



## Research Report

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Rural Parents with Urban Children:  
Social and Economic Implications of  
Migration on the Rural Elderly in Thailand

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## Abstract

The goal of the present study is to explore the circumstances in Thailand under which the migration of rural adult children to urban areas takes place, with attention to how parents and their situation influence these decisions, and the consequences for the social and economic well-being of parents who remain behind in the rural areas after the children leave. The analysis relies primarily on 27 open ended interviews conducted in 2004 with older age parents with migrant children from four purposively selected rural communities that were studied 10 years earlier. Our findings suggest that for many, probably most rural Thai elderly parents, the migration of children to urban areas contributes positively to their material well-being. Negative impacts of migration on social support, defined in terms of maintaining contact and visits, have been attenuated by the advent of technological changes in communication and also by improvements in transportation. Phone contact, especially through mobile phones, is now pervasive in sharp contrast to the situation 10 years earlier when it was extremely rare. Much of the change in Thailand in terms of the relationships between rural parents and their geographically dispersed adult children is quite consistent with the concept of the 'modified extended family', a perspective that has become common in discussions regarding elderly parents in industrial and postindustrial societies but rarely is applied to the situation of elderly parents in developing country settings.

## Introduction

The relentless urbanization taking place throughout Asia, fueled primarily by the migration of young adults from rural areas, is often portrayed in a negative light among observers concerned with the well-being of rural elderly. Such a view is exemplified by the Plan of Action of the 2nd UN World Assembly on Aging: "In many developing countries... the ageing population is marked in rural areas, owing to the exodus of young adults. Older persons may be left behind without traditional family support and even without adequate financial resources" (United Nations 2002, paragraph 29). Such statements of concern are echoed throughout the literature on aging in developing countries (e.g. Jamuna 1997; Kosberg and Garcia 2004; 1994, p10; United Nations Population Fund 2002, p.19) and fit within a broader argument that the general process of 'modernization' or development, of which urbanization is a part, is undermining the extended family including its function as a source of old age support (Aboderin 2004). Yet very little research has been conducted (Lloyd-Sherlock 1998).

In contrast to these predominately negative views of rural to urban migration for parents, the academic literature on migration, especially as related to the developing world, contains both theoretical arguments and empirical studies that depict the consequences in a much more positive light. In this body of literature, migration is seen as part of a household strategy to diversify risks for families and benefit both migrant and non-migrant members, including presumably the older age parents who typically remain behind in the place of origin (Cai 2003; Stark and Lucas 1988; Stark and Bloom 1985; Vanwey 2004). Most of this literature, however, is urban based and from the perspective of the migrants. Moreover, even when non-migrant family members are considered, prior studies rarely specifically address the impacts on older age parents in the sending areas (Guest 1998; for exceptions see Coles 2001; Khun undated; Sando 1986 and Sorensen 1986). Indeed, most migration studies that explicitly consider older persons focus instead on the migration of elderly themselves, especially in connection with retirement and health, and usually are based in economically advanced countries (e.g. Burholt 1999; Choi 1996; Cutchin 2001; Silverstein and Angelelli 1998; Smith 1998).

A second body of literature, dealing with how family relations and structure change as societies evolve from agrarian to industrial and then to postindustrial forms also provides both theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence suggesting a more positive view of the impact of migration on parents left behind. One main thrust of this literature is the proposition that, contrary to earlier views that the emergence of modern bureaucratic industrial society necessarily leads to the demise of extended family relations, a modified version of the extended family emerges that is adapted to the changed circumstances and the dispersion of its members (Litwak 1960; Litwak and Kulis 1987; Smith 1998). According to this view, advances in technology, especially with respect to transportation and communication, permit family members to maintain close contact and to fulfill many, if not all, of the responsibilities to each other that previously required geographical proximity. A more recent but related view argues that current social trends, particularly increased marital instability, are actually increasing the importance of multigenerational bonds, enhancing and sometimes replacing the functions previously associated with the nuclear family (Bengtson 2001). So far, this literature has been almost exclusively concerned with the experience in developed countries, and especially the US (for an exception see De Vos, Solis, and De Oca 2004). Nevertheless, the concept of a 'modified extended family', the modes through which important functions can be fulfilled over geographical distance, and the extent to which such functions are maintained are all interesting to explore in the context of the developing world. In brief, the study of the impact of migration on the social and economic well-being of older age parents who are left behind has relevance for theoretical concerns both with respect to migration and the family.

The goal of the present study is to explore the circumstances in Thailand under which the migration of rural adult children to urban areas takes place, with attention to how parents and their situation influence these decisions, and the consequences for the social and economic well-being of parents who remain behind in the rural areas after the children leave. We examine a range of consequences in order to assess both positive and negative impacts for the parents. Our approach relies primarily on thematic qualitative analysis of 27 case studies of older age parents with migrant children from four rural communities in Thailand but is also framed by quantitative

information that portrays both the local and national situation. Unlike most migration research, ours is rural based and is mainly from the perspective of the older aged parents who remained behind rather than from their migrant adult children in urban areas.

It is important to keep in mind that most older aged parents in Thailand who have migrant children also have children who live locally including ones who may coreside and these children also contribute to the parents' social and economic wellbeing. However given the focus of the present study on the impact of migration, the following discussion concerns mainly social and economic support in relation to migrant children.

### **Analytical Framework**

Arguably, there are both benefits and disadvantages for rural parents as a result of the migration of adult children to urban areas. For example, the departure of adult children reduces their availability to provide assistance in the daily functioning of their parents' households or personal care for those who become frail or suffer chronic illness. At the same time, rural parents may benefit from remittances derived from their urban based children or derive pride from their occupational or social success in an urban environment. Moreover, decisions about migration (including return migration of adult children or migration of parents to join an adult child) are likely responsive to the changing situation of the parents for any particular family unit.

Figure 1 (see page 29) provides an overview of a conceptual framework that guides our exploratory analysis. It derives in part from prior expectations of the issues that need attention based on the literature, our own previous research experience, and our observations and impressions accumulated during fieldwork. The basic theme represented by the framework is that outmigration of adult children affects support exchanges between the migrant children and their parents which in turn determine the impact on the parents' social and economic wellbeing. Some of the ways in which support exchanges are affected will lead to gains and others to losses for one or the other party. Moreover, these support exchanges are conditioned by a number of influences that change over time, particularly in response to life cycle changes for both parents and adult children (Knodel, Chayovan, and Siriboon 1996). Thus while migration is typically an event (although sometime multiple events), the cumulative consequences for the parents is a result of processes that operated over the period of time that the migrant child has been absent. It is the cumulative net impact up to the point at which our interview occurs that is of ultimate interest in our analysis.

We recognize that many influences determine both the act of migration as well as the subsequent support exchanges. Our concern is primarily in the latter although we are also interested in the extent to which parents play a role or are a consideration in the decision to migrate. Some influences on the support exchanges relate to the situation of the parents and others to that of the migrant children. Relationships within the family will also exert influence. All of these may change over the life course of both the parents and the migrant children. We also recognize that migration is not necessarily permanent. Some children will return more or less permanently due to their own and/or their parents' situation; others may follow a pattern of repeat or circular migration. We thus represent return migration as well as the consequences it has for support exchanges in the framework although we do not address it in the present analysis.

### **The Thai Setting**

Starting in the late 1960s, Thailand experienced a rapid and extensive decline in fertility and substantial increases in life expectancy. Since the current older Thai population established their families when fertility was still high, however, persons aged 60 and over still averaged over 4 living children in 2002. At the same time, their children tend to have much smaller families with few desiring more than two children (Knodel, Chayovan, and Siriboon 1992; Knodel et al. 2005). Due mainly to the fertility decline, the Thai population is rapidly aging. According to recent UN estimates, persons aged 60 and over as a share of the total population rose from 5.0 to 9.3 percent between 1975 and 2000 and is expected to reach a full fourth of the population shortly after 2040 (United Nations 2005).

