Transnational Migration and Changing Care Arrangements for Left-Behind Children in Southeast Asia: A Selective Literature Review in Relation to the CHAMPSEA Study

Theodora Lam

Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography,
National University of Singapore
arilcft@nus.edu.sg

Brenda S.A. Yeoh

Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography,
National University of Singapore
geoysa@nus.edu.sg

Lan Anh Hoang

School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, Australia
lahoang@unimelb.edu.au

September 2013

ARI
ASIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE
National University of Singapore

Asia Research Institute
National University of Singapore
469A Tower Block #10-01,
Bukit Timah Road,
Singapore 259770
Tel: (65) 6516 3810
Fax: (65) 6779 1428
Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg
Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research in the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

Transnational Migration and Changing Care Arrangements
for Left-Behind Children in Southeast Asia:
A Selective Literature Review in Relation to the CHAMPSEA Study

INTRODUCTION

As a significant exporter of transnational labour migrants, especially women, within and beyond the region, Southeast Asia presents itself as an important site for the study of families fractured by migration. Of particular interest are the children who have been left in their home countries and who live a major part of their lives under the care of relatives or strangers, in the long term absence of their migrant fathers, mothers or even both parents. While the migration of fathers, though undesired, has traditionally been accepted as a norm and necessity for survival, the increasing feminisation of migration[1] in recent decades is igniting worries over the resulting 'crisis of care' in the left behind communities (**Parreñas**, 2005a). The absence of any one parent will undeniably create "displacement, disruptions and changes in care-giving arrangements" (SMC, 2004: 61) but the migration of mothers seems to beget greater changes and adjustments for the remaining families. This, according to Scalabrini Migration Center's (SMC) study in 2003 on children[2] left behind by migrants, is unsurprising given that "changes in women's roles often have more implications for the family than changes in men's roles" (SMC, 2004: 3).

The growing participation of mothers in labour migration streams and their consequent long absences from home thus generate higher levels of anxiety about the well-being of the 'family' than when men migrate without their families. This trend of 'diverted mothering' (Horton, 2008) has gradually captured the attention of the media, government/policy makers, non-profit organisations and academia. Gender-differentiated transnational migration is a phenomenon that not only implies "a redefinition of the economic role of women in the society and within their family" but also the "redefinition of the traditional family" (Tobin, 2008: 1). The ways in which households function are being altered, with consequences for familial relations, the gender division of labour and the traditional (read 'patriarchal') balance of power between gender in both host and home societies. It is at the 'family' or 'household' level where migration dynamics are most keenly felt, and where individual actors constantly rework their roles and responsibilities within the framework of changing circumstances in their family situations. In short, gender-differentiated migration is without doubt a significant driver of contemporary social transformation of the 'family/household' in sending communities, as to be observed from its impact on changing arrangements and relationships of care around left-behind children.

---

[1] According to the World Migration Report, women migrants constitute nearly half of all migrations (49.6%) and can be generally found in female-dominated occupations such as health care, education, domestic service, manufacturing and entertainment (IOM, 2008).

[2] The mean age of the children surveyed in SMC's (2004) study is 10.72 and are mainly between 10 and 12 years of age.

In this context, this paper aims mainly to organise and review the emerging academic literature on children left behind by international migrant parents predominantly in Asia using the following four themes,
(a)   impact on household structure and relationships within the transnational household;
(b)   impact on gender roles, identities and relations;
(c)   impact on intergenerational relations; and
(d)   impact on children's physical health and psychological well-being (and, separately, educational outcomes of left-behind children).

It then concludes by introducing and specifying how a large scale multi-method project investigating child health and migrant parents in Southeast Asia (CHAMPSEA) expects to contribute to a further understanding of the themes identified in the literature review.

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE 'LEFT BEHIND': A SELECTIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

The plight of children (and to a lesser extent, the aged) left in the home country by migrants was grabbing headlines in both sending countries such as China, Mexico and the Philippines, and receiving countries such as Canada and the United States (US). Left-behind children around the world have also been the object of study by different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including the Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and Save the Children. Overall, these groups appear to echo one another in publishing generally bleak findings on the impact of migration on children, particularly when the mothers are away. Left-behind children were reported to suffer from psychological and emotional stress, are more susceptible to deviant behaviour and criminal offences whilst expressing feelings of abandonment or resentment at being left behind (D'Emilio *et al.*, 2007; Jespersen, 2006; Save the Children, 2006; Tobin, 2008).[3]

Public opinions notwithstanding, the 'left-behind' as a subject of study is still a fairly recent topic in the field of research on transnational migration. Readers in the past had to comb through studies on transnational migrants for brief glimpses into the stories of those left behind, and writings focusing on the left-behind have really only emerged around the late nineties, gaining more prominence in this millennium. In addition, many of the existing studies relating to the left-behind are largely situated in the US or countries of origin for US-bound migration streams, for instance, Mexico, the Caribbean and other countries in Latin America. The contiguous cross-border movements between America and Latin American countries have provided researchers in the north with rich material for in-depth study, ranging from the gendered experiences and struggles of transnational migrants (including reunification and returnees) and transnational parentingto migration outcomes, remittances and impacts of transnational migration on (including well-being of) different left-behind members.[4] Research on the left-behind in this region has also seen a shift in methodological approach from forming an understanding of the left-behind spouse, children, elderly or carer through migrants' voices, to relying on direct firsthand accounts from those left-behind.

---

[3]   For more information on some of the studies conducted for/by these organisations, please see Bryant (2005), D'Emilio *et al.* (2007), Jespersen (2006), Save the Children (2006), Tobin (2008) and Whitehead and Hashim (2005).

[4]   For research on different aspects of Latin American transnational families, see Adams (2000), Dreby (2006; 2007), Falicov (2007), Glick Schiller and Fouron (1998), Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), Kana'iaupuni *et al.* (2005), Kandel and Massey (2002), Miyares *et al.* (2003), McGuire and Martin (2007), Moran-Taylor (2008a; 2008b), Olwig (1999), Pribilsky (2001), Orellana *et al.* (2001) and Viruell-Fuentes (2006).

On the whole, research on Latin American transnational migrants and the left-behind clearly leads the field whilst studies in and on Asia have been more sporadic in comparison. Most Asia-related studies available in English are studies of Filipino and Sri Lankan transmigrants and their families, given the long history of the outmigration of domestic workers from these countries. This is slowly changing as more studies on transnational migration from other parts of Asia such as Indonesia and Thailand are emerging. The following subsections endeavour to pull together, academic research relating to left-behind families of transnational migrants in the Asian context using the four organising themes mentioned earlier.[5]

Impact on Family Structure and Relationships within the Transnational Household

When migrants embark on their journeys away from home, many justify their actions not just in terms of seeking a better life not for themselves but often by drawing on the discourse of undertaking migration "for the sake of the family". At the same time, their departure inevitably and most immediately affects the realm of the family within countries of origin, often requiring adjustments of different degrees on the part of left-behind family members. Tasks may need to be reassigned and existing roles of the remaining family members have to change so as to fill the void created by the absent migrant (Gamburd, 2000; Hugo, 2002; *Parreñas*, 2005a). The type and degree of adjustments required as well as the capacity for change depend on a variety of factors, including the gender and social class of the migrant, socio-cultural norms as well as other "lines of influence" which will "indicate and highlight what are regarded as the pivotal issues" (Rigg, 2007:175). For instance, left-behind Filipinas appear to be able to take over the roles of their migrant husbands successfully and continue looking after their children whilst preserving their existing nuclear household structure (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; *Parreñas*, 2005a; SMC, 2004). On the other hand, though Sri Lankan women are also capable of taking on the roles of their absent husbands, societal norms disapprove of them living 'alone', thus requiring the inclusion of one or more relatives into the nuclear household (Bruijn *et al.,* 1992).

