

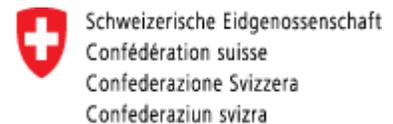


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Migration and Gender Outcomes: Analysis of Selected Policies in Sri Lanka

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Migration and Gender Outcomes: Analysis of Selected Policies in Sri Lanka^{*}

Bilesha Weeraratne[†]

Abstract

This paper analyzes the implications of migration rules, regulations, and policies in Sri Lanka, in the country's efforts to integrate gender perspectives into migration issues. The study focuses on three policies: the imposition of maximum chargeable amounts that agents can collect for recruiting migrant workers, mandatory predeparture training for migrants, and the Family Background Report requirement. The study adopts a combined methodology, wherein an in-depth case study of Sri Lanka is developed based on data from key informant interviews and a review of the literature. This qualitative methodology is reinforced by a difference-in-differences analysis of the Family Background Report policy. The study finds that women's increased access to migration brought about by the zero-chargeable policy is neutralized by the Family Background Report (FBR) requirement. Ideally, the FBR policy should be revisited to strike a balance between women's autonomy versus benefits to children left behind. As such, in addition to the multifaceted gender implications of migration policies, the study underscores the importance of coordination among policies to ensure optimal gender outcomes.

Key words: Gender, migration, Sri Lanka

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DCS	Department of Census and Statistics
FBR	Family Background Report
GAD	gender and development
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
KII	key informant interview
KNOMAD	Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development
MADE	Migration and Development Civil Society Network
MFE	Ministry of Foreign Employment
MFEPW	Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (predecessor to MFE)
MNPEA	Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
NLMP	National Labour Migration Policy
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PDOS	Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar
SL Rs	Sri Lankan rupees
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
TI Germany	Transparency International Germany
TI SL	Transparency International Sri Lanka
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

There is almost one female migrant for every male migrant, and migrants account for more than 3 percent of the world's population (World Bank 2016). The implications of migration are different for men and women, and the anticipations, interactions and power dynamics associated with gender can heavily influence all aspects of the migration process. As such, a single policy initiative can have different outcomes based on gender. For instance, policies to protect the welfare of female migrants have the capacity to decrease female migration and increase male migration. Ghosh (2009) highlights that laws designed to protect women (such as those that require official emigration clearance for unskilled workers) can create another source of oppression and exploitation for women migrants. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between policies and concerns about gender issues and migration.

Sri Lanka's experience since the introduction of open economic policies in the late 1970s provides ample evidence along these lines. Among the gender equality commitments made by Sri Lanka, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1981, and the more recent Sustainable Development Goals are important. In recent years, one policy focus in Sri Lanka has been to improve the protection and welfare of migrant workers and their families.¹ Under this policy emphasis, concerted efforts have been made to reverse the female dominance in migrant departures. Specifically, from 1988 to 2007, the average share of women among labor migrants was 66 percent. In more recent years (2008–14), the average share of women decreased to 46 percent. Interestingly, despite the decline in the share of female migrants, their magnitude has remained almost constant. These details about labor migration and related policies, along with the differentiated policy implications for men and women, make Sri Lanka an ideal candidate for providing insights into the relationship between migration and gender. Such insights can provide valuable lessons for countries that are aiming to achieve sustainable and inclusive development, improve public service provision, and ensure human rights.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the influence of different migration-related rules, regulations, and policies and their efforts to integrate gender perspectives. These policies include the imposition of maximum chargeable amounts that agents can collect for recruiting migrant workers, mandatory predeparture training for migrants, and the Family Background Report (FBR) requirement. This study aims to address three research questions: (1) what rules and regulations affect the gender outcomes of migration? (2) what are the gender impacts of each policy? (3) which policies have affected male and female migrants who have received support before migration? To achieve these, the analysis is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative component develops an in-depth case study of Sri Lanka based on data from key informant interviews (KIIs) and a review of the literature, which are reinforced by a quantitative difference-in-differences analysis.

The study finds that these directives have many intended and unintended gender implications. The analysis of the positive and negative gender implications provides valuable lessons for future policy

¹ In the remainder of the paper, the term "migrants" refers to international migrant workers, also known as labor migrants.

formulation and implementation, which would facilitate the development of well-founded, evidence-based, constructive approaches to gender issues within migration policies to boost national development.

Section 2 discusses the meaning of gender and its growing importance in the context of migration, while Section 3 focuses on the case of gender and labor migration in Sri Lanka. Section 4 is devoted to the qualitative analysis of the impact of each policy, followed by the quantitative analysis in Section 5. Section 6 discusses other gender related migration policies in Sri Lanka, while Section 7 summarizes the study followed by policy implications and recommendations in Section 8.

2. Migration and Gender: Literature Review

Gender refers to the social differences between women and men that are learned, changeable over time, and have wide variations within and between cultures (EUROPA n.d.). Being a process common to men and women, migration has diverse implications for the two genders, which has made gender an integral part of migration. Thus, gender has necessarily been incorporated into migration-related research and policy development (IOM 2015). IOM (2009, 9) notes that “gender blind policies run the risk of proposing inappropriate responses and solutions to problems.” Similarly, gender specificities change over time and are significantly influenced by the migration experience. Gender is a dynamic notion that points to how differences between men and women are created, evolve, and play out throughout migration.

Despite this growing importance and the related literature on gender and migration (Calavita 2006; Fleury 2016; Moya 2007), only a limited literature focuses on the gender implications of migration policies. OSCE (2009) highlights that gender-sensitive labor migration policies recognize that men and women migrate for economic reasons and better employment opportunities, and that the migration experiences of men and women may differ significantly. The report shows that female migrant workers may experience more disadvantages and discrimination at all stages of the migration process because of the employment categories and sectors offered, educational requirements, and stereotyping, which is often further magnified by the intersectional marginalization of age, class, and ethnicity. OSCE (2009) further notes that gender-sensitive labor migration policies should acknowledge the significant economic and social contributions made by female migrant workers to their countries of origin and destination.

The literature on the theoretical considerations of gender inequality and development includes two main theories. The “women in development” theory is a response to the neglect of women in modernization theory, which has treated development and income inequality as gender-neutral phenomena. Critiquing modernization theory, Boulding (1976) argues that women have always been important actors in history, but their major activities were made invisible by their disproportionate seclusion within the family household. Boserup (1970) shows that international economic development is a gendered process that has affected men and women differently. Gender equality emerged as a development goal among economists and development theorists, and the wide dissemination of “women in development” culminated in its recognition in CEDAW. CEDAW has been ratified by 191 countries. Similarly, “gender and development” (GAD) theory was developed in response to the failure of world-systems theory to integrate gender in its analysis. The theoretical roots of GAD are in socialist-feminism (Rathgeber 1990). GAD theorists have integrated intersectionality by acknowledging that women can be affected differently by policies depending on their class, race, and ethnic position within poor countries (Marchand 1996). GAD literature also considers women to be agents in the development process and not mere victims.

3. Migration and Gender: The Case of Sri Lanka

In 1977, Sri Lanka introduced open market economic policies that included relaxation of restrictions on departure for foreign employment. Since then, labor migration has become organized and prominent. The majority of labor migration flows in the post-1977 period have consisted of temporary migrants who intended to work abroad for a short period while their families remained in Sri Lanka. Because of this short-term view of labor migration from Sri Lanka, remittances make a significant contribution to foreign exchange earnings in the country. In 2015, remittance receipts accounted for 8.4 percent of gross domestic product, surpassing earnings from garment exports, tourism, and tea exports.

During most of the years since the first half of the 1980s, women have accounted for the majority of migrant workers (see figure 1, panel 1). The peak years for female labor migration were 1993 and 1997, when women accounted for 75 percent of migrants. Since 2008, the share of women has declined as a result of government policies such as encouraging skilled migration over low-skilled migration, higher minimum wages for domestic workers, and restriction on the migration of mothers (Thimothy et al. 2016). The decline in the percentage of women among migrant departures is largely due to the increase in male workers and not because of a significant reduction in the absolute number of female departures. This rise in male migration is due to concerted government efforts encouraging migration of skilled workers and providing more opportunities for men to become skilled and migrate as semi-skilled and skilled workers. The emphasis on migration of skilled workers stems from the National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP), which is aimed at increasing inward remittances as well as minimizing the vulnerability of low-skilled migrant workers, who were previously predominantly female.

