

Effect of Foreign Labour Migration on their Spouse

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the impact of foreign labor migration on their spouse to understand the economic, social, and demographic effects on the left behind family members, especially spouses in Ward No. 5, Bhardeu of Konjyosom Rural Municipality of Lalitpur district. 150 respondents, mostly spouses, provided quantitative data that was gathered using a structured questionnaire and planned interviews utilizing the census approach. Most migrants are Tamang men who are driven to relocate overseas by social and economic pressures. Malaysia is the prime country of destination for foreign labour migrants with more than half (56%) having migrated there an increase in workload and experiences of social discrimination among female spouses and decrease in communication among married spouses illustrate some social and demographic challenges associated with foreign labour migration on the left behind spouses. According to this study, left-behind spouses feel more at ease discussing the social discrimination they encounter with their family members rather than with other community members and institutions. This demonstrates how information about such situations may be limited to the migrant's home. These repercussions are varied, and to balance them, extensive government regulations that cater to the demands are required, as are support services for spouses who have been left behind. To eliminate unfavorable misconceptions about overseas labor migration and educate the public about the difficulties experienced by left-behind spouses, community awareness is essential.

Key words: Effect, foreign labour migration, spouse, left behind and discrimination

INTRODUCTION

The Nepalese government has implemented a few laws and initiatives to assist migrant workers and their families after realizing the significance of international labor migration for the nation's economy. The Nepalese government has facilitated the labor migration process through various acts, rules, policies and agreements with other countries. Foreign labor migration in Nepal is governed by the Foreign Employment Act and Foreign Employment Rules, which were established by the government. The primary government agency in Nepal, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), is in charge of creating the laws, rules, and regulations that oversee and control international labor migration in the country. However, the sector also faces significant challenges, including issues related to the recruitment process, working conditions, and the social, psychological and economic effects on left-behind family members (ILO, 2020).

The recent history, in the fiscal year 1993/94 A.D the number of labour approvals which was issued by DoFE were 3,605. A decade later, in 2003/04 A.D it reached 106,660 and in 2013/14 A.D it peaked at 519,638. However, the volume of labour migration has been decreasing since 2014 A.D and it reached 354,098 in 2017/18 A.D and 236,208 in 2018/19 A.D. Labour migration in Nepal is predominantly male while the proportion of female migrants has been increasing over the recent years (MoLESS, 2020). According to the preliminary [2021 Census Data](#), a total of 2.2 million Nepalese are abroad, out of which 81.28 percent are male and 18.72 percent are female (CBS, 2022). Out of 77 Districts, five districts i.e. Kathmandu, Kailali, Jhapa, Rupandehi and Morang have the highest proportion of Nepalese who were abroad in 2020 A.D. Nonetheless, the top five districts in 2021–2022 where Nepali migrant laborers originated were Dhanusha, Jhapa, Siraha, Sarlahi, and Mahottari (MoLESS, 2022).

Foreign labour migration in Nepal has been driven by various factors, including high unemployment rates, low wages, poverty, and political instability (Kunwar, 2015). In Nepal, labor migration is seen as a means of subsistence. It is dominated by men and has roots in colonial history (Khatriwada & Basyal, 2022). Growing differences in wealth, human rights, security, and income between nations act as push factors for migration. (Kunwar, 2021).

Malaysia and the six GCC nations continue to be the most sought-after locations for Nepali labor migration, accounting for more than 85 percent of the laborers migrating from Nepal (MoLESS, 2020). The majority of Nepal's migrant labor force consists of young adults, with half falling between the ages of 25 and 34, which is the economically most productive age group (MoLESS, 2022). Foreign labor migration has played a significant role in Nepal's economy, as remittances from migrant workers have contributed to the country's foreign exchange reserves and helped reduce poverty (Shrestha, 2021).

