

**ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF CHILDREN MIGRATION ON THE HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY
IN VIETNAM**

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Abstract. The objective of the article is to systemize studies on the effects of children migration on the health of the elderly in the world. On the basis of examining results of the studies, the author argues that in order to clarify the current status of children migration and the health of the elderly in Vietnam, it is necessary to consider several aspects, such as: poor mental health; self-rated health, chronic diseases; illness within 12 months prior to investigation; treatment within 12 months prior to investigation; activities of personal daily living; and limitations to body functions.

Keywords: *children migration, the elderly, health, population, Vietnam*

1. Introduction

The aging population of Vietnam is growing faster than other population groups in terms of both relative and absolute numbers, especially the oldest population group of 80 years old and above. The rapid rate of aging occurs in the context of low level of socio-economic development is a major challenge for governments of developing countries like Vietnam concerning the burden of social security namely pension, retirement, healthcare. On the other hand, the rapid rate of aging along with the mass migration influx of people of working age from rural to urban areas have significantly affected all aspects of life of the elderly in Vietnam. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam and UNFPA (2016)¹, in the period between 1989 and 2014, the number of internal migrants among provinces doubled from 1.3 million to 2.6 million people. Children migration from rural areas to cities and industrial zones to for livelihood has changed the arrangement of life of the elderly in urban areas markedly. Formerly, in traditional families, the elderly depend on their children and are taken care of by them, but nowadays, children migration for livelihood has made life of the elderly more vulnerable.

Children migration has made significant effects on life, especially, health of the elderly back in their hometown. In the world, the assessment of the effects of migrant workers on health and healthcare of the elderly in their hometown has attracted the attention of many researchers.

¹ The General Statistics Office of Vietnam and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The 2014 Vietnam Intercensal Population and Housing Survey. Migration and Urbanization in Vietnam. Vietnam News Agency Publishing House Hanoi, 2016.

2. Studies around the world on internal migration of children and its effects on the health of the elderly

International studies suggest that migrant children create better financial conditions for the elderly to access medical and healthcare services. Some studies suggest that migrant children will provide better financial support to their parents at home when they get sick or catch diseases. Typically, Xiang Biao (2006)² found that although migrant children make their parents feel lonely but overall, they are satisfied with their daily life. The study also adds that elderly people with migrant children often receive more presents, cash, and better healthcare than those without. Nevertheless, the author also concludes further that although children migration currently has not had negative effects on the elderly in their hometown, in the long run, it has potential consequences to the healthcare system for the elderly in rural areas on the basis of present households in China.

In addition, Giles and Mu (2006)³ the poor health condition of old parents in families with only one child, especially a son in rural China will have negative impacts on the decision to migrate of the child. However, for families with two or more children, it will not be affected and the migrant child still fulfill the responsibility of taking care of their parents through financial support to the remaining one at home or hire a caregiver for parents. The results of the study also show that parents in normal health condition in families with migrant children will have to work more and longer and in the long run, it will adversely affect their health.

John Knodel, et al. (2007)⁴ when assessing the effects of children migration on the health of the elderly in Thailand on aspects of healthcare service provision, concludes that about one fourth of the elder claim that children migrating to different districts provide good conditions to the elderly in the place of residence of the migrant children or in places different from the place of residence of the elderly, but the youngest elderly group are provided with less conditions because they usually have good health. The study also adds that children migrating to Bangkok or urban areas will have better understanding and ability to access healthcare facilities and will make it possible for their parents benefit from good healthcare service conditions when they get sick or need taking care of.

Chandore (2009)⁵ studies the effects of children migration on the life of the elderly in Cambodia. In addition to assessing the effects of children migration on the economic life of the elderly, the study also adds that thanks to financial support from migrant children, parents in their

² Xiang Biao. How far are the left-behind left behind? A preliminary study in Rural China. *Population, Space and Place*, – pp,179-191, 2006.

³ John Giles and Ren Mu. Elder Parent Health and the migration decision of Adult children: Evidence from rural China. IZA DP No. 2333, 2006.

