

Husbands' International Labour Migration and the Change of Wives' Position among the Left-Behind in Rural Bangladesh

Md. Masud Sarker

Department of Political Studies, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh
E-mail: sarkermasud@yahoo.com

Md. Shahidul Islam (Corresponding author)

Department of Sociology, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh
E-mail: shahidulsoc@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study aims to examine the effects of husbands' international labour migration on wives' position among the left-behind wives in rural Bangladesh. A cross-sectional study conducted in Tukur bazar Union Parishad under Sylhet Sadar upazilla in Sylhet district, Bangladesh and data was collected through face to face interview. Two stage cluster sampling technique was applied to select the 220 migrant's families. About 220 comparable non-migrant families were selected by using stratified random sampling method. Binary logistic regression was applied to measure the effects of husbands' international labour migration on women decision making role and women autonomy. The findings reveal that men's labour migration was positively associated with women decision making role and women autonomy. So, male international migration increases the women decision making role and autonomy in rural areas.

Keywords: International migration, Decision Making, Autonomy, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

International labour migration is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. International migration is not only improving the economic growth of Bangladesh but also have significant affects on poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Economic changes cause the family changes which is the important topic in the social science (Yabiku et al., 2010). When male or female move their productive activities from home to factory, they practiced more freedom in their family and less control over their family (Yabiku et al., 2010). International labour migration changes the family both the less developed and more developed world (Iqbal and Mohyuddin, 2014). When the male member of the family migrated from outside of their family, the role of the female member is being changed; they enjoyed more autonomy of the household level (Yabiku et al, 2010). International migration of husbands has impacts on the gender basis power structure within the family (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Where the male members remain outside of the family and remittances are sent to wives, it leads restructuring of the political structure of the migrants' family and the wives of the international migrants have power/control over the family. She has the significance control in decision-making and daily activities in their household. In the absence of husband in the household, women take not only the control over household resources but also enhance their responsibility in the family (Garcia, 2006). Women have to take different role with regards to household as greater than before authority in spending economic decision, freedom of movement (Iqbal and Mohyuddin, 2014). So, women who remain in household while their husbands are labour migrants are always enjoyed higher autonomy, independence, and decision-making authority (Yabiku et al., 2010). When male are migrated, then the headship of the nuclear families changed. Women have to adapt to the new situation and manage the household tasks in their husband absence. Women have to take full responsibility of their husbands' tasks, duties and roles (Yabiku et al., 2010). The left behind women have to adjust to the new situation and their role and status also changes (Hadi, 2001). All wives have no equal access to remittances. Educational status of women also plays an important role in handling remittances from their migrant husbands (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Those are higher educated, are more handling/controlling the remittances compared to those are lower educated. There is a positive relation between remittance received by wives from their husband and the capacity of the wives to make household and economic decision in the family (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Proper education and direct access to remittance of the wives lead to a fully empowered of women in family (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Among the left behind women have greater decision making power at home, these are in nuclear families compare to these are in joint families (Yabiku et al., 2010). Left behind women start interacting various organization and institutions such as banks and government agencies that might have not using before (Yabiku et al., 2010). In the rural area, women have the power in agricultural decision making. International labour migration of husband also has negative impacts of women. Sometimes women feel insecure without male members in household (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Due to the absence of their husbands, they feel anxieties, miseries, and various socio-economic problems (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). Some of the wives who do not

receive remittance directly are treated as an widow (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). They are spending time by performing religious activities, taking care of their children, visiting the relatives' house, sewing tapestry, watching T.V, and in some cases, staying in fathers' house (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). It is a matter of great sorrow that in some cases both family members and community members especially the males are very suspicious of their moral and sexual purity (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008).

A huge number of male are in abroad from Bangladesh. Remittance is essential for economic development of the country. A number of studies in Bangladesh are focusing on the socio economic aspects of remittances. The contribution of remittance in raising the living standards is well known. But the link between international male migration and the left behind women status are unclear in Bangladesh (Hadi, 2001). So, this study tries to understand the effects of international labour migration of adult men in changing the women's position among the left-behind in rural Bangladesh.

