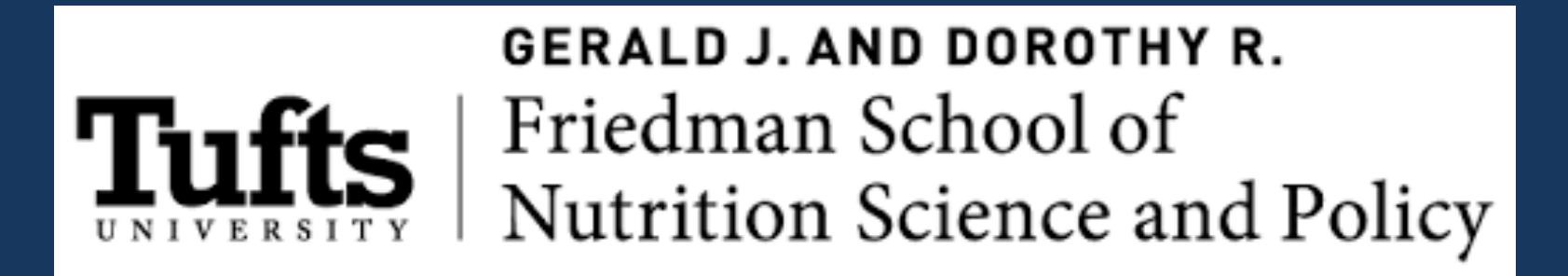


Effect of Male Migration on the Women-Left-Behind: Case Study of Maulali, Far Western Nepal



Jeeyon Janet Kim, MSPH



BACKGROUND

In 2010, it was estimated that 30% of the total male population was absent in Nepal. Compared to global figures where women make up about half of the world's migrant population, 90% of Nepalese migrants are men. Many men also migrate alone without their family, living temporarily away from home to earn wages.

There is a tendency for empirical studies to focus on the *monetary* impact of migration. Remittances constitute almost one third of Nepal's GDP and their contribution to poverty alleviation is well-noted. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the non-monetary impact of migration on the household-left-behind. The social and cultural ties between the migrant and the household left-behind and the effect of *social* remittances remain under-explored. The people who are left-behind are "often invisible, and their role, experience, wellbeing and interconnectedness with the practice of migration are not well understood" (Gartaula, Visser, Niehof 2012, p. 402).

The limited research on the non-economic effect male out-migration may have on the families left behind has thus far yielded inconclusive findings. Moreover in Nepal, studies examining the effect of male out-migration on women-left-behind (WLB) have been limited in scope and focused only in the hills and *terai* (southern plain region) ecological zones and remain unexplored in the mountainous ecological zone of Nepal.

STUDY SITE

Maulali is an isolated Village Development Committee in the Far Western region of Nepal (Table 1; Figure 1). Nearly all households are engaged in agriculture and annual migration to the *terai* and India is common. Migration in Maulali is highly gendered with most able-bodied men seeking opportunities and leaving behind their wives and family (Figure 2 & 3, Spring 2016). Most migrants stay away for extended periods of time; the survey suggests that only 35.9% of migrants return to Maulali at least every six months, and 28.1% have not returned in over three years.