⁴ John Knodel et al. Migration and intergenerational solidarity: Evidence from Rural Thailand. UNFPA Thailand. *Papers in population aging* No.2, 2007.

⁵ Khuon Chandore. Impact of migration on older age parents: Preliminary findings from two communes of Battambang province, Cambodia, 2010.

hometown have better access to medical, examination and treatment services to improve health.

International studies assess the effects of children migration on two aspects of self-rated health status of the elderly (SRH) and activities of daily living of the elderly (ADLs) and other aspects of physical and mental health of the elderly.

Kuhn et al. (2011)⁶ conclude that children migrating in 1997 have positive impact on the health of parents in 2000. Specifically, those without migrant children had the mortality rate (6.0%) nearly two times as high as those with migrant children (3.3%); among those still alive, the number of those with migrant children having poor SRH, ADLs status are smaller than those without. In addition, the study also adds that people with at least one migrant child often have more children who are better-educated and more likely to have family, have more household assets and receive net transfers more.

John Knodel, et al. (2007) concludes that children migration will not affect the health of the elderly if they are still in good health and have frequent contact between migrant children and the elderly at home. However, the study further proves that although children far from home do not have conditions to take long-term care of elderly people who suffer from chronic illnesses, they will still return in the case of the elderly getting seriously ill. Furthermore, for the elderly experiencing difficulties in instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) such as cooking, financial spending for the whole household, housework, laundry and moving, children living in the same home and nearby will have conditions to care for the elderly better than the migrant children.

Ramesh et al. (2011)⁷, in their study on the case of Thailand, have proved that children migration is closely related to poor mental health in the elderly back home, however, it cannot reflect a close relation with the physical health status of the elderly. The study further proves further that children migration will create better conditions for the elderly in the countryside to have treatment conditions.

When researching on Mexico, some authors have used different methods and have the same conclusion that children migration has negative impacts on the health of the elderly. Specifically, Antman (2010)⁸ proves that by probit model and concludes that having a migrant child will increase 3.6 percentage points in the probability of parents having poor physical health, a 1.1 percentage point increase in the probability of parents having poor physical health such as heart attack or stroke, a 3.2 percentage point in the probability of parents having poor mental health. The author also adds that women often have poor overall health and mental health when their children migrate.

⁶ Randall Kuhn et al. The effects of Children's migration on Elderly Kin's Health: A counterfactual approach. *Demography*, 2011, No48. – pp.183-209.

⁷ Ramesh et al (2011). Impact of migration children on health and health care -seeking behavior of elderly left behind.

⁸ Francisca M. Antman. Elderly care and intrafamily resource allocation when children migrate. 2010.

However, Antman (2013)⁹ has used instrumental variables as the proportion of migrant children having had married and genders of migrant children because married sons tend to migrate more than daughters and unmarried sons in order to prove that in families with children migrating to the US, the migration of children will make parents in poor health both physically and mentally because they feel lonely and worried for children who have to migrate for livelihood and especially for families with children who illegally migrate to the US, this situation is even worse, possibly contribute to the risk of heart attack and stroke for parents. This study also adds that parents in families with migrant children have fewer opportunities to access medical services and often live in suburban areas.

International studies assess the effects of children migration on the mental health of the elderly. Other studies have proved that although children migration create better financial conditions for their parents' treatment and it is also not the cause for the elderly to suffer from chronic illnesses and poor physical health but it has negative impacts on the mental health of the elderly as follows:

HelpAge International in Moldova (2010)¹⁰ researches on the case of Moldova has suggested that although migrant children often make their parents more worried and lonely, but receiving money from children in some respect can help them feel less frustrated and worried for their aging life.

Chun-Wing Tse (2013)¹¹, when researching on the impacts of migrants on the elderly in China, has shown that migrant children have had negative impacts on the overall health of their elderly parents at home, such as mental health, physical health, memory loss, and especially serious illness when their children are away. However, migrant daughters often have more serious effects on the health of parents because daughters often spend more time caring for and confiding in their parents, so when they are away, it will have worse effects on both physical and mental health of parents in their hometown.

