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Consequences of Internal and Cross-border Migration of Adult Children for Their Older Age Parents in Battambang Province, Cambodia: Grounding Experiences in Local Settings and Family Circumstances

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In the 1990s Cambodia's transition to an open market economy provided impetus to migration out of rural areas into cities, principally Phnom Penh, and across international borders, mainly Thailand. The rise of the garment industry, growth in tourism and construction, and further integration with regional and world markets spurred large-scale labor demand. Meanwhile several factors such as high population growth, low productivity in agriculture, successive crop failures, and lack of rural industry encouraged young adults to migrate out of their parents' homes in search of work. Our paper examines migration at the family level focusing on a comparison of effects of internal versus cross-border migration for rural older age parents who remain behind. The analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data from a case study conducted in June and July 2010 in two communes of Battambang Province. The quantitative data come from a survey of 265 respondents aged 60 to 70 with information they provided about themselves and their 1,268 children. The survey findings are richly supplemented by qualitative data from 30 interviews conducted with a sub-sample of the elderly respondents. The research findings include analysis of exchanges of material support, contact between migrants and parents, and associations of internal and cross-border migration with the material and psychological well-being of parents. The modest contrasts associated with internal and cross-border migration for families in our study underscore that findings are very much conditioned by specific local settings and by specific family circumstances thus making unqualified generalizations difficult.

Keywords: *Internal migration, cross-border migration, older age parents, Battambang province, Cambodia*

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Introduction

The movement of people from rural areas in developing countries to cities and across borders, primarily in search of employment, is an inescapable consequence of development and the globalization process. Labor migration has become a persistent and accelerating reality in many developing countries, including Cambodia. How this impacts on family members including intergenerational solidarity and well-being of older persons who remain in the area of origin is a matter of considerable debate and research including that in Southeast Asia (e.g. Abbas et al., 2013; Knodel et al., 2007; Knodel et al., 2010). Moreover, the impacts of internal and cross-border migration are rarely considered together. This study examines consequences of both types of migration at the family level for rural older age parents in the places of origin. Primary interest focuses on comparing material and social support to parents from internal and cross-border migrant children as well as the associations between these two types of migration with aspects of parents' well-being. The study also addresses several related questions: What is the prevalence of internal and cross-border migration? What are the destinations of the internal and cross-border migrants? What are the risks associated with migration? Although the data are not suited for establishing causal relationships they permit extensive descriptive analysis.

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

Internal and cross-border migration from rural areas in Cambodia is characterized by diverse patterns. With respect to internal migration, agricultural laborers travel to other provinces to transplant and harvest rice, work in plantations, grow cash crops, or raise poultry and livestock. Internal migration to Phnom Penh provides higher paying jobs for young women in the garment factories and for the men in construction work. With regard to cross-border migration, agricultural laborers work seasonally at the Cambodia-Thailand border while others venture further into Thailand to work in construction, transport services or on Thai fishing boats. Cross-border migrants into Thailand tend to be men. More recently international migrants from Cambodia have found work in Malaysia and South Korea. The majority of migrants to Malaysia are women employed as domestic helpers, while most of the migrants to South Korea are men working in factories (Murshid, 2007; FitzGerald et al., 2007; Chan, 2009).

The migration process involves networks that include relatives, neighbors and friends with migration experience, and informal and formal recruitment agents. Cross-border migration is decidedly more risky. Labor migration to Thailand is largely illegal and when using informal agents the costs may be high and the outcomes typically uncertain. Undocumented workers encounter problems in the payment of wages, loss of savings, police harassment and arrest (Chan, 2009). Migrating across international borders through formal recruitment agencies is becoming increasingly more common and is generally considered to reduce risk. However a recent Asia Foundation report finds that the domestic and regional legal framework for labor migration is underdeveloped, that recruitment agencies are able to work with little regulation, and that victims of exploitation experience difficulties in prosecuting perpetrators (Holliday, 2011).

A Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) study funded by the World Bank entitled *Moving Out of Poverty?* identifies migration for employment as a critical channel for improving the well-being of households and communities. At the same time the study cautions that migration is not a quick solution to poverty reduction as its impact is variable and often short term (FitzGerald et al., 2007). This observation is consistent with findings in the international literature: de Haas (2007) maintains that notwithstanding their often considerable benefit for individuals, households and communities, migration and remittances are no panacea for solving more structural development problems.

A Social Science Research Council literature review on migrant remittances and development indicates a dearth of comparative studies on internal and international remittances. This has sparked much debate about how the effects of remittances from internal migration – on poverty, inequality, gender and social stratification – differ from remittances from international migration (Adams et al., 2009). One study in Mali found that international migrants are more likely to remit, and to remit more money, than internal migrants (Gubert, 2002). Results from another study in Morocco suggest that the incomes and living standards of households from whom some members migrated are similar to households with no members that migrated. By comparison, households from which members migrated internationally received a major boost to their incomes from remittances, and tend to invest in housing and agriculture (de Haas, 2006).

