

Factors Contributing for People to be smuggled to Italy from Sri Lanka: A Case Study of the Mahawawa Divisional Secretariat Puttlam District

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Background

Italy became a prominent destination for illegal migrants¹including those from Sri Lanka due to its relationships with non - stable and less developing countries; the shape of Italian peninsula and easy access through the Mediterranean sea; being a paradise for tourists and the positive relationships with neighborhood countries (Fasani, 2008). Therefore a number of smuggling cases were recorded across the region as large numbers of migrants cross borders to Italy in an irregular fashion, often aided by smugglers².

Research Problem

Fasani (2008) notes that during the last three decades Italy has become a popular destination for Sri Lankan migrants. This study further mentions the dangers of life risk factors of illegal migration, especially via boat migration. Brown (2012) notes that Italy is one of the main destinations for smuggled migrants and majority of Sri Lankans attempt to reach Italy by 20 day trawler boats. Due to lack of food and water and also because of the extra heavy loads of passengers, by the time the boat reaches the destination some of them die. When a migrant dies, the families suffer several consequences including family dissolution and increasing existing social and economic vulnerability. Even if the migrant reaches the destination, there is no guarantee of employment due to their illegal status and they can end up without work or worse in custody for illegal migration. Yet, there is a continuing increase of smuggled migration.

¹There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. Migrants may be illegal because; (i) they entered a country without authorization; (ii) they entered legally but are staying or working without authorization; or (iii) they entered a country and were authorized to work but their work violates regulations concerning the employer, duration or type of work, or the hours worked (United Nations, 2000).

² Smuggling is "The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" (Art. 3(a), UN Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000).

Objective

The main objective of the study is to examine the social, economic, demographic, political and geographic factors affecting smuggling to Italy from Sri Lanka despite the negative consequences faced by migrant and the family.

Theoretical Perspective

Smuggling could utilize several theories. At the micro level, neo-classical theory discusses that wage inequality in a country could cause international migration when there is an opportunity to earn a better income at the destination (Lewis, 1954; Harris and Todaro, 1971). New economics of migration model explains that if there is a possibility to increase the expected income through migration less attention would be given the risk of migration (Srnk and Bloom, 1985). According to Lee's theory(1966) four factors should be considered for migration such as (i) Push factors at the place of origin; (ii) Pull factors at the place of destination; (iii) Intervening obstacles; (iv)Migrant characteristics. This theory explains that there negative factors which push population from the origin and positive factors which pulls population to the destination. These push and pull factors could influence separately or combined.

Empirical Perspective

As Sri Lankans want to become economically successful and fulfill their other needs within a short period of time, migration occur not only legally but also by several illegal methods (Pathirage and Collyer, 2011). Irregular migration has been an important element in Sri Lankan emigration for several decades. In 2007 Sri Lanka it has identified as the top 20 origin countries that recorded most of irregular migrants. Among the countries Sri Lanka is placed 17th (Blangiardo, 2006). The irregular migrants use boat method, border crossing method and visit visa as irregular channels. As the per geographical format of Italian peninsular, majority of the migrants use boat methods and finally when they reached the Italy some of them have died as capsized (Blangiardo, 2005). As irregular migrants do not have vocational training, they happened to do informal jobs in the destination countries. Also they lost the government protection for being irregular (Ghosh, 2000).

Research Methodology

The study is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from case studies and a survey respectively conducted in Mahawawa Divisional Secretariat (DS) in Puttalam district which is known as "Punchi Italiya". Five Grama Niladari divisions were selected from this DS Division as the study area. A mixed methods approach was used to collect data. Quantitative data was collected from 69 respondents who migrated from 1985 to 2014 from the study area. Among them 12 are banished person from Italy due to illegal migration, twenty one among them were return migrants after achieving their migration goals the rest are family members of persons who got smuggled. The households were selected by using snowball sampling method. In addition the study used secondary data sources. Qualitative data was analyzed descriptively and quantitative data was analyzed using uni- variate statistical methods.

Results

According to the present study it has been revealed that every one of the sample migrated to Italy leading the economical factors as earn higher income and due to unemployment (12 per cent). Also the present study revealed that more than 68 per cent of smuggled people in the sample got information regarding migration from their friends, 12 per cent from neighbors and 19 per cent from the relations. Majority who responded to this information flow were those having economic hardships and were unemployment at the origin. Case study of Piyasena (59 years old) and Luky (35 years old) provide the example for this. According to Piyasena,

“I was a fisherman from 13 years old. I schooled till grade 3. I got low salary although worked hardly. After that I got to know from my friend that it is an easy path to become richer in short time that is migrating to Italy. After that I migrated though my boat without cost”.

