

Causes and Consequences of Return Migration in Sri Lanka: A Case Study of Female Unskilled Migrant Workers

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s, many Sri Lankan workers returned from Kuwait after the outbreak of the First Gulf War. There were unexpected numbers of female domestic workers among the group of returnees, and this news was received with widespread astonishment by Sri Lankan politicians and society in general. The rapid rise of female international migration had emerged by push and pull factors from situations and conditions both domestically in Sri Lanka and abroad. The major external pull factor was the drastic expansion of demand for female live-in domestic workers in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. There was also a negative external factor among other labor exporting nations in South Asia, which stimulated female migration from Sri Lanka. Most South Asian governments have not positively promoted female workers' unaccompanied migration since the beginning of open door policies in the Middle East, because of cultural and Islamic values towards women. Consequently, foreign employment agencies and the like have encouraged the migration of Sri Lankan women as domestic workers to meet the large demand from the Gulf States. Since then, many Sri Lankan women, on average 80,000–100,000 annually, have migrated to the Gulf as domestic workers. However, after the discovery of such large-scale female migration, Sri Lankan society has gradually come to view the phenomenon negatively based on the values of the culture towards women, especially among the Sinhala Buddhist elites. The government emphasized the protection of Sri Lankan workers abroad and reformed the migration policy from 2006 to promote male migrants and skilled and technical workers over female domestic workers.

This paper examines data and information obtained from a questionnaire and interview survey on 522 female returnees engaged as domestic workers (90%) and garment workers (10%) in the Gulf region. The study was conducted in H. prefecture in South Province,

Sri Lanka between 2007 and 2009. In addition, the research discussed women's reasons for migration and return, possibility of re-migration, and present living conditions after returning, focusing on female migrant domestic workers, who are considered the major female migrant group. To understand the views of Sri Lankan female workers on migration, the study conducted a follow-up survey in 2014 and 2016 with the country's return to stability after the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War (2009). The survey examined the changes in respondents' views correlating to the changes in Sri Lankan migration policy and the changing situation and structure in the societies of Sri Lanka and destination countries.

Return Migration and the Contribution of the Study

The actual situation of returned migrants remains a largely unknown chapter in the migration process in general. Most migration studies focus on policy, social, and economic impacts from the perspectives of the developed and industrialized nations of immigration. Few studies on returned migrants have been conducted in the origin countries in terms of their living conditions, integration in the labor market, and so forth. This is a meaningful study for labor-exporting countries, which regard foreign employment policy as part of their economic development strategy, to grasp the causes and realities of return migration and make suitable amendments. We must consider the factors that encourage returnees to return and their reasons for returning, because they may have successfully reached their goals or may have failed in the migration process. The assessments and improvements of foreign employment promotion measures are necessary to understand return migration (Wang and Fan, 2006; Cassarino, 2015: 257; Wahba, 2016). It is also an acute measure for policy making that we conduct empirical surveys of returned migrants to understand their contribution and reintegration into society (Kuschminder, 2013). The timing and conditions of their return is also a matter for consideration. Gmelch (1980) defines return migration as the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle. It must be distinguished from circular/repeat migration and re-emigration. Alternatively, King (2000) defines return migration as the process whereby people return to their country or place of origin after a significant period in another country or origin. For the United Nations, a return migrant is an individual who has been abroad for at least 12 months.

