

Impediments to left-behind children achieving a basic education: a case study in Prey Veng, Cambodia

UNG Chanmony*

World Education Cambodia (WEC), 3rd Floor Emerald Building, Norodom Boulevard, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

*Corresponding Author: UNG Chanmony (chanmony148@gmail.com)

To cite this article: Ung, C. (2021) Impediments to left-behind children achieving a basic education: a case study in Prey Veng, Cambodia. *Cambodia Journal of Basic and Applied Research (CJBAR)*, 3(1), 21–52.

សង្ខេប

អត្ថបទនេះស្វែងយល់ពីបញ្ហាប្រឈមរបស់កុមារដែលមានឪពុកម្តាយចំណាកស្រុកទៅធ្វើការនៅប្រទេសថៃក្នុងការសម្រេចបានការអប់រំថ្នាក់មូលដ្ឋាននៅខេត្តព្រៃវែង។ ការសិក្សានេះបានរកឃើញថា ចំណាកស្រុករបស់ឪពុកម្តាយជះឥទ្ធិពលអវិជ្ជមានដល់កុមារ។ កុមារប្រហែលពាក់កណ្តាលទទួលបានការងារផ្ទះ និងការងារកសិកម្មច្រើនជាងមុន។ លទ្ធផលជីវិតស្ត (T-test) បង្ហាញថា កម្រិតនៃការចូលរួមរបស់កុមារចំពោះការងារផ្ទះមានការប្រែប្រួលគួរឱ្យកត់សម្គាល់ ប៉ុន្តែមិនប្រែប្រួលខ្លាំងចំពោះការងារកសិកម្មទេ បន្ទាប់ពីឪពុកម្តាយធ្វើចំណាកស្រុក។ កត្តានេះបណ្តាលឱ្យកុមារទទួលបានការគាំទ្រ និងការណែនាំលើការសិក្សាតិចជាងមុន។ ក្រៅពីការសិក្សាក្នុងសាលាកុមារជាងពាក់កណ្តាលមិនបានទទួលការបង្រៀនបន្ថែមនៅផ្ទះ ដែលជាតួនាទីរបស់ឪពុកម្តាយ។ មួយភាគបីនៃកុមារទាំងនេះ ធ្លាប់ត្រួតថ្នាក់ ភាគច្រើននៅកម្រិតបឋមសិក្សា ដែលការជួយបង្រៀនបន្ថែមពិតជាសំខាន់។ កុមារជាច្រើនឈឺ និងមានបញ្ហាផ្លូវចិត្ត បន្ទាប់ពីឪពុកម្តាយធ្វើចំណាកស្រុក។ កត្តានេះបានជះផលប៉ះពាល់បន្ថែមទៅលើលទ្ធផលសិក្សាផងដែរ។ មានកុមារតែមួយភាគបួនប៉ុណ្ណោះដែលទទួលបានជំនួយ និងការគាំទ្រពីរាជរដ្ឋាភិបាល អង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាល ឬអង្គការសហគមន៍ ដូចជាការផ្តល់អាហារូបករណ៍ ការផ្តល់សម្ភារៈសិក្សា ឬឯកសណ្ឋាន។ ការគាំទ្រទាំងនេះត្រូវតែបង្កើនឱ្យកាន់តែច្រើនជាងមុន ដើម្បីជួយឱ្យកុមារ ដែលមានឪពុកម្តាយធ្វើចំណាកស្រុក អាចបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាថ្នាក់មូលដ្ឋាន។

Abstract

This paper explores the impediments to the children of migrant parents working in Thailand achieving a nine-year basic education in a rural commune of Prey Veng province. The study finds that parental migration negatively impacts left-behind children. Around half of these children are required to take on a greater share of household and farm work. A T-test indicates a significant difference in the level of their involvement in household chores, but not for farm work, following parental migration. This also results in children receiving less educational assistance and guidance. More than half were found to receive no additional education support at home outside of school to replace the role of their parents. One-third of these children were required to repeat a grade, mostly at the primary school level, where additional support is crucial. Many children who were left behind also were found to experience illnesses and emotional problems. This has an additional impact on educational performance. Only one-quarter of children who are left behind receive assistance from government, non-government, or community organizations in the form of scholarships, the provision of school materials or uniforms. It is recommended that this support is increased to provide greater support to these children in their endeavor to access a basic education.

Keywords: basic education, left-behind children, parental migration; Prey Veng, Cambodia; Thailand

Introduction

Labor migration is currently an attractive livelihood strategy for many young Cambodian people from both rural and urban areas. In 2020, 393,229 Cambodian workers migrated to work abroad via official channels in Thailand (77.3%), South Korea (12.4%), Malaysia (7.6%), Japan (2.3%) and Singapore (0.2%). Approximately 42.8% of these migrants were female (ILO, 2020). Cambodian migrant workers primarily migrate to Thailand (Hing et al., 2011; MoLVT, 2014), where they commonly work in the fishing, agriculture,

construction, manufacturing, entertainment and service sectors (ILO, 2020). Push factors for cross-border migration include insufficient local employment (Adams & Page, 2005; IOM, 2010); poor living standards (Ratha, 2003); a desire to transfer remittances to their household (Ratha, 2013); household poverty (Adams & Page, 2016); domestic political instability (European Parliament, 2014). Pull factors include a high demand for labor in each host country (Sophal, 2009).

Migrant workers make a significant contribution to the social and economic development of both developed (United Nations, 2016; Vutha et al., 2014) and developing countries (de Hass, 2006). They access higher salaries and the remittances they send home play an important role in their home country (Haider et al., 2016; Adams & Page, 2016). It has been demonstrated that these remittances alleviate poverty and improve living standards through meeting basic needs such as food and housing (Cuecuecha & Adams, 2016); the ability to invest in small business activities; enabling debts or loans to be paid (OECD, 2006, Roth & Tiberti, 2017); and in accessing healthcare (Jampaklay, 2006).

However, anecdotal evidence shows that parental migration has a detrimental impact on children who are left behind (Vutha et al., 2014). Previous empirical research has outlined the negative impacts of parental migration on the educational outcomes of these children (Meyerhoefer & Chen, 2011; Lu, 2012; Hu, 2013). Children from migrant families have poorer school attendance; and face a higher risk of dropping out of school due to a loss of local labor (MoP, 2012). Older children tend to be asked to contribute more to household chores and are often required to engage in income

generation activities to meet short-term labor or cash shortages (Bai et al., 2018). Moreover, in the absence of their parents, they receive less educational support (Vutha et al., 2014).

