



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research  
Vol. 8, Issue, 1, pp. 15243-15250, January, 2017

**International Journal of  
Recent Scientific  
Research**

## Research Article

### GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONALS AND ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING CARE AND PROTECTION SERVICES TO THE LEFT BEHIND CHILDREN (LbC): A SRI LANKAN PERSPECTIVE

**Buddhiprabha D. D. Pathirana**

Department of Philosophy & Psychology, University of Peradeniya,  
Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2016  
Received in revised form 25<sup>th</sup>  
November, 2016  
Accepted 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2016  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2017

##### Key Words:

Left behind children, Female Migrant  
Workers, Sri Lanka, Middle East

#### ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan women have been journeying to the Middle East to be employed as domestic workers for several decades. The majority of them are mothers of young children who have left their children with their spouses and kin carers, having made ad hoc arrangements. This paper explores the services and provisions available to the LbC of the Sri Lankan female migrant workers to the Middle East (ME) from varied government organizations. The paper also provides suggestions and recommendations to these professionals/ organizations with the aim of promoting the wellbeing of the LbC of female migrant workers to the ME.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan women have been working as domestic workers in the Middle East for over four decades. A significant number of them are women, employed as domestic workers and in other relatively less skilled service sectors. They are with comparatively low levels of education (when compared to the national average). A significant percentage of these female domestic workers to ME are also mothers of young children who have overstayed their employment. They may have been separated from their children for a relatively long period; leaving their children behind on ad hoc arrangements. These arrangements include requesting their spouses, immediate family member, relative or neighbour to look after the left behind children (LbC) during their employment (Gamburd, 2008).

Literature conveys these ad hoc arrangements for the LbC in particular and female migration, in general, creates a plethora of problems for the female migrant workers, and their families (Perera&Rathnayaka, 2013; Senaratna, 2012; Senaratna, 2011; Hugo &Ukwatta, 2010; Gamburd, 2008; Senarathna, 2007). Literature also conveys that children of female migrant workers to Middle East experience psychological, educational and physical health issues (Senarathna, 2011; Hugo et al., 2010; Senarathna, 2007) due to varied repercussions attached to their mother's lengthy departure.

Moreover, a lacuna of structures and specific mechanisms prevent children from accruing professional care and protection services for their wellbeing apart from those received by their primary caregivers.

#### *The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment*

Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) is the State agency responsible for regulating the foreign employment in Sri Lanka. It oversees the issues pertaining to migrant workers. Established in 1986, under the Act No.21, it is a self-financed, semi-government corporation (funded by migrant workers' recruitment fees and commissions paid by employment agencies). It does not receive funds from the Treasury (CARITAS, 2010). The objectives of the SLBFE are spread over a wide area which can be classified broadly as promoting / developing foreign employment opportunities, regulating, assisting, and setting standards for foreign employment agencies

SLBFE oversee the welfare and protection of migrant workers by undertaking the training, orientation, and verifying documentation before seeking employment. It places its priorities on the promotion of migration as a means of income generation for the State and individuals employed abroad (SLBFE, 2016). It aims to promote opportunities for Sri Lankan migrant workers to find decent and productive employment while enjoying freedom, equity, security and

\*Corresponding author: **Buddhiprabha D. D. Pathirana**

Department of Philosophy & Psychology, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

human dignity. Its Policy comprises of three sections; namely, governance of the migration process, protection and empowerment of migrant workers and their families, and linking migration and development processes. It is intended to do so through the institution of policies, laws, regulations, services and facilities for migrant workers and their families. It also places a special emphasis on the development of skills to promote productivity, higher wages, and protection for migrant workers and their families.

In the past, the SLBFE has organized child protection awareness programs to ensure the protection of the migrant worker's children. Through these programs, it aims to identify children in need of special attention and assistance with the intention of providing financial, health assistance as well as helping to purchase items required for their education for children with high academic competencies (SLBFE, 2016). SLBFE has also established "Rataviru" (Heroes Abroad) day-care centre for the LbC if their parents are its registered members.