This study targeted female returnees from abroad. Over 90% of the targeted female returnees had engaged as live-in domestic workers in households in the Gulf region of the Middle East. They went abroad for work, expecting employment opportunities on arrival alongside the opportunity to save money, which they cannot expect to do in their homeland. Therefore, we hypothesized that once the women had reached their goal and were content with their savings, they would decide to return to their home country wherein they would re-integrate. In most Asian nations, unskilled foreign workers are governed and controlled by restrictive rules and regulations. Asian nations receiving unskilled foreign workers have implemented policies making it difficult to access citizenship. In general, host countries in Asia set limiting and discouraging measures on unskilled foreign workers; thus, migrant women decide to return sooner or later based on their own internal reasons or encouragement from the external migration policy of the host country. Foreign workers can be viewed as a “hard to find” population in such receiving countries. In addition, there are restrictions on conducting interview surveys on foreign workers in receiving countries in Asia. Thus, it is easier for researchers to access returnees in their countries of origin. As such, this survey collected information from female returnees, such as on their reasons for migration and return and whether they succeeded or failed in attaining their goals. Consequently, this study can reach conclusions regarding the benefits and costs to developing countries of policies encouraging female unskilled labor migration.

Female Labor Force Participation under the Export-oriented Economic System

The institutionalization of foreign employment promotion measures commencing in the 1980s has led to the infiltration of migration into Sri Lankan society¹. Under the impact of a neoliberal global economy, an international “migration-friendly” environment has been constructed in Sri Lanka. Social transformation within the country was evident after the market-oriented policy reforms initiated in 1977. The government commenced

¹ Specifically, the following measures were taken: 1) the establishment of diplomatic offices and embassies in countries in the Middle East, 2) consignment of foreign employment promotion services to the private sector, 3) legislation of the Act of Foreign Employment in 1980, 4) setting of a target of 100,000 employment opportunities in the Middle East, and 5) establishment of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment in 1985 (Kage, 2014: 157).

the promotion of an export-oriented economy, privatization of state companies, domestic and foreign investment, establishment of free trade zones, and promotion of free trade.

The export-oriented policy was promoted under the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), and the apparel industry became a major leading industry handling the exports of world-famous brand items (Dheerasinghe, 2003: 34). In the apparel industry, 70–80% of workers are women (Arai, 2006: 35; Karunaratne and Abeyssekara, 2013: 13), who are typically young and of rural origin (Hewamanne, 2010). The export-oriented policy provided opportunities for the labor participation of Sinhalese women. The business operators of this female-dominated industry conducted personnel management based on traditional gender roles to develop effective production systems and profit expansion. Female workers operated sewing machines to stitch bits of fabric together to produce ready-made clothes. However, female factory workers have limited opportunities for promotion and increases in pay compared to male workers. Furthermore, the values of South Asian societies dictate that fathers protect their unmarried daughters. After they are married, the role of protector devolves to the husband, and to the sons when women are in their old age. Thus, conditions of employment for women workers are based on the expectation that they are not the sole breadwinners (Kotikula and Solotaroff, 2006: 3–4; Hewamanne, 2010). In the case of export profits from the apparel industry in Sri Lanka, the local content ratio is quite small, as Sri Lanka needs to import intermediate goods such as materials and parts and capital goods such as machineries without setting an import tax. Therefore, the actual amount of foreign exchange from apparel exports is of a similar value as the labor income for Sri Lankan workers, irrespective of the trend for an increase in export value.

In Sri Lanka, the free trade policy resulted in an excess of imports over exports. Domestic products lost their own market when the country's traditional industries and agriculture were damaged after cheap and high-quality goods entered the country. Sri Lankan products, excepting traditional export items such as tea, could no longer compete in international markets. Consequently, the country was economically weakened compared to the situation from the late 1970s. The free trade policy encouraged the development of a female dominant industry, which caused a problem in terms of male youth unemployment. In these economic circumstances, while the export values of apparel products increased steadily, workers' wages remained low, especially for female

workers. Unemployment and rural poverty emerged among the male youth and distorted politics, contributing to the riots and armed conflict in the 1980s².

