

# WOMEN LABOR MIGRATION IN ASIA: MOTHER MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstrak

Migrasi tenagakerja wanita (TKW) telah menjadi bagian utama migrasi tenaga kerja di Asia sejak tahun 1980an. Negara utama pengirim TKW ini adalah Indonesia, Filipina dan Sri Lanka. Sebagian besar TKW melakukan migrasi secara individual. Hal ini berakibat pada terjadinya perubahan pola pengasuhan anak di keluarga migrant perempuan tersebut. Berdasarkan penelitian yang dilakukan oleh PPK-LIPI pada tahun 2011 di Indramayu, Jawa Barat, artikel ini membahas proses yang dialami oleh anak yang ditinggalkan ibunya yang bekerja di luar negeri. Dalam rangka mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai isu ini, khususnya dalam konteks Asia, artikel ini juga mendiskusikan pustaka dengan isu serupa di Filipina dan Sri Lanka. Kajian di artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa migrasi oleh ibu untuk bekerja di luar negeri memiliki dampak signifikan terhadap proses perkembangan anak yang ditinggalkan di daerah asal. Dari beragam dampak yang dialami oleh anak para migrant wanita tersebut, komunikasi yang bermigrasi memegang peranan yang sangat penting dalam proses adaptasi anak terhadap situasi absennya ibu dalam kehidupan mereka sehari-hari. Di lingkup yang lebih luas, persepsi masyarakat terkait nilai-nilai normative keberadaan ibu dalam kehidupan keluarga sehari-hari turut menentukan proses penerimaan anak terhadap situasi pekerjaan ibunya.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

International labor migration is considered as an alternative solution to overcome unemployment and poverty problem in some developing countries. One of the important labor movements in international migration literature is the migration of female labors in Asia. This phenomenon has started since 1980s and known as 'feminization of migration'. The main characteristic of this type of migration is a large number of female labors migrate from developing countries in Asia to Gulf regions as well as to industrialize countries within Asia, and they mainly work as domestic helpers. The involvement of women as workers abroad has contributed significantly to the

## Abstract

*Female labor migration has been a prominent feature of labor migration in Asia since 1980s. Indonesia, along with Philippines and Sri Lanka, have been major sending countries of this type of migrants. Since the majority of the migrants are go abroad unaccompanied, this situation resulted in changes of left-behind family arrangement. Changes majorly apply to caregiving arrangement of left-behind children. Based on the research by PPK-LIPI in 2011, this article discuss the impacts of mother migration on left-behind children in Indramayu, West Java and their adaptation process to such situation. In order to get more comprehensive understanding of this issue, particularly in Asian context, this article also discuss similar cases on Philippines and Sri Lanka by reviewing related literatures. It appears that mothers' migration has a significant impact on left-behind children's development process. While there are different extent of the impacts, the children's communication with migrate mothers play an important role on the coping strategies of the children. In community context, the opinion of the children's surroundings in regards to mothers' absence in their daily lives would also determine the children's acceptance of their mother migration.*

*Keywords: mother migration, left-behind children, impact, women labor migration*

economic wellbeing of left-behind families in areas of origin through remittances.

The female migrants are usually work as contract labors who have to work in two continuous year period without having return to their countries of origin. Since many of them engage in multiple overseas work contracts or long-term migration (Hugo and Ukwatta 201), this would bring implications to left-behind family arrangement, particularly when the female workers are married and has children. The main implication is the change in caregiving arrangement of left-behind children. For example, instead of being taken care by both parents, children of migrants are only looked after by their

fathers. In some cases, they have to live with their extended family, such as grandparents or aunts. This situation put the children on vulnerable situation due to their mothers' absence during their physical and psychological development stages.

As expressed on reports by Save the Children (2006, p.27), the absence of mothers has an enormous impact on left-behind children's lives and their development. It can be seen from the gain that the children had from remittances sent by their migrating mothers. The money could provide opportunities to them to access better educational and health facilities. However, mothers' migration may also create psychological costs and emotional problems for the children. Thus, Save the Children (2006 p.2) argues that mothers migration "could violate a child's right to development, survival and education".