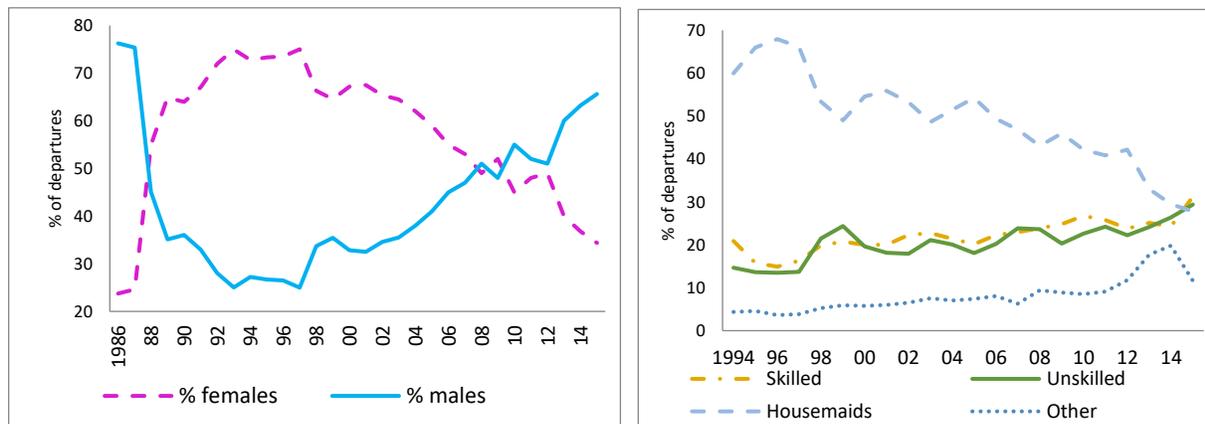
Among female migrants, domestic workers account for the largest share. In 2014, domestic workers accounted for 80 percent of female departures. Despite a long-term declining trend in this share, in absolute terms, women still account for more than 100,000 departures per year. Similarly, female domestic workers still account for a large share among all occupations. Overall, the majority of Sri Lankan migrant workers are involved in jobs in the left tail of the skills distribution of migrant workers.

The majority of migrants, male and female, head to the Middle East region. In 2013, Saudi Arabia and Qatar each accounted for 27 percent of total migrant departures; 51 percent of migrants to Saudi Arabia were women, while 90 percent of those destined for Qatar were men. In recent years, the recruitment process for labor migration from Sri Lanka has mainly been through licensed recruitment agents, which was overtaken by “other sources” (56 percent) in 2015. Such other sources mainly include securing foreign employment through personal contacts. Recruitment through licensed agents also often involves subagents, that is, informal representatives of licensed agents. Despite the absence of a clear understanding of the exact number of subagents operating in Sri Lanka, their services are essential for referring potential migrants from villages to the recruitment agencies located in cities.

The institutional framework for labor migration from Sri Lanka includes the Ministry of Foreign Employment (MFE), which governs the sector. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) is the regulatory authority for the foreign employment industry in Sri Lanka. SLBFE handles all approvals for foreign employment, registration of migrants and recruitment agents, and predeparture training, among its other responsibilities. Other key stakeholders in the industry include the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency, which serves as the government recruitment agency for foreign employment, and the Association

of Licensed Foreign Employment Agencies, which ensures and enforces ethical practices for the foreign employment trade by strict disciplinary control of all stakeholders (Timothy et al. 2016).

Figure 1. Labor Migration from Sri Lanka, 1986–2014



Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Annual Report*, various years.

The policy framework for labor migration from Sri Lanka is based on the NLMP of 2008. In recognition of the contribution of Sri Lankan women migrant workers and their particular vulnerability, the policy notes that the “State shall apply gender sensitive criteria in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes affecting migrant workers and the composition of bodies tasked for the welfare and empowerment of migrant workers” (MFEPW 2008, 7).

4. Qualitative Analysis

For the qualitative analysis, data are based on five KIIs conducted for this study² along with data from secondary KIIs and focus group discussions conducted with potential and returnee migrant workers by Weeraratne (2014), Jayaratne et al. (2014), and Weeraratne, Wijayasiri, and Jayaratne (2018). The qualitative analysis framework adopts a five-step approach involving familiarization, identification of a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping, and interpretation. Additionally, the findings are triangulated and validated with the literature. The following discussion and interpretation of qualitative analysis is presented along these thematic areas emerging from data.

4.1. Zero Chargeable Recruitment Fees for Female Domestic Workers

The literature shows that migrants go to many lengths to finance their recruitment, including selling assets or borrowing from private moneylenders at high interest rates. Those who do not have access to credit make arrangements with agencies or employers to finance their migration costs, allowing them to deduct a portion of their monthly salary until the full amount is recovered (MADE 2014). Such financing of migration is considered risky, resulting in migrants having to pay off large debts, although certain

² KIIs were conducted with Padmini Ratnayake, Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Employment; W. M. V. Wansekara, Additional General Manager, SLBFE; P. P. Weerasekara, Deputy General Manager, IT, Planning and Approval, SLBFE; Nisha Arunatilake, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS); and Sunimallee Madurawela, Research Officer, IPS.

governments and banks offer low-interest loan programs to migrant workers (MADE 2014). In Gulf Cooperation Council countries, increasing recruitment and migration costs and the exploitation of migrant workers occur mainly because of the unhealthy nexus among recruiting agents and individuals who take part in visa trading (Barkat, Hossain, and Hoque 2014).

Worker-paid migration costs vary markedly depending on the worker's skill level—costs rise as worker skill levels fall, so that low-skilled workers pay a higher share of their foreign earnings to recruiters and others than do high-skilled workers. Workers often outnumber jobs in low-skilled occupations, making some workers willing to pay high fees to move to the front of the queue of workers seeking foreign jobs. Such low-skilled workers know they are paying higher fees for foreign jobs than set by the government; still, they may not complain because they get what they want, that is, a foreign job that offers a higher wage (Martin 2014). For these reasons, many sending countries, such as Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, have established ceilings for recruitment fees, while Pakistan specifies a service charge and the Philippines does not allow any charges to be levied on migrant workers (Ratha, Yi, and Yousefi 2016).

Sri Lankans find it difficult to finance migration costs, and premigration indebtedness is common (IPS 2013; Samaratunga, Jayaweera, and Perera 2012; Ukwatte 2010). Specifically, MoH and IOM (n.d.) find that 21 percent of the 37 percent of migrants in debt before migration were in debt for financing foreign employment. Kadirgamar (2013) notes that other common reasons for the indebtedness of Sri Lankans in general include consumption purposes and investment in assets such as land and vehicles.

Against this backdrop, maximum chargeable recruitment fees were introduced in 2009 under Amendment No. 56 to the original SLBFE Act of 1985 to protect migrant workers from agents charging arbitrary recruitment fees, in some instances charging both employer and employee. The SLBFE Act of 1985 prohibited any licensed foreign employment agent from charging fees for placement of migrant workers, while the amendment stipulates that “If any licensee does not receive any commission or any other payment to secure employment opportunities outside Sri Lanka, he may charge the actual expenses to be incurred, in addition to the registration fee from any recruit, after having obtained prior approval for the same from the Bureau.” In this context, given that employers cover the entire cost of recruitment and travel of housemaids to the Middle East, the recruitment agents are not allowed to charge any fees, hence the term zero chargeable. For other job categories, the maximum chargeable is calculated based on the monthly salary, duration of the employment contract, and exchange rate. For instance, for men heading for low-skilled work in the Middle East, the maximum chargeable is capped at SL Rs 125,000,³ and at SL Rs 35,000 for garment workers⁴ of both sexes. For Israel, the maximum chargeable for any occupation is SL Rs 300,000. These zero and maximum chargeable policies are implemented effectively in Sri Lanka, where errant recruiters are penalized.

Therefore, the elimination of recruitment fees for Sri Lankan female domestic workers heading to the Middle East makes migration an accessible livelihood option for more women. The employers in destination countries in the Middle East completely finance the recruitment cost for female domestic workers. Weeraratne (2015) notes that approximately SL Rs 875,000 is spent by a Saudi employer to

³ This amounts to about two months' wages for a Sri Lankan driver in Saudi Arabia.