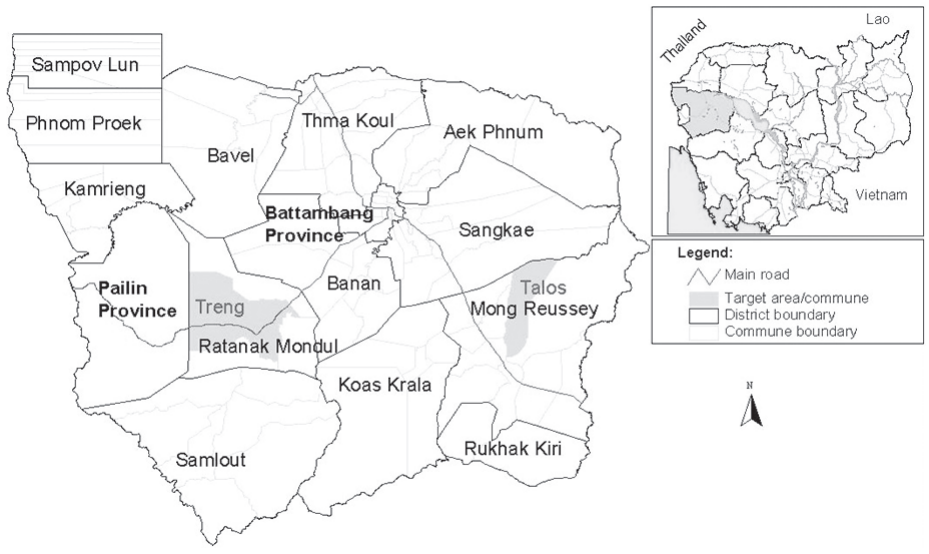
A CDRI study based on the nationally representative 2007 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey indicates that both internal and international remittances reduce the level, depth and severity of poverty. Moreover remittances from international migrants were found to be more effective at reducing poverty than those from internal migrants. The study concludes that remittances have a greater impact on reducing the severity of poverty than on reducing the proportion of people living in poverty (Tong, 2011).

Research Methods

In order to examine the effects of internal versus cross-border migration of adult children for their rural older age parents that remained behind, we conducted a case study in two communes in different districts of Battambang Province in June and July 2010. Battambang borders Thailand and Pailin Province to the west and, especially since the late 1990s, provides many laborers to Thailand and other Cambodian provinces. The first commune, Treng, lies on the western side of the province, near but not along the border of Thailand. Highway 67, connecting the provincial capital of Battambang and that of Pailin Province, runs through the commune. According to the 2008 Census, Treng had a population of 12,410 living in 2,534 households. The second commune, Talos, is situated on the south-eastern side of the province near the main highway running north to south across the province and connecting the provincial capital of Battambang to the national capital of Phnom Penh. In 2008 the commune contained 1,765 households with a population of 8,509 (Figure 1).

The study sites consisted of five selected villages within each commune. The villages were purposively selected based on accessibility during the rainy season during which interviewing took place and for geographic spacing between villages. The current study uses a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data come from a purposive survey of 265 respondents aged 60 to 70 who provided information about themselves and their 1,268 children. Information from the survey is supplemented by qualitative data from follow-up interviews with a sub-sample of 30 elderly survey respondents from the survey and two local officials. Given the relatively modest sample sizes, caution is called for when drawing conclusions from the findings although the qualitative data can at least provide some supplemental evidence to judge their reliability. In addition, we recognize that contributions by migrant children to their parents may be affected by the parents need for such support. However, given the small sample size and the relative homogeneity of the local settings with respect to widespread impoverishment, we do not address this in our analysis as the number of cases are insufficient to form categories that would meaningfully distinguish the level of need.

Figure 1: Map of study site, Battambang Province



The survey design called for interviewing one individual born between 1940 and 1950 in each sampled household with an eligible respondent. Households were selected from the local registers which were available for all villages and included

dates of birth for all household members. Village chiefs assisted with updating the information and helped draw maps locating the households. For households with more than one eligible respondent the individual to be interviewed was selected randomly. Interviews were conducted in June 2010. The 265 respondents interviewed were almost equally divided between the two study sites.

In July 2010 the researchers conducted interviews in which respondents explained in their own words narratives about their relationships with both their migrant (internal and cross-border) and non-migrant children. Literal quotations from the interview transcripts are incorporated into the following analysis to facilitate interpretation of quantitative findings and to help provide a holistic picture grounded in the reality as viewed by the research subjects.

