

The health of left-behind wives using the social determinants of health framework: the other side of Nepalese regulated labour migration

Adhir Kumar Sharma

Diploma in Commerce (Tribhuvan University, Nepal), Master in Business Administration (Tribhuvan University, Nepal), MA in Social Studies (Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the
University of New England, Australia
December 2013

Candidate's Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



.....
Adhir Kumar Sharma

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without my supervisors Dr. Mary Ditton and Dr. Judy Harris Humphries who have worked with me throughout my candidature. Professor Jeffrey Kottler was instrumental in my starting the thesis at University of New England and he supervised me for a short period as did Professor Barbara Rugendyke. I would like to thank these supervisors who generously gave their time to me for discussions, comments and criticisms.

The participants willingly shared their stories with me. They asked nothing for themselves and gave so much. I hope that this thesis is faithful to their contributions. I am grateful to them. The research assistants, Mrs. Meena Kuwar and Mrs. Uma Gurung were invaluable to me during the field work and I appreciate all their hard work. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Lila Karki for his support during my field work.

On this journey I have been assisted by other distinguished colleagues. Dr. Leigh Lehane, Dr. Barry Tolchard, Higher Research Degree Coordinator, and Dr. Sui Chung, read drafts and offered suggestions for improvements. I deeply appreciate their efforts. I am grateful to Dr. Yoni Luxford, Acting Deputy Head of the School for her encouragement.

I would like to thank the University of New England for the Post Graduate Strategic Scholarship without which my study would not have been possible. Richard Wills provided excellent editorial assistance and I appreciate his work. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Shiva Aryal and other colleagues of Helvetas for their support for many years and their practical assistance with transport during my field work.

Abstract

In the last twenty years at least one million Nepalese men have travelled to the Gulf States in a government process of regulated labour migration. This involves men being away from home for decades and impacts on at least five million family members in Nepal. Although Nepal relies on remittances from this migration for 23 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, the literature has not explored the health and welfare of the wives who are left behind in this process. This research addresses the other side of regulated Nepalese labour migration because: 1) it focuses on the left-behind wives; and 2) it is concerned with their health using the social determinants of health approach.

Capitalism and globalisation have combined to produce a labour supply chain of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from developing countries to increase the wealth in developed countries. Because of poverty, lack of employment opportunities and intra-national conflict in Nepal, migration for work has been taken up by desperate rural men. Nepal is a patriarchal society and the left-behind wives are often subordinate, ill-prepared, and vulnerable in the migration process and its consequences.

This research seeks to understand the subjective experience of being left behind from the perspective of the wives. This research explores: the lived experiences of the left-behind wives of the Nepalese migrants to the Gulf States; the impacts of this migration from the perspective of the wives using a social determinants of health framework; and the social support services available and useful to the left-behind wives.

This is an interpretative study utilising a mixed methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative components were conducted concurrently and in parallel. The quantitative component comprises a survey based on the health-related Millennium Development Goals

and was completed by 90 left-behind wives. The qualitative component consisted of in-depth interviewing of 24 left-behind wives with the social determinants of health providing a framework for the questions.

The findings from this research indicate that the left-behind wives are more disadvantaged as far as health is concerned than the rest of the Nepalese population. The factors that contribute to this state relate to: the subordinate position of the left-behind wives within the rural patriarchal society; discrimination against women generally; and corruption within public services. Although the migration process and its resultant remittances move the left-behind wives above the poverty line, the findings also indicate that the timeframe for this change is significant. The left-behind wives experience years of deprivations and hard work as they live with the debt bondage of the migration process and engage in manual work. It takes about five years for the left-behind wives to pass beyond the survival stage and to start to show small improvements in their lives. The debt bondage and the duration of separation of the husbands and left-behind wives are practices that make this labour migration similar to slavery.

Although this research paints a dark picture of the impact of migration on the left-behind wives there are some areas that indicate improvements could be made. The left-behind wives could be prepared for the process and community participation support services could be developed that would assist them greatly.

This research contributes to migration studies because it highlights areas that are not often mentioned. It concentrates on left-behind wives, and it has a health orientation rather than the socio-economic perspective more usually taken in migration studies.