#### ***State child welfare agencies responsible for care and protection of the LbC***

The care and protection of the Sri Lankan children come under the purview of the Ministry of Women & Child Affairs. It comprises of several departments and statutory institutions, overseeing the care and protection of the Sri Lankan women and children. They are Sri Lanka Women's Bureau, National Committee on Women, Department of Probation and Child Care Services, National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) and Children's Secretariat (Ministry of Women & Child Affairs, 2016).

#### ***The Department of Probation and Child Care***

The Department of Probation and Child Care Services was established on 1st October 1956, under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance No 48 of 1952. It aims to provide care and protection for the Sri Lankan children. Its mission is listed as protecting the rights of Sri Lankan children especially ones belonging to vulnerable groups (i.e. Orphaned, abandoned, destitute children and children in conflict with the law); confirming to the national policies and international standards for children while ensuring their maximum participation (Department of Probation and Child Care, 2013). After Provincial Councils have been formed certain administrative functions of the department has been vested to the Provincial Commissioners of Probation. Probation Officers and Child Right Promotion Officers are key government officials endowed with the responsibility of childcare of the LbC.

#### ***National Child Protection Authority (NCPA)***

National Child Protection Authority was established in 1998. It has a wide mandate to address all aspects of prevention and child protection issues in the continuum of prevention to intervention. Section 14 of the NCPA Act lists the responsibilities of the NCPA pertaining to the LbC. They comprise of formulating policies, advising government on national policy and measures pertaining to prevention and treatment of child abuse and protection issues of Sri Lankan children, creating awareness on child protection, consulting and co-coordinating with relevant ministries/local authorities/

public & private sector, organizations and recommending prevention measures for child abuse and protection of the Sri Lankan children (including protection issues of the LbC). Its services also extends to recommending legal, administrative reforms for the effective implementation of national policy, monitoring implementation of the progress of all investigations, and conducting research if and when required (NCPA, 2013).

#### ***Providing recommendation for optimum care and protection of the LbC***

Considering the revenue that female migrant workers contribute to the national economy as well as the threats/ harm the female migration pose for the wellbeing of the LbC, there seemed to be urgency in findings structural changes to the existing mechanisms in the best interests of the female migrant workers as well as their children. Thus, aim of the present paper is to provide recommendations to professionals working towards the wellbeing of the LbC with aim of providing optimum care, protection, and well-being within them.

#### ***Recommendation 01: Make amendments to the migration ACT ensuring the best interest of the migrant workers, their children, and families***

Due to the violation of human rights issues experienced by transnational female migrant workers (Human Rights Advocates, 2009) and considering the social/ emotional costs of the migration to their children/families; many South Asian countries do not proactively encourage female migration to the Middle East.

Interestingly, the present act of SLBFE reflects a positive attitude pertaining to female migration to the ME. The paper is of the opinion that this approach conveys ignorance and negligence of social-emotional cost that female migration poses to the LbC. Hence, considering the varied negative repercussion created from female migration to the ME, the paper believes even though the revenue they contribute to the national economy is significant they far outweigh the social-emotional costs incurred from it. Thus, the paper argues that even though the current migration act recognizes the significant contribution of migrant workers to the national economy through varied benefits provided, it should not promote female migration to ME as one of the profound means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development.

SLBFE Act in principle recognizes, the wellbeing of the families of Sri Lankans employed outside the country, and have taken considerable measure in the past to promote the wellbeing of the LbC. These interventions include introducing scholarships for children of the migrant workers, and insurance schemes (SLBFE, 2016). However, the paper is of the opinion that the responsibility for the care and protection of the LbC are not adequately reflected in these interventions. For instance, this policy does not seem to acknowledge the optimum care and protection practices which child welfare agencies in Sri Lanka seem to advocate, as mentioned in the paragraph below.

Acknowledging the social-emotional costs on the children, Sri Lanka's ministerial cabinet approved a proposal by the Minister for Child Development and Women's Empowerment that would veto women with children under 5 years of age from emigrating for work. The regulation also required mothers with

children over 5 years to obtain approval from a government committee after submitting proof that they can provide appropriate caretakers for their children (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

However, this proposal was met with criticism by Human Rights Organizations as they claimed that this policy blatantly discriminates against women and threatens the well-being of their children. According to the proponents of freedom of women, this policy would prevent many mothers from supporting their children from the only form of work they can find (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Thus the paper believes that the government of Sri Lanka urgently requires resolving the dilemma which currently seems to exist between the women's freedom of movement and their right to choose a career in the best interest of their LbC. Currently, only handful of measures exists in this arena, containing a multitude of loopholes.