The survey questionnaire included extensive questions about the respondent and spouse (if living) as well as their surviving children. Some questions related to all children, some only to those children who ever migrated, and still others to children who had returned after migrating and were currently living in their parent's district. Migration was defined to include both situations in which adult children moved from the parent's district for a continuous period of at least one year as well as situations that consisted of multiple shorter term moves that when added together cumulated to at least one year. Note that questions about migration were not asked about children who had recently moved out of the district but had not yet been away continuously or cumulatively for at least a year[5].

In the following presentation of research findings, the focus is on comparing the consequences of internal and cross-border migration of adult children on their parents who remain in the area of origin. Also included is selective background information to place this comparison in the appropriate local context.

[5] As a result of the questionnaire structure, some information is available for all children, some just for ever-migrants, and some for only return migrants. For example, information on a child's current location is available for all children. However, analyses that compare children in terms of their current location will include a small number of children who live outside their parents' district but are not themselves migrants since in some cases parents may have moved rather than the child. Analyses that compare migrant children who were gone for at least one year (continuously or cumulatively) exclude children who recently left the parental district but have not yet been away for a year.

Research Findings

Living Arrangements with Respect to Children

The findings of our study indicate that migration characterizes most of the households surveyed. Over two-thirds (68 percent) of the elderly households reported having an ever migrant child and almost as many (64 percent) have a current migrant child. Currently 56 percent have a current internal migrant child including 14 percent with a child in Phnom Penh. By comparison, 24 percent have a current international migrant child most of whom are in Thailand. This includes 18 percent with children beyond the Thai border area. Although a high percentage of the elderly households reported having a current migrant child, even more had a child living at home. In total, 80 percent had a co-resident child and 91 percent had a child in the same village. The fact that respondents averaged 4.8 living children allowed some children to migrate while others remained in the homes or villages of their parents (Table 1).

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

Percent of respondents with at least one child	Total	Commune		Sex		Currently married	
		Treng	Talos	Men	Women	No	Yes
In the household	80.0	80.2	79.9	82.1	78.6	78.1	81.3
In the village (a)	91.3	92.4	90.3	95.3	88.7	87.6	93.8
Ever migrated	67.9	58.8	76.9**	67.9	67.9	62.9	71.3
Migrated but returned	15.8	12.2	19.4	13.2	17.6	15.2	16.3
Currently migrated internally	55.8	52.7	59.0	57.5	54.7	51.4	58.8
Currently migrated to Phnom Penh	14.3	12.2	15.7	17.9	11.3	11.4	16.3
Currently migrated out of country	23.8	18.3	29.1*	20.8	25.8	21.0	25.6
Currently migrated to Thailand near border	6.4	1.5	11.2***	3.8	8.2	5.7	6.9
Currently migrated beyond Thai border (b)	17.7	16.8	18.7	17.0	18.2	15.2	19.4
Base number of cases	265	131	134	106	159	105	160

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

Notes: References to migrants in this table include those who recently left even if not away one year.
(a) Includes those who have children in the household
(b) Includes migrants in other countries as well as Thailand

Among the 265 respondents, 60 percent were female. A majority of the respondents (60 percent) were married with most of the remainder widowed (35 percent). Overall, there were no statistically significant differences between the elderly respondents based on sex and current marital status with respect to living arrangements with their children. However, a significantly higher percentage of elderly households in Talos commune had ever migrant children compared to those in Treng commune. Despite the fact that Treng is geographically nearer the Thai border, Talos elders are especially more likely to have migrant children who go to Thailand but remain near the border. This difference might reflect stronger and more developed social networks that foster such migration in Talos than Treng, which in turn are traceable to differences in their settlement histories, dwelling arrangements, and specifics of their locations. Treng is a more recently settled area where the modal duration of the respondents' residence is only 14 years. In contrast almost four-fifths of the Talos respondents lived in Talos since the end of Khmer Rouge period 30 years ago. In addition dwellings in Treng are strung out along the national highway and thus more dispersed than in Talos. To take advantage of the nearness to the Thai border Treng residents must go through adjacent Pailin Province which until the late 1990s was controlled by a faction of the Khmer Rouge and prone to sporadic fighting which likely would make such migration more difficult.

Migration of Children to Internal and Cross-border Destinations

The respondents in both communes combined had a total of 1,268 living children. Of the 33 percent of the children that had ever migrated, 21 percent were current internal migrants including five percent that went to Phnom Penh. By contrast, eight percent were current international migrants including six percent that went beyond the Thai border. Of note, 32 percent of the children co-resided with parents while 59 percent lived at least in the same village (Table 2). Somewhat in contrast with the respondents, there were significant differences among the respondents' children with regard to living arrangements with their parents based on their sex, age and marital status. Compared to children who were married as well as those over age 30, higher percentages of non-married children and those under 30 co-resided and lived in the same village as their parents. These differences reflect the life stages of the children. Older and married children are more likely to have left their parental homestead. Moreover, significantly higher percentages of female than male children also lived in the same village as their parents.

