

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to investigate the impacts of parents' migration in relation to the socioeconomic status of the family and education of the left behind children. It also looked at the coping strategies with regards to migration in individual level, family level and community level. Ta Won Phan Ya village, Hlaing Bwe Township in Kayin State, Myanmar was chosen as a case study for investigation. The research used both quantitative surveys of 100 households samplings and qualitative technique of in-depth interview and focus group discussion with the left behind children, caregivers and the community key informants. The analysis of the impacts of parent's migration will be discussed in the following session.

5.1 Socio-economic Situation of the Families and the Community

According to the finding, the economic conditions and living standards of the families in this Ta Won Phan Ya was found in a better position after migration took place. About twenty percent households of the survey sampling were found as the well-to-do families and the majority is the average families who had regular income from remittances. Less than ten percent of the sampling was found to be poor families which the majority of them were non-migrant families.

Since there are Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centre and primary school in the village, all children have access to basic education. Young children below the age of five are well prepared before they join the primary school as they get chance to attend ECCD centre. However, the existing infrastructure (lack of secondary school and the distance between the school and the village) do not support for those who wants to continue their study. In terms of access to health services, there is a village clinic managed by the midwife. Other than modern medications for small injury and minor illness which uses at the clinic, traditional medicines also play the vital role for this community.

Since there is one main road passing through the centre of the village with regular public bus running, the transportation is relatively efficient. Moreover, with the Thai telephone line installed in the village, the communication is better than before. Convenient transportation and improvement in communication make local people's lives easier and contribute to smooth migration as well as reduction of trafficking case.

Seventy one percent out of the 100 surveyed households were found as migrant households in this community. It can be argued that the living standard of the families in this community benefits from migration. According to this study, thirty percent migrant population from the survey indicated that migration is relatively a better way for the family's living. Since migration has already been taken place more than a decade, it indicated that local people regard migration as a strategy to solve the family livelihood problem as well as used as an economic tool for progressive life.

5.2 Socio-economic Impacts of Migration on the Left behinds

Among the 71 migrant households of the survey samplings, 39 percent is the households that have one or both migrant parents. Since it constitutes over one third of the survey households, it can be believed that local people do not see parents' migration as a problem for the left behind family and the children. Migration of parents is seen as the norm by means of which parents struggle for their children. Parents themselves perceived that without migrating and working abroad, there will be no improvement in the status of their families and children.

The study found out that migration of parents has both positive and negative impact on the left behind children, the families and the community. Children and families gain economically and they are better off in terms of economic prosperity through the remittances from migrant parents. It indicates that transfer of remittances from migrants to the families is relatively smooth although it is through the unofficial channel. The strong network between migrants and the families, as well as with the

brokers is a key factor. In addition, the existence of telephone facility and improvement in transportation also smooth the flow of remittances.

Remittances obviously have positive effects, which show that they contribute to poverty reduction in the family and help children's access to education. Those remittances from parents provide educational supports for children such as school fees, books and supplies. Not only affordable for the school fees but money from remittances also support expenditures for schooling such as uniforms, Parents - Teachers' association fees, donation at school and equipment for transportation.

At the family level, remittances enable the families to solve their cost of living. In addition to the daily living, the families can also use such money to renovate the houses, repay debts, tax fees and other payments collected by the community. Through the remittances, families can do meritorious deeds such as hosting novitiation ceremony for sons and donation for religious affairs which is highly valued in their tradition.

The improvement in individual households contributes to the development of the community's living standard. Tax and contribution needed for the community can be collected without problems mainly because of the remittances. Like this, the community could do the social activities and host the festivals that give a good image for the community.

However, migration is not a stand alone matter. There are many negative impacts of migration, such as the attractive job opportunities from the destination countries as a pulling factor and less interest on farming, lack of job opportunity in the village and the evidence of improvement in living standard of the old migrants as the pushing factors. Those factors formulate migration to be happened and it affects to the different levels.

It is obvious that migration of parents affects children in many ways. Despite the economic well-being and improvements in social status, children were found

having desire to be with their parents. The emotions of children due to the absence of parents were not physically noticeable. Generally, by appearance, one can say that children are happy with their present life. Only when the in-depth interview was conducted, did they reveal their emotions when they were asked about their parents. They looked away, thinking hard as to how and what they should answer. One can state that they suddenly start thinking of their parents. Tears in their eyes are the evidence of missing their parents.