The Nepalese government does not collect comprehensive data on migration patterns and the data that is available is not easily accessible. Another problem is lack of reliable Vital Registration System in Nepal that records data related to foreign labour migration. Similarly, such data aren't available at the ward office of the study area. Although there is large flow of

foreign labour migrants from the study area, however the lack of available data prevents a thorough understanding of the effects of foreign labor migration. Hence, this study will help to fill the gaps in current knowledge by generating additional data.

According to a study conducted in Nepal, there are three times higher depression rates in left-behind wives than those living with their husbands (Adhikari et al., 2018). A study sponsored by Swiss Development Co- We examined at how male migration from Khotang and Udaypur districts to Malaysia and the Gulf countries affected women's means of subsistence. This study shows that foreign migration for employment has long-term effects on social dynamics and wide-ranging effects on women's and children's lives (Adhikari, 2015).

The findings from a study in Nepal indicate that left-behind wives are negatively impacted in terms of health and wellness by the growing trend of male migration abroad. This is especially true in terms of their mental health such as prevalence of depression. More than three quarter of left behind wives who were surveyed were suffering from depression (Bhurtyl & Wasti, 2021). When men migrate due to better economic opportunities to improve themselves and their families, responsibility of caring for children are often transferred to the women. A study conducted in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam concludes that left-behind mothers with their husbands employed abroad are more likely to experience poor mental health (Graham, Jordon & Yeoh, 2015).

A study conducted in Liuyang, China also showed that left-behind female spouses scored lower on health-related quality of life than non-left-behind female spouses (Yi, Zhong & Yao, 2014).

Sironi and Emmanuel, (2019) reported that independence in making decisions, mobility, purchasing power, freedom and financial independence has increased among left behind female spouses. At the same time, responsibilities of agricultural work, taking care of the children and elderly have also increased after migration of their husbands. In the research article titled 'Male Migration and 'Left behind' Women: Bane or Boon?', the author has argued that the left behind female spouses were able to use their potential successfully to become leaders in absence of their husbands. The article also states that they enjoyed the freedom to make decisions and that freedom has contributed to their being empowered positively. They also experienced freedom in terms of decision-making mobility and participation in political activities (Ullah, 2017).

A study in India explored the effect of female labor migration on the well-being of left-behind husbands and their families in India. The study showed that migration had a significant effect on gender roles and power dynamics within households. It found that the husbands often had to take on new responsibilities, such as childcare and household chores, and that these changes led to a shift in traditional gender roles. It also found that the husbands experienced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression due to the separation from their wives (Singh & Mukherjee, 2017).

Similarly, a study titled "Impact of international female migration on the left behind husbands in Malang, Indonesia" found that the husbands experienced social and emotional effects due

to their wives' migration. The study found that migration led to feelings of depression and anxiety. In certain instances, it resulted in high levels of stress, loneliness, divorce, and extramarital affairs (Pallikadavath et al., 2016).

There have been no previous studies in Konjyosom Rural Municipality, Ward No. 5, Bhardeu, focusing on how foreign labour migration affects the families left behind. Additionally, the ward office lacks official documents related to foreign labour migration. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the effects of foreign labour migration on the families of migrant workers in the area. It will help in understanding both the positive and negative impacts of foreign labour migration.

This paper findings can help us better understand how migration affects families. By using these results, local leaders can create and carry out policies that support economic growth, build stronger community ties, and promote political stability. These changes can, in turn, improve the overall quality of life for people in this ward.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the demographic effects of foreign labour migration on the left behind family members, particularly spouses of the migrant households.
2. To examine the socio-economic effects of foreign labour migration on the left behind family members, particularly spouses of the migrant households.