⁴ This is less than one month's wage for a Sri Lankan garment worker in Saudi Arabia.

recruit a female domestic worker from Sri Lanka, which amounts to more than two years' salary for the domestic worker. This cost includes upfront incentives to the migrant and her family and the agents involved (formal and informal agents as well as local and foreign agents). The incentives often cover other costs associated with preparing for migration, such as training or obtaining a passport. Together, the zero chargeable policy and the practice of upfront incentives make migration very lucrative. Inevitably, the lure of migration is associated with multifaceted gender implications.

The absence of recruitment costs can promote very calculated decisions of escape in the face of domestic violence and abuse. For such victims, the absence of a recruitment fee makes it easier to leave the abusive spouse despite lack of finances to fund migration. Caritas Sri Lanka (n.d.) shows that many women seek foreign employment to escape from abusive or alcoholic husbands. For another group of women, the absence of the recruitment cost facilitates a very calculated family decision to overcome financial and other difficulties (Hettige et al. 2012). Caritas Sri Lanka (n.d.) and HRW (2007) note that many women who migrate to be domestic workers have no alternative job opportunities in Sri Lanka and were unemployed or underemployed. For them, the absence of a recruitment cost made migration an ideal survival strategy, allowing women to contribute to improving the family's financial situation. Additionally, in Sri Lanka the "wage gap between similarly-situated males and females at the bottom end of the wage spectrum can be as large as 33 percent in the private sector and 27 percent in the public sector" (HRW 2007, 10). The ability to migrate free of charge has a significant impact on addressing the wage gap a woman must endure by remaining in Sri Lanka.

On the flip side, it is claimed by MFEPW (2014, 2), that the substantial upfront incentives fuel impulsive migration decisions without "sufficient space to take a considered decision." The repercussions of such decisions include greater vulnerability at the destination and ad hoc arrangements for the family left behind. Moreover, the autonomous decision to migrate without sufficient buy-in of family members often leaves these women and the family less prepared to handle unexpected situations. In recent years, female domestic workers have reported the highest number of complaints at destination (SLBFE 2015).

Moreover, migration decisions have many implications for the children and family left behind. For instance, older female relatives (for example, the migrant's mother or aunts) or female children are suddenly burdened with childcare and other household responsibilities, affecting their own lifestyles. For older women, these additional responsibilities often result in them neglecting their own health and well-being as they attempt to cope with the new situation and additional responsibilities. Similarly, female children entrusted with the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare at very young ages are deprived of their childhood (Save the Children 2006). Female children carry more of the responsibility in such situations because of the cultural norms in South Asia that assign a lower status to women. "[G]irls are widely viewed as a burden" (Sijapati 2015, 4), which results in them being the recipients of ad hoc and added responsibilities. In contrast, except for husbands, these sudden additional responsibilities are rarely entrusted to older men (such as the migrant's father or uncles) and male children in the family. IOM (2009) underscores this point by noting that the gap between male and female roles remains when other female family members take over the responsibilities of the wife and mother, and the male role in the household remains unchanged. Consequently, it is necessary to increase awareness in society at large, and among

family members of female migrants, of the value of female autonomy and prepare all concerned for gender role re-adjustments.

When migration is a calculated family decision, adjusted gender roles are more readily accepted by men and women. The greater income earned by migrating women empowers them in areas such as family decision making and how income is distributed between expenses and savings and what types of expenses and savings. “The newfound power to make decisions and the financial freedom and new authority induced [a] sense of self-worth and independence. Many workers, especially women, had not experienced this before; having lived sheltered lives under the authority of their fathers, brothers and husbands” (Hettige et al. 2012, 49). As noted by UN (2015), in some cases husbands have accepted the position of secondary income earner in relation to the earnings of their wives and prioritized the role of homemaker and caregiver. Save the Children (2006, 18) finds that fathers “assumed new roles involving childcare activities and had a higher comfort level with these roles,” which implies “greater flexibility in the role of father and that ingrained notions of gendered responsibilities in the household may be seeing certain kinds of transformations in the context of the migration of females within families.” Jayasundere, Abeyasekera, and Idemegama (2015) highlight how a father successfully took care of an eight-year-old child while the mother made several trips to Lebanon as a migrant worker until the family built a house and bought a vehicle. The change in gender roles instigated by female migration is viewed ambiguously by children. For instance, Save the Children (2006, 18) shows that children were uncomfortable with changed parental roles, although children viewed the role changes in case of fathers as more positive than negative. Despite being a well-thought-through decision, the mother’s absence may still result in additional responsibility being placed on older women and girl children in the family (Hettige et al. 2012).

Another implication of the absence of recruitment costs and provision of upfront incentives is their capacity to attract women into the labor force. Previous studies show that most female migrants were not employed before migration. Among the 1,520 women surveyed in ILO (2013), only 24 percent had been previously employed. Thus, another gender implication of the zero chargeable policy and the relative ease of obtaining foreign employment is the ability to attract women into the labor force. As Arunatilake, Madurawala, and Jayawardena (forthcoming) suggest, if foreign employment is considered, the *national* female labor force participation rate would increase slightly in Sri Lanka.

The absence of a recruitment cost and provision of upfront incentives affects men differently. Weeraratne (2015) notes that the combination of the absence of recruitment costs and the presence of upfront incentives makes husbands more likely to force wives, who are otherwise not motivated, to migrate for employment. As noted by the author, the intriguing nature of disbursement of the upfront incentive and the possibility of unrestrained use of approximately SL Rs 225,000 (more than six months’ salary of the migrant worker) makes foreign employment a free flow of cash in the eyes of some husbands.

The zero chargeable policy made possible by the employer paying the full cost of recruitment also tends to give the employer a sense of ownership over the female domestic worker. As stated, most employers in the Middle East end up paying SL Rs 875,000 (over two years of the worker’s salary) to recruit a female domestic worker from Sri Lanka. Thus, even before the worker arrives, the employer has made a huge investment for an unseen worker who may or may not continue working for the entire contracted period of two years, and who may or may not be ideal for the job. The combination of this uncertainty and the

huge upfront investment may limit the worker's freedom and human rights. The literature (HRW 2007; IOM 2009; Caritas Sri Lanka n.d.) notes that extreme cases of such perceived ownership result in housemaids being overworked or abused. Moreover, this sense of perceived ownership often extends to confiscation of migrant workers' passports by the employers (HRW 2007; IOM,2009), which disempowers migrant women and makes them feel insecure and vulnerable in a near slave-like situation.

4.2. Mandatory Predeparture Training Requirement

Many countries have a practice of predeparture orientation for the protection of migrant workers. In the Philippines, Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (PDOS) have been mandatory since 1983. PDOS delivered by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration cover topics such as the code of conduct for overseas Filipino workers, destination country profiles, employment contracts, social security, travel procedures, financial literacy, and health and safety (Thimothy et al. 2016). A PDOS certificate of attendance is required for processing the travel and employment documents presented to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration for the issuance of exit clearance.

In Bangladesh, all aspiring migrants must be registered in the official database of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and must attend the predeparture briefing in the bureau's briefing center before their departure. In contrast, predeparture orientation for migrant workers is not mandatory in India, and "the absence of pre-departure orientation services that provide information about the nuances of migration to various destinations is a critical lacuna adversely affecting migrant workers" (Thimothy et al. 2016).

In Sri Lanka, predeparture training was made mandatory in 1996 for those pursuing foreign employment (Siddiqui, Rashid, and Zeitlyn 2008). Such mandatory predeparture training was introduced as part of a package including training, SLBFE registration, and welfare benefits. Specifically, the training had to be completed and certified for the migrant to register with SLBFE, and registration was compulsory for eligibility for welfare benefits such as predeparture loans, scholarships for children, insurance coverage, and others. Thus, in the late 1990s, migration spiked noticeably, mainly because of the increase in registration of migrants, which resulted in declining migration through illegal channels. Moreover, one key informant for the current study strongly believes that mandatory predeparture training has contributed to lower levels of complaints by migrants in destination countries. The main objective of predeparture training is to prepare migrants for foreign employment and thereby reduce their vulnerability at destination. Predeparture training content and duration vary by the intended destination of potential migrants and their anticipated job category. As of April 2016, there were 25 training centers operated by SLBFE, after all privately operated training centers were closed. Recent changes also revised the duration of training courses; for example, the previous 21-day residential training targeting female domestic workers headed to the Middle East is now 40 days. This training course covers topics such as domestic housekeeping, cleaning methods, operation of household appliances, food preparation, table arrangement and food serving, language skills, caring for the elderly and children, financial literacy, laws and customs of the host countries, safe migration, migrant workers' rights and responsibilities, and arrangements for family left behind (Thimothy et al. 2016). Successful completion of this training results in a National Vocational Qualification Level 3 certification (see table 1 for details about other mandatory predeparture training courses).