1.1 Literature review

Iqbal and Mohyuddin (2014) analyzed the impacts of male's labour migrations from Pakistan on their families left behind in Pakistan. They found that absence of male members from house-hold, the role and decision-making autonomy of women who stay behind were changed. They found that women invested remittance on economic and business activities. Remittances contributed to improve the quality of life and brought happiness in their family. The left behind women were felt more independent and autonomous in the absence of their male members. Although left behind generally feel much comfortable to live their parents period, they can easily decided where they live-parents house or husbands' house. Left behind women was freely visited their friends and families when they want. The left behind women had to participate in the social obligations where male members were required. Hadi (2001) examined the changes in the left-behind women's position at the family level due to migration of male members. They found that male migrants had the positive impacts on women's decision-making capacity and education of girls in the migrant families. He also found that migration also reduced the practice of dowry in marriage. Migrants' family was more likely to send their girls to the school. The absence of men had increased the decision making capacity of the women. International migrants raised the living standard of their left behind family. International migration also had modified their social behavior through the diffusion of secular ideas into the traditional values of the sending communities. Southiseng and Walsh (2001) readdress the link between remittances and the roles of women in Laos. They identified the four way to spent the remittances; those are (a) spending the remittance for family security and family well-being; (b) spending the remittance for fungible activities; (c) spending the remittance for economic and business activities; (d) spending the remittances for community development. They found that 80% women were being empowered by the remittance. Social remittance helped the women to gain trust from friends, colleagues, boss or family as they had been abroad and absorbed more information and this gave them better bargaining power than before. Social remittances also helped them to gain better jobs, work well in their jobs, get more network connections and friends and caused the community positively to recognize their identities. Remittances also improve the quality of life of the women. The women became the main decision maker whether to spend them on the household or else saving or investing the money in productive activities. Rahman (2007) examined the two domains where the gender relation were changed; (a) changing the division of labor between men and women and increasing the women in decision making process. Absent of male member, family headship of nuclear family also changed. Women had to control receipt remittance and decision-making. In absence of their male member, wives had to do the work those replace of her husband. Sabur and Mahmud (2008) examined the political impacts of remittance both the community and the family level. After receiving remittance, the economic condition is also improved of the migrant's family. So, their social status also increased in the society. They showed that household civic amenities was changed after migration, the relationship between the migrant families and the local elite developed, the relationship between the migrant families and the local bureaucrats, involvement of political participations also increased, contribution of community level also increased. They also showed that there was a positive correlation between women remittance received and decision making at the house hold level. Yabiku et al. (2010) examined the husbands' labour migration and wives' autonomy in Southern Mozambique. They found that both men's cumulative migration history and current migration status were positively associated with women's autonomy in this area. Men's migration leads to women more income generation activities and employment. Men's labour migration generally related to lower fertility of women because of absence of male reduced the sexual intercourse. They found that women had lower freedom and autonomy in extended family whether their male members are living another places. They found that international labour migration increased women autonomy and this autonomy continued even after the man comes back

2. Data and methods

The study was undertaken in Taker bazar Union Parishad under Sylhet Sadar upazilla in Sylhet district,

Bangladesh. 220 migrant families were selected through two stage cluster sampling method. At first stage, ward no 1 and ward no 5 were randomly selected from the 9 wards of this union. Then those two wards were divided by 22 clusters. Migrant's families were recognized where at least one member had been living in foreign country for at least six months. The second stage, the total 220 migrants households (22x10) were the sample of the study. Another 220 non migrant's families were selected by using stratified random sampling method as a comparison group. So, a total 420 sample families were the sample of the study. Data were collected by face to face interview through a semi-structure questionnaire.

2.2 Analytical technique

At first socio-economic status of the migrants and non-migrants families were described. Then the differences of women decision making role and women autonomy of the migrants and non-migrants families were presented. Women decision making role was measured by using Hadi's decision making capacity indicator (Hadi, 2001). Then the score of women decision making role score was ranged from low decision making to high decision making. The women autonomy was measured by Yabiku et al technique (Yabiku et al., 2010). Then the women autonomy score was ranged from low autonomy to high autonomy. Finally, binary logistics regression was applied to measure the effects of migration on women position (women decision making role and women autonomy).

3. Result

The summary statistics shows the socioeconomic variable in table 1. The minimum age of the migrant families' women was 16 year and the minimum age of the non-migrants families' women was 15 year. The minimum of the family members of the migrant was 5 and non -migrant was 4. The minimum year of schooling of both migrant's women and non-migrant's women was 0. The minimum land ownership of the migrant was 0.90 acres and non-migrant was 0.20 acres.

The maximum age of the migrants was 50 and the maximum age of the non-migrants was 55. The maximum of the family members of the migrant was 14 and non -migrant was 15. The maximum year of schooling of both migrant's women and non-migrant' women was 17. The maximum land ownership of the migrant was 30 acres and non-migrant was 5 acres.

The mean age of the migrants' family women was 26.76 years and the mean age of the non-migrants family women was 27.21 years. The mean of the migrants' family members was 7.33 and the mean of the non-migrants family members was 5.76. The mean of the years of schooling of the migrants' family women was 6.16 and the mean of the years of schooling of the non-migrants' family women was 7.74. The mean of the land ownership of the migrants' family was 5.67 acres and the mean of the non migrants family land ownership was 1.44 acres.