This article aims to discuss impacts of mother migration on left-behind children in Indonesia as well as to examine adjustment and adaptation strategies of left-behind children in the situation of their mothers' absence. This paper, in particular, would highlight the implication of the mothers' absence to the emotional development as well as the health and education outcomes of the children with migrant mothers. Data on this study based on a PPK-LIPI's research on the social cost of migration in Indramayu. In order to get more comprehensive framework on the left-behind children condition, this article would also discuss issues on left-behind children by migrant mothers in other prominent sending countries of female migrants in Asia, namely Philippines and Sri Lanka. The discussion would be conducted by reviewing findings from several literatures on left-behind children by migrant mothers, such as Parrenas (2005a & 2005b)'s study in Philippines on young adult children in transnational mother families and Save the Children (2006) study on young left-behind children by migrant mothers in two prominent migrants' area of origin in Sri Lanka.

This article is presented in six sections, with the introduction being the first. Next, it discusses the theories and setting context of mother migration. The next three sections address several issues related to the impacts of mother migration on left-behind children, namely caregiving arrangement, children's communication, and children's coping strategy, respectively. The final section concludes the study.

## **2. WHY DO THE MOTHERS MIGRATE?**

Migration is a complex process and it is difficult to examine a certain international movement based on a

single theory. However, in order to get better comprehension on the feminized labor migration issues, particularly in Asia, it is important to revisit conceptual context on this issues by reviewing several prominent migration theories. One of the prominent theories regarding this issue is dual labor market theory. The theory focuses on the importance of pull factors or demand for labor from destination countries rather than push factors or labor supply in sending countries to initiate immigrant worker flows, particularly in industrialized countries (Massey et al. 1993). Piore (1979) as one of the major proponent of this theory hypothesized that there are two distinct parts of labor market in migrants' destination countries, namely primary and secondary labor market. While primary labor market characterized with skilled and secure employment as well as high wages, secondary labor market described as unskilled and instability employment with low wages (Piore 1979, Heisler 2008). Since occupational type reflects social status, natives refuse to work in low wage employment and this situation opens up job opportunities to foreign labors. Therefore, the former market type attach to the natives while the latter seems to be destined for the immigrants. Besides that, since this movement derived from labor demand, recruitment practices by employers hold important role in enabling individuals from foreign countries to enter the labor market in industrialized countries.

Female labor migration from Indonesia, and other developing countries in Asia, to work as domestic workers in Middle East as well as East and Southeast Asia countries can also be explained by the theory above. The migration flow, which also known as feminization of migration, started in the late 1970s and 1980s when there was an increased demand of domestic workers from oil-rich countries in Gulf States as well as newly industrialized countries in East and Southeast Asia (Asis 2005). In Middle East countries, the domestic worker demands driven by increased household economic status in those countries that affected many affluent local women prefer to delegate household tasks to domestic helpers (Kaur 2007). Similarly, Surtees (2003) notes that one of the major cause of female labor migrant flows is increased demand in destination countries for subservient female workers to do domestic works or household tasks. Meanwhile, the demand for domestic workers in East and Southeast Asia countries, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, accounts for the increasing need of domestic helpers due to increased participation of local women in labor market (Asis 2005). Thus, the existence of these female labors has contributed to the improvement of quality of life and living standards of people in

destination countries (Moniaga 2008) and this situation may create long-run demand for unskilled immigrants to be occupied in such jobs (Massey et al. 1993).

Examination on the worker recruitment process of Indonesian female workers migration shows a similar fashion that put forward by dual labor migration theory. Kaur (2007) argues that workers from Southeast Asia that classified in unskilled migration flows are those who employed on particular job with temporary basis and recruited through private agencies or under sponsorship system by citizens of destination countries. According to Raharto (2002), recruiters play a major position in the migration process since they are the main source information for the potential migrants regarding employment opportunities as well as migration cost and administrative requirements. One prominent characteristic of female migrant workers from Indonesia is unskilled and have low level of education (Raharto et al. 2002, Raharto 2011). Besides that, the situation where there is only slight increase of wages of domestic workers or even stable wages, especially those who work in Gulf countries (Raharto 2011) could be explained by this theory. Instead of supply-demand mechanism, wages in this type of jobs are determined, and generally held down, by social and institutional mechanisms.