Parental migration also negatively influences child health (Meng & Yamauchi, 2015), even in situations where other adults remain at home to care for them (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011). Children who are left behind experience a greater degree of illness and psychological issues than children from non-migrant families. Poor health is another factor that affects educational outcomes. Children with health problems are often absent from school for extended periods and have difficulty concentrating in class (Basch, 2011), often due to unhygienic behaviors. This has been linked to poor academic performance (Case et al., 2005; Suhrcke & de Paz, 2011; Tong, Luo, & Piotrowski, 2015; Hanson & Woodruff, 2004). Children with health problems are more likely to repeat a grade and to drop out of school entirely (Barbaresi et al., 2007; Démurger, 2015).

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) adopted Vietnamese guidelines for 10-years of general education (4+3+3) up until 1985. In 1986, this was replaced with a local system of 11-years of general education (5+3+3). Then, in 1996, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RoGC) further enhanced the education sector by enacting a policy of a 12-year of general education (6+3+3) (ADB, 2014). This was linked to major educational reforms implemented by the MoEYS including a revised school curriculum, new textbooks, and improvements in capacity (Chey & Khieu, 2017). An official age for children to be admitted into Grade 1 was set as six years old (UNESCO, 2013).

RoGC policies, in particular, Education for All (EFA) 2003-2015 were framed to ensure the right of all children to access a free, quality education in a public school for at least nine years (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009). The first nine years of schooling were officially considered to constitute a *formal basic education*, comprising Grades 1 to 6 in primary, followed by Grades 7 to 9 in lower secondary school (ADB, 2012). The motivation for reform was to increase access to education and improve its quality (Chansopheak, 2009). Access reforms were aimed at improving educational opportunities for school-aged children regardless of gender, geography, wealth, and health. Quality reforms were aimed at improving the efficiency of the educational system by improving teaching quality, leadership, management, and classroom materials (Chhinh & Dy, 2009).

Within this context, this research investigates the barriers to completing a nine-year basic education for children whose parents migrated to work in Thailand. It aims to (i) explore the impacts of parental migration on education in Cambodia, and (ii) identify the specific needs of children whose parents have migrated to work in Thailand.

Characterizing left-behind children

Left-behind children are affected by different factors in different countries. In western society, the dissolution of marriage or divorce frequently results in family separation (Potter, 2010). In developing countries, children are more often left behind as a result of parental death and more recently, parental migration (Lu, 2012). Recently the phenomenon of *left-behind* children has attracted greater interest, most likely as a result of migration becoming a greater determinant of population change than it has previously (IOM, 2015).

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNESCAP) reported in 2013 that, while the movement of people within and between regions has increased globally, the phenomenon was particularly robust in Asia, which has been described as *the world's largest migration corridor* (Zimmer & Natta, 2015). This situation is replicated in Cambodia, where that been steady increases in urban-to-rural migration; as well as out-migration to other countries (CRUMP Research Team, 2012). A key question that remains is *who remains in rural areas after migrants left? And, how does out-migration affect these people?* Many scholars refer to these people as *left-behind*, particularly children and the elderly (Knodel et al., 2010; Toyota et al., 2007).

The term *left-behind children* have been defined as *children who are left to live in the countryside with their grandparents or relatives, while their parents move to urban areas or outside the country for work* (Duan & Zhou, 2005). Similarly, *left-behind children* have also been defined as *children who have remained at home after one or both of their parents have migrated* (Duan & Zhou, 2005). UNICEF defines *left-behind children* as *children who were raised in their home country or country of habitual residence but were abandoned by the adult migrant(s) responsible for them* (UNICEF, n.d.). Another source defines *left-behind children* as *young people whose parents go out to work, or one parent goes out to work, and the other has no ability for guardianship* (Hong et al., 2019).

Parental migration impacts educational performance and duration for both genders in their country of origin. Parental migration has a negative impact on the number of years of schooling of left-behind child accesses (Lee, 2011); school attendance and performance (Giannelli & Mangiavacchi, 2010);

and the likelihood that a left-behind child will drop out of school, or repeat a grade (Liu et al., 2018). Jingzhong and Lu (2011) found a negative association between parental migration and a variety of aspects of a child's life, including educational support, assistance and supervision at home.

Parental migration poses risk to the educational outcomes of left-behind children due to requirements to spend more time working on farms (Chang, Dong & MacPhail, 2011), extra household chores (Hanson & Woodruff, 2004), and lack of educational oversight (Hu, 2013). For instance, parental migration has been shown to increase the obligation for children aged 7 to 12 to complete household chores (de Brauw and Mu, 2011); as well as girls aged 16-18 (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011). This tends to result in reduced study hours, which harms educational outcomes (de Brauw & Mu, 2011).

Parental migration also interrupts family life, which has well-being consequences for children left behind (Nikolova et al., 2018). The literature shows that the negative impacts of parental migration include a deficit of care and problematic behaviors (Jingzhong & Lu, 2011); a low likelihood of receiving proper health care, and poor general health (Lee, 2011); and higher levels of anger, resentment and depression (Dreby, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). When family members migrated, children experience higher levels of stress and depression that are not offset by remittances (Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018). In Ghana, Angola, and Nigeria, changes to primary caregivers due to out-migration was shown to harm the psychological well-being of children (Mazzucato et al., 2015); while father-only migration has been associated with problems with child behavior in Thailand and Moldova (Vanore et al., 2015).

This study employs a descriptive approach to assess the negative impacts on left-behind children in Prey Pnov Village whose parents have migrated to Thailand regarding their educational needs. The study site was selected purposively, and stratified sampling was used to evenly access boys and girls. A snowball method was applied to identify children whose parents had migrated for work to Thailand. A sample size of 84 left-behind children, with equal representation from boys and girls, was chosen for an acceptable error of 9% (Yamane, 1967).

