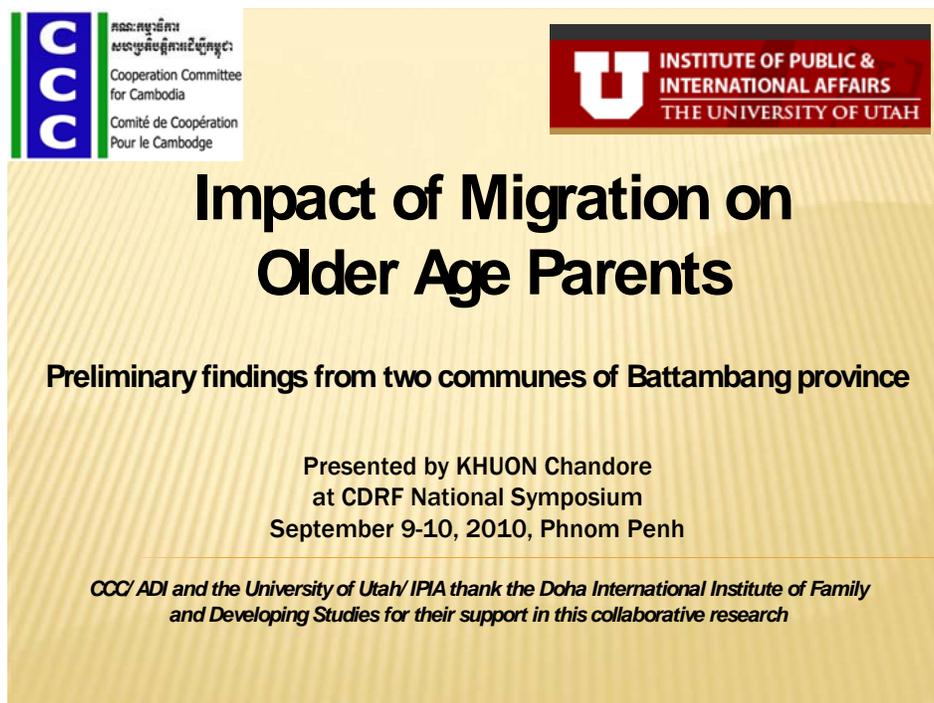


Impact of Migration on Older Age Parents: Preliminary Findings from Two Communes of Battambang Province, Cambodia

Presentation by Khuon Chandore at the Cambodia Development Research Forum (CDRF) Symposium, September 9, 2010, Phnom Penh, Cambodia on behalf of the collaborative research team from the Analyzing Development Issues (ADI) Project of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) and the Institute of Public and International Affairs (IPIA) of the University of Utah.



The aim of this presentation is three-fold. First, it shows some preliminary findings from our ongoing collaborative study. Second, it seeks to determine whether older people are being left behind as suggested by some researchers. Third, it compares the situation of elderly people with and without migrant children.

The issue of how migration of adult children impacts older age parents in rural areas is significant due to current trends towards globalization and population ageing throughout the developing world. In Cambodia, rural people migrate to urban areas or to other countries in search of work to earn income to support their families back home. This trend has increased in recent years. Some studies conducted in Cambodia argue that migration generally contributes positively to the economic well-being of migrant families. However, other research undertaken

in Cambodia maintains that migration has negative social consequences in that the exodus of adult migrant children from rural areas leaves behind the elderly and the young to care for themselves.

The latter view is reflected in the 2007 *Participatory Poverty Assessment of the Tonle Sap* conducted by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI). Discussing domestic and cross-border migration this study argues that construction, tourism, garments and services sectors in Cambodia attract able-bodied workers through rising wages. Similarly cross-border demand from Thailand and Malaysia exerts pressure on the Cambodian labor market to send workers. The result is that able-bodied adults desert their villages leaving behind the old and the very young to work on the farms. By contrast, the study contends that poorest households are left behind for a different reason. Lacking credit and skills they are unable to migrate and find themselves left behind in low-productivity work in the village.