In cases where mothers migrate, most left-behind families will enlist the help of extended family members – often female – or even friends to undertake caring or nurturing tasks vacated by the absent mothers (Gamburd, 2000; *Parreñas*, 2005a; SMC, 2004). As a result, pre-migration nuclear household structures may have to be expanded after migration to incorporate extended kin such as grandparents and aunts. Converting to an extended household type may hence be a viable strategy to fill the gaps resulting from the migrant's absence (Bruijn *et al.,* 1992); conversely, living within an extended household structure in the first place may be an important reason why either or both parents are able to migrate. Maintaining the extended household structure during migration may be a viable strategy for the success of the migration. It should be noted, however, that extended family structures may also break apart upon the migrant's departure due to "inherent social conflict[s]" (Bruijn *et al.*¸1992: 173). Hugo (2002: 32) further argues that migration is the key in transforming predominantly "emotionally extended" Indonesian families to "emotionally nuclear families" accompanied by "the erosion of patriarchal power". He explains that in leaving the country, the migrant is actually 'resigning' from his or her role as a worker on the family land and is thus no longer ruled by the head of household. The eventual disintegration of the extended household as an

---

5 Notably, children (or any other members of the family for that matter) are not only left behind by international migrants but also by internal migrants, deceased and/or diseased parents (especially in Africa) or as victims of war, unrest and other forms of displacement. Children in these circumstances are also vulnerable to effects similar to those experienced by children of international migrants and more, including susceptibility to infectious diseases such as AIDS. This review focuses only on children left behind by *international* migrants although it should be remembered that it is often not possible, or necessary, to distinguish between the effects of internal vis-à-vis international migration.

economic unit will weaken "patriarchal authority and the dominance of the extended family" (Hugo, 2002: 32). The availability of remittance income from migration may also affect household structures and affiliations by encouraging the nucleation of households and helping young families become independent from their extended kin. This was evident in a study by Piotrowski (2008) on the impact of remittances, albeit from internal migration, on household division in Nang Rong, Thailand. In his study, remittances from siblings facilitated the movement of their sisters and husbands from the extended household into their own.

At the same time, current nuclear families may merge with another temporarily when left-behind children are fostered out to other households during their mothers' absence (Bruijn *et al.,* 1992; Hugo, 2002). The situation becomes more problematic when the basic structure of the nuclear family crumbles permanently after spouses separate due to labour migration. Though there may already be cracks in a marriage that led to the migration of one party, extended absences of the migrant – as evidenced by Hugo's (2002) study in East Flores, Indonesia – can exacerbate marital instability and lead ultimately to the break-up of the family unit. There are signs of a higher incidence of divorce among migrant households, resulting in abandoned families being left to fend for themselves. Hugo (2002; 2005), along with other scholars such as Afsar (2005) and Yea (2008) further reveal cases where migrant spouses take on new partners and have new children when away and/or left-behind spouses engage in extramarital affairs. Left-behind children may in turn experience feelings of jealousy and abandonment while parents who have formed new families may find it difficult to negotiate the conflicting demands presented by having two families (Yea, 2008). Old family relations may be compromised in time as a result of new liaisons (Yeoh and Lam, 2007).

It should be noted that the adverse social and emotional effects on the health of familial relations are not predetermined. Hugo (2002) notes that of key importance is the presence of support networks for left-behind families of low-skilled migrants in maintaining resilient family lives in the absence of one parent. Migrants themselves who are physically absent from 'home' may still contribute to the durability of the family. Asis (2002), for example, shows that while some Filipino women migrants she interviewed spoke of troubled marital relations and wayward children, the majority actively worked at maintaining a sense of connection with their children through phone calls, letters and other means of long-distance communication (what Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila [1997: 550] calls transnational "circuits of affection, caring and financial support"), succeeding in keeping their families physically and emotionally intact through the period of their absences. The dedication of migrant Filipino mothers in sustaining the relationship with their left-behind children was also apparent in ***Parreñas (2005b) work***. Whatever the costs and triumphs, sustaining the family across distance may be regarded in itself a form of resistance against the circumstances.

Economic considerations often provide a major impetus for the migration of one or more members of the family. Economic disparities between sending and receiving nations evidently come into play, and opportunities to eke out a better life for families at home have been the driving force for the large flows of low-skilled labour migrants. The act of sending back home remittances carved out from earnings is an integral part of the migration strategy and not simply a 'random product' of migration (Sofranko and Idris, 1999: 468). The act in itself is also a reaffirmation of the migrants' commitment toward their left-behind kin. Conversely, remittances may also act as a form of insurance for migrants in the expectation that their children will reciprocate by looking after them in their old age, or help maintain good family relations with extended kin in order to protect their inheritance (Thieme and Wyss, 2005). Analyses of the use of remittances by left-behind families show that while there is a general consensus that remittances constitute a valuable economic contribution to the family, their long-term effects are contentious. Among the uses of remittances are the fulfillment of basic necessities, investment purposes and the purchase of luxury goods. While a large proportion of remittances are used to sustain basic necessities, the distribution of

remittances to other expenses, mitigated by kin obligations, is significant in influencing the long-term economic benefits to the family. Sofranko and Idris (1999) argue that rather than being an anti-modern construct, the extended family helps to utilize migrant remittances for business investment purposes through the provision of information, thereby facilitating wealth creation for left-behind kin. Such prudent reciprocal treatment of remittances then strengthens the relationship between the migrants and the left-behind.

Some households, however, remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty even upon the receipt of remittances from migration. This is especially evident in Sri Lanka where left-behind husbands squander away the remittances from their migrant wives on 'social activities' such as drinking and gambling (Gamburd, 2000). Money becomes the cause of friction between the couple when men see it as their right as head of households to spend the remittances as they deemed fit while women have no say over their hard-earned money. For cases where remittances have been mismanaged, conflicts over the control of money and how it should be spent is thus a common occurrence between the migrants and their left-behind spouses. Gamburd (2000: 183) goes on to reveal that the "continued physical absence [of migrant women] greatly diminished their control over the money they sent home". Likewise some studies of Filipino female migrants show that their ties to the family back in the Philippines may rob them of control over their wages earned abroad. Barber's (2000: 402) study of the agency of Filipino female migrants in Canada, for example, shows that these women carry with them ingrained expectations to be "mindful of the wellbeing of [their families]" back in the Philippines. Barber argues that this is an expectation of both the family and the Philippine state, rooted in the idea of the woman's duty to the home. When recounting her own story as a migrant mother, Sampang (2005) shares that some families of migrant Filipinas do not treat their failure to remit money kindly, continually plying pressure and increasing expectations on the migrants until they are driven to despair and even death.

While money can unify and reinforce family relationships, it can also create rifts between migrants and their extended family members as not all migrants and their spouses are keen on sharing the economic benefits of migration outside their nuclear unit (Bruijn *et al.¸* 1992). In a case study presented by Gamburd (2000), a migrant woman was unable to remit or give any money to her own mother who had looked after her children during her absence because of her husband's disapproval. Both parties had since severed ties with each other and the parents did not visit their daughter (the migrant woman) even when she attempted suicide over the sad state of affairs after her return. Another important point to stress is that not all members of the left-behind family benefit equally from the receipt of remittances. In many parts of Southeast Asia, the privileging of male over female offspring often mean that the income and remittances sent back by young women migrants are channelled to their brothers' education, or to facilitate their migration, while the women themselves are not accorded similar opportunities for self-improvement (Asis, 2000). However, it should also be noted that current studies in the Southeast Asian context have not given explicit attention to the gendered effects of remittance distribution and use, an area which warrants further attention.

In sum, research from the Southeast Asian context (whether from international or internal migration) have been ambivalent in answering the question as to "whether remittances have the effect of reaffirming or reconfiguring gender ideologies and relations across transnational space"; while patriarchal conditions have been entrenched in some cases, in others, "remittances do trigger changes in social relations within families, which become a site of struggle and negotiation over the distribution of resources, mediated by gender, patriarchal and generational relations" (King, Dalipaj and Mai, 2006: 429-430).

Impact on Gender Roles, Identities and Relations

Gender-differentiated migration may also lead to altered gendered divisions of labour within the left-behind household, the configurations of which depend on the existing divisions of power, negotiated along the lines of age, gender and the relationships among members of the household (Chant, 1998). In the past when male migrants tended to dominate emigration flows, it was believed that women, children and the elderly were rendered most vulnerable as a result of migration. Studies revealed that the migration of the male heads of households may lead to women and children performing tasks traditionally done by men, including agricultural work (Hugo, 2002; Xiang, 2007). Aside from women assuming greater responsibilities and additional workloads (see reviews by Asis, 2003; Castro, 2002; Dwiyanto and Keban, 1997; Gardner, 1995; Hadi, 1999; 2001; Hugo, 2000; Russell, 1986; Smith-Estelle and Gruskin, 2003), studies also showed that male migration led to more financial hardships as well as difficulties with disciplining their children for women (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Dwiyanto and Keban, 1997; Hugo, 2000), lower access to food (Smith-Estelle and Gruskin, 2003) and increased loneliness and isolation (Skeldon, 2003; Gardner, 1995). According to some studies, the situation for left-behind daughters tends to be discouraging as they, despite their mothers' best efforts, tend to leave school earlier and form their own families through early marriages and unplanned pregnancies in order to complete their own lives (Gamburd, 2000; Sampang, 2005).