As in other Southeast Asian societies, the family traditionally takes primary responsibility for older persons in Thailand. Widespread norms supporting filial obligations to parents underlie the existing system of intergenerational relations and government policy is geared towards reinforcing family responsibility for support and care of older persons (Knodel, Saengtienchai, and Sittitrai 1995; Thailand, Ministry of Public Health 2004). Parents, however, also typically feel a continuing obligation to ensure their children's well-being, and intergenerational exchanges of support and services remain pervasive (Knodel et al. 2000). Living arrangements of older aged parents and adult children have been closely intertwined with this system of support exchanges. A vast majority of older Thais either live with or very near at least one of their adult children. Nevertheless, coresidence has declined moderately during the last two decades (Knodel et al. 2005; see also Table 2 below). An overall tendency exists to live with a married daughter rather than a married son. This pattern differs by region and is especially pronounced in the areas coterminous with the Northeast and Northern regional dialects but much weaker in the central region and even modestly reversed in Bangkok. More importantly, Thais are relatively flexible in this matter, living with a son if no daughter is available even where the norm is strongly skewed towards married daughters (Knodel, Chayovan, and Siriboon 1992). Traditionally children inherit equally, except that the one who stays with the parents commonly gains the house and perhaps an extra share of the land.

During much of the last several decades, Thailand experienced rapid economic growth that was temporarily, although sharply, interrupted during the economic crisis that descended in 1997 and engulfed many countries in the region. Only recently has substantial recovery occurred. At the same time, the importance of agriculture within the economy declined precipitously. These decades of economic expansion were accompanied by increasing geographical mobility, especially in the form of labor migration from rural to urban areas (Osaki 1999; Curran et al. 2003).

### Research Design and Data

The present analysis is based primarily on semi-structured open-ended interviews conducted in March and April 2004 in conjunction with a 'census' of all persons age 60 and over in four rural sites (two in Kanchanaburi in the central region and two in Surin in the Northeast). Data collection was done in by the four principal investigators themselves.<sup>1</sup> The sites were selected because two of the principal investigators (the co-authors of the present paper) had conducted a detailed study of living arrangements in these sites exactly 10 years earlier thus permitting comparisons over time (for a description of the earlier research see Knodel and Saengtienchai 1999). Each site consisted of several adjacent administratively defined villages (*mubaan*) within a single sub-district (*tambo*). In the original study, the sites were purposively selected. In Kanchanaburi province, which was selected for its moderate distance from Bangkok (100–200 kilometers), we chose one relatively prosperous site about 20 kilometers from the provincial town (Central site 1) and another more remote and less developed site about 80 kilometers from the provincial town (Central site 2). Surin was chosen because we wished to include a specific site that had been featured in a 1992 newspaper article on the desertion of the rural elderly resulting from rural out-migration of young adults (Charasdamrong 1992). We also chose a second site in the same district but substantially further from the main highway. We refer to these as Northeast sites 1 and 2 respectively.

Improvements in road access to all sites during the 10 years since the original research were evident and especially striking for the two sites in the Northeast for which paved roads had largely replaced unpaved earlier ones. Transportation links between the sites and provincial centers as well as Bangkok were clearly improved for the two Northeastern sites and also for the two in the Central Region, where this is less of an issue. Also noticeable were improved local government health facilities. Another development of potential consequence for migration was an increase in the compulsory level of education from six to nine years which was in the process of implementation during the intervening period. This resulted in an increase from 6 to 9 grades being offered in many local elementary schools. One particularly striking change was the increased access to phones. Not only had a government program installed public phone booths throughout rural Thailand but, much more importantly, mobile phones are now widespread. Even if only some households have one, their use is typically available to at least some degree to neighbors, relatives, and friends who do not. In general, it seemed evident to us that living

standards appeared better on average than ten years earlier despite the intervening economic crisis. At the same time, our impression was that the two Northeast sites remained poorer and less developed than even the more remote of the two Central region sites. This is not unexpected given the purposive manner in which the sites were picked and that generally the Northeast is the poorest region in Thailand.

We collected basic information on living arrangements and migration of adult children for all persons aged 60 and over in the four sites (in total 823 elders in 623 households). To conduct this 'census' of elders, we relied on a combination of existing sources and key informants. We initially identified persons 60 and over in the site by extracting names from family folders kept in the local (sub-district level) health stations for each household when available and/or from lists of elders maintained by local health or community officials used to recruit members for government sponsored elderly clubs or for other purposes. We then interviewed key informants (health center staff, village health volunteers, and local officials) to update the list and provide basic information about each case. In constructing the 'census' form, we tried to frame questions in ways that would not require more detailed knowledge than an informant would be likely to possess. For example, we asked if someone had any children living in the Bangkok area rather than the exact number of children there (See appendix A).

#### *Accuracy of quantitative data*

In order to check the accuracy of this approach we visited a convenience sample of 94 households to verify information provided by direct interviews with either the elderly members themselves or some other adult household member. To measure the accuracy, we calculated both the amount of gross and net error for items for which the correct response was either yes or no. Gross error refers to the percent of the 132 elderly persons in the 94 households who would have been misclassified in regards to a particular item if based on the information originally provided by a key informant. Net error refers to the percent that the results would be wrong if aggregated. Since errors in opposite directions cancel each other out when aggregated, the net error can be substantially lower than the gross error.<sup>2</sup>

The results, presented in Table I, indicate that the 'census' information is quite reliable, particularly when considering aggregated results. For example, while 4.5 percent of the individual elders would be misclassified with regards to whether or not there is a coresident child in the household, the aggregate estimate of all elders who coreside with a child would be off by only 1.5 percent. Even with respect to information on whether an adult child had migrated to Bangkok, for which the gross error is almost 17 percent, the net error is under 2 percent. The very low levels of net errors indicate that aggregate statistics summarizing the situation of elders in our research sites are likely quite accurate even though based mainly on key informant reports. Moreover, since we corrected the information for cases we visited for the accuracy check, the gross error of the final results of the 'census' are likely lower than table I indicates.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Comparison with national level data*

Table 2 provides an overview of changes in living arrangements that have occurred both nationally and in the four sites under study (taken collectively). The national figures are based on representative surveys conducted by the National Statistical Office in 1994 and 2002 and refer only to the rural population to enhance comparability to our research sites. Data for the four sites are based on the current 'census' we conducted during our recent fieldwork as well as a similar 'census' conducted during the prior study of the sites in 1994. The results show that the national decline in coresidence between elderly parents and children is mirrored in our four study sites, although the overall coresidence level is higher. Likewise, the percentage living alone, although still quite low, increased both nationally and in our study sites. An increase is also apparent for the share of elders who live with only a spouse. Nevertheless, both nationally and for our local sites, results indicate that a large majority of older Thais, still either have a child in their household or are living very near to one. Finally, the percent in rural skip generation households (i.e. in which a grandchild lives with the elderly in the absence of an adult child) has increased modestly nationally and is currently is at a level in our four study sites that is rather similar to that at the national level.

**Table 1. Percent gross and net error in key informant reporting in 'census' of older persons in study sites, 2004.**

	Gross error	Net error
Is there any child who co-resides	4.5	1.5
Is there any child who co-resides, lives next door or lives nearby	3.8	2.2
Is there a grandchild in the household?	12.1	1.5
Did any migrant child return?	6.8	5.7
Is any adult child living in Bangkok area?	16.7	1.5

Note: Based on comparisons of reports from key informants and direct interviews with household members in 94 households with 132 elderly members.

Gross error refers to the percent of older persons for whom the information provide by the key informant would result in an incorrect classification with regard to the question posed.

Net error refers to the difference between the uncorrected and corrected aggregated percent of cases that would result in an incorrect result after aggregating all cases taking into account that errors in opposite directions cancel out.

**Table 2. Living arrangements of rural persons aged 60 and over, national and study site results**

	National (for rural population only)		4 study sites (combined)	
	1994	2002	1994	2004
Percent distribution of living arrangements				
with a child/child-in-law (regardless of others)	71.8	64.2	83.8 <sup>(a)</sup>	70.5
with others but not children (with or w/o spouse)	11.7	12.9 <sup>(b)</sup>	9.4	16.7
with spouse only	13.0	16.4	4.0	7.6
live alone	3.5	6.5	2.9	5.1
Total percent	100	100	100	100
% who live with or nearby a child	n.a.	78.8 <sup>(c)</sup>	n.a.	83.9
% in skip generation household <sup>(d)</sup>	8.9	10.3	n.a.	11.2

Source: National estimates are based on original tabulations from the 1994 and 2002 Surveys of Elderly in Thailand conducted by the National Statistical Office; study site estimates are from our census of older persons in the 4 sites (see text).