Children are found to be adaptable to the situation of living without parents. They feel distance and unattached from their parents due to the long separation since childhood. However, they still yearn for the complete family life. It can be assured that children are trying to adjust and adapt to the situation which is not a normal family life although they understand about the positive return in terms of money and materials. They did not grow up naturally in complete family as the other children who are with the parents. Children are obliged to accept the situation even though they do not really want that. They have to urge themselves to understand and accept the situation of being left behind by the parents. These conditions would be a possibility of become a trauma for them in a long run.

Since the left behind children had come across the experience of lack of parental care in their childhood, two extreme sentiments can be occurred to them when they become adult and get married. As a positive outcome from their experience, they might provide their children with full parental care which they had not been received when they were young. In a contrary, they might treat their children with the same experiences which they have encountered in their childhood. They will regard that their children will be survived without their cares as they themselves had not been grown up under parents' attention.

In terms of access to education, the study of Mexican migrant families revealed that remittance income from the migrant parents encourages them to invest in education and reflect their educational aspiration (Kendal & Kao, 2001). However, the finding in Ta Won Phan Ya village contradicts with the study in Mexican

children. The educational performance of the Kayin's left behind children was found not difference from that of non-migrants children. Moreover, the left behind children are even losing their interest in education due to lack of encouragements and emotional support from their parents. No matter how hard the parents try in other countries to provide the educational necessities for their children, it could not inspire the children to learn hard except to follow their parents' trend to migrate upon adulthoods.

According to the finding, it can be argued that migration of parents reduced children's motivation to learn in school. As a result of the separation from their parents, it appeared that they were just waiting for the time to migrate like their parents. Majority of the left behind children were found not having a strong aim to become an educated person. Moreover, children's aim to become a valuable person was totally depended upon their environment. Not much educated person was found to be well-to-do people in the community. Caregivers, due to their low literacy level, have less ability to explain the value of education to the children. This makes the children perceived education as an unworthy investment. Lack of role models in their surroundings makes children less ambitious for their future. The only role model for them is parents' migrating and work abroad.

In terms of educational performance, studies from Philippines showed that education of children left behind by migrant mothers were better off than children of non-migrants (Asis, 2006). This is due to the better education system in the Philippines which provide opportunities to bright up the children's future. However, this study shows no difference situation in education performances between the children of migrants and non-migrants. One of the reasons behind is due to the limited education service in the community as there is no secondary school in the village. The distance of school combining with the factor of grandparents' inability to work for the children make the children hesitate to go to school. Moreover, the education system of the country itself does not provide much incentive for the children. Many children lose their willingness to learn in school and they believe that only moving to other country will offer them good opportunity to learn and earn money.

In addition, according to the field research, low self confidence was found in some children particularly who live in the monastery where they did not receive parental care. Such kind of children are longing for the family life as they expressed during the interview. Adolescents, since they started to understand things well, they were found to have double emotion. As they see the economic gains from the parents' migration, they can accept the absence of parents but at the same time they also want their parents to be with them. They prefer to have a complete family life like their friends from non-migrant families. Since parents' migration has been in place for many years, the number of left behind children will be increased in the future. Although they have to accept this matter, they still see that parents' migration is not good for the children.

At the family level, since migrant parents can leave their children with the extended family members at home or relatives or at monastery and see it as a normal life style, children's feelings are not counted. Parents might not understand their children's inward feelings as children are physically appeared to be happy and satisfied. Thus, they will go on migrating and provide their children with financial supports which is not the real desire of the children. Migrant parents might think that they have fulfilled their duties by regular and adequate remittances. However, the most important thing for children which is not realized by the migrant parents is the physical and emotional supports from the parents.

Moreover, the left behind children do not have chance to take part in the family's production as the family does not work on the traditional farming like the previous time. Children have no involvement in family's work as the income is taking care by the parents. It makes them lose the connection to the family's bondage. Due to out-migration of many members from the family, the members lose attachment to the community but have desire to migrate to other place.

Since members of the left behind families see migration provide the positive return for the family, the flow of migration would be difficult to reduce. Instead, the numbers would be possible to increase. As a consequence, the village will become a source of cheap labours supply for the neighbouring countries particularly Thailand. Meanwhile, migration is also occurring in other villages in the township and throughout the Kayin state could become a source of labour supply. In addition, not only the area of Kayin State but also other parts of Myanmar will provide cheap labour unless the country provides employment opportunities for its citizens.

5.3 Coping Strategies

In the absence of parents, majority of the left behind children lived with their grandparents. Some others were either with the relatives or neighbour, and some at the monastery. Under a good care of their caregivers, children were able to fit into the environment even though they lacked the parental care. Caregivers, as per result from the field study, had capability to care for the children. In general, according to the field research, most of the caregivers particularly the grandparents devoted their time for the children. Only few grandparents in old age were found to have difficulties in bringing up the children. As migrant families had income from the parents' remittance, grandparents no longer worked in the farm but gave more time for the children. Other caregivers such as aunts, neighbours and headmistress also provided parental care to the children whom they had to look after. Monks, unlike the layman, also provided the necessary support for the children who stayed at the monastery. Adequate care and support from the caregivers made the children feel secure and adaptable to the environment.