METHODS

The research is based on Ward No. 5, Bhardeu of Konjyosom Rural Municipality and selected purposively for various reasons. Firstly, among five wards present in Konjyosom Rural Municipality, it has the highest number of populations who have migrated abroad for employment. Secondly, the study area has both male and female foreign labour migrants and is near Kathmandu metropolitan city. The population there is homogeneous consisting mainly of Tamang ethnicity. A descriptive and cross-sectional research design has been conducted. The primary respondents are the spouses of the foreign labour migrant. In cases where the spouses are not available to participate in this study, information has been gathered from other adult family members living in the same household. The nature of the data used both primary and secondary sources. Quantitative data has been collected from the left behind household members comprising mainly of spouses and parents of foreign labour migrants. The total sample size for the study is 150 respondents; the complete household listing has been done to determine the total number of spouses in households from which at least one person (Male or female) has migrated to a foreign country for employment. There are 152 households in Ward No. 5 from which at least one spouse has migrated to a foreign country for employment. Two respondents were not available at home during the data collection period. So, only 150 respondents' information was collected. The data collection method is a census method. Data collection has been performed by using Kobo based electronic application called Kobo Toolbox. The researcher has obtained informed verbal consents from all the respondents before starting each interview. Finally, data has been analyzed by using Stata13 software. Data analysis for this study is mainly based on descriptive type of analysis. The results are

presented frequency tables, cross tabulations, and other necessary information from edited and cleaned datasets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of the Foreign Labour Migrants

Demographic characteristics such as age, gender and age groups provide valuable insights into the composition of the foreign labour migrant population and help identify patterns and variations within that population.

Table 1: Distribution of Foreign Labour Migrants by Gender and Age groups

Age group	Male		Female		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
15-24 yrs	28	93.3	2	6.7	30
25-34 yrs	42	79.2	11	20.8	53
35-44 yrs	41	89.1	5	19.9	46
45 and above yrs	25	86.2	4	13.8	29
Total	128	85.33	22	14.67	150

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In the 15–24 years age group, there were 30 respondents, of which an overwhelming majority were male (93.3%), with only 6.7 percent females, indicating very low female participation in this youngest group. The 25–34 years age group had the highest number of respondents (53). Although males still dominated this group (79.2%), the proportion of females (20.8%) was relatively higher compared to other age categories. Among respondents aged 35–44 years, a total of 46 participants were recorded. Males again formed a large majority (89.1%), while females accounted for a smaller share. In the 45 years and above group, 29 respondents were included. Like other age groups, males (86.2%) outnumbered females (13.8%). Overall, the table clearly shows that male respondents dominate across all age groups, with female participation consistently low, though slightly more visible in the 25–34 years age category. This suggests a gender imbalance in participation across all age ranges in the study.

Social Characteristics of the Foreign Labour Migrants

In this section foreign labour migrant's educational status, marital status and family structure has been discussed.

Table 2: Distribution of Foreign Labour Migrants by Educational Level, Marital Status and Family Structure

Educational Attainment	Number	Percent (%)
Grade-1 to Grade-5	48	32.00
Grade 6 or Grade 9	15	10.00
Grade 10 (SLC/SEE)	19	12.67
Grade 11-12 or Equivalent	8	5.33
Informal education	40	26.67
Illiterate	20	13.33
Total	150	100.00
Marital Status of Foreign Labour Migrant	Number	Percent (%)
Single	47	31.33
Married	100	61.86
Remarried	1	0.67
Separated	1	0.67
Widowhood	1	0.67
Total	150	100
Family Structure	Number	Percent (%)
Nuclear	89	59.33
Joint	61	40.67
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Almost a third (32%) of the migrants had education of grades 1-5 and more than a quarter (27%) had informal education. Similarly, more than a tenth (13%) were illiterate and similar proportions of the migrants passed SLC/SEE. Finally, a tenth (10%) studied grades 6-9 and just over 5 percent completed grade 12 or equivalent. This shows that most of the foreign labour migrants were relatively less educated. Similarly, majority of the migrants were married comprising almost two thirds (62%) and single migrants comprised of almost a third (31%). A small proportion (1%) of migrants were remarried, separated and widowed/er. More than half (59%) of the migrants lived in a nuclear family while the remaining lived in a joint family.

