

Association between GCE Ordinary Level results and characteristics of foreign employment of parents of Advanced Level students in a national school in Wennappuwa

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ABSTRACT

Background:

Migration of parents seeking foreign employment has become an important issue, due to effects on their children's health and educational performance. Such effects can depend on the characteristics of the parents' foreign employment.

Objective:

To determine the association between academic performance and characteristics of foreign employment of parents in General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A/L) students of a national school in Wennappuwa.

Method:

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among randomly selected 110 A/L students whose parents are foreign employees. Information on socio demographic characteristics, GCE Ordinary Level (O/L) results and characteristics of foreign employment of their parents were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test were used to analyse the data.

Results:

Majority of the parents of the study participants were employed in Italy (77%), more fathers employed abroad than mothers. A significantly higher proportion of students with fathers employed in foreign countries for less than or equal to 10 years had better academic performance than the proportion of students with fathers employed in foreign countries for more than 10 years ($p=0.02$). No significant association was found between the child's academic performance and the category of parent's employment, country of employment, number of visits to Sri Lanka and the duration of the mother's employment.

Conclusions:

The GCE O/L results of this group of students was associated with a shorter duration of employment of the father overseas, but not with the country of employment, category of employment, which parent is employed and the regularity of visits back home.

Background

A foreign worker is a person who works in a country other than the one in which he or she is a citizen. Even though migration of parents helps in uplifting the financial status of the family, it has many negative

implications. Foreign employment of parents directly results in deterioration of foundation of the family and affecting the individuals of the family adversely[1].

A confiding relationship between the carer and the



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child is important to the child's socio emotional development and wellbeing. It has been proved that the absence of mother from the country caused a twofold increase in mental health problems of children[2].

The parent involvement in a child's life has a significant impact on the child's growth and development. Hence, the children whose parents are abroad for foreign employment show less-interest towards their education[3]. In North America, it has been found that the separation from fathers reduced the educational attainment for whites and Hispanic children[4]. A study about Mexican migration to USA on gender, educational attainment, and the impact of parental migration on children left behind reports a drop in educational performance with the father being employed abroad[5]. Another study from Philippines concludes that "the children of migrant mothers are significantly more likely to be lagging behind in school when compared to the children of migrant fathers"[6].

Literature also shows that both reduced school performance and neglected health are two closely related effects affecting the left behind children of migrant parents. A survey conducted in the Hunan Province of China, involving rural children aged from 8 to 18, has shown that "left-behind children were disadvantaged in health behaviour and school engagement than the children living in non-migrant families"[7].

In Sri Lanka, the North Western Province has the highest number of foreign employment seekers after Western Province. A considerable number of them from this province are from the Puttalam District[8]. The association of parental foreign employment and academic excellence of children in the Puttalam District in Sri Lanka has not been investigated before. This research was carried out to bridge the gap between the current knowledge on parental migration in Sri Lanka and its effects on the children's education. The objective of this research was to determine the association between academic performance and characteristics of foreign employment of parents in General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level (GCE A/L) students of a national school in Wennappuwa.

Methods

In a descriptive cross-sectional study, 110 participants from Grade 12 A/L students, aged 16-18 years, from a national school in Wennappuwa were selected, using random sampling. The school main register for the first year A/L students was obtained and numbered. Random numbers were generated and students matching the numbers were selected. Participants who fulfilled inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected until sample size was

completed. The students who passed the GCE O/L in the first attempt, with one or both of their parents being employed abroad for a minimum period of 6 months were included in the study. The selection of this particular school was for convenience.

Primary data were obtained by using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised questions inquiring into the socio-demographic features and GCE O/L results of the participants, and the characteristics of foreign employment of their parents. The socio-demographic factors collected were school of primary education, distance from home to school, accommodation, educational level of the father and mother, and the presence of elder and younger siblings.

The GCE O/L results were categorized into two categories: more than or equal to four S passes but less than four B passes; and four B passes or more. The characteristics of foreign employment of parents were categorized as: status of foreign employment (only mother, only father), caregiver of the participant (parent, other); country of foreign employment (Italy, other); mother's category of foreign employment (skilled, non-skilled); duration of mother's foreign employment < 4 years, more than 4 years); mother's number of visits to Sri Lanka (once or more per year, other); father's category of foreign employment (skilled, non-skilled); duration of father's foreign employment (< 10 years, more than 10 years); and father's number of visits to Sri Lanka (once or more per year, other).

The association between the GCE O/L results and the characteristics of foreign employment was analysed using Chi square test at a significance level of $p < .05$. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo.

Results

The response rate was 100%. All the participants were male and Sinhalese. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1.

The characteristics of foreign employment of parents are shown in Table 3. Majority had only the father employed abroad. Most of the parents were in Italy and were employed for a long duration (e.g. 10 years or more for fathers and 4 years or more for mothers). The GCE O/L results of the students were categorized as shown in Table 2.