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

Percent of children who are	Total	Sex		Age		Currently married (a)	
		Male	Female	<30	30+	No	Yes
Location of children (% distribution)			**		***		***
In parental household	31.7	29.7	33.8	49.2	16.5	64.6	11.2
In the village	27.3	26.3	28.3	14.3	38.6	5.2	41.0
In the district	9.9	12.3	7.7	7.5	12.1	1.4	15.2
In Phnom Penh	4.7	3.7	5.8	6.3	3.4	7.9	3.2
Elsewhere in Cambodia	18.8	19.0	18.4	16.1	21.1	13.3	22.2
Outside Cambodia	7.6	9.1	6.1	6.6	8.4	7.7	7.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Selected statistics							
% at least in same village (b)	59.0	56.0	62.0*	63.5	55.1***	69.8	52.2***
% at least in same district (c)	68.9	68.3	69.7	71.0	67.2	71.1	67.4
% ever migrated	32.6	33.0	32.2	32.6	32.7	31.8	33.5
% returned migrant	4.4	4.1	4.7	4.9	4.0	4.3	4.7
% current internal migrant	20.7	19.8	21.4	21.1	20.3	19.9	21.5
% current migrants in Thailand near border	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.2	2.4	1.6	2.0
% current migrant beyond Thai border (d)	5.8	7.3	4.2*	5.4	6.0	6.1	5.2
Base number of cases	1,268	627	640	589	679	443	785

Significance levels: *= .05 level; **= .01 level; ***= .001 level.
Statistical significance is based on Pearson chi square; in the case of for location of children the statistical significance refers to the entire percent distribution.

Notes: References to migrants in this table include those who recently left even if not away one yearTabulations by sex exclude on case of unknown sex
(a) Excludes 29 cases below age 15 and 11 cases who are monks or of unknown marital status.
(b) Includes children in the household
(c) Includes children in the household and village
(d) Includes migrants in other countries as well as Thailand

There are no significant differences based on sex, age and marital status among the full set of current internal migrants. However, when considered separately, migrants

to Phnom Penh were significantly more likely to be single females under the age of 30, reflecting the preference of the Phnom Penh garment factories for female workers. Thus 37 percent of current migrants to Phnom Penh were women under 30 compared to only 19 percent of current migrants elsewhere (not shown in table). Among cross-border migrants, the only statistically significant difference is that they were more likely to be men than women. This could reflect greater concern about perceived risks of women could face through international migration.

Risks Associated with Migration

The interviews reveal that older age parents are acutely aware of the risks associated with migration and express concern about the welfare of their migrant children. Most parents appear to be reluctant for their children to leave although many see little alternative. A 60-year-old village chief in Treng commune who has children living in Battambang town expressed the conflicting feelings experienced by many parents:

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

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

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

One of the most heartrending stories came from an elderly woman in Treng commune. Her migrant son had apparently gone to sea on a Thai fishing boat but had not been heard from since:

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

Exchanges of Support

Migration of adult children from rural areas is sometimes viewed as leaving elderly parents behind to work on their farms with no one to help (Murshid, 2007). This observation assumes that children who continue to live with their parents make greater contributions to them but fails to differentiate among various types of assistance. Our study addresses this issue by separately examining filial contributions with respect to helping with housework, with business or farm work, and with financial contributions during the past year. The results show that children make different but complementary contributions to parents depending on their location. In brief, children who live with or near their parents provide more regular help with housework and with business or farm work while children who live further away contribute more money. Note that some children who were living at substantial differences were recent migrants and thus the regular contributions to housework or to business or farm work reported by respondents likely refer to contributions made prior to migration.

Not surprisingly, co-resident children are by far most likely to regularly help parents with housework (87 percent) and with business or farm work (71 percent). Those in a different household in the same village are far less likely to do so but still more likely than children who live further away. Given that the large majority of parents have a child in the household, this evidence contradicts the view that high rates of migration among their children leave parents behind with no one to help. At the same time, 43 percent of the children living outside of the country contributed over 100,000 riels (USD 25) in the past year to their parents. By comparison, only seven percent of children living in the same village contributed this much (Figure 2)[6].

[6] Monetary contributions from coresident children are not considered due to difficulties in their interpretation. Presumably many households share a common budget and money received from a coresident child might likely be used for household expenses that benefit all members including the child who made the contribution. Also note that the high percentages of children in Phnom Penh and outside the country that help with business or farm work regularly in the past year is likely attributable to the fact that some were recent migrants, away for less than one year.