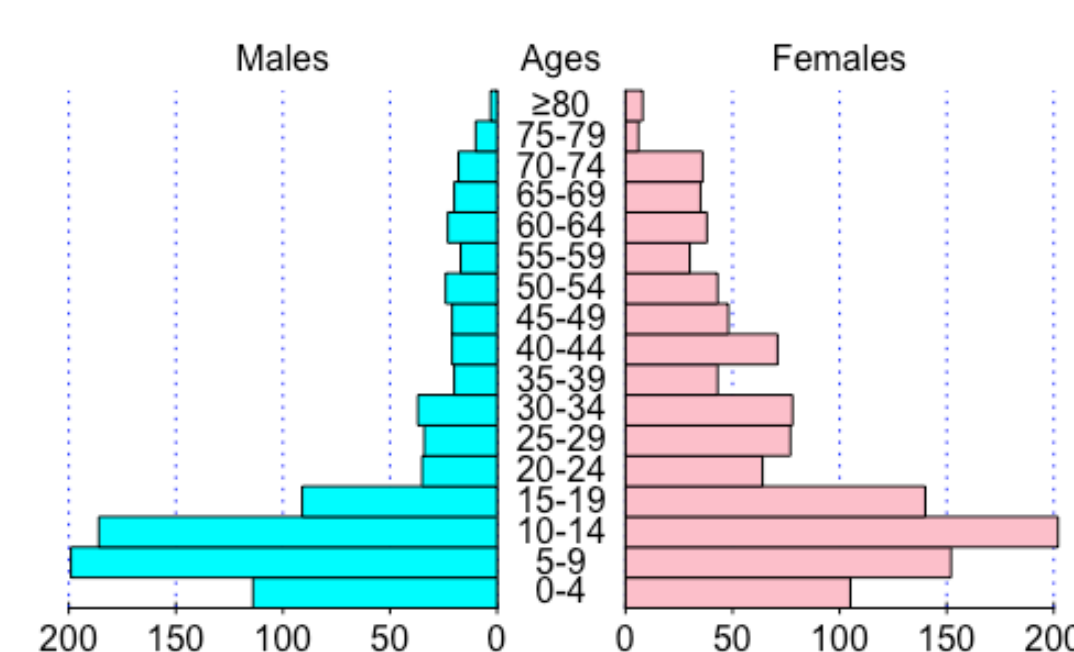


Figure 2: Maulali Population Pyramid

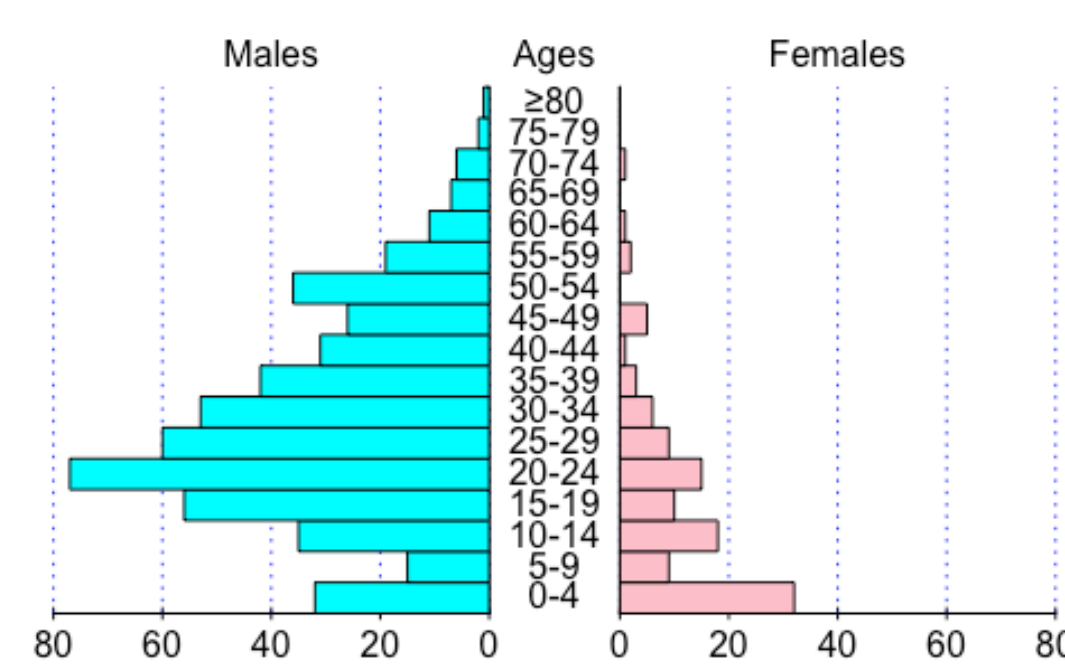


Figure 3: Maulali Migrant Population Pyramid

METHODS

Table 1: Study Site Characteristics (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