It also argues that the government of Sri Lanka requires considering social, emotional costs as well as the long-term financial costs (i.e. money spent on child protection investigation, revenue spent on alcohol and drug addiction rehabilitation) for children of the female migrant workers as well as other expenses incurred by the long-term failures of their employment abroad.

Hence, the paper recommends the government of Sri Lanka to consider revising the migration policy considering the best interest of the female migrant workers and their children.

**Recommendation 02: Develop effective mechanisms to monitor the protection of the LbC**

Literature conveys that LbC experience varied types of abuse (Perera & Rathnayaka, 2013; Senarathna, 2011; Hugo *et al*, 2010; Save the Children, 2006) which threaten their wellbeing. Hence, the paper argues that the government of Sri Lanka requires taking specific and urgent measures to ensure the protection of the LbC.

As the statutory body responsible for the protection of the LbC, the paper recommends the NCPA to develop an effective monitoring mechanism to identify and monitor the protection issues of the LbC; especially, those children who may be at risk for abuse and neglect. Paper identifies different strategies to carry out this mechanism, they are:

**Carry out the monitoring through the District Child Protection Committees (DCPC) formulated by the NCPA-**

NCPA has formulated DCPC's in each administrative district in Sri Lanka, under the capacity of 15(e) of the Act No.50. The structure of the DCPC bring together multitude of government officers (i.e. officers in charge of the probation and child care, local law enforcement authorities, the Judiciary, and health), individuals from the non-governmental partner organizations and civil society activists who are concerned about the care and protection of the children in each district. The District Secretary acts as a focal point of the DCPC and is responsible for the planning and implementation of activities. Therefore, the paper believes that DCPC portrays a hopeful sign for better coordination of childcare and protection, bringing together a large number of local child care and protection professionals, para-professionals and community workers/civil society

activists. Unfortunately, DCPC's seem to be inadequately managed and not optimally functional at the district level, with very few DCPC's meeting regularly to discuss and coordinate activities. Hence, before using DCPC's to monitor the protection issues of the LbC the paper recommends NCPA to evaluate the current status of each district DCPC.

**Carry out effective child protection monitoring through the district and psychosocial coordinators of the NCPA-**

The paper believes that NCPA is strategically positioned to create an effective monitoring mechanism for the care and protection of the LbC through its large body of officials, starting from psychosocial and district coordinator of the NCPA. With the help of other professionals who are in direct contacts with the LbC such as teachers and school counselors, NCPA officials could form a network with school authorities, GS and the family health worker in each GS divisions to monitor and address the protection issues of the LbC. In line with this recommendation the paper also requests the NCPA to strengthen the school child protection committees, and the school level monitoring activities of the LbC to be carried out through the school child protection committees.

Further, the paper recommends the SLBFE and Ministry of Education (MoE) to initiate independent monitoring mechanisms; requesting regular reports from the schools pertaining to the academic achievements and psychosocial issues of the LbC; thus leading to form an alert system to detect their academic failures, continuous absenteeism and school drop outs.

**Recommendation 03: Develop effective mechanisms to support, and monitor care/support available to the LbC**

As the government statutory body endowed with the care and rehabilitation of Sri Lankan children, the paper recommends the Department of Probation and Child Care Services to develop an effective mechanism to monitor, care & support available to the LbC. It believes that care and support could be supervised/ monitored through the Probation and Child Rights Promotion Officers attached to the Department of Probation.

Since school are reported to provide a protective spaces for children without adequate parental care (Save the Children, 2006) and LbC seem to have placed a high faith in peers (Save the Children, 2006), and teachers were often seen as "surrogate parents" by Sri Lankan adolescents (Pathirana, 2014); the paper recommends the department of Probation & the MoE to explore the ways of including teachers and peers to be part of a care and support mechanism for LbC.