Figure 2: Contributions to parents by children aged 15 and older by location of child

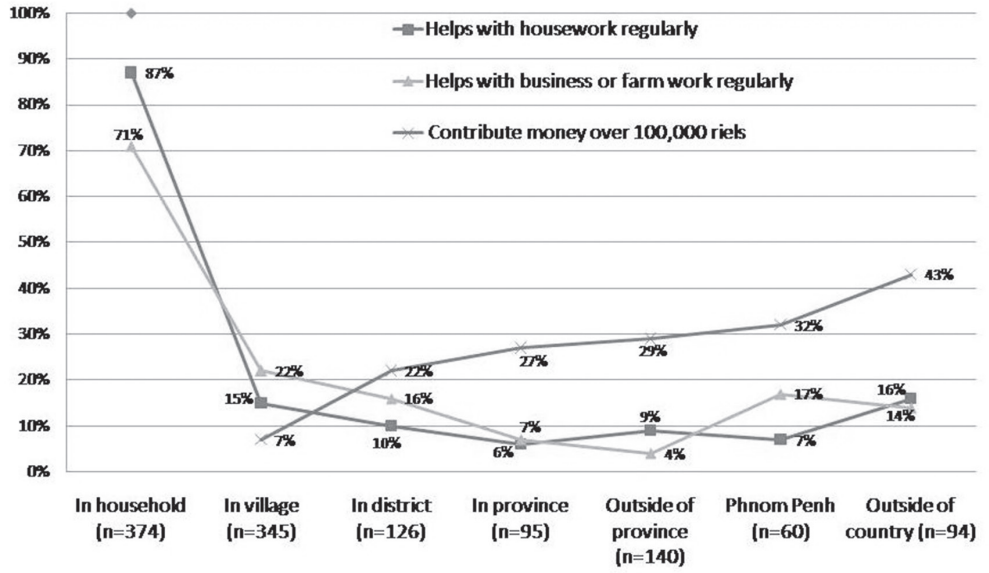
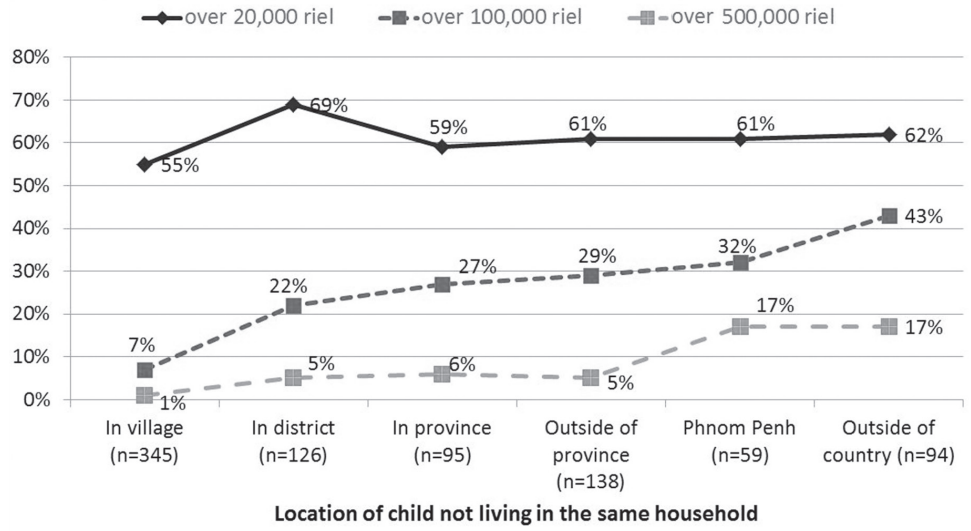


Figure 3 shows in more detail the monetary contributions that non-coresident children make to their parents. Of particular note is that the percentages of non-coresident children that contribute over 500,000 riel (USD 125) to their parents in the past year are by far highest for those living in Phnom Penh and outside Cambodia. This suggests that opportunities for higher-paying work for migrant children are considerably more favorable in these destinations. Meanwhile most non-coresident children irrespective of location contributed over 20,000 riel (USD 5) to their parents in the past year. These relatively small contributions can have important symbolic value for parents especially during the culturally important Khmer New Year and P'Chum Ben festivals as well as provide parents with small amounts of money to make donations at the pagoda.

Figure 3: Children sending money to parents in past year by location of child



Exchanges of support and services between parents and children can flow in either direction or be entirely absent. Parents often provide material support to migrant children, especially in financing costs incurred at the early stages of the migration process. Parents helped pay migration expenses for 48 percent of the children that ever migrated away for at least one year. While international compared to internal migrant children were more likely to receive this support, the difference is not statistically significant even when adjusted for age, sex, marital status and return migrant status (Table 3).

In total, 56 percent of children that had migrated provided their parents with regular financial support as migrants. This reveals the strong concern of the migrants for the well-being of their parents. While international compared to internal migrant children were more likely to provide this support, the difference is not statistically significant.