However, not all the studies on male migration revealed negative outcomes for women. Women who remain in the source area from which men migrate may also find themselves taking on a wider range of roles and responsibilities, becoming more autonomous and involved in decision-making within the family and community. For example, long term absences of males in Punjab due to migration have often accorded wives with greater autonomy and decision-making power over land issues, children's education and household finances (Donnan and Werbner, 1991). Women in this situation are likely to continue holding on to their increased power even after their husbands' return. As a result, it was found that women generally gained greater self-confidence from being more actively involved in decision-making and also experienced an improvement in their socioeconomic status (Hadi, 1999; 2001).

With the more recent feminisation of labour migration in the region, studies on the gender impact of female migration have also emerged. An important issue relates to whether the migration of women necessarily leads to men taking on the roles previously assumed by women (Asis, 2000; Lam, Yeoh and Law, 2002). In general, studies show that when women migrate, men left behind do take on *more* caregiving roles. This is evident in studies on Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka but the change, especially in the case of the Philippines, is not always sustained nor continued after the women's return (Afsar, 2005; Chantavich, 2001; Hugo, 2005; *Parreñas*, 2005a). In Bangladesh, husbands who take on household chores in the absence of their migrant wives often do so with the help of older children (Afsar, 2005). Though men in Sri Lanka do not openly admit to the assumption of household and child-rearing tasks – work that is seen to threaten their sense of masculinity – Gamburd (2000) observed that there was actually more male participation than reported. As with Save the Children (2006), Gamburd (2000: 197) argues that "older concepts of gender roles and family responsibilities [will] slowly change" in Sri Lanka when more men take over 'women's chores' during their wives' absence.

Changes in fathering roles may be able to counteract the negative impact of the mother's absence on children left behind as most of the left-behind children view the change in their father's roles positively. On the flip side, more left-behind fathers appear to be experiencing greater stress in this reversed situation as more of them pick up drinking and drug-taking habits as a form of escape. This may eventually increase risks among the children, have an adverse effect on children's emotions and

affect their performance in school examinations (Gamburd, 2005). Children may also be averse to returning home and take to wandering the streets if their fathers are drunk most of the time (Gamburd, 2000). More research is certainly needed on how left-behind men adapt to their wives' absence, in what ways they fill the caregiving void, and how masculinities are negotiated in the context of the increasing feminisation of labour migration.

It should be noted that migrant parents do not necessarily forsake but instead adapt their parenting roles after migration. For the Filipinos, mothers away continue to bear most of the responsibility for childcare even after leaving the Philippines while eldest daughters and female kin are tasked with taking over household chores (Asis, 2006; *Parreñas*, 2002; 2005a).[6] Migrant Filipino mothers continue to maintain close contact with their children and take charge of providing funds and arranging for others to raise their children *(Parreñas*, 2005b). In fact, *Parreñas* (2005a) argued that both the reifications and transgressions of gender norms persist in transnational Filipino households all the more when mothers are away. In her study examining the impact of labour migration through the eyes of the left-behind Filipino children,[7] the maintenance of traditional gender ideologies actually intensifies despite women's wage work overseas and occasionally even generates conflicts within many Filipino migrant families. The disparity between women's perceived lack of domesticity given her outmigration and the continued pressure to follow gender norms with respect to caring practices, has led to a "gender paradox" that in turn, hinders the acceptance of "the reconstitution of mothering" in transnationally split households (*Parreñas*, 2005a: 92). Filipino fathers neither change the way they view their place in the family nor contribute more towards caring or other household responsibilities when their wives are away. This has led to confusion among children left behind, resentful of fathers who further widen the distance by shunning nurturing roles and generally failing to "reconstitute fathering in ways that balance and reciprocate the efforts of mothers to perform transnational mothering" (*Parreñas*, 2005a: 140).

According to *Parreñas (*2005a), eldest daughters assume heavier burdens when their mothers are away than when their fathers leave while sons are saddled with more responsibilities when their fathers leave. However, the workload of the sons is still not comparable to those undertaken by the daughters. Regardless of age, eldest daughters are called upon to do housework, make decisions and care for the well-being of their family. They, especially those from poorer families, experience a large decrease in the quality of life after their mothers leave. In the process, they do benefit by picking up new skills and becoming more independent. The continued division of labour across generation by gender will undoubtedly affect the "socialization of children, since the gendered division of task assignments to children usually moulds household work patterns in a later age" (*Parreñas*, 2005a: 112).

To summarise, when women – traditionally linked with care-giving and the upkeep of the household (Zlotnik, 1995) – respond to the economic pull of new feminized migrant labour streams, they leave gaps in household work which are often picked up by other female members of the household such as grandmothers, sisters, aunts and daughters (*Parreñas*, 2005a; Yeoh and Huang, 2000). Whether this empowers women is a question which does not lend itself to easy generalizations. It is known though that Sri Lankan women who have returned after migrating often find themselves becoming more assertive and vocal, and will attempt to exact changes by demanding "radical adjustments in

---

[6]   This is also true among other migrant communities where the role of caregiving continues to fall on women's shoulders even after migration (see for example Dreby, 2006; Spitzer *et al.*, 2003).

[7]   The children in *Parreñas' (2005) study refer mainly to young adults from transnational families of unspecified ages. Her study did include surveys with elementary and high school students from transnational migrant families using questionnaires in order to obtain the perspectives of younger children.*

the roles and behaviors of their husbands" (Gamburd, 2000: 199). Rigg (2007) and Hugo (2002) also reveal in their studies, evidence that women's status and role in the household economy as well as community improves after their migration. Such changes may put pressure on spousal relationships and threaten the masculinity of husbands. In brief, the question as to whether migration is a strategy of empowerment for women yields rather mixed conclusions depending on the perspective taken. It is unlikely, in the short term at least, that there would be significant changes in women's identity as lynchpins of the family even with the enlarged sphere of autonomy opened up to women as a consequence of migration. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that gender relations are "neither solely harmonious not antagonistic" but entailing shared as well as conflicting interests, economic and emotional support (Ahlers and Zwarteveen, 2009). Both genders need to "precariously balance personal with collective needs and interests in their households and communities, simultaneously legitimizing and contesting inequalities" (Ahlers and Zwarteveen, 2009).

Impact on Intergenerational Relations

Transnational migration not only influences household structures and gender identities, it also affects intergenerational relationships between the migrant parent and the left-behind child, migrant parent and the left-behind aged parent as well as the relations between the left-behind elderly (grandparent) and the young. In terms of parent-child relationships, *Parreñas (*2005a: 67) found that the migration of fathers produced a "gap" or "a sense of social discomfort and emotional distance" between Filipino fathers and their left-behind children. Generally, Filipino children feel "embarrassed" and "awkward" around their fathers even after their return because there was less intimate communication between both parties during the time when they were apart. Migrant fathers who continue to uphold their macho role as the disciplinarian even when they are away tend to obstruct the possibility of forging closer ties with their children, while those who invest in quality time communicating with their children will have more opportunities to bridge the parent-child gap. In contrast, left-behind children experienced feelings of abandonment when their mothers are not present since mothers continue to be the sole nurturers even in their absence. Such feelings of abandonment decrease when mothers continue to show their care through frequent intimate communication and close supervision over their left-behind offspring.[8]

While studies on the Philippines indicate that relationships between left-behind children and their migrant parents remained strong across the distance, thus reemphasizing the importance of the family (*Parreñas,* 2005a; 2005b; SMC, 2004), studies on left-behind children in Guatemala divulge that they tend to lose "respect, trust, and love" for their migrant parents over time (Moran-Taylor, 2008a: 89). They begin to prefer money from their migrant mothers over intimacy and become disappointed with their mothers when they fail to send any money home (Moran-Taylor, 2008a). Long-distance parenting becomes even more difficult when left-behind children, on reaching adolescence, refuse to acknowledge the authority of migrant parents. Such defiance may eventually show up in higher cases of child delinquency and neglect (Gamburd, 2000).

