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Reconsidering the Impact of Migration on Older Age Parents

A Case Study of Two Communes in Battambang Province, Cambodia

Analyzing Development Issues (ADI) Project, Cooperation Committee for Cambodia and University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)

ADI and UCSF thank the Doha International Institute of Family Studies and Development for their support in this collaborative research

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Abstract

This ADI study undertaken in collaboration with the University of California, San Francisco addresses two overarching questions: How does migration of adult children affect the well-being of rural older age parents who remain behind, and how does this migration impact intergenerational solidarity? The research was conducted in two communes of Battambang Province in June and July 2010 using quantitative and qualitative methods. A survey questionnaire with 265 parents aged 60 to 70 provides information about the respondents and their 1,268 children. In addition, 30 open-ended follow-up interviews conducted with a sub-sample of the elderly respondents richly supplement this data.

The research examines the consequences of migration for older age parents with respect to living arrangements of parents and children, migration impacts on parents' well-being, material support and monetary exchanges, social contact between parents and children, caring for grandchildren and parents' health and psychological well-being. The study indicates generally positive impacts of migration on the well-being of older-age parents. This lends some support to the idea that "modified extended family" relationships are emerging between older age parents and migrant children in Cambodia. At the same time intergenerational solidarity between parents and both migrant and non-migrant children takes place within an overall context of poverty. Families with fewer children, and a future of declining family size could impact on intergenerational exchanges.

Introduction

The movement of people from rural areas in developing countries to cities and across borders, primarily in search of employment, is an inescapable consequence of development and the globalization process. This type of labor migration has become persistent and an accelerating reality in many developing countries, including Cambodia (Chan, 2008). How this impacts on family members including intergenerational solidarity remains, however, a matter of considerable debate. International forums concerned with advocacy and mass media accounts tend to view migration as undermining the family and leading to the loss of economic, social and psychological support and personal care for elderly parents from absent children (Knodel et al, 2010). Older people being left behind to fend for themselves in rural areas due to the emigration of their adult children has also been a common account in the Cambodian literature.

A Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) study funded by the World Bank entitled *Moving Out of Poverty?* identified migration for wage employment as a critical channel for improving individual well-being. Yet the authors also cited the movement of people out of rural areas as driving demographic change towards an erosion of traditional sources of protection for older adults still living in these areas (FitzGerald et al, 2007). Another CDRI study undertaken in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank cites migration as accelerating the destabilization of rural areas: "as able-bodied young men and women desert village after village, while the old and the very young, along with the destitute, are left behind to tend the farms" (Murshid, 2007). In short, these statements imply that the migration of adult children away from their parents' home in rural areas of Cambodia has the potential of disrupting and eroding long-established and time-honored family values and norms that have worked to solidify the family and maintain intergenerational solidarity. These negative portrayals fit within a broader argument that views the general process of development, of which increased migration is an integral part, as undermining the extended family and its function as a source of old age support (Aboderin, 2004; Hendricks and Yoon, 2006; Hermalin et al, 2003).

Meanwhile, there are alternate perspectives that view the impact of migration on the family in the developing world in a less negative light. In much of this literature, migration is seen as part of a household strategy to diversify risks for families and benefit both migrant and non-migrant members, including older age parents who typically remain behind in the place of origin (Cai, 2003; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Lucas, 1988; Vanwey, 2004). Still, most of this literature is urban based and from the perspective of the migrants. Even when non-migrant family members are considered, few studies specifically address impacts on older age parents. In addition, the focus of these studies is typically limited to implications for economic exchanges rather than the fuller range of support that children potentially provide parents that would also include social interaction, assistance with daily living, and care giving services related to health.

One perspective that does consider a broader range of impacts and focuses more broadly on how family relations and structures change as societies pass from agrarian to industrial and then to postindustrial forms is that of the "modified extended family" (Knodel et al, 2010; Litwak, 1960, 1987; Smith, 1998). Rather than development leading to the demise of extended family relations, a modified form emerges that is adapted to the changed circumstances. According to this view, advances in technology, especially with respect to transportation and communication, permit family members to maintain close contact and to fulfill some, if not

all, of the responsibilities to each other, including obligations to older age parents that previously required geographical proximity. So far, the concept of a "modified extended family" has mainly been discussed in the context of economically advanced Western countries, especially in the United States. Nevertheless, the modes through which important family structures can be fulfilled over geographical distance and the extent to which they are maintained in a changing society merit exploration in the context of the developing world (Knodel et al, 2010).

Cambodia, the setting of the present research, provides a particularly interesting case for studying the consequences of migration on family life. The country experienced nationwide demographic movements during the Khmer Rouge and post-Khmer Rouge eras, which resulted in the resettlement of large groups of people in both urban and rural areas. These migrations culminated in the 1990s with the repatriation of thousands of Cambodian refugees from the Thai border and the government takeover of the final Khmer Rouge strongholds. As the conflict-induced migrations subsided, economic and social change provided impetus to market-driven migration out of rural areas into cities, principally Phnom Penh, and across international borders, mainly Thailand. In the 1990s Cambodia's transition to an open market economy spurred the rapid rise of the garment industry, growth in tourism and construction and further integration with regional and world markets. These developments generated large-scale labor demand facilitated by expanding communication and infrastructure networks. Meanwhile several factors encouraged young adults to migrate out of their parents' homes in search of work. These included high population growth, low productivity in agriculture, successive crop failures from droughts and floods during 2000/05, rapid decline of natural resources, loss of traditional access to natural resources, and the lack of rural industry (Murshid, 2007; FitzGerald et al, 2007; Analyzing Development Issues, 2005; Ang et al, 2007; Ballard, 2007; Lim, 2008).

The CDRI *Moving Out of Poverty?* study identifies migration for employment as a critical channel for improving the well-being of households and communities. At the same time the study cautions that migration is not a quick solution to poverty reduction as its impact is variable and often short term (FitzGerald et al, 2007). Research conducted as part of the CDRI *Participatory Poverty Assessment of the Tonle Sap* indicates that the effects of migration on household welfare are mixed. The flow of remittances from other than garment workers is characterized as volatile and unpredictable (Murshid, 2007). Chan's cross-country labor migration study (2009) concludes that economic benefits from labor migration outweigh the costs. The Analyzing Development Issues' study *Impact of the Garment Industry on Rural Livelihoods* (2005) illustrates the importance of garment factory work in the lives of rice farming households in Prey Veng Province. Nonetheless remittances were generally spent to support recurrent costs of subsistence rather than to start small businesses. Rural livelihoods were thus sustained, although not transformed, by the garment industry. A CDRI study based on the nationally representative Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2007 found that remittances have a greater impact on reducing the severity of poverty than on reducing the proportion of people living in poverty (Tong, 2010). While these studies provide insights into the effects of migration on household welfare the emphasis is largely economic without a specific focus on older age parents.

The 2004 Cambodia Survey of the Elderly revealed some important elements of Cambodian family life with respect to migration (Knodel et al, 2005). As in much of the world, the family in Cambodia traditionally has primary responsibility for older persons. The family therefore is responsible not just for providing material support for older members but also for assistance related to functional health including providing needed assistance with activities of daily living. Such support is especially critical for frail older adults. Given the necessity of being in close proximity in order to engage in intergenerational exchange, particularly that which is

related to daily physical needs, living arrangements has been an important part of the familial support system. The 2004 Cambodia Survey of the Elderly indicated that almost half of those 60 and older in Cambodia have at least one child living out of the province. At the same time over 80 per cent also have a child living nearby (Zimmer et al, 2008). This suggests the possibility of complex interactions among and across children and their parents with respect to support of various kinds. This includes physical support, which requires proximity, and material support, which does not. Whether a concomitant decline in support is occurring is an important but under-investigated issue.

Research Questions

The overarching questions addressed in this research are: How does migration of adult children affect the well-being of rural older age parents who remain behind, and how does this migration impact intergenerational solidarity? More specifically, the study seeks to examine whether the migration of adult children leads to the desertion and neglect of older parents, whether types of intergenerational exchanges differ depending upon the location of children, whether migrants and their parents maintain social contact, whether the net balance of material exchanges over the duration of the separation favor parents or children, and whether taking care of the migrants' children places a burden on the elders.