CDRI RESEARCHERS HAVE OBSERVED

“The outlook for the Tonle Sap region and Cambodia is further acceleration in migration.... The medium-term outlook ... is one of continued demographic destabilization of the countryside as able-bodied young men and women desert village after village, while the old and the very young, along with the destitute, are left behind to tend the farms.”

Source: ‘Domestic and Cross-Border Migration from the Tonle Sap’ In *We are Living with Worry All the Time: A Participatory Poverty Assessment of the Tonle Sap*, Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), April 2007.

The literature from Cambodia and this present study indeed support the finding that domestic and cross-border migration is accelerating in the country. However, viewing migration as a trend that leads to the desertion of the old and the young in rural areas is more problematic. This presentation thus poses three questions which depicted are in the slide below.

MIGRATION IS ACCELERATING IN CAMBODIA

BUT:

- ❖ Are able bodied men and women deserting village after village in Cambodia to work as labor migrants?
- ❖ Are the old and young left behind to work on the farms with no one to help?
- ❖ Are the destitute more likely to be left behind?

Before presenting data from our preliminary findings which address the questions above, I will give a brief overview of research methods employed in this study. The primary instrument was a survey questionnaire which consists of a non-probability sample of two-hundred and sixty five individuals who have at least one living child. The survey was conducted in June 2010 in two communes of Battambang province in northwest Cambodia. The first commune was Traeng, one of four communes within the district of Ratanak Mondol. This commune lies on the western side of the province and nears but does not border Thailand. Highway 67, a main road that connects the provincial town of Battambang and the provincial town of Pailin, runs through the commune. The second commune is Ta Los, one of eleven communes within the district of Mong Russey. It is situated on the eastern side of the province and is near Highway 5, a main highway that runs north to south across the province and connects Battambang town to Phnom Penh.

Traeng commune has eight villages, of which 5 villages were selected for study. In Talos there are nine villages, of which 5 villages were selected for study. Two additional villages in Ta Los were used in the study pre-test. The survey selected households with an individual member born between 1940 and 1950 from the registers of the commune police. The researchers sought to interview one person from this age group from each household that contained such an individual. The list of people born within this time period was verified by the respective village chiefs and those who had moved away or died were eliminated from the list. Village

chiefs also added new residents born in these years not recorded on the commune police list. In cases where there was more than one eligible respondent a random selection was made on whom to interview.

Interviewing was completed within five days. There were no refusals, meaning everyone that was contacted was interviewed. If a respondent was not available the interviewer attempted a contact on another day and at times appointments were made to return. However, some eligible respondents were not available at the time the interviewer visited, often because they were out working in their farm at the time. The estimated response rate was approximately 80 per cent.