(a) excludes elderly who live with a child-in-law but not a child.

(b) includes a small number of indeterminate cases.

(c) defined as co-residing with or seeing a child at least several times a week.

(d) defined as living with at least one grandchild but no child or child-in-law. In the case of the study sites only grandchildren under age 18 are considered.

#### *Case study selection*

Based on information collected in the census, visits to households for the accuracy check, and consultation with key informants, we selected 27 households to conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews with the elderly members (see Appendix B). We purposively selected cases of older persons who have migrant children and particularly ones who were in Bangkok or surrounding area, a prime destination of rural to urban migrants. In addition, we were particularly, although not exclusively, interested in cases in which the elderly parents did not live with any of their children. Generally we were introduced by key informants to the prospective interviewees. In

cases of married couples, we talked with the couple jointly if possible. In many of these cases, both members of the couple were elderly (i.e. 60 or older). Thus the 27 case studies involved 44 elderly parents. In four of the case studies, we were also able to interview an adult child who had previously migrated but had returned to the parents' locality (see Appendix C). In one case a visiting migrant child joined in the interview.

All interviews were tape recorded after receiving prior permission from the interviewees. For each of the 27 cases, the person who conducted the interview reviewed the tapes and compiled a detailed summary that also included selected transcription of the actual interview. Each summary was also fully translated into English for use of the non-Thai coauthor. Our qualitative analysis relies on these summaries of the case studies. In order to facilitate the analysis, we used the qualitative analysis program NVivo to code the summaries and systematically retrieve segments for review.

Basing the analysis on the summaries which include only selected segments of the actual interview rather than a full transcription has the advantage of keeping the number of pages of transcript to analyze more manageable. Even so, the total pages add up to close to 300 in each language and present a formidable challenge to digest. The approach has the disadvantage that the analyst can not be sure particular points that are missing in the summaries are necessarily absent from the interview, especially when the importance of the point only emerges in the course of systematically analyzing the summaries and was not fully anticipated at the time they were constructed.

Table 3 provides a provincial comparison of the research sites as well as a comparison between the overall 'census' results and cases interviewed in detail with respect to the location of the nearest child and several other relevant aspects for our analysis. The age of elderly persons is very similar between the study sites in the two provinces. The northeast study sites are characterized by somewhat lower coresidence and somewhat higher prevalence of skip generation households and childless elders than is the case in the central region study sites. The likelihood of having a migrant child and especially one in Bangkok is substantially higher for the Northeast study sites than those in the central region. However the two sets of provincial sites are rather similar in the percent of elders who have a returned migrant child present in their locality.

The cases chosen for interview in detail are somewhat younger than the overall elderly population in the study sites. Other differences with regards to the location of children are a result of deliberate selection of cases based on the substantive concerns of our research. Thus among our case studies, all have a migrant child and nearly three fourths have one in the Bangkok area.<sup>4</sup> They're also far less likely to be coresident with the child and more likely to live with a grandchild whose parent is absent. In addition, for almost a third of elders covered in our case studies, there is no child within their own sub-district. Finally, our case study elders are more likely to have a returned migrant child living with or near them. Given that we purposively chose at least one site that was portrayed as being associated with lack of support for elderly parents and our concentration on cases who deviate from the normative pattern of coresidence with an adult child, our research design increases the chances that our results will capture, and perhaps be skewed towards, negative consequences of migration for 'left behind' parents.

Although information on the socio-economic situation of older persons was not included in the 'census' form and was not one of the criteria for selection, we learned a great deal about both the current and past situation for cases selected during the course of our open-ended interviews. Clearly our case study households covered a wide range of socio-economic levels within the rural context, from being desperately poor to being relatively comfortable. Many of the better off parents, however, had been quite poor in earlier times, reflecting the considerable improvement in living standards that has generally characterized the Thai population over the last few decades.

**Table 3 Comparison of provincial research sites and cases interviewed in detail, by location of nearest child and other selected indicators**

	All persons 60 and over in study sites			Cases interviewed in detailed <sup>(a)</sup>
	Kanchanaburi (Central region)	Surin (Northeast)	Total sample	
Average age of elderly person	69.4	69.7	69.5	67.5
Nearest child (percent distribution)				
coresident in parental household <sup>(b)</sup>	74.8	63.9	70.5	47.7
nearby parental household	13.7	14.3	14.0	9.1
in same sub-district ( <i>tambo</i> )	1.8	4.0	2.7	11.4
elsewhere	5.2	9.0	6.7	31.8
childless	4.6	8.7	6.2	0.0
Total percent	100	100	100	100
% in a skip generation household <sup>(c)</sup>	9.1	14.3	11.2	22.7
% with a migrant child <sup>(d)</sup>	73.4	78.8	75.5	100.0
% with a migrant child in Bangkok area	28.8	53.3	38.3	72.7
% with a returned migrant child	21.0	17.8	19.7	27.3

Source: our census of older persons in the 4 sites (see text).

(a) based on 44 elders in 27 households.

(b) includes a small number of cases in which s child-in-law but not a child is coresident.

(c) defined as living with at least one grandchild under age 18 but no child or child-in-law.

(d) migrant child is defined as living anywhere outside the sub-district of the parent.

### *Limitations of research design*

There are a number of limitations to our study design. We note that researchers from different disciplines hold diverse views regarding the legitimacy of particular research approaches. Some put little credence in what social actors directly relate themselves about their experiences and prefer to infer motivations from behavioral data instead (Lauby and Stark 1988). Others argue that it is critical to incorporate perspectives, meanings, and accounts gained from the actors themselves (Aboderin 2004). Our current research design is obviously more consistent with the latter view. Nevertheless, we recognize that when interpreting our interviews there is a need to be aware of potential effects of memory error, changed perceptions in response to post migration experience, difficulties in articulating processes that are relatively complex, and biases reflecting the interviewee's own interests.

Another limitation of our design, is that we can only examine the impact of migration on the parents up to the time of the study and thus can not capture impacts that have still to emerge or that may alter in the future. Given that the nature and even types of social and economic exchanges between parents and children are conditioned by the life course stages of both parties, the impacts that eventually emerge may be different than those evident up to the point of our study. Indeed a number of our interviewees were quite aware that implications for their situation of having children living at some distance may change in the future. Our study is by no means unique in this respect and indeed this limitation is likely to be shared by most research on family level migration impacts. Nevertheless this limitation is important to consider when interpreting results.

Finally we note that the samples on which our quantitative and qualitative data are based are very 'clustered' in the sense that they come from only four localities in rural Thailand. This is of particular concern with respect to the study of migration given the importance of community social networks in stimulating and directing migration in Thailand and elsewhere (Curran and Saguy 2001; Curran et al. 2003; De Jong, Richter, and Isarabhakdi 1996; Stark and Bloom 1985).<sup>5</sup> Thus we are unlikely to tap the full range of situations associated with the migration of

adult children and its impacts for older age parents. This combined with our purposive selection of sites and of cases for interview clearly limit the extent to which our results can be generalized. Nevertheless we believe that a number of themes that emerge are likely to be fairly common features of at least the situation in rural Thailand.

### Findings from case studies

As noted above, detailed information was solicited through open-ended interviews for 27 purposively selected cases of an elderly parent or couple who had at least one migrant child (i.e. who lived outside the parents' sub-district). Five cases involved a widowed or divorced older age parent and the remainder currently married couples.<sup>6</sup> In all but three cases, the parent or couple had more than one migrant child. In the large majority, at least one child was living in Bangkok or some other urbanized area and almost all had at least one child who ever lived in an urban area. Some also had migrant children who were living in other rural areas. Just over half of the 27 cases had at least one other child who currently was living next door or very nearby (i.e. within a few minutes walk from the parents' home). Some also had children who were still in the same sub-district (and thus not considered migrants in this study), although their homes were not in walking distance.