Research Methods

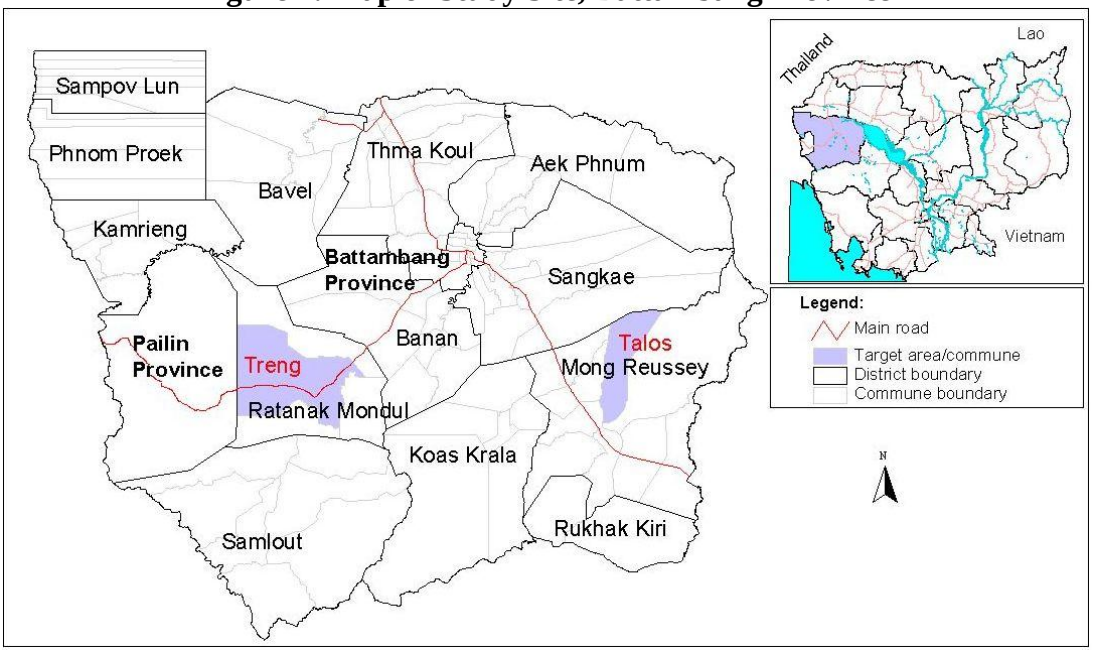
The study was conducted in two communes of Battambang Province in June and July 2010 using quantitative and qualitative methods. Battambang is bordered to the west by Thailand and Pailin Province and known to provide many laborers to Thailand and other Cambodian provinces, especially since the late 1990s. The quantitative data comes from a purposive survey of 265 respondents aged 60 to 70 and their 1,268 children. The information from the survey is supplemented by qualitative data from 30 open-ended follow-up interviews conducted with a sub-sample of the elderly respondents.

Cambodian provinces are administratively divided into districts which are in turn separated into communes. Battambang has thirteen districts and the study took place in two communes within two of these districts. The first study commune was Treng, one of four within the district of Ratanak Mondol. This commune lies on the western side of the province near, but not along, the border with Thailand. Highway 67, a main road that connects the provincial capital of Battambang and the provincial capital of Pailin Province, runs through the commune. At the time of the 2008 Census Treng had a population of 12,410 living in 2,534 households. The second study commune was Talos, one of eleven within the district of Mong Ruessey. This commune is situated on the south-eastern side of the province and is near Highway 5, a main highway that runs north to south across the province and connects the provincial capital of Battambang to the national capital of Phnom Penh. Talos is also near the province of Pursat. At the time of the 2008 Census the commune consisted of 1,765 households and had a population of 8,509 (Figure 1).

Communes are further divided into villages; the unit within which the sample was selected. Villages were selected purposively based on a combination of accessibility during the rainy season, when the interviewing took place, the ease of which a sampling frame could be accessed, and for some geographic spacing between villages. The sampling frames came in the form of household registers kept in the commune police office. These registers contain the name, sex, date of birth, and marital status of all people in all households within villages. The commune of Treng has eight villages, five of which were selected for study. Talos has nine

villages, and again, five were selected for study. Two additional villages in Talos were used in the study pre-test.

Figure 1: Map of Study Site, Battambang Province



The current study selected households that contained an individual born between 1940 and 1950 from the registers and sought to interview one person from each household that contained such an individual. The list of people born within this time period was verified by the village chiefs of their respective village and those who had moved away or died were eliminated from the list. Village chiefs also added new residents not on the list. During the verification process with the village chiefs, spot maps were made that identified the specific households in which the potential respondents lived. Interviewers then visited the villages and were dispersed to eligible households to conduct the interviews. In cases where there was more than one eligible respondent a random selection was made on whom to interview.

There were no refusals, for everyone who was contacted was interviewed. If a respondent was not available the interviewer attempted a contact on another day and at times appointments were made to return. However, some eligible respondents were not available at the time the interviewer visited, often because they were out working in their farm at the time. The response rate was 80 per cent. The survey interviews were completed within five days in June 2010. The 265 respondents interviewed were almost equally divided between the two study sites with 131 from Treng and 134 from Talos.

In July 2010 the researchers returned to Treng and Talos communes to conduct open-ended interviews. In all, successful interviews were completed with a subset of 30 respondents and 2 commune officials. Each interview lasted an average of an hour. The purpose of the interviews was to allow respondents to relate in their own words narratives about their relationships with both their migrant and non-migrant children. The open-ended nature of the interviews provides important complementary information to the data obtained through the survey questionnaires. As such, the combined analysis of these two data sources permits a mixed-method approach that goes beyond what is possible by relying on the quantitative data alone. Selected literal quotations have been drawn from the transcripts and incorporated into the analysis to facilitate interpretation of specific quantitative findings. The qualitative interviews thus illustrate how various specific survey findings fit together to provide a holistic picture grounded in the reality as viewed by the research subjects.

Structure of the survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire used to interview parents not only has extensive questions about the respondent and spouse (if living) but also solicits extensive information about their living children. One set of questions asks specifically about children who ever moved from their parent's district for either a continuous period of at least one year or who made multiple shorter term moves that added up to at least one year. This constituted our initial definition of migration with the caveat that children who remained in the original districts of their parents after their parents had migrated to the study sites were not considered as migrants. An additional set of questions asks about "return migrants" i.e. those who met this definition of migration but had returned and were currently living in the parental district. Such detailed sets of questions were not asked, however, about children who had recently moved out of the district but who had not yet been away continuously or cumulatively for at least a year.

Another set of questions asks about every living child of the respondent including their current location and exchanges with parents during the previous year regardless of migration status or duration. Thus, the groups of children that are compared with each other differ somewhat in the following analyses depending on which set of questions provides the relevant information for a particular dependent variable. Some analyses compare children solely in terms of their current location. In these analyses, a small number of children who live outside their parents' district are not strictly migrants since it was the parents who actually moved rather than the child. Other analyses compare migrant children who were gone for at least one year (continuously or cumulatively) but exclude those children who recently left the parental district and have not yet been away for a year.

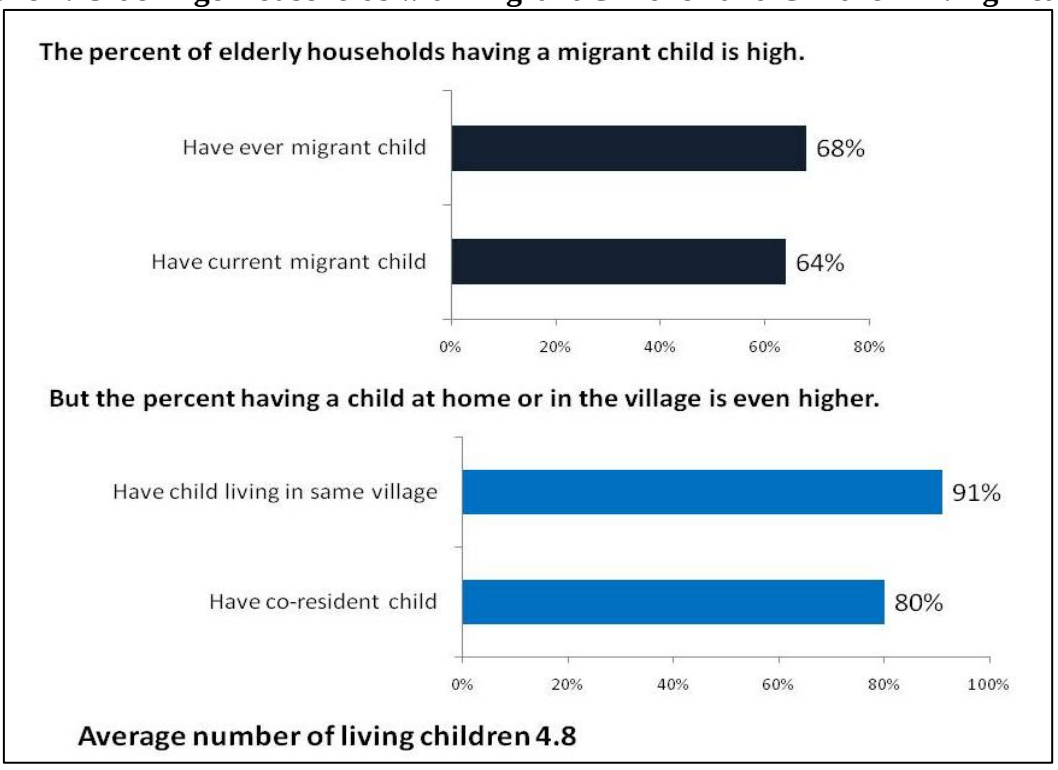
Research Findings

Research findings are discussed under six major headings: living arrangements of parents and children, migration impacts on parents' well-being, material support and monetary exchanges, social contact between parents and children, caring for grandchildren and parents' health and psychological well-being.

