues
- Cultural and social reintegration,
- Children's education
- What services are available (to restart the job, psychosocial support for family issues, and so on)?

#### **Gaps**

What psychosocial needs are not covered by existing available services?

How do the families/migrants cope with their psychosocial issues in absence of support services?

**Annex – 8**  
**List of Case Studies**

Case no	Code	Description
	GK5	Galle, Kathaluwa: Gunawathi 61, female. Sinhala. Migrant returnee. Returned with mental health condition (paranoid symptoms) Lost husband 2 years ago while away. Reports having very traumatic experience.
2.	GK7	Galle, Kathaluwa: Maya 45, female. Sinhala. Returnee. Went when engaged. Returned to find partner married. Married another through a proposal. He turned out to be schizophrenic. Is a single mother now.
3.	HW1	Hatton, Welioya: Maryamma 58 ,female. Tamil. Primary carer for migrant daughters 2 children and single mom to autistic adopted son.
4.	AK1	Ampara, Kalmunai: Riyaza 32, female. Muslim. Wife of migrant husband and primary carer for sisters two sons.
5.	GD3	Galle, Dewata: Neluka 25, female. Sinhala. Mother of one year old. Returned after two very difficult attempts at working in the Middle East.
6.	AS1	Ampara, Sainthamaruthu: Nooranya, female. Muslim. Wife of migrant. Mother of 2 sons. Struggles to raise Children alone.
7.	GamR2	Gampaha, Ranpokunugama: Rehana 20, female. Single Remembers what it was like when her mother left her at age 7.
8.	GamR1	Gampaha,Ranpokunugama: Anoma 27, female. Sinhala. Returnee after brief and traumatic spell with Sri Lankan family in the Middle East.
9.	GamM1	Gampaha,Maimbula: Dayawathi 57, female. Sinhala. Returnee, mother of 3 boys. Has built four houses but lost the relationships with her sons.
10.	AK1	Ampara, Kalmunai: (location, job and race changed due to special concerns about being Identified) Thayalini and Thileepan. Married couple early 30s. Tamil. Life changed for the better financially after Thayalini's time overseas but they cannot relate to each other anymore.
11.	GKT4	Galle,Kataluwa: Sumithra 48, female. Sinhala. Returnee whose husband nearly killed himself because he didn't hear from her, while her letters to him were being thrown away by employer in the middle east.
12.	HD3	Hatton,Dickoya: Sivanesan 48, male. Tamil. Shop owner. Married to two sisters at the same time. One is a migrant in Saudi, other lives with him currently. 5 children from both marriages.