As is well known from previous studies in Thailand and elsewhere, migration histories can be quite complex and often involve multiple moves. Our case studies provide ample examples of such complexity. Many of the migrant children made additional moves following their initial departure from the parental household. Some returned for varying periods. At the time of our study, 7 cases currently had at least one returned migrant child currently coresiding with them or living nearby. For some cases, a child had returned but had migrated out again including a few where children followed a 'circular' migration pattern, moving back and forth between their rural parental home and urban destinations. Most children who left, however, had not returned other than for temporary visits, even if they had made multiple moves. Although some may eventually return, many others are likely to be more or less permanently living away, even if that was not a conscious intention when they first left. Thus although the initial departure from the parental household often occurs in a context of uncertainty, it frequently has significant implications for the parents' future living arrangements. For this reason, we start our analysis by examining the situation of the initial departures of children to migrate elsewhere.

#### *Departing the parental household*

Children who migrated typically did so as adolescents or young adults. Such exits often followed a child's completion of compulsory schooling and a period with parents before deciding to move elsewhere. Thus only rarely do children leave before age 15.<sup>7</sup> Most who migrated were 15 through 20 years old at the time although about a third were older. Given the young ages at which most children first leave, the large majority were still single at the time. The Bangkok area was the initial destination for over half of the more than 90 children reported to have migrated and quite a few who initially went elsewhere eventually spent time in Bangkok.

#### Reasons for migration

Work, education, and marriage constitute the three major reasons for leaving the parental household and moving to an urban area, with work being by far the most common. However, moves to live nearby or to somewhere in the same sub-district, as well as more distant moves to other rural areas, usually were connected with marriage. In general, parents considered moves precipitated by marriage or to follow a spouse as normal and expected, even when they meant that the child would be a considerable distance away.

"T. was the first to leave home. At that time she moved out because she got married and had to build her own family. So we just let her go. Children grow up and naturally leave home to have their own lives." [married mother, Central 2, 93/64].

While marriage can prompt children to move away, it could also anchor children to the home community. One widow who lived alone mentioned that a son returned from Bangkok, married a local woman, and settled down in

the same sub-district. She noted that this son only stayed here because he married a local woman and had he not done so he would be in Bangkok like his other brother.

Migrating elsewhere to continue education accounted for about a fourth of the migrant children reported by our case study parents in the two Central Region sites but for very few in the two Northeast sites. Although our case study sample was not selected to be representative of the localities, it still seems likely that this sharp difference is a reflection of the generally more impoverished settings of the northeastern sites. In a few cases, children who were still quite young joined relatives or siblings elsewhere, usually Bangkok, to study where schools were likely thought to be of better quality. Far more commonly, children went to get specialized vocational training or to study at the tertiary level. Examples include children going to attend nursing, technological, and commercial schools.

By far the most common reason for migrating, especially to urban destinations, was for employment. This typically was linked to education, but in two very different ways. For children who received tertiary or specialized vocational education, appropriate jobs that fit their training were rarely available in the home community. Many who left home to study simply remained away as they took suitable positions elsewhere at the completion of their studies. Others returned home but only temporarily while they sought appropriate work elsewhere. Similarly, when a child was able to attend specialized vocational or higher educational institutions by commuting from home (as in Central site 1 which was near the provincial town) and the time came to work, it was necessary to move elsewhere to find a suitable job. As one parent whose daughter received a vocational degree and then left for Bangkok states:

“She graduated and simply should find a job. If not, she had to work on our rice fields, which are very small, and the income might have been less than the expenses. It’s good that she’s gone for work.”  
[married father, Central 1, 1/96]

In many cases where children pursued education and then left to work elsewhere, parents took pride that the children were able to find appropriate employment and advance their careers even if their migration away was required for this to happen.

A very different and far more common link between education, migration, and finding a job arose from the need to find a way to make a living once a child finished compulsory education. In many cases, both parents and children viewed migration as a necessity arising from the lack of opportunities for earning a livelihood in the home locality, especially if the parents had limited or no agricultural land. In addition, many parents and children viewed agricultural work in a negative light. In contrast urban jobs were typically seen not just as more available but superior because one could earn more and because urban work was perceived to be less strenuous and not require working outdoors in the sun.

“If he stayed here he wouldn’t get anywhere. There was no work for him. Going there, he could earn a bit more each day. Here there is only planting sugar cane. It is hot and hard work. Working as he did in Bangkok was better.” [married father, Central 2, 6/126]

Even though, children of poorer families who did not study past the compulsory primary level typically took low level jobs, some of which were mainly unskilled manual labor (as did the son referred to in the above quote), such jobs were still seen as preferable to being underemployed or economically inactive in the home village. Many starting jobs such as factory or restaurant work or being a maid could still be seen in a positive light by many rural parents as they avoided being in the hot sun and did not require great physical exertion, aspects of agricultural work that frequently were mentioned in very negative terms and to be avoided if at possible.

“All parents who are farmers don’t want their children to work in the field for fear that their children couldn’t tolerate the hardship.” [widowed mother, Central 1, 5/91]

"I asked her to go, for being here, she had to be hired to work in the hot field exposed to the sun, like me and her dad working so hard. Working in Bangkok, she wouldn't work outdoors in the sun."  
[married mother, Central 2, 107/96]

### The role of parents and others

Decisions resulting in children leaving the parental household to live away in urban areas or other distant places typically involved not only the parents and child themselves but others as well. As previous research in Thailand has indicated, social networks played a vital part in the migration of children who moved away. The role of relatives and siblings were particularly prominent in the case of children who left to work, although in some cases friends or other villagers exerted a the strong influence. The fact that a child would be joining a sibling or a relative was often reassuring to parents, who otherwise would have been more concerned about their child leaving for a distant place, particularly an urban setting, if there was no one familiar there. Parents tended to be less reassured when the child left with or went to join friends and in some of these instances were not even consulted before the child left. Thus quite commonly, a child left to work for a relative or to join a sibling who arranged for a job for the newcomer. New migrants also often found accommodation with relatives and siblings, at least during the initial stages following the move. Even when the purpose of leaving was to continue education, assistance from relatives or sibs was not unusual.

"Living here, (my son) has no work. The rice can be grown only once a year. As a relative wanted to take him to be apprenticed (as a motorcycle mechanic) and work, I let him go." [married father, Northeast I, 532/90]

"My sons and daughters moved to work in Bangkok because of their eldest brother. They can earn more money in Bangkok because there is no occupation for them here. When one goes there and the living is better, the others then follow them." [married father, Northeast I, 584/157]

As noted above, in a number of cases in the Central region sites, the parents paid for higher or specialized vocational education of a child. In some instances, children left home for this purpose and the parents directly financed the move. In instances when the child remained at home during the period of study, and only moved away later to pursue an appropriate job, the parents can also be considered to have helped finance their child's departure in the sense that the education was a necessary preparation for obtaining the position outside the home community.

Other than paying for education that channeled children to particular types of jobs not available in the local community, the interviews reveal little evidence that parents directly financed costs associated with the initial move.<sup>8</sup> Typically transportation costs would be low and, as noted, the migrant child often knew some one in the destination who could provide shelter, so substantial costs were likely to be rare. This combined with the prevalence of poverty in the study sites, and the fact that many who left home, especially in the Northeast sites, did so due to their parents economic hardship, makes it unsurprising that so few parents reported helping finance their child's move.

Somewhat more surprising is that parents rarely mentioned that they helped migrant children find a job. Nevertheless, given that in many instances either relatives or siblings were involved in providing or arranging jobs or accommodation when a child first left home, it is quite possible that parents played some intermediary role in making the arrangements. It seems unlikely that a relative or sibling of the migrant-to-be would not at least consult the parents in advance if they played an instrumental role in arrangements that led the child, especially an adolescent aged one, to leave home. In some instances, the parents may even have been the ones to initiate the arrangement. Unfortunately we did not specifically probe this issue in the interviews and direct comments to this effect were rarely offered spontaneously. Thus we can only infer the parents' role in helping with arrangements.

Parents usually were in agreement that the child could migrate and in the large majority of instances gave their consent. As noted above, when a child left to marry and live with a spouse, parents typically accepted this as normatively appropriate. In cases where the child left home for education, parents were often instrumental in the move. In instances in which the child left to find work, the idea seems often to have originated with the child who then informed the parents and requested their consent. Still there were instances in which a child went away, typically with friends, with out telling the parents or did so explicitly contrary to the parents will. In such cases, relations between the parents and child were likely strained even before the departure and sometimes remained so afterwards. Yet even in these few cases, the child either informed the parent soon after the move or at least eventually resumed contact.