---

[8]   In the case of Mexico, gender expectations in parenting in Mexico affect the relationships between migrants and their children across distances even when migrant fathers and mothers communicate with their left-behind children in similar ways. Dreby (2006: 56) found that the relationships between migrant Mexican mothers and their children left behind are dependent on their ability to "demonstrate emotional intimacy from a distance" while the relationships between migrant fathers and their children are correlated with their capability in providing economically for the family when away. As successful economic migrants, fathers are able to maintain stable and regular relationships with their children in Mexico.

The migration of one or both parents poses another set of intergenerational issues between migrants and their (sometimes elderly) parents – many of whom also double up as the carers of the left-behind children. In Indonesia, ties between the elderly and their adult migrant children have reportedly been weakened by migration (Hugo, 2002) while studies by Gamburd (2000) and Bruijn *et al.* (1992) allude to estranged relationships between Sri Lankan migrants and their left-behind parents due to the inability to meet the various familial, social and monetary expectations imposed by each generation. The inability to meet these expectations, as in the case of some of Gamburd's (2000) respondents, resulted in relationships ending on a sour note or leading to the splitting of extended families. Relationships between migrant mothers (or even fathers) and their elderly parents tasked with caring for their children may also become fractured owing to the tensions and divergences in care-giving practices between generations (Gamburd, 2000).[9] Left-behind children are often sensitive to such tensions, turning them to their advantage by playing the carer against the migrant parent and vice versa in order to get what they want.

One study that reflects the left-behind carer's perspective comes not from the region but Guatemala. Moran-Taylor's (2008a) study examined the relationships between carers and migrants by speaking to the carers – often maternal grandmothers, aunts and occasionally friends – in Guatemala directly. She found that relationships between migrant parents and carers improve if carers assume the "fundamental responsibility for raising the children" by providing love while the migrant parents ensure financial support (Moran-Taylor, 2008a: 87). However, as also manifested in Gamburd's (2000) study in Sri Lanka, conflicts often arise when migrant parents fail to remit money as promised or remit less money over time. Further conflict between carers and migrant parents may arise where both parties become caught up in a blaming game regarding the care and discipline accorded by either party. For example, migrant mothers may be upset with the carers' inability to exert control over their children and for spoiling them, while carers blame the mothers for migrating (Moran-Taylor, 2008a).

Despite the special call at the 30th session of the Commission on Population and Development in New York in 1997 (NGLS, 1997; UN, 1997) for greater attention to be given to the impact of migration on the left-behind elderly, we know little of how they cope with the absence of their children and the state of their relationships after migration. Available evidence seems to suggest that the costs outweigh the benefits as the left-behind elderly are often saddled with looking after their grandchildren (Knodel and Saengtienchai, 2002). This increased burden on grandparents may lead to health problems and stress among the aged and require a reversal of caregiving roles among the young and old instead. Other researchers have found that remittances do not provide a satisfactory means of old-age insurance and that the absence of a close family member along with a lack of financial support (in the case of Albania) is associated with marked health effects in the left-behind parent, with women being at higher risk than men (Burazeri *et al.*, 2007). In this vein, Hugo's (2002) study in the Indonesian context suggests the abandonment of the elderly as a result of the dwindling of the 'carer generation'. In contrast, Xiang's (2007) review of studies on the left-behind elderly in rural China shows that the migration of adult children has not left the elderly in dire straits. In fact, despite feeling lonely without their children, a higher percentage of the elderly actually expressed that they were satisfied with their lives compared to those whose children had remained behind. In another study by Senyurekli and Detzner (2008) on intergenerational ties between Turkish migrants and their left-behind parents, migrants continued to feel the same closeness to their parents with constant communication. However, such feelings gradually developed into ambivalence given the transnational family situation where both parties begin to mutually censor information

---

[9] Moran-Taylor's (2008a) study further reveals that migrants often pick up new cultural practices from their host countries that may change their views on disciplining their children as compared to the carers who have stayed in the same environment.

transmitted to the other in order to 'protect' each other. Worries about the health and well-being of the left-behind parent is also constantly at the back of the migrants' minds.

The studies reviewed here – rather piecemeal in nature especially with regard to work in the Asian context – do not provide consistent answers or adequately address the impact of migration on intergenerational relationships between the migrants and the left-behind. In particular, we know little about the relationships between migrants' parents and their own parents *per se* (as opposed to their relationships with their parents as carers of their children). More work on the way the intergenerational gap is being negotiated between grandparent-carers and left-behind children will also be useful. Finally, Hugo (2000: 308) has called for more research on left-behind elderly women in particular as they are "among the most empowered groups in less developed countries, yet gain little attention".

Impact on Children's Physical Health and Psychological Well-Being

The physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of left-behind children is one aspect that is of concern to many researchers especially when popular opinions tend to highlight the detrimental nature of social and emotional consequences reaped by left-behind families and dependent members, particularly when the wife/mother is the migrant. A number of effects from the strain of family separation have been catalogued, ranging from a higher incidence of mental disorders among women and children to lower levels of school performance and impeded social and psychological development among children (Hugo, 2002). Using a diversity of methods, researchers from different fields such as public health, psychiatry and sociology have worked towards augmenting the literature and extending our understanding on this topic.

Researchers from the social sciences attempt to use a combination of methodologies to study the health and well-being outcomes of left-behind children in a bid to ensure reliability and validity. For the 2003 Children and Families Survey conducted in the Philippines (hereafter referred to as the 2003 Philippines study), school-based surveys containing sections on biodata, family relations, social support, psychological and emotional health, etcetera, as well as focus groups discussions were carried out to explore the various impact of migration on left-behind children (Asis, 2006; SMC, 2004). Though information on height and weight measurements was generally patchy, such available data from Negros Occidental – a province in the study – were used to assess the physical health of the children from that region. The study used migration status, gender of migrants and migrants' occupations as explanatory variables while a separate control stipulating that parents must not be divorced or separated unless due to migration was added to mitigate against the effects of pre-existing negative familial relations that may affect the study results. To make their study more representative of the general population, SMC (2004: 12) also weighted its data from a school-based sample of children "to reflect the distribution of children-respondents in the actual population". This study on 1,443 children, eventually threw up mixed but interesting results which were then categorized under three distinct themes; where migration clearly matters, seems to matters and does not matter.

Briefly, SMC (2004) found that the socio-economic status and gender roles in the family are obviously affected by migration. The frequency of communication between children and migrant parents appears to have an impact on children's well-being with a higher frequency contributing to better well-being outcomes. *Parreñas'* (2005b) research concurred with this finding as her study also highlight the increasing incidences of left-behind children from working-class families feeling abandoned since they have less ability to sustain transnational communication. SMC (2004) also found that parental migration has a positive effect on the physical health of left-behind children: migrants' children tend to be taller and have better general health than non-migrant children; and

non-migrant children fall sick more frequently although there was also a slightly higher proportion of mothers-away children who are more susceptible to common ailments and loss of appetite. Overall, the 2003 Philippines study did not uncover any alarming impact of mother's absence on the physical well-being of children. This can perhaps be attributed to better nutrition from the higher socio-economic status of migrant families as well as the quality of caregivers. However, among the children, more of them with mothers away report themselves as being unhappy, more anxious and lonely, and able to get the least hours of sleep. More left-behind boys, than girls, are also reportedly more vulnerable to being "touched in sensitive areas" (SMC, 2004: 51).

The generally positive results of migration on left-behind children from the 2003 Philippines study differed considerably from Battistella and Conaco's 1996 study where children of migrants were observed to be lagging behind those of non-migrants. In their study, Battistella and Conaco (1998) used questionnaire surveys, which included a Social Anxiety Scale and Children's Loneliness Scale,[10] administered to elementary grammar students (9 to 15 years old) in 39 schools, as well as conducted focus group discussions with left-behind parents, carers and teachers. However, they were quick to concede that "several methodological constraints" pertaining to the cognitive development of young children, sampling method and use of focus groups may "limit the extent of the conclusions that can be drawn from this study" (Battistella and Conaco, 1998: 229). Such limitations may also apply to other studies reviewed here. In addition, using school-based sampling (as in the case here) instead of household sampling is potentially risky in neglecting the views of children who are not in school for reasons which could be precisely migration-related. This is despite **Parreñas**' (2005a) argument that migrants' children are likely to be better represented in school settings. Although Battistella and Conaco (1996; 1998) reported that migrants' children are generally normal and well-cared for by the extended kin, they performed less well in terms of academic performance and social adjustment. Also, Battistella and Conaco's (1996; 1998) finding that mothers-away children are not doing as well as other migrant children is consistent with the 2003 Philippines study (Asis, 2006). Overall, Battistella and Conaco (1998) found that children with migrant mothers tend to suffer more while **Parreñas** (2005a) argue that this is not necessarily so as migrant mothers remain intimately connected to their left-behind offspring.