Tea is a traditional Sri Lankan export item and has been internationally competitive since the British colonial era (1802–1948). In those days, foreign companies and plantation owners developed an organized production system spanning planting, harvesting, processing, transporting, marketing, and export. However, the profits from tea production did not trickle down to the locals, because the investors were British or other Europeans and labor was provided by Tamil workers from India. Owners used their profits and invested only in this sector, while Tamil workers remitted to India. After independence (1948), the government placed the tea industry under state control, and distributed a plot of land for tea cultivation to the male heads of Sinhalese households. Since the British colonial era, tea plantations have employed both male and female Indian-Tamil workers at low wages. Since then, this sector has also been characterized by a strong gender division of labor. Only women pluck tea, while men are responsible for other physical work, machine operation, and watching and monitoring other workers (Kotikula and Solotaroff, 2006).

Most Sri Lankan export items are made by hand by female workers at a low cost. However, the labor participation rate of women is still low³. Sri Lankan women continued to work and support export industries during the conflict and riots. Moreover, women entered the international labor market to support their families.

The international migration business spread with the institutionalization of foreign employment in the 1980s under the export-oriented economic system. This is the main cause of the feminization of international labor migration. The underlying theory of the foreign employment business considers labor as a trade item. As such, the labor force became an export item and target of international markets for business. Foreign employment agencies emerged in various business fields, offering opportunities for

² The Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009) was a conflict fought on the island of Sri Lanka between Sri Lankan military and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The JVP insurrection (1987–89) was the second armed revolt conducted by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna against the Sri Lankan government.

³ Labor force participation rates in the first quarter of 2016: male 75.5%, female 36.3%. Economic active population by region: Sri Lanka (male 63.3%, female 36.7%), urban (male 66.3%, female 33.7%), rural (male 63.2%, female 36.8%), estate (male 55.8%, female 44.2%) (DCS, 2016).

foreign employment and dealing with contract-related procedures. These are rare skills and competencies, providing agencies with a strong power advantage vis-à-vis their clients. Most international migrant job seekers can only depend on their agency. This imbalance of skills and information between the parties creates the preconditions for the possible exploitation of job seekers by their agents. Furthermore, in the sphere of international relations, Sri Lanka does not have powerful diplomatic cards in economic terms. Therefore, the country has limited negotiating power in terms of protecting its citizens working abroad.

Consequently, Sri Lankan female migrant domestic workers are categorized in the lower strata of workers, as influenced by the nation and gender order as well as by the host countries' low job ranking for paid housework. According to the SLBFE annual reports, most complaints are from female migrant domestic workers, who accounted for half of all out-foreign employment workers from 1995 to 2007. In addition, remittances from countries in the Middle East where they work accounted for 50–60% of the total annual remittance inflows in Sri Lanka, where remittances constitute a share of 6–10% of the GDP and 50% of total export earnings. The labor export strategy is an important means of ensuring and maximizing foreign exchange earnings. However, wages for female domestic workers remain equivalent to the minimum wage in host countries.

Recognizing the risks of sending female domestic workers, the government raised the minimum age of women seeking employment as domestic workers to 21 years. In addition, they banned the migration of mothers with children aged less than five years. After the cessation of armed conflict in 2009, the government promoted male migration to ease the pressure of unemployment on former soldiers (Kage, 2016).

Profiles of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Rural Villages

This study conducted a questionnaire and interview survey on female returnees in rural areas⁴ (including some fishing villages) in H. prefecture in South Province from October 2008 to March 2009. For the purpose of analysis, this study extracted data on 500 returned domestic workers from countries in the Middle East. Participants were aged

⁴ According to the Census Statistics 2012 (CBSL, 2016: 1), the resident population share by region is as follows: urban 18.2%, rural 77.4%, estate 4.4%.

from 21 to 66 years. Over 90% of the population in the research area was Sinhalese Buddhists⁵, although some Muslims residing around the fishing ports and shopping town were included. The results of the sample survey were as follows.