A quantitative approach was applied using descriptive statistics via a frequency analysis to determine the negative impacts of parental migration on education outcomes. Inferential statistics such as a T-test and Weighted Average Index (WAI) were applied to determine similarities and differences in the perceptions of boys and girls and to evaluate the perception of and degree of satisfaction of left-behind children concerning their education. Qualitative methods were also employed via collecting interview data from the MoEYS, UN, and ILO, to support conclusions derived from the quantitative approach. This enabled the research to more deeply analyze the impediments faced by left-behind children in accessing a basic education and also access information about their specific needs.

Results and Findings

Child involvement in income generation

Parental migration was found to result in the loss of labor in the household and community that they resided in. Those left behind, especially children and the elderly, faced an increased burden of household chores and farm work. Figure 2 demonstrates that half of the left-behind children surveyed indicated

that their household responsibilities had after parental migration. Around 2% of children now worked as day laborers to meet income shortfalls.

Figure 2. Percentage of children indicating increased levels of household responsibilities after parental migration

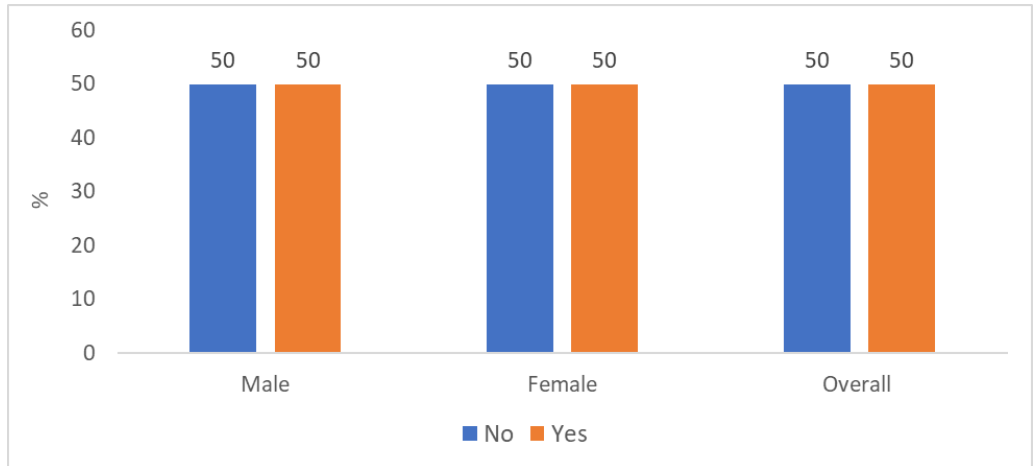


Table 1. Involvement in household and farm work before and after parental migration

Attributes	Before parents migrate (n=84)		After parents migrate (n=84)		P-Value
	WAI	OA	WAI	OA	
Housework involvement	0.58	M	0.72	H	0.000***
Farm work involvement	0.33	L	0.37	L	0.256

Notes: WAI=Weight Average Index measured on a five-point scale [Very Low (VL) = 0.00-0.20, Low (L) = 0.21-0.40, Moderate (M) = 0.41-0.60, High (H) = 0.61-0.80, Very High (VH) = 0.81-1.00]; OA=Overall Assessment; level of Significance * P<0.05; **P< 0.01; ***P<0.001.

A five-point Weighted Average Index (WAI) was then used to assess the degree of involvement in household and farm work before and after parental migration. Further, a T-Test analysis was used to see if the left-behind children’s involvement in the household and farm work had changed significantly. It was found that child involvement in the household chores had

increased significantly (p -value = 0.000), but not for farm work (p -value = 0.256). Overall, the number of children involved in the household chores has increased significantly, while only a marginal increase was observed for farm work, especially for female respondents.

Impact of parental migration on the education and health care of children

Due to the lack of household labor and an increased involvement of left-behind children in household chores, left-behind children were often absent from school after parental migration. On average, children missed a total of 5.08 days per year from school (5.19 days for boys and 4.98 for girls) (Table 2). Some children missed significant amounts of school, with 2.4% of female respondents missing an additional 15 days of school than the previous year; while 4.8% of male respondents missed an additional 11 to 15 days. Parental migration is believed to have had a more significant effect on female left-behind children regarding household chores as they were more engaged with these activities.

Table 2. Number of additional days that children were absent from school

No. of days	Male (%) (n=42)	Female (%) (n=42)	Overall (%) (n=84)
5 and below	66.7	69.0	67.9
6-10	28.6	28.6	28.6
11-15	4.8	0	2.4
Above 15	0	2.4	1.2
Average	5.19	4.98	5.08

Approximately 30% of the left-behind children surveyed also experienced grade repetition, which occurred on average in Grade 2.32. Boys tended to repeat a higher grade (2.88) than girls (1.33) (Table 3). The primary reason

given for this experience was a lack of educational support at home, especially for primary school-aged children who require a greater deal of assistance with their studies at home. This decreased after parental migration, resulting in poorer educational performance.

Table 3. Grades repeated by male and female left behind children

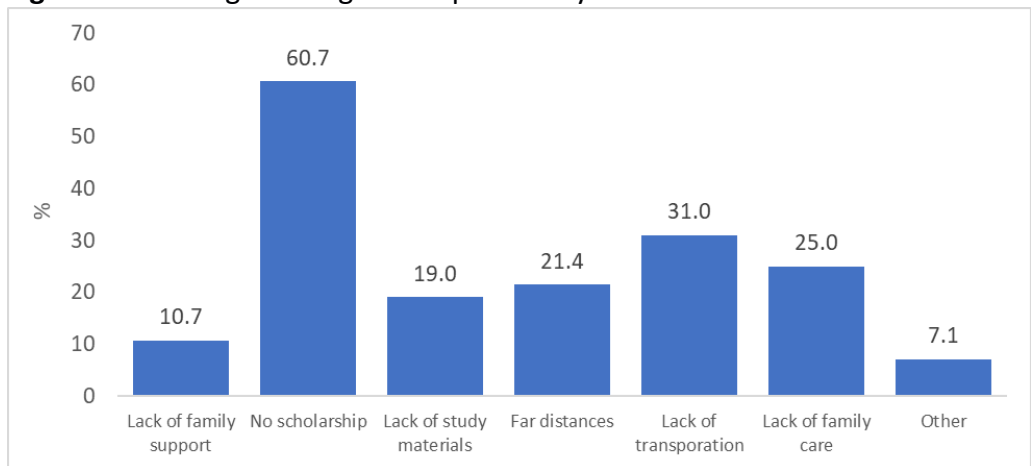
Attributes	Male (%) (n=42)	Female (%) (n=42)	Overall (%) (n=84)
Grade 1-3	68.8	100	80.0
Grade 4-6	25.0	0	16.0
Grade 7-9	6.3	0	4.0
Average (year)	2.88	1.33	2.32

Parental migration was also found to have a significant impact on education as a result of increased household and farm work obligations, leading to a rise in absences from class. Parental migration was also a key factor in the decision for a child to drop out of school completely as a result of leaving with their parents. Around 11% of left-behind children have been asked by their parents to drop out of school and move to Thailand to work with their parents. This occurred on average of 4.22 times and was found to be a key driver in increasing the likelihood that a left-behind child would drop out of school.