One way of examining the impacts of migration on the physical well-being of left-behind children is by looking at their anthropometric measurements. Cameron and Lim (2005) is one rare study in the regional context that uses anthropometric data to assess the impact of changes in household composition on the welfare of children in rural northeast Thailand due to internal outmigration. Their findings showed that apart from nuclear families, other household types generally result in significantly worse child nutritional outcomes. According to Cameron and Lim (2005: 16), "negative marginal effects were largest for extended families with both parents present", larger for household types where both parents have migrated and also single parent or grandparent households. There were fewer marginal negative effects when one parent is present and the other has presumably migrated. Remittances from migrants exceeding 8,000 baht were also shown to have a positive impact on children's weight-for-height and weight-for-age. At the end of their study, the authors did include caveats cautioning against alarm because first, their sample size was small and that the z-scores calculations were based on a reference sample drawn from a developed country, thus biasing the results towards negative values. Furthermore, the decision to migrate because of the poor economic conditions (which could be the cause of poor nutritional outcomes) as well as length of time the children have lived under such household conditions has not been taken into consideration.[11]

---

[10] Modified versions of these scales were also used by Scalabrini Migration Center (2004).

[11] For other studies relating to the use of anthropometry on children of migrants, see Guinn (1988), Markowitz (2005) and Will, Zeeb and Baune (2005).

Migration of one or both parents may affect their children's social behaviour in different ways. Battistella and Conaco (1998) learned that Filipino children with absent mothers showed poorer social adjustment and suffered from impeded social and psychological development. The 2003 Philippines Study in contrast showed that the children in the survey have generally adjusted well socially, have strong social support and get along well with other family members. This result was not very different from that of non-migrants'. In Sri Lanka, Save the Children (2006) study also reported that children left behind have positive relationships with their caregivers and that minority ethnic groups have higher extended family ties when mothers migrate. Nonetheless, the Sri Lanka study also reaffirmed Jampaklay's (2006) findings in Thailand that a mother's love is often irreplaceable even by the best caregivers as more negative effects on the children left behind by mothers can be observed. Xiang's (2007) review of studies on children left behind in China showed children developing behaviours at two extremes under the care of their grandparents. Children left behind may either be withdrawn or excessively aggressive as their grandparents either spoil or neglect them. Finally, the 2003 Philippines Study found that migration of parents did not matter in the socialization of children as well as the transmission and formation of important values and spirituality. Even when their parents are not around, children left behind continue to be assigned common chores by caregivers as part of their responsibility training. However, children of non-migrant families on average have to do more chores relative to the children of migrant families. The same type of values and spiritual information is also being transmitted to children, whether from parents or caregivers. In terms of future career choices, children of both genders regardless of their parents' migration status have similar aspirations.

The agency of the child in determining migration outcomes also deserves close attention. Asis (2006) suggests that children play a role in improving their own well-being by taking charge of their lives, devising ways of coping with parental absence and also keeping the family together. Children are also given space to grow independently upon the removal of restrictive parental control and may learn many important skills when they view their left-behind circumstance positively. Asis (2006: 63) reminds us that we are best able to understand how "children make sense of the challenges and opportunities presented by their parents' migration and how they grow from the experience" by taking the children's perspective. This is something that Dreby (2007), Olwig (1999) and *Parreñas (*2005a) attempts as well in their studies. Through these studies, we are gaining a deeper understanding of the general experiences, overall well-being and empowerment of left-behind children.[12]

In summary, findings from the above studies generally support those from elsewhere showing that remittances contribute to better nutrition and access to modern health care and child care services. On the downside, left-behind children also seem to have a higher vulnerability to the spread of HIV/AIDS, a higher rate of drug use and heroin addiction (Battistella and Conaco, 1998: 224) and suffer higher levels of emotional disruption, stress and sadness (Mendoza, 2004; Ganepola, 2002: 9). The existing scholarship also show that many children of transnational migrants are left with relatives or foster caregivers who play an important role in providing care and ensuring wellbeing (Asis and Baggio, 2003; Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Ganepola, 2002: 7; Gardner, 1995; Mendoza, 2004). To supplement our understanding, we turn to Latin American studies for more information.

---

[12]   Using the life stories of four children (two boys and two girls) left behind in Leeward Island of Nevis, Olwig (1999) draws a picture of the social, economic and emotional feelings of left-behind children involved in growing up in a transnational home. Dreby (2007: 1050) on the other hand uses ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with 141 Mexican transnationals to argue that left-behind children are not the powerless beings as they are often depicted in the literature but that they are actually empowered in "different ways at different ages".

First, Aguilera-Guzman's *et al.* (2004) document the impact of the absence (periodic absence of six years) of Mexican fathers due to international migration on the mental health of their teenage children (11 – 14 years) left behind in rural Zacatecas, Mexico, by using a stress-mediator-consequences theoretical framework. To develop the items used in the scales for the study, namely the Scale of Stress Associated with Father's Physical Paternal Absence due to International Migration and Scale of Compensators in Children of Migrants Associated with Father's Physical Absence due to International Migration, the authors first conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 24 children (M=12 years) to explore issues relating to absent fathers, peers, family and communities. The final scales along with other questions are eventually administered in a questionnaire format to 106 migrants' children and 204 non-migrants' children. The data underwent item discrimination and factor analyses to eventually reveal that while migrants' children are more 'vulnerable to psychosocial problems' than non-migrants' children, they are generally 'ambivalent' about their father's absence and that it is ultimately the gender of the left-behind child that matters more (Aguilera-Guzman *et al.*, 2004: 721).[13] This study essentially used fathers' migration status to predict mental health outcomes among left-behind teens through custom-designed stressor/compensator scales. It was eventually found though that changing gender roles in the community creates more stress for teens in the study than paternal absence. Further in-depth interviews need to be conducted to better understand the results of the study.

Another similar study looking also at the psychological outcomes of paternal absence due to international migration on children left behind in southern Ecuadorian Andes is by Pribilsky (2001). The data was gathered through various qualitative techniques such as paired interviews on husband and wife; father and child; mother and child, informal interviews and focus groups with students suffering from the syndrome being studied – nervios, 'a culturally specific depression-like disorder' – as well as interviews with other key informants and surveys. While the locals are quick to attribute the rising incidences of children suffering from this disorder to their father's absence, Pribilsky (2001) instead cautions that it may perhaps not be the father's absence *per se* but the children's way of using nervios as a mechanism of coping with their changing lifestyles brought about by new transnational family formations and transnational consumption practices. Therefore, while being physically away may not affect the children's psychosocial health directly, the other changes brought about by the father's migration such as rising income and new lifestyles are possible culprits.

Finally, Kana'Iaupuni's *et al.* (2005) study on social and kinship networks in Mexico confirmed that kinship support and networks matter in positively affecting the health and well-being of left-behind children, especially on mothers with young children from poorer families. They found that having extended networks offered more support resources to mothers with young children, while the greater social support and interaction within these structures also contributed to healthier children. All things considered, it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions on the impact of parental absence due to migration on children's physical health and psychological well-being since the results have so far been rather mixed. There needs to be more systematic studies with comparative value if we are to come to grips with the impact of 'dollar mommies' and foster-care stations on the wellbeing and development of left behind children, especially in the Asian context, and in situations where extended families are shrinking in size and kinship networks loosening in the face of rapid socio-economic development and effective fertility control programmes. Also important would be more focus on the perspectives of children growing up in global family networks (Olwig, 1999).

---

[13]   The results revealed that "being a man or a woman in a subculture that encourages male migration with gender-based demands and constraints places teenagers at greater risk of experiencing the psychosocial problems associated with FPAIM, such as dropping out of school, drug abuse, child abuse, and familial and social vulnerability and uncertainty" (Aguilera *et al.,* 2004: 721).

