

Living Conditions and Intension of Future Movement among Return Migrants: A special reference to International Female Domestic Workers from Kerala, India

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Abstract

In recent times, female migration has been the focus of growing attention among researchers worldwide. Female migration has an impact on the place of origin, on their families, on gender relations and on themselves. The causes and consequences of female migration appear to be different from those of male migration because females have different social and economic roles in the family and in the economy. Females are nearly exclusively found in the service sector, domestic work, care-giver work, and entertainment work. Majority of the Asian females migrating to the Middle East are domestic workers. Traditionally domestic work was considered as limiting women's development and personal growth. But, the situation has changed and it helps to improve their economic autonomy, increase in knowledge about cross cultural matters, public exposure and better lives.

Return migration is another important aspect in the female migration. Return migration to the place of origin is an inevitable consequence of internal and international migration. The return migration has serious implication on the socio-economic changes in the place of origin, especially in the rural areas. The most important problem of return migrants is their readjustment in the place of origin after return. Female migrants may have to face difficult situation after their return. Some of the females who were successful in migration may not face many problems after return while some others who had returned without completing the contract and without having much savings may face more problems. In addition to financial problems, sometimes the return of females without having any savings can create some kind of tensions in the family members also. This makes the condition worse for the females after return.

In India, a fair percentage of the migrants originate from the state of Kerala. Studies have shown that in Kerala, on the whole the conditions are favourable for an increasing trend in female migration and females those who migrate for work related reasons are increasing. There

are a few studies focused on some of the issues of return migration in Kerala and the main focuses of these studies are on male migration. Hence, it is important to look into the impact of return migration on the female migrants and their family and their future plans.

The present paper, based on primary data collected from six villages in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, focuses upon the present living conditions and future plans of female migrants in the place of origin after return. For the present study, the villages in Thiruvananthapuram district were divided into three strata based on female work participation rate and from each stratum, two villages were selected randomly. From each selected village, three wards were selected randomly in order to get approximately 1000 households in each village. The identification of female migrants was done by a complete house listing of 5787 households in all the selected wards. The present paper is based on female return migrants who migrated internationally for domestic work.

The study revealed that the reasons for return migration included both the factors at the place of destination and individual factors. However, the major reasons for return of female migrants were found to be related to health. While a substantial proportion of the international migrants had returned because of unfavourable conditions they had to face abroad such as non-payment of salary, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, some other migrants had returned because of their illegal stay abroad made them to repatriate compulsorily. Further, it was observed that a sizable proportion of the female migrants had returned for other familial reasons such as children education and future, to take care of family and other family responsibilities.

Female migrants had faced differing situations after their return such as financial problems and other tensions in the family. In addition to financial problems, some of the international migrants had faced some kind of tensions in the family because of their return while none of the internal migrants reported this. As regard to the work status after return, about three fourth of the migrants were not working after their return. The main type of work involved by the return migrants were domestic work, fish sale, coir industry and vegetable selling.

Because of their deteriorated financial status after return or due to familial problems these females would like to migrate again. The proportion who wanted to migrate again was relatively higher among females who were young, illiterate, who were not currently married, and whose last place

of destination was Gulf countries. In some cases, return migrants want to migrate again not necessarily for financial benefits but due to the problems in the family because of their return.