Other challenges for left-behind children that emerged as a result of parental migration included a reduction in educational guidance and support, a lack of money in the form of scholarships (61%), reduced family care (25%) and support (11%), distance to school (21%), a lack of transportation (31%), and a lack of study materials (19%) (Figure 3). An interview with a DoE official and commune chief revealed that the case study commune had one lower

secondary school, which was beyond walking distance from many children. A lack of transportation often caused children to miss school, especially for girls who were concerned about their safety.

Figure 3. Challenges facing to complete a 9-year basic education



The health of left-behind children was also adversely affected by parental migration, despite other extended family members providing care at home. This is believed to have been a result of a lack of daily food, leaving the children vulnerable. Around 5% of respondents indicated that they did not have enough food in comparison to other children. Moreover, 8% of respondents indicated that they did not receive sufficient care from their guardians.

With these results in mind, a Weighted Average Index (WAI) was used to measure the degree of sickness after parental migration with a T-Test analysis to detect if this was a significant result. It was found that a moderate number of left-behind children became ill, with no significant variation in results for boys and girls (p -value=0.771). However, while left behind children lived with

extended family members, they were less likely to receive the same level of care as before.

Table 4. Frequency of left-behind children becoming ill after parental migration

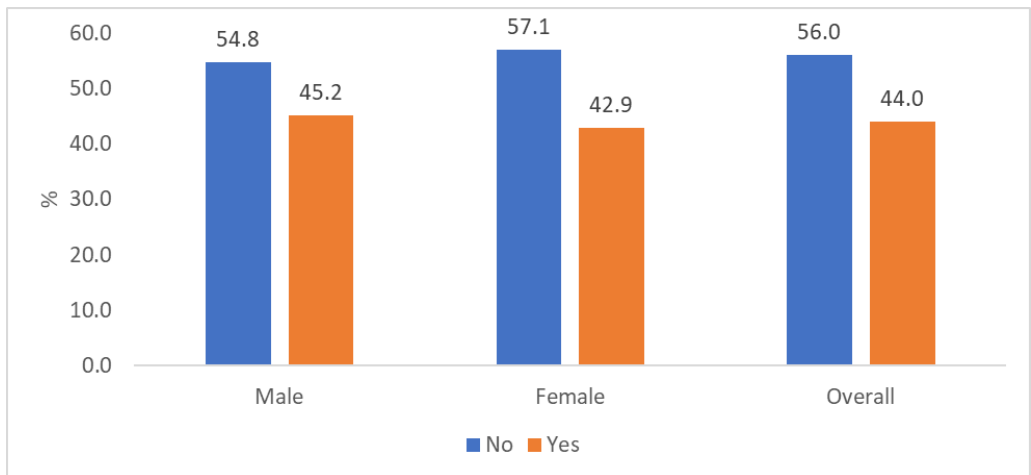
Attribute	Male (n=42)		Female (n=42)		Overall (n=84)		P-value
	WAI	OA	WAI	OA	WAI	OA	
How often do you get sick?	0.56	M	0.57	M	0.56	M	0.771

Notes: WAI=Weight Average Index measured on a five-point scale [Very Low (VL) = 0.00-0.20, Low (L) = 0.21-0.40, Moderate (M) = 0.41-0.60, High (H) = 0.61-0.80, Very High (VH) = 0.81-1.00]; OA = Overall Assessment; level of Significance * P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Care and support mechanisms

Only 44% of left-behind children interviewed indicated that they received additional educational support and guidance at home, compared with 56% who did not (Figure 4).

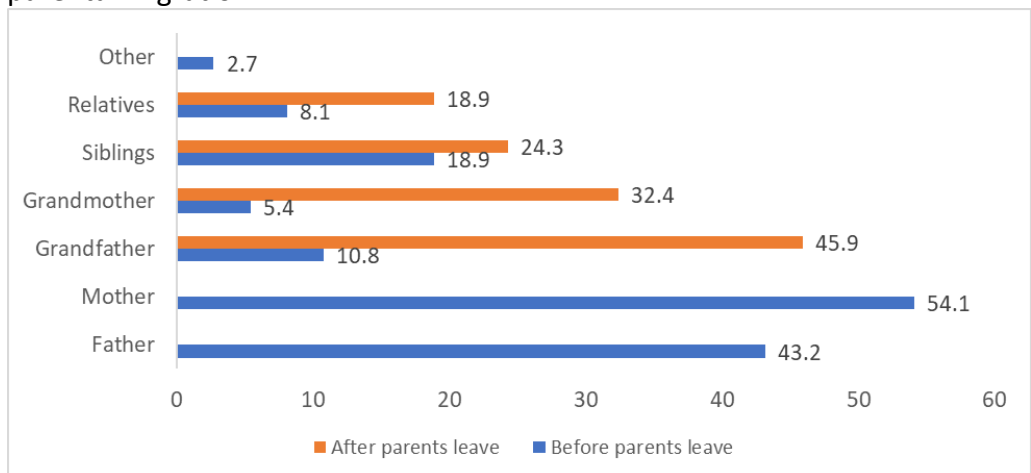
Figure 4. % of left-behind children receiving any educational support at home



Illiteracy and low educational attainment among caregivers were found to be key factors leading to this result. This made it difficult for caregivers to provide educational support to left-behind children. The migration of the

