

Migration, Ageing and Spousal Separation: A Review of Current Population Trend in Nepal

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Abstract

Demographic trend of population mobility in Nepal is significant which has given rise to various opportunities and also tragic end. The role and relationship of family is influenced by change in family structure. The focus of this study is to assess the status of migration, ageing and spousal separation in Nepal. The study is based on the census data and reports available from Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal. Data shows ageing population 60 years and above has reached 8% of the total population. Finding shows absent male population is increasing rapidly and labor related spousal separation in Nepal is high among the Asian countries which reached to 32% in 2011. The association between the subjective wellbeing of family left behind is revealed by some study. Further analytical study is recommended to see the effect of migration in elder population and spouses in context of Nepal.

Keywords: Migration; Urban growth; Absent population; Elderly population; Spousal separation; Nepal

Introduction

The urban population of the world has increased rapidly from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014. Asia consists 53 percent of the world's urban population, despite the lower level of urbanization [1]. Kathmandu, the capital city-urban hub of Nepal, is one of the fastest growing cities in south Asia.

Asian continent is both origin and destination for migrant worker. Middle East and East Asian countries are the destination of labor migrant originating mainly from South and Southeast Asia. The percentage of emigrants is high among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries from Indian sub continent. Nepal deployed 354,716 emigrants in 2011 [2]. Along with the GCC countries, other major destinations of Nepalese emigrants are Malaysia and India. Comparing with female workers population, the male workers population is much higher in South Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India were among 16 net sender countries over the 50 years period [3].

People are driven to the cities and alien countries mainly due to lack of employment, insecurity and political instability. Rapid urbanization is usually accompanied by rapid urban population growth, haphazard and unplanned settlement in developing countries. Urbanization is considered as a major reason for splitting of three generations. The middle generation when seeks employment in other countries, grandparents are the one to look after the family and child [4]. Sometimes, these old generations are the one who are left behind and neglected. Today's generation is likely to live separately with changing phenomenon such as economic security, rising rates of migration, divorce, remarriage, step-family relations and thus prefer to stay single or not to have a child [5].

Migration has both advantages and disadvantages. It benefits the family, mostly by having opportunities for better housing, secure lifestyle and sufficient resources for living. In Asian context, female partner of migrants gain autonomy and freedom for decision making in the household which is mostly taken by the male members. Sometimes, it helps to distance themselves from the violent and sexually abusive

partner. Unmarried migrants has a minor effect on a family left behind but long term separation as a migrant parent or spouse has detrimental consequences [6]. In many cases migrant workers are unable to bring their family members to the country of employment which leads to separation for a period of time. Providing care for dependents, decision-making responsibilities and fulfilling emotional needs remain as a huge challenge in the long-term absence of family members. This makes them (partners) prone to conflict and even results in the dissolution of marriage.

There is an association between population mobility and spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, STDs and other communicable diseases. Migrants have difficulty in dealing with social and sexual norms in new environment which possess them at the sexual risk [7]. The spouse in country of origin also becomes the victim of unprotected sex when their partner returns. For example, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Far western region of Nepal is mainly due to the infected migrants returning back home from India [8].

Relevance of the study: There has been a transition in the pattern of providing care to the elderly. The elderly, culturally supposed to be cared by the offspring in Nepal, are gradually abandoned these days due to migration of offspring in urban and foreign countries. Nepal lacks behind on adopting proper rehabilitation or geriatric care center [9]. Moreover, there are the cases of older people living in care center despite of having family members. There are also the cases of depression and long term sickness that are extremely in need of care but are being left in care center by their family. This has some negative impact in rising elderly population. The situation is aggravated by the migration which is also the cause of spousal separation in Nepal. The research in the area of ageing is limited. And, no such studies have been carried out regarding spousal separation in context of Nepal. This study can help researcher for and make aware to stakeholders about the particular problem.

Method

This study is based on the secondary information available from National Population and Housing Census Report, Population Monograph of Nepal volume I & II [10]. Central Bureau of Statistics launched the Census report in 2012, Population Monograph of Nepal - volume I in 2014 and II in 2015. The objective of the research is to assess the current status of labor migration, ageing and spousal separation in Nepal. It aims to answer the following major research questions.

- What is situation of labor migration in Nepal?
- What is the status and trend of elderly population in regards with migration in Nepal?
- What is the status of migration induced spousal separation in Nepal?

Here, "Absent population" refers to the group of people who are out of their home (abroad/ out-migrated). "Spousal separation" refers to the condition in which the migrant partner is absent for considerable period of time (normally six

months). For "ageing", we have taken the data of population who are above 60 years of age.

