

The CHAMPSEA (Child Health and Migrant Parents in South- East Asia) study is a research programme that examines the impact of parental migration on the health and well-being of children who are 'left behind'. In 2008, CHAMPSEA collected information from approximately 1,000 households in each of the following Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. This was followed by a small number of in-depth interviews conducted in 2009. In Udon Thani, 42 families were interviewed at the qualitative stage.

Information was collected from the following respondents: a responsible adult (similar to the household head), the primary caregiver of the index child, and the index child. Two age groups of children were selected: young children (aged 3, 4 and 5 years) or older children (aged 9, 10 and 11 years). Structured interviews were also conducted with the older children to capture their views about parental migration and their own well-being.

In Thailand, researchers from Mahidol University surveyed 1,030 households in two Thai provinces with high rates of international out-migration, Udon Thani and Lampang. Thailand has been sending workers abroad since the 1970s. Udon Thani has been the province with the highest number of overseas migrants, while Lampang has the highest rate of overseas migrants in the Northern region. The sample includes 519 transnational households (486 of these had a father working abroad, 3 had a mother working abroad, and 30 had both parents working abroad) and 511 non-migrant households. The dominance of father-migrant households reflects the common acceptance of fathers working abroad over mothers in Thailand.

This report provides information about child health and well-being in Udon Thani. The following sections discuss aspects of household wealth, child nutrition, child psychological well-being, and child educational outcomes in relation to overseas parental migration. Additionally, the report includes some information about children's perspectives of their own well-being.

## **Household Wealth**

One of the main reasons why families decide to send a household member abroad to work is to support the subsistence and wealth generation of the household. While we cannot say for certain that migration causes observed household wealth (or other circumstances), the data provides an interesting picture of household wealth among sending communities.

The majority of families surveyed in Udon Thani owned the land and house that they lived in. The proportion of ownership among these households was 93% for land ownership and 97% for house ownership. While proportions of home ownership did not differ between transnational and non-migrant households, differences were noted in terms of home ownership. Among transnational households, 99% were home owners, while the proportion was 96% among non-migrant households.

Using a household wealth index that classifies households into three groups (low wealth, medium wealth, and high wealth), the survey shows that the proportion of high wealth households was higher among transnational households (24%) than non-migrant households (15%). At the same time, the proportion of low wealth households was larger among non-migrant households than transnational households (39% versus 34%).

The survey also examined family savings. Data suggests that the percentage of households with savings of at least 60,000 baht was higher among transnational households than non-migrant households (21% versus 7%). The proportion of families with no savings at all was 37%, and this percentage was higher among transnational households (39%) than non-migrant households (35%). Therefore, while transnational households were more likely to have a higher amount of savings than non-migrant households, they were also more likely to have no savings at all.

## **Child Nutrition**

Measurements of height and weight were collected among children in households interviewed on the day of the survey. These measurements can be compared with other indicators of child nutrition because the procedures for collection and analysis followed international standards. Three indicators are presented in the study: stunting (measured by HAZ), overweightedness (measured by BAZ), and thinness (measured by WAZ for children aged 3 to 10 years, and BAZ for children aged 11 years). A child is considered to be stunted if the HAZ is below -2 S.D., overweight if the BAZ is above 2 S.D., and thin if the WAZ or BAZ is below -2 S.D.

Among the children interviewed in Udon Thani, 9% were classified as stunted, 7% as overweight, and 7% as thin. The proportions of stunting and thinness were not significantly different across categories of age, gender, parental migration status, type of carer, or household economic status. While incidences of stunting and thinness appeared highest among children aged 5 years and among those from low wealth households, these differences were not statistically significant. We did observe, however, a significant difference in overweightedness between boys and girls. The proportion of boys who were overweight was double the proportion of those who were girls (10% versus 5%). Incidences of overweightedness also seemed higher among children aged 10 years, those whose carers were not their mothers, and those from high wealth households. Nonetheless, these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

## **Child Psychological Well-Being**

During the interviews with community leaders, a significant concern raised was the perceived increase in problem behaviours among children living in transnational households. The CHAMPSEA study used a standard measure, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), to examine child behaviour and psychological well-being.

In Udon Thani, the majority of index children were considered to be mentally healthy (70%), while 16% were seen as being at risk of having mental health problems. 14% showed signs of mental health distress. Children from transnational households were more likely to have mental health problems as compared to those from non-migrant households (17% versus 10%). The proportion of children identified as having problems in psychological well-being was higher among young children (19%) than those who were older (8%). Differences in child psychological well-being were not observed across categories such as the child's gender, type of primary carer, or household economic status.

## **Child Education**

Migrant sending families often speak of providing for children's education as a primary reason for choosing to work abroad. Among older children aged 9 to 11 years, almost all were currently enrolled in school. Information on educational progression was obtained from both carers and the children themselves.

In Udon Thani, children's school performance was similar between those from transnational and non-migrant households. The proportion of carers reporting the child's performance as being above average, average, and below average was 16%, 77%, and 9% respectively. These figures were not significantly different among those from transnational and non-migrant households. Only 2% of carers reported that the child had ever received a negative school report, while more than one third (35%) reported that the child received a good report from school. These figures were not significantly different between transnational and non-migrant households.

## **Child's Perspective**

One of the innovative aspects of the CHAMPSEA study was to include information on children's perspectives. Children may offer a different perspective of their life circumstances compared to

the adults around them.

We asked all the older children (age 9, 10 and 11 years) some questions about schooling. Data from our survey in Udon Thani showed that children tended to provide more positive reports of their school performance than their carers. 32% reported faring better in school than their peers, 60% reported faring similarly, and 8% reported doing worse. No significant differences were noted among children from transnational and non-migrant households.

In addition, most of the children (68%) reported that they always enjoyed school, 14% almost always, and 18% enjoyed school sometimes (including not at all). Again, no significant differences were found among children from transnational and non-migrant households.

We also asked all the older children if they were happy or unhappy. More than half of the children interviewed in Udon Thani reported that they were generally happy, and 41% responded that they were very happy. The percentage of those reporting to be neither happy nor unhappy accounted for only 7%. The proportion of those who described themselves as being very happy was higher among children from transnational households (43%) than those from non-migrant households (39%), although the difference was not statistically significant.

15% of the children interviewed in Udon Thani reported that they currently worked to support their family. The proportions were mostly similar among children from transnational and non-migrant households.

## Conclusion

Data from our survey indicates that transnational households enjoyed better economic status than non-migrant households. Except for the standard measure of children's mental health (SDQ), results from our survey did not show remarkable differences between children from transnational and non-migrant households, especially in terms of school enjoyment, school achievement, general

happiness, or incidences of child labour. Results based on children's perspectives suggest that there did not seem to be many positive benefits associated with having a migrant parent.

Preliminary findings based on the standard measure of psychological well-being suggest, however, that children from transnational households were at a greater risk of having mental health problems as compared to those from non-migrant households. Further analysis is currently being undertaken to better understand the factors associated with this difference. Meanwhile, the results should be considered with caution, and we hope to offer a more comprehensive explanation in the near future so that appropriate interventions can be formulated and implemented.



## The CHAMPSEA Study:

### Preliminary Report for Udon Thani, Thailand

- A study of the health and well-being of children under 12 years of age
- A comparison of children whose parent(s) work abroad and children who live with both parents
- Covering 4,000 households in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam

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