While parents usually consented to their child's departure, some were clearly ambivalent, mainly out of apprehension about the child's own welfare. This appears to be more so in cases of daughters than sons. In several of our case studies, the father either accompanied or went to visit a migrant daughter soon after migration to allay worries about her situation. Still in many cases where a child left to find work, parents saw little alternative to the child leaving given the limited opportunities to make a living locally. Moreover, given how common migration to urban areas for work was in the communities once a young person finished compulsory schooling and reached an employable age, departures were an expected life course event for most families.

#### Saliency of implications of migration

Given that the focus of our research is the eventual impact of migration of children on the parents, we were particularly interested in exploring the extent to which parents' welfare was a concern for the parents themselves and for the migrant child at the time of the initial departure from home. Still, it is important to stress that consideration of the implications of migration for the well being of the migrant children themselves clearly emerged from our interviews as a far more salient consideration for the parents at the time a child leaves the parental home, especially when the reason for the move is to find work in an urban area or to gain further education.

Interviewer: When she was about to leave, did you think with whom you would live? Did you think of yourself in this respect?

Father: I was hardly concerned about myself. Since I have some properties and work, growing rice. I only worried about my daughter. She was young at that time; she might not have thought much about it. There was no telephone those days. If I missed her or was worried, I had to go to her. [married father, Central 1, I/51-2]

Although the impact of migration on the migrant children themselves is beyond the scope of the present study, recognition that this is a predominant concern of parents is important to bear in mind for our analysis to be placed in proper perspective.

Generally, long term implications of migration for parent's welfare in old age were not commonly considered by either the migrant children or their parents at the time of initial departure from home. To the extent the implications for the parent's well being were considered by either party, it was usually from a more immediate than a longer time perspective. The low saliency of longer term impacts likely derives from a several key influences. First, given the young ages at which most children first left, the initial departure typically occurred when the parents themselves were still economically active and physically well. Thus parents often did not see a need for the child to remain in the locality to assist them. Second, given that children migrated away usually one at a time and that today's elderly typically had relatively large families, when a child departed there often would still be others at home or nearby. These points were explicitly made in a number of the interviews.

Interviewer: When he thought of leaving, he told you. How did you react then?

Father: As he wished. His mother was still fit at that time. She could work and seek employed. So he went. [married father, Central 2, 82/79-80]

"Many were still left behind. The sons were also here. If (my daughter) could earn a living, she should go." [married father, Central 1, 215/63]

Other considerations also played a role. In many instances when children migrate, there is genuine uncertainty about the permanency of the move. Indeed, as mentioned above, there are numerous examples of children who had returned after migrating. The interviews also revealed a number of instances in which the parents expected or at least had some hope about the return one or more of their children. The inability of some parents to adequately support their young adult son or daughter also contributed to the tendency of parents, and perhaps also the children, to think about more immediate rather than longer term consequences. Indeed for parents with little or no land, children leaving were sometimes seen as relieving the economic strain within the parental household.

Interviewer: Having your children leave home for here and there, sometimes coming back and then leaving again, makes you concerned, doesn't it?

Father: No, not at all. Only that they have a job and money without depending financially on us. Their living away, it is fine for us. They don't leave for good; they come home once every few months or on festive holidays, such as Songkran (Thai New Year) or Lent. [married father, Central 2, 50/160-1]

Interviewer: Did you ever think, 'We should have kept our children with us to help on the field?'

Father: No, never. My field was small. We could manage doing it all ourselves... We couldn't grow enough rice to sell, even couldn't meet our daily meals. We also had debts to pay. Therefore, we had to let them go. As little as my 4 to 5-rai field is, both of us could work it. [married father, Northeast 2, 582/286-9]

Since almost all Thai elderly have multiple children, only the departure of the last child would result in the parents living without any child. Thus, we might expect the last child's migration would have particularly concerned the parents. Yet little evidence of this emerged from the 5 cases we interviewed in which all children migrated away (and thus no child was either coresident or nearby). This may in part be the result of insufficient probing. In one of these cases, the very elderly widow being interviewed seemed both reluctant and incapable of articulating the situation. In two other cases, the parents did not seem worried about being left alone because they had extremely good relationships with their children and were confident this would continue even after the last one left. One of these cases also mentioned that they, the parents, could depend on each other. In yet another case, the second of two children (both daughters) to leave seemed to have agreed to seasonally return to help with plowing thereby minimizing the loss of her labor for the parents. In the last of these five cases, the parents appear to have viewed the exit of their last child much as they did their others, namely as a necessity for the child to be able to earn a living.

Although long term implications for the parents seem not to have been salient at the time children first migrated, consideration of more immediate consequences were acknowledged as playing a part in a number of cases interviewed. As already mentioned above, one anticipated consequence was freeing the parents of the responsibility of supporting the child or providing the child with a means of livelihood from limited family agricultural land. Far more common, was anticipation of support that the migrant child would be able to provide to the parents to relieve their economic hardship. This was particular true in the Northeast sites. The idea that migration of a child could help in supporting parents soon after the move could just as well be initiated by the child as by the parent.

"She said she didn't like living in the country, but preferred living in Bangkok. She consulted with me and told me that if she could earn money, she would send me some. So I let her go as she wished, she was going for work, not for fun. Leaving to work, she could afford to feed herself and the family. Staying here, she had nothing to do." [widowed mother, Central 1, 214/46-47]

“S. was the first to go to Bangkok to find a job 15 years ago because he wanted to help us parents. At that time we had nothing. After he sent us money, we were able to buy some land for making living.”  
[married father, Northeast 2, 582/144]

Not all parents, however, indicated they were expecting meaningful material support and several explicitly denied this, making clear that their primary consideration was that the move would benefit their child but not necessarily themselves.

### *Migration and social support*

Except under unusual circumstances, face-to-face contact and interaction with their grown children is a valued and important source of social and emotional support for older age parents. The frequency of face-to-face contact depends on residential proximity and thus migration of children clearly reduces opportunities for face-to-face interactions. At the same time, it is extremely rare for a parent not to see children who moved away on a periodic or at least occasional basis and even rarer to completely lose contact with children once they migrate.<sup>9</sup>

### Maintaining contact while away

In the not very distant past, maintaining contact between parents in rural areas and children living in urban areas or other distant places, especially on a regular or frequent basis, was not easy for most migrant children and their parents. In cases of emergency, telegrams could sometimes be sent. If parents urgently needed to reach migrant children, they or someone on their behalf would first need to reach a post office to send the telegram and would also need to know an address where the child could be reached. The latter requirement could be a serious problem if the child moved frequently or lived in temporary dwellings such as is typical for construction workers, a common occupation of migrant children from poorer families. Letters could be used for normal communications, but took several days to arrive, required an ability to read and write, and took some effort. Messages could also be passed between parents and migrant children by intermediaries who traveled back and forth but this usually would depend on chance opportunities.

In the last few years the widespread availability of mobile phones has literally revolutionized the ability for rural parents and their children living elsewhere, especially those in urban areas, to contact each other. At the time we conducted field work in the four sites in 1994, local access to telephones was almost nonexistent for villagers. Even today, private telephone lines to village households are extremely rare. Some change in the 10 year interim between our two studies began as a result of a government program that installed public pay phone booths in villages throughout Thailand. However, observation from our research sites indicate many such public phones, perhaps most, are routinely out of order. Also, even when they work, they may be convenient to call out but are far less so for receiving incoming calls.

In contrast, mobile phones are both convenient and increasingly common. The vast majority of the parents among our case studies reported that they had at least occasional and, in numerous cases, fairly frequent phone contact with migrant children. Almost all was through mobile phones. Only one couple we interviewed had a regular telephone installed in their home but quite a few had a mobile phone of their own, typically provided by one of their migrant children. Sometimes another member of the elder's household, typically a coresident child or grandchild, would have a mobile phone. Even for elders without a mobile phone in the household, almost all had access through a neighbor or nearby relative who could not only receive incoming calls for them but would usually also allow them to make outgoing calls, although usually for some small fee. In addition, many of the migrant children have their own mobile phones and those who do not are certain to know someone who does. Only in 1 of the 27 cases of elderly parents with migrant children that we interviewed was there no contact with any child by phone although in some of the other cases, phone contact was only for urgent matters and hence infrequent.