Overall, 55 percent of the migrant children contributed to the medical expenses of parents who incurred them. International migrant children were more likely than internal migrant children to make these contributions but the difference is not statistically significant. By contrast, 32 percent of the migrant children had returned to help their parents when they were ill. Not surprisingly, this is more common for internal than international migrant children.

Table 3: Support exchanges during period of absence between parents and ever-migrant children away for at least one year by whether migration was internal or international

	Percent of migrants			Adjusted odds ratio (internal migrants as reference) (a)
	All migrant children	Internal migrant children	International migrant children	
Whose parents helped to pay expenses to migrate	48.4	46.7	53.5	1.116
Whose parents provided rice or food on a regular basis	17.6	19.6	11.6	.527
Who provided parents with regular financial support	56.1	54.7	60.5	1.389
In which net material gain was in favor of parents(b)	42.4	40.5	48.2	1.484
In which net material gain was in favor of children(b)	33.0	37.0	21.2**	.451**
Who contributed to medical expenses of parents who had expenses (c)	55.1	52.7	63.6	1.471
Who returned to help during illness among parents who had an illness (d)	32.0	35.5	18.2*	.387*
Base number of cases (e)	344	258	86	344

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

(a) adjusted by logistic regression for age, sex, marital status and return migrant status with age entered as a continuous variable

(b) material gain refers to food, money and assets collectively as subjectively judged by the respondent; the denominator includes cases where equal or no material support was exchanged

(c) excluding 87 cases who had no medical expenses

(d) excluding 91 cases who had no illness

(e) cases refer to number of ever migrant children about which respondents reported

During the entire time of absence of the migrant children, a higher proportion (42 percent) were said to have contributed more to parents' material support (food, money, assets) than the parents (33 percent) contributed to theirs. Thus there is considerable variation with respect to who benefits more. Still, the predominance of a net positive flow in the direction of the parents is clear. At the same time, in cases where the net material gain was in favor of children, internal compared to international migrant children were significantly more likely to be the beneficiaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Talos commune a 67-year-old man relies on two single daughters working as housemaids in Battambang town to support himself and his wife and his youngest

child who is a mute. In addition, the two daughters support the four children of their elder sister who were left with their grandparents when their elder sister went back to the Thai border with a second husband:

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

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

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

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

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

Social Contact of Children with Parents

The migration of children reduces opportunities for sustained day-to-day interaction with parents. While migration may contribute positively to the economic well-being of migrant families, it may also erode valued social contact between parents and children. Compared to the past, however, the advent and wide use of mobile phones greatly facilitates the ability of parents and migrant children to communicate with each other.

Not surprisingly, frequent visiting is clearly related to the location of the child. Children in the same province but in a different district are far more likely to see the parents at least monthly compared to those in another province including Phnom Penh. Virtually no children living outside the country are able to visit their parents monthly (Table 4). These differences are statistically significant even after adjustment for age, sex and marital status. Still, only 31 percent of the children living in the same province as their parents visited monthly. In contrast, most children living outside the districts of their parents irrespective of location talked on the phone with the parents at least monthly. While children outside the country were somewhat less likely to do so, presumably because the cost is higher, the difference between those inside and outside the country as well as between children living in other provinces and in Phnom Penh is not statistically significant. Thus regardless of whether living inside or outside Cambodia, migrant children relied on phone calls rather than visits to maintain contact with their parents.

When discussing social contact between parents and children it is important to keep in mind that only nine percent of the elderly respondents had no child in the village, only 6 percent had no child in district, and only one percent had no child in Cambodia. Thus in the study sites it is extremely rare for all children of elderly parents to leave the country and even quite rare for all children to leave their parents' district.

Table 4: Contact between parents and children living outside the district by location of child: percent and odds ratio adjusted for age, sex and marital status

	Visit at least monthly		Talk on phone at least monthly		Visit or talk on phone	
	percent	adjusted odds ratio	percent	adjusted odds ratio	Percent	adjusted odds ratio
Among children in and outside country						
in Cambodia (reference category)	17.8	--	60.9	--	62.9	--
outside country	1.1	.048***	52.1	.720	51.6	.629
Among children in Cambodia only						
in province (reference category)	30.9	--	64.8	--	67.0	--
in other province(a)	11.8	.286***	56.5	.669	58.4	.644
in Phnom Penh	10.2	.210**	65.0	.782	66.7	.791