Table of Contents

Candidate’s Certification	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables.....	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction to the study.....	1
1.2 Aim of the thesis.....	1
1.3 Background to the research	2
1.4 Significance of the research.....	12
1.5 Study design.....	14
1.6 Organisation of the thesis	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18
2.1 Introduction.....	18
2.2 Migration is a contemporary global issue.....	18
2.2.1 The nature of migration	18
2.2.2 Theoretical perspectives of migration	21
2.2.3 Phases and patterns of migration	26
2.2.4 Patriarchy and migration.....	31
2.2.5 Globalisation and migration	32
2.2.6 Contemporary factors in international migration	35

2.2.6.1 Poverty relieving strategy	36
2.2.6.2 Escaping conflict and environmental hazards	36
2.2.6.3 Employment opportunities	37
2.2.6.4 Debt bondage	38
2.2.6.5 Remittances.....	39
2.2.7 Summary.....	45
2.3 Migration and Nepal	46
2.3.1 Context of Nepalese migration	47
2.3.2 Demographics about castes and patriarchal society	48
2.3.3 Nepalese economy and migration.....	50
2.3.4 Nature of migration.....	52
2.3.5 Nepalese employment policies relating to migrants to the Gulf States	57
2.3.6 Rural community life in Nepal	59
2.3.7 Social determinants of health and migration	62
2.3.8 Millennium Development Goals for Nepal	65
2.3.9 Nepalese development policies and programmes.....	70
2.3.9.1 Strategies and programmes for achieving Millennium Development Goals..	78
2.3.10 Public services in Nepal.....	83
2.3.11 Summary.....	86
2.4. International labour migration and left-behind Nepalese wives.....	87
2.4.1 Vulnerability and women	87
2.4.2 International labour migration and left-behind wives	88
2.4.2.1 Findings of international labour migration with left-behind wives.....	88
2.4.2.2 Challenges faced by research with left-behind wives.....	92
2.4.3 Nepalese labour migration and left-behind wives	96

2.4.3.1 Findings on Nepalese labour migration and left-behind wives	96
2.4.3.2 Challenges faced by Nepalese research on left-behind wives	100
2.4.4 Summary	103
2.5 Summary	104
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	106
3.1 Introduction	106
3.2 Description of the nature of the study	109
3.3 Ethical process for the research project	110
3.3.1 Female research assistants in fieldwork	110
3.4 Research methods used in the study	112
3.4.1 The quantitative component	115
3.4.1.1 Demographic category	116
3.4.1.2 Education and occupation category	117
3.4.1.3 Factors related to husband's migration	119
3.4.1.4 Health-related MDGs for left-behind wives	121
3.4.1.5 Economic impacts of male migration	129
3.4.1.6 Population and sampling	132
3.4.1.7 Survey sampling process	133
3.4.1.8 Data collection, manipulation and data analysis	137
3.4.1.9 Evaluation of quantitative method	138
3.4.2 Qualitative component	139
3.4.2.1 Sampling process in the in-depth interviews	139
3.4.2.2 Data collection for interviews	142
3.4.2.3 Analysis of qualitative data	146
3.4.2.4 Evaluation of qualitative method	147

3.5 Integration of quantitative and qualitative data	148
3.6 Validity and reliability of research project	149
3.7 Summary.....	150
Chapter 4: Social Determinants of Health Affecting Left-behind Wives.....	151
4.1 Introduction.....	151
4.2 Demographic information.....	152
4.2.1 Age of left-behind wives	152
4.2.2 Households of left-behind wives	153
4.2.3 Sex composition in left-behind wives' households	153
4.2.4 Household members by age in left-behind wives' households	154
4.2.5 Family type of left-behind wives.....	155
4.2.6 Caste/ethnicity of left-behind wives' households.....	156
4.3. Education and occupation.....	156
4.3.1 Literacy of left-behind wives.....	157
4.3.2 Education levels in households of left-behind wives	157
4.3.3. Type of work for left-behind wives	159
4.3.4 Work safety for left-behind wives	160
4.3.5 Occupation of household members	161
4.4 Factors related to husbands' migration.....	162
4.4.1 Country of destination and work type	162
4.4.2 Periods of migration	163
4.4.3 Frequency and purpose of return	164
4.5 Millennium Development Goals.....	165
4.5.1 Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	166
4.5.2 Goal 2: Reduce child mortality.....	169