However, not all postulates described in dual labor market theory can be applied in the international movement of unskilled female workers from Indonesia. A major postulate in this theory is wage differential between sending and destination countries is not a necessary condition for labor migration to occur (Massey et al. 1993). In the case of domestic workers from Indonesia, Noveria et al. (2010) find that there is huge income gap for the same job between Indonesia and destination countries. For example, while domestic helpers in Indonesia are paid a salary on average US\$ 60-100 per month, their counterparts can get a salary US\$ 200-250 per month while working in Middle East countries and US\$ 500-600 per month in Hong Kong or Taiwan. On the sending countries' point of view, this situation may have influence on migration decision making by the potential female migrants although they have to work in bottom position of jobs hierarchy in destination countries.

Despite some problem faced by several migrant workers while living abroad (Raharto 2011), the female labor migration from less developed countries in Asia are still persisted. One of the theories that can explain the perpetuation of this movement in the

micro level is cumulative causation theory. This theory, proposed by Massey (1990), believes that initial migration can cause change in social, economic and cultural aspects, not only at the individual level but also in the community level. Therefore, it can lead to more migration acts in community where the initial migrants originated. People in a community might be motivated to participate in foreign labor market after witnessing the successful of migrant households to increase their economic welfare by the migrants' remittances and resulted in increased social status in their community. Therefore, in a migrant-dominant community, working abroad not only acts as source of household income but also a way to reach and maintain certain life style and social status. This situation can lead to repetitive migration by the same migrants or chain migration by other household members in the migrant families as well as deploy migration behavior among their communities.

The continuity flow of Indramayu's female workers to go abroad can be seen as the application of the theory above. As a major source of female labor migrants from Indonesia, its population movement to go abroad has been started in the beginning 1980s when a few number of women decide to take the job opportunity abroad in order to alleviate their family's poverty burden (Raharto *et al.* 2013). The limitation to send only female family member due to limited job opportunities abroad for male. The phenomenon of sending woman migrants was mainly occurred in parts of the regency that were known as poor areas due to infertile paddy field. From their movement abroad, the households of female migrant were gained significant economic improvement, that indicated by having a new or renovated house, buying furniture and vehicles, or celebrating their son's circumcision with huge traditional ceremonies (Raharto *et al.* 2013). In addition, their economic improvement also raised the social status of the migrant family in the community. This situation, subsequently, encouraged non-migrant family to send its female member working abroad as well in expectation to have similar economic and social gain.

Furthermore, the cumulative causation theory also highlight the importance of network and institutions aspects for maintaining international migration flows, particularly in creating migration network as well as forming commercialized migrant institutions, such as brokers or local recruitment agents. In the context of female migration in Indramayu, a study by Raharto (2011) shows that one of female worker migrants' major reason working abroad is follow neighbors or relatives who previously had worked in those countries. Besides that, most of the migrants accessed

the foreign labor force through local recruitment agencies that affiliate with recruitment agencies in the destination countries. Local agencies also provide related services, such as money loans for left-behind family, passport and visa arrangement as well as work training. Similarly, World Bank (2006) finds that local recruitment agencies has a huge influence on female workers movement from rural area in Indonesia.

By reviewing theories and setting of female migrants in Indonesia, particularly in Indramayu, it can be seen that this type of movement has been a long-standing practice and the women's mobility from this area can be attributed to the social and economic condition in the areas of origin. Thus, it is important to examine several aspects related to the issues of feminization of migration, including issues of left-behind family. The Indramayu study that would be discussed in this article was conducted by PPK-LIPI in Juntinyuat and Juntikebon villages, the two main areas of origin of women migrants from this regency. By using household surveys, the study asked 200 pair of respondents from migrant households (caregivers and left-behind children aged 13 to 21 years old) about information on socio-economic dynamics and coping strategies of left-behind households, as well as their perception on migration of their household members. The selection of the respondents used purposive sampling method, based on a list provided by staffs of village head's office. In addition, in-depth interviews were also conducted in order to gather qualitative information related to mother migration's impact on left-behind children.

