

## Re-migration intention among urban migrants in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

Literature on urban migration in Sri Lanka over the past decades has emphasized that migration plays a vital role in urban population dynamics. Since 1977 Gampaha district of the Western Province has become a popular urban-ward migration destination and a significant proportion of young people have migrated to engage in employments, especially in Free Trade Zones (FTZs). Many studies have focused on determinants of urban migration and there is lack of research on re-migration intentions of urban migrants. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the issues faced by urban migrants and factors influencing urban-ward migration and re-migration intentions. The study is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from selected urban communities in Gampaha urban areas. Data were obtained from a sample survey using an interviewer administered questionnaire covering 400 migrant households. Qualitative information was gathered using in-depth interviews. Descriptive analysis and logistic regression were used for quantitative data while content analysis was used for the qualitative data. Findings revealed that the male-headed households were higher than their female counter parts. More than half of the respondents (60 percent) had secondary education or below. More educated migrants had higher intentions to re-migrate due to disturbances faced in the current urban living. Urban to urban migration (59.7 percent) was higher than the rural to urban migration. Factors such as marriage, development programmes, family reasons and respondents' age at migration were the major factors influencing urban migration. The qualitative findings also discovered that inadequate social amenities and poor economic backgrounds lead to urban-ward migration and after. However, migrants intended to re-migrate in search of more comfortable livelihoods after experiencing negative consequences of migration. Findings suggest that improving physical infrastructure and human capital utilization at rural contexts reduce the negative consequences of urban-ward migration.

**Keywords:** factors, influencing, urban migration, households, re-migration

### Introduction

#### Background of the study

In most developing countries there has been a rapid growth rate of urban population in the highly urbanized areas than that of sub-urban or rural population. China and India among South Asian countries account for 30 percent of the world's urban population (United Nations Population Division, 2014, 2013) [9]. Sri Lanka is a typical example for this. There have been tremendous crowded communities in urban areas due to the increase in urban-ward migration. In 2001, the urban population was 14.6 percent of the total population while by 2012 the urban population was 18.2 percent of the country's population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2001, 2014) [2, 4]. Braunvan, (2004) [1] also indicated that the people would prefer to be pulled towards the prosperous areas and pushed from the unprosperous areas. In the Sri Lankan context, Colombo and Gampaha districts are the most populated districts due to various reasons. Among the districts of Sri Lanka, Gampaha has become an industrialized district since 1978. After the open economic system was introduced, the relationship between the level of development and level of urbanization has increased, mainly in the capital of the country and the Gampaha district.

The urbanization process offers more employment opportunities, better infrastructure facilities, communication and other services for the urban lives. To utilize these benefits most rural youths have migrated to urban areas, especially in the Free Trade Zones in the Gampaha district

as well as the Colombo district (Ranabahu, 2004; Ranathunga, 2011) [4, 6]. However, urban-ward migration is a common occurrence in Sri Lanka like in other developing countries and it has influenced urban population dynamics and creates many implications on the urban environment and the wellbeing of urban population. As a result of these issues, urban migrants tend to re-migrate further away from the highly urbanized areas.

#### Objectives

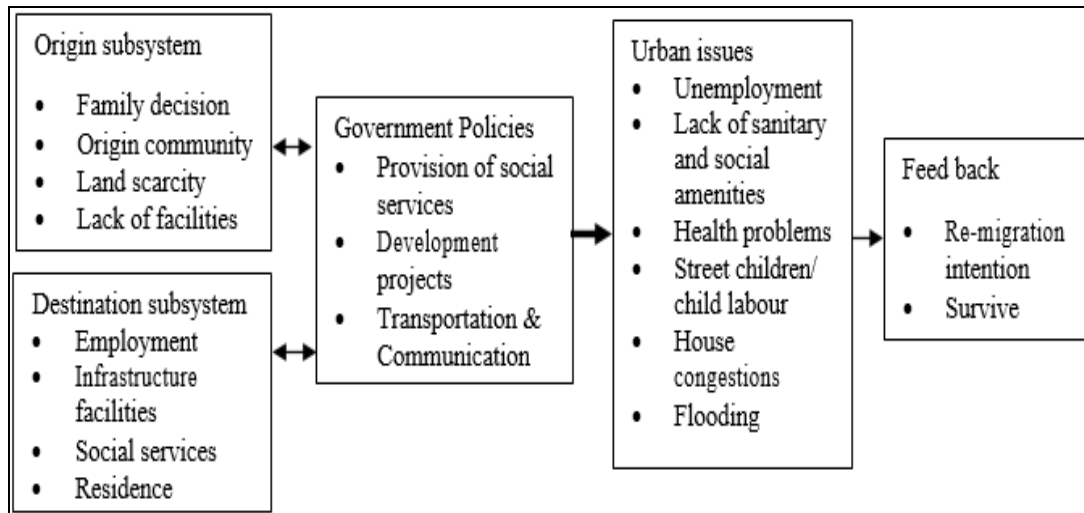
The main objective of the study was to investigate the issues faced by urban migrants at the urban destinations which are associated with rapid population growth and rapid urbanization. In addition, specific objectives include;

- To examine factors influencing urban-ward migration
- To identify the reasons influencing the re-migration decision.

#### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the internal migration process is shown in mainly two sub-system; place of origin and place of destination. The origin sub-system is controlled by the decision of the family, traditional laws and origin communities which influence individual or family-level migration to urban areas. The urban destination sub-system tends to motivate migrants to migrate into urban areas due to social amenities, employment opportunities and other social services that sustain the livelihoods in urban areas. Further, the presence of relatives and friends in urban

communities is one of the important factors influencing urban-ward migration.



Source: Adjustment of Mabogunje system approach of rural to urban migration (1970)

Fig 1: The Conceptual Frame Work

**Materials and methods**

The study was carried out in the Gampaha district because of its high concentration of urban migrants from different areas of the country. Three urban areas were selected for this study covering 400 migrant households while considering the volume of migration and the level of urbanization. First, three urban areas have been selected by applying the quarter sampling method. Secondly, highly urbanized and highly migrated Grama Niladhari (GN) divisional areas (10 GN Divisions) were purposely selected and a sample frame prepared according to the household lists of each GN division. Finally, migrants were identified in each GN divisions and migrant household units were selected by using the simple random sampling method (40 migrant households were selected in each GN division). In-depth interviews and case studies were conducted to gather qualitative information regarding social implications on the households and the destination community. In-depth interviews were done as representing households and authorities of the Urban Council areas. Descriptive analysis was used to identify the characteristics of migrants. The Logistic regression model was adopted to identify the factors influencing re-migration intentions. Finally, the content analysis was applied for the qualitative data to identify the issues of urban migration at destination and reasons of re-migration intentions.

**Findings of the study**

Migrant families decided to migrate from one place to another by demographic characteristics of migrants, socio-economic, political and environmental factors while economic factors play a vital role in influencing rural to urban migration. Among the reasons of migration, the decision to migrate to urban locations mainly includes employment issues in the agricultural sector and low wages at the origin place. The descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of migrants belong to the middle age group and most of them are employed in informal sector employments at the urban destination. Also, it is found that the male-headed household proportion was higher than their female counterparts. More than two-thirds of the male headed households were represented in the reproductive age group.

Around 60 percent respondents have secondary or below secondary level education. According to their employments, most migrant families (approximately 58 percent) have low income and they have become the more vulnerable group in urban lives.

Quantitative analysis was applied to find the reasons for the urban-ward family migration. The Logistic Regression analysis was applied to fit a model in the examination of the relationship between the dependent variable (migration or non-migration) (Y) and the independent variables of employment purpose (X1), marriage (X2), government development programmes (X3), purpose of permanent residence (X4), family reasons (X5), and respondents’ age (X6). The following Table shows the Logistic Regression results:

Table 1: Logistic Regression for urban-ward migration and other variables

Variables	Coefficient	Exp. (β)
Employment purpose	0.760	2.138
Marriage	1.176*	3.242
Government development programme	2.888***	17.953
Permanent residency	0.737	2.089
Family reasons	2.372**	10.720
Respondent’s age at migration	-0.079***	0.924
Constant	-2.518	0.081

Source: Field survey, 2014

Note: \*\*\* significant at the 0.001 level, \*\* significant at the 0.01 level and \* significant at the 0.05 level

Table 01 shows that the independent variables; marriage and development programmes launched by the government were positively related to urban-ward migration while respondent’s age at migration was negatively significant on the dependent variable.

Further, qualitative findings revealed that the elderly and educated migrants prefer more to live in serene environments. Moderately educated migrants had higher intentions to re-migrate far away from the highly urbanized areas due to urban disturbances and environmental issues faced in current urban living. Also, migrant families who had faced the tsunami disaster are more interested in re-

migrating to their place of origin because of their employment issues and their children's education problems. In addition, social implications such as house congestion, flooding, garbage disposal problems, lack of space, air pollution and drug abuses encouraged the re-migration decision. Even though in the developing world urban-ward migration and urbanization are serious global phenomena, most rural to urban migrated families prefer to move to the suburban areas.

### Conclusion

According to the findings of the study, it has been revealed that rural to urban family migration has also influenced the increase in the urban population growth urban areas in Gampaha. In turn it influences the increase of urban socio-economic issues such as scarcity of land, social amenities, inadequate health and sanitary facilities, child labour and drug abuses. To overcome the above difficulties, this study suggests that useful and common amenities such as pipe borne water facility, electricity, entertainment facility and other infrastructure facilities should be provided in the suburban and rural areas. More competitive, good educational facilities and increased human capital in the education field should be made available outside the urban areas. Also, small scale industries should be established in the suburban and rural areas and the raw materials produced in villages should be utilized in order to provide employment. By-laws should be implemented to prevent or reduce the negative impact of urban-ward migration, as a long term solution. Finally, the findings suggested that public services and institutions should be decentralized into the suburban and rural areas.

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