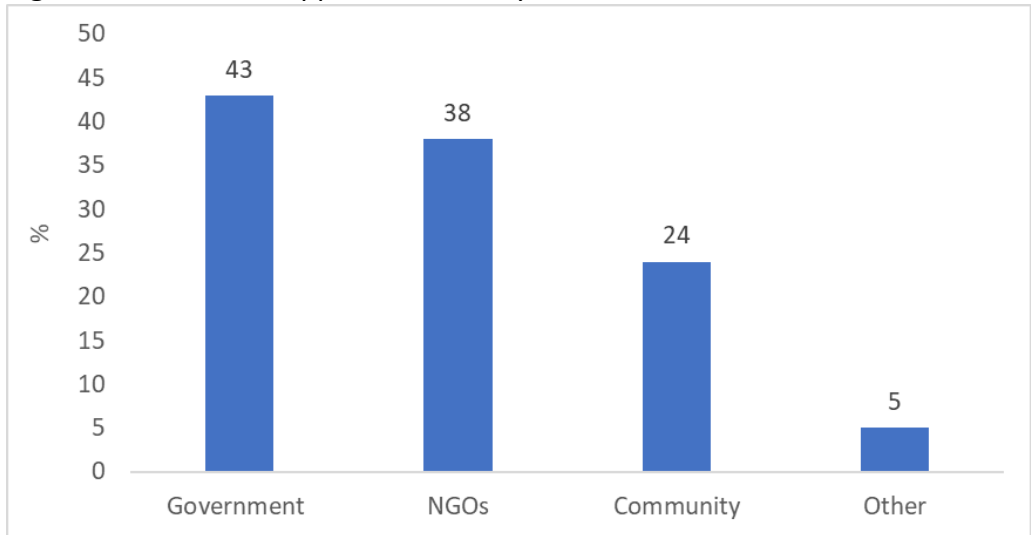
parents was another factor. Figure 5 demonstrates that the nature of support offered to left-behind children changed after parental migration to Thailand. Previously their mother (54.1%) or father (43.2%) were the household members who would offer this support; followed by siblings (18.9%), a grandfather (10.8%), other relatives (8.1%), or a grandmother (5.4%). After parental migration, this role shifted to be fulfilled by a grandfather (45.9%) or grandmother (32.4%), with smaller increases observed for the involvement of siblings.

Figure 5. Family members of children providing support before and after parental migration



When surveyed, 25% of left-behind children indicated that they received support from other sources such as the government (43%), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (38%), and the community (24%). This support was offered in the form of school materials (81%), cash (57%), uniforms or other clothing (24%), or scholarships (19%) (Figure 7). These children confirmed that this support was beneficial to their education.

Figure 6. Sources of support received by left-behind children

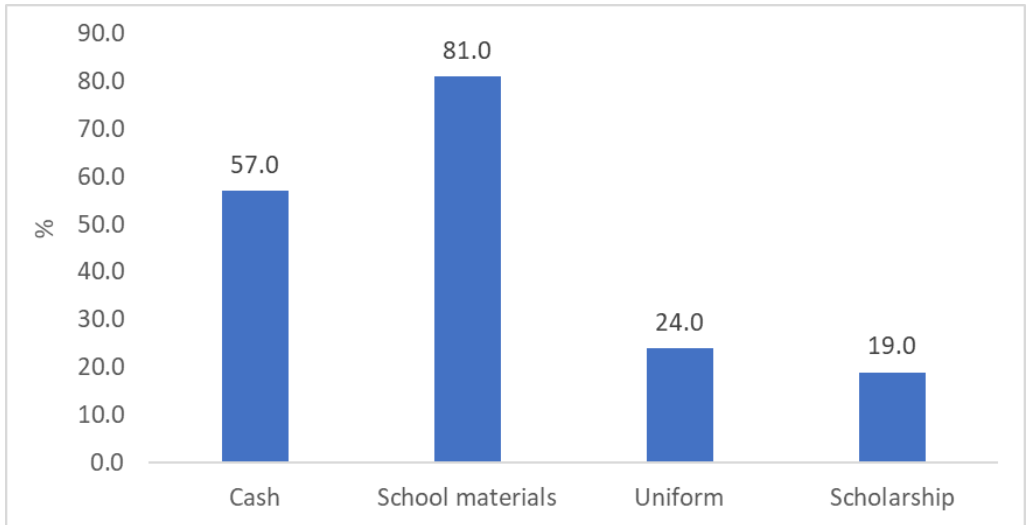


Key informant interviews revealed that some children were able to access a ministry scholarship for marginalized children valued at 240,000 riels per year, in which children would be provided with 80,000 riel three times each year. NGOs, such as *Room to Read*, also provided access to learning and teaching materials for children in the commune as well as support for teachers. An interview with the commune chief and school directors revealed that fundraising activities were held in the commune to improve infrastructure and facilities available to children as well as improving the school environment. These funds were also used to purchase study materials for left-behind children.

The provision of support for children in terms of cash, school materials, school uniform or clothes to left-behind children after parental migration was assessed using a five-point Weighted Average Index (WAI). A T-Test was also used to explore whether this support was perceived differently by boys and

girls. It was found that the need for education of boys and girls was not significantly different for any of the stated indicators, except for school meals. Children perceived assistance in accessing a basic education as highly important and they indicated that they were highly satisfied with each stated indicator (WAI = 71% – 80%; Table 5).

Figure 7. Types of support received by left-behind children



Educational support needs were found to be very high following parental migration to Thailand. Both male and female left-behind children were found to be extremely satisfied with their scholarships and study materials. Boys were found to value study materials (84%), uniforms (82%), transportation (80%), school meals (80%), educational support (79%), and motivation (81%) more highly than girls. Girls were found to value emotional care (75%), peer-to-peer friendships (76%), homework clubs (71%), and school events (73%) more highly.