Regarding the average income of female returnees' households, about 65% were below the public poverty line in H. prefecture⁶. In the research areas, job opportunities and sources of income were rice cultivation, coastal and offshore fishing, construction, transportation, carriage, shop owners, stall keepers, food processing, and so on. As seen in Table 1, the occupations of 80% of the primary income earners (father or husband) were farmers, daily wage laborers, and other self-employed jobs. The government classifies their occupations as self-employment⁷. Just 10% were engaged in the formal sector, worked for private companies, or were government employees. Surprisingly, 7% of female returnees responded that during their childhoods, their mothers were also migrant domestic workers in the Middle East.

⁵ According to the Census Statistics 2012 (CBSL, 2016: 1), the population share by ethnicity is as follows: Sinhalese 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamils 11.2%, Indian Tamils 4.1%, Moors (Muslims) 9.3%, others 0.5%. The population share by religion is Buddhist 70.1%, Hindi 12.6%, Islam 9.7%, Protestant and Catholic 7.6%, and others 0.0%.

⁶ Percentage derived from applicable households in terms of their average monthly expenses in 2006/07 using the standard values of expenses of the official poverty line in H. prefecture.

⁷ According to the Central Bank (CBSL, 2015: Table 53), the employment situation in the fourth quarter of 2014 was as follows in terms of occupations: Government 5.3%, private 41.9%, manager 2.3%, self-employment 31.8%, and unpaid family worker 8.6%. Our research area indicates a higher share of self-employment than the average for Sri Lanka.

Table 1 Employment and social status of returnees' households in rural villages (rate of response %)

	Female returnees	Husband	Father*	Mother*
Farmer	1.4	26.6	42.2	24.0
Wage laborer	3.0	22.6	31.2	25.6
Other self-employed	12.0	30.4	17.2	5.8
Private sector	4.4	5.0	2.2	1.0
Public sector	1.0	6.6	4.4	1.2
International migrant	0.4	1.8	0.0	7.0
Housewife	75.8	0.0	0.0	33.6
Unemployed	0.6	1.4	0.2	0.0
Retired	1.4	1.8	-	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Kage (2014: 154).

Note: The employment and social status of their fathers and mothers were during the female returnees' childhoods.

The number of years of female returnees' average schooling was 8.1 years⁸ (see Table 2). No female returnee had attained education at the tertiary level. In addition, the percentage of female returnees who were illiterate and elementary school dropouts increased with age. At the time of the survey, 75.8% of female returnees responded that they were housewives. The other female returnees worked as sewing machine operators in apparel factories in the free trade zone as daily wage laborers or small-scale storeowners.

⁸ Compulsory education in Sri Lanka is for children aged from 5 to 14 years for 10 years (Liyanage, 2014: 117). According to a hearing survey in H. prefecture in 2008/09, 4.2% of female returnees had never studied.

Table 2 Education attainment of female migrant domestic workers in rural villages by age group

	All age groups	By age group				total
		20s	30s	40s	50–66	
Not educated (%)	4.2	0.0	14.3	47.6	38.1	100.0
Grades 1–4 (%)	8.4	0.0	16.7	42.9	40.5	100.0
Grades 5–10 (%)	53.2	9.8	28.2	37.6	24.4	100.0
O/L passed (%)	28.0	15.0	37.1	27.1	20.7	100.0
A/L passed (%)	6.2	9.7	29.0	35.5	25.8	100.0
<i>Total schooling (years)</i>	<i>8.1</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>8.8</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>8.1</i>	-

Source: Kage (2014: 152).

Note: O/L refers to General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level, and A/L to the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level.

Regarding their migration experiences, the first female domestic worker in this study first headed to the Middle East from the surveyed areas in 1980. On average, they had 2.1 migration experiences: 36% migrated once, while 64% migrated more than twice. The average duration of stay abroad was four years. Of the female returnees, 47% stayed abroad for 4–10 years, and 30% stayed for more than 10 years. The major destinations for domestic workers were Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. About 70% of the women left their husbands and children at home when they migrated the first time, while 17.8% responded that they were single at the time of the first migration. The single migrant women remitted money for the education of younger brothers and sisters and to support parents. In addition, 7.6% of the women indicated that they had migrated for the first time after being widowed or divorced.