Living Arrangements of Parents and Children

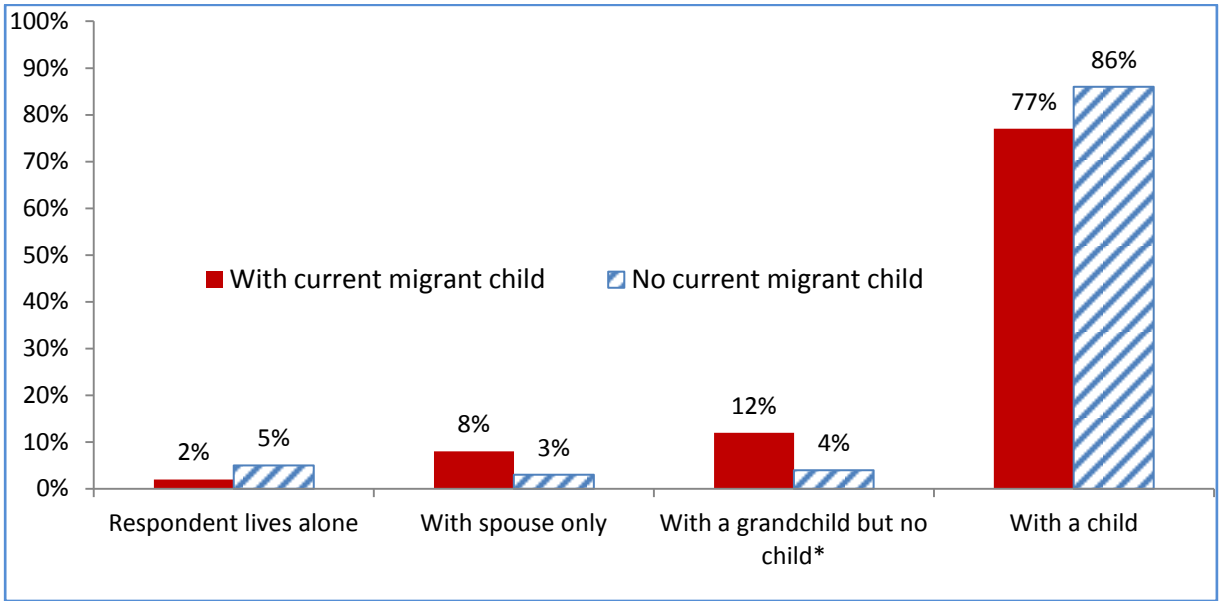
The findings of our study indicate that migration but not desertion characterizes the older-age households surveyed. A high percentage of the elderly households reported having a migrant child. And yet an even higher percentage stated that they had a child living at home. Almost two-thirds of the respondents had a current migrant child while four-fifths had a co-resident child. This indicates that the elderly parents had not been left alone despite the high migration rates of their children. This may be explained by the high fertility rate of this cohort of parents. On average, the respondents had 4.8 living children. This allowed some children to migrate and others to remain behind in the homes or villages of their parents (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Older Age Households with Migrant Children and Children Living Nearby



The study also compared the living arrangements between the respondents who had a current migrant child and those who did not. If older-age parents with a migrant child were typically left alone we would expect large percentages of them to live without a child in the household. This was not the case. More than three-fourths of the respondents with a current migrant child also lived with a child. Interestingly, respondents with a current migrant child were less likely to live alone than respondents with no current migrant child, although the former were more likely than the latter to live only with a spouse or with a grandchild but no child. However, the differences in all these cases were small (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Living Arrangements of Older Age Respondents



***Includes respondents living only with grandchildren, with spouse and grandchildren but no child and with other relatives and grandchildren but no child.

Migration Status of Children

Among the 265 respondents 60 percent were female. A majority of the respondents (60 percent) were married with most of the remainder widowed (35 per cent). Overall, there were no statistically significant differences between the elderly respondents based on sex and current marital status with respect to the migrant status of their children. However, a significantly higher percentage of elderly households in Talos commune had ever migrant children compared to those in Treng commune (Table 1).

Table 1: Percent of respondents in relation to migration status of children by commune, sex and marital status

Percent of respondents with any	Total	Commune		Sex		Currently married(a)	
		Treng	Talos	Men	Women	No	Yes
Number of cases	265	131	134	106	159	105	160
Co-resident child	80.0	80.2	79.9	82.1	78.6	78.1	81.3
Child living in the same village (b)	91.3	92.4	90.3	95.3	88.7	87.6	93.8
Ever migrated child	67.9	58.8	76.9**	67.9	67.9	62.9	71.3
Returned migrant child	15.8	12.2	19.4	13.2	17.6	15.2	16.3
Current migrant child	64.5	58.0	70.9*	66.0	63.5	59.0	68.1
Current internal migrant child	55.8	52.7	59.0	57.5	54.7	51.4	58.8
Current internal migrant child to Phnom Penh	14.3	12.2	15.7	17.9	11.3	11.4	16.3
Current migrant child out of country	23.8	18.3	29.1*	20.8	25.8	21.0	25.6
Current migrant child to Thailand near border	6.4	1.5	11.2***	3.8	8.2	5.7	6.9
Current migrant child beyond Thai border (c)	17.7	16.8	18.7	17.0	18.2	15.2	19.4

Significance levels: *=.05 level; **=.01 level; ***=.001 level.
Notes: This table includes children who recently left the parental district but have not yet been away for a year as migrants.
(a) Married includes those who are currently married but not living with spouse.
(b) Includes those who have co-resident children.
(c) Includes migrants in other countries as well as Thailand

Although Treng is geographically nearer the Thai border than Talos, the higher ratios of Talos elders with migrant children is particularly pronounced with respect to migrants who go to Thailand but remain near the border. This difference might reflect stronger and more developed social networks that foster such migration in Talos than Treng, which in turn are traceable to differences in their settlement histories, dwelling arrangements, and particular locations. Treng is a more recently settled area where the modal duration of the respondents' residence is only 14 years. In contrast almost four-fifths of the Talos respondents have lived in Talos since the end of Khmer Rouge period 30 years ago. In addition dwellings in Treng are strung out along the national highway and thus more dispersed than in Talos. To take advantage of the nearness to the Thai border Treng residents must go through adjacent Pailin Province which until the late 1990s was controlled by a faction of the Khmer Rouge and prone to sporadic fighting.

Reasons Why Children Migrate

Although the survey questionnaire did not directly probe into the underlying reasons for migration, relevant comments were made in the open-ended interviews. The Talos commune chief's observations succinctly sum up prevailing situations:

> First they migrate because they have no land for cultivation. Second some people migrate to the border to find work after they have completed their farm work. Some of them also do business at the border areas. Some households do not have land for cultivation and migrate more than others. Other households have farmland but they migrate during the seasons when they are free…. During corn harvest season they migrate to the border to pick corn. Some even cross the border into Thailand to find work. Some people send their children to work at the garment factories in Phnom Penh. Some go to Malaysia.

Some respondents view migration as a response to the lack of jobs available in Cambodia. A 61 year old father from Talos commune with four of seven children working in Thailand laments:

> I do not want my children to go to another country if there are jobs in our country. I want them to make a living [here]…. But there are no jobs. We need to go where work is available. We cannot do otherwise. We cannot just stay [here] where there is no employment. We need to go and make a living all of the time. If we did not go then we would always be poor.

Other respondents mentioned that recent droughts had diminished rice yields and forced people into debt leading their children to migrate. A 61 year old widow from Talos commune who relies on the earnings of her son-in-law in Thailand comments:

> A lot of people have left [the village] because they could not get any yields from their rice farms…. Some people had already transplanted but… there was no rain and it all dried out…. Others borrowed money to do rice farming, but they fell into debt when there was no rain and the farm did not produce any crop…. If they did not go to work outside, they would not be able to afford to feed their families.

Still other respondents acknowledged the unpredictable nature of crop cultivation but resist the urge to migrant. A 61 year man from Treng commune, whose five children either live with him or in the village, presents a contrasting view:

> The difficulty is that cultivation has not been good, and we have many mouths to feed…. Some years the cultivation is good. Other years it is not…. [But] it is not necessary for us to go somewhere else. When we go far away to earn a living we can send money home only after consumption. If we stay home and make less money but are together it is better.

Migration and Living Arrangements of Children

Consistent with the finding that high migration rates have not left older age parents alone is the finding that not all able-bodied children have migrated. The respondents in the two communes combined had in total 1,268 living children. Of these only 33 percent had ever migrated, 21 percent were current internal migrants and 8 percent were current cross-border migrants. So while able-bodied children had evidently migrated, even more able-bodied children had not. Among the ever-migrant children there were no significant differences with respect to their sex, age, or marital status. However, current cross-border migrants were more likely to be male than female (Table 2).

Table 2: Percent of children in relation to living arrangements and migration status by sex, age and marital status

Percent of children who	Total	Sex		Age		Currently married (a)	
		Male	Female	<30	30+	No	Yes
Number of cases	1268	627	640	589	679	443	785
Co-reside with parent	31.7	29.7	33.8	49.2	16.5***	64.6	11.2***
Live in same village as parent (b)	59.0	56.0	62.0*	63.5	55.1***	69.8	52.2***
Ever migrants	32.6	33.0	32.2	32.6	32.7	31.8	33.5
Returned migrants	4.4	4.1	4.7	4.9	4.0	4.3	4.7
Current internal migrants	20.7	19.8	21.4	21.1	20.3	19.9	21.5
Current migrants out of country	7.6	9.1	6.1*	6.6	8.4	7.7	7.3

Significance levels: *=.05 level; **=.01 level; ***=.001 level.

Note: References to migrants in this table include those who recently left but are away for less than one year (continuously or cumulatively).

(a) Excludes 29 cases below age 15 and 11 cases who are monks or of unknown marital status. Married includes those who are currently married but not living with spouse.

(b) Includes co-resident children

Meanwhile, 32 percent of the children co-resided with their parents while 59 percent lived in the same village as their parents. Somewhat in contrast with the respondents, there were significant differences among the respondents' children with regard to living arrangements with their parents based on their sex, age and marital status. Significantly higher percentages of non-married children and those aged less than 30 both co-resided and lived in the same village as their parents than did percentages of married children and those aged 30 or older. These differences reflect the life stages of the children with younger and non-married children more likely to live with or nearby their parents. Moreover, significantly higher percentages of female than male children also lived in the same village as their parents.