### **3. CAREGIVING ARRANGEMENT WHILE MOTHERS' AWAY**

Indonesia, along with Philippines and Sri Lanka, are well-known as the prominent sending countries of female labor migrants. Asis (2002) suggests that around 60-80 percent of labor migrants from these countries are women. In addition, most of the female migrants are on married status (Hugo 2002). Most of the time, these migrants must go abroad unaccompanied, so this results on the situation of the married migrants have to leave their family in their areas of origin. This type of migration leads to change in family structure and composition of the woman migrants' family. As found in the study in Indramayu, about 90 percent of children from migrant families surveyed are children with migrant mothers. In Philippines, ECMI (2004) finds that about 35 percent of children ages 10-12 years old come from mother migrant families. In addition, the study by Save the Children (2006), which studied households of migrant

mothers in districts with highest number of female labor migrants in Sri Lanka, finds that nearly half of the left-behind children of migrant mothers were less than six years old at the time their mother worked abroad at the first time.

When mother migration takes place, there is a shift of parents' role in migrant families. As the mothers work abroad to support the economic wellbeing of the left-behind families, mothers play a role as breadwinner of the family. However, this type of family arrangement is not very common in Indonesia, as in some other countries in Asia. This is because most people in these countries still adopt patriarchal view where wives are assigned childbearing and childrearing roles in the family (Hugo 2002). As they change their role to far-distant breadwinner of their household, mothers need to shift their nurturing responsibilities to other family members in their origin of areas. Generally, left-behind husbands are those who act as the main caregivers of the left-behind children. The study in Indramayu finds that most of migrating decisions by the migrant mothers are done without family discussion on childcare and domestic chores arrangement prior to the mother's migration. Therefore, the shift of caregiving roles to the left-behind fathers is usually not something that done by options or voluntarily, but by default since there is no other persons that would look after the left-behind children.

When fathers become the main caregivers for the left-behinds, they could face some difficulties to adjust with their new tasks. The Indramayustudy finds that those with left-behind toddlers, particularly, need to perform intensive caregiving and this situation forced them to be stay-at-home dad. For some fathers, this situation is such an uncomfortable situation since it means it is difficult for them to do economy activities outside their home. Besides that, it reflects the situation of husband's full dependency on income from their wives' migration. Similar with what migrant mothers did before migrated, the fathers need to do various domestic chores and caregiving activities, ranged from cooking, bathing the children, taking children to school, cleaning the house, washing clothes, attending parent-teacher association meetings, to feeding the children. As reported by Save the Children (2006), this could result on fathers in migrant mother families are experiencing more stress in their lives compared with fathers in non-migrant families. In certain areas, it is found that drinking alcohol become habits for most of the fathers to cope with the stress. In other cases, Asiset *al.* (2004) finds some left-behind husbands who got confused or shocked after realized all the household works

become their responsibilities since their wives migrated. This is because they are not accustomed to perform the domestic chores while their wives still at home. It took months for them to adjust for the responsibility changes.

The study in Indramayu, as well as findings in Philippines (Parrenas 2005a), also reveal some fathers who reluctant to work on their new caregiving responsibility and prefer to ignore it. This situation could be attributed to patriarchal paradigm in the migrant communities that distinguish father and mother roles in the family (Parrenas 2005b). This paradigm make left-behind fathers have not change their view on their roles on the family despite their wives' migration. Some left-behind fathers still believe that the nurturing responsibility is not their domain as husbands and fathers. In some cases, in Philippines, fathers hire domestic workers to do all the household tasks (Parrenas 2005b). Alternatively, the fathers delegate their new responsibility to older children or extended kin. For example, there is a small portion of left-behind children who are nurtured by their extended families, such as grandmothers or aunts. Save the Children (2006)'s study in Sri Lanka reports about three fourth of left-behind children acknowledge their grandmothers as their primary caregivers. Therefore, it can be said that extended families, particularly female relatives, also play a role in childcare arrangement in the migrant mother families.