4.5.3 Goal 5: Improve maternal health	171
4.5.4 Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	173
4.5.5 Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	174
4.6 Economic impacts of migration	178
4.6.1 Type of houses of left-behind wives	179
4.6.2 Income of households of left-behind wives	180
4.6.3 Spending priority for left-behind wives' households	181
4.6.4 Economic comparison of left-behind wives households' with other villagers....	182
4.7 Summary	183
Chapter 5: The Lives of Left-Behind Wives	185
5.1 Introduction.....	185
5.2 Migration is a desperate act	187
5.2.1 No other choice but to migrate for work	188
5.2.1.1 Poverty	188
5.2.1.2 Lack of job opportunities.....	191
5.2.1.3 Continuous intra-country conflict.....	192
5.2.2 Debt bondage	193
5.2.3 Cultural context of Nepalese migration to the Gulf States	196
5.2.3.1 Subordination of women and their workload in the Nepalese patriarchal society	196
5.2.3.2 Women, caste and discrimination.....	200
5.2.3.3 Knowledge about the reality of migration	203
5.2.3.4 Culture of helping one another	204
5.2.4 Summary.....	204

5.3 The young wives: the survival stage.....	205
5.3.1 Introduction.....	205
5.3.2 Working and living.....	206
5.3.2.1 Maintaining the family structure	206
5.3.2.2 Sexual harassment of vulnerable women	210
5.3.2.3 Occupational health and safety.....	211
5.3.2.4 Remittances for women.....	212
5.3.2.5 Participation in an informal social system.....	213
5.3.2.6 Cooperatives	215
5.3.3 Housing, drinking water and sanitation	216
5.3.3.1 Housing.....	216
5.3.3.2 Drinking water.....	218
5.3.3.3 Sanitation.....	218
5.3.4 Family relationships	219
5.3.4.1 Relationships with mothers-in-law	220
5.3.4.2 Sexual exploitation from male members of the household	220
5.3.4.3 Benefits from being with family.....	221
5.3.5 Relationships with husbands.....	222
5.3.5.1 Time before separation	222
5.3.5.2 Communication with husbands.....	223
5.3.6 Young wives with children.....	225
5.3.6.1 Pregnancy and childbirth.....	226
5.3.6.2 Access to health care support services.....	228
5.3.6.3 Children’s illness	229

5.3.7 Psychological stress	230
5.3.7.1 Many demands, little control, and little support	230
5.3.7.2 The strain of prolonged marital separation	232
5.3.7.3 The stress of being vulnerable and unprotected	233
5.3.8. Summary	234
5.4 Moving beyond the survival stage: young wives growing old and still left behind ...	235
5.4.1 Introduction.....	235
5.4.2 Asset accumulation	235
5.4.3 Trying to offer a better life for their children	237
5.4.4 Changing the guard.....	239
5.4.5 Improvement of marital relationships with maturity	240
5.4.6 Social relationships and social status.....	241
5.4.7 Health of the wives	244
5.4.8 Permanent consequences of migration	245
5.4.9 Barriers to public services	246
5.4.9.1 Ignorance	247
5.4.9.2 Physical access to transport	247
5.4.9.3 Discrimination against women	249
5.4.9.4 Corruption.....	250
5.4.9.5 Fragile state of post-war conflict in Nepal	251
5.4.10 Summary.....	253
5.5 Summary.....	254
Chapter 6: Discussion.....	256
6.1 Introduction.....	256

6.2 Quantitative findings	256
6.2.1 Introduction.....	256
6.2.2 Welfare of left-behind wives compared to that of other Nepalese women	256
6.2.3 The Nepalese national use of migrants’ remittances	260
6.2.4 Gains for the left-behind migrants’ wives compared to the gains for the host countries.....	262
6.3 Qualitative Findings.....	265
6.3.1 Introduction.....	265
6.3.2 Engaging with the migration process	265
6.3.3 The early years of surviving as left-behind wives	270
6.3.4 The later years of growing old and still being left behind	278
6.4 Conclusions and final remarks.....	284
6.5 Recommendations.....	288
6.6 Implications	293
6.7 Summary.....	294
References.....	296
Appendices	331
Appendix 1. Research ethics approval.....	332
1.1. Human research ethics approval.....	332
1.1. Human research ethics approval	333
1.2. Information sheet for participants.....	335
1.3. Consent form for participants	339
Appendix 2. Questionnaires.....	341
2.1. Survey questionnaire	342
2.2. In-depth interview schedule.....	348