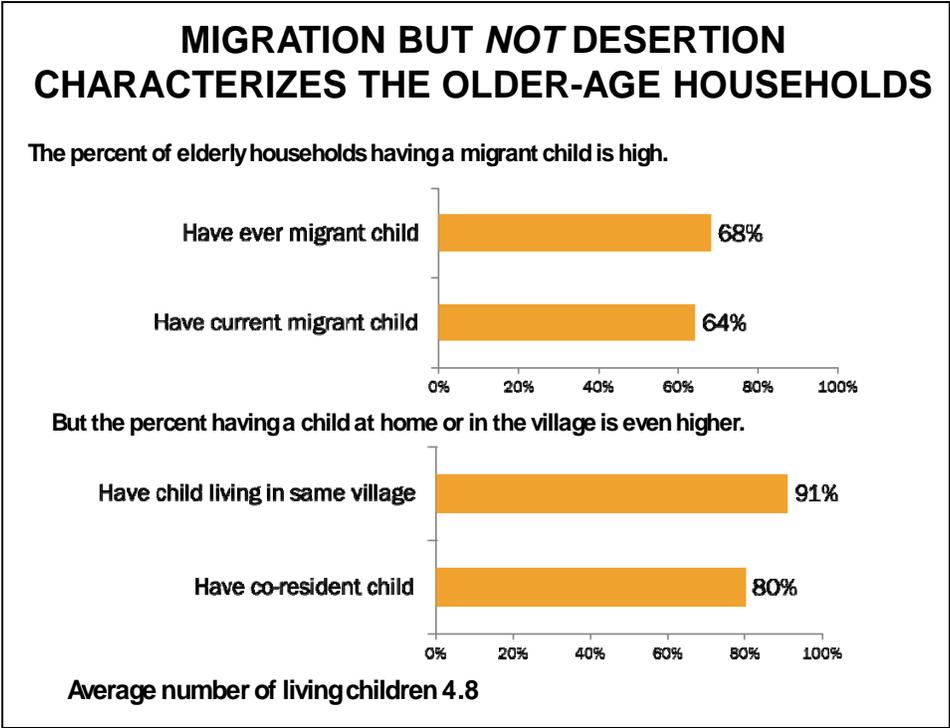
RESEARCH METHODS

- Two communes (Treng and Talos) in two districts (Ratanak Mondul and Mong Reussey) of Battambang province
- Survey questionnaires with 265 people aged 60 to 70 who have at least one living child

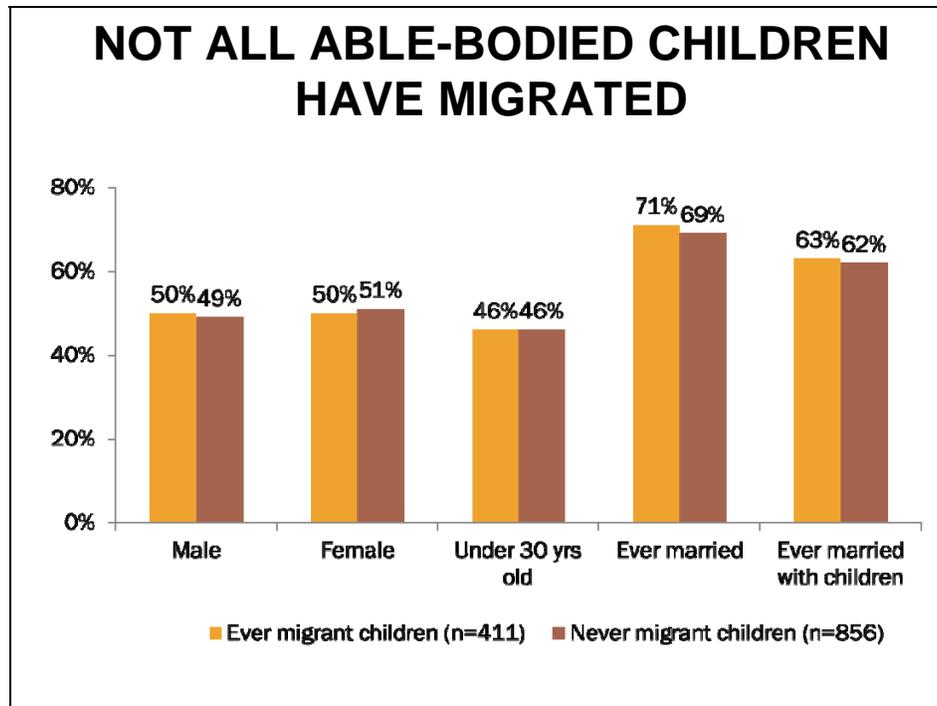
The study defines migrants as children who have moved away from their parents out of the district of their parents. Children of parents who remained in the original districts of their parents after their parents had migrated to the study sites were not considered as migrants. While information was gathered on all migrant children, more detailed information was gathered on migrant children who had been away continuously or cumulatively for at least one year.