Reasons for and Consequences of Migration

Based on the survey, we identified economic problems as the main reason for female migration. Table 3 provides the reasons for migration. The purpose of building a house was the most frequent response. Sri Lankan traditional housing is constructed

from natural materials such as fermented mud mixed with cow dung and palm leaves for the roof. Traditional and semi-permanent houses are fragile in heavy rain and a symbol of rural poverty. Building a house with durable and artificial materials such as brick, tiles, and cement demonstrates an improvement in social status. In the survey, 30% of the women responded that they first migrated because they wanted to build a house. This response rate increased when they re-migrated. However, in reality in Sri Lanka, only 2.5% of the women could confirm that their remittances were used by their families at home to construct a house (see Table 4). About 70% noted that their families had used remittances to purchase items for daily living consumption. This tendency increased during the second migration. For the second migration, few women indicated that their reasons for going were to save money to establish a business or in general. As the number of female migrations increased, we found that husbands tended to become dependent on the remittances of their wives. At the time of the survey, 26% of the women lived in a completed house, while 65% had already started living in a house under construction. To successfully construct a house through remittances, the assistance of the in-situ family is essential, especially the cooperation and support of the husband. It was mentioned in the survey that if the husband is a carpenter, the house could be constructed on a smaller budget and in a shorter timeframe. Remittances were used to purchase objects for the bathroom and kitchen, as well as taps, furniture, fans, audio sets, televisions, and washing machines. Upon their return, the women tended to bring home electrical appliances for the house and liquor for their husbands from the airport's duty free shop. Table 5 shows that the condition of female returnees' roofs at their houses is on par with H. prefecture and better than the Sri Lankan average. In December 2004, wide areas of the coastal regions in H. prefecture were affected by the tsunami disaster, during which time domestic and international aid agencies provided housing to the victims. In female returnees' households, the level of ownership of home electrical appliances exceeded the average in Sri Lanka.

Table 3 provides the undocumented reasons for migration, for example, divorce or separation, maintaining living standards, introduction to migration by a mother or sisters, and escape from the JVP uprising. When we examine the relationship between the reasons for the first migration and frequency thereof, women migrated twice on average for the following reasons: to construct a house, medical costs, influenced by friends and

their own curiosity, and introduction from mother and sisters. The women aiming to construct a bathroom and kitchen migrated once on average. However, women who aimed to maintain their living conditions or invest in a business during the first migration migrated four to five times on average. In addition, those wanting to support their families, or were divorced or separated from their husbands, or wanted to provide for the education of their children during the first migration tended to migrate two and a half to three times on average.

There were many similar stories regarding the decision-making process for female migrants: women mostly migrated because they wanted to support and cover the education expenses of their children. At the time of the first migration decision, mothers noted that they did not have enough milk for their babies or enough food and clothing for their growing children. Furthermore, some mothers first decided to migrate to protect themselves and their children from alcoholic and abusive husbands and escape poverty. These were the major reasons for female migration. In many cases, the remittances of female domestic workers were used for daily consumption, the education of a child and/or a younger brother and sister, and debt repayment. In this sense, we conclude that international labor migration is an effective strategy to directly reduce poverty. However, the interviews determined that the social costs fell on the family left behind at home. In total, 85.9% of female returnees who left their children behind reported that their child's study performance and attendance at school worsened after their migration (Kage, 2014: 226). They noted that migrants' children had difficulty concentrating on their studies, because of loneliness and other negative emotions due to the lack of a parent; falling into bad company; the increased burden of domestic work and caring for younger brothers and sisters; wasting remittance money on purchasing clothes, accessories, and cosmetics; or becoming a victim of sexual abuse. In this survey, we noticed many negative impacts on children's healthy development among migrant families.