Risks Associated with Migration

The open-ended interviews illuminate that older age parents are acutely aware of the risks associated with migration and express concern about the welfare of their migrant children. Most parents appear to be reluctant for their children to leave although many see no alternative. A 64 year old widow from Talos commune with internal and cross-border migrant children voiced these sentiments:

> I do not know what may happen to my children who earn their living far away. If they stayed here and could afford [to buy] food it would be all right. But they are poor…. I do not have anything so [some of] my children went away to earn their living and I stayed back with my daughter. If I were rich I would not let my children go away. But I am poor and getting old…. If I [tried to] stop them I would not be able to feed them. So I had to let them go…. I have to bear the hardship with my children.

Parents take what measures they can to protect their migrant children. A 64 year old man from Treng commune makes clear that he allowed his daughter to work in a Phnom Penh garment factory only because she stayed with a relative:

> [My daughter] called a relative in Phnom Penh. The relative found her a job [in the garment factory] when she got there. I let her go because I have relatives there. Otherwise I would not have let her go…. I am happy because she earns money. If she stayed here, she would not be able to find anything…. [But] if she had to live outside, I would not let her go.

Parents also worry that their migrant children will fall into bad company. A 69 year old woman from Treng commune long separated from her husband and living with her recently returned migrant daughter from Thailand, spoke about her concern for her single son working in Kratie Province:

> If the children are nearby, it is better. No matter what mistake my son makes I can give him guidance. But now that he is far away, I am worried that he will follow others and become bad.

The 60 year old village chief of Chisang in Treng commune who has children living in Battambang town expresses the conflicting feelings experienced by many parents:

> The people in this village do not want their children to go away. It is because the parents are poor that the children have gone away…. Circumstances forced them to let their children go far away. The children did not want to go away from their parents either. They want to live close to their parents. But they … had to go out to make money. For daughters to leave their parents, it is not ordinary…. Because their parents were facing such a hard time they had to migrate…. They had to look for money to help pay off their parents' debt. Their parents did not want their daughters to go but they could not help it…. When the parents … have paid their debts, the children will come back.

Parents are particularly concerned about their daughters working abroad in other countries. Having guarantees from company recruitment agencies, and more importantly witnessing the positive experience of former migrants, helps to mitigate but not erase these concerns. A 61 year old father from Treng commune explained why he and his wife allowed his 18 year old daughter to work in Malaysia:

> [My daughter] is training in Phnom Penh to work abroad in Malaysia…. She will work abroad through a company and will be able to come back home after two years…. She will serve other people cleaning the house, doing the laundry, taking care of the elderly…. My nieces have gone there and some have already come back… I let [my daughter] go because I saw other people who had gone and had earned money…. She has gone through a company which has guaranteed that nothing would happen [to her]….. [My wife and I] agreed to let her go because my nieces have gone there.

Migrating abroad through companies is generally considered to be the safer option, although unscrupulous companies have been known to take advantage of prospective migrants.[1] The commune chief of Talos recognizes the need to be vigilant:

> People go to Malaysia to work through companies. So far as a member of the authority I have been careful because I am concerned about trafficking in women and children. I have invited the companies that export labor to come and meet with the authority. Then I send them over to meet with the district governor who is responsible for women's affairs so that he can ask questions and check the documents to see if they are legitimate.

Clearly cross-border migration is more risky than internal migration. Some respondents described instances in which their undocumented migrant children were arrested and imprisoned in Thailand before being sent back to Cambodia. A 62 year old widow from Treng commune recounted this experience of a daughter who had migrated to Thailand:

> [My other] daughter has also gone to Thailand, but after she was arrested and imprisoned, she never went back…. She worked at a construction site. The Thai [boss] did not pay her and when she talked to him, he informed the police and they arrested her…. She was then sent back to Cambodia.

The most heartrending stories came from two elderly women in Treng commune. Each spoke of their migrant sons who had apparently gone to sea on Thai fishing boats but whom had not been heard from again. One woman who resided in Kilo village said this about her son:

> The elder son … went to Koh Kong [Province]…. We have never heard from him [since]…. I heard he worked on boats…. I hope he is still alive. I am worried he might have been killed and thrown into the sea.

Another woman from Chisang village shared this story:

> My son has gone to Thailand for six years now, and I have not heard from him. He has never sent me money or news. I do not know whether he is alive or dead…. He went to Thailand abruptly… He did not inform me…. Those who went with him have now come back already…. I asked his friends and they have not heard from him since then either. They only knew he worked on a boat…. I have no more hope for him.

Migration Impacts on Parents' Well-Being

Migration of adult children from rural areas is often said to erode the well-being of elderly parents. Our findings do not support this observation. In general, the situations of elderly parents with or without migrant children were comparable. Indeed, their mean wealth scores, physical ability scores, family satisfaction scores, psychological well-being scores and the percentage with activity of daily living limitations are virtually the same. At the same time, respondents with a current migrant child reported significantly higher rates of landlessness than respondents without a current migrant child (Table 3). This is not surprising as households without land would be under greater pressure to have children work as migrants.

[1] See Asia Foundation (Holliday, 2011) and Human Rights Watch (2011) reports. On 14 October 2011 Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered recruitment agencies to indefinitely stop sending Cambodian domestic workers to Malaysia following repeated reports of abuse and illegal activity. See Kuch Naren, "Gov't Suspends Sending Maids to Malaysia," *The Cambodia Daily*, 15-16 October 2011.

Table 3: Selected indicators of respondents' well-being by migration status of children

	Migration status		
	Has current migrant child	**Has no current migrant child**	**Total**
Number of cases	171	94	265
Wealth score[1](mean)	4.8	4.6	4.8
Percentage of those who do not have land	36	21*	31
Physical ability score[2] (mean)	4.5	4.6	4.5
Percent with activity of daily living limitation[3]	10	7	9
Family satisfaction score[4] (mean)	7.4	7.5	7.4
Psychological well-being score[5] (mean)	11.1	11.4	11.2

Significance levels: *=.05 level based on chi-square test and T-test

1. Measured as a summed score of thirteen household items plus two housing characteristics.
2. Physical ability score is based on respondent's perception on three measures; ability to walk 200 meters, ability to lift a 5 kilogram bag of rice, and ability to maintain the house all without help from others. Highest physical ability score is 6 and lowest is 0.
3. A limitation with an activity of daily living means that respondent need help caring for herself/himself, like bathing and getting dressed.
4. Family satisfaction score is based on respondent's perception of how family gets along and depends on each other and how children are doing with their lives. Highest family satisfaction score is 9 and lowest is 3.
5. Psychological well-being score is based on respondent's perception on six measures. Highest psychological well-being score is 18 and lowest is 6.

Since the large majority of elderly parents have a co-resident child, the migration of their other children does not generally have an adverse effect on them. But does this also hold true for elders where the nearest child lives outside the household or outside of the village? Our study addressed this question by examining the characteristics of the respondents by the location of their nearest child.

Respondents with a co-resident child have on average significantly higher wealth scores, economic satisfaction scores, family satisfaction scores, and psychological well-being scores than do respondents whose nearest child resides in the same village or outside the village. Moreover, respondents with a co-resident child have significantly lower rates of landlessness than that of respondents whose nearest child resides in the same village or outside the village (Table 4).

Table 4: Selected indicators of respondents' well-being by location of nearest child

	Location of nearest child		
	In household	**In village**	**Outside village**
Number of cases	212	30	23
Wealth score (mean)	5.1	3.3	3.3***
Percentage of those who do not have land	25	40	74***
Physical ability score (mean)	4.5	4.7	4.6
Percent with activity of daily living limitation	9	13	4
Family satisfaction score (mean)	7.6	6.6	7.1***
Psychological well-being score (mean)	11.4	10.1	10.8**

Significance levels: **=.01 level; ***=.001 level based on chi-square test and ANOVA test
For definitions, see Table 3.

The proportion of respondents with all children outside the village (and who thus may be considered to have been left alone) is less than 10 per cent. Still many are landless and poor. Of note, 18 of the 23 respondents that comprise this group are females and 13 of these females are not currently married.

The open-ended interviews suggest that in a number of cases, parents' well being is an important issue for parents and adult children alike in making decisions to migrate as well as to return. A 62 year old man from Treng commune relies on the support of his elder daughter who works in a Phnom Penh garment factory. At the same time he refuses to let her younger sister leave home to join her:

> I will not let [my younger daughter] go. I want her to stay home with her mother to keep her company. Only the elder sister [has permission] to go. If [my younger daughter] goes there [with her sister] then her mother will be alone when I go out [to work]. My wife is scared to stay home alone.

A 60 year old divorced woman from Talos commune has five children, four of whom are returned cross-border migrants from Thailand now living with her. The decision of her returned migrant children to remain with her clearly pleases her:

> My children wanted to go to Thailand to work packaging cakes. All my children wanted to go but they were concerned that I might become sick. So they would not go. I allowed them to go but they said, "Ma, we are not going because you would be living alone. If something happens to you, and you call us, we would not be able to come back right away." Therefore, they decided to stay back, and work nearby. We have managed to get by until now.

Like decisions not to migrate, decisions to return often consider the well being of older age parents. A 61 year old woman from Treng commune living alone with her nine year old granddaughter asked her daughter working in Thailand to return home to be with her and the child:

> [My daughter in Thailand] could not send money home because she did not have any. She could only earn enough money to feed herself…. I asked her to come back because at least we could live together. We can try to find something. Despite hunger, we can stay together…. We never know about our [health]. We may get sick today or tomorrow…. Who is going to look after us? If the children are nearby, it is better.