Table 5. Perceptions of children towards educational support received at school

Attributes	Male (n=42)		Female (n=42)		Overall (n=84)		P-value
	WAI	OA	WAI	OA	WAI	OA	
Scholarships	0.83	VH	0.83	VH	0.83	VH	0.970
Study materials	0.84	VH	0.81	VH	0.82	VH	0.269
Uniforms	0.82	VH	0.79	H	0.80	H	0.242
Transportation	0.80	H	0.75	H	0.78	H	0.094
School meals	0.80	H	0.72	H	0.76	H	0.036*
Emotional care	0.72	H	0.75	H	0.74	H	0.353
Educational care	0.79	H	0.79	H	0.79	H	0.820
Educational motivation	0.81	VH	0.78	H	0.80	H	0.225
Peer-to-peer friendships	0.75	H	0.76	H	0.76	H	0.756
Homework clubs	0.70	H	0.71	H	0.71	H	0.695
School events	0.72	H	0.73	H	0.72	H	0.780

Notes: WAI=Weight Average Index measured on a five-point scale [Very Low (VL) = 0.00-0.20, Low (L) = 0.21-0.40, Moderate (M) = 0.41-0.60, High (H) = 0.61-0.80, Very High (VH) = 0.81-1.00]; OA = Overall Assessment; level of Significance * P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Discussion

Negative impacts of increased involvement in household labor

In this study, the negative impacts of parental migration on the left-behind children were documented. The education outcomes of these children suffered when they were required to take on a greater burden of domestic duties (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003). Parental migration resulted in increased amounts of time spent on farm work (Chang, Dong, & MacPhail, 2011) and household chores (Hanson & Woodruff, 2004). It is often assumed that when parental migration occurs, the size of the labor force in rural

households and communities decreases and family remain behind unexpectedly face increased time burdens. The findings from this study of left-behind children showed this to be true for 50% of those surveyed.

The T-test revealed that after parental migration to Thailand, left-behind children have a greater degree of involvement in both household and farm work. This supports the results of previous research and indicates that increased responsibilities for decreases the amount of time available for the education of left-behind children resulting in poorer academic outcomes.

The negative impacts of reduced education and health care support

The negative impact of parental migration on the education of left-behind children has been examined in the literature. It has been found to impact educational performance, and the duration of schooling when compared with children whose parents remain home (Lee, 2011; Liu et al., 2018). The results of this study reveal that 30% of left-behind children (n=25) were in the correct grade for their age when interviewed, while a greater proportion were studying at a lower than expected level. This suggests that left-behind children experience delayed school enrolment, which is meant to occur at the age of six. Often alternative caregivers do not take them to enrol at school on time.

Further, left-behind children are more likely to be absent from class, causing poor educational performance leading to grade repetition. This study revealed that 30% of the left-behind children interviewed experienced grade repetition in lower primary school. At this stage of their development, children require additional assistance outside of the classroom from adults. This support is not always available for left-behind children, who spend less time learning due to a lack of guidance, motivation, and inspiration.

This lack of supervision, guidance and support from family members (Hu, 2013) experienced by 56% of left-behind children interviewed in the study is a major negative outcome of parental migration. Another is the capacity of caregivers who are left behind with the children. Many of these caregivers were the grandparents of the children and were found to be illiterate, failing to access a basic education themselves. This poses a risk that left-behind children will not have access to the level of support at home that is required to achieve good educational outcomes.

The disruption of family life caused by parental migration also has a potentially negative impact on the well-being and health of the left-behind children (Meng & Yamauchi, 2015; Nikolova et al., 2018). This affects many aspects of the life of a child, resulting in problematic behaviors and health issues (Jingzhong & Lu, 2011). Parental migration has been linked to a higher likelihood of adverse impacts (Lee, 2011). This finding is supported by the study which found an increased incidence of illness among the left-behind children sampled. The T-test analysis indicated that the degree of this illness was moderate in this case study.

In Mexico and China, children of migrant parents displayed high levels of resentment, anger and depression due to parental migration (Dreby, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). Out-migration of household members has been linked to increased stress and depression (Ivlevs et al., 2018), and lower psychological well-being (Vanore, Mazzucato, & Siegel, 2015), which is not able to be mitigated by the benefits of remittances (Ivlevs et al., 2018). The present study concurs with this finding, with 76% of left-behind children found to experience emotional problems such as sadness, hopelessness, fear, and

anxiety. The contribution of parental migration has been confirmed to harm both the physical and mental health of left-behind children, which negatively impacts educational outcomes.

While the degree of illness and poor health was found to be moderate for both boys and girls who are left behind, the majority of children were found to have emotional problems. The alternatives to caregiving provided by the parents of left-behind children were found to be of a lower quality, despite left-behind children indicating that they were very happy with their caregivers. Nevertheless, left-behind children demonstrated problematic behaviors and negative problem feelings. They endure sickness and psychological stress that cause educational setbacks and interference with schooling. These children may miss a lot of school days due to these issues and have trouble concentrating in class; affecting their educational outcomes. Poor educational outcomes linked to health issues make it more likely that left-behind children will repeat a grade or drop out of school.

Educational support and the needs of the left-behind children

Just one-quarter of the left-behind children interviewed had received educational support from the government, NGOs, or community organizations. The most common forms of assistance in the study area were in the form of scholarships (provided mainly by the government), school learning materials, school uniforms and other clothes, and cash.

However, this support was limited to a small number of these children, with gaps in the level of assistance required to achieve adequate educational outcomes. Left-behind children indicated that they valued support in the form of scholarships (83%); school materials (82%); school uniforms (80%); and meals

(76%), emotional care (74%); educational care (79%), educational motivation (80%); peer-to-peer friendships (76%), homework clubs (71%), and school events (72%).

Scholarship, school materials, school uniforms, and school meals were found to be in high demand among left-behind children. While parents intended for their children to access remittances to support everyday expenditure on education for their children such as school materials and uniforms; it was found that delays in sending payments meant that these needs were sometimes not met in the case study area.

Left behind children expressed a desire for educational support in the form of study clubs, educational care, and educational motivation to replace the support lost as a result of parental migration. Their parents have previously provided this extra support at home. Other caregivers who remained with these children did provide support, but it was not as effective as that provided by their parents. Therefore, homework or study clubs were valued by left-behind children.

Other forms of support such as emotional care, peer-to-peer friendships and school events were also indicated to be beneficial. Following the migration of their parents, 76% of the left-behind children surveyed found that they experienced emotional problems such as grief, hopelessness, and fear. Peer-to-peer friendship groups and school activities or events targeted at addressing these problems enabled these children to develop additional supportive relationships with their peers, establish positive interactions, and mitigate any potential discrimination they may experience from their peers.