Table 1 depicts various training courses offered by SLBFE. Except for the training for domestic workers (housekeepers), all others are commonly available for men and women. In addition to modules targeted toward specific occupational categories, such as elder care for caregivers and cooking for housemaids, all training courses have common components such as travel procedures, personal health and cleanliness, adjustment to foreign culture and social environment, and remittance transferring and family economy. For the component on family economy, all married participants are required to bring their spouses and unmarried participants must bring their parents. The family members are educated about what the migrant's life will be like in the destination country and what their roles will be as family members.

In 2015, 57,530 people obtained predeparture training. As seen in table 2, the largest number of trainees were those who underwent the five-day non-domestic training. This training is commonly conducted for men and women, and its associated direct costs are uniform across both genders. However, because of the nonresidential nature of this training, and the requirement to attend the program on five consecutive days, it involves gender-specific implications in accessibility. For men, traveling a long distance from home daily or finding temporary accommodation close to the training center for five days involves only financial costs. However, women, many of whom are not used to traveling long distances alone, would culturally prefer a chaperon, which increases the cost of attending training. Additionally, compared with men, women cannot easily find accommodation for five consecutive days, given that they are less likely to stay at a commercial lodge or hostel. This makes accessing training more complicated for women than for men.

Table 1. Predeparture Training Offered in 2016

Destination	Job category	Duration (days residential)	Fee (SL Rs)
Middle East	Housekeeping assistant	40	13,822.00
Middle East	Non-domestic (Sinhala/Tamil)	5	1,500.00
Middle East Countries, Maldives	Non-domestic sector	5	1,500.00
Singapore; Hong Kong SAR, China; Malaysia	Housekeeping assistant and caregiving	30	14,718.60
Cyprus	Housekeeping assistant and caregiving	30	14,718.60
Israel	Housekeeping assistant and caregiving	30	14,152.50
Middle East	Literacy (Sinhala/Tamil)	18	2,500.00

Source: Author's compilation based on information in SLBFE 2016.

Note: Except for 5 days of training, all others are residential.

Women are less likely than men to be employed when pursuing foreign employment and related training. Thus, the opportunity costs experienced by the two genders are different. Men would need to obtain a leave of absence from the present employer or quit a job to undergo training. For most women, leaving home for training on five consecutive days involves greater coordination on the home front. If a woman travels daily for training, she would need to ensure that food is prepared for the rest of the family members and housekeeping chores are attended to before or after attending training. If she decides to stay away from home during the five days of training, she would have to ensure alternate arrangements

at home. Similarly, preparing for household activities during an absence is greater for women attending the residential training programs. In most cases, women ask their mothers or siblings to stay at their homes in their absence to ensure the smooth operation of household activities. The focus group discussions conducted by Weeraratne, Wijayasiri, and Jayaratne (2018) revealed that women considered this separation from home to be a valuable learning experience before actual departure from the country for foreign employment.

For most men, attending a training program and the related time away from home are hardly noticed by their family and community. As observed by MFEPW (2014, 10), “compared to maternal absence, paternal absences are not unusual or rare in the life of Sri Lankan children and they are comparatively less disruptive.” In contrast, when a woman attends training, her time away from home is much more noticeable because of the greater role she plays in household activities. This absence is more profoundly noticed by the community if a woman resides away from home during the training period. In the unfortunate event that a trained woman is not able to migrate, society has a greater tendency to misinterpret her absence as a relationship issue between the spouses. Such social stigma is rarely associated with the man’s absence from home.

Table 2. Predeparture Training Conducted in 2015

Training	Number of training programs	Number of trainees
Housekeeping assistant (NVQ ^a Level 3)	-	4,795
Middle East domestic (21 days for first-timers)	344	5,670
Middle East domestic (7-day refresher course)	37	420
Literacy (18 days)	45	589
Non-domestic (5 days)	1,192	41,444
Cyprus (NVQ, ^a 30 days)	19	393
Singapore (domestic, 30 days)	10	173
Israel caregiver (30 days)	29	678
Korean language training	75	3,368
Total trained in 2015		57,530

Source: Author’s compilation based on data in MFE 2015.

a. NVQ = National Vocational Qualification certification.

Predeparture training has greater empowering capacity for women because it equips them with information and knowledge about working life, which, to most domestic workers (also known as housemaids), is a new experience. As such, it better prepares these trainees for foreign employment. Most men who undergo training have previously been employed in Sri Lanka, and the added knowledge about working life they acquire is minimal. As noted in the literature, the “tips” provided to women about protecting themselves from the sexual demands of their employers and other men are valued as much as the information on protecting one’s self from electric shocks (Dias and Jayasundere 2002). The profound gender impact of predeparture training is evident in the literature, which shows that “[women] remembered their instructors’ anecdotes and many had kept copious notes and were seen carrying their

exercise books at the airport” (Ali 2005, 114). Predeparture training in Sri Lanka is targeted to vulnerable groups such as female domestic workers, to provide them with information to equip them to cope better in their new work environment and offer strategies for reducing the social cost of labor migration for women. This targeting of predeparture training promotes gender equity in migration outcomes, especially at the destination.

Nonetheless, Timothy et al. (2016) argue that the timing and duration of predeparture training in Sri Lanka are not optimal because the training is delivered too close to departure, which tends to overwhelm migrants with too much information. Additionally, the emotional turmoil of the impending separation from family limits the information retained from the predeparture training. This may be especially true for women leaving children behind, given that these women take a greater role in childcare than men. In a critique of predeparture training in Sri Lanka, Timothy et al. (2016, 56) note that “pre-departure programmes provided to women domestic workers are not fully preparing the workers to perform their expected tasks nor protecting them from harassment and abuse.”

Despite the lack of concrete evidence that predeparture training contributes to greater protection and less vulnerability of migrant workers at destination, the gender implications discussed above provide some initial evidence of the success of the policy.

4.3. Family Background Report

Several countries have repeatedly introduced policies that include age-based bans or exclude women from certain countries or sectors, which restrict the mobility of women and forces them into migration through informal channels, thereby increasing their vulnerability and risk of exploitation (Sijapati 2015). Ghosh (2009) argues that sex-specific bans and discriminatory restrictions on women’s migration on the basis of age, marital status, and pregnancy or maternity status should be repealed, along with restrictions that require women to obtain permission from their spouse or male guardian to obtain passports or travel. Siddiqui (2008, 8) highlights that “sending country governments should acknowledge the reality of feminization of international migration and instead of enacting laws that restrict movement of women for work, adequate information should be made available so that aspirant women migrants can make an informed choice.”

Bangladesh has a long history of banning women from migrating for employment. Siddiqui (2008) notes that in 1981, Bangladesh banned all semi-skilled and unskilled women workers from overseas employment on the grounds of protecting their dignity abroad. This policy was revised in 1988 by replacing the ban with restrictions to limit the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women. In 1997, an almost complete ban was imposed on migration of all categories of women except highly qualified professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and teachers. Siddiqui (2008) documents that this move was viewed by critics as unconstitutional and discriminatory toward women and claimed that it would contribute to trafficking of women. As a result, the government lifted the ban on migration of all categories of women workers except domestic workers. By 2003, the restriction was further relaxed such that unskilled or semi-skilled workers over age 25 were able to migrate with special permission from the regulatory authorities (Siddiqui 2008).

Nepal banned female labor migration from 1998 to 2003. As noted by Siddiqui (2008, 8), this “obstructive policy environment is endangering women migrants of Nepal. The approach of securing women abroad through restricted emigration has proved useless. It has neither been able to curb migration nor secure women.”