The smuggled people in the study area used five main types of illegal methods to migrate; i.e. (i) via boat (46 per cent); (ii) Helmet method (13 per cent); (iii) border crossing method (33 per cent); (iv) visit visa (3 per cent); (v) temporary work visa (6 per cent). Among these methods majority used the boat method. Since many of them were fishermen they used fisher boats to migrate illegally to Italy and gradually this trend expanded. Two factors mainly influence for adopting this method - geographical situation of the study area, i.e. Mahawawa Divisional secretariat where its western part is surrounded by the Indian Ocean. A large number of the population (i.e. 3752 in 2015 according to Sampath Pathikada, 2015) being fishermen who had boats, and the knowledge to handle them and had the legal permission to travel in the sea. Therefore using the fishing trawlers they crossed the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean to reach the coasts of Italy. Actually they decided that this is the cheapest transportation method to Italy and acted as push factors for smuggling though it had risk to life. According to the study seven deaths were reported among the smuggled persons and among them 45 percent recorded while travelling to Italy using boat method and border crossing method..

When investigated, it is revealed that a number of factors have acted as push factors for smuggling. It has been revealed that Among the total sample 83 per cent migrated due to social stimulation. In an in-depth interview with a school principal of this area (72 years old, male) he notes that, in 1972 a catholic priest stayed at the ‘cross church’ in Marawila and he was called ‘*LOGO Suwami*’. A poor family supplied food to the priest. The father of this family died unexpectedly due to a boat accident. Subsequently the priest went to Italy and took with him the family of the deceased. They returned after ten years and built a house like a palace. This made the people of this area decided that migration to Italy is an easy path to economic success within a short period. Therefore with the increasing the flow of Italy migration today Wennappuwa, Marawila and Mahawawa Divisional Secretariats in Puttalam district are identified as “Millano Dream”, “Little Italy”, and “Second Italy”. Although material resources are improved in the area only 45 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the migration move. While economic advancement appears to be the only reason for satisfaction of respondents, declining human capital such as family disorganization is the main reason for dissatisfaction. Family

disorganization has been created by due to several reasons (i) due to physical, mental and disability conditions of the family members (ii) mortality conditions of family members (iii) divorced or separate to parents in the family. However due to Italy migration 85 percent of migrants had suffered from bad health conditions. Especially due to environmental conditions, duration and nature of stay at the destination, heavy manual labour affected their physical health. Also Indebtedness and economic hardships were the created as main reasons of theses mental illnesses. Because of that due to social stimulus 69 per cent of migrants migrated selling their land and house and 90 per cent of smuggled people migrated getting creditor with higher interest. Also Due to Italian migration economy of the families has improved and different sub-cultures have emerged in the Sri Lankan society. A part of this sub-culture is that spouse of smuggled people and married migrants engage in extra-marital affairs and it gives bad ideal to the society.

As well as the liberal migration policy that the Italian government introduced in the 1990s also encouraged and opened new windows for both legal and illegal migrants to enter Italy as a main pull factor. However as illegal migration increased continuously, the Italian government had to bear high costs to take actions against the illegal labour migrants. Therefore the government gave the responsibility of illegal migrant to NGOs, vocation campaigns and the Catholic Church. The study respondents revealed that although these were illegal migrants, the Catholic Church treat them well by supplying food, medicine, cloths and every day necessities at the destination. The Church also teaches them the Italian language to make it easier for them to find work. Case studies of Kalista (42 years old) and Chandana (53 years old) show that the church called "Piyassa Jesu Palli" supported them to remain in Italy. This information acted as a push factor for new illegal migrants from the study area. A contributing factor for the help from the church is the characteristics of the sample; among the sample 49 per cent are Catholics and they expected the support of the church even before they migrated and became confident and were encouraged to migrate illegally due to the expected protection from the church. However, protection from the church only comes when they arrive at the destination. They face risks on journey especially when crossing borders. Also they may be imprisoned due to their illegality and face punishment or repatriation before being able to reach the church. The case study of Anura (34 years old) proves this. Anura migrated through the border crossing method risking the threat to life and selling all properties he was arrested by Italy police and Italy government banished him. Finally he lost everything only saving his life. Figure 1 below constructed for qualitative data using word cloud shows the main factors for smuggling.

As reveals from the figure 1 it reveals that though push and pull factors have been affected the smuggling, push factors are more affected than pull factors. Catholic church, income of the family, sea location highly affected the smuggling.

Conclusion and Policy Implication

The study shows that economic deprivation and marginalization of the poor; social stimulus, geographical situation, characteristics of the migrants as push factors and nature of the migration laws of destination country and supported of the catholic church have contributed to smuggling as pull factors.

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