Appendix 3. Conferences and publications	351
3.1. Abstract accepted for the presentation at two conferences.....	352
3.1.1. Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, San Diego, 21-24 March 2013	352
3.1.2. International Convention of Asian Scholars, Macau, 24-27 June 2013	352
3.2. Presentation in conferences	353
3.2.1. Oral presentation at 1st Global Conference on Crisis and Opportunity, 7-9 February 2013, Sydney.....	354
3.2.2. Oral presentation at American Canadian Conference for Academic Disciplines, 20-23 May 2013, Toronto.....	355
3.3. Publications.....	356
3.3.1. On-line book chapter	357

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Process of research	17
Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of social determinants of health.....	63
Figure 3. 1. Schema of the methodology.....	108
Figure 3. 2. Map of Nepal showing research area	135

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Theories of migration defined by level of analysis	26
Table 2.2. Features related to migration process between India and the Gulf States	54
Table 2.3. Features related to human aspects of migration to India and the Gulf States	56
Table 2.4. Operational framework of social determinants of health	65
Table 2.5. Human Development Index of the selected countries in 2011	68
Table 2.6. Progress towards meeting MDG one to four in selected countries	69

Table 2.7. Progress towards meeting MDG five to seven in selected countries	70
Table 2.8. International labour migration studies of left-behind wives.....	91
Table 2.9. Research on Nepalese labour migration and left-behind wives	97
Table 3.1. The five categories of data in the survey questionnaire	116
Table 3.2. The MDG 1 indicators and survey questions with research indicators	122
Table 3.3. The MDG 2 indicators and survey questions with research indicators	123
Table 3.4. The MDG 5 indicators and survey questions with research indicators	125
Table 3.5. The MDG 7 indicators and survey questions with research indicators	128
Table 3.6. Selection of sample population.....	137
Table 4.1. Age distribution of left-behind wives.....	152
Table 4.2. Age and sex composition in households of left-behind wives	154
Table 4.3. Age distribution in households of left-behind wives.....	155
Table 4.4. Family type of left-behind wives.....	155
Table 4.5. Caste/ethnicity distribution in households of left-behind wives	156
Table 4.6. Literacy rates of left-behind wives	157
Table 4.7. Education levels in households of left-behind wives	159
Table 4.8. Work type of left-behind wives	160
Table 4.9. Average work hours of left-behind wives	160
Table 4.10. Left-behind wives who reported feeling unsafe at work	161
Table 4.11. Occupations of workers in households of left-behind wives.....	162
Table 4.12. Husbands' destination country	163
Table 4.13. Type of husbands' employment	163
Table 4.14. Periods of migration for husbands going to the Gulf States.....	164
Table 4.15. Number of return visits of husbands working in the Gulf States	164
Table 4.16. Purpose of return visits by husbands	165
Table 4.17. Households with inadequate food consumption annually	167

Table 4.18. Underweight children aged under five years	168
Table 4.19. Stunted children aged under five years.....	168
Table 4.20. Under-five mortality rate	169
Table 4.21. Infant mortality rate	170
Table 4.22. One-year children immunised against measles	170
Table 4.23. Knowledge of maternal mortality.....	171
Table 4.24. Births attended by skilled birth attendants	172
Table 4.25. Contraceptive prevalence rate	173
Table 4.26. Knowledge about the use of contraceptives	173
Table 4.27. Prevalence of tuberculosis	174
Table 4.28. Proportion of population using safe drinking water	175
Table 4.29. Distance to safe drinking water	176
Table 4.30. Sources of drinking water	177
Table 4.31. Population using pit latrines	178
Table 4.32. Population's access to soap	178
Table 4.33. Houses of left-behind wives by type of roof materials.....	179
Table 4.34. Annual income in the households of left-behind wives before and during their husbands migration to the Gulf States	181
Table 4.35. Left-behind wives report of spending priorities	182
Table 4.36. Economic wellbeing of left-behind wives' households compared to other households	183
Table 5.1. Description of participants	187