In Sri Lanka, the FBR policy introduced in 2013 is an attempt to restrict labour migration of females with young children. The policy stipulates that women with children younger than age 5 years are restricted from migrating for domestic work abroad because they are not “recommended” for foreign employment, while women with children older than age 5 years will only be recommended for migration if satisfactory alternative care arrangements are in place to ensure the protection of their children. Additionally, the FBR specifies that the maximum age of migration for female domestic work is 55 years, and the minimum age is 25 for Saudi Arabia, 23 for other Middle Eastern countries, and 21 for all other countries. The relatively higher minimum age for Saudi Arabia imposed by the FBR is aimed at discouraging young and inexperienced women from migrating for domestic work and facing adverse consequences.

Some of the justifications for the introduction of the FBR include to “provide mothers sufficient space to take a considered decision to migrate rather than decide in compulsion of events, especially when agents providing substantial upfront incentives to migrants” and to provide a proactive family support mechanism to address vulnerabilities instead of the mere provision of necessary information through predeparture training (MFEPW 2014, 2–3).

The FBR’s immediate aim is to discourage women from migrating, with a long-term objective of reducing the adverse implications on children left behind and the associated “family breakdown” (UN 2015). In August 2015, the FBR directive was extended to cover all women seeking foreign employment, and the upper age limit of 55 years was eliminated, and instead females over 50 years were made not required to fulfill the FBR requirement. UN (2015) highlights that the FBR has resulted in decreasing female migration, and Weeraratne (2016) quantifies this decrease to be in the range of 449–812 female domestic workers per month.

Siddiqui (2008) notes that Sri Lanka initially focused on female migration because when Sri Lanka entered the foreign labor market, the demand for male labor was saturated and shrinking, but there was significant demand for women in the domestic and manufacturing sectors. “Realising the demand for female labour migrant[s], the Sri Lankan government actively pursued a policy of promoting female labour migration. This was pursued despite opposition of a section of the civil society of Sri Lanka. Now that Sri Lanka has consolidated its presence, the state has become more interested in pursuing male labour migration. This highlights the patriarchal ideology of [the] Sri Lankan State” (Siddiqui 2008, 8). Siddiqui (2008) further notes that the Sri Lankan policy restricting female migration underscores the state’s double standard, wherein the government promoted female migration when it was necessary, and now that it is no longer crucial to the country’s immediate economic well-being, it is reverting to its traditional ideology of men as the principal breadwinners. For detailed information on the debates and discussions about the FBR, see IPS (2015), UN (2015), and Jayasundere, Abeyasekera, and Idemegama (2015).

Previous studies (UN,2015 and Weeraratne,2016) and the quantitative analysis in the subsequent section shows that as expected, the FBR policy caused a decrease in female labor migration. Such restrictions in foreign employment opportunities for women negate most of the positive impacts brought about by cost-

free migration. Additionally, the FBR associates greater parenting responsibility with the mother. Although the norm is to have two parents in a family, the “*Family*” Background Report policy only restricts the mother’s migration for employment. In contrast, the father can depart for foreign employment at will. This asymmetry in parenting is well documented by IPS (2015) and UN (2015).

In filling out the FBR form, married women applicants are required to fill in their husband’s name along with his consent to childcare arrangements, which confirms his “no objection” for his wife’s migration. Despite the inclusion of information about arrangements for childcare in the mother’s absence in the form and related information about guardians for cases in which the father is not the guardian, the husband’s signature and consent for the wife’s migration is independent of her maternal status (Jayaweera 2015). This requirement for the husband’s consent—explicit or implicit—underscores the implicit imbalance of power in the relationship between the two spouses. Separated or divorced women are required to prove that the separation has been legally determined, which, as highlighted by UN (2015, 23), blurs the “personal/private and the ‘public’ domain of women’s lives.” For unmarried women, the FBR requires the signature of a guardian. However, as noted by UN (2015), the Sri Lankan constitution considers one an adult at age 18 and thus not under the guardianship of parents.

In contrast, none of the above restrictions applies to single, married, separated, or widowed men. UN (2015, 23) highlights that these FBR requirements profile “women in a negative and degrading light,” because they imply that women would provide incorrect information. Despite such profiling, it is widely believed that women are less corrupt than men, globally and in Sri Lanka (TI SL 2002; TI Germany 2014).

As discussed in section 3, the run-up to the introduction of the FBR coincided with severe punishment, including the death penalty, experienced by some migrant domestic workers in the Middle East, and the persistent failure by destination countries to ensure decent working conditions and the well-being of low-skilled workers. As highlighted by Jayaweera (2015), evidence of the appalling conditions faced by male migrant workers, especially those employed in the construction industry (for example, in Qatar), continues to grow.

Given that the well-being of migrants is a central theme of migration policy in Sri Lanka, the absence of any corresponding restrictions on the freedom to migrate for construction work (at least in Qatar) indicates a degree of gender bias in policy formulation. Additionally, domestic occupations include drivers and gardeners, jobs that are performed by men. Thus, the FBR singles out women, and the resulting restrictions are inconsistent with women’s freedom of movement and freedom of employment as enshrined in international human rights conventions. This discrimination against women is evident in all aspects of the FBR intervention.

Additionally, the FBR policy relegates older women to less productive activities in their productive years. The initial FBR requirement in 2013 introduced an upper age limit of 55 years for female domestic work abroad. This upper limit is inconsistent with the ongoing rhetoric urging that the retirement age be increased in Sri Lanka and encouraging people to work late into life. Similarly, the age limit contradicts the higher average life expectancy enjoyed by Sri Lankan women, 78.6 years compared with 72 years for men (DCS 2016), and expects women to spend 29 years—about a third of their lives—in less productive activities. Based on growing global evidence about the benefits of active and socially integrated lifestyles (James et al. 2011; Rowe and Kahn 1997), involvement in household activities and care for grandchildren

appear to be a scientifically and culturally appropriate option for better quality of life for older women in Sri Lanka. Despite the existing evidence on the positive contributions of older women in Sri Lanka to household responsibilities and caring for grandchildren, often enabling their own daughters to pursue employment abroad (Gamburd forthcoming), the FBR requirement does not recognize the potential for older women to be substitute caregivers in the absence of mothers.

Moreover, the FBR policy negates many of the benefits of easier migration brought about by the zero chargeable policy. Specifically, migration for some women is an escape from abusive or violent domestic situations. The requirement for a husband's or parent's signature eliminates the possibility of moving away from an adverse situation at home. Additionally, among the unintended consequences of the FBR are the solicitation of forged FBRs for prices ranging from SL Rs 25,000 to SL Rs 85,000 and an increase in departures of women under visitor visas, which is outside the purview of SLBFE (IPS 2015). Bypassing SLBFE eliminates protective measures such as mandatory pre-departure training and SLBFE registration of contracts, which are designed to minimize vulnerability at destination.

The immediate aim of the FBR is to discourage the migration of women, the longer-term objective being to reduce the adverse impacts on children left behind related to mothers' migration and the associated "family breakdown." The analysis above clearly shows that the policy has decreased the migration of women. However, no comprehensive study has determined whether the policy's long-term objective has been achieved. Nonetheless, based on the gender-focused policy implications analyzed in this paper, on the one hand, anecdotal evidence indicates that mothers who have migrated while the FBR has been in effect have been subjected to additional predeparture stress and pressure brought about by the policy. These adverse effects on the mother's mental state would have a negative impact (at least during her last days at home) on her relationship with and the well-being of her children. On the other hand, no mechanism is in place to support those who were "not recommended" for migration under the FBR. Hence, although the FBR "protected against family breakdown," it is unclear whether staying together as a family contributed to the greater well-being of the children. As such, despite its genesis as a protective mechanism, those held back from migration view the FBR as a punitive measure. Similarly, most development officers involved in the process view the FBR as a punitive measure against the migration of women, mainly because of the absence of clarity in communication of its objectives from policy makers to those implementing it at the grassroots level.

In 2016, because of lobbying and statements by different stakeholders, the FBR requirement was considered for review by a parliamentary subcommittee representing the Ministries of Foreign Employment, Women and Child Affairs, National Policies and Economic Affairs, Justice, City Planning and Water Supply, and Finance. Despite much encouragement by MFE and SLBFE to repeal the FBR based on evidence in the literature and stakeholder perceptions, the subcommittee decided to continue to enforce the FBR requirement. Nevertheless, based on recommendations by MFE and SLBFE, a pilot project commenced in January 2017, in which the FBR decision is made by a committee at the divisional secretariat level instead of the individual development officers. This committee include officials from MFE; the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs; and the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine, to review FBR applications.