The preliminary findings of our study indicate that migration but not desertion characterizes the older-age households surveyed. A high percentage of the elderly households reported having a migrant child. And yet an even higher percentage stated that they had a child living at

home. Just less than two-thirds of the respondents had a current migrant child while four-fifths had a co-resident child. This indicates that the elderly parents have not been deserted despite the high migration rates of their children. This may be explained by the high fertility rate of this cohort of parents. On average, the respondents had 4.8 living children. This allows some children to migrate and others to remain behind in the homes or villages of their parents.

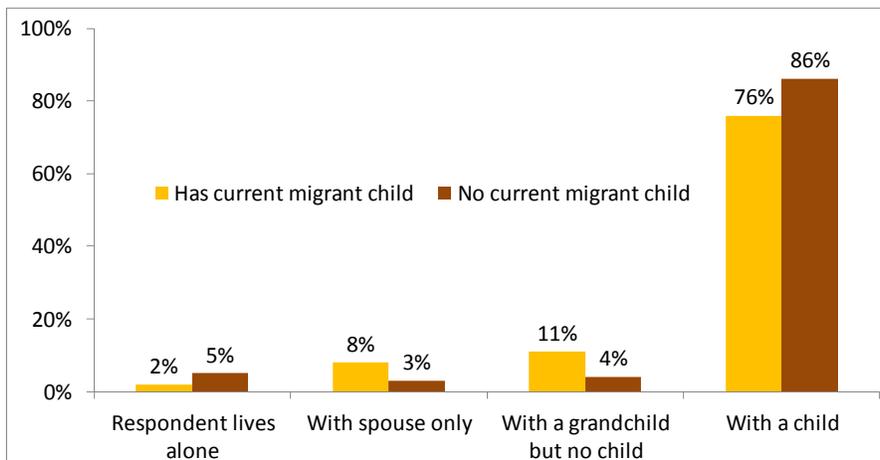


Consistent with the finding that high migration rates have not left older age parents deserted is the finding that not all able-bodied children have migrated. Of the total 1,267 living children of the sample households only 32 per cent had ever migrated. This means that 68 per cent of the children had remained within the districts of their parent. Moreover, a child’s sex, age, marital status, and having their own children had no bearing on their migration status. The chart below shows no major differences among these characteristics of children and whether or not they had ever migrated. So while able-bodied children may have migrated, even more able-bodied children may have not.



The study also compared the living arrangements between the respondents who had a current migrant child and those who did not. If older-age parents with a migrant child have been left behind we would expect large percentages of them to live alone, with only their spouse, or with a grandchild but no child. This is not the case. Slightly more than three-fourths of the respondents with a current migrant child also live with a child. In comparison with respondents without a current migrant child, higher percentages of respondents with a current migrant child do live alone or with a grandchild but no child. However, the differences are small.

HAVING MIGRANT CHILDREN DOES NOT LEAVE THE OLD AND THE YOUNG ALONE AT HOME



In general, the situation of elderly parents with or without migrant children is comparable. Indeed, their mean wealth scores, physical ability scores, family satisfaction scores, and psychological well-being scores are virtually the same. At the same time respondents with a current migrant child reported higher rates of landlessness (36 per cent) than respondents without a current migrant child (22 per cent). This is not surprising as households without land would be under greater pressure to have children work as migrants.

With respect to the contention that the destitute are being left behind because they lack credit and skills to migrate, our findings also offer some insight. If the destitute were unable to migrate due to the constraints of their poverty then we would expect that the wealth scores of the respondents without a current migrant child would be much lower than those with a current migrant child. This is not the case lending doubt to the assertion that the poorest do not migrate.

