

The CHAMPSEA (Child Health and Migrant Parents in South-East Asia) study is a research programme that examines the impacts of parental migration on the health and well-being of children who are 'left behind'. In 2008, CHAMPSEA collected information from approximately 1,000 households in each of the following Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. This was followed by a small number of in-depth interviews conducted in 2009. In Udon Thani, 42 families were interviewed at the qualitative stage.

Information was collected from the following respondents: a responsible adult (similar to the household head), the primary caregiver of the index child, and the index child. Two age groups of children were selected: young children (aged 3, 4 and 5 years) or older children (aged 9, 10 and 11 years). Structured interviews were also conducted with the older children to capture their views about parental migration and their own well-being.

In Thailand, researchers from Mahidol University surveyed 1,030 households in two Thai provinces with high rates of international out-migration: Udon Thani and Lampang. Thailand has been sending workers abroad since the 1970s. Udon Thani has been the province with the highest number of overseas migrants, while Lampang has the highest rate of overseas migrants in the Northern region. The sample includes 519 transnational households (486 of these had a father working abroad, 3 had a mother working abroad, and 30 had both parents working abroad) and 511 non-migrant households. The dominance of father-migrant households reflects the common acceptance of fathers working abroad over mothers in Thailand.

This report provides information about child health and well-being in the Lampang province. The following sections discuss aspects of household wealth, child nutrition, child psychological well-being, and child educational outcomes in relation to overseas parental migration. Additionally, the report includes some information about children's perspectives of their own well-being.

Household Wealth

One of the main reasons why families decide to send a household member abroad to work is to support the subsistence and wealth generation of the household. While we cannot say for certain that migration causes observed household wealth (or other circumstances), the data provides an interesting picture of household wealth among sending communities.

In Lampang, the majority of households interviewed owned land (84%) and almost every household owned the house that the family lives in (94%). The proportions of land ownership among transnational and non-migrant households were 85% and 82% respectively, while the figures for home ownership were 95% and 93% respectively.

Using a household wealth index that classifies households into three groups (low wealth, medium wealth, and high wealth), the survey shows that the proportion of high wealth households was not significantly different between transnational and non-migrant households (21% and 22% respectively). At the same time, the proportion of low wealth households was much larger among non-migrant households than transnational households (48% compared to 39%).

The survey also examined family savings. Data suggests that the percentage of households with savings of at least 60,000 baht was higher among transnational households than non-migrant households (23% versus 10%). The proportion of families interviewed in Lampang with savings of at least 60,000 baht was 23% for transnational households, and 13% for non-migrant households.

Child Nutrition

Measurements of height and weight were collected among children in households interviewed on the day of the survey. These measurements can be compared with other indicators of child nutrition because the procedures for collection and analysis followed international standards. Three indicators

are presented in the study: stunting (measured by HAZ), overweightedness (measured by BAZ), and thinness (measured by WAZ for children aged 3 to 10 years, and BAZ for children aged 11 years). A child is considered to be stunted if the HAZ is below -2 S.D., overweight if the BAZ is above 2 S.D., and thin if the WAZ or BAZ is below -2 S.D.

Among the children interviewed in Lampang, 7% were classified as stunted, 7% as overweight, and 9% as thin. The proportions of stunting and thinness were not significantly different across categories of age, gender, parental migration status, type of carer, or household economic status. Incidences of stunting seemed high among children aged 4 years, and those whose carers were not mothers, while thinness peaked among children aged 9 years. It should be noted, however, that these differences were not statistically significant. Significant differences were observed in overweightedness across different types of carer and household economic status. The proportion of children who were considered overweight was over four times higher among those whose carers were not their mothers as compared to children being cared for by their mothers (25% versus 6%). Overweight children were found most prevalent among high wealth households (13%) than in medium wealth (6%) or low wealth (5%) households. The proportion of children who were overweight also seemed high among children aged 9 years, although differences across age were not significant.