Educational Outcomes

Educational outcomes is clearly one of the more observable (and studied) impacts of migration although, to date, no consistent impact of migration on the educational achievement of left-behind children have been found: positive impacts (i.e. higher rate of school enrolment, better investment of parents on children's education, better performance at school) seemed to dominate in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Thailand (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Hadi, 1999; 2001; Kuhn and Menken, 2002), while mixed consequences were found in the Philippines (Asis, 2006; Asis and Baggio, 2003; Battistella and Conaco, 1998; SMC, 2004) and negative outcomes in Sri Lanka and Thailand (Fernando, 2001: 10; Jampaklay, 2006). Where a large proportion of migrants' remittances are used for children's education, remittances have a mainly positive effect on the education of left-behind children, although the uneven preponderance of negative effects in some studies suggests that parental absence may not be fully compensated for by remittance flows. We turn to a few case studies for a clearer understanding of the specificities involved.

In Thailand, Jampaklay's (2006) study showed rather negative outcomes of migration on school enrolment and attitudes toward education in their studies.[14] She concluded from her study that it is the gender of the migrant and the period of absence that are the significant independent variables: longer absences of mothers tend to lead to lower education prospects of their children as compared to long-term paternal absences. The short-term absence of fathers, however, also appeared to reduce children's chances of school enrolment. Jampaklay (2006: 108) explained that the adverse effects of mother's absence on children left behind are probably due to "the situation of living in the extended household that jeopardizes the educational chances of children". Lastly, she argued that while migrants' remittances raised the prospects of children left behind staying in school, they might also have lured the children into dropping out and migrating as well.

In contrast, Rahman et al.'s (1996, cited in Afsar, 2003) research in Bangladesh found that school enrolment rates were higher among migrants' families in the rural areas. The study by Kuhn (2006) further showed that the emigration of fathers and male siblings often resulted in improvements in the education of children left behind in some rural areas in Bangladesh.[15] He concluded that outmigration of fathers and brothers in these rural areas have substantial and predominately positive impacts on the pace of schooling of children, both boys and girls, left behind in Matlab. However, the migration of sisters has no effect on their sibling's education while cases of migrant mothers were still too rare to warrant any conclusion. While parent's migration sometimes provides Bangladeshi children with better educational prospects, Siddiqui (2003) counter-argued that the absence of mothers causes children's education to suffer. In India, it was found that migrants to urban areas have a heightened awareness of the value of education which translates into greater attention to ensuring that their children receive a better education; however, the migration of males was reported to lower girls' chances of acquiring an education as they have to take on more domestic responsibilities (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003).

---

[14]   Jampaklay's (2006) analysis draws upon the 2000-2003 data-set of a longitudinal study (Kanchanaburi Demographic Surveillance System) in Kanchanburi province, Thailand. She used a four category dependent variable (enrolled and not moved; enrolled and moved; not enrolled and not moved; not enrolled and moved) describing the children's enrolment and migration status in 2003 while the key independent variables were father's and mother's living status during 2000 to 2002.

[15]   The study integrated data from Matlab Health and Socio-Economic survey with Matlab Health and Demographic Surveillance System and covered the Matlab *Thana* (sub-district) of Bangladesh.

The 2003 Philippines Study shows that Filipino migrants' children are mainly enrolled in private schools, and that they are generally happy at school. At least during the elementary years, children of migrants performed better at school, received higher grades as well as school awards when compared to children of non-migrants. On the contrary, Battistella and Conaco (1998) reported that Filipino children of migrants fared worst academically in relation to non-migrants' children. Both studies have similar findings relating to children with migrant mothers – those with absent mothers have a tendency to lag behind children of the other groups. The migration of mothers thus presents a 'catch 22' situation where although migrant mothers remit more money to invest in their children's education, their children often end up not performing as well due to their absence. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the educational performance of children left behind by mothers is also lower than those with mothers working in Sri Lanka and non-working mothers. According to Gamburd (2005), the children of migrant mothers tend to drop out of school to look for work or help with household chores.[16]

A common point that emerges repeatedly in the above studies (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Gamburd, 2005; Jampaklay; 2006; Kuhn, 2006; SMC; 2004) is the observation that the gender of the migrant parents has a very strong impact on the educational achievements of left-behind children. More often, children with absent mothers tend to perform poorly while the absence of fathers in Kuhn's (2006) study are shown to correlate positively with the pace of schooling of left-behind children.

THE CHAMPSEA STUDY – AN INTRODUCTION

Overall, migration scholarship has depicted rather different if not contrasting impacts of transnational migration on the health and well-being of left-behind children (Asis and Baggio, 2003; Battistella and Gastardo-Conaco, 1998; Hadi, 1999; 2001; Hugo, 2002; Kuhn and Menken, 2002; SMC, 2004). A large part of the existing body of literature on left-behind children focuses on their educational outcomes in the context of transnational migration with rather mixed reports on the impact of migration on children's educational achievements and experiences. Literature on migration's impacts on left-behind children's health has been more sporadic and mostly focusing on the Philippines. CHAMPSEA (Child Health and Migrant Parents in South-East Asia) is hence the first large-scale cross-country project to use multiple quantitative and qualitative methods in researching the health of left-behind children in the region, namely Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

In the quantitative surveys completed in 2008, CHAMPSEA investigated child health in both interviews with the carer and the child him/herself. Survey data was collected from a total of some 1,000 households in each of the four Southeast Asian countries. The Older Child Questionnaire that was used for interviews with children aged 9-11 years addresses child health through different methods: (i) a set of five questions on the child's general psychological state; (ii) a set of 11 questions on the child's health behaviours such as alcohol drinking and smoking; and (iii) anthropometric measurements. The data collected through the first two methods was stored in a Microsoft Access database and subsequently exported to STATA for analysis using multivariate techniques. WHO Anthro – a software developed by the World Health Organisation for assessing growth and development of the world's children – was used to analyse the anthropometric data.

---

[16] In a study conducted by Save the Children (2006), children with migrant mothers are found to have poorer attendance and performance at school. The study stated that children left behind in rural areas did better in school but emotionally, they felt more lonely and sad due to the departure of one or both parents.

Being the person responsible for caring for the child and most knowledgeable of the child's health, the carer was given the major task of reporting on the health of the child. Firstly, CHAMPSEA used the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the mental health of the target child. The carer was read a set of 25 statements on the child's mental state, behaviours and interaction with other people and requested to confirm if they were not true, somewhat true or certainly true. In addition, the carer was also asked if the child had had any emotional, behavioural or social difficulties. Secondly, the study also looks into the child's physical health including medical history such as birth weight, vaccinations, physical or mental disabilities as well as incidence of illness, and accidents in the six months preceding the survey. The carer was also requested to report on how these problems were dealt with by the household and the kind of healthcare services the child had access to during those illness or accident episodes.

During the qualitative phase of the CHAMPSEA project, issues relating to the child's health were re-investigated through an in-depth interview with the carer. The focus of the interview questions were on how the child's healthcare was managed by the carer, the migrant parent and other family members, as well as the roles different people played in decision-making processes over health issues and in actual practices of healthcare in relation to the child. CHAMPSEA also examined the possible impacts of parental transnational migration on the healthcare of the child, from the carer's perspective, by inquiring about differences in the child's health and access and management of healthcare before and after migration. Interviewers also probed into whether the child's health influenced the migration decision at all, whether as a motivator or a hurdle.

By combining a number of methods and measures such as anthropometric measurements, psychological measurements, behavioural observations (carer's and older child's accounts) and school performance, CHAMPSEA hopes to provide a holistic understanding of the left-behind child's physical and psychological health. This was carried out using consistent methods in order to allow for meaningful comparison across the four countries.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND THE 'CARE TRIANGLE'

There is now an increasing vein of literature calling for children and youth to be made more visible in transnational migration, seeking to affirm their place not as passive dependents or somehow 'missing in action', but as actors in their own right who play a role in shaping both the migration processes and experiences of their families, as well as their own life courses (Knörr and Nunes, 2005; Olwig, 2003; Orellana *et al.*, 2001). By giving children time and space to express their views and account for their own actions (as well as those of others) both in the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research, the CHAMPSEA study hopes to contribute to the call to conceptualise children as social agents who shape their own roles *vis-à-vis* others/adults, recognising both the limits and possibilities of their awareness, actions and strategies. This would serve as an important corrective in view of popular accounts (and sometimes policy literature) which tend to pathologize left-behind children as victims of abandonment and neglect by their own parents.