Table 3 shows the association of the characteristics of parental foreign employment with the GCE O/L results of students. A significant association was found between the GCE O/L results and the father's foreign employment duration ($p = .02$). No associations were found between the GCE O/L results and the duration of mother's employment, country of employment, category of employment, which parent is employed and the regularity of visits back home.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample

	Number (N=110)	Percentage (%)
School of primary education		
Joseph Vaz College	96	87.3
Other	14	12.7
Distance from home to school (km)		
< 5	72	65.5
5-10	30	27.3
>10	8	7.3
Accommodation		
Own home	98	89.1
Relative's home	9	8.2
Hostel	3	2.7
Presence of elder siblings		
Yes	67	60.9
No	43	39.1
Presence of younger siblings		
Yes	39	35.5
No	71	64.5
Father's Education Level		
Tertiary Level	7	6.4
Advanced Level	68	61.8
Ordinary Level	1	0.9
Grade 8	34	30.9
Mother's Education Level		
Tertiary Level	2	1.8
Advanced Level	41	37.3
Ordinary Level	64	58.2
Grade 8	3	2.7

Table 2. GCE O/L results of students

O/L Results	Number (N=110)	Percentage (%)
4 S passes or better but less than 4 Bs	46	41.8
4 Bs or more	64	58.2

Discussion

Our study found that there is an association between GCE O/L results of students and the duration of employment of the father. The students who had fathers employed abroad for more than 10 years performed worse by a statistically significant degree than the students with fathers employed abroad for less than 10 years. This finding is in agreement with the study on “gender, educational

attainment, and the impact of parental migration on children left behind”[5]. The above study found a drop in educational performance with the father being employed abroad[5]. This study, however, did not compare the different durations of foreign employment of the father with the educational performance.

Our study discovered that there was no association between educational performance and the duration of mother being employed abroad. This is contradictory to the results of the study conducted in Philippines that concluded: “the children of migrant mothers are significantly more likely to be lagging behind in school when compared to the children of migrant fathers”[6]. This may be related to the smaller number of mothers involved in our study.

Our study found no association between educational performance and both parents being employed abroad when compared to a single parent being employed. This is also contradictory to the results of a study in Ghana, Nigeria and Angola” [9], again explained by the small sample size and a majority of fathers only working overseas.

The statistically significant association of the long duration of the father's foreign employment with the poor academic performance implies the importance of a father's presence for the wellbeing of a child. The absence of a statistically significant association between which parent is employed abroad implies that both parents are equally important for children's wellbeing. The absence of any statistically significant association between the category of employment indicates that it is the presence of the parent that matters and not the financial security provided by a better category of employment.

Our results, though mainly related to educational performance, would have important implications on the health and well-being of the children left behind by foreign employed parents. As shown in a study in China[7], it is not only the educational performance of the child that would be compromised when parents leave their children to seek foreign employment. Hence, in those children of foreign employed parents who are underperforming educationally should also be screened for other health and well-being issues.

This is the first study of its kind carried out in this region and hence provides some information regarding this problem. Although using GCE O/L results as a measure of academic performance provided a standard measure, there was no means of verifying the accuracy of the self-reported results by the participants.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study identified only one significant association that affect the performance at the GCE O/L results of this group of students. This was longer duration of employment of the father. The GCE O/L results of students were not significantly associated with mother's duration of employment, country of

Table 3. Characteristics of parents' foreign employment associated with students' O/L results

Characteristics of foreign employment	Number of students (N=110)	Percentage (%)	O/L results four B or better	O/L results four S or better but less than four B	Total	Significance
Status of foreign employment						
Only mother	9	8.2	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	9 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.338$ df = 2 p > 0.05
Only father	86	78.2	49 (57.0%)	37 (43.0%)	86 (100%)	
Both	15	13.6	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	15 (100%)	
Caregiver						
Parent	94	85.5	55 (58.5%)	39 (41.5%)	94 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.29$ df = 1 p > 0.05
Other	16	14.5	9 (56.2%)	7 (43.8%)	16 (100%)	
Country of foreign employment						
Italy	85	77.3	47 (55.3%)	38 (44.7%)	85 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 1.282$ df = 1 p > 0.05
Other	25	22.7	17 (68.0%)	8 (32.0%)	25 (100%)	
Mother's category of foreign employment						
Skilled	12	50	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	12 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.178$ df = 1 P > 0.05
Non- skilled	12	50	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)	12 (100%)	
Mother's duration of foreign employment						
<4 years	4	16.7	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)	4 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.320$ df = 1 P > 0.05
>4 years	20	83.3	12 (60.0%)	8 (40.0%)	20 (100%)	
Mother's number of visits						
< Once or more per year	10	41.7	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	10 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 1.143$ df = 1 P > 0.05
Other	14	58.3	10 (71.4%)	4 (28.6%)	14 (100%)	
Father's category of foreign employment						
Skilled	81	80.2	47 (58.0%)	34 (42.0%)	81 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.60$ df = 1 p > 0.05
Non- skilled	20	19.8	11 (55.0%)	9 (45.0%)	20 (100%)	
Father's duration of foreign employment						
<10 years	34	33.7	25 (73.5%)	9 (26.5%)	34 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 5.437$ df = 1 p < 0.05
>10 years	67	66.3	33 (49.3%)	34 (50.7%)	67 (100%)	
Father's number of visits to Sri Lanka						
Once or more per year	47	46.5	27 (57.4%)	20 (42.6%)	47 (100%)	$\chi^2 = 0.000$ df = 1 P > 0.05
Other	54	53.5	31 (57.4%)	23 (42.6%)	54 (100%)	

employment, category of employment, which parent is employed and the regularity of visits back home. However, there were many limitations in this study. Educating the school authorities and parents to provide better support to the students whose fathers are in foreign employment for a long duration and to conduct an island wide study, with a larger sample size, are recommended. Such a study should include both girls and boys from all age groups. Other performance indicators such as involvement in sports, extracurricular activities should also be assessed.

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