Table 2 shows that the differences of the women position between migrant and non-migrant families. The decision making score of the women of non-migrant family was 8.5 where the decision making score of the left behind women was 28.5. The decision making score was significantly differed from migrant to non-migrants women. The autonomy score of the women of non-migrant family was 2.5 where the autonomy score of the left behind women was 5.8. The autonomy score was significantly differed from migrant to non-migrants women. The decision making score of the left women was 25.6 whose husbands was abroad for less than five years and the decision making score of the left women was 27.5 whose husbands was abroad for more than five years. The autonomy score of the left behind women was 4.8 whose husbands was abroad for less than five years and the autonomy score of the left women was 5.2 whose husbands was abroad for more than five years.

The table 3 shows the effects of men's labour migration on women position. The women, where the migrants have lived abroad less than five years, were 3.12 times more likely to raising higher decision-making compared with the women of non-migrant families while other independent variables remain fixed. The women, where the migrants have lived abroad five years or more, were 5.96 times more likely to raising higher decision-making compared with the women of non-migrant families while other independent variables remain fixed. The odds of the age was 1.09, which means for each year differences for age, the women was 1.087 times more likely to raise high decision making. The odds of the land ownership was 1.096, which means for each acres differences for land ownership, the women were 1.096 times more likely to raise high decision making.

The women, where the migrants have lived abroad less than five years, were 3.39 times more likely to raising higher autonomy compared with the women of non-migrant families while other independent variables remain fixed. The women, where the migrants have lived abroad five years or more, were 6.38 times more likely to raising higher decision-making compared with the women of non-migrant families while other independent variables remain fixed. The odds of the age was 1.053, which means for each year differences for age, the women were 1.053 times more likely to raise higher autonomy. The odds of the land ownership was 1.074, which means for each acres differences for land ownership, the women were 1.074 times more likely to raise high autonomy.

4. Discussion

We found that men's labour migration had positive relationship with both women decision making and women autonomy in rural areas. A study conducted by Hadi (2001) in Bangladesh found that men's labour international migration had significant positive association with women's decision-making capacity (Hadi, 2001). So, men's labour migration increases the decision making capacity of wives of rural areas of Bangladesh. A study conducted by Yabiku et al. (2010) in Mozambique found that men's labour migration also positively associated with women's autonomy. All the migrants' family women feel more independent and autonomous in the absence of their male members (Iqbal and Mohyuddin, 2014). They enjoy the freedom of movement to participate in social activities and to visit their relatives (Iqbal and Mohyuddin, 2014). This study reveals that left behind women autonomy increases after the migration of their husband. International migration can be considered as a use full aspect for the gender development like rising consciousness about their right and responsibilities (Islam et al, 2013). Migrant's family women are participated in many different social activities. Migrant's family women found the authority to spend the money in household activities. They easily manage their household budget. Migrant's family women not only easily spend money for their health matters but also easily manage health matters for their children. Migrant's families are more likely to educate their women (Hadi, 2001). Education of girls also will improve the women position in society.

The effects of men's labour migration on women position also depends on the types of family. In the nuclear family, men's labour migration positively effects on decision making capacity and autonomy of the left behind women. But in the joint family, most of the autonomy are enjoyed by the mothers in law or others male members of the household. They are considered as a passive member of the family (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). They have no role in decision making in household level (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). They have no right to go outside without the permission of the family members. They are not permitted to talk any male inside and outside of the family (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008). We found that duration of migration have no significant relationship on women decision making capacity and autonomy. In Bangladesh, duration of the migration have little effects of the decision making capacity among the left behind women (Hadi, 2001).

We found that women decision making capacity was positively related to the age of the women. Evidence supports those women household decision making empowerment increases with the increases of women age (Islam et al, 2014). We found that age of the women have positive significant effect on women autonomy in rural areas. A study conducted by Haque et al. found in Bangladesh that women autonomy increases with the increase of women's age (Haque et al, 2011).

Our study indicates that landownership is positively associated with women decision making capacity and autonomy. But Hadi (2001) found in that landownership was negatively associated with decision making role of women in rural areas of Bangladesh (Hadi, 2001). He mentioned that upper classes community of rural areas might followed the patriarchal domination (Hadi, 2001). Our study also reveals that women autonomy and women decision making role are not related with religion.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that men's labour international migration is positively related to decision making role and autonomy of the left behind women in rural areas of Bangladesh. This study also reveals that women age and land ownership are also positively associated with both women decision making role and autonomy in rural areas of Bangladesh.

