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Children's perceptions on their parent's migration for foreign employment

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Migration of men and women in search of foreign employment is a widespread economic activity in Sri Lanka. A large number of migrant mothers and fathers leave their children at home, transferring their care giving responsibilities to a relative or to another person. Therefore, a group of children in the Sri Lankan society have been deprived of the vital role of one parent in the context of labour migration. This particular study attempted to identify the perceptions of some of those children regarding their parent's migration. Three Grama Niladhari Divisions, viz., Matotagama, Nakuttiya and Kadaweediya having high proportions of male and female migrants in the Matara Divisional Secretariat Division of the Matara District was selected as the field setting for this study. Primary data collection was done through an interviewer administered questionnaire, in-depth interviews and observation using 30 households. Main respondents were children between the age group of 12 to 18 while returnee migrant parent, spouse of the migrant and the primary caregiver were also taken as supportive respondents. The study revealed that in all three areas, children felt the absence of their mother more than that of their father. The reason was that, in the absence of a majority of migrant fathers the children's mother was the primary caregiver. Findings also show that although the migrant parent could easily fulfill the material needs of the children through money, the fulfilment of their emotional needs were not that easy.