Children not living in the districts of their elderly parents may likewise visit temporarily to assist their parents in times of illness. The 60 year old chief of Chisang village in Treng commune was deeply moved when his older children came from Battambang town to be with him during an illness:

> When I was sick [my three older children] came to see me…. I spent one week at the commune health center. They were worried that I might die. They came both day and night…. They paid for everything; medical bill, medicine, and other costs. I did not have to worry about anything. I had some money but they told me not to pay for anything and to keep the money to buy food when I returned home…. I am really grateful to them. It means that they care about their father.

Similarly a 64 year old father from Treng commune appreciated that his elder daughter left her job in a Phnom Penh garment factory temporarily to care for him while he was sick even though his wife and younger daughter lived at home with him:

> [My daughter] was working. Someone called her and asked her to come back from Phnom Penh. She came back to look after me.… When I was sick she took care of me.

In contrast there are cases where older age parents have had little or no contact with their migrant children. For elders who have no other children living nearby this may have severe consequences. The account of an elderly woman from Treng commune who lives alone with her husband poignantly illustrates this circumstance. The woman has two sons both of whom are migrants. One son went to Thailand seven years ago while the other migrated internally in the past year. Neither son has been in contact with their mother since they migrated. Being left behind in this way has obviously taken its toll on her:

> I am concerned that being old I cannot earn a living. There is not much work in this area. I cannot rely on my husband's work either because he is also old now. He can only look after other people's cows. He cannot cut wood or collect bamboo shoots for sale…. I only stay at home. Sometimes, I can cook but some other times I cannot…. I am really miserable…. I became sick when my sons left me…. Since they have gone without any news, my illness has gotten worse. I have been thinking about them so much that I could not eat anything.

Having several children provides elderly parents with an opportunity to receive benefits from migrant children while not having to forfeit the assistance received from children living nearby. A 62 year old widow from Talos commune has three daughters: the first living in Banteay Meanchey provincial town, the second living nearby in the same village, and the third living with her together with her husband and two children. Approaching old age this woman talks about the advantages of having several children: some to support her as migrants and others to help her nearby:

> It is [good] that some [children] live nearby while others live far away….It is their jobs. If they live nearby they cannot earn their living. They need to go far to earn their living. Some children can move to a distant place while others stay back. They do not all have to be here. Some children go far away and some stay with me. Being old I want to have five children. It would be good then. Some children can go to Phnom Penh, some to Battambang [town], while others can go to Banteay Meanchey [town]. With too few children at an old age it is difficult. If I had four to five children they could help support me.

A 61 year old man from Talos commune with four of seven children working in Thailand similarly appreciates the complementary benefits of having migrant and non-migrant children:

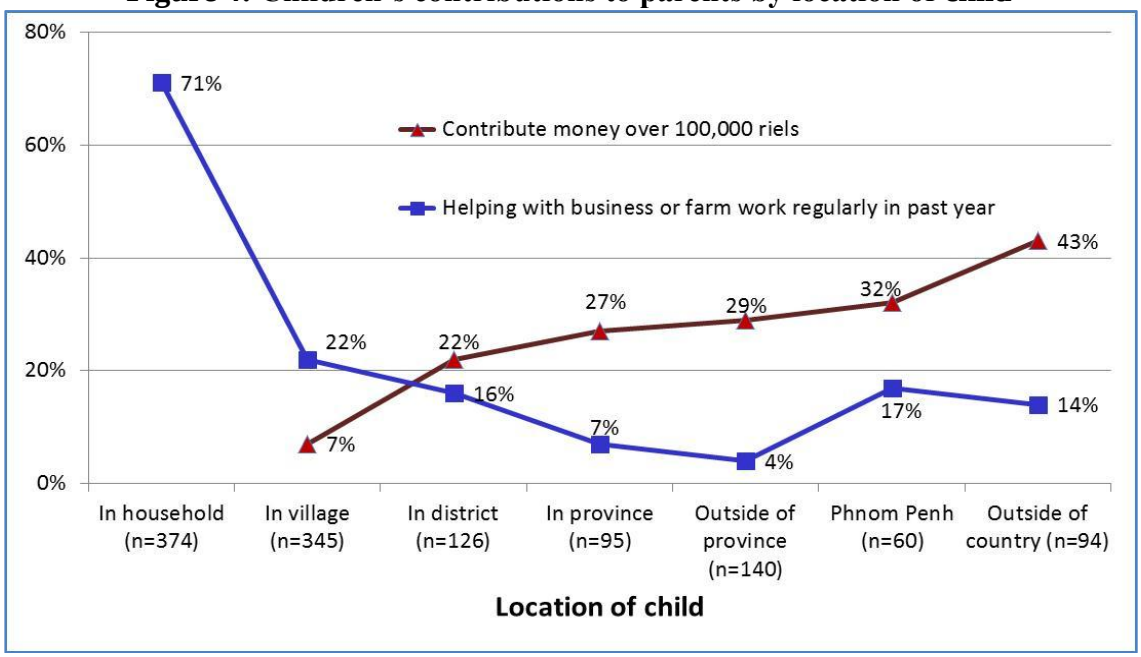
> The children here give me food everyday while the children [in Thailand] give me money once a month. The children here do not have money but they give me food…. [When] the children [in Thailand] can afford they give me money.

Material Support and Monetary Exchanges

Migration of adult children from rural areas has been said to leave elderly parents behind to work on their farms with no one to help (Murshid, 2007). This observation maintains that children who continue to live with their parents make greater contributions to them. Our study addresses this issue by correlating children's contributions to parents with respect to regular help with business or farm work and to monetary contributions. The findings show that while children who live with or near their parents provide more regular help with business or farm work, children who live further away contribute more money.

Not surprisingly, co-resident children are by far the most likely to regularly help parents with business or farm work (71 percent). Those who live in the same village but in a different household are far less likely to do so but still more likely than other children who live further away. Given that the large majority of parents have a child in the household, this evidence contradicts the view that high rates of migration among their children leave parents behind to with no one to help. At the same time, 43 percent of the children living outside of the country contributed more than 100,000 riels (US$ 25) in the past year to their parents. By comparison, only 7 percent of children living in the same village contributed this much (Figure 4).[2]

Figure 4: Children's contributions to parents by location of child



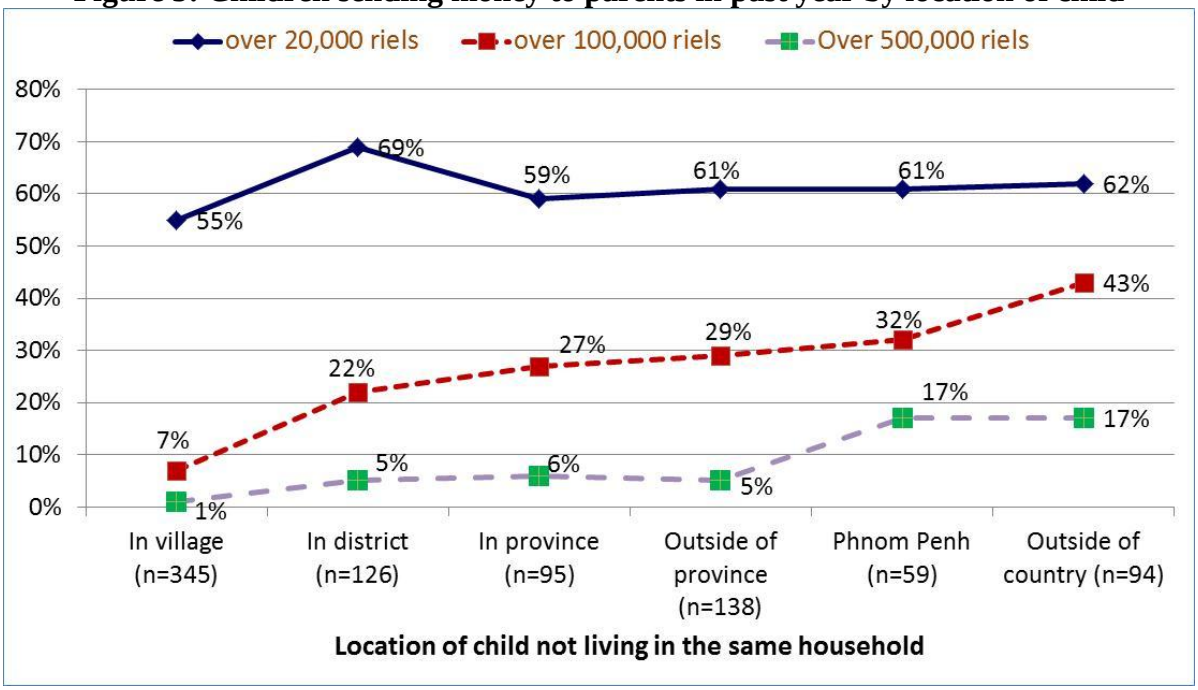
Note: The high percentages of children in Phnom Penh and outside the country helping with business or farm work regularly in the past year were due to the fact that they were recent migrants, away for less than one year.

These findings suggest that children make different and complementary types of contributions to their parents depending on their location of residence. Children who continue to live with their parents are available to make valuable contributions by providing regular help with business and farm work and it is crucial not to underestimate this support. At the same time children working outside of the district within Cambodia and outside of the country, while obviously not available to provide regular help with business and farm work, frequently contribute important monetary support.