References

1. Garcia, S. R. (2005). Migration, remittances and gender in the Dominican Republic: Women's contribution to development. United Nations international research and training institute for the advancement of women. [Online] Available: <http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC21598.pdf>(June1, 2014)
2. Hadi, A. (2001). International Migration and the Change of Women's Position among the Left-Behind in Rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Population Geography*,7(1):53-61. doi: 10.1002/ijpg.211.
3. Haque, M. M., Islam, T.M., Tareque, M. I and Mostofa, M.G. (2011) .Women Empowerment or Autonomy: A Comparative View in Bangladesh Context. *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 8(2):17-30.[Online]Available: [http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/BEJS%208.2%20Women%20Empowerment %20or%20Autonomy.pdf](http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/BEJS%208.2%20Women%20Empowerment%20or%20Autonomy.pdf)(June1, 2014).
4. Iqbal, S and Mohyuddin, A. (2014). Male Migration: Decision Making Autonomy and Changing Roles among Females Left Behind: A Feminist Approach (A Case Study of Village Pindi Baha-ud-Din). *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 29 (4): 480-485. doi: 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2014.29.04.13950.
5. Islam, M. S., Ahmed, M. S., Alam, M. S.(2014).The Role of Microcredit Program on Women Empowerment: Empirical Evidence from Rural Bangladesh. *Developing Country Studies*, 4(5):90-97. [Online] Available: <http://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/DCS/article/viewFile/11389/11731>(June1, 2014).

6. Islam, S., Parvin, S & Kalam, A. (2013). Socio-economic Impacts of International Migration in Bangladesh. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(4):9-17. [Online] Available: <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEDS/article/download/4829/4907>(June1, 2014).
7. Southiseng, N and Walsh, J. (2001).Remittances and the Changing Roles of Women in Laos.*International Science Index*, 5(1):63-69. [Online] Available:<http://waset.org/publications/5648/remittances-and-the-changing-roles-of-women-in-laos>(June1, 2014).
8. Rahman, M. S. (2007).Migration and Social Development: A Family Perspective. *Asia Research Institute. Working Paper Series No. 91.* [Online] Available: http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps07_091.Pdf(June1,2014).
9. Sabur, M.A and Mahmud, H. (2008). Political impacts of remittances: A Micro-level Study of Migrants' Remittances in a Village in Bangladesh.4(12):128-134. [Online] Available:<http://ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/viewFile/772/746>(June1, 2014)
10. Yabiku, S.T., Agadjanian, V.and Sevoyan, A.(2010). Husbands' Labour Migration and Wives' Autonomy. *Popul Stud (Camb)*. 64(3): 293–306. doi:10.1080/00324728.2010.510200.

Table 1. Background characteristics of the migrant and non-migrant family

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Women age				
Migrant	16	50	26.7626	7.680
Non-migrant	15	55	27.2123	7.087
Family members				
Migrant	5	14	7.3318	2.54648
Non-immigrant	4	15	5.7555	2.37351
Years of schooling				
Migrants	0	17	6.1555	5.68678
Nonimmigrant	0	17	7.7364	5.92830
Landownership (acres)				
Migrant	0.90	30	5.6736	6.73863
Nonimmigrant	0.20	5	1.4386	1.33099

Table 2. Differences in the women's decision making role and autonomy between the migrant and non-migrant families, by socio-demographic factors.

Type of family	Decision making	Autonomy
Non-migrant	8.5	2.5
Migrant	28.5	5.8
P value	<0.01	<0.01
Duration of migration		
Less than 5 years	25.6	4.8
5 years or more	27.5	5.2
P value	ns	ns

ns = not significant.

Table 3. Logistic regression shows the effects of men's labour migration on women position (Decision making and autonomy)

Variables	Women position					
	Decision-making			Autonomy		
	B	S.E.	Odds ratio	B	S.E.	Odds ratio
Duration of migration						
Non-migrant(ref)						
Less than 5 years	1.139	0.637	3.123*	1.221	0.618	3.391**
5 years or more	1.785	0.703	5.960**	1.853	0.671	6.377***
Age of the respondents	0.084	0.022	1.087***	0.052	0.020	1.053*
Years of schooling	-0.058	0.054	0.943	-0.004	0.039	0.996
Land ownership	0.091	0.041	1.096**	0.071	0.038	1.074*
Religion						
Muslim(ref)						
Hindu	.391	.590	1.478	.691	.589	1.996
Constant	-4.455	1.123	.012	-3.581	1.007	.028

Significant at *p 0-10; **p 0-05; ***p 0-01;

Ref= reference category

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

