

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction/Statement of the problem

The growing number of adults migrating across international borders has affected children in many ways. Millions of Asian parents migrate internationally in search of work. Some of these parents leave their children behind; others take them along (Bryant, 2005). The plight of children left behind by one or both migrating parent (s) in developing countries has attracted growing attention in recent years in Asia. In this globalization era, increasingly uneven development and porous borders are encouraging more people to look for better job opportunities. Many of these are labour migrants, both men and women, have left their children behind with extended family members or friends in the home countries in their quest to improve livelihood circumstances for themselves and their families.

In the case of Myanmar, large numbers of people migrate internationally leaving their children behind. It is estimated that the overall number of Myanmar migrants in Thailand is somewhere in between 800,000 and one million (Paisanpanichkul, 2001). One of the reasons for migrations is to escape from the economic hardship and to seek job opportunities to support their families and children.

Myanmar is administratively divided into 7 States¹: Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan – the main ethnic groups of the country and 7 Divisions² Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagain, Tanintharyi and Yangon (see map in page 16). There are 135 different ethnic races with more than 100 indigenous languages belonging to 8 major nationalities: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bhamar,

^{1,2} States and divisions are roughly equivalent to provinces.

Mon, Yakhine and Shan. Kayin³ state, one of the States in Myanmar located in the south-eastern part of the country consists of 7 Townships and 5 sub-Townships.

Kayin State stretches down the southern and eastern part of the country bordering much of northern and north-western of Thailand. The main economy in Kayin State is farming and agriculture. The frequent clashes between the military and the ethnic armed forces have resulted in a lack of peace and stability in the area and a jeopardized economy. There is forced labour whereby people have been forced to do work for the military. There are no job opportunities, with the notable exception of forced labour, which has made poverty to become widespread within the state, thus contributing to migration across the border into Thailand. The resultant fewer job opportunities for the local people together with the widespread poverty are the major factors that are encouraging migration.

Socio-economic conditions of people in Myanmar particularly at the village level in Kayin state are very low. The government spending for the civilian sector is extremely low and it is only 4% of GDP. Poverty is the rule of the day for the majority of those living in the rural areas of the Kayin State due to the continued armed conflict and the resulting circumstances that are no longer favourable for a safe and secure work environment. Traditional farming work is no longer seen as a suitable job for the daily survival of local people. They, therefore, move out of their villages and migrate to Thailand where they can work and earn and have their basic needs met not only for themselves but also for their families.

Hlaing Bwe, the area where the research will be conducted, is one of the seven townships in Kayin State which shares a border in the east with Thailand. Traditionally, most of the local people rely on growing paddy and other seasonal crops for their livelihood. However, large numbers of people have left their villages and migrated to Thailand. Some of the reasons given for migration include no income / poverty, no job opportunity, boring/ambition to be rich and to get away from debts (Save the Children UK, 2005). The driving forces for migration are poverty, conflict

³ Formerly called "Karen"

between army and armed groups and taxation from those groups. Thailand's rapid economic growth has created an enormous demand for cheap, unskilled labour in the private sector (Panam et al, 2004). The pushing factors from the area combined with the pulling factors from across the borders contribute to mass migrations of local people into Thailand.

This migration rate in Kayin State in 2005, the year of study, is 13.9 per cent with females accounting for 57.4 per cent and males 42.6 per cent. The migration rate in Hlaing Bwe is around 10 per cent (Save the Children UK, 2005). The rate is likely to be increased in the following years. When parents cannot fulfil their parental duties for their children, they begin to think of migrating. There is an increase of migrant labour when there is a lack of income for the farmers, chronic food shortages, increases in visible malnutrition among children, decline in school attendance as struggling farmers start moving to get food and work (Save the Children UK, 2005). In Hlaing Bwe Township, Kayin State, many young and middle-aged parents leave their children at home and migrate to find jobs with the intention to support the social wellbeing of their family and children. In the absence of one or both parents, children are left behind with their grand parents, relatives, older siblings and some with the neighbours to be looked after. Some are left behind in the monastery with the monks. Many parents reported that when migrating they leave their children with grandparents or other relatives in order that they may study (Caouette, n.d.:109).