Child Psychological Well-Being

During the interviews with community leaders, a significant concern raised was the perceived increase in problem behaviours among children living in transnational households. The CHAMPSEA study used a standard measure, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), to examine child behaviour and psychological well-being.

In Lampang, the percentages of children classified as normal, at risk of having mental problems, and having signs of mental problems were 78%, 11%,

and 11% respectively. Our survey indicates that children from both transnational and non-migrant households showed similar patterns of psychological well-being. Young children (16%) were more prone to having psychological problems than older children (6%). In addition, when using the household wealth index as an indicator of economic well-being, results suggest that the percentage of children with psychological problems was highest among children from low wealth households. The proportion of children classified as abnormal was 16% in low wealth households, while the percentage from medium wealth and high wealth households were 10% and 6% respectively.

Child Education

Migrant sending families often speak of providing for children's education as a primary reason for choosing to work abroad. Among older children aged 9 to 11 years, almost all were currently enrolled in school. Information on educational progression was obtained from both carers and the children themselves.

In Lampang, 10% of the children were above average in terms of school performance, whilst 81% were classified as average, and 9% as below average. There were significant differences in school performance based on the migration status of households. Carers in transnational households reported a higher proportion of children performing above average in school than those among non-migrant households (15% and 6% respectively). Overall, a high proportion of index children were reported to have received a positive school report (57%), and only 9% had ever received a negative school report. While these differences were not statistically significant, carers in transnational households were more likely to report both negative and positive school reports as compared to those in non-migrant households.

Child's Perspective

One of the innovative aspects of the CHAMPSEA

study was to include information on children's perspectives. Children may offer a different perspective of their life circumstances compared to the adults around them.

We asked all older children (aged 9, 10 and 11 years) some questions about their perceived school performance and how much they enjoyed school. In Lampang, the percentage of those reporting themselves as doing better or much better than their classmates in school was 26%, while 64% reported fairing about the same, and 10% reported doing worse. Children from transnational households who reported doing better or much better than their peers accounted for 32%, while the percentage of those from non-migrant households was 21%. These differences were not statistically significant.

Almost two-thirds of the children interviewed always enjoyed school (65%), one fifth (21%) almost always, and 14% enjoyed school sometimes (including not at all). No significant differences were found among children from transnational and non-migrant households.

We also asked all the older children if they were happy or unhappy. In Lampang, half of the children interviewed reported that they were very happy, while 45% responded that they were happy. Only 5% thought of themselves as being neither happy nor unhappy. This figure was not significantly different among transnational and non-migrant households.

However, significant differences were found in the incidence of child labour. Although the prevalence of child labour in Lampang is small (8%), the percentage difference between children from transnational and non-migrant households was significant. Incidences of child labour were much lower among children from transnational households (4%), as compared to children from non-migrant households (11%).

Conclusion

In Lampang, our survey indicates that transnational

households enjoyed better economic status than non-migrant households. The study has identified some important differences among children based on household wealth, care arrangements and parental migration status. For example, a higher prevalence of mental health problems among children from low wealth families was noted. On the other hand, children from high wealth households and children who were cared for by non-mothers were more prone to being overweight. Also, children from transnational households were reported to have a higher percentage of positive school performance reports.

In addition, child labour (which may have important implications for the long-term educational achievement of children) was less prevalent among transnational households.

However, differences in mental health status were not found to be significant between children from transnational and non-migrant households. Based on children's perspectives, children from transnational and non-migrant households fared similarly in terms of school enjoyment and achievement.



The CHAMPSEA Study:

Preliminary Report for Lampang, Thailand

- A study of the health and well-being of children under 12 years of age
- A comparison of children whose parent(s) work abroad and children who live with both parents
- Covering 4,000 households in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam

The CHAMPSEA study was supported by the Wellcome Trust, UK [GR079946/B/06/Z], [GR079946/Z/06/Z].

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