Based on previous literature (Pathirana, 2006; Save the Children, 2006) the paper recommends the Ministry of Education, and the Department of Probation & Child Care to create care and support circles or ecological structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1970) surrounding the LbC. In line with this, the paper suggests in creating three care and support circles around the LbC. They are: 1. First or the inner circles to be formed with fathers, kin carers, friends and peers of the LbC, 2. the second circle or the middle circle with teachers, school counselors & school administrators and other supportive professionals and finally, 3. The third or the outer circle formed with government officials, in charge of care and support of the LbC, as well as civil society activists/ community workers.

Further, the paper suggests that the State Child Welfare agencies require evaluating the support available to the LbC from these ecological structures. If and when gaps exist they require addressing them by advocating suitable mechanisms.

Moreover, it further recommends that the Ministry of Education to explore ways of providing extra academic support in and out of the classroom to at risk LbC, as literature convey that majority of the LbC experience issues related to their studies and school due to their mother's absence (Save the Children, 2006; Perera *et al.*, 2013).

***Recommendation 04: Develop a risk assessment index to identify at-risk LbC***

In line with that recommendation, the paper stresses the importance of developing a research and evidence based risk assessment index to assess the risk and vulnerabilities of LbC. The literature (Senaratna, 2012; Senaratna, 2011; Hugo *et al.*, 2010) features the risk factors pertaining to, 1. home (e.g. alcoholism of the father/ spouse of the female kin carers or male/ female family members of the kin-carer, signs of violence depicted towards the children by the kin carers or other adults, neglect of the children conveyed by their clothes, eating habits and/ or physical appearances, signs of extreme poverty), 2, school (e.g. poor school attendance, rapid drop down of school grades, rapid decreases in academic performance), 3, community (e.g. neighborhood violence, proximity to the former perpetrators), 4. Child (e.g. signs of substance abuse of the teenage children, an increase of aggression or conduct problems displayed, external physical appearance of the child such as signs of unkemptness, poor appetite, sudden weight loss, indications of emotional instability...) of the LbC.

The paper also stresses the importance of documenting and circulating this risk assessment index to identify at-risk LbC. It also recommends this risk index be accessible and available to varied stake holders such as other government organizations, private and national/ international organizations, and funding partners. It also believes that this risk index should be accessible to individuals belonging to many and varied professional tiers secretaries of the Ministry of Education to teachers and school counselors.

The paper also recognizes the importance of providing awareness programs/ training to professional groups providing care and protection to children as well as community members to identify at-risk children in general as well as the LbC in particular. As a result, these professionals and organizations would be in a position to identify at-risk LbC.

The papers also stress the importance of creating awareness among principals, teachers and school counselors pertaining to the risk index. The paper is of the opinion that they serve as the initial contacts for LbC and be professional groups who would be in a position to identify whether the at-risk LbC.

Using these risk index questionnaires, the paper suggests the NCPA to request teachers and school counselors to report the progress of the children quarterly, biannually or annually, depending on the risk level that each child is placed. The paper is of the opinion that the risk assessment or the vigilance index should exist as a brief document, preferably containing one or

two pages. It should also be simple, easy to comprehend and administer, requesting information pertaining to the school attendance of the child, grades obtained as well as their financial/ socio emotional status. The paper also recommends that the original should be kept in the schools while copies should be sent to district psychosocial coordinator, relevant overseeing district officers of the SBFE, department of Probation and Child Care, and NCPA.

In line with this, the paper draws several recommendations to the government of Sri Lanka. They are:

1. Develop resource materials to create awareness pertaining to the risk index within the professionals attached to care and protection agencies as well as child-friendly community organizations.
2. Develop and conduct training programs for professionals (specifically teachers and teacher counselors) and community members of the community vigilance squads with aim of improving their skills and competencies.
3. Develop an effective monitoring mechanism to ensure the sustainability of the vigilance audits.

***Recommendation 05: Develop a vigilance assessment tools or risk assessment tools to identify the protection, care and support available to the LbC with intention of improving their wellbeing***

The paper also recommends the NCPA to draw up culturally relevant, standardized vigilance tools to measures at risk LbC. These tools and measures should be able to mirror the risk index and can be in the form of questionnaires, rating scales or situational tests. The paper further suggests that these vigilance assessment tools should be sensitive to the child's developmental, cultural, religious and geographical background.