As the following exchanges indicate, using mobile phones not only has made contact much more convenient and provides important social and emotional support for the parents but also serves practical purposes for both parents and children.

“There was no telephone those days. If I missed her or was worried, I had to go to her.” [married father, Central 1, 1/52]

Wife: In the past, we had to write them letters, which took long to reach their hands. It's better now via phone.

Husband: Only a ring. We don't have one, but all our children do. It has become much more convenient in the past 2 years since mobile phones are used everywhere. They were expensive before, ... but I've heard now one only costs (a small amount). [married father and mother, Central 2, 50/191-2]

Observer: What do you do, when you want to get in touch with the children in Bangkok

Husband: I call them using a mobile phone (of the co-resident son). We often call each other...

Interviewer: Who usually calls first, you or the children?

Husband: They, from Bangkok, call me to ask about us if I failed to contact them for too long, or when they have business and want to ask me to do something for them, such as dealing with the district office about the household registration and so forth.

Wife: Both the son and the daughter call, asking, “how are you?”. If our son is isn't at home, they will call that house (the wife's brother's house next door). And my sister will run to us bringing the telephone.

Husband: (All the children have mobile phones.) It is prevalent now...

Wife: Sometimes, when the elder brother misses a call, the younger sister calls back asking whether mom and dad want anything. Dad mentions that he feels like eating things such as herbs, a ground lizard or a bullfrog and she then manages to bring him some. When she get a ground lizard, she'll bring it here at once. [married father and mother, Central 2, 61/162-171]

In a number of the households we visited for interviews, the parents had lists of mobile phone numbers of their children posted on the walls, rafters or somewhere easily visible. Several were in large numbers making them easy to read from some distance. At least one interview was temporarily interrupted by a call from a daughter who phoned daily to check up on the parents who were given a mobile phone of their own. One circumstance that clearly served to increase the likelihood of frequent calls was the presence of a grandchild from the migrant child. In quite a few of these cases, the older age parents mentioned that their migrant child would call to check up and, if old enough, speak with the grandchild but at the same time talk with them. In some cases, the grandchild had even been given the phone. Phone contact between older-age parents and their migrant children is also encouraged by television ads. In at least two interviews, the elderly parents referred to an ad they saw on television that features an elderly mother calling her son just to hear his voice.

Mobile phones also make it easier for migrant children to talk with each other and consult about their parents' welfare or coordinate visits, joint outings or provision of material support. In at least three interviews, the parents specifically mentioned that if one child knows the parents are ill, he or she will telephone the others so they will know so all can visit the parents. In both cases there appeared to a particular child who the parents could call and who would take responsibility to call the siblings.

“If I get sick, I'll call her. Then, she will phone to tell her siblings. Or when I run short of money, I also tell her. She'll call to tell her brothers again. When I get sick, all our children know that we don't have money, so they help us. In normal condition, we sometimes have financial trouble, so we call to tell her.” [married mother, Northeast 1, 532/75]

Extensive focus group research at the start of 1990's revealed that health care concerns, including help getting to a doctor or hospital and personal care when ill or bed ridden were the most salient areas of need to most elderly participants. The need for help from adult children, particularly during a health crisis, was seen as an important reason for needing to have children either coresident or living nearby (Knodel, Saengtienchai, and Sittitrai 1995). The widespread availability of phones, especially mobile phones, seems to have noticeably reduced this concern. The availability of the phone to contact migrant children at a time of illness was mentioned in a number of our interviews. Significantly, four of the five cases who did not have an adult child living with them or nearby, including the case from whom the previous quote comes, specifically mentioned that they could call a child if they became sick. In the remaining case, the couple indicated that a daughter called them twice a week so presumably if a health care need arose they could quickly let her know.

### Visits

Visiting constitutes an important means of contact between rural parents and their migrant children, especially given the opportunity for face-to face interaction. Although visits can go in either direction, it is far more common for the migrant children to return to their home village than for parents to go to visit their children in urban areas or elsewhere.

*By children to parents.* It is a strong tradition in Thailand for adult children who are away to return to visit and pay respects to their parents on Songkran, the 3 day Thai New Year period in April, and many do so. Other holidays also are occasions for visits, especially if they span more than just a day. Special events such as a wedding, funeral, ordination ceremony or organized trips to make merit at the home village Buddhist temple (*Katin or Pha Pa*) can prompt a visit back to the village as well. Thus at a minimum, parents see almost all their migrant children at least once a year and see many of them more frequently, as documented by several national surveys (Knodel et al. 2005; Chayovan and Knodel 1997). Among the 27 cases of parents we interviewed, only 6 reported having migrant children who have been seen less than once a year. All of these cases, however, had other migrant children whom they saw more often. Moreover one of the cases involves a daughter who moved to the US but who calls often.<sup>10</sup>

A number of factors appear to influence the frequency with which urban based children make visits to rural parents. Distance clearly plays a role. Frequent visits were more common for the parents we interviewed in the Central region sites than in the Northeast, undoubtedly reflecting the typically shorter distances involved and the relative ease of transportation from Bangkok and surrounding area, a common migrant destination, to these sites, especially the one near the provincial capital. Another clear influence was the presence of grandchildren from the migrant child, especially for migrant daughters. Many cases of regular and frequent visits of migrants were made in association with visiting a child of their own being cared for in the village by the grandparents. In contrast, migrant children who had married and were raising their family in their new location were likely to visit parents less frequently. Indeed a number of parents seem to accept this as understandable. Not only were such migrant children more firmly rooted in their own community but they also would typically have two sets of parents to consider for visits as opposed to the situation of unmarried migrants.

"She sometimes fails to come, or sometimes she'll come with her younger sister. She has her own family. She is already married." [married father, Central 2, 143/62]

"All the children have their own family to be responsible for. They have to make a living and have no time (to visit)." [married father, Northeast 1, 532/85]

The type of work of migrant children could also influence their availability to visit parents back in the village, especially when the distance required many hours of travel as would be the case for those from our Northeast sites who worked in the Bangkok area. Those who were self employed such as taxi drivers or street vendors would be a different situation as to taking time off than those who were employees. Parents often cited the inability of a child to take leave of their work as a reason why a child did not visit often. In some cases, this

could have been a rationalization on the part of the parent or a weak excuse on the part of a negligent child but in others it likely was an important consideration.

“It was not easy for him to come. His work doesn’t allow him a long leave. He can’t be absent more than the permitted amount. At the time his dad died, in fact he came to his dad as he was hospitalized, but had to return before his dad recovered.” [widowed mother, Central I, 5/62]

Financial considerations could influence the ability to take time off work as well as to afford the expenses of a trip back home, especially since many migrant children would feel a sense of obligation to provide at least some token money or gifts, especially food or clothes, to their parents on the occasion of a visit home. Family relations could also play a part. In a few cases, strained relations between parents and a child or between migrant and non-migrant siblings appeared to be the main reason for infrequent visits. More commonly, however, the opposite seems to hold, with siblings joining together to combine a visit to parents with an opportunity to get together among themselves as well.

For some parents and migrant children, being able to talk frequently on the phone can be a substitute for visiting or at least compensate for infrequent visits, especially when the child lives a substantial distance away and visiting would require considerable time, effort or expense. This is exemplified in the following exchanges.

Mother (talking about a son who is soldier stationed in a distant province): He lives a very long distance away, rarely does he have a chance to visit us.

Father: He calls his mother frequently, when he is on guard or in the evening. [married mother, Central I, 263/82]

Interviewer: What about your son...? Does he come here often?

Mother: Not so often. He is busy. He has to work and pick up his children. Their school is very far... But he has to come during the festivals.

Father: He calls us, too.

Mother: He calls us regularly... I said to him, ‘Son, have you seen the ad on TV where the mother calls her son and the son asks are you sick and she answers no I just want to hear your voice?’ So he calls us saying, ‘hello, how are you, and how about dad?’ [married mother, Central I, 337/228]

There are a variety of reasons that prompt migrant children to return to visit parents in their home community. In many instances some combination of emotional need on the part of the children to see parents and a sense of obligation to provide emotional support to parents underlie visits. But these are also often mixed with other motivations and circumstances. Since many migrant children retain their registration in their parents’ household, visits could also be prompted by official events such as elections or business with the district office. Perhaps most importantly, visits by children are intricately linked to the provision of material support to parents. Although money can fairly readily be sent to parents through the post office or other venues and often is, a common pattern is to bring money personally to the parents when practical. This may be on a fairly frequent and regular basis or just occasionally. In a reasonable share of the cases, frequent and fairly regular visits were associated with bringing money to parents, especially when the parents were caring for a grandchild from the migrant child. In many cases, however, the money is only a modest amount and more of symbolic value.