#### **4. CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION WITH CAREGIVERS AND MIGRANT MOTHERS**

The study in Indramayu reports the main challenge of nurturing responsibility's shift in households with migrant mother is communication between the left-behind children and the caregivers. It is found that, in general, the children only have limited interaction with their main caregivers. Many left-behind children prefer to only talk about general issues with their caregivers. Most children feel more comfort to share their specific issues, such as school problems or other difficulties, with their peers or even choose not talk about it to anyone. According to Graham *et al.* (2012), this communication problem arises because it is quite hard for the children to feel emotion closeness with their caregivers despite their physical nearness. In Sri Lanka, Save the Children (2006) reports that left-behind children have more communication difficulties when their primary caregivers are their grandparents or those that are over 60 years old. Due to the huge generation gap, children feel unable to communicate with them. Regardless who act as caregivers for left-behind children, it is argued that

this communication problem results on caregivers' less attention to the children's problems. In addition, from the children's perspective, this situation could make children to feel ignored. It could lead to emotional disorders in children and thus have negative implications to their development.

Despite the geographical detachment with their children, many of the migrant mothers still carry out mothering activities while they are away. The Indramayu study finds that the mothers conduct this role through communication with their children in the areas of origin, by several means such as text messages, phone calls, letters. In Philippines, it is found that means of communications are more varied by also using online chatting (Parrenas 2005a). It is argued that when migrant mothers able to build intensive communication with their children, it would help children to cope with mothers' absence as well as to prevent negative impacts of migration (Parrenas 2005b). Besides that, this distant mothering practice is not only to ensure the emotional stability of the children, but also to help the migrant mothers cope with the pain of separation with their children (Parrenas 2005a). Furthermore, this situation implicates the double burden that carried out by the migrant mothers. This is because not only they provide financial support for their left-behinds, but also they still nurture their children from a distant (Parrenas 2005a).

However, there is limitation on how intense the migrating mothers can perform their roles. Graham *et al.* (2012) argue that the mothers' employment conditions as well as lack of financial resources may restrict migrant mothers to have intensive communication with their left-behind children. As domestic workers in their migration destination countries, the mothers could work long hours and without day off. This situation makes them unable to have enough spare time to maintain regular communication with the left-behinds. Besides that, migrant mothers might consider the expensive rates that apply when they make international phone calls or send text messages. Migrant mothers might need to prioritize on utilization of their salary, whether to maintain intensive communication with their children or to send it as remittances to their left-behind family. In terms of communication intensity between migrant mothers and their children, the study in Indramayu finds only about a third of left-behind children who had regular communication with their migrating parents, while the rest reveals they only have occasional contacts with their mothers. Mobile phone calls are found to be the most common way of communication in this study. Similarly, a study by Hugo & Ukwatta (2010) in Sri Lanka finds that most

of migrant mothers from Sri Lanka have difficulties to make frequent communication with their left-behind children. Their contact with the children is mostly conducted once a month through landline phone calls. In addition, many migrant mothers, particularly those who come from rural area, still prefer to use letters to communicate with the left-behinds.

In contrast, studies by Parrenas (2005a), which studied young adult children in transnational mother families in Philippines, shows that most migrant mother and left-behind children have very intensive communication through various means. Not only sending text messages on a daily basis for waking them up and preparing them go to school as well as making phone calls at a certain time of the week, but migrant mothers also send gifts and letters on certain periods of months. Additionally, Graham *et al.* (2012) reveal that many children of migrant in Philippines has access to internet network that enables them to have more intensive communication with the migrating parents through instant messages or video call. The utilization of advanced communication tools such in Philippines is rarely found in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Hugo & Ukwatta (2010) argues that this situation is influenced by the lower level of education and earnings of female migrants from those countries, compared with their counterparts from Philippines.