***Recommendation 06: Draw up a vigilance profile for the LbC***

Based on the outcomes gained from the vigilance assessment tools the paper recommends the NCPA to draw up a vigilance profile of each left behind child. Further, it recommends the NCPA to evaluate the vigilance status of the each left behind child to determine whether they are at risk, potential to be at risk or not at risk. The paper also recommends the LbC experiencing multiple risks from varied macro and micro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1970) to be provided more vigilance, care, and protection from NCPA, the Department of Probation as well as other professionals, their kin carers and community workers in the district.

Considering their close physical and emotional proximity to the children the paper envisage that school counselors and class teachers are ideally positioned to draw up the vigilance profiles of the LbC in their schools/ classes.

The paper also recommends the NCPA to conduct quarterly, half yearly or annual vigilance audits to assess the status of the LbC. If the risk assessment conveys that a particular left behind child is at risk, then the NCPA as the agency responsible for the protection of the Sri Lankan children can take suitable interventions to protect him/her through the responsible child protection coordinator in the respective GS division.



### **Recommendation 07: Set up vigilance squads**

The paper also recommends the NCPA to train community organizations to set up child-friendly vigilance squads pertaining to the care and protection of the LbC. Currently, such squads exist and function extremely well to promote health within the communities. Further, the paper recommends these vigilance squads to be developed through school child protection committees and or DCPC's. It also is of the opinion that NCPA could provide awareness and support to professionals, community members and primary caregivers of the LbC through these vigilance squads.

### **Recommendation 08: Develop a national data base**

Lack of data on LbC poses problems for policy makers, thus the paper recommends the development of a comprehensive database. Thus, the paper recommends the NCPA to set up a national data-base of the LbC'. The data-base should categorize children according to their developmental trajectories, geographical locations, and type of household. It should also list the special needs, risks/vulnerabilities of the child (i.e. characteristics of the caregiver, whether he/she has displayed past alcoholic or abusive traits) and support available to the child (i.e. number of caregivers providing care & protection...).

### **Recommendation 09: Allocate special cadre positions to monitor the care & protection of the LbC.**

There are many and varied state agencies and child welfare service providers involved in providing multitude of services to LbC in particular as well as Sri Lankan children in general. Thus, the paper recommends these agencies, both at the national and provincial level to maintain an, effective interagency coordination to ensure consistency, maximum use of funds, and avoid duplication of services if and when possible.

In line with this, the paper also recommends the government of Sri Lanka to establish a cadre positions in each government organization providing monitoring, protection, and care to promote the physical, psychosocial/ financial wellbeing of the LbC. The paper recommends that the. The paper describes the potential role and responsibilities of the individuals in these cadre positions as follows:

1. Officer responsible for the wellbeing of the LbC attached to NCPA could shoulder the responsibility of protection and monitoring of the LbC through district coordinators and psychosocial coordinators, members of the DCPC's and networking and communicating with the school child protection committees (teachers, schools counselors and principals of the LbC).
2. The department of Probation and Child Care could shoulder the responsibility of promoting care and psychosocial wellbeing of the LbC through the district level probation officers again communicating and networking with the teacher, principals' and school counselors.
3. MoE could monitor the academic performance and school attendance of the students again through the same channel.
4. SLBFE could provide welfare services and financial assistance to these organizations while providing scholarships (which they already do) based on the

recommendations made by the NCPA, the Department of Probation and Child Care and Ministry of Education.

The paper envisions that smooth coordination and networking should be ensured among the professionals filling these cadre positions to promote the optimum wellbeing within the LbC. It also recognizes the importance of smooth and efficient interagency coordination and networking. through these professionals. However, it also stresses the importance of each organization conducting independent monitoring and vigilance audits to ensure the wellbeing of the LbC.

### **Recommendation10: Develop and coordinate training programs/ support services to professionals, paraprofessional and members of the community organizations providing child care & protection services to LbC**

Considering the scarcity of training available to individuals providing psychosocial services/ support services to the LbC; the paper recommends developing and coordinating such services. Thus, the paper recommends in providing following training, awareness programs, refresher courses and short term workshops to individuals working with the LbC in varied capacities.