EXCEPT FOR HAVING LAND, THE SITUATION OF ELDERLY PARENTS WITH OR WITHOUT MIGRANT CHILDREN IS COMPARABLE

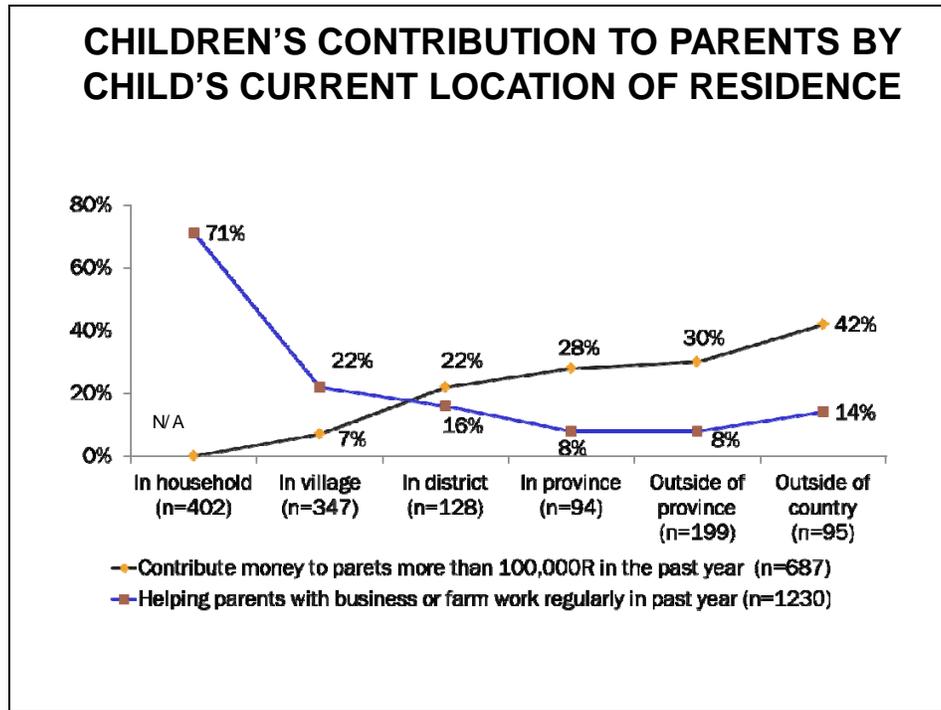
	Migration Status		
	Has current migrant child	Has no current migrant child	Total
Number of cases	170	95	265
Wealth score ¹ (mean)	4.8	4.6	4.8
Percentage of those who do not have land	36%	22%	31%
Physical ability score ² (mean)	4.5	4.6	4.5
Family satisfaction score ³ (mean)	7.3	7.5	7.4
Psychological well-being score ⁴ (mean)	11.1	11.4	11.2

- 1 Measured as a summed score of thirteen household items plus two housing characteristics.
 2 Physical ability score is based on respondent's perception on three measures. Highest physical ability score is 6 and lowest is 0.
 3 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. Highest family satisfaction score is 9 and lowest is 3.
 4 Psychological well-being score is based on respondent's perception on six measures. Highest psychological well-being score is 18 and lowest is 6.

Returning to our principle line of inquiry: Has migration left parents behind to work on their farms with no one to help? Do children who continue to live with their parents make greater contributions to them? Our study addresses these questions further by correlating children's contributions to parents - with respect to regular help with business or farm work and to monetary contributions - by the child's current location of residence. The findings show that while children who live with or near their parents provide more regular help with business or farm work, children who live further away contribute more money.