Number of households	623
Total population	3413
Members/household	5.5
Sex ratio (male/female)	0.85
Sex discrimination	Very high
Caste discrimination	High
Migration population	1018 (23%)
Infrastructure	No consistent access
Food insecurity (2008-2014)	Moderately Severe
Poverty headcount	53.9%
Male literacy	73.2%
Female literacy	40.2%
Access to safe water	44.1%
Access to safe sanitation	4.5%

Figure 1: Maulali, Far Western Nepal



Table 2: Focus group discussions by respondent categories

	Male	Female	Total by Caste
High Castes	9	8	17
Low Castes	3	4	7
Total by Gender	12	12	24

The central research questions of this qualitative case study were:

- What are the effects of male out-migration on women-left-behind's workload and role in decision-making processes?
- What factors hinder and/or facilitate these effects?

Between February 2016 – March 2017, the study conducted 24 focus group discussions and 47 iterative in-depth interviews. Respondents were recruited through stratified purposeful sampling by caste, gender, and migration status (Table 2). All interviews and discussions were conducted in Nepali through a translator.

Data analysis is currently underway using NVivo.

Acknowledgements: This study was conducted as part of *Promoting Agriculture, Health, and Alternative Livelihoods (PAHAL)*, a USAID funded project. JJK gratefully acknowledges the PAHAL study team at the Feinstein International Center, her dissertation committee members (Drs. Mark Constanas, Daniel Maxwell, Elizabeth Stites, Patrick Webb) and the Friedman Fellowship for their continuing support. This study would not have been possible without Ms. Gomati Awasthi, translator extraordinaire, and the generosity of the respondents from Maulali.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Women-left-behind's workload:

- Heavy un/unpaid work burden on women in absence of men
- Challenges with child care/discipline
- Dependence on (male) labor exchange
- Maintenance of gendered responsibilities and role

*When men go to India, it obviously impacts the family left behind. They have to do more fieldwork. They have to cut grass and fetch firewood. There is too much work to do. They have to do everything. They carry from market and carry load. Discipline becomes difficult. Children don't listen to their mother. They are less obedient. **When we leave, everything comes on the head of women** (Focus group discussion with high caste men)*

Women-left-behind's decision-making roles:

- Maintenance of patriarchal decision-making roles
 - Operational vs. substantive
- Factors hindering WLB's decision making role:
 - Economic dependence
 - Lack of "courage"
 - Illiteracy/limited education
 - Household structure
 - Technology (ex. cellphones)
 - Existing work burden

We believe that women should have power to make decisions, they should make major decisions. But we cannot do it... We need to earn and have money to have decision-making power. Earning money and having employment gives confidence. It gives power to women. Then they can do these things... I don't have money so I depend completely on my husband. (Focus group discussion with low caste women)

We buy vegetables, salt, washing powder, meat, fruit, clothes, sandals, books and pens. I decide how we spend, not bahini (second wife)... We have to ask our husband if we need a loan, if we need to buy things in credit. We have to ask someone who is bigger/senior... We have to ask tulo manche (translates to big people, referring to seniority not age)... My husband is higher status than me. Husbands have higher status. Always. (In-depth Interview #2 with high caste woman whose husband is in Bangalore, India)

IMPLICATIONS

While data analysis is ongoing, preliminary results show that:

- Male out-migration is a central economic fact for households in Maulali
- Migration brings both risks and benefits for the migrant and his sending households.
- Effects of migration are highly gendered, with the absence of men inferring a higher work burden on women-left-behind and added stress of managing household-level decision making roles.
- Programs should prioritize ways to support the women and children who remain behind.