Of note, the percentages of non-coresident children contributing over 500,000 riel (US$ 125) to their parents in the past year noticeably increases for those children living in Phnom Penh and outside Cambodia. This suggests that these destinations provide higher-paying work for migrant children. Meanwhile a majority of non-coresident children irrespective of their locations contributed over 20,000 riels (US$ 5) to their parents in the past year. These relatively small contributions had important symbolic value bonding children to parents especially during Khmer New Year and P'Chum Ben festivals as well as providing parents with small amounts of money to make donations at the pagoda (Figure 5).

[2] Monetary contributions from co-resident children are not considered due to difficulties in interpretation as presumably many households have a common budget and money received from a co-resident child might likely be used for household expenses that directly benefit the child who made the contribution.

Figure 5: Children sending money to parents in past year by location of child

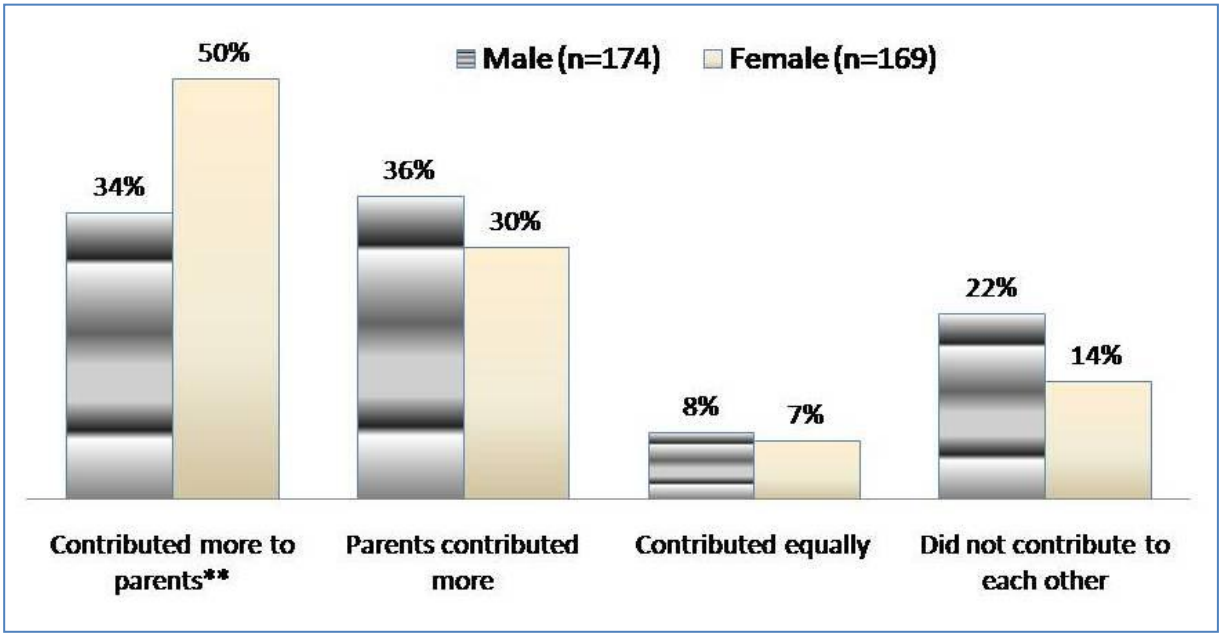


Exchanges of support and services between parents and migrant children can flow in either direction or be entirely absent. Not only do migrant children contribute monetary support to their parents. Parents often provide financial support to migrant children, especially for costs incurred at the early stages of the migration process. Among the 344 ever migrant children away for at least one year, 48 percent received help from their parents to pay migration expenses. Meanwhile, 56 percent of the ever migrant children away for at least one year provided their parents with regular financial support as migrants. This reveals the strong concern of the migrants for the well-being of their parents.

In all, 55 per cent of the ever migrant children who were away for one year or more contributed to the medical expenses of their parents who incurred them. Moreover, 32 percent of the ever migrant children away for at least one year had returned to help their parents when they were ill.

During the entire time that the ever migrant children away for at least a year were gone, a higher proportion (42 percent) were said to have contributed more to their parent's material support (food, money, assets) than their parents (33 percent) contributed to theirs. These findings clearly indicate that there is considerable variation in situations with respect to who benefits more. Still, this underscores the predominance of a net positive flow in the direction of the parents. Of note, the proportion of female migrants who contributed to this net positive flow was significantly higher than that of the male migrants (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Direction of contributions between migrant children and parents



Significance level: **.01 level based on chi-square test

Support Received from Migrant Children

The open-ended interviews make clear that some respondents benefit substantially from the remittances sent back from their migrant children. A 66 year old disabled man from Treng commune with two sons working in Thailand expresses his gratitude for the financial support received from his eldest son:

> My eldest son … has married a Thai wife…. He left a cell phone for us to call him. I told him that I was in debt… about three million Riels. I [intended] to sell the farm land and move to Battambang town to live with my daughter. He said he would not let me sell the farm…. After about eleven months he sent me the money to pay off all the debt…. He said that I was old and did not have to borrow money from others anymore…. He started to give me 2,000 Baht a month…. Now I am a bit better off because of my son's support.… He told me to call him immediately when I did not have rice to eat…. My son said that he would pay gratitude to me for having taken care of him since he was small.

Similarly a 61 year old widow from Talos commune relies on support from her son-in-law who works as a welder in Bangkok. At the same time another son who works just inside the Thai border borrows money from her for travel expenses:

> I live here with my daughter. Before she lived [near the Thai border] with her mother-in-law. She stayed there until she gave birth. Then I took her to live here in this village. Her husband works as a welder in Bangkok. He sends her 1,500 Baht per month…. This daughter has money. She gives me some money to buy some [small grocery] goods to sell to make some profit…. The daughter I live with is supportive. [The other children] … give me money only during P'Chum Ben and [Khmer] New Year. This is because they are also poor.

While remittances received from cross border migrants can be crucial for older age parents so too can remittances received from internal migrant children. A 64 year old man from Treng commune acknowledges his thankfulness for the financial support he receives from his garment worker daughter in Phnom Penh:

> I can rely on my elder daughter [who works in garment factory in Phnom Penh] as she earns money. She gives me money. I would have died already when I was sick if I had not received money from her.

A 64 year old woman from Treng commune with five living children relies on her son working as a laborer in the border town of Poipet to support her. She has had no news from her elder son who apparently went to sea on a Thai fishing boat last year:

> If [my son in Poipet] did not support us, then we would have to go hungry. Last month I owed someone 50,000 Riels and he gave me 100,000 Riels to pay back the money…. My neighbors say I will not go hungry because my son supports me.

In Talos commune a 67 year old man relies on two daughters working as housemaids in Battambang town to support himself and his wife and his youngest child who is a mute. In addition, the two daughters support the four children of their elder sister who were left with their grandparents when their elder sister went back to the Thai border with a second husband. Previously another daughter, now recently married, also worked as a housemaid in Battambang town and provided support:

> I have four grandchildren [living with me] plus one of my own children who is a mute. So all in all there are five. Before three daughters helped support me but one got married and now only two support me. But they cannot support me with all the money because we have to pay off our debts…. They are paying off debts and supporting me…. I feel sorry for them because they have no future. With the money they earn, they support me.

But while some older age parents receive important financial support from cross border and internal migrant children, others do not. Some elderly parents receive little or nothing from their migrant children. A 69 year old woman from Treng commune with five children recounts the net loss she incurred from the migrant experience of her son in Thailand:

> When my youngest son was in Thailand he used to send me money, about four times. In total the money was about 3,000 to 4,000 Baht. The money was my son's sweat and blood so I did not spend it. Instead I saved the money and bought one Chi of gold and kept it for him…. Then I heard that he was seriously sick and sent to [Banteay Meanchey provincial town]. I had to sell the gold to pay for his treatment. I had to spend more money than the money he sent to me…. I cannot rely on my children. They are all poor.… How can I demand from them when they are even poorer than me?

A 60 year old widow from Treng commune takes care of the three grandchildren of her deceased daughter. She received no support from her only living child, an internal migrant son who lives in the town of Pailin:

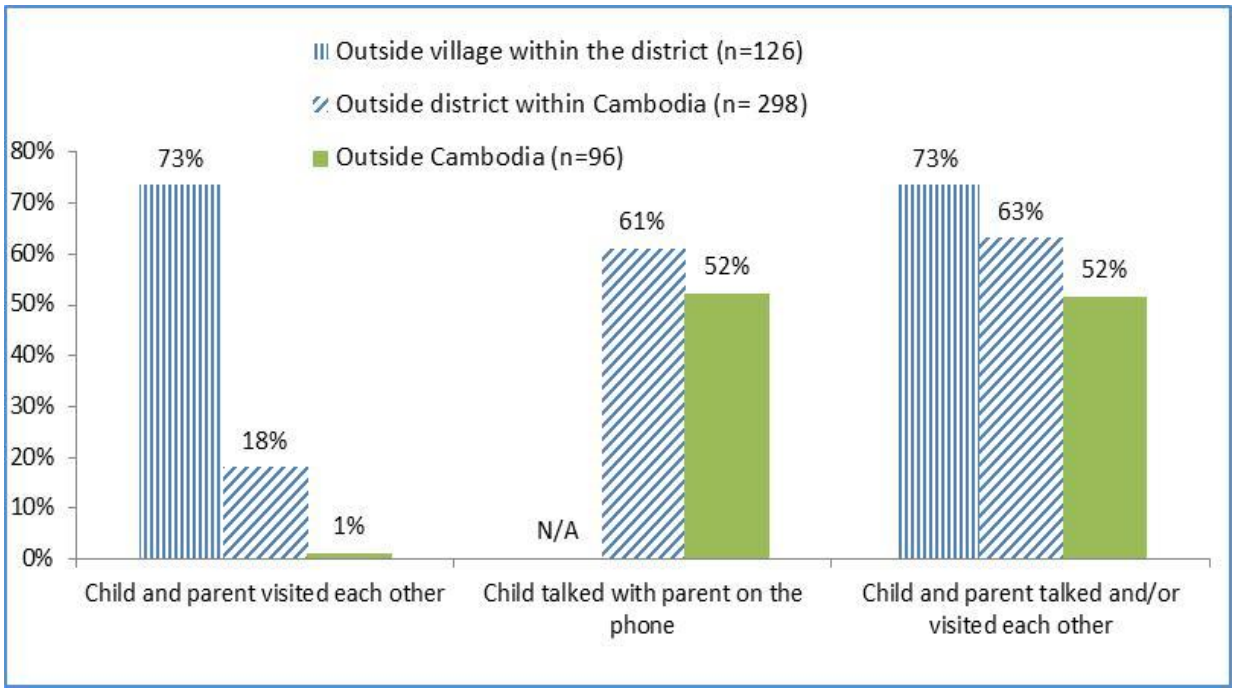
> [My son] never sends me any money. He came once during the funeral of his sister…. When he went back he did not have any money for the bus fare. I borrowed 15,000 Riels for him to pay for the bus fare to go back. I still owe this money…. I said to my son, "Son … I am poor now all by myself. Can you come back to live with me? If I do not feel well at times, I can rely on you." He said that he could not come back because he had his upland farm. If he talks like this, how can I rely on him?

Social Contact between Parents and Children

Social contact between parents and adult children is valued in Cambodia. The migration of children away from their parents reduces opportunities for sustained day-to-day interaction and thus threatens to undermine this value. While migration may contribute positively to the economic well-being of migrant families, it may also erode relationships between parents and children. In the past long distances separating parents and children prohibited regular monthly visits, and phone connections were not available. Now the advent and wide use of mobile phones greatly facilitates parents and migrant children communicating over long distances.

Our findings reveal that a majority of children living outside the district of their parents either within or outside of Cambodia talked and/or had visits with their parents at least once a month. Both groups relied heavily on phone calls rather than visits to maintain contact. These levels of interaction are somewhat lower but compare favorably with those of children living outside the village but within the same district of their parents, i.e. with those of children whom this study does not consider to be migrants (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Children living outside the village maintain social contact with their parents at least once a month



When discussing social contact between parents and children it is important to keep in mind that very few parents interviewed have no children nearby. Only 9 percent of the elderly respondents have no child in the village, only 6 percent have no child in district, only 4 percent have no child in the province and only 1 per cent has no child in Cambodia. The three cases in the last group represent migrant children in Thailand near the border. Thus in the study sites it is extremely rare for all children of elderly parents to leave the country and even quite rare for all children to leave their parents' province.

The open-ended interviews indicate that older age parents in Treng and Talos communes appreciate the ease of phone contact with their children. The 60 year old village chief of Chisang in Treng commune, who has children living outside the district in Battambang town, expresses relief that he can call them when he is sick:

> It is good if the children live close by because when I am sick they can serve us in time. For the children who live far away, it takes time for them to come…. At this time, as you know, we can make phone calls. No matter how far away they are, we can contact them. If I tell them I am sick, they would come right away.

Even older persons without mobile phones are often able to use those belonging to a relative or neighbor. Access to a neighbor's mobile phone enables a 61 year old widow from Talos commune to talk with her son, an agricultural laborer working inside the Thai border:

> Sometimes [my son working at the Thai border] calls someone here and says he wants to talk with me. So the person brings me the phone. If I call him now, I can talk with him right away. Sometimes I call him once a month or every two weeks … when I have something to say to him. But when I do not, I just want to ask him if he has found work.

Caring for Grandchildren

One potential important service that older age parents provide for their migrant children is to take care of the migrants own young children (i.e. the grandchildren whose parents are migrants). Overall 142 (54 percent) of the respondents had ever migrant children away for at least one year who had children of their own. Only 6 percent of these respondents, all of whom were female, had ever gone outside of the district to take care of these grandchildren for at least three months.

Respondents were considerably more likely to have taken care of grandchildren in their own homes when their migrant parents were away. In total, among the 142 respondents in question, 31 (or 22 percent) had grandchildren from their migrant children who lived with them for at least six months. Such caretaking was somewhat more likely to be reported by female than male respondents (24 percent vs. 18 percent). Almost half had cared for more than one grandchild resulting in an average of 1.8 grandchildren that were cared for by these 31 respondents. Moreover, half of these grandchildren started to live with the respondent when they were no more than 5 years old. The average total time grandchildren lived with the respondent was 4.2 years.

With regard to the costs incurred for raising these grandchildren during the period of care giving, the grandparents reported that they paid most or all expenses in three-fifths of the cases, the grandchild's parents paid most or all expenses in one-fourth of the cases, and both parties shared expenses in almost all of the remainder.

The open-ended interviews reveal difficulties encountered by older age parents taking care of grandchildren of migrant children. A 67 year old widow from Talos commune takes care of three grandchildren, while her daughter and son-in-law work in Thailand to earn money to pay off debts:

> [My daughter] went to work in Thailand [with her husband] for two years already. She sends me money to feed her children here…. All three of their children live with me…. I am old and look after the grandchildren…. She owes people money. Her husband is also in debt. Because she still owes people money, she does not want to come home. She does not think her mother is old. She never comes to visit me. But what can I do as she is still in debt.

A 61 year old man from Talos commune has four migrant children working in Thailand. His eldest daughter sends remittances to her parents to care for three of her children living with them:

> [My eldest daughter] went with her husband to make a living in Thailand. She has a passport…. She went there legally with her husband…. She works as a laborer there…. She has two children [with her]…. She left [three] children here…. They contact me every month. When they have money, they send me 2,000 to 3,000 Baht per month to raise the grandchildren…. The money they send me is just for their children's expenditures…. They give me a little money for medicine when I am sick. The money is not enough for me to buy something to eat…. It is difficult for them to earn money. They have to deduct [money from] their earnings [to pay off costs].

While the migration of children may add caretaking burdens to older age parents, it is not the only factor that occasions elders to take care of their grandchildren. There are cases where the deaths of non-migrant children necessitate old age people to provide for their grandchildren as well. A 63 year old woman from Talos commune recounts how she had to overcome her embarrassment after two of her non-migrant children died of AIDS. She now raises four orphaned grandchildren with her husband:

> I have to raise four orphaned grandchildren…. Their parents have all died…. According to the Buddhist Dharma I owe other people's karma…. I was very embarrassed because they died of the AIDS disease one after the other…. I left home and went to Mong Russey [town]. I did not want anyone to see me…. Only later when I saw other people also got the same disease did I feel less embarrassed.

A 60 year old widow from Treng commune cares for the three grandchildren of a non-migrant daughter who recently died. She complains that their father who also lives in her house and earns as a soldier provides little support:

> I live here with three grandchildren…. After my daughter gave birth to her third child she [was ill] for about three months and then she died…. I have been trying to raise my grandchildren. Sometimes my neighbors give me 1,000 to 2,000 Riels to buy food…. My niece gives me a few cans of rice…. My livelihood is very poor…. I cannot do anything other than sell labor to other people. If I work I have to leave the grandchildren by themselves. No one will cook food for them…. So I have to stay with them…. When my time in this world is over I do not know how [grown] my grandchildren will be…. Their father also lives in the same house. He is a soldier. But he does not provide for his children….. He drinks every night until dawn… He says a few words to the children and then disappears like a firefly.

Parents' Health and Psychological Well-Being

Based on the lowest score of either respondent or spouse, the respondents with no current or returned migrant child assessed their or their spouses' current health more favorably in comparison with respondents with a current migrant child and with respondents with a returned migrant child. At the same time, more than half of the respondents without a migrant child, and more than two-thirds of the respondents with either a current migrant child or a returned migrant child described their own or their spouses' health as poor or very poor (Table 5).

Among respondents and spouses with or without a current or returned migrant child, percentages with functional limitations were virtually identical as were mean family satisfaction scores and mean psychological well-being scores. Still it is noteworthy that 17 per cent of the elders with a returned migrant child suffered an activity of daily living limitation (i.e. either respondent or spouse needed help caring for themselves) compared with 10 per cent with a current migrant child and 6 per cent with no migrant child. This finding may indicate that some of the returned migrant children came home to care for their parents when the latter were no longer able to care for themselves.

Table 5: Physical and psychological health of respondent and spouse by migration status of child

	Migration status of child		
	Has no current or returned migrant child	**Has current migrant child[1]**	**Has returned migrant child[2]**
Number of cases	85	171	42
Percent distribution of current health status[3]			
Good	8.2	2.9	2.4
Fair	37.6	29.2	26.2
Poor or very poor	54.1	67.8	71.4
Percent distribution of health status in past year[3]			
Improved	11.8	6.4	7.1
Stayed the same	5.9	14.6	7.1
Got worse	82.4	78.9	85.7
Percent with functional limitation[4]	42.4	55.6	57.1
Percent with a household limitation[5]	43.5	51.5	54.8
Percent with an activity of daily living limitation[6]	5.8	9.9	16.7
Mean family satisfaction score[7]	7.5	7.4	7.5
Mean psychological well-being score[7]	11.4	11.1	11.3

Statistical significant tests have not been made for this table.