In the nuclear families, while one parent migrates, children have been left with either mother or father at home. However, most of the families lived in the extended families that included children's grandparent(s) and other members who were still unmarried. Upon getting cares and attentions of other extended family members, the left behind mother or father did not have much difficulties of being away from the spouses. By sharing workload, burdens were reduced. Extended family members

provided physical and emotional support to the left behind spouses so that they were able to cope with the situation of being left with the children.

Some families, although they did not want their members to migrate, they had to agree as they could gain the return from migration. Both migrants themselves and the non-migrant members in the community felt and accepted migration as a normal process - a norm for survival and life. Thus, these left behind families will content with the situation even though they have more work load and they are able to adapt with it.

According to the research, the left behind children and the families could overcome the migration's situation through the remittances and communication. Majority of the migrant households were found they were dependent mainly on the migrant remittances. Since remittances were regular for most of the households, the families back home had less difficulty in financial problem. Lack of communication facilities were the barrier between migrants and the left behinds in the early days. Now, since the communication is convenient through the Thai cordless phones, both migrants and the family can make a call when it is necessary. This convenient communication tool enables migrant parents and the children maintain their family relationship through the contact.

The study found that the left behind families survive in the community through the help of community members, either in financial or personal supports. In terms of educational support for children, although the caregivers' education level is low, children still could learn at their teachers' home to do the school work. In addition, as there are local groups in the community, the families could seek assistance from those groups when they are in-needs. Through those supports, left behind families feel well and secure.

As migration of parents has already been long standing matter, it can be regarded as a normal way of life for a family, to have either one or both of the parents to be away working in a foreign country. Children can easily adapt to the environment

through the above mentioned supports. Children neither see nor feel that their parents' migration is a major problem. Children appeared to have fully understanding of their parents' migration and accepting the situation. Some children prefer their parents to be working abroad because parents can provide them money. This scenario shows that children regard their parents as a source of money and flows of goods for them, while they accept the absence of parents in the families. Meanwhile, children particularly older children see that parents value monies than their own children as they have left and migrated.

The study showed the significant aspects of remittance which benefits the family back homes. It also indicated the important role of the extended family members and community that provide warmness to the left behinds. Meanwhile, it revealed the downsides of parents' migration on the children and the families. Since parents' migration is likely to continue, the best way is to balance the advantages and the drawbacks for the best interest of the children.

5.4 Structural Analysis of Migration's Impacts

The research found that migration occurred due to the pushing and pulling factor from the sending and receiving countries. In Hlaing Bwe Township, although there is farming work as the local economy in the community, many people move to other countries particularly Thailand to receive earning for themselves as well as for their families. Local people no longer rely on the farming as it does not provide sufficient income for the family. Hence there is no motivation to go on farming. In addition to its low investment to the agriculture sector, the provision of updated appropriate technology by the government is almost nil. Moreover, the farmers have limited accessibility to the market. The government set quota and prices for the farmers to sell them rice at rates far below the prevailing market price. The farmers can only sell the rice that has remains after the allotted quota. Thus, no matter how hard the farmers work in the farm the whole year, there is no benefit for them. In addition to this, the obligation to pay tax to the DKBA and cash contribution to the government department makes the local people want to leave the place more. There is

also the success story of the former migrants in the community. Consequently, young and middle age people leave the farm work and migrate to neighbouring countries as they believe that they will receive better income by working in other countries.

Migration takes place in the family mainly because of the regular income. Due to migration of parents, the family could obtain their basic needs and there is an improvement in the family's living standard through the remittances. Parents consider that they fulfil their duties by sending regular remittance to their children. As the caregivers receive regular remittances from the children's parents, it is assumed that by looking after other's children the caregivers also benefit from the parents' remittance. This provides mutual benefit to both the parents and the caregivers. However, unnoticeably, money becomes the factor that influences the social relation among the three groups: children, parents and the caregivers.

Children have to stay mostly with the caregivers other than with the parents and they understand that their parents provide them financially. The caregivers, since those children are not their own, they do not treat them harshly. One of the grandmother mentioned that since they are her grandchildren, she could not treat them like her own children. Parents, since they are physically away from their children, they could not provide direct guidance to their children. The caregivers also have less ability to guide the children. This could be of two reasons: not their own children or low literacy level. Also, there is no one who can influence the children. This could have disastrous results especially when the children reach critical period in their lives, as in adolescent / puberty. This issue should be considered seriously. Usually, this is a factor that is easily overlooked. Absence of parents and lack of proper guidance can effect the children's future growth in his attitudes, his outlook and behaviour towards life in general.