Table 3 Reasons for migration (Response rate %)

	1 st Migration	2 nd Migration
Constructing a house	30.8	51.7
No income	28.0	10.1
Difficult economic situation	8.5	6.4
Education for children	7.4	15.2
Debt repayment	6.2	1.7
Bereavement or divorce from husband	5.0	2.4
Friends' influence and own curiosity	3.6	1.0
To save money	2.6	5.4
To purchase land	2.4	1.4
No job	2.0	0.3
Many children to support	1.4	0.7
Medical costs	1.2	0.3
Business investment	0.4	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Kage (2014: 159).

Table 4 Uses of remittances (Response rate %)

	1 st Migration	2 nd Migration
Daily consumption	69.0	82.6
Savings	29.0	36.0
Debt repayment	3.5	-
House building / reform	2.5	1.1
Education and child support	2.3	1.7
Purchasing land, durable goods	0.7	-
Medical costs	0.5	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Kage (2014: 245).

Table 5 Comparison of average living and housing conditions: female returnees' households, H. prefecture, and Sri Lanka (non Distribution rate %)

	No permanent roof (Palm leaves, etc.)	No toilet facilities	No home electrical appliances
Female returnees' households (2008/09)	4.8	5.2	13.6
H prefecture (2009/10)	4.6	1.8	29.3
Sri Lanka (2009/10)	14.0	2.5	33.1

Source: Female returnees' households, Kage (2014: 179); Sri Lanka and H. prefecture, DCS (2011).

Reasons for return

Table 6 shows the relationship between the reasons for return and frequency of migration. The item "expiration of employment contract period" means that returnees had not encountered serious problems while working abroad and returned after their employment contract expired. The item "expiration of residential period (change of workplace)" means that returnees could work until the date of return, but changed workplaces, because the first employer claimed to have changed the new worker to an agency in the host country. There was a more than 50% probability that female domestic workers worked in the Middle East until their contract expiry date and returned without serious problems, and around a 10% possibility that the family at home asked the migrant worker to return. Many family problems were reported, indicating that wives and/or mothers working abroad can seriously affect the family at home. For example, the effects of wives' migration include husbands' having extramarital affairs, husbands becoming alcoholics, illness, forcing kids to play the role of a wife, and domestic violence or murder. Most husbands expected their wives to play the role of caregiver to them and the children. However, when these caregivers were lost, the family tended to encounter problems. Migration by mothers seriously affects the children, as indicated by the many sad stories regarding those left behind. These children tend to be more rebellious, play truant more often, perform acts of wrongdoing, and drop out of school. Furthermore,

daughters elope, and some children become ill and depressed. Often, these family matters are the reasons for return. In addition, other family matters reported included death of a family member, loss of a child's caretaker, the 2004 tsunami disaster, or the murder of a family member. However, as mentioned, the most common reason female migrants returned was problems arising from their children.

Table 6 Reasons for termination of employment contract and return (Response rate %)

	1st (n= 498)	2nd (n= 318)	3rd (n= 145)	4th (n=40)	5th (n=13)	6th (n=4)
Expiration of employment contract period	53.4	50.0	53.1	57.5	38.4	50.0
Expiration of residential period (change of workplace)	5.8	8.3	11.0	5.0	7.7	-
Family in Sri Lanka	9.2	12.1	10.3	10.0	-	25.0
Problems at the workplace	25.6	23.2	21.3	22.5	53.9	25.0
<i>Overwork/Too much work</i>	4.8	3.8	4.1	5.0	15.4	-
<i>No wage/deduction</i>	4.8	4.8	3.4	7.5	15.4	-
<i>Illness/accidents</i>	4.0	4.8	4.8	2.5	7.7	-
<i>Claims from employer</i>	4.0	1.9	2.1	2.5	-	25.0
<i>Abuse/disrespect</i>	3.6	4.4	2.8	2.5	7.7	-
<i>Sexual harassment</i>	3.2	2.2	-	-	7.7	-
<i>Bad relationship with employer</i>	1.2	1.3	4.1	2.5	-	-
War (Gulf War, conflict, etc.)	5.0	2.5	2.8	2.5	-	-
Others	1.0	3.9	1.5	2.5	-	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Data is from the questionnaire and interview conducted in H. prefecture (2008–2009). n is the number of effective responses.