1. Respondent may also have a returned migrant child.
2. Respondent may also have a current migrant child.
3. By lowest score of either respondent or spouse.
4. Functional limitation means that either respondent or spouse have some difficulty or cannot walk 200 meters on their own or have some difficulty or cannot lift a 5 kilogram bag of rice.
5. Household limitation means either respondent or spouse have some difficulty or cannot do the work that needs to be done to maintain the house like cleaning, cooking or repairs.
6. For either respondent or spouse. See Table 3 for definition.
7. See Table 3 for definition.

The open-ended interviews provide some insight into the psychological well-being of the older age parents irrespective of whether or not they ever had migrant children. Older age persons who find solace in their Buddhist beliefs appear to have achieved a sense of well-being as they approach death. A 60 year old *archar* or Buddhist lay leader from Talos commune who has cross border and internal migrant children narrates how he is preparing for the next life:

> I have been an *achar* for five to six years now…. Today I try to seek the benefits for the next life. I am not interested much in the current life. This is because [life] is very short so I am seeking things that are beneficial for the future. We cannot depend on [our] children…. Parents will have to depend on themselves once the children are married…. This is life. Therefore we have to do what we can do now…. We cannot just wait for the children's help…. We should prepare our own place now. This is the life of Cambodians who are Buddhists.

Similarly a 62 old man from Treng commune with two children, both non-migrants, talks about the importance of moving beyond earthly concerns and preparing for death:

> I do not have any problems now except for livelihood. I do not have any concerns. I only think about dharma…. This is the future path…. Wealth cannot help support a person's life. A person needs to construct himself so that he can avoid misery…. When we [die and] go back to our native land … no one can help us except the karma…. Our children can help only when we are alive. But when we are dead they cannot help…. When we die no one can help us except ourselves. We need to look towards … the future. Our earthly life is only in this life…. That is why dharma is the path for us to take.

A 70 year old widower from Talos commune has eight children and sufficient land so that only one son migrated out of the district to Phnom Penh. While proud of being able to provide for his family, he regrets that he was unable to conduct a *katin* or Buddhist gift giving ceremony to the monks:

> I am old already, it is normal if I die…. If I die, so be it…. When my wife was alive, I thought about her and the children. But now the children are all married, my wife has died, and I live alone by myself…. When they were here … I had to earn money. That is why I could not save money to conduct a *katin.* I could only support my family…. When my wife and children were around, I wanted to have farms and property for my wife and children. But now, I no longer want these. What I want now is good deeds for the next life. When I have a little money, I do a good deed…. With some money, on Buddhist precept day I go to the pagoda.

Conclusions

The findings of our study document clearly that migration but not desertion characterizes the older-age households surveyed. Nearly two-thirds reported having a current migrant child while four-fifths had a co-resident child. Despite the high migration rates of their children the elderly parents had not been left alone. This may be explained by the high fertility rate of the respondents aged 60 to 70 years. On average, the respondents had 4.8 living children. This allowed some children to migrate and others to remain behind in the homes or villages of their parents. More than three-fourths of the respondents with a current migrant child also lived with a child. Consistent with the finding that high migration rates have not left older age parents alone is the finding that not all able-bodied children have migrated. Only 33 percent of the respondents' 1,268 living children had ever migrated.

While there were no statistically significant differences between the elderly respondents based on sex and current marital status with respect to the migration status of their children, a significantly higher percentage of elders in Talos commune had ever migrant children compared to those in Treng commune. Although Treng is geographically nearer the Thai border than Talos, the higher ratios of Talos elders with migrant children is particularly pronounced with respect to migrants who go to Thailand but remain near the border. This difference might reflect stronger and more developed social networks that foster such migration in Talos than Treng, which in turn are traceable to differences in their settlement histories, dwelling arrangements, and particular locations.

Migration of adult children from rural areas is often described as eroding the well-being of elderly parents. Our study does not support this observation. Generally, the situations of elderly parents with or without migrant children were comparable. Indeed, their mean wealth scores, physical ability scores, family satisfaction scores, psychological well-being scores and the percentage with activity of daily living limitations are practically the same. At the same time, respondents with a current migrant child reported significantly higher rates of landlessness than respondents without a current migrant child. This is not surprising as households without land would be under greater pressure to have children work as migrants.

Migration of adult children from rural areas has been said to leave elderly parents behind to work on their farms with no one to help. Our research does not support this contention. While children who live with or near their parents provide more regular help with business or farm work, children who live further away contribute more money. This suggests that children make different and complementary contributions to their parents, depending on their place of residence. Children who live with their parents make valuable contributions by providing regular help with business and farm work. Children working outside the district, within Cambodia and outside the country, often contribute important monetary support.

A CDRI study based on data from the nationally representative 2007 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey indicates that remittances from international migrants are more effective at reducing poverty than those from internal migrants (Tong, 2010). Our study likewise finds that cross-border migrants are considerably more likely than internal migrants to provide greater financial assistance through remittances, although with an important caveat. Remittances from internal migrants who go to Phnom Penh are comparable to those from cross-border migrants, suggesting that these destinations provide higher-paying work for migrant children Still the low monetary values of the remittances in both of these instances supports the findings of other research that remittances in Cambodia are generally spent on recurrent costs of subsistence (Analyzing Development Issues, 2005; Tong, 2010).

Parents often provide financial support to migrant children, especially for costs incurred at the early stages of the migration process. Nearly half of the migrant children received help from their parents to pay migration expenses. Meanwhile, more than half of the migrant children provided their parents with regular financial support as migrants. Respondents were also more likely to report that they received more material support from a migrant child than the child received from them over the entire period the child was gone. Moreover, the proportion of female migrants who contributed to this net positive flow was significantly higher than that of the male migrants.

While the migration of children away from their parents reduces opportunities for sustained day-to-day interaction, the advent and current wide use of mobile phones greatly facilitates parents and migrant children communicating over long distances. Our research found that a majority of children living outside the district of their parents, either within or outside of Cambodia, talked and/or had visits with their parents at least once a month. Both groups relied heavily on phone calls rather than visits to maintain contact. These levels of interaction are somewhat lower but compare favorably with those of children living outside the village but within the same district of their parents, i.e. with those of children whom this study does not consider to be migrants.

With respect to caring for grandchildren only 6 percent of the respondents who had migrant children with children of their own had ever gone outside of the district to take care of grandchildren for at least three months when their migrant parents were away. By comparison 22 percent of these respective respondents had taken care of grandchildren who lived with them for at least six months when the migrant parents were gone. With regard to the costs incurred for raising the grandchildren during the period of care giving the grandparents paid most or all expenses in three-fifths of the cases.

The qualitative interviews with the parents underscore several commonalities and enrich the quantitative findings. Parents typically are concerned about the welfare of their children, both female and male, and appreciate the risks involved in migration, with cross-border migration risks recognized as more serious than those associated with internal migration. Parents thus prefer that their cross-border migrant children use formal rather than informal recruitment agents, although some local authorities now recognize the need to scrutinize formal recruitment agencies. While some parents are reluctant to let children migrate, especially daughters, crop failures and growing debt force them to put aside such concerns in hope of receiving potential benefits from remittances. Parents appreciate the access and ease of phone contact with migrant children, which allay their fears of not being able to call on children in times of illness. Having some children at home or nearby is also seen as important or even more important for parents' sense of security as having migrant children.

The experience of the older age parents with respect to migration reflects its diverse nature in Cambodia. Migration within the country is often seasonal and low paid but having a daughter working in a Phnom Penh garment factory can be considerably more beneficial financially. Similarly the earnings and hence remittances of migrant children working abroad may depend on where they go. As a result, individual experiences of older age migrant households vary considerably. Having migrant children, whether internal, cross-border or both can be advantageous for some and disadvantageous for others. What accounts for these individual differences? Clearly the type of internal or cross-border work can have much to do with the prospects of success. Migrating through formal rather than informal channels may also help to ensure success. But the stories of our elderly respondents point in other directions as well and serve to explain the influence of migration on their overall material and psychological well-being, These include the character of their children, having other children living as co-residents or nearby, having sufficient numbers of children to ensure different types of support,

having a living spouse, having good health, having land and independent means of subsistence, and having a sense of the spiritual as they approach death.

In sum, contrary to the view that the migration of adult children in Cambodia has negative social consequences on elderly parents, our research indicates generally positive impacts on the well-being of older-age parents. This lends some support to the idea that "modified extended family" relationships are emerging between older age parents and migrant children in Cambodia. But while our study reveals generally positive impacts of migration on older age parents, there is one area of particular concern. Respondents with all children outside the village (and who thus may be considered to have been left behind) are fewer than 10 per cent, but many are landless and poor. In comparison especially to respondents with a co-resident child, their incidence of landlessness is much higher and their average wealth score is much lower. Government and NGO policies and programs developed to mitigate the adverse affects of migration would do well to target such people.

Despite the fact that our study shows intergenerational solidarity between parents and both migrant and non-migrant children, it takes place within an overall context of poverty. The wealth of elders is not great and one can imagine that it would be less so without the help of children. It is possible that children play a role in limiting the impact of rural poverty but poverty still exists. While opportunities for migration will help rural elders through the support of their migrating children, there is also reason to be cautious. Families with fewer children, and a future of declining family size could impact on the intergenerational exchanges.

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