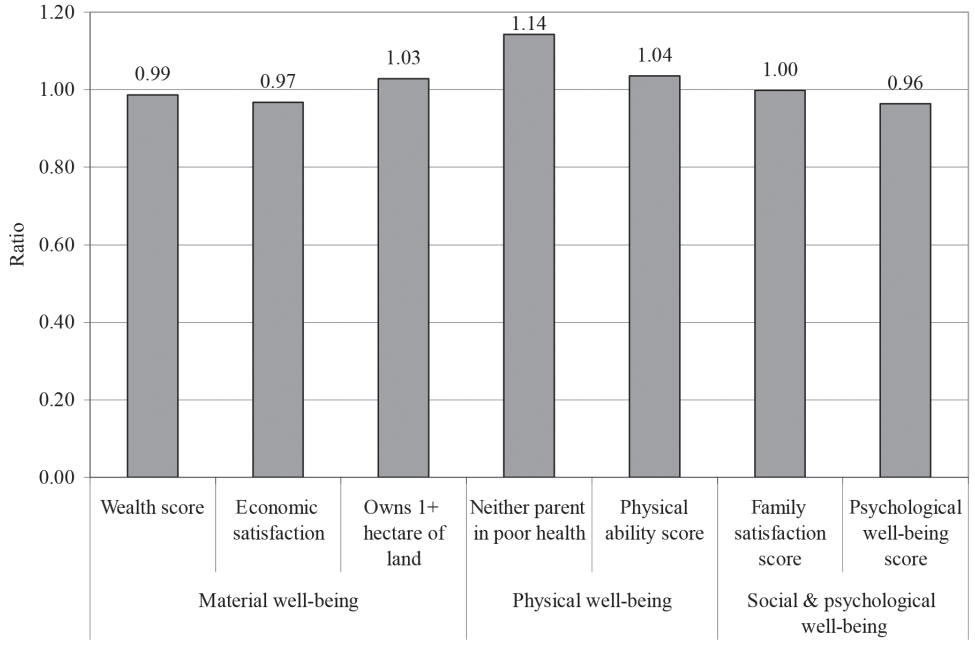
Significance levels: *= .05 level; **= .01 level; ***= .001

Note: Significance levels not shown for percent columns
- Odds ratio adjusted by logistic regression with age entered as a continuous variable
- Base number of cases in: province (97); other province (136); Phnom Penh (59); out of country (95)
- (a) excluding Phnom Penh

Association with Parents' Well-being

In general, the well-being of elderly parents with only internal migrant children and those with international migrant children in the sample sites are comparable as indicated by the ratios of a series of measures intended to assess the well-being of parents (Figure 4). These measures cover material, physical, and social and psychological aspects of well-being. None of the differences in these measures between parents with only internal migrant children and those with any international migrant children (with or without an internal migrant child) were statistically significant. This lack of difference may in part reflect that irrespective of whether they have an internal or cross-border migrant, the vast majority have a coresident child, a situation that may contribute importantly to their well-being on a number of the measures.

Figure 4: Ratio of well-being indicators of parents with international migrant children to those for parents with only internal migrant children



Notes: 108 respondents have only internal migrant children and 63 have international migrant children (including 23 who also have an internal migrant child). None of the differences between these two groups of respondents on any of the measures shown is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Wealth score is measured as sum of thirteen household items plus two housing characteristics.
Economic satisfaction ranges from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied)
Poor health refers to self assessed health stated as poor or very poor for either respondent or spouse.
Physical ability score is based on respondent's perceived ability to walk 200 meters, to lift a 5 kilogram bag of rice, and to maintain the house without help from others. Score can range from 0 to 6.
Family satisfaction score is based on respondent's perception of how family gets along and depends on each other and how children are doing with their lives. Scores can range from 3 to 9.
Psychological well-being score is based on six items. Scores can range from 6-18.

The interviews suggest that in a number of cases, parents' well-being is an important issue for parents and adult children alike in making decisions to migrate as well as to return. A 60-year-old divorced woman from Talos commune has five children, four of whom are returned cross-border migrants from Thailand currently living with her. The decision of her returned migrant children to remain with her clearly pleases her:

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

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

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

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

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

Older age persons who find solace in their Buddhist beliefs appear to have achieved a sense of well-being as they approach death. A 60-year-old *archar* or Buddhist lay leader from Talos commune who has both cross-border and internal migrant children narrates how he is preparing for the next life:

> *I have been an achar for five to six years now…. Today I try to seek the benefits for the next life. I am not interested much in the current life. This is because [life] is very short, so I am seeking things that are beneficial for the future. We cannot depend on [our] children…. Parents will have to depend on themselves once the children are married…. This is life…. We should prepare our own place now.*

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

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

Conclusions

The findings of our study exemplify clearly that migration of adult children is common in households with older persons in Battambang. Over half of the older persons interviewed in the two study communes have at least one current internal migrant child and almost a fourth have a current international migrant child most of whom are in Thailand. In some cases international migration involves only short distances to areas near the Cambodian border for agricultural work but most that go to Thailand go deeper into the country. The main demographic distinctions among migrants are that the international migrants who go beyond the border region are predominantly males while the internal migrants who go to Phnom Penh tend to be young, female and unmarried.