Note: “Expiration of residential period (change of workplace)” means that the woman changed workplaces and worked for the duration of stay, because the first employer replaced her at the agency. There were some cases of deportation and repatriation after women faced “problems at the workplace.”

Furthermore, the rate of occurrence of problems at the workplace causing their return was over 21%. Table 7 shows female migrant domestic workers' working conditions in the Middle East. All women who returned reported that their employers assigned work tasks depending on their demands. Most of the women who returned mentioned that they did not have any days off during the week, and around 10% responded that they did not have a private room to sleep in, but had to sleep in the kitchen or living room. Almost 20% said that they were always hungry, because their employers did not provide enough meals, providing only instant noodles or roti such as flour as staple foods. The Sinhalese eat rice as a staple food, so they do not manage well without rice. Problems regarding sustenance is a serious issue for workers.

Table 7 Experience of working abroad: working conditions (rate of respondent %)

Question	Conditions	Response rate
Work task	Employer's demand	100%
Breaks during working	Yes, I had	35%
	No break	65%
A day off in the week	Yes, I had	7%
	No day off	93%
Sleeping arrangements	Private room	80%
	Kid's room	8%
	Aged, patient room	1%
	Kitchen, living room, no room	11%
Leisure time a day	1-4 hours	23%
	5-8 hours	64%
	9 hours or more	13%
Meals	Yes, I had enough	82%
	Not enough	18%

Source: Kage (2014).

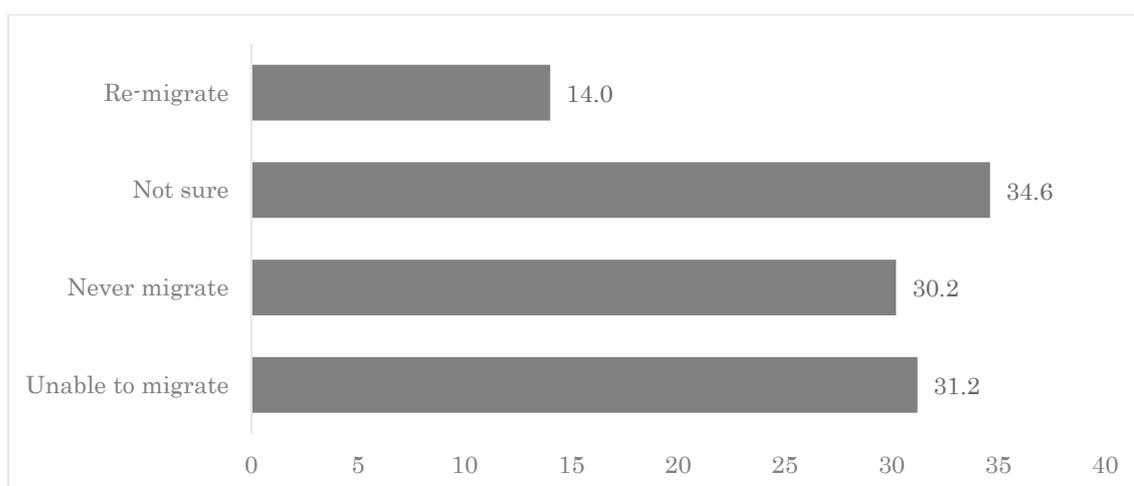
We conclude that sending female domestic workers abroad is risky for the migrants and their families, because 50% of returnees responded that they returned in the middle

of their work contracts. As such, the hypothesis that the probability of success is higher for well experienced migrant domestic workers should be rejected in the case of unskilled female migration.