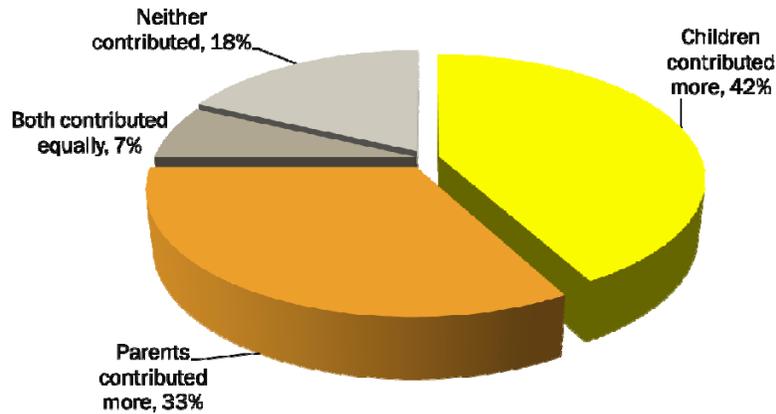
A total 71 per cent of the children who live with their parents and 22 per cent who live in the same village help their parents with business or farm work regularly. This evidence supports the argument that despite the high rates of migration among their children, parents are not being left behind to run their businesses or work on their farms with no one to help. At the same time, 42 per cent of the children living outside of the country contributed more than 100,000 riels (US\$ 25) in the past year to their parents. By comparison, only 7 per cent of children living in the same village contributed this much. (Note: Co-resident children were not asked about contributions of money after pre-tests produced unreliable results.) These findings suggest that children make different and complementary types of contributions depending on their location of residence. Children who continue to live with their parents are available to make valuable

contributions by providing regular help with business and farm work. Children working outside of the country, while obviously not available to provide regular help with business and farm work, do contribute important monetary support.

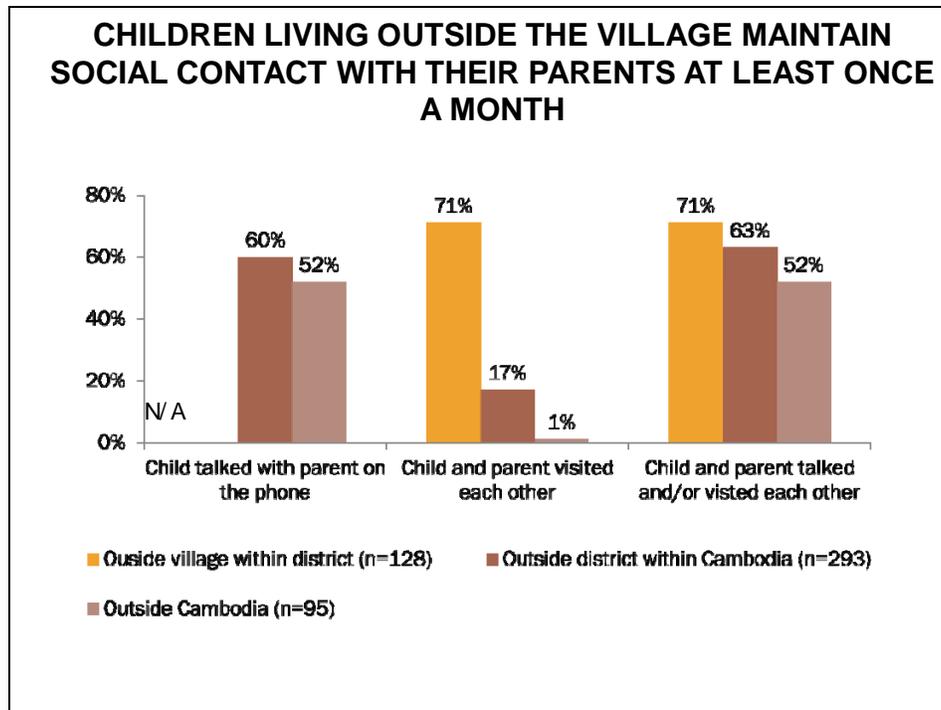


Exchanges of support and services between parents and children can flow in either direction or not at all. As we have seen migrant children living outside of the district of their parents contribute monetary support to their parents. At the same time parents can sometimes be an important source of material support to migrant children especially in financing costs incurred at the early stages of the migration process. Our findings reveal that during the entire time that the migrant children were away, more migrant children (42 percent) were said to have contributed more to their parent's material support (food, money, assets) than their parents (33 percent) contributed to theirs. This underscores a net positive flow in the direction of the parents.

DIRECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS BETWEEN MIGRANT CHILDREN AND PARENTS (n=344)



Our findings support the results of other studies undertaken in Cambodia that migration can contribute positively to the economic well-being of migrant families. But does not migration at the same time undermine the social relationships between parents and children? In the past this may have been the case. Long distances separating parents and children prohibited regular monthly visits and phone connections were not available. Now with the advent and wide use of mobile phones long distances no longer pose barriers to communication. Our findings reveal that a majority of children living outside the district of their parents either within or outside of Cambodia talked and/or visited their parents at least once a month. Understandably, both groups relied heavily on phone calls rather than visits to maintain social contact. These levels of social interaction compare favorably with those of children living outside the village but within the same district of their parents, i.e. with those of children that this study does not consider to be migrants.



To this point our findings have shown that the migration of children does not generally have adverse effects on parents since the large majority still has co-resident children. But what about elders whose nearest child lives outside the household or even outside of the village? To address this question our study considered the characteristics of the respondents by the location of their nearest child. Clearly the 80 per cent of respondents who have co-resident children have the highest average wealth scores, the highest average family satisfaction scores, the highest average psychological well-being scores, and the lowest percentage of landlessness. By comparison, the 9 per cent of respondents whose nearest child lives outside of the village have the lowest wealth scores and the highest percentage of landlessness. Thus while the percent of respondents left behind (i.e. with all children outside the village) is small, many are landless and poor. Moreover, this finding plus our earlier discussion about the poorest leads to an interesting observation: While the destitute are not being left behind, the left behind are largely destitute.

RESPONDENTS WITH ALL CHILDREN OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE ARE SMALL IN NUMBER BUT MANY ARE LANDLESS AND POOR

	Location of nearest child		
	In household	In village	Outside village
Number of cases	212	30	23
Wealth score ¹ (mean)	5.14	3.30	3.26
Percentage of those who do not have land	25%	40%	74%
Physical ability score ² (mean)	4.52	4.73	4.61
Family satisfaction score ³ (mean)	7.55	6.61	7.05
Psychological well-being score ⁴ (mean)	11.41	10.10	10.77

- 1 Measured as a summed score of thirteen household items plus two housing characteristics.
 2 Physical ability score is based on respondent's perception on three measures. Highest physical ability score is 6 and lowest is 0.
 3 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. Highest family satisfaction score is 9 and lowest is 3.
 4 Psychological well-being score is based on respondent's perception on six measures. Highest psychological well-being score is 18 and lowest is 6.

Our preliminary findings lead us to several conclusions, the analysis of which will be developed further in our full report:

1) While there is a high rate of migration in the two communes there is also a high rate of children living in the same household and village of their older-age parents. This may be due to the higher average number of living children among the older-age parents.

2) Not all able-bodied children have migrated. Of the total living children of the sample households only 32 per cent had ever migrated. This means that 68 per cent of the children had remained within the districts of their parent.

3) Contrary to the view that older-age parents with migrant children live mainly alone, with only their spouse, or with a grandchild but no child, more than three-fourths of the respondents with a current migrant child also live with a child.

4) Overall, the elderly parents have not been left behind. Children remain in the household to help their parents with business and farm work while migrant children contribute more money to their parents.

5) The situation of elderly parents with or without land is comparable. At the same time respondents with a current migrant child reported higher rates of landlessness which is not surprising as they would be under greater pressure to have children work as migrants.

6) With respect to the claim that the destitute are unable to migrate, we would expect that the wealth scores of the respondents without a current migrant child would be much lower than those with a current migrant child. This is not the case lending doubt to the assertion that the poorest do not migrate.

7) Our findings reveal that during the entire time that the migrant children were away, a higher percentage of migrant children contributed more to their parent's material support than their parents contributed to theirs. This underscores a net positive flow in the direction of the parents.

8) A majority of children living outside the village, and even outside the country, maintain social contact with their parents at least once a month. This is made possible largely through the wide use of mobile phones.

9) While the percent of respondents left behind (i.e. with all children outside the village) is small, many are landless and poor.