“I’m wondering why he hasn’t come yet. He usually comes every month, but why not this month? I can’t guess what might hinder him. Once he comes, he gives me 400-500 baht.” [widowed mother, Central 2, III/93]

“He comes once a year. He came sometimes for the making merit festival and gives us 100 Baht a time. Otherwise he has no money left to pay for the bus fare. He never sends us money.” [married mother, Northeast I, 514/108]

*By parents to children.* Visits by parents to see their migrant children are considerable less common than visits by the children and are often associated with some special purpose. Many of the parents have migrant children whom they have never gone to visit and indeed several mentioned that they do not even know the child's address. One reason that motivated some parents to visit, especially in the case of daughters during the early period after leaving home, was concern about the child's welfare. A number of parents went to check up on how their daughter was doing and reassure themselves all was well. Health problems also lead to parents spending time with the migrant child. A number of parents went to visit their child in connection with an operation or treatment at a hospital in Bangkok or other urban place where the child was living and then stayed with the child to convalesce. In other cases, the parent was in poor health and simply went to be cared for by the child. In a couple of cases a mother went to temporarily help with grandchild care. There were also instances of what would seem to mainly be social visits to the children. In several instances parents joined some of their other children and went to visit as a group. But generally visits by parents to children mainly for their own sake did not seem to be all that common and clearly were far less so than social visits in the reverse direction.

Mother: Not so long after she had gone (to Bangkok), she wrote us a letter telling us there was no need to worry, she could live there. After she had gone for 4-5 months, Dad visited her.

Father: I went alone. Mom stayed home. I went there as she explained in her letter how to go, where to catch a bus and get off, and where to change the bus... I went to see how she lived. It was not too bad. Her salary was 80 baht...

Mother: I've been there once for a month as I had an eye operation. I stayed with (my daughter) and in the hospital, too. I don't like Bangkok. I have no friends there. I couldn't go out anywhere and had to sit in the house all the time.

[married couple, Northeast I, 615/62]

There are a number of reasons why visits by rural parents to their migrant children are not widespread. An important one is that it is typically far easier for the migrant child to return to the home village than for older age parents to travel to some urban area with which they are unfamiliar. A number of the parents we interviewed said traveling a long distance would be difficult, at least in recent years, due to their physical state. Others referred to a need to stay at home to take care of grandchildren or were worried to leave their house, fields or animals unattended. A number of parents mentioned that they felt (or would feel) out-of-place in a city, not knowing what to do or how to get around on their own. Another fairly common deterrent was the lack of space in the migrant child's dwelling unit for the parent to stay, particularly when the child did not have a house of their own. Somewhat related to this was the concern of parents that their visit would inconvenience their child or that they would not be welcome, especially by children-in-law.

Daughter: Both Dad and Mom have been to Bangkok. They couldn't be there more than a week.

Father: There, I could just sit in the house.

Daughter: Yes, they could only sit still. Walking anywhere, they were afraid of motor vehicles and getting lost. Their children had to go working... They moaned to go home.

Father: I missed my cattle and my field. [Northeast I, 596/147]

### *Migration and economic support*

Extensive survey data document the importance of adult children in Thailand for providing economic and material support for older-age parents. According to a 2002 national survey, 77 percent of all Thais over 60 reported receiving income or material support from children during the previous year and 71 percent reported that either a child or child-in-law were their main source of financial support (Knodel et al. 2005). These results refer to the combined support from all children whether or not any are migrants. Unpublished results from a 1995 national survey of Thais aged 50 and over, indicate that among rural parents with at least one adult child living in a different province (and thus a likely migrant), 78 percent received at least some money in the prior year and 62 percent received at least 1000 Baht (about US \$40 at the exchange rate at the time) from one or more of these children.<sup>11</sup> In addition, 78 percent received food or gifts from these children in the previous year. Some parents

also provide monetary and other assistance to their migrant children, although the flow in this direction is less common. According to the 1995 survey, almost one-fourth of the parents gave some money to at least one child living in a different province, almost a fifth gave at least 1000 Baht and just over a third gave food or other gifts.

### Support to parents

Economic support from migrant children among our case studies came mainly in the form of money and gifts. Not all migrant children provided support to parents although a large majority, over four-fifths, were reported to have provided at least some money. At the same, all of the parents we interviewed had received some monetary support from at least one of their migrant children. Also, virtually all the parents received gifts from one or more children, at least in the form of food.

*Financial support.* Monetary support from migrant children varied considerably in amounts and frequency. The most common pattern were occasional gifts of money associated with visits as described above. The amount provided on such occasions was often modest and in some instances only of token value. In other cases, the amounts were moderate to quite substantial.

“He’ll give some money if he comes, sometimes 200-300 baht or 100 baht if he has only a little. He visits us rarely, sometimes once a year. Some years, he comes only once during Songkran (Thai New Year). This year he came twice and plans to come again on Songkran Day” [married mother, Central 2, 93/121]

Irregular contributions were also sometimes made independent of visits. In one case, a daughter who lived abroad sent amounts that were very substantial even if on an occasional basis. In other cases, children who gave money during infrequent visits also occasionally sent money by other means.

Another common pattern and typically more significant in terms of the impact on the parents’ economic situation were remittances provided on a more or less regular basis intended for the parents’ daily living expenses and in some cases to permit parents to save for some major expense. About half of our case studies reported that they were receiving such regular support currently. Additionally a few others had received regular remittances in the past but no longer did so. Such regular support could be brought personally by the child or sent as money orders.

“The youngest daughter supports us with 10,000 Baht once every two months. She lives in Bangkok, she gives us regularly... She doesn’t send by post for fear that it might get lost... She comes to us every two months with money for us. But she has never stayed overnight. Coming on Sunday, she returns on the same day.” [married father, Central 2, 143/86]

The amounts involved varied considerably and in a number of instances were associated with grandchild care. In the latter cases, the amounts provided were sometimes sufficient to cover child care and also help support the parents. In other instances, the money was only enough for child care costs and in five cases the older aged parents bore much of the child care expenses themselves. However only in two of these latter cases did this seem to be much of a burden. In the others, either the grandparents refused any substantial payments since they could afford the costs themselves and felt that their migrant child needed the money more or other migrant children were providing the parents with sufficient financial help to cover their own expenses.

“My two daughters who left their 4 children with me give me totally about 8,000-10,000 Baht per month. I use it for their children’s education and for food for the whole household. This amount is enough because I am not extravagant” [married father, Northeast 1, 584/106]

Others payments could be more targeted for special purposes such as health care. In cases of chronic illnesses, health care support could be routine but more commonly health care support was associated with urgent

situations. In the few cases where children were government employees or in the military, their health insurance could reimburse expenses incurred by their parents. Other targeted support could be for improving the parents' house or building a new one for them or, less frequently, for buying land for the parents. These amounts would typically be substantial and could come from irregular but large payments or from savings by the parents from more regular but generous remittances, perhaps with an understanding between parents and children that this would be the case.

Interviewer: How did the children's moving away effect your lives?

Father: My daughters sent us money to buy land (for rice fields)... the sons paid for building the house... Sometimes the elder and sometimes the younger. The other daughter also paid for a time... That's why we finally have a big house and cattle. Our children helped us and contributed bit by bit. We got some from selling cattle... Thus, I can meet the expenses thanks to my children. [married father, Northeast 2, 582/146]

It was not unusual for parents to receive different forms of support from different children or that the form of support would alter with circumstances related either to the needs of the parents (such as changes in their health or the entrance or exit of a grandchild from the household) or the ability of the migrant child to provide support (such as loss of a job or starting their own family).