The CHAMPSEA study, thus aims to also understand changes in the care arrangements within transnational households and the impact on children's well-being from *multiple* perspectives by focusing on the web of care relationships in the 'Caring Triangle' – between the surrogate carer, the migrant parent, and the left-behind child.[17] In particular, the research gives weight to the perspective and account of the surrogate carer of the left-behind child, primarily because while the substitute carer plays a pivotal role in what Hochschild (2003: 401) calls the "global care chain" or

---

[17]   See Graham *et al.* (2012) for an in-depth discussion on the 'care triangle'.

the "invisible human ecology of care"' as the very first link, he/she is often missing from accounts. As the 'mother-as-carer' norm appears to be shifting towards other carer models in societies experiencing a high volume of female outmigration to meet the demands of a gender-differentiated global labour market, understanding the perspective of the left-behind surrogate carer will also become increasingly essential if the transnational labour migration system is to be sustainable.

Finally, focusing on the web of care relationships woven around the left-behind child allows us to interrogate the complex nature of *care*, in its different forms, (dis)embodiments and associations with different people. By giving attention to the alignments, slippages and contradictions in different accounts of care arrangements among the key 'caring' actors in the household, we also hope to highlight the politics of and negotiations over care within Southeast Asian households coming to grips with balancing productive and reproductive work as they become drawn into transnational migration across the global stage. To read more about the various findings from the CHAMPSEA study, please visit http://www.populationasia.org/CHAMPSEA/publications_champsea.htm.

REFERENCES

Adams, C. (2000) Integrating children into families separated by migration: a Caribbean-American case study. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless,* 9(1): 19-27.

Afsar, R. (2003) *Internal Migration and the Development Nexus: the Case of Bangladesh.* http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/dossiers/livelihoods&id=17561&type, date accessed 12 November 2006.

------ (2005) Conditional mobility: the migration of Bangladeshi female domestic workers. In S. Huang, B.S.A. Yeoh and N. Abdul Rahman (eds.) *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 115-145.

Aguilera-Guzman, R., Salgado de Snyder, V.N., Romero, M. and Medina-Mora, M.E. (2004) Paternal absence and international migration: stressors and compensators associated with the mental health of Mexican teenagers of rural origin. *Adolescence,* 39(156): 711-723.

Ahlers, R. and Zwarteveen, M. (2009) The water question in feminism: water control and gender inequities in a neo-liberal era. *Gender, Place and Culture,* 16(4): 409-426*.*

Asis, M.M.B. (2000) Imagining the future of migration and families in Asia. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 9(3): 255-272.

------ (2002) From the life stories of Filipino women: personal and family agendas in migration. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal,* 11(1): 67-94.

------ (2003) International migration and families in Asia. In R. Iredale, C. Hawksley and S. Castles (eds.) *Migration in the Asia Pacific.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar: 99-117.

------ (2006) Living with migration: experiences of left-behind children in the Philippines. *Asian Population Studies,* 2(1): 45-67.

------ and Baggio, F. (2003) The other face of migration: children and families left behind. Paper presented at the workshop on *Taking the lead: successful partnership initiatives for the delivery of settlement services* at the 8th International Metropolis Conference, 15–19 September, Vienna, Austria.

Barber, P.G. (2000) Agency in Philippine women's labour migration and provisional diaspora. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4): 399-411.

Battistella, G. and Conaco, M.C. (1996) Impact of migration on the children left behind. *Asian Migrant,* 9(3): 86-91.

------ (1998) Impact of labour migration on the children left behind: Philippine Study. *Sojourn,* 13(2): 220-241.

Bruijn, B.J., Schampers, T., Speckmann, J.D. and Zijleman, E. (1992) Labour migration, household structure and their impact on the well-being of children. In F. Eelens, T. Schampers and J.D. Speckmann (eds.) *Labour Migration to the Middle East: From Sri Lanka to the Gulf.* London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 159-182.

Bryant, J. (2005) *Children of International Migrants in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines: A Review of Evidence and Policies.* UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Working Paper No. 2005-5, http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf_/iwp2005_05.pdf, date accessed 22 November 2006.

Burazeri, G., Goda, A., Tavanxhi, N., Sulo, G. Stefa, J. and Kark, J. (2007) The health effects of emigration on those who remain at home. *International Journal of Epidemiology,* 36: 1265-1272.

Cameron, M. and Lim, S. (2005) Migration, household composition and child welfare in rural northeast Thailand. *Working Paper in Economics 05/05,* Department of Economics, University of Waikato, New Zealand, http://ideas.repec.org/p/wai/econwp/05-05.html, date accessed 12 February 2009.

Castro, N.M. (2002) Crisis among couples in migration and itinerancy. *People on the Move,* 90: 129-134.

Chant, S. (1998) Households, gender and rural-urban migration: reflections on linkages and considerations for policy. *Environment and Urbanization*, 10(1): 5-21.

Chantavich, S. (2001) *Female Labour Migration in South East Asia: Change and Continuity.* Bangkok: Asian Research Centre for Migration.

D'Emilio, A., Cordero, B., Bainvel, B., Skoog, C., Comini, D., Gough, J., Dias, M., Saab, R. and Kilbane, T. (2007) The impact of international migration: children left behind in selected countries of Latin America and Caribbean. Division of Policy and Planning Working Papers, New York: UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/The_Impact_of_International_Migration_LAC.pdf, date accessed 05 February 2009.

Donnan, H. and Werbner, P. (1991) *Economy and Culture in Pakistan: Migrants and Cities in a Muslim Society.* London: Macmillans Academic and Professional Ltd.

Dreby, J. (2006) Honor and virtue: Mexican parenting in the transnational context. *Gender and Society,* 20(1): 32-59.

------ (2007) Children and power in Mexican transnational families. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 69: 1050-1064.

Dwiyanto, A. and Keban, J. (1997) Migration issues in the Asia Pacific: issues paper from Indonesia. In P. Brownlee and C. Mitchell (eds.) *Migration Issues in the Asia Pacific,* Working Paper Series No. 1. Australia: Asia Pacific Migration Research Network.

Falicov, C. (2007) Working with transnational immigrants: expanding meanings of family, community, and culture. *Family Process,* 46(2): 157-171.

Fernando, N. (2001) Pre-departure, reintegration and policy advocacy in the migration process. Paper presented at consultative workshop on *Migration and HIV/AIDS*, Colombo.

Ganepola, V. (2002) The psychosocial wellbeing of families left behind by asylum migration – the Sri Lankan experience. Paper presented at the *WIDER Conference on Poverty, International Migration and Asylum*, Helsinki, Finland, 27-28 September.

Gardner, K. (1995) *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gamburd, M. (2000) Nurture for sale: Sri Lankan housemaids and the work of mothering. In K, Adams and S. Dickey (eds.) *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 179-205.

------ (2005) "Lentils there, lentils here!" Sri Lankan domestic labour in the Middle East. In S. Huang, B.S.A. Yeoh and N. Abdul Rahman (eds.) *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 92-114.

Glick Schiller, N. and Fouron, G. (1998) Transnational Lives and National Identities: The Identity Politics of Haitian Immigrants. In M. Smith and L. Guarnizo (eds.) *Transnationalism From Below.* New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 130-164.

Graham, E., Jordan, L., Yeoh, B.S.A., Lam, T., Asis, M. and Sukamdi (2012) Transnational families and the family nexus: Perspectives of Indonesian and Filipino children left behind by migrant parent(s). *Environment and Planning A,* 44(4): 793-815.

Guinn, B. (1988) Anthropometry of Mexican American children in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Sciences,* 10(2): 139-147.

Hadi, A. (1999) Overseas migration and the well-being of those left behind in rural communities of Bangladesh. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal,* 14: 43–58.

------ (2001) International migration and the change of women's position among the left-behind in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Population Geography,* **7**: 53–61.

Hugo, G. (2000) Migration and women's empowerment. In H.B. Presser and G. Sen (eds.) *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving beyond Cairo.* New York: Oxford University Press, 287-317.

------ (2002) Effects of international migration on the family in Indonesia. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 11(1): 13-46.

------ (2005) Indonesian international domestic workers: contemporary developments and issues. In S. Huang, B.S.A. Yeoh and N. Abdul Rahman (eds.) *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 54-91.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. and Avila, E. (1997) 'I'm here but I'm there': the meanings of Latina transnational motherhood. *Gender and Society,* 11: 548-571.

Horton, S. (2008) Consuming childhood: 'lost' and 'ideal' childhoods as a motivation for migration. *Anthropological Quarterly,* 81(4): 925-943.