Migration in Myanmar family takes place in three patterns. Usually, the father or mother will migrate for a short period of time to work in the host country (seasonal migration). Another pattern is for both parents to migrate for a certain time period to support the rest of their family and their children (parental migration). The third pattern is for parents to take their family along with them as they work for a long period of time in the host country (family migration). People migrating in the forms of seasonal and parental migration patterns are mostly from low-income families and parents have to leave their children at the place of origin. Children may have to adapt and cope with the situation of absence of one or both parents. Migration of parents can affect children economically and socially either positively or negatively or both.

Remittance from migrant parents can help improve the wellbeing of children, maintain family economic stability and reduce poverty and there are studies that support this concept. In Indonesia, remittances can be expected to improve the condition of poor or near-poor families (ADB, 2006: 140). Despite the economic bonus that migrant parents provide, children suffer psychological problems which could impinge on their rights to development, survival and education (Save the Children, 2006). The extended family's role in acting as surrogate parents in the absence of children's parents plays a vital part for the children in order to get care, support and guidance. However, in some cases, the extended family is unable to make up for the genuine parental care that the child is in search and in need of. Many Mexican children living outside of two biological parents' homes live with other adults. These adults may not compensate for parental absence with regard to child well-being (Nobles, 2006).

The case of the illegal Myanmar migrant workers from the research area may be different as the channels for cash remittances are limited and unofficial. For example, Myanmar domestic workers use underground brokers to remit their money back home (Caouette et al, 2006). Other migrants use relatives and friends to hand-carry the money or they themselves bring the savings home when possible (ibid). Thus, the remittance may not be regular and it can create problems for the family who completely rely on the migrant workers' remittances. Irregular financial support from the parents may create hardship situations for children in terms of their daily food and even survival and the paying of school fees. This can be one of the consequences of parents' migration on children that can affect their future.

In terms of coping strategies at the family level, traditionally, support for children comes from extended family, relatives and neighbours but general poverty restricts everyone's capacity to help others in need. Due to the poverty and high migration rate in Hlaing Bwe Township, the caregivers might not be able to devote enough time for these children as they also have to struggle for their daily survival. Instead of receiving care, these children have to work in the farm to help the adults as

well as to take care of their younger siblings. Older siblings of school age have to take care of the younger when grandparents are busy (Save the Children in Myanmar, 2007). In the absence of parents, children may be driven to drop out of school and to work for their livelihood when the extended family members can no longer provide the necessary guidance, care and support as they themselves are unable to take care of their basic human needs.

Among the total population in Hlaing Bwe, there are fewer than 100,000 children under the age of 18 of which slightly more than 43,000 numbers are children under the age of 5 (Save the Children in Myanmar, 2007). According to the information from the office of Township Education Officer, there are 28,498 children enrolled in primary schools for 2006-2007 school-year in the whole Township (ibid.). Drop out rate in primary level is low but the rate becomes higher at the age of 12 and 13. About 39 per cent of children and adolescents are out of school. Children of migrant parents are also included in this out of school children percentage.

At the community level, the community support also plays an essential role in assisting the children of migrants in terms of caring, schooling, health and other social issues. However, lack of human and financial resources from the community may put children in unwholesome, environmental situations. In the Myanmar community, there used to be civil society groups such as religious groups, youth groups, social welfare groups who voluntarily help the community. In Hlaing Bwe also, there are civil society organizations working for the welfare of the villagers. One or two international organizations are working in the township also. Those organizations are likely to have benefited all the children in general including children of migrant parents. However, due to recurring conflicts between ethnic armed groups and the army, "aid" seldom reached the villages. The result of whether or not children are benefiting from that "aid" is unclear.