Overview of Foreign Labour Migration Details

Almost half (49%) migrated abroad for employment due to economic push factors such as unemployment, poverty, debt and insufficient earnings at home. More than a third (38%) migrated due to social pull factors such as better opportunities and a better future for the family. Similarly, a tenth (10%) migrated due to economic pull factors, which include more salary and better jobs. The majority (87%) of the migrants travelled abroad with information available from manpower agencies. Less than a fifth (17%) used information accessible from friends. More than half (56%) of the foreign labour migrants' destination country was Malaysia while roughly a fifth (19%) went to industrialized countries. With the exception of the UAE, more than a tenth (14%) of the destinations were in the Gulf. The United Arab Emirates was the destination for ten percent.

The majority (91%) of the foreign labour migrants for both genders worked indoors. More than half (50%) of the migrants borrowed money from friends or relatives to travel abroad for employment. Similarly, more than a third (35%) of the migrants took out loans from banks or financial institutions to manage money for employment. Slightly less than a tenth (8%) of the migrants used their savings while a small proportion (6%) took out loans from the local moneylenders to travel abroad for employment. This shows that the trends of borrowing money and taking out loans were predominant among most migrants to manage money to travel abroad for employment.

A large majority (93%) of migrants from both genders were able to get jobs according to the contract document in their destination countries. Majority (94%) of the male migrants and more than three quarters (82 %) of the female migrants were able to get jobs according to the contract document. Similarly, a small proportion (5%) of the migrants from both genders could not get jobs according to the contract document. Almost a tenth (9%) of the female migrants and a small proportion (5%) of the male migrants could not get jobs according to the contract document. The average monthly income of the foreign labour migrants was NPR 72,840 with maximum income of NPR 2,50,000 and minimum income of NPR 34,000. Six respondents reported foreign labour migrant's income as "Do not know".

More than a third (38%) of the migrants were engaged in service-related work. More than a quarter (28%) were engaged in manufacturing while less than a fifth (15%) were engaged in wholesale/retail and trade. Less than a tenth (7%) were engaged in construction and slightly more than 2 percent were engaged in administrative work. Around 2 percent were engaged in professions such as security and driving. Finally, a small proportion (2%) of the respondents were not aware of the current job.

Effects of Foreign Labour Migration on Left Behind Spouses

FLM often involves separation of spouses, which can have significant demographic, social, and economic consequences for the left behind families. This section covers the gender of married respondents with migrant spouses, satisfaction of left behind spouses with the support system available at home, changes in communication and stability in husband-wife

relationships after FLM, coping strategies adopted by the left behind spouses and the experience of social discrimination by the left behind spouses.

Table 3: Distribution of Married Respondents with Migrant Spouses categorized by Gender

Gender of the Married Respondents	Number	Percent (%)
Male	11	12.79
Female	75	87.21
Total	86	100.00
Satisfaction Level of Left Behind Spouses	Number	Percent (%)
Very satisfied	8	9.30
Satisfied	36	41.86
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	12.79
Dissatisfied	31	36.05
Total	86	100.00
Changes in Communication after FLM	Number	Percent (%)
Increase in communication	14	16.28
Decrease in communication	36	41.86
Still has remained the same	36	41.86
Total	86	100.00
Changes in Stability in Husband-Wife Relations	Number	Percent (%)
Increase in stability in husband-wife	3	3.49
Decrease in stability in husband-wife	8	9.30
Still has remained the same	75	87.21
Total	86	100.00
Types of Coping Strategies	Number	Percent (%)
Make frequent communication	68	88.31
Seek support from family/ friends/ relatives	1	1.30
Engage in hobbies	1	1.30
Crying	7	9.09
Total	77	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Majority (87%) of the married respondents were females, and they had male spouses as foreign labour migrants. Similarly, just over a tenth (13%) of the married respondents were males and they had female spouses as foreign labour migrants. This shows that majority of the married respondents were female spouses of the FLM. Slightly less than a half (42%) of the spouses were satisfied and almost a tenth (9%) were very satisfied with the support system available at home after FLM. More than a third (36%) reported that they were dissatisfied with the support system available at home.