Changing Attitudes towards Work

Based on the survey findings, migration can be risky for unskilled women. At the time of this research, which was conducted between 2008 and 2009, some female returnees recognized the high risk of migration and negative impacts on their husbands and children. However, most belong to the group of poverty households in Sri Lanka. When considering their poor living conditions, unemployment, and their children's education expenses, foreign employment as domestic workers in the Middle East remained a means of escaping the problems at home. This survey also questioned the possibility of re-migration. Female returnees responded that they would re-migrate (14.0%), were not sure (34.6%), would never migrate (30.2%), or were unable to migrate because of age and illness (31.2%) (see Figure 1). The younger generation tended to indicate that they would re-migrate, while the older generation responded that they would never migrate. Many of their children did not want their mothers to migrate abroad as domestic workers.

Figure 1 Willingness to re-migrate as a domestic worker to the Middle East in 2008/09 (rate of response %)



Source: Kage (2014: 163).

After the conflict ended in May 2009, the economic and social situation of Sri Lanka has drastically changed. The Sri Lankan government accepted China's development scheme in 2006, and began constructing infrastructure such as the international port, international airport, international cricket ground, and roads in the broader areas of H. prefecture. In association with these changes, the number of guesthouses and small-scale hotels, shops and retailers, cars and machinery maintenance and repair shops, and home electronics shops increased in the city center of H prefecture. The distribution rate of car owners also increased, such that traffic jams were generated on main roads during peak times. Moreover, the opportunities for employment and income generation increased, as did the wage rates in H. prefecture.

In 2011, the government implemented compulsory measures to set the minimum age for female migrants at 21 years, and banned the migration of mothers with children aged less than five years. I conducted a follow-up interview survey in H. prefecture and other parts of Sri Lanka in 2014 and 2016. The follow-up survey identified some changes in the perspectives and willingness of female migrants and their families. During the conflict era, young women in rural areas tended to view working as machine operators in the apparel industry in the free trade zone as a good employment model. However, after the conflict ended, the new generation of young women tends to not want to work in a factory; rather, they prefer to be fashionable shopkeepers in stylish shops in the city center. It seems that the young generation does not want to go on a life like their mothers' working abroad as domestic workers. Therefore, they do not choose to migrate as domestic workers, as long as Sri Lanka remains at peace and continues its economic development.

Concluding Remarks

Even as changes in the social and economic structure and opportunities for women's social advancement increases, Sri Lankan women live within the strong gender values of South Asia. In the export industry sector such as the tea industry, apparel industry, and international migration, the female labor force has contributed to the economy of Sri Lanka and provided care services in international markets, because they accept low wages and generally work hard. This study focused on female migrant domestic workers, and considered social and economic perspectives after the neoliberal open market regime.

This study examined the causes and consequences of international labor migration, finding changes in the perspectives and willingness to consider foreign employment as domestic workers alongside social and economic changes at home and in the destination country. When the political situation of the country stabilizes and the country develops, the push factor reduces the forces causing migration. The follow-up survey also found that Sri Lanka has begun receiving foreign labor. Today in Sri Lanka, this phenomenon is evident in the construction sector, factories in the apparel and electronics industries, and tea estates, and consequently, labor shortage issues have emerged. It is claimed that some Sri Lankan business managers have started employing foreign workers or seasonal migrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Kage, personal communication, Prof. O. G. Dayaratna Banda, University of Peradeniya, August, 2016). However, the labor participation rate of Sri Lankan women has not yet reached 40%. In my view, Sri Lankan women still bear a large share of the burden associated with housekeeping in the family. Even though women may be engaged in professional jobs, they are also expected to play the role of a good wife, mother, and daughter. In this time of change in the industrial structure from agriculture to the service industry, women have been an important source of labor in society, and are expected to play a key role in producing the next generation. Thus, contemporary women in Sri Lanka seem to be tied to gender values requiring them to take concurrent responsibility for double roles—workers and mothers—in their lives.

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