5. Quantitative analysis

5.1. Data and Methodology

The main gender implication of the FBR is that it caused a decrease in the number of female departures. To investigate the causal effect, the quantitative component of this paper involves a difference-in-differences methodology based on monthly departure statistics obtained from SLBFE from 2012 to 2015. Given that FBR was introduced for housemaids in June 2013 and expanded to cover all women in August 2015, the analysis is presented in two segments. The first analysis focuses on housemaids from January 2012 to June 2015. For the second analysis, all female migrants other than housemaids regardless of job category are considered from June 2013 to December 2015. Table 3 below depicts summary statistics for by age groups for two types of migrants considered in this study.

Table 3: Average Female Departures of Housemaids and Non-Housemaids by Age Groups

Age group	Housemaids			Non-Housemaids		
	Obs	Mean	SD	Obs	Mean	SD
25-29 years	18	1420.11	209.64	25	296.44	38.20
30-34 years	18	1818.56	202.77	25	300.40	50.11
40-44 years	18	1674.72	190.12	25	231.08	35.64
45-49 years	18	1414.39	180.63	25	187.48	31.03

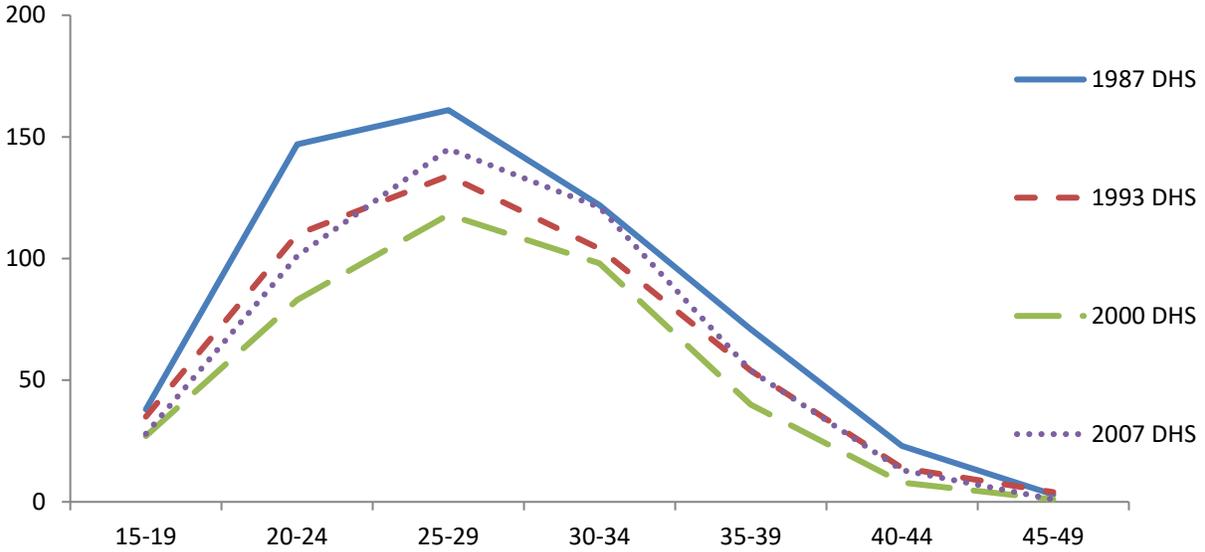
Source: Author's estimation

Note: Period for Housemaids is January 2012 - June 2013 , period for Non-Housemaids is June 2013 - July 2015

The difference-in-differences methodology exploits the variation in departure statistics before and after the introduction of the FBR across two groups that were and were not affected by the policy. The basic idea behind the methodology is to analyze those affected by the policy (the treatment group) and take the difference in average monthly departures of that group before and after the introduction of the policy. For a separate group that has not been affected by the policy (the control group), the difference in average departures before and after the FBR policy is calculated. Subtracting this difference related to the control group from the difference associated with the treatment group provides the difference-in-differences estimate. Subtracting the difference in the control group eliminates other possible reasons that may affect average departures.

Among housemaids, age groups that are more likely to have young children are considered the treatment group, while age groups less likely to have young children are considered the control group. Based on DCS and MOH (2009), the age groups 25–29 and 30–34 years are high-fertility ages and thus are associated with having young children; hence, these are the treatment group (see figure 1). The age groups 40–44 and 45–49 years serve as the control group. See Weeraratne (2016) for an extensive discussion of the validity of the above assumptions and the validity of the parallel-trends assumption required for difference-in-differences estimation. The top four panels in figure 2 justify the parallel trends assumption for housemaids.

Figure 1. Fertility Rates



Source: DCS and MOH 2009.

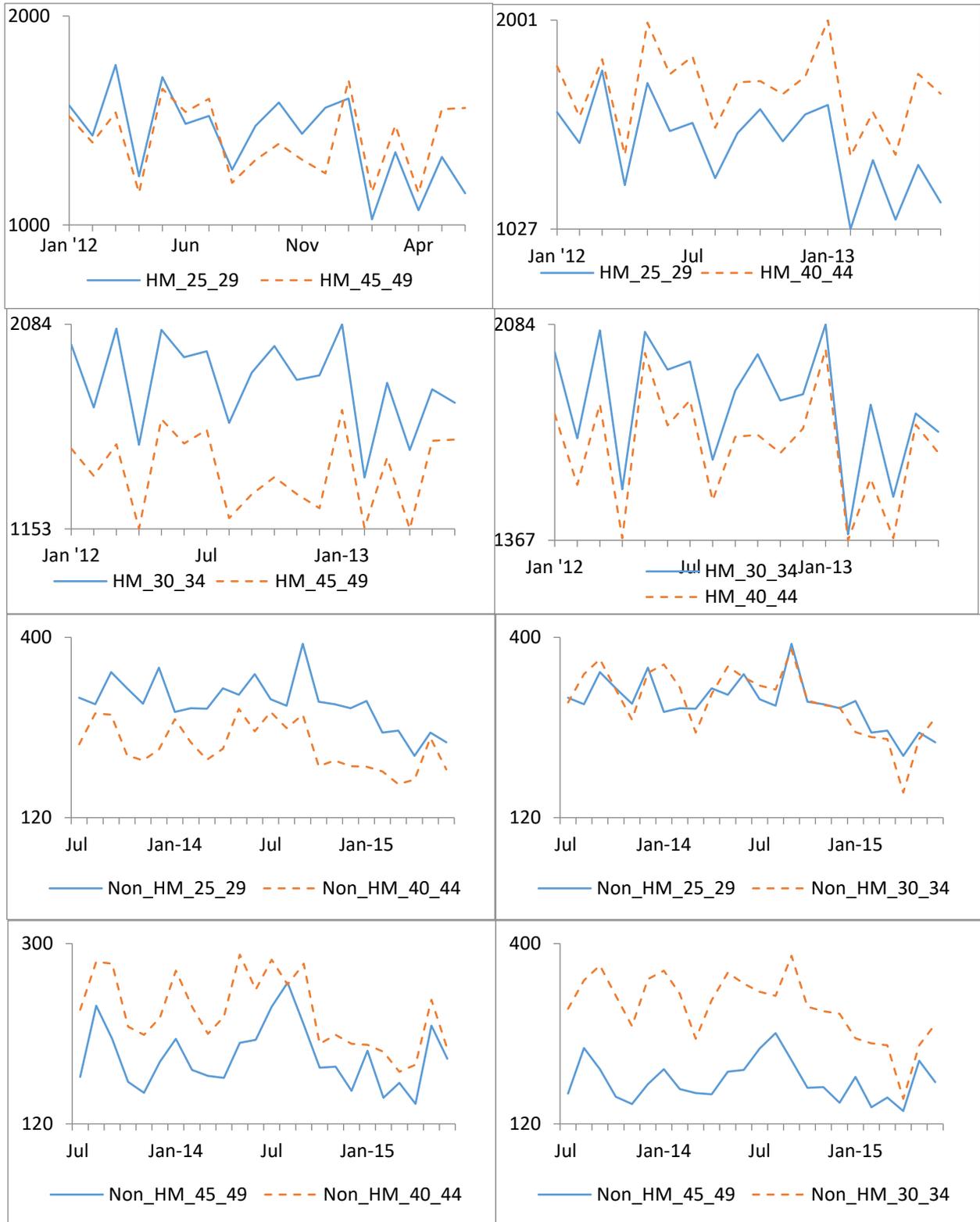
Note: DHS = Demographic and Health Survey.