In every communication means that link migrating mother and her children, mother is the one who usually initiate the first attempt. While communicating with their parents, most children talk about their daily life activities and school routines. The Indramayu study finds children prefer to only share the good news to make their mother happy. This is because they do not want to feel worry if their mothers heard about their concerns or difficulties.

Communication between migrant mothers and left-behind children plays an important role on the children's acceptance of the situation of their mothers' absence as well as their emotional development. Through intensive and frequent communications, the left-behind children would be able to feel their mothers' presence in their daily lives as well as maintain strong emotional connection with their mother (Asis 2002). In addition, the patriarchal paradigm or the narratives build in the communities might also influence the different ways of children's coping strategy to their mothers' absence. Since the children believe that mothers' main role is to nurture and take care their kids, many of them believe that their mother should stay at home and be physically present in their daily life (Parrenas 2005b). Therefore, many left-behind children still cannot accept their mothers' migration even though some of them have

intensive and frequent communication with their migrant mothers.

## **5. HOW LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN COPE WITH MOTHER'S ABSENCE?**

Studies on left-behind children of migrant mothers find different level of acceptance of mothers' absence by children's age group. For older children, there is a two-sided opinion regarding their mothers' migration. The study in Indramayu shows that in one side, adolescent children of migrant mother realize the reasons why their parents need to work overseas. In other side, they still generally feel less love, attention and support from their mothers in their daily lives. Similarly, Parrenas (2005b) in her study on young adult children in transnational mother families in Philippines also found that the left-behind children consider the nurturing acts of their distant mothers are not enough and expect to have more intensive mothering, although they highly acknowledge their mother's contribution on financial condition of their family.

Furthermore, the Indramayu study finds that absence of parents is quite easily accepted for most of children under five years old in this study. It is because they are too young to comprehend and feel detachment with their parents. However, this situation are easily changed as they grow up and learn about their mother's missing on daily basis. As argued by Tobin (2008), young children perceived their parents' migration as a form of abandonment as they get older. Besides that, young left-behind children are more likely to grow up and grow apart from their mothers (Asis 2002). In addition, Save the Children (2006) assumes that although younger children of migrant mother may not yet able to understand the separation, but if they did, they probably cannot cope with this situation. This is because children aged less than six years old are in their critical development stage that greatly needs sufficient physical and emotional nurturing.

The implication of the left-behind children's acceptance on mothers' migration could be observed through the well-being of the children. In term of happiness, ECMI (2004)'s study in Philippines finds that children of migrants, in general, are less happy in comparison with children of non-migrants. Children of migrant mothers, particularly, reported to be less happy compared with children of migrant fathers. Similarly, a study by Graham *et al.* (2012) finds that compared with children from non-migrant families, there is less proportion of children of mother migrants in Indonesia who said they were happy. Besides that,

this study also finds that left-behind children with infrequent contact with their migrating parents are more likely to express unhappiness compared with those who have regular communication with their migrating parents. This unpleasant feelings could be results their poor social adjustment and suffer from impeded social and psychological development (Battistella&Conaco 1998). In addition, Asis (1995) suggests that left-behind children's surroundings notice bad behavior of left-behind children, such as undisciplined behavior, no interest in academic matters and lavishness.

The study in Indramayu finds some left-behind daughters who express disappointment and suffering feelings regarding their mothers' migration. This is highly attributed to their additional burden on household tasks due to their mothers' absence. Most of the time, with or without help from their caregivers, they have to carry out some domestic chores, such as look after their younger siblings, clean the house, cook and wash clothes. This may cause emotional problems for left-behind daughters because they have to experience drastic changing in their daily routines after their mothers go abroad. It might also result in decline of their quality of life (Parrenas 2005a).

Health condition and education performance of the left-behind children could serve as reflections of their emotional development in the absence of their mothers. Several studies have shown the mother migration may create health problems on children left-behind. For example, in her study in Central Java (Indonesia), Purwaningsih (1994) claims that separation from migrating mothers causes emotional difficulties for left-behind young children that led to their poor health. For example, absence of mother may affect children's appetite, resulting in malnutrition. Similarly, study by Save the Children (2006) reports some negative impacts to children in Sri Lanka after their mothers' migration, such as weight loss of children under five years old. In addition, a study by ECMI (2004) in Philippines shows that children left by their mother tend to have poorer health compared with those who left by their father based on physical health indicators, such as height, weight and incidence of common illness.