At the state level, Myanmar government has Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) and Ministry of Health (MOH) in which those ministries are assisting the welfare of the citizens. Those ministries provide the

villages in terms of education and health by assigning school teachers, health care workers and social welfare workers. However, government-assigned staff is not willing to work in the areas due to poor school facilities and living conditions. Besides the government ministries, there are also the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) and Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MwAF) that are government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) in country. In many parts of the country, they are cooperating with some international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in some activities. Those GONGOs are providing support in collaboration with the local level concerned departments. Nevertheless, supports going down to the grassroots level are rarely seen.

The Myanmar Basic Education System comprises of three levels: primary, secondary and higher education. When children reach their 5th birthday, they are enrolled in the primary school where they learn from Kindergarten (KG) – grade 1 up to grade 5. The secondary education which consists of a lower secondary level (Middle School), covering grades 6 to 9, and an upper secondary level (High School) comprising grades 10 and 11. Once children pass the high school examinations, they are entitled to join institutions of higher education such as universities, degree colleges, colleges & others. All citizens, whether from the urban or the rural areas, are entitled to this educational system provided they obtain the required scores. In spite of the government's efforts to improve the educational system in the country by the provision of school infrastructures and learning materials, there are evidences of declining resources, minimal professional support with deteriorating learning conditions, loss of many teachers and a reduction in the numbers of children making the transition from primary to middle and middle to high school (UNICEF, 2001). School fees for the primary school is said to be free according to the policy, but in reality parents still have to pay for their children when enrolling.

Schools have not been renovated and classroom facilities are poor and under equipped, especially in the rural areas. The problems in most of the schools in Hlaing Bwe Township is that of "inadequacy" or "insufficiency" in terms of the number of teachers, school furniture, learning materials, funding and security of the school

premises. (Save the Children in Myanmar, 2007). Government assigned teachers are few and far due to low pay, poor working conditions and the families being unable to join them, for social, economic and security reasons. The education system is in a pitiable state. School expenses have to be borne by the students' families thus creating financial obstacles to education for many poor households. So, children from poor families in the village have little or no chance to attend schools. Children of migrant parents may not be able to pay school fees in time if the family is totally depending on the migrants' remittances. On the other hand, children lose interest in school and eventually drop out of schools if the need arises for the children to help in the family's farm work. This is especially true in the case of very poor farming families where children are required to help the parents. Parents require the children to leave school and work to support the family, contribute towards the family's earnings while some will even have to work as hired cow-hands/herders (Save the Children, 2007).

Through out the existing research it can be argued that there are socio-economic impacts of migration of parents to children and family who are left behind. The existing studies in Kayin state look into the conditions of migration, the assessment on human trafficking problem and general situation analysis of the area. However, there is no study on the situation of the children who are left behind by the migrant parents. The purpose of this study is therefore, to explore the socio-economic situation of families left behind including the children and the state of affairs of these children in the absence of their migrant parents. This study will use human development index which will look at the poverty level, education and social relationships to measure the well-being of family left behind especially children. It will also study their adaptation and coping processes and how it affects them from the three different levels of the family, the community and the state levels.

1.2 Topic of the Thesis

This study will investigate the socio-economic situations of children left behind by one or both migrant parents. It will focus on children left behind by the migrant parents; how those children are raised, their economic/financial situations,

their social relationships and their coping mechanisms to stay in an environment without their parents who are the breadwinners. An assessment of the consequences of one or both parents' migration on the children will also be assessed.

This study will also find out how the remittance benefits children, the frequency of remittance from migrant. The use of remittance by the family members will be studied in order to know how the family spends the remittance and how do they prioritize in using it. Since children are left behind with the extended family, role of the extended family and caregivers will also be investigated to see whether they can fully support the children and how they cope with it.

The research will also study the communities, the environment of the migrants' children to determine how the community overcomes the migration problem and what kind of supports are provided to the children left behind, how the caregivers collaborate with the community members, local groups in the community and humanitarian organization who in one way or the other are implicated in the migration issue.