For the second analysis, all female migrants other than housemaids regardless of job category are considered from June 2013 to December 2015. As before, the age groups 25–29 and 30–34 years are considered the treatment group, and age groups 40–44 and 45–49 years are considered control groups. The bottom four panels in figure 2 justify the parallel-trends assumption for all female migrants other than housemaids. For each group, the estimates are based on equation (1):

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta TREAT + \gamma AFTER + \delta TREAT \times AFTER + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{it} is the average monthly departure of women for employment; $TREAT = 1$ for those in the treatment group and $TREAT = 0$ for the comparison group; and $AFTER$ indicates the period after the respective intervention. For instance, for housemaids, $AFTER = 1$ for July 2013 to June 2015, while $AFTER = 0$ for January 2012 to June 2013. Similarly, for the second analysis, $AFTER = 1$ for all periods from August 2015 to December 2015, while $AFTER = 0$ for July 2013 to July 2015. The coefficient on the interaction term, δ , indicates the causal effect of the FBR requirement (treatment effect) on average monthly departures. The identification of the treatment effect is based on the intertemporal variation between the treatment and control groups.

Figure 2: Trends in Monthly Departures before Implementation of the Family Background Report Requirement



Source: Staff, based on Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment data

Note:

1. All vertical axes correspond to the number of departures.
2. All horizontal axes correspond to the time period.
3. HM_25_29: housemaids ages 25–29 years.
4. HM_30-34: housemaids ages 30–34 years.
5. HM_40-44: housemaids ages 40–44 years.
6. HM_45-49: housemaids ages 45–49 years.
7. Non_HM_25_29: all female migrants other than housemaids ages 25–29 years.
8. Non_HM_30-34: all female migrants other than housemaids ages 30–34 years.
9. Non_HM_40-44: all female migrants other than housemaids ages 40–44 years.
10. Non_HM_45-49: all female migrants other than housemaids ages 45–49 years.

5.2. Analysis of Housemaids

In the analysis of housemaids, as seen in table 3, all coefficient estimates for δ are negative and statistically significant. For housemaids in the age group 25–29 years, when the control group is housemaids ages 40–44 years, the impact of the FBR is a decline in departures by 261 women per month. For the same treatment age group, when the control group is changed to housemaids ages 45–49 years, the decline in departures is 463 women per month. As a percentage of average departures reported for this age group of 25–29 years in Table 4, these declines are 18 and 33 %, respectively. Columns 3 and 4 in table 3 show the estimated impact of the FBR on housemaids in the age group 30–34 years, for whom the impact is a decline in departures by 310 housemaids per month when the control group is housemaids ages 40–44 years and a decline of 512 housemaids per month when the control group is housemaids ages 45–49 years. As a share of average departures reported for this age group of 30-34 years in Table 3, these declines are 17 and 28 %, respectively. These findings confirm the previous findings by Weeraratne (2016), showing that when an extended data period is considered, a similar negative causal effect of the FBR is evident.

To test the robustness of the findings, a placebo test is performed, by shifting the time of implementation of the FBR requirement to June 2014 from its actual time of June 2013. The data period considered for the placebo test is restricted to June 2013 to June 2015.

As is evident in first four columns in Table 5, none of the coefficient estimates is significant at any conventional level, confirming that the decline in departures seen in table 3 was caused by the FBR intervention. As robustness check the validity of assumption that FBR only affects those in the age groups of the 25-29 and 30-34 years, and hence defining them as treatment groups and others control groups, a second placebo test is performed where the age group 40-44 years is considered as a placebo treatment group and the 45-49 age group is considered as the comparison group. As shown in column 5 of Table 5 a weak statistical significance (at 5 % level) is estimated for the placebo treatment effect. Thus, even though the parallel trends assumption between treatment and control groups were valid, the assumption based on fertility rates that females aged 40-44 years are not affected by the FBR is not upheld under this robustness check. Instead, this robustness test shows that age group of 40-44 is also likely to be affected

by the FBR policy. As such, findings in columns (1) and (3) in Table 4 need to be considered in light of the limited validity of the underlying assumption concerning the comparison group used.

Table 4. Coefficients of the Difference-in-Differences Model for Housemaid Departures

	(1) 25–29 vs 40–44	(2) 25–29 vs 45–49	(3) 30–34 vs 40–44	(4) 30–34 vs 45–49
Treatment group	–254.6*** (–4.24)	5.722 (0.10)	143.8* (2.25)	404.2*** (6.44)
After policy change	–312.3*** (–5.57)	–110.3* (–2.01)	–312.3*** (–5.23)	–110.3 (–1.88)
Treat # After	–261.1** (–3.29)	–463.1*** (–5.95)	–310.0*** (–3.67)	–511.9*** (–6.17)
Constant	1,674.7*** (39.48)	1,414.4*** (34.01)	1,674.7*** (37.09)	1,414.4*** (31.88)
Observations	84	84	84	84

Source: Staff estimates.

Note: *t* statistics are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Placebo Test Coefficients of the Difference-in-Differences Model for Housemaid Departures

	(1) 25–29 vs 40–44	(2) 25–29 vs 45–49	(3) 30–34 vs 40–44	(4) 30–34 vs 45–49	(5) 40–44 vs 45–49
Treatment group	–508.8*** (–8.51)	–417.2*** (–6.75)	–122.9 (–1.84)	–31.25 (–0.46)	260.3*** (4.23)
After policy change (placebo)	–154.0* (–2.52)	–83.08 (–1.32)	–154.0* (–2.26)	–83.08 (–1.19)	–110.3* (–1.99)
Treat # After (placebo)	–11.44 (–0.13)	–82.38 (–0.92)	–86.27 (–0.89)	–157.2 (–1.59)	–202.0* (–2.52)
Constant	1,429.8*** (33.81)	1,338.2*** (30.64)	1,429.8*** (30.30)	1,338.2*** (27.62)	1304.0*** (36.17)
Observations	46	46	46	46	60

Source: Author's estimates.

Note: *t* statistics are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5.3. Analysis of all Female Migrants other than Housemaids

The second analysis includes all female migrants other than housemaids from June 2013 to December 2015. The FBR was extended to all women with effect from August 2015 and, as depicted in Table 6, there

is a statistically significant negative impact of this intervention. For all female migrants other than housemaids in the age group 25–29 years, the FBR reduces departures by 53 and 69 women per month when the control groups are female migrants in the age groups 40–44 and 45–49 years, respectively. These estimated declines correspond to 18 and 23 %, relatively as a share of average departures reported in Table 3. When the treatment group is women ages 30–34, the drops in departures for the same two control groups are 53 and 69 women per month, or 18 and 23 % of average departures reported in Table 3. This new finding of the negative impact of the FBR on all female departures is robust to the placebo test, in which the intervention date is shifted to June 2014 and the data period is restricted to June 2013 to June 2015. As seen in first four columns in Table 7, for this placebo test, none of the coefficient estimates is statistically significant.

To test the validity of the assumption in identifying age groups affected by the FBR, as in the first analysis those in the age group 40-44 years is considered as a placebo treatment group and the 45-49 years age group is considered as the comparison group. Contrary to the case of Housemaids, column 5 in Table 7 shows no statistical significance on the interaction term implying zero impact of the FBR on the placebo treatment group. This validates the assumption that the FBR only affects those in the age groups of the 25-29 and 30-34 years, and not those in the age groups 40-44 and 45-49 years.

Table 6. Coefficients of the Difference-in-Differences Model for Female Departures (Other than Housemaids)

Coefficients of Diff-in-diff Models for Female Departures (Other than Housemaids)

	(1) 25-29 vs 40-44	(2) 25-29 vs 45-49	(3) 30-34 vs 40-44	(4) 30-34 vs 45-49
Treatment group	65.36*** (6.17)	109.0*** (10.92)	69.32*** (5.56)	112.9*** (9.45)
After policy change	-32.48 (-1.84)	-16.28 (-1.21)	-32.48 (-1.84)	-16.28 (-1.21)
Treat # After	-52.56* (-2.40)	-68.76*** (-3.67)	-53.12* (-2.49)	-69.32*** (-3.84)
Constant	231.1*** (31.96)	187.5*** (29.79)	231.1*** (31.96)	187.5*** (29.79)
Observations	60	60	60	60

Source: Author's estimates.