Government interventions to provide extra assistance to left-behind children to complete a basic education are critical. The government should consider increasing the number of scholarships available to these children and expanding the program to other rural areas, with a high proportion of left-behind children. Providing scholarships has been found by this study to increase the likelihood that these children will be able to remain in school and realise better educational outcomes.

The government should also consider incentivizing the private sector to establish operations in rural areas by providing necessary physical infrastructure, skilled workers and other preferential treatment. In the short-to-medium term, agricultural diversification and food processing may help absorb a large number of low skilled workers with lower educational attainment who may otherwise be driven to migrate for work. However, in the long-term, the next generation of rural villagers will require the skills to be able to diversify into other value-added industries such as manufacturing and tourism. Increasing the number of low-skilled jobs for Cambodians is important for minimizing the number of workers who migrate to other countries, meaning that fewer children are left behind. This will reduce the negative impacts of parental migration on the access of children to the right to education.

Non-governmental organizations should extend educational assistance programs for marginalized children including scholarships, school materials, and transportation services to other rural areas. Children who require support should be identified in collaboration with commune officials. The commune should encourage parents and caregivers to invest more in the education of

their children, along with providing greater educational support and motivation. Schools should consider supporting the formation of homework clubs for students to access improved peer support to address any problems that may arise.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that parental migration has placed the educational outcomes of left-behind children in jeopardy. Parental migration has been found to negatively impact half of the children surveyed due to the need to spend more time on household chores or farm work. The increase in household chores was found to have a significant impact on left-behind children compared to those whose parents did not migrate. One-third of left-behind boys and girls were found to experience grade repetition in lower primary school due to a lack of educational support, guidance, and motivation at home after parental migration.

More than half of children who were left behind did not receive any out-of-class educational support after their parents moved to Thailand. They presented with physical illnesses and emotional problems. While one-quarter of left-behind children accessed assistance from the government, NGOs, or community organisations in the form of scholarships, school materials, uniforms, or cash, the availability of this support was not sufficient to assist all left-behind children. This included a lack of soft support in the form of educational care and motivation.

Government interventions to assist left-behind children are necessary. For instance, the expansion of the existing scholarship program to other rural areas with high levels of out-migration would be an effective measure for

addressing the situation outlined in this paper and enable more children to access their right to a basic education.

Poverty and a lack of local employment were found to be potent local drivers for parental migration. The government should consider encouraging private businesses to locate themselves in rural areas by offering them with the requisite physical infrastructure and skilled workers to facilitate an increase in the number of low-skilled jobs available to Cambodians. In the medium term, this is needed to reduce the number of workers who decide to out-migrate as well as the number of left-behind children. This will mitigate the negative impacts of parental migration on the child right to education.

It is recommended that future studies focus on other population-dense contexts where there are high levels of out-migration and left-behind children. This may provide additional evidence about how to promote the right to education of left-behind children. Future research may choose to study the impacts of left-behind children whose parents migrated to work in other locations such as Malaysia or South Korea. These studies may focus more deeply on dimensions such as the health of left-behind children and build on the findings of this paper that show that education and health impacts are interconnected.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions. He also acknowledges the advice of Dr Sok Serey in shaping this paper. Without this support, the research would not have been possible.

Author Biography

UNG Chanmony holds a Master of Development Studies from Royal University of Phnom Penh and a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development from the Royal University of Agriculture. He currently works at World Education Cambodia.

References

- Adams, R. H. & Page, J. (2005) Do international migration and remittances reduce poverty in developing countries? *World Development*, 33 (10), 1645–1669.
- Adams, H.R. & Page, J. (2016) *International migration, remittances and poverty in developing countries*. The World Bank.
- ADB. (2012) *Cambodia: Education Sector Development Program*. Manila: ADB.
- ADB. (2014) *Cambodia country poverty analysis 2014*. Mandaluyong: Asian Development Bank.
- Bai, Y., Zhang, L., Liu, C., Shi, Y., Mo, D., & Rozelle, S. (2018) Effect of parental migration on the academic performance of left-behind children in North-Western China. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 54(7), 1154–1170.
- Barbarese, W.J., Katusic, S. K., Colligan, R.C., Weaver, A.L., & Jacobsen, S.J. (2007) Long-term school outcomes for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: a population-based perspective. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, 28(4), 265–273.
- Basch, C.E. (2011) Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. *Journal of school health*, 81(10), 593–598.

- Case, A., Fertig, A., & Paxson, C. (2005) The lasting impact of childhood health and circumstance. *Journal of health economics*, 24(2), 365-389.
- Chang, H., Dong, X. Y., & MacPhail, F. (2011) Labor migration and time use patterns of the left-behind children and elderly in rural China. *World Development*, 39(12), 2199–2210.
- Chansopheak, K. (2009) Basic education in Cambodia: Quality and equity. In *The political economy of educational reforms and capacity development in Southeast Asia* (pp. 131-152). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Chey, C.O. & Khieu, V. (2017) Cognitive domain, level of difficulty and topic distribution of the science stream in the national exit examination in Cambodia. *Cambodia Education Review*, 1(1), 33–48.
- Chhinh, S. & Dy, S.S. (2009) *Education reform context and process in Cambodia*. In *The political economy of educational reforms and capacity development in Southeast Asia*. Springer, Dordrecht.
- CRUMP Research Team (2012) Migration in Cambodia: Report of the Cambodian Rural-Urban Migration Project (CRUMP). Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, Government of Cambodia.
- Cuecuecha, A. & Adams, H.R. (2016) Remittances, household investment and poverty in Indonesia. *Journal of Finance and Economics*, 04(03), 12–31.
- Dara, V. (2021) Governor seeks to reduce migration from Prey Veng, retrieved from <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/governor-seek-s-reduce-migration-prey-veng>.
- de Brauw, A. & Mu, R. (2011) Migration and the overweight and underweight status of children in rural China. *Food Policy*, 36(1), 88–100.