Hochschild, A.R. (2003) The nanny care chain. In R.J. Ely, E. G. Foldy and M.A. Scully (eds.) *Reader in Gender, Work, and Organization.* Oxford: Blackwell.

IOM (2008) *World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy*. http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/ published_docs/studies_and_reports/WMR2008/Ch1_WMR08.pdf, date accessed 03 February 2009.

Jampaklay, A. (2006) Parental absence and children's school environment: evidence from a longitudinal study in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. *Asian Population Studies,* 2(1): 93-110.

Jespersen, E. (2006) Migration and children: a need to fill information gaps in order to guide policy responses. *Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre* http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/turin/Turin_Statements/JESPERSEN.pdf*, date accessed 05 February 2009.*

Kana'laupuni, S.M., Donato, K., Thompson-Colon, T. and Stainback, M. (2005) Counting on kin: Social networks, social support, and child health status. *Social Forces,* 83(3): 1137-1164.

Kandel, W. and Massey, D. (2002) The culture of Mexican Migration: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Social Forces,* 80(3): 981-1004.

King, R., Dalipaj, M. and Mai, N. (2006) Gendering migration and remittances: evidence from London and northern Albania. *Population, Space and Place,* 12(6): 409-434.

Knodel, J. and Saengtienchai, C. (2002) AIDS and older persons: the view from Thailand. *PSC Research Report No. 02-497, Feb*. Michigan: University of Michigan.

Knörr, J. & Nunes, A. (2005). Introduction. In: Knörr, J. (ed.), *Childhood and Migration: from experience to agency*. Bielefeld: Transkript, 9-21.

Kuhn, R. (2006) The effects of fathers' and siblings' migration on children's pace of schooling in rural Bangladesh. *Asian Population Studies,* 2(1): 69-92.

------ and Menken, J.A. (2002) Migrant social capital and education in migrant-sending areas Bangladesh: complements or substitutes? *Working Paper of Institute of Behavioral Science* (May 3). University of Colorado, Boulder.

Lam, T., Yeoh, B.S.A. and Law, L. (2002) Sustaining families transnationally: Chinese-Malaysians in Singapore. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 11: 117–44.

Markowitz, D. (2005) Overweight and stunting in migrant Hispanic children in the USA. *Economics and Human Biology,* 3(2): 215-240.

Mendoza, D. (2004) Migrant workers' children left behind, left out. *IPSnews* http://www.ipsnews.net/migration/stories/children.html, date accessed 25 April 2005.

Miyares, I.M., Wright, R., Mountz, A., Bailey, A. and Jonak, J. (2003) The interrupted circle: truncated transnationalism and the Salvadoran experience. *Journal of Latin American Geography,* 2(1): 74-86.

McGuire, S. and Martin, K. (2007) Fractured migrant families: paradoxes of hope and devastation. *Family and Community Health,* 30(3): 178-188.

Moran-Taylor, M. (2008a) Guatemala: migration and child rearing. *Latin American Perspectives,* 34(4): 79-95.

------ (2008b) Guatemala's Ladino and Maya Migra Landscapes: the tangible and intangible outcomes of migration. *Human Organization,* 67(2): 111-124.

NGLS (1997) 30th session of the Commission on Population and Development. *NGLS Roundup,* May.

Olwig, K. (1999) Narratives of the children left behind: home and identity in globalised Caribbean families. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 25(2): 267-284.

------ (2003) "Transnational" Socio-Cultural Systems and Ethnographic Research: Views from an Extended Field Site. *International Migration Review*, 37: 787–811.

Orellana, M., Thorne, B., Chee, A. and Lam, W.S.E. (2001) Transnational childhoods: The participation of children in processes of family migration. *Social Problems,* 48(4): 572-591.

Parreñas, R. (2002) The care crisis in the Philippines: children and transnational families in the new global economy. In B. Ehrenreich and A. Russell Hochschild (eds.) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy.* New York: Metropolitan Books, 39-54.

------ (2005a) *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

------ (2005b) Long distance intimacy: class, gender and intergenerational relations between mothers and children in Filipino transnational families. *Global Networks,* 5(4): 317-336.

Piotrowski, M. (2008) Migrant remittances and household division: the case of Nang Rong, Thailand. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 70: 1074-1087.

Pribilsky, J. (2001) Nervios and 'modern childhood': migration and shifting contexts of child life in the Ecuadorian Andes. *Childhood,* 8(2): 251-273.

Rigg, J. (2007) Moving lives: migration and livelihoods in the Lao PDR. *Population, Space and Place,* 13(3): 163-178.

Russell, S.S. (1986) Remittances from international migration: a review in perspective. *World Development,* 14(6): 677-696.

Sampang, C. (2005) *Maid in Singapore: the Serious, Quirky and sometimes Absurd Life of a Domestic Worker.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.

Save the Children (2006) *Left Behind, Left Out: The Impact on Children and Families of Mothers Migrating for Work Abroad.* Sri Lanka: Save the Children.

Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) (2004) *Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children.* The Philippines: Scalabrini Migration Center.

Senyurekli, A. and Detzner, D. (2008) Intergenerational relationships in a transnational context: the case of Turkish families. *Family Relations,* 57: 457-467.

Siddiqui, T. (2003) *Migration as a Livelihood Strategy of the Poor: the Bangladesh Case*. Paper presented at the regional conference on *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices* in Asia, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 22–24 June 2003, http://www.livelihoods.org/hot_topics/docs/DfIDChildren.doc, date accessed 12 November 2006.

Skeldon R. (2003) Migration and migration policy in Asia: a synthesis of selected cases. Paper presented at the regional conference on *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, Department of International Development, UK, 22–24 June 2003.

Smith-Estelle, A. and Gruskin, S. (2003) Vulnerability to HIV/STIs among rural women from migrant communities in Nepal: a health and human rights framework. *Reproductive Health Matters,* 11(22): 142-151.

Sofranko, A.J. and Idris, K. (1999). Use of overseas migrants' remittances to the extended family for business investment: a research note. *Rural Sociology*, 64(3): 464-481.

Spitzer, D., Neufield, A., Harrison, M. and Hughes, K. (2003) Caregiving in transnational context: "my wings have been cut; where can I fly? *Gender and Society,* 17(2): 267-286.

Srivastava, R. and Sasikumar, S.K. (2003) *An Overview of Migration in India, Its Impacts and Key Issues.* Paper presented at the regional conference on *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 22–24 June 2003, http://www.livelihoods.org/hot_topics/docs/Dhaka_CP_2.pdf, date accessed 12 November 2006.

Thieme, S. and Wyss, S. (2005) Migration patterns and remittance transfer in Nepal: a case study of Sainik Basti in Western Nepal. *International Migration,* 43(5): 59-98.

Tobin, V. (2008) *Gender, Migration and Children's Rights.* Paper presented at the International Conference on *Gender, Migration and Development: Seizing Opportunities, Upholding Rights*, Hotel Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, Philippines, 25-26 September 2008.

UN (1997) *Follow-up Actions to the Recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development: International Migration*. E/CN.9/1997/NGO/1,Feb.

Viruell-Fuentes, E. (2006) 'My heart is always there': The transnational practices of first-generation Mexican immigrant and second-generation Mexican American women. *Identities,* 13(3): 335-362.

Will, B., Zeeb, H. and Baune, B. (2005) Overweight and obesity at school entry among migrant and German children: a cross sectional study. *BMC Public Health,* 5: 45 http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/5/45, date accessed 12 February 2009.

Whitehead, A. and Hashim, I. (2005) *Children and Migration: Background Paper for DFID Migration Team.* http://www.livelihoods.org/hot_topics/docs/DfIDChildre_n.doc, date accessed 12 November 2006.

Xiang, B. (2007) How far are the left behind left behind? A preliminary study in rural China. *Population, Space and Place,* 13(3): 179-191.

Yea, S. (2008) Married to the military: Filipinas negotiating transnational families. *International Migration,* 46(4): 111-144.

Yeoh, B.S.A. and Huang S. (2000) "Home" and "away": foreign domestic workers and negotiations of diasporic identity in Singapore. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4): 413-429.

------ and Lam, T. (2007) The costs of (im)mobility: children left behind and children who migrate with a parent. In United Nations ESCAP, *Perspectives on Gender and Migration*. Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 120-149.

Zlotnik, H. (1995) Migration and the family: the female perspective. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 4(2-3): 253-271.