Results and Discussions

The population of Nepal has reached about 26.6 million with population growth rate of 1.35 [10]. There is improvement in living standard and employment. As of 2010/2011, the population living under the poverty line is about 25% [11]. Employed population has increased to 78 percent from 67 percent in 1995/96 [12]. Agriculture is the major driver of the economy, contributing for about 36 percent of GDP [13].

1. General Population characteristics: 2001 versus 2011

Table 1. Population growth, household size and population density.

| Year | Total | Male | Female | Growth Rate |
|------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 2001 | 23,151,423 | 11,563,921 | 11,587,502 | 2.25% |
| 2011 | 26,494,504 | 12,849,041 | 13,645,463 | 1.35% |

| Year | Number of household | Average household size | Female Headed household | Population density Person/Sq. Km |
|------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2001 | 4,253,220 | 5.44 | 14.87% | 157 |
| 2011 | 5,427,302 | 4.88 | 25.73% | 180 |

Sources: CBS 2001, CBS 2011

The general characteristics of population in Nepal in the year 2001 and 2011 are shown in Table 1. The average population growth rate decreased from the 2.25% in 2001 to 1.35% in 2011. The neighboring countries of Nepal viz. India and China has the highest population in the world with population growth rate about 1.64 and 0.5 respectively in between 2000-2010 [14]. Average household's size of Nepal has reduced to 4.88 from 5.44 which are similar with that of India (5.3 to 4.8 in 2011) [15].

In Nepal, one fourth of the household is headed by female contradictory to Bangladesh and Pakistan. Female head household in Bangladesh was 11% in 2011 and 10.9 % in Pakistan during the year 2012 [16]. The male to female sex ratio has decreased from 0.99 to 0.94 in 2011 in Nepal resulting more female population than male. But, in the case of neighboring countries like India and China, the ratio is comparatively higher. In India sex ratio is 1.06 [17] whereas that in China is 1.05 [18]. In context of rural and urban areas, sex ratio is 92 and 104 respectively. This means that male has more dominancy in urban areas of Nepal comparing to the rural parts [19].

Regarding population density, it has increased comparing to the year 2001 because of increased total population. The population density of Nepal has increased to 180 per km²

but is lower than that of other South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Maldives which ranges from 200 -1200 per km². However, Bhutan and Afghanistan has relatively lower population density than Nepal [20].

2. Migration : Internal versus International

I. Urban Growth

The number of urban centers has increased gradually throughout the census years. The percentage of urban population has increased from 3.6% in 1961 to 17.1% in 2011. In the span of 10 years, despite same number of urban centers, urban population has increased from 13.9% in 2001 to 17% in 2011. Among urban areas, Kathmandu Metropolitan City constitutes the largest population with a household size of 3.94. Population density of urban areas is 1,381 per sq. km. in contrast to 151 per sq. km. in rural areas of the country. Rural population percentage has reduced from 96.4% in 1961 to 82.9% in 2011 because of migration and upgrading of rural areas into town and municipality. Table 2 shows the distribution of population in rural and urban areas of Nepal during 1961-2011.

Table 2. Population distribution by rural/urban residence, Nepal, 1961-2011.

| Year | Urban Centers | Urban population | Rural population | Total |
|------|---------------|------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1961 | 16 | 336,222 | 9,076,774 | 9,412,996 |
| 1971 | 16 | 461,938 | 11,094,054 | 11,555,983 |
| 1981 | 23 | 956,721 | 14,066,118 | 15,022,839 |
| 1991 | 33 | 1,701,181 | 16,795,378 | 18,491,097 |
| 2001 | 58 | 3,227,897 | 19,923,544 | 23,151,423 |
| 2011 | 58 | 4,523,820 | 21,970,684 | 26,494,504 |

Source: CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume I, (2014)*

Rapid growth of urbanization in Nepal is due to centralization of services and facilities. Kathmandu valley, a capital city of Nepal functions majority of administrative, political, tourism, transportation, education and health care facilities [21]. In India, urban population has increased from 17.97% in 1960 to 31.16% in 2011 with urban annual growth rate of 1.61% while that in rural areas was 1.15 % [22].

Increased internal migration to urban areas has a tremendous impact on physical environment. For example, Kathmandu Valley has largest population with uncontrolled and uncoordinated growth. This indeed has narrowed open space essential for building, roads and other developmental infrastructure compromising the health and environment. Children are exposed to diarrheal diseases at a rate of 17.9 per cent due to poor sanitation in overcrowded urban areas of Nepal compared to rural areas at 12.6 per cent [23].