- de Haas, H. (2006) Migration, remittances and regional development in Southern Morocco. *Geo-forum*, 37, 565–580.
- Démurger, S. (2015) *Migration and families left behind*. IZA World of Labor.
- Dreby, J. (2015) US immigration policy and family separation: The consequences for children's well-being. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 245–251.
- Duan, C., & Zhou, F. (2005) Research on the States of Left-behind Children'. *Population Research*, 29(1), 29-36.
- European Parliament. (2014) *The impacts of remittances on developing countries*. Belgium: European Union.
- Giannelli, G.C., & Mangiavacchi, L. (2010) Children's schooling and parental migration: Empirical evidence on the 'left-behind generation in Albania. *Labor*, 24, 76–92.
- Haider, Z.M., Hossain, T., & Siddiqui, I. O. (2016) Impact of remittance on consumption and savings behavior in rural areas of Bangladesh. *Journal of Business*, 01(04), 25–34.
- Hanson, G.H. and Woodruff, C. (2004) *Emigration and educational attainment in Mexico*. Working paper, University of California, San Diego.
- Hing, V., Lun, P. & Phann, D. (2011) *Irregular migration from Cambodia: Characteristics, challenges, and regulatory approach* (No. 2011-26). PIDS Discussion Paper Series.
- Hirosato, Y. & Kitamura, Y. (Eds.). (2009) *The political economy of educational reforms and capacity development in Southeast Asia: Cases of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam* (Vol. 13). Springer Science & Business Media.

- Hong, Y., Fuller, C., & Serpa, S. (2019) Alone and “left behind”: a case study of “left-behind children” in rural China. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1-16.
- Hu, F. (2013) Does migration benefit the schooling of children left behind? Evidence from rural northwest China. *Demographic Research*, 29(2), 33–70.
- ILO. (2020) *Triangle in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note*. Phnom Penh.
- IOM. (2010) *Analyzing the Impact of Remittances from Cambodian Migrant Workers in Thailand on Local Communities in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh. IOM.
- IOM. (2015) *World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility*. France: Imprimerie Courand et Associés.
- Ivlevs, A. & Veliziotis, M. (2018) Local-level immigration and life satisfaction: The EU enlargement experience in England and Wales. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 50(1), 175–193.
- Jampaklay, A. (2006). Parental absence and children's school enrolment: evidence from a longitudinal study in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. *Asian Population Studies*, 2(1), 93–110.
- Jingzhong, Y. & Lu, P. (2011) Differentiated childhoods: Impacts of rural labor migration on left-behind children in China. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38, 355–377.
- Knodel, J., Kespichayawattana, J., Saengtienchai, C., & Wiwatwanich, S. (2010). *How left behind are rural parents of migrant children? Evidence from Thailand*. *Ageing & Society*, 30(5), 811–841.

- Lee, M. H. (2011) Migration and children's welfare in China: The schooling and health of children left behind. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 44(2), 165–182.
- Liu, Z., Yu, L., & Zheng, X. (2018) No longer left-behind: The impact of return migrant parents on children's performance. *China Economic Review*, 49, 184–196.
- Lu, Y. (2012) Education of children left behind in rural China. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(2), 328–341.
- Mazzucato, V., Cebotari, V., Veale, A., White, A., Grassi, M., & Vivet, J. (2015) International parental migration and the psychological well-being of children in Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 215–224.
- McKenzie, D., & Rapoport, H. (2011) Can migration reduce educational attainments? Depressing evidence from Mexico. *Journal of Population*, 24(4), 1331–1358.
- Meng, X., & Yamauchi, C. (2015) Children of migrants: The impact of parental migration on their children's education and health outcomes. Institute for the Study of Labor.
- Meyerhoefer, C.D., & Chen, C. J. (2011) The effect of parental labor migration on children's educational progress in rural China. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 9(3), 379–396.
- MoLVT (2014) *Policy on labour migration for Cambodia*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: ILO.
- MoP (2012) *Migration in Cambodia: Report of the Cambodian Rural-Urban Migration*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: MoP.

MoP (2019) *General Population Census of the Kingdom of Cambodia 2019*.

NCDD (2018). *Commune Database Online 2018*. Ministry of Interior.

Nikolova, M., Roman, M., & Zimmermann, K. F. (2018) *Left behind but doing good. Civic engagement in two post-socialist countries*. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 45(3), 658–684.

OECD (2006) *International migrant remittances and their role in development. International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2006 Edition*, 139–161.

Potter, D. (2010) Psychosocial well-being and the relationship between divorce and children's academic achievement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(4), 933–946.

Ratha, D. (2003) Workers' remittances: An important and stable source of external development finance. *Global Development Finance*, 157-175.

Ratha, D. (2013) The Impact of Remittances on Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction. *Migration Policy Institute*, 5.

Roth, V., & Tiberti, L. (2017). *Economic effects of migration on the left-behind in Cambodia*. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 53(11), 1787–1805.

Sophal, C. (2009) *Costs and Benefits of Cross-Country Labour Migration in the GMS*:

Srivastava, R., & Sasikumar, S. K. (2003, June) *An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues*. In Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia (pp. 22–24).

Suhrcke, M., & de Paz Nieves, C. (2011) The impact of health and health behaviors on educational outcomes in high-income countries: a review of the evidence.

- Tong, Y., Luo, W., & Piotrowski, M. (2015) The association between parental migration and childhood illness in rural China. *European Journal of Population*, 31(5), 561–586.
- Toyota, M., Yeoh, B. S., & Nguyen, L. (2007) Bringing the ‘left behind’ back into view in Asia: a framework for understanding the ‘migration–left behind nexus’. *Population, Space and Place*, 13(3), 157–161.
- UNICEF (n.d) Children “Left-Behind”. UNICE Working Paper.
- UNESCO (2013) *Cambodia: Age distribution and school attendance of girls aged 9-13 years*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: UNESCO.
- United Nations (2016) *International Migration Report 2015: Highlight*. New York: The United Nations.
- Vanore, M., Mazzucato, V., & Siegel, M. (2015) ‘Left behind’ but not left alone: parental migration & the psychosocial health of children in Moldova. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 252–260.
- Vutha, H., Pide, L., & Dalis, P. (2014) *The Impacts of Adult Migration on Children’s Well-being. The Case of Cambodia*. Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh.
- Wu, Q., Lu, D., & Kang, M. (2015) Social capital and the mental health of children in rural China with different experiences of parental migration. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 270–277.
- Zimmer, Z & Natta, M.V. (2015) *Migration and Left-Behind Households in Rural Cambodia: Structure and Socio-economic Conditions*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: UNFPA and National Institute of Statistics.