#### **Teachers/school counsellors**

1. Psychosocial training programs (information on listening to children, group activities, information pertaining to developmental trajectories...), workshops, and refresher courses to address the general needs of children and LbC in particular
2. Specific training programs to address the needs of LbC pertaining to care and protection (e.g. training on psychosocial first aid containing information on how to respond to children when they report traumatic event such as child sexual abuse, suicidal tendencies...).
3. Specific training programs containing information pertaining to conducting vigilance audits using risk assessment index, drawing up risk profiles for the LbC in their schools/ classes,
4. Provide extra academic support to at risk and academically challenged LbC in and out of the classroom by the Ministry of Education, as literature convey that majority of the LbC experience issues related to their studies in their mother's absence (Save the Children, 2006; Perera *et al.*, 2013).

#### **NCPA officials**

4. Conducting risk assessment audits, setting up vigilance squads, short term training programs to NCPA officials, case officers in the department of Probation & Child Care Services, Police Officers in Children and women's desks, day care staff of the SLFEB day care centres, in addressing issues pertaining to the LbC.

These recommendations are made when considering the significant role the above professional groups play in the lives of the LbC; being at times their initial and sometimes their only contact and support.

The paper stresses the importance of establishing smooth coordination of such services through the coordinators in each

government service provision agency to the LbC. It also suggests that support be carried out via support groups, using virtual venues (e.g. websites, creating email groups, announcements placed in the face book page created especially for this purpose such as posting meeting dates/training programs on it), and developing/creating efficient monitoring mechanisms. The paper also recommends in creating effective networks among different government organizations as well as international partners

Further, the paper article believes that this care and support should differ based on the type of service provided by the para/professional

**Recommendation 11: Develop and circulate resource materials for individuals (professionals, paraprofessional and members of the community organizations) providing child care & protection services to LbC.**

The papers stresses the importance of developing and circulating resources to varied professional groups and community members to /improve promote care and protection services to the LbC.

The paper is of the opinion that these resources and resource materials should be simple, easy to comprehend and in the forms of study packs, booklets, leaflets, video clips and films.

The paper also recommends in developing a website which can be accessed by the public and be useful to all the stake holders of female migration to the ME. The paper suggests that this website requires containing resources such as e-booklets, e-flyers, video clips, online educational support (especially for children sitting for scholarship, O/L, and A/L) and other awareness creation information for migrant workers, teachers, school counselors, as well as others providing psychosocial services to LbC.

collected and compiled by the SLFEB, other related organizations (CARITAS, 2010) and independent researchers (Perera *et al*, 2013; Hugo *et al*, 2010; Senarathna, 2012; Senarathna *et al*, 2011). These data mainly exist pertaining to the demographics of the migrant workers (e.g. age, gender, the length of stay, country of employment), their children (mainly addressing issues on their health, education and psychological problems as well as nature and the relationship with their carers). However, this data does not provide answers to many psychological, educational and developmental trajectory related issues of the LbC. They also lack longitudinal in-depth information on the migrant workers or their children. Therefore, this information seems to be inadequate when developing a risk assessment index, profiling vigilance, using vigilance assessment tools, audits or establishing vigilance squads. The informational gathered is also not sufficient to draw up cost/benefit analysis of the female migration to the ME.

Since almost all of migration from Sri Lanka to the ME is legal and documented, Sri Lanka has a unique opportunity to draw up and analyze migrant's profile, the psychological impact of the migration on the migrant workers and their families (mainly children) and answer questions pertaining to selection effects. Hence, the paper recommends in conducting an island-wide house hold survey to systematically acquire and record information about past and present female migrants and their families. The paper further suggests that this study should be carried out at different measurement points or should be longitudinal in nature to explore the causes, nature, type, long/short term impact of mother's migration to ME on their LbC The paper also recommends that this study requires to suvey. current and past female migrants to the ME and their LbC.