Erika Arenas et al. (2011)¹², when researching on the impacts of migrant children both domestically and internationally on the mental health of the elderly in Mexico, provide the same results as Antman (2013). The study proves that the elderly with children migrating to the US will become increasingly worried, sad and lonely, even in some cases want to die more than those without children migrating. Specifically, with respect to demography, parents of 50 years old of

⁹ Francisca M. Antman. How Does International Migration Affect the Health of Elderly Parents Left Behind? Evidence from Mexico. Working Paper, 2013.

¹⁰ HelpAge International and UNICEF. Staying behind: the effects of migration on older people and children in Moldova, 2010.

¹¹ Chun-Wing Tse. Migration and Health outcomes of left-behind elderly in Rural China, 2013.

URL: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2440403>.

¹² Erika Arenas and Jenjira Yahirun. Left Behind: The Effects of Offspring's Migration on Parental Mental Health in Mexico. 2011.

age and above with children migrating will become more depressed than those younger, men are often slower to state changes compared to women.

3. The issue of research for Vietnam

Domestic studies on the impacts of migrant children on the life of the elderly are limited to only the aspects of economic life improvement and poverty reduction. The effects of migrant children on the health of the elderly are mentioned only generally in a number of studies, such as: the General Statistics Office and the United Nations Population Fund (2005)¹³ using the Vietnam 2004 Migration Survey dataset analyzes based on univariate and multivariate methods and draws conclusions on the impacts of migrants on the health of remaining family members back home on two aspects: (1) migrants support members at home in healthcare through money; and (2) assessment of migrants of the health condition of household members. Regarding the first issue, the study found that 15.8% of migrants send money to their family members for healthcare, with the majority are people migrating to Hanoi sending money home accounting for 33.3% of the total number of those do. Regarding the second issue, the study proves that 19.3% of migrants claim that the health of their remaining family members is better or much better, 74.5% of migrants claim that there is no change in the health of their remaining family members since their migration, only 5.1% assess that the health of the remaining family members become worse since their migration. Middle-aged migrants have a better role in improving the health of remaining family members than young migrants do; people migrating to Hanoi are able to improve the health of family members better than other regions.

Barbieri (2006)¹⁴ has applied the Stata tool to analyze two datasets: The Vietnam Population and Housing Census 1999 and VHLSS 1997-1998 have demonstrated that children migrating to work far away from home are expected to have significantly positive and multi-dimensional effects on the life of their parents in rural Vietnam, where government grants for the elderly are very lacking and weak in recent years and the responsibility the responsibility of caring for the elderly belongs to family members and the community. However, the study also points out that children migration has made the elderly in rural areas lack both physical and mental caregivers.

Le and Nguyen (2011)¹⁵ researching on the impacts of migrant children on the mental health suggest that migrant children make parents in their hometown experience mixed emotions.

¹³ The General Statistics Office of Vietnam and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Survey of Migration of Vietnam in the year of 2004: Migration and Health. 2005.

URL: http://vietnam.unfpa.org/sites/asiapacific/files/pub-pdf/DidanvaSuchhoe_GSO1206_v.pdf

¹⁴ Magali Barbieri. Doi Moi and the Elderly: Intergenerational support under the strain of reforms. Paper prepared for presentation at the 2006 Population of America Association Meeting, Los Angeles, 2006.

¹⁵ Le Bach Duong and Nguyen Thanh Liem. From Rural to Urban: The socio-economic impacts caused by the migration of Vietnam. Labor Publishing House, 2011.

On the one hand, migrant children make their parents happier because of seeing their maturity but on the other hand, worried about the problems their children will have to face when being far away from home.

Thus, studies in Vietnam have not clarified the fact that migrant children, especially internal migration from rural to urban areas and industrial zones for livelihood, will have total impacts on the health of the elderly back home both physically and mentally. Therefore, the article aims to clarify the impacts of internal migration of children on the health of the elderly in Vietnam in these aspects: (i) poor mental health, (ii) self-rated health, (iii) chronic diseases, (iv) illness within 12 months prior to investigation, (v) treatment within 12 months prior to investigation, (vi) activities of personal daily living, and (vii) limitations to body functions.

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