Almost half (42%) of the spouses reported that there has been a decrease in communication after spousal FLM. Same proportions of the spouses reported that communication has remained the same. Only 16 percent of spouses reported that communication has increased. Overall, this illustrates varying experiences among spouses regarding communication changes after spousal FLM. The majority (87%) of the spouses reported that the overall stability in husband-wife relations remained the same while almost 9 percent reported that it decreased after spousal foreign labour migration. The majority (88%) of the married respondents made frequent communication with their spouses who were abroad. This illustrates that majority of the married respondents relied on frequent communication as a coping strategy to deal with spousal absence.

Experience of Social Discrimination by Left Behind Spouses

Social discrimination is defined as the differentiating treatment of an individual based on their actual or perceived characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, gender, income status, or medical condition) (Meyer, 2003).

Table 4: Distribution of Social Discrimination Experiences Based on Gender of the Left-Behind Spouses

Experience of Discrimination	Male Spouse (%)	Female Spouse (%)	Total
Yes frequently	0	2.67	2.33
Yes sometimes	9.09	25.33	23.26
No	90.91	72.00	74.42
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The experience of discrimination among male and female spouses. Overall, most respondents reported that they did not experience discrimination (74.42%), indicating that discrimination was not common for the majority. However, experiences differed by gender. Female spouses were more likely to report discrimination than male spouses. About 25.33 percent of female spouses said they experienced discrimination sometimes, compared to only 9.09 percent of male spouses. A small proportion of respondents (2.33% overall) reported experiencing discrimination frequently, and this was reported only by female spouses, while no male spouses reported frequent discrimination. In contrast, a much higher proportion of male

spouses (90.91%) stated that they did not face discrimination, compared to 72 percent of female spouses.

Table 5: Distribution of Types of Social Discrimination experienced by Left Behind Spouses

Types of Social Discriminations	Number	Percent (%)
Negative stereotypes or prejudice	4	18.17
Verbal harassment or insults	18	81.81
Total	22	100.00
Relationship with the Left Behind Spouses	Number	Percent (%)
Family	15	93.75
Friends / Relatives	1	6.25
Total	16	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 shows that a majority (82%) reported the experience of verbal harassment or insults after FLM. So, verbal harassment or insult was the most common type of social discrimination that the left behind spouses experienced. Over two-thirds (69%) percent of the spouses left behind experienced social discrimination reported that they informed someone about it. The majority (94%) of the spouses left behind informed their family members and a small proportion (6%) informed their friends or relatives.

CONCLUSION

The migrant households' economic well-being improved as a result of remittances, which also allowed them to make investments in productive uses like savings and housing as well as necessities like children's education, healthcare, and celebrations. Foreign labor migrants also had a significant impact on household decision-making. The majority of wives who were left behind had access to smartphones and the internet, which allowed them to regularly connect with their migrant spouse and deal with their separation.

Meanwhile, on the bane side, FLM brought social and economic strain on migrant's households. There was an increase in loans in the migrant's households, and an increase in employment opportunities for left behind spouses. As far as the social and demographic effects of FLM are concerned, there was an increase in workload for left behind spouses and decrease in communication among spouses after foreign labour migrant of their husbands/wives. One key finding of this study is that higher proportion of female behind spouses were experiencing social discrimination during the absence of their migrant husbands compared to male left behind spouses. Since, most of the left behind spouses were females; this shows the demographic implication of FLM. In addition, the left behind spouses were more comfortable talking to their family members instead of other persons and institutions present in the neighborhood discussing the social discrimination that they faced.

Similarly, the study highlights various social issues faced by the elders such as an increase in loneliness after FLM of their loved ones, difficulty in accessing health facilities, increased care giving responsibilities and lack of proper mechanism in place to support the left behind spouse and despite of having many positive outcomes, FLM can take a social and economic toll on left behind family members. It also shows how the country of destination and the degree of education of the migrant can influence how and where the remittances are spent. Because the effects of FLM are intricate and multidimensional, balancing these effects necessitates thorough and well-considered strategies that tackle the various issues related to FLM.

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