Migration is often portrayed as leaving rural elderly parents behind to work on their farms with little help. This is not the case in our study sites. Fully four-fifths of respondents had a child living with them and over 90 percent had a child living at least in the same village. This reflects their large family sizes that allow some children to migrate while others remain with parents. The children who live with or near parents often help regularly with housework as well as with business or farm work while children who migrate often contribute important monetary support through remittances. Thus children make different and complementary contributions to their parents, depending on their location relative to their parents.

Although, there are only limited studies worldwide that compare remittances from internal and international migrants, it is generally assumed that international migrants earn more and thus remit larger amounts than internal migrants (Adams et al., 2009). A CDRI study based on data from the nationally representative 2007 Cambodia Socio-economic Survey also suggests that remittances from international migrants are more effective at reducing poverty than those from internal migrants (Tong, 2011). Our study likewise finds that international migrants are considerably more likely than internal migrants to provide greater financial assistance through remittances, although with an important caveat. Remittances from internal migrants who go to Phnom Penh are comparable to those from cross-border migrants. Still the low monetary values of the remittances in both of these cases supports the findings of other research that remittances in Cambodia are generally spent on recurrent costs of subsistence (Analyzing Development Issues, 2005; Tong, 2011).

That migrants to Phnom Penh are almost as likely as international migrants to remitting relatively large amounts of money to their parents underscores a central point of our study: differences between internal and international migration and their effects on families are specific to the settings in which they occur. Migrants from our study sites typically have very modest educations, averaging only between five to six years of schooling, with little difference between those who stay within the country and those who cross an international border. Thus even though cross-border migrants with low education can often earn more in less skilled work abroad than at home, they lack employment opportunities for higher paying jobs that are open to well educated and highly skilled migrants from more developed settings.

Parents sometimes provide financial support to migrant children especially for costs incurred at the early stages of the migration process. This was so for almost half of the migrant children covered in our survey. At the same time, respondents were also

more likely to report that they received more material support from a migrant child than the child received from them. Moreover, net benefits to parents were more frequently mentioned with respect to international than internal migrant children even though parents were more likely to help pay the costs involved for cross-border migration.

Differences are also apparent in the type of social contact maintained with parents. Not surprisingly, internal migrants are able to visit more frequently than those who go abroad. Still only a modest minority of internal migrants see their parents at least every few months. Moreover, there is little difference between cross-border and internal migrants in terms of keeping in contact through phone calls. Internal migrant children are also more likely than international migrants to return to help their parents during illness but international migrants were somewhat more likely to contribute to the medical expenses of their parents.

More generally, parents who have international migrants differ little from those who have only internal migrants on a range of measures of material, physical, social and psychological well-being. Given the cross-sectional nature of our survey data and our inability to adequately control for the influence of differential selection factors that may characterize migrants and their households of origin, these associations are only descriptive. Nevertheless, given the particular context within which the migration takes place in the study sites, e.g. the low skill levels of both types of migrants, the ability for parents to keep in contact by phone almost regardless of the migrants location, and the common presence of at least one coresident child even for parents with migrant children, it is plausible that for older age parents the impacts of internal versus international migration of their children do not differ greatly.

The qualitative interviews with the parents also underscore several commonalities. Parents typically are concerned about the welfare of their children, both female and male, and understand the risks involved in migration. Cross-border migration risks are viewed as more serious than those associated with internal migration. While some parents are reluctant to let children migrate, especially daughters, crop failures and growing debt force them to put aside such concerns in hope of receiving potential benefits from remittances. Parents appreciate the access and ease of phone contact with both internal and cross-border migrant children, which allay their fears of not being able to call on children in times of illness. Having some children at home or nearby is also seen as important, perhaps even more important, for parents' sense of security as having either internal or cross-border migrant children.

The experience of the older age parents with respect to migration reflects its diverse nature in Cambodia. Internal migration is often seasonal and low paid but having a daughter working in a Phnom Penh garment factory can provide more secure and substantial financial benefits (Murshid, 2007; Analyzing Development Issues, 2005). Similarly the earnings and hence remittances of migrant children working abroad may depend on where they go. As a result, individual experiences of older age parents with migrant children vary considerably. Having migrant children, whether internal, cross-border or both can be advantageous for some and disadvantageous for others. What accounts for these individual differences? Clearly the types of internal or cross-border work can affect the prospects of success. Migrating through formal rather than informal channels may also help to ensure success. But the stories of our elderly respondents suggest other influences as well and help explain how migration impacts both their material and psychological well-being. These include the character of their children, having other children living as co-residents or nearby, having sufficient numbers of children to ensure different types of support, having a living spouse, having good health, having land and independent means of subsistence, and having a sense of the spiritual as they approach death.

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