However, it is argued that the bad health condition of the left-behind children is only occurred in short time or in several months after their mothers' departure. In the long run, it is suggested that parental migration would have positive impacts on the health condition of children (Kanaiaupuni& Donato 1999). This situation could be happened when remittances from

migrating parents are used for improving the children's access to healthcare facilities.

In terms of education performance, the study in Indramayu finds that it is hard to determine whether mother migration brings negative impacts to children's education or not. This is because most children of migrants have been abandoned by their migrating parents since their pre-school age. Consequently, it is impossible to make comparison between their school performance before and at the time of their parents' migration. However, it is revealed that, in general, the left-behind children's caregivers do not impose strict monitoring to the children's daily school activities. Instead of paying attention to the children's academic performance, the children's caregivers usually only care about whether the children leave home to go to school in the morning and return home in the afternoon. This situation, subsequently, results on some school drop-out cases among left-behind children. The cases are claimed as the impact of the absence of mother. The drop-out children in this study reveals that since there is a lack of support and concern on their education from the caregivers, they suffer academically which result in low school attendance and academic achievement. At the end, they tend to prefer drop out from the school.

In contrast, a study by ECMI (2004) in Philippines shows the positive relationship between remittances and academic achievement of left-behind children. This study shows that children of migrants perform better than the non-migrant children, particularly in the elementary grade. Besides that, this study shows that many children from migrant families could enroll in private schools due to the financial benefit they hold from remittances. However, this study also pointed out that children left by mother tended to have more academic difficulties in comparison with children left by father or both parents. Similarly, a study by Save the Children (2006) shows that level of attendance and school performance of left-behind children by migrating mothers in Sri Lanka tended to be lower compared with children from non-migrant families. This study argues that not only because the mothers' absence, the low educational attainment by the left-behind children also influenced by the low educational level of caregivers as well as the fact that most of the caregivers are senior citizen.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Mothers' migration obviously has impacts on the development of left-behind children. Not only because the displacement in family arrangement will

influence the emotional development of left-behind children, but also the absence of mothers made them vulnerable to experience negative impacts of parental migration. Besides that, due to the traditional view that still holds by most Asian communities that suggests good mothers are those who stay at home and do not leave their children, it is no surprise no matter how intensively mothers keep in touch with their left-behind offspring, many children still require their migrant mothers to perform more nurturing acts when the mothers are away.

Findings from the study in Indramayu as well as literatures on left-behind children studies in Philippines and Sri Lanka suggest the different extent of mother migration's impact on education and health condition as well as on emotional problems of left-behind children. The extent of the impact greatly depends on the children's acceptance regarding their mothers' migration. Therefore, good communication with the migrating mothers as well as with the caregivers is an important key to minimize the extent of possible problems that may appear in terms of mothers' absence. Furthermore, migrant parents should maintain regular and intensive communication with their children since it can help left-behind children to reduce the feeling of being lonely or abandoned by their parents. Advanced technology, as shown in the study in Philippines, could ease the geographical barriers in transnational mothering and help children to easily keep in touch with the absent mothers. However, it might be difficult for left-behind children in Indonesia and Sri Lanka to adopt the technology due to the financial limitation as well as lack of high technology skills.

In addition, government and surrounding communities are expected to support left-behind children on their adjustment process to their mothers' absence. Government could play a role on providing a support system, such as counseling and assistance, for left-behind children, particularly the younger ones. Meanwhile, community leaders, such as teachers and religious leaders, could also contribute in helping the left-behind children by acknowledging the issues on parental migration in their lectures or sermons. In broader context, it is also important to rebuild new narratives that support migrant mothers' role as breadwinners for the family while they still perform as mothers from a distance. When migrant communities do not perceive labor migration as a negative thing to do by a mother, it can make an easier adjustment process for left-behind children.

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