1.3 Research Questions

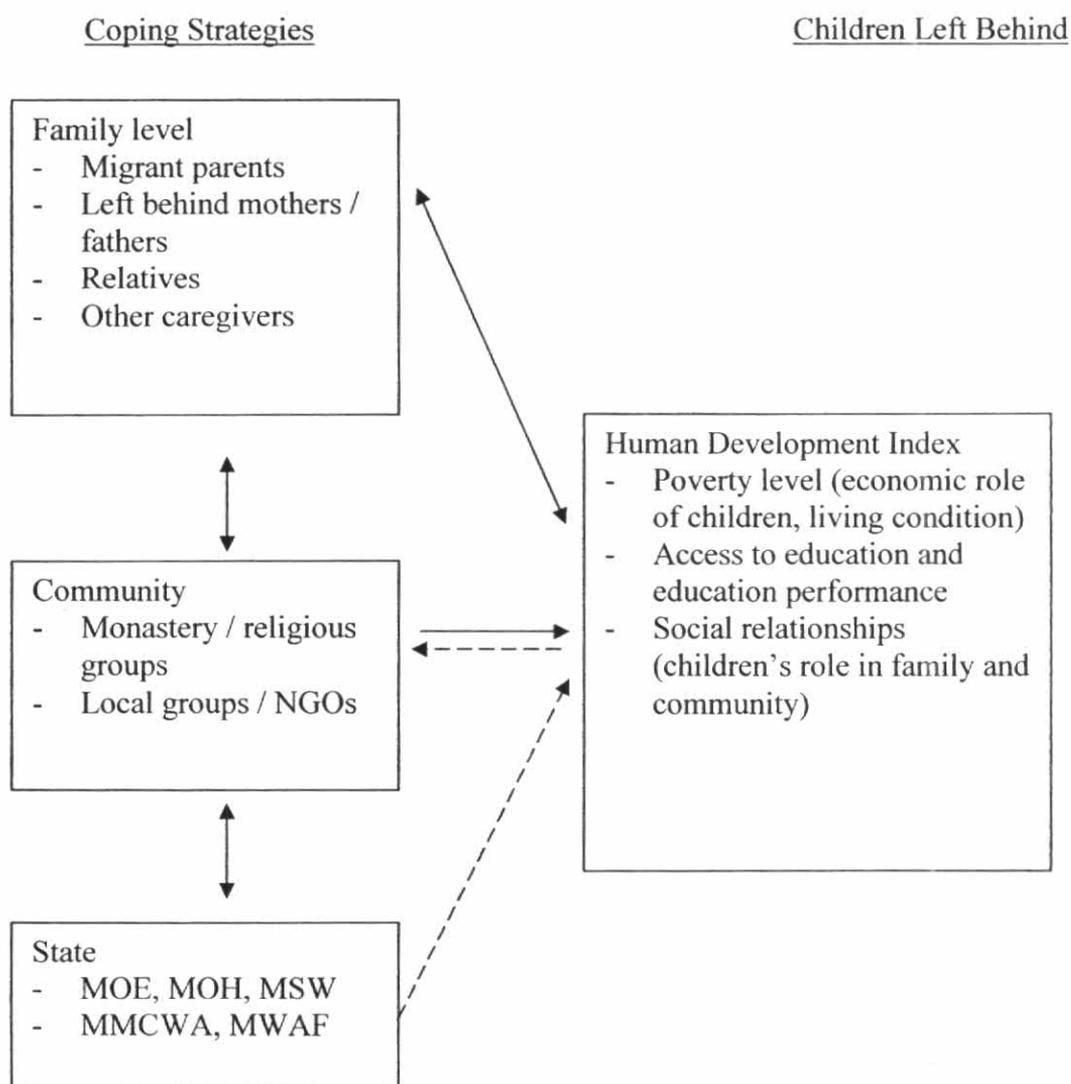
1. What are the impacts on left behind families, children and community due to migration in terms of socio-economic and access to education?