Note: *t* statistics are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Nevertheless, the FBR may include a possible substitution effect, where the treatment group affected by the FBR may have on women belonging to the control groups. As discussed before, older women in Sri Lanka often care for their grandchildren, which makes migration of their daughters for employment

abroad possible. The FBR policy, which constrains young mothers to stay home, will then free older women to migrate. Therefore, even if parallel trend assumption is valid before the start of the FBR, any differences in trends between the treatment and comparison groups that occur after the introduction of the FBR may not only capture the treatment effect on women having young children, but also this possible substitution effect. As such, results discussed above may also include some substitution effect, which cannot be addressed using current data.

Table 7. Placebo Test Coefficients of the Difference-in-Differences Model for Female Departures (Other than Housemaids)

	(1) 25–29 vs 40–44	(2) 25–29 vs 45–49	(3) 30–34 vs 40–44	(4) 30–34 vs 45–49	(5) 40–44 vs 45–49
Treatment group	-274.2** (-3.04)	-27.56 (-0.32)	108.8 (1.18)	355.4*** (4.06)	43.60*** (4.55)
After policy change(placebo)	-41.72 (-0.46)	8.222 (0.10)	-41.72 (-0.45)	8.222 (0.09)	-16.28 (-1.21)
Treat # After (placebo)	-78.89 (-0.62)	-128.8 (-1.07)	-77.33 (-0.59)	-127.3 (-1.03)	-16.20 (-0.73)
Constant	1796.4*** (28.21)	1549.8*** (25.71)	1796.4*** (27.56)	1549.8*** (25.05)	187.5*** (29.76)
Observations	72	72	72	72	60

Source: Author's estimates.

Note: *t* statistics are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

6. Other Policies

Overall, the three regulations outlined above have been successfully implemented. In addition to these selected regulations, the NLMP of 2008, its subpolicy on Return and Reintegration, and the Migration Health Policy have gender implications. NLMP acknowledges the fundamental equality of women and men before the law and the significant role of women in nation building. As such, this policy recognizes the contribution of Sri Lankan women migrant workers as well as their vulnerabilities, for which the state aims to apply gender-sensitive criteria in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs that affect migrant workers. NLMP recognizes that the concentration of labor migration in low-skilled categories dominated by female workers is a major challenge, with related problems of protection, low remuneration, and resulting low remittances.

NLMP provides the necessary guidance for the subpolicy on Return and Reintegration, which is based on linking migration to development to enable the skills and potential of returnees to be tapped for national and personal development. Among its many underlying principles, the one on upholding the values of inclusiveness, nondiscrimination, and gender equality is directly relevant for this study. Similarly, the Migration Health Policy addresses the gender dimensions of migration through its reference to health-

related issues resulting from gender-based violence faced by outbound migrant workers, particularly women in low-skilled work and employed in domestic environments. This Migration Health Policy stems from Sri Lanka's overall vision for the protection of the rights of all migrant populations.

7. Summary of Findings

Gender implications have always been present in labor migration, but these implications have recently come to the forefront as a topic of discussion and study. More nations are recognizing the correlation between gender and migration and the importance of addressing gender issues to enhance the benefits of migration for origin and destination countries. In the meantime, the full benefits and opportunities for migration to advance gender equality and general well-being are yet to be realized. To improve understanding of the relationship between national policies and concerns about gender issues and migration, this study analyzed the influence of migration policy areas in Sri Lanka.

The study focused on three policies: zero chargeable recruitment fees for female domestic workers to the Middle East, mandatory pre-departure training for migrants, and the FBR requirement. The analysis shows that each policy affects men and women differently. The findings show that the intended impacts of the zero chargeable policy include elimination of debt bondage and premigration indebtedness, empowerment, resilience to income shocks, and greater labor force participation by women. The unintended consequences for women include a decrease in impulsive decisions to migrate, being forced to migrate, being subjected to a sense of ownership by the employer, resilience to adverse domestic situations such as abuse and violence, and addressing the gender wage gap to some extent. The positive implications of the zero chargeable policy on men include acceptance of the position as secondary income earner in the family and taking over more childcare and household responsibilities, while alcoholism and forcing women into migration are some unintended outcomes. The policy also causes older women and girl children in families to take on more responsibilities than older men and boy children.

The gender implications of pre-departure training include accessibility issues faced by women, the gender-specific opportunity costs of training, and greater protection and empowerment of female migrants as a result of training and the related advancement toward equity in gender outcomes at destination.

The main gender implication of the FBR is that it causes female departures to decline. It also unevenly distributes parenting responsibilities between the mother and father, limits the independence and freedom of women, casts women in a negative light, violates women's human rights, and treats female domestic workers differently from male domestic workers. Moreover, the policy discriminates against men who are vulnerable at destination versus women who are protected under the FBR. If the FBR were expanded to cover men, it would introduce greater involvement of family members in the male migration decision-making process, which has the potential for greater scrutiny of employment conditions at destination prior to migration.

8. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The gender implications from the study highlight a few overall policy implications. On impulsive migration, related complaints and premature return of less prepared migrant workers burden SLBFE with administrative and repatriation costs, which could have been avoided. Similarly, such complaints and

premature return by Sri Lankan migrant workers damage the reputation of the entire female domestic worker supply from Sri Lanka and negatively affect its bargaining power in destination countries.

Additionally, the study finds that some of the positive gender implications brought about by one policy are negated by another policy. For instance, greater accessibility of women's migration brought about by the zero chargeable policy is neutralized by the FBR requirement for the same set of women. Specifically, easy access to migration can possibly improve a violent or abusive domestic situation and underscores the values enshrined in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 2005. However, when the FBR is implemented as a blanket policy, it negates such benefits. Similarly, the greater responsibility in household activities and childcare assumed by husbands associated with the zero-chargeable recruitment fee is reversed by the FBR's assumptions about the mother's greater role in childcare. Moreover, the greater protection ensured by mandatory predeparture training is diluted by the FBR's potential to drive migration outside oversight by SLBFE.

At the national level, Sri Lanka is striving to enable women to have "better access to opportunities at all levels" (MNPEA 2016). However, easy access to migration brought about by the zero chargeable policy and upfront incentives is associated with a disproportionate allocation of household responsibilities to younger and older female members of the household, in contradiction to the ongoing national policy interests in improving gender equity.

As such, in addition to their multifaceted gender implications, these migration rules, regulations, and policies also have policy implications. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations to improve the related policy implications are as follows:

- Restructure predeparture training into two components in which (1) migration awareness training targets potential migrants so they can make an informed decision, and (2) predeparture training targets those who have decided to migrate for employment.
- Introduce into the predeparture curriculum a component on mapping out the targets and goals (benefits) of migration versus its potential issues and sacrifices (costs). Such a mapping exercise would facilitate a better understanding of the full scope of migration, its costs and benefits, and its intended objectives, as well as a plan for achieving these objectives.
- Negotiate with destination country governments to incorporate upfront incentives into higher monthly wages for female domestic workers.
- Improve coordination among policies to ensure optimal gender outcomes.
- Mainstream gender in migration policy formulation.
- Devise greater advocacy and legislative initiatives to strengthen awareness, training, and capacity building; enhance protection and assistance; and build more effective bilateral, regional, and international cooperation on gender. Much could also be achieved through greater advocacy and legislative and policy initiatives.
- To handle situations of domestic violence, the FBR requirement should be equipped with a built-in flexibility mechanism to facilitate regulators to evaluate the pros and cons of departure for foreign employment against remaining in a violent or abusive domestic situation.

- To overcome issues of access to predeparture training, residential training with fewer days (that is, two and a half days) covering the same number of hours as the five-day nonresidential training (with sessions continuing late into the evening) should be introduced for women.

In conclusion, these findings based on the Sri Lankan case study provide valuable lessons for policy formulation in other countries, to minimize the negative and maximize the positive gender implications of migration policies.

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