The rising of squatters or slum dwellers known as 'Sukum-bashi' is a major challenges for sustainable urban development in Nepal. Urban slum population of Nepal was estimated as 58.1%, Bangladesh with 61.6% and India 29.4 %. There is decreasing trend of urban slum in all three countries from 1999 to 2009, however, the change in percentage is observed minimal in context of Nepal [24].

Besides increasing urban population, international migration is skyrocketing. Least educated people from Nepal prefer to go to Gulf countries where as educated citizen prefer to go to English speaking countries like USA, UK and Australia. Migration is not new in Nepal; at least one member in a family from 57% of household has migrated away from the house in past ten years [25]. This phenomena result in higher dependency upon the remittances. Remittances from people residing in a foreign land accounted 2.14% of GDP in the year 2001 which increased to 22.4% in 2011 and to 28.8 % in 2013 [26]. Because of which, the share of agriculture sector for total GDP has reduced from 37.6% in 2001 to 35.1% in 2013 [27]. Remittances have helped in reducing the poverty, however, large number of migrants results in shortage of labor in the country and remittances itself has no significant contribution in agriculture production in context of Nepal [28].

II. Absent population

Absent male population in 1981 were 328,448 which increased steadily and reached 679,489 in the year 2001. It dramatically increased to more than one million in 2011 due to the opening of labor market in country like Malaysia which has been one of the top destinations for Nepalese worker [29]. In the course of seven years (2008-2014), more than 2.2 million labor permits were issued in Nepal. In between these years, there were about 3,272 death cases (data reported to government sector) among labor migrants [2]. Regarding the female migrants, the share of Nepalese female migrant is highest within the south Asian countries (68.2% in 2010) [30].

Table 3. Absent population of male and female in the census year 1981 -2011.

| Year | Total Population | Total Absent | Absent Male | Absent Female |
|------|------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1981 | 15,022,839 | 402,977 | 328,448 | 74,529 |
| 1991 | 18,491,097 | 658,290 | 548,002 | 118,288 |
| 2001 | 23,151,423 | 762,181 | 679,489 | 82,712 |
| 2011 | 26,494,504 | 1,921,494 | 1,684,029 | 237,400 |

Source: CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume I, (2014)*

Female absent population rapidly increased from 74,529 in 1981 to 118,288 in the year 1991 as shown in Table 3. The sudden decline in absent female population during 2001 (82,712) can be referred to banning female labor migration.

The policy was lifted later in the year 2003 [30]. In 2012, Government of Nepal has again implemented policy which allows women of only age above 30 to travel to gulf countries for work. However, this could lead to the rise of already undocumented illegal migration evident in countries like Iraq which was previously banned for the migrant workers.

The result of migration has also affected the population growth and ageing. There is decreasing population growth in 2011 compared to 2001 as shown in the Table 1. Young population has declined over the census years. It has decreased from 40% in 2001 to 36% in 2011 [31]. There is no significant change in age group 15-64 over the period- 58% in 2011 [32]. However, maximum population absent is found in the age group 15-24 and 25-34 which is main working population of the country (Table 4). The ageing population is also on rise along with the old dependency ratio from 9.46 in 1961 to 14.28 in 2011 (Table 6). Older female population (60 above) is found high comparing to male population in both census year 2001 and 2011 [33].

Table 4. Absent population in different age group in 2011.

| 2011 | Total | Male | Female |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Age group | 1,921,494 | 1,684,029 | 237,400 |
| 0-14 | 121,148 | 84,897 | 36,246 |
| 15-24 | 867,496 | 762,772 | 104,704 |
| 25-34 | 605,888 | 544,968 | 60,894 |
| 35-44 | 227,356 | 210,060 | 17,287 |
| 45-54 | 49,617 | 45,025 | 4,588 |
| 55-64 | 11,636 | 9,584 | 2,052 |
| 65+ | 3,670 | 2,671 | 999 |
| Not stated | 34,683 | 24,052 | 10,630 |

Sources: CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume I, (2014)*

3. Ageing

The trend of nuclear family is rising at present but most of the people used to live in a joint family in the past. Older generations are most likely to look after children and even the whole family as the adults work outside for earning. The left behind elderly face double burden - living in isolation as young adult migrates and responsibilities of taking care of family [34].