1.4 Research Objectives:

- To explore the socio-economic situations of the families and the community
- To investigate the socio-economic conditions of left behind children due to parents' migration
- To study how the children, caregivers and community cope with the absence of migrant parents

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The following figure shows the general description of inter-linkage between Migrants, Children and families left behind, Community and State.



1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Study Design

The study design was an empirical field research. This research was an exploratory research since there was no previous research having been done in this area regarding the situation of left behind children of migrants. This research adopted both documentary review and field research. For field research, this study used both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to get the necessary data.

In terms of quantitative method, the research applied the random sampling survey method so as to correspond to the situation of the entire population in the study area. With constraints on the large number of targeted population as well as the researcher's time limitation, this research selected only 100 households out of total of a 230 households for the survey in order to represent the population and the characteristics of such village. Out of the village's five wards, the survey randomly selected 20 households from each ward to make up a total number of 100 households.

This random sampling survey applied as the preliminary research in an attempt to understand the overview of household economic status, number of migrant household and household with parents' migration, number of left behind children and the availability of the social services in the community. Survey took place for about two weeks. Data were manually transcribed on a daily basis and finally analyzed.

For qualitative method, this research used in-depth interview with migrant families and key informants in the community selected from the survey results. The qualitative method was used in order to get a deeper understanding on the situation and how the left behind children and respective family cope with this situation. In-depth interviews were carried out with:

- (1) left behind children, age between 8 and 18,
- (2) their caregivers and
- (3) community key informants

After selecting migrant households based on the survey outcome, the first group interview commenced with participants drawn from children and caregivers from migrant households, particularly with one or both migrant parents. This interview explored the overall picture of their situations in terms of access to education, health care and living conditions with other family members in the absence of the migrant parents.

For face to face in-depth interview, sixteen children and sixteen caregivers were selected. Sixteen left behind children of different ages and gender were chosen for interviews. This stage shed some light on their real situation and their feeling on staying separately from parents. The interviewed children were mainly from the household where both parents migrate and live with the grandparents. Six children were from primary school, six from secondary school, two from monastic education and two drop outs. Among the interviewed sixteen children, ten were left behind with grandparents, two with aunt, two with father whose mother is migrant and two with the monks at the monastery with the months.

Sixteen caregivers interviewed were grouped into seven grandmothers, two mothers whose husbands migrated, one father whose wife migrated, one aunt and one neighbour. In addition, two return migrants whose husbands recently returned to Thailand and presently mother of young kids were also interviewed in order to know their situation of working in Thailand and the reason of return. A monk who teaches children monastic education and a headmistress who is in the meantime taking care of a left behind child were also interviewed. This headmistress was interviewed as both caregiver and key informant.

The second group of interviewees comprised 10 key informants from the community. One community leader, secretary of the village peace and development council, one midwife, headmistress and one teacher in primary school, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) teacher, monk and social workers were interviewed. This second group was to reflect from community level support rendered

for the left behind children and coping strategies for the left behind families. One focus group discussion was also conducted with children of age of fourteen to seventeen of both migrant and non-migrant parents to get information on parental migration status as well as the children's feelings with regards to parents' working abroad and living condition with grandparents, relatives and neighbours. Not only were the formal in-depth interviews conducted with the selected participants but also informal talks with some other children and villagers were done in order to get more information about the community and migration situation. Moreover, to understand the overall conditions of the village and the living condition of the target groups, the study also applied non-participatory observation.

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were conducted at varied convenient time and place of the participants. All participants were first informed on the purpose of the study and that their anonymity was assured. The participants were then asked according to the prepared questions followed by their opinion regarding parents' migration. Written notes were made upon the participants' responses. At the end of the each day, the interview record of what was said in local language was translated into English based on the note made during the interview.

In-depth interviews with children and caregivers were conducted at individual houses. For children and caregivers of the same family, interviews with children were done separately from their own caregivers in order to avoid the influence of the caregivers on the children. Face to face interviews with in-school children took place after they came back from school at 3:30 – 4:00 in the afternoon. Key informants interview were done at the respective places of each respondents. Most interviews with key informants took place in the evening or at night time dependent in their availability.

