

Problems of Migrant Workers in the Middle East: A Case Study of Return Female Migrants in Sri Lanka

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There is overwhelming evidence that the increase in labour migration from Sri Lanka to the Middle East (*ME*) was due to the rapid development of economic and social activities in oil exporting countries. Of a total of 248, 096 of Sri Lankans who had migrated for employments there, 247, 119 had gone to the ME. The number of female migrants has increased significantly over the last three decades. Approximately half of the estimated 214 million international migrants worldwide were females. In Sri Lanka, women migrants have increased for the period during 1996-2009 with the exception of 2008 where male comprised 51 percent of the total migrants. The contribution of formal foreign employment remittances to Sri Lankan economy was *LKR* Million 382, 801 in 2009. Migration also alleviates unemployment and income deficiency among the poorer segments of Sri Lanka's population. Nevertheless, domestic women workers in ME are subjected to abuse, violence, salary discriminations and inhuman working conditions. Limited research has been undertaken to identify problems of domestic women workers in ME. The objectives of this study were to; identify the problems faced by female migrants, examine the reasons for the identified problems and identify the institutional intervention in the prevention of problems. A total of 60 female returnees including 39 from *Kuliyapitiya* West Divisional Secretariat Division and 21 returnees who had come to complain their problems to Foreign Employment Bureau were selected for the study. The overall findings highlight that, 83% of female migrants have been suffering from mental and physical harassment and salary discriminations. They have also been deceived by job agents regarding the workload and salaries. The study further revealed that the problems were highly dependent on migrant's age, gender, ethnicity, education level and pre-migration training.

Key words: Gender, Middle East, Female migrants, Returnees