Table 5. Elderly population over the years.

| Age | 1911 | 1941 | 1971 | 2001 | 2011 |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 60+ | 4.28% | 5.33% | 5.88% | 7.46% | 8.13% |

Source: CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume II, (2015)*

The old aged population reached 8.13% of the total population in the year 2011 as shown in the Table 5. The household head of 60 years and above was 6.8% in the year 1995/96 which increased to 7.6% in survey year 2003/04 and to

9.1% in 2010/11 [35]. In developing countries, one in every twelve person aged 60 or above lived alone comparing to one in four people in developed countries [24]. Elderly people are forced to live in the care center though keeping the old parent with young adult used to be a culture in the past and is still prevalent in Nepal. There are about 70 organizations registered all over Nepal with about 1,500 elders living in these old-age homes at present [36]. According to a study done among the old age home of 16 districts of Nepal, being a burden in family and having no family members was some reasons of institutionalized elderly people [37].

Sometimes, growing old makes people dependent and vulnerable to neglect and abuse. There were about 117 elder abuse cases reported from July 2008- 2010 published in a daily newspaper. However, this was only reported cases. Neglect by family member was the most common form of elder abuse accounting 33.3 % [9]. More than half of the populations living in old age home were suffering from depression [38]. Similarly, study of elderly both in home setting and institution showed elderly living in institutional settings had higher psychosocial problems than those cared in home [39]. In Thailand, elderly who had a migrant child were more likely to have symptoms of poor mental health and seek treatment more often than those children who hadn't migrated [40].

The report of Global Age Watch 2013 shows the social and economic well-being of older people around the world. According to the report, Nepal stands at 77th position out of 91 states. This shows gap and poor progress with respect to older people's well-being [41]. Despite of all, the national representative survey is yet to be done. Recently, the Ministry of Health and Population has agreed to conduct survey in elderly people.

Table 6. Trend of Young and old age dependency ratio from 1961-2011.

| Year | 1952/54 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Child Dependency Ratio | 67.94 | 72.58 | 75 | 78.1 | 81.87 | 72.69 | 61.28 |
| Old Dependency Ratio | 8.79 | 9.46 | 10.41 | 10.78 | 11.21 | 12 | 14.28 |
| Total Dependency Ratio | 76.73 | 82.05 | 85.41 | 88.88 | 93.09 | 84.69 | 75.56 |

Sources: CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume I, (2014)*

4. Spousal separation

Never married population has gradually increased in both male and female population as shown in Table 7. There was about 40% and 31% of never married male and female population respectively in 2011 contrast to 35% of male and 23% of female in the year 1981. The rise in never married population might be the cause of gradual increase in mean age of marriage both male and female. Mean age of marriage increased by 4.3 years for male and 5.2 years for female from 1961 to 2011. Widowhood and Divorce/Separated in both

male and female are decreasing over the census years.

Table 7. Marital Status from 1981 -2011.

| Age group | Male | | | | Female | | | |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|-------|
| | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Never married | 35.1 | 35.6 | 39.2 | 40.6 | 23.3 | 25.7 | 30.3 | 31.13 |
| Ever married | 64.9 | 64.4 | 60.6 | 59.4 | 76.7 | 74.3 | 69.2 | 68.87 |
| Currently married | 62.1 | 60.5 | 58.5 | 52.7 | 70.8 | 65.7 | 65.4 | 61.82 |
| Divorced/separated | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.1 | 0.35 |
| Widow | 2.4 | 3 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 5.5 | 7.2 | 3.7 | 4.61 |
| Not stated | 0 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Sources: CBS, Population Monograph of Nepal, volume II, (2015)

There is an increase of widowed and widower as the age advances and peaks at 60 above (Table 8). In 2001, case of widowed and widower was 24% and 9% in the age group of 60 and above which increased to 30% and 11% in 2011 respectively. Divorce in female is highest in the age group 50- 54 with 0.74% whereas divorce in male is relatively less comparing to female and is constant from the age 35 to 60 above.

Table 8. Marital status in different age group between the year 2001 and 2011.