**Table 1** An overview - Regular monitoring to ensure protection, care, and support to the LbC

No	Description	Responsible department/Statutory Body/Agency	Meta Responsibilities
I	Counseling	Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau	1. Help aspiring migrant workers with young children to explore alternatives to migration 2. Inform support services available to the LbC
II	Registration	NCPA through Women & Children's Desks of the CWB Monitoring Protection	1. Developing Risk Assessment Index 2. Draw up Individual Vigilance Profiles 3. Establishing Vigilance Squads
II	Monitoring, care & Protection	1. NCPA – Evaluate the existing monitoring mechanisms available to the LbC. 2. Make amendments to the monitoring if and when the gaps exist 3. Revised monitoring mechanisms implemented through the DCPC', district & psychosocial coordinators of the NCPA and school child Protection Committees (SCPC) 4. Calculate a cost-benefit analysis for individual migrant workers Monitoring Care & Support Department of Probation& Child Services - Education Ministry of Education – Monitoring academic performance, school dropout and absenteeism	4. Training members of the vigilance squads (class teachers of the LbC, school counselors, local probation officer, NCPA officer, GS, local health care practitioners, 5. Special training programs for teachers & school counselors of the left behind children as their primary/initial contacts. 6. Developing resource materials 7. National data base on the LbC 8. Conducting research – carry out a national survey with the assistance of the census & statistics department,

The paper is of the opinion that this website should also contain child development information to migrant workers addressing their developmental trajectories, parental awareness material on effective parenting on the national languages of Sri Lanka.

**Recommendation 12 a: Conduct a household survey to acquire information on migrant workers and LbC**

Since, LbC is a topic of national concern. Hence, ; there is significant amount of administrative and other forms of data

The survey also requires exploring economic and psychosocial benefits and costs for the migrants and their families with special emphasis on return migrants.

**Recommendation 12.b: Conduct research to identify the care, support, and protection that professional can provide to the LbC**

In addition, the paper proposes to conduct research on the following topics in order to answer the key questions listed below, they are:

1. What is the geographical density of the LbC
2. What are the differences between women and men in terms of migration decisions, the length of the stay and occupational placement in the destination country relative to the education levels?
3. Are the selection impacts, more or less pronounced for women?
4. What are the services available to female migrant workers to the ME?
5. Do they access these services and what causes them to accessing/not access these services?
6. What are the psychosocial costs and profits of their absence to their families, especially children?
7. Do families and children compensate for the spouse/mother migration? If so how?
8. What are the attitudes of professional pertaining to networking, sharing information pertaining to children?
9. What are the nature, type, efficiency and interagency communication if and when providing services to the LbC?
10. What are the limitations in providing psychosocial protection and support services to LbC?

## CONCLUSION

**Phase I– Consider female migration as the last option, making it a choice not an act of desperation for women with young children**

The Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau (SFEB)'s committees within divisional secretariats should ensure that families are supported with programs prior to their decision to migrate. The paper argues that the Sri Lankan government should consult with migrant, community, and women's groups to enhance economic and educational opportunities for women allowing female migrant workers to migrate based on their choice rather than desperation.

If the decision is made to migrate, the SLBFE along with the State Child Welfare Services should ensure childcare plans are in place before the migration. Further, the migrant mothers requires to have a clear understanding of childcare support available to their LbC.

**Phase II –Registration, follow ups and support services**

The paper recommends that the NCPA should make the registration mandatory for the female migrant workers with children to ensure the care and protection of their children. Since majority of the female migrant workers seem to convey reluctance to register with the NCPA; the paper also recommends that NCPA in conjunction with the SLBFE should strive to encourage registration via provision of awareness and incentives which are already in place (scholarships for children, easy payment loans), promoting outreach programs to LbC whose migrant mothers to ME have not registered. Further, there should be a periodic follow-ups and support services in

place by the state child welfare agencies pertaining to the wellbeing of the LbC.

Despite the wealth of research into the impact of female migration, child welfare agencies rarely appear to conduct routine evaluations on multitude to issues associated with the LbC of the female migration. This is probably maybe due to a whole range of reasons (e.g. high demands on staff, resource constraints, lack of appropriate knowledge and research skills). Thus, the paper also attempts to illustrate an important area of research and evaluation that has not been adequately explored. Therefore, based on literature the paper recommends the concerned authorities strives to identify guidelines that would be ideally considered when planning interventions for LbC by professionals and child welfare agencies in Sri Lanka.

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**How to cite this article:**

Buddhiprabha D. D. Pathirana.2017, Guidelines for Professionals and Organizations Providing Care and Protection Services To The Left behind Children (Lbc): A Sri Lankan Perspective. *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 8(1), pp. 15243-15250.