The finding on the children's lower level of interest on education could be due to many reasons. The first reason is related to parents' migration. Children see that their parents could earn money working abroad without obtaining higher education. Another reason is unstable education system in Myanmar. Likewise, the education

system could not provide the children with career opportunities. Even after complete high school, children may think that the education they have obtained will not be applied to get a job. Another reason could be the encouragement from the community. It appears that the community invest in religion more than in education. The community members are very willing to donate for the religious affairs and to do the meritorious deeds. The satellite dish at the monastery and religious festivals all year round are the evidences. However, the proposal by the primary school teacher to extend the primary school to Post Primary School which could provide learning opportunity for the children was postponed.

The study found the changes in the community as a contribution to migration. The improvement in the infrastructure of the community is obvious for everyone to see. The improved housing condition contributes to the physical development of the community. The installation of Thai telephone lines contributes towards a smooth communication system providing opportunities for the migrant families to keep in touch each other on a regular basis. A change of life style in the community was also found. In the early days, people in the community used only the bullock cart and bicycle for transportation. Now, motorbikes are popular and its use is widespread.

It is obvious that the dependency on the remittances is growing instead of reliance on the traditional farming. The earning style of the community changed from self-reliance to dependency, farmers to migrants. Moreover, the remittances have been used only for solving short term problem such as day to day living, paying tax, etc. Investment for the future was not made. As people only think of migrating abroad and earn, there is no bonding within the community for its development. This situation will create economic and social transformation of the community, from traditional farming which is self-reliance economy to migration which is the dependent on the market economy.

5.5 Recommendation

The process of migration cannot be changed because it has already been in active for more than ten years in Hlaing Bwe Township. It is viewed as being positive in the local people's perspective. This cannot be stopped and the only alternative is to let it continue. Prevention for migration at this stage is not possible and the best alternative at the moment is to ensure that current socioeconomic conditions of the family is improved and sustained, thus contributing to the community's development and progress as well.

According to the field study, the research found out that most migrant parents perceive that only working abroad is the only means by which they could provide the necessities of the family and the children. To halt this occurrence is not possible for the moment. However, this idea needs to be re-considered whether remittance from cross-border parents is the most important thing for upbringing the left behind children. It can be argued that the migrant parents should have an alternative thought. For example, whether at least mother could stay with the children to a certain age in order to provide parental care and support before they decide to migrate, as mother could play both mother's and father's role.

As discussed in the previous chapter that the supporting factors for children education are related to existing welfare services and infrastructure. For example, the lack of secondary school in the village or the long distance between the high school and the village are the discouraged factors for children to pursue their higher education. Therefore, it is recommended that if the community would consider investing more in education like they do for the religious. That is to extend the Primary School to Post Primary School which was proposed by the primary school teacher. By doing so, all the children will be able to access the secondary level education in the village.

Since migration will continue in developing countries, there should be a collaboration and cooperation of all partners at different level, between community

level and state level to institute migration policy that will safeguard and protect their migrants. Internationally, there should have collaboration between the country of origin and destination country in order to protect migrants. For example, policy implementation to protect migrants should be enforced, such as the immigration regulations especially at border areas. As the loss of interest in farm work is one of the issues for migration, it is to recommend that an improvement in the country's agriculture system be made in order to support farming and agricultural sector. So that people will still keep their farms or keep doing their traditional farming even though their main income might come from non-agricultural sector. This idea will also benefit for the country since it prevents the decrease in rice production of the country. Lastly, since the main reason of migration is lack of job opportunities, this issue should be considered by the State itself. The important factor is to review the country's economic strategy that will reduce the unemployment of the citizens.

5.6 Further Research

Due to the limited time frame of the researcher, the findings will be limited. Thus, it is recommended to do further in-depth study on the transformation of the community from self-reliance to the dependency on the external income.

Since migration is a phenomenon of the situation in Myanmar, especially for the communities that share their borders with other countries, a similar study is recommended, such as the study of seasonal migration in Northern Shan State which shares the border with China or the daily migration from Rakhine state to Bangladesh.

Moreover, internal migration within Myanmar is also becoming trendy these days. People migrate from rural to urban areas, from small towns to big cities for economic reason as well as due to the attraction of the urban lifestyles. Thus, it is to recommend that a research should be done on the internal migration within Myanmar, either from rural to urban migration or migration from small towns to big cities.