For documentary review, this research analyzed base on the documents, reports and other relevant research reports from the International Non-Governmental Organization named *Save the Children*. Primary data from the community such as list of households and map of the village were also collected from village peace and

development council⁴ (VPDC) office. To verify the validity of information obtained from the focus group discussion and the interview, the data were cross checked from different sources as well as with available documents.

1.6.2 Study Period

Data collection period was from the first week to third week of July 2007. The collected data from survey were screened in order to get the number of migrant households and that of left behind children. Subsequently, the study continued with in-depth interviews with children, the caregivers and key informants. Research started with family survey in the first week. In the second week, the survey and the in-depth interviews went along and the remaining in-depth interviews were completed in the third week.

All the questionnaires for survey and questions for in-depth interview to conduct with the households, children, family members and key informants were translated into Myanmar language to minimize language barrier. As most of the interview took place in eastern Pwo Kayin Language, the researcher whose native language is Sagaw Kayin, had to seek help for interpretation in order to understand thoroughly the conversation. After each visit to the research area, data were transcribed and analyzed.

With the concern that entering a village for a particular purpose could possibly pose some risks, an INGO *Save the Children* was contacted. A preliminary meeting with the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) leader and the secretary was held on the first day upon arrival at the village to explain the objectives of the research and to request the approval and coordination. Selection of household and family for survey was done with the assistance of the VPDC secretary and staff of that particular INGO.

⁴ Name of village level authority

1.7 Ethical Consideration

The researcher explained the objectives of the study and obtained consent from the participants before starting the survey and the interview. In conducting in-depth interview, the participants were explained the interview was for the academic purpose only. Data from the INGO and communities were used only with the permission of those particular organization and the community. For their safety and security purpose, name of interviewees were omitted.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The research was taken place in Ta Won Phan Ya village which is located in the west part of Hlaing Bwe Township. It is easy to travel and the distance from the capital of Kayin state to the village is about one to one and a half hours travelled by car.

The study was both quantitative and qualitative field research. However, since the study has to be done in a limited time frame, the findings can be limited. The findings only represented Hlaing Bwe Township in general and the community and village in which the research was carried out in particular.

This study concentrated on the situation of left behind children in the absence of their parents who migrated abroad. The focus was only on the situation of children from Hlaing Bwe Township, Kayin State. The study was the investigation of the social and economic condition of left behind children and how these children cope with the situation of parents who have migrated out of the country. Children for this study will be all children under the age of 18.

Participants were selected by me and/or with the help of the secretary of VPDC and the project staff of the organization that is working in Hlaing Bwe Township. Availability of the participants and the staff of the organization were the key factors. Varieties of participants such as children, caregivers, teachers, health workers and community level key informants were included in the interviewing

process. Since the interview involved children, the age of the interviewed children participants were between 8 to 18 years.

Limitation throughout the field research was language barrier. Although the researcher herself is a Kayin ethnic, language spoken were completely different. The researcher's language is *Sagaw* Kayin and the language used in the community is *Pwo* Kayin Language. Since the whole community speak only *Pwo* Kayin language, using Myanmar language for the in-depth interview was not appropriate. The researcher had to seek help from the INGO worker and the youth volunteer for interpretation. All the interview with both children and caregivers were done in Kayin Language and only Key informants interview were done in Myanmar language.

1.9 Significance of the Study

Parents' migration can be regarded as a development issue because it affects two generation: moving parents and children left behind. The findings of this study will contribute to the understanding of parents' migration effect on left behind children whether it is positive or negative in terms of education performances and social well-beings. It will also reveal whether or not migration benefit family members and the community. It will be useful as a model for those who work for the welfare of children in Myanmar especially for children left behinds by the parents. The recommendation made in this study will be useful in improving the child care mechanism of the family and community level.

Map of Myanmar with States and Divisions