| All Age Group | % Never married | | % Widow/Widower | | % Divorce/Separated | |
|---------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|---------------------|------|
| Year | 2001 | 2011 | 2001 | 2011 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Male | | | | | | |
| All ages | 39.23 | 40.56 | 1.34 | 1.63 | 0.23 | 0.25 |
| 5-9 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 10-14 | 99.18 | 99.55 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.00 |
| 15-19 | 87.08 | 92.91 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.10 | 0.03 |
| 20-24 | 49.38 | 57.72 | 0.10 | 0.08 | 0.20 | 0.17 |
| 25-29 | 18.15 | 21.29 | 0.23 | 0.16 | 0.30 | 0.28 |
| 30-34 | 5.69 | 6.67 | 0.34 | 0.23 | 0.35 | 0.35 |
| 35-39 | 2.77 | 2.86 | 0.58 | 0.40 | 0.32 | 0.40 |
| 40-44 | 2.01 | 1.98 | 0.96 | 0.69 | 0.40 | 0.43 |
| 45-49 | 1.52 | 1.61 | 1.46 | 1.21 | 0.32 | 0.44 |
| 50-54 | 1.43 | 1.49 | 2.49 | 2.17 | 0.35 | 0.45 |
| 55-59 | 1.35 | 1.21 | 3.79 | 3.48 | 0.31 | 0.43 |
| 60+ | 1.42 | 1.10 | 9.11 | 11.00 | 0.32 | 0.43 |
| Female | | | | | | |
| All ages | 30.26 | 31.13 | 3.65 | 4.61 | 0.32 | 0.35 |
| 5-9 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 10-14 | 98.19 | 98.88 | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.00 |
| 15-19 | 66.05 | 76.80 | 0.22 | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.07 |
| 20-24 | 21.02 | 27.32 | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.25 | 0.24 |
| 25-29 | 5.58 | 7.31 | 0.44 | 0.48 | 0.34 | 0.35 |
| 30-34 | 2.61 | 2.89 | 0.86 | 0.97 | 0.41 | 0.40 |
| 35-39 | 1.75 | 2.04 | 1.71 | 1.83 | 0.45 | 0.51 |
| 40-44 | 1.5 | 1.77 | 2.91 | 3.14 | 0.54 | 0.61 |
| 45-49 | 1.24 | 1.44 | 4.84 | 4.82 | 0.55 | 0.65 |
| 50-54 | 1.31 | 1.40 | 7.90 | 7.65 | 0.57 | 0.74 |
| 55-59 | 1.05 | 1.13 | 11.21 | 11.54 | 0.54 | 0.70 |
| 60+ | 1.18 | 1.03 | 24.94 | 30.14 | 0.50 | 0.64 |

Sources: CBS, Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume I, (2014)

Beside the cases of divorce and death, many youth from developing countries migrate as a laborer to support their family financially. Labor related spousal separation is highest in Nepal among other Asian countries. Among married women of reproductive age whose husbands live away from them was 4–5% in Vietnam and Cambodia and 9–12% in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, compared with Nepal’s 26% in between 2005 and 2007 [42]. Married woman whose husband lives elsewhere was about 12 percent in Bangladesh [43]. In Nepal, spousal separation increased from 26% in 2006 to 32% in 2011. Among the surveyed woman, 52% reported separation of less than seven months and 35% of more than years. The study findings showed that woman of age group 35 were more likely to have husband away from home. Rural women were more likely to live alone than urban female population [25]. Woman with no education and with highest wealth quintile were less likely to report spousal separation [25].

The migration and spousal separation have impact in quality of relationships. Migration is supposed to increase remittance and provide financial support to family. Separation with husband makes a woman take more responsibilities and share more decision making power. International migration is positively related to decision making role and autonomy of the left behind women in rural areas of Bangladesh [44]. However, woman has less leisure hours per day and with male out-migration they also have to bear extra burden of work [45].

Past study has revealed stronger relationships between having migrant relatives and emotional well-being for women. Women were more likely to report depressive symptom and loneliness than man. The association of loneliness for a woman with husband being abroad was found highest [46]. The depression and somatoform disorders were highest among female spouses in left-behind migrants than males [46]. Remittances though change the socioeconomic status of a family, cognitive and subjective well-being doesn’t improve especially when wives are living with their laws [47].

We consider that the present review article will aid valuable information in further analyzing emerging problems associated with migration such as ageing and depression, loneliness; spousal separation and quality of life.

Limitation of the study: Although this is the first study to link the ageing and spousal separation in Nepal, it is not free from limitations. Firstly, it is based solely on the secondarily data. Secondly, this study lacks the in-depth analysis about the subject matter due to very limited data availability in Nepal. Thirdly, very few literatures are available dealing with the study on ageing and spousal separation and it was difficult to conduct systematic review.

Conclusion

Nepal is facing heavy drain of manpower where the aged population is also on rise. Migration has been an ultimate choice reducing a large number of unemployed populations. However, it has unprecedented consequences; rise in haphazard urban growth, double burden for elderly population who are in need of care and support and long-term spousal separation. Migrant workers are prone to some form of illness such as STDs, depression, suicides and deaths. It is also likely to affect the family left behind whether it is just a separation, illness or death. Elderly population is forced to live in a care center or alone whereas separated spouses are subjected to depression. Past studies conducted in other countries has showed the association between the subjective well-being of family left behind. However, there are no any studies being carried out in Nepal and further analytical study is required to see the effect of migration in elder population and spouses.

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