"My 3rd daughter is a nurse. She doesn't like buying little this or that. When she gives us, she gives a big item or a big sum of money, such as a mobile phone, a T.V., a table, a swing. The eldest daughter looks after our miscellaneous things, such as food, clothes, monthly telephone bill, or small pocket money." [married mother, Central I, 263/73]

Parents also mentioned that some of their migrant children never provided them money or only provided trivial amounts. In a couple of cases the parents even cited instances where they had to give the child money for return bus fare at the end of a visit. While in some cases this was presented as a complaint, in others the parents stressed that the children were unable to help support them in any significant way and thus that the lack of support was understandable. In at least two cases, the parents discouraged children from giving more than token support because the parents felt that they were already comfortable financially and believed that the children could better use the money themselves.

*Non-monetary support.* Virtually every case we interviewed reported receiving some non-monetary support from their migrant children, at least when gifts of food are considered. This is not surprising given that it is quite normal to bring some food when visiting parents, even if only as a token. Food given to parents usually was quite ordinary. But children who could afford to sometimes brought special and expensive types of food that they know are among their parents' favorite or that help symbolize a special occasion. Regular provision of food to older age parents, however, is largely limited to non-migrant children who coreside or live nearby for obvious practical reasons.

Gifts of clothing are also sometimes brought in connection with visits although this was mentioned far less than food. As with food brought by migrant children, such gifts are unlikely to have great economic value. Of much greater significance is the provision of household appliances and, as discussed above, mobile phones. In at least half of the cases we interviewed, the parents received appliances from migrant children. These included not only small inexpensive items such as a fan, thermos, electric pot or radio but also some far more costly items. Among the most common of the bigger ticket items were television sets and refrigerators. In several cases migrant children had bought furniture for the parents' home and in at least one case each, migrant children had bought a washing machine, stereo equipment, an air conditioner, exercise equipment, a set of carpentry tools and a water pump. In a couple of cases parents were given a motor cycle and in one case the children bought the parents a car.

“My youngest daughter rents a house in the town. She is employed in a stationary store. She tries to save as much money in order to buy things for us, such as a fridge for me or a motorcycle for her dad.” [married mother, Central 2, 107/92]

In a few cases, non-monetary support also was in the form of labor. In three of the cases we interviewed, a migrant child returned to help with agricultural labor at particular times of the growing cycle when intense labor was needed.

### Support from parents

As noted above, exchanges of economic significance between rural parents and urban migrant children can go in both directions. Although support from adult children to parents in the village are more common, our interviews revealed considerable support provided in the opposite direction as well. Such parental provided support could be financial although often it was of a non-monetary nature in the form of village products or, most importantly, child care services.

*Financial support.* One form of parental financial assistance to migrant children that has already been discussed (in connection with the departure from the parental household) is payment for a child's education when the child leaves to study elsewhere. Aside from this, parents rarely financed living expenses of migrant children. Only in two of our cases did parents mention that they sometimes gave money to a migrant child under normal circumstances. However, in at least a fourth of the cases interviewed, parents provided substantial financial help associated with special circumstances or for special purposes. These included: paying off a large debt incurred by a daughter who had purchased an automobile and helping pay for the funeral of her spouse; financing a son's travel to Taiwan to work; paying a bribe to exempt a son being drafted into military service; taking out a loan for their daughter in Bangkok to pay educational fees for her children; financing a daughter's apprenticeship as a beautician in Bangkok and paying to set up a beauty shop for her when she returned to the village; buying land in the village in one case and helping build a house in another for migrant children to prepare for their return; and helping pay for a son's wedding in Bangkok. In several cases, parents had to mortgage or sell land or sell cattle to cover these expense. Such financial assistance was mainly limited to parents who had some savings or assets and thus were able to provide it and did not involve those who were poor.

“I still regret that loss (of my land) until now, but that was my child's debt. She didn't ask me to help, but it didn't matter if she asked or not. Parents simply help their children. The 10-rai piece of land that was sold is not little.” [married father, Central 1, 1/81]

*Non-monetary support.* Two main types of support not directly involving money that rural parents provided urban migrant children emerged from our interviews. Both were reasonably common and were not limited to parents of any particular socio-economic situation. The first is the provision of village products, especially rice, to migrant children when they were departing from a visit or when the parents went to visit the children. In some cases only token amounts were given, as is typically the case when migrant children bring food to their parents on visits. In other cases, however, the amount given by parents is substantial.

“I wanted to visit him so I picked tamarind and removed all the outer covering. Then I made dried chili, picking chilies, not so many. I still could do that at the time, and laid them in the sunshine to be dry. This was for him. I wanted to give it to him.” [widowed mother, Central 1, 5/68]

“Sometime I give rice to my son who is a military officer in Bangkok because he likes it and he says my rice is delicious.” [married father, Northeast 1, 584/112]

The second and undoubtedly most important type non-monetary support rural parents provide for migrant children is child care services, particularly having grandchildren live with them in their household in the village. Also in a few cases, a parent provided temporary child care for a grandchildren in the city. Clearly such child

care services have significant economic value for the migrant children as it permits them to work outside the home without having to hire someone else to mind their child. Among the cases we interviewed, almost half were currently caring for one or more grandchildren from migrant children and a couple of others had done so in the past. In a number of these cases, another adult child, i.e. an aunt or uncle of the grandchild, was coresiding with the grandparents and may well have helped with the child care. As noted, most migrant children who left their children with the grandparents helped pay for the costs involved but this would typically cost the children less than arrangements that could be made in the city and was likely psychologically easier for them in as much as the their young child was with grandparents rather than someone else (Richter 1996). In several cases, a parent spent time in Bangkok with the migrant child to look after the grandchildren.

“I have stayed with my daughters helping her take care of children, nothing more, just looking after their children. My daughters went out to work... I stayed with them in Bangkok. Both couples had to work all day, so rearing children is trouble for them.” [widowed mother, Northeast 2, 471/70]

Finally, in two cases, parents reported that they needed to mind their migrants child's property or take care of their domesticated animals while the children were away. Both these cases involved short term rather than permanent migration.

## Discussion

Assessing the social and economic impacts of the migration of adult children to cities or their surroundings on parents who remain in the rural areas, especially when based primarily on qualitative data, necessarily requires subjective judgments by the analysts. As noted above, even with open-ended interviews, reports by the parents are likely to be incomplete and may purposively or inadvertently contain inaccuracies. Several of our interviews, especially those involving strained relationships within the family, seemed to have prevented full and balanced accounts of the parents situations and how migration has affected them. Still we believe that the information from our open-ended interviews is sufficient to at least broadly characterize the impacts on material well-being for all but one of the cases with reasonable confidence.<sup>12</sup> Assessing the impact on social support is a somewhat different matter, especially since conceptualizing and measuring social well-being is less straightforward. However, our interviews provide at least a basis for making some relevant general observations on this account.

### *Impacts on economic well-being*

Our findings suggest that for many, probably most rural Thai elderly parents, migration of children to urban areas contributes positively to their material well-being. Among the 26 cases for which we feel relatively sound judgments can be made, up to the time of our study 3 seem to have experienced a net economic loss as a result of the migration of their children and 7 experienced little net effect. All the other 16 cases seemed to have benefited, with some benefiting very substantially.

The rarity of net negative impacts among the cases we interviewed is particularly striking given that the purposive selection of sites and cases, as described above, would seem to enhance the chances that we would encounter such situations. Moreover, each of the three cases with net negative economic impact is somewhat idiosyncratic. In one the parents secured a large loan by a son, who subsequently dropped out of contact, to finance a move to Taiwan to work and thus the negative impact was not actually created by urban migration within Thailand. However, even in this case, a migrant daughter, whose child the parents care for, remits regularly and other migrant children provide occasional support. The second case involves a mother who is separated from her husband and who had invested in her children's education but finds the expectation that she would later benefit to be unfulfilled. The lack of support, however, seems to stem more from serious conflict within the family than from migration. In the third case, two migrant daughters appear to take advantage of their father's generosity to cover debts and other expenses associated with their life in their new location. It is noteworthy, that the three cases involved are not among those who are currently poor nor were likely to have been particularly poor at the time the children left.

At the other extreme, parents in at least four of our cases seemed to have benefited a great deal from children leaving for urban areas. These cases include two married couples who were currently the best off economically among all parents interviewed. Both couples had started from very humble beginnings and all their children had migrated away. The ability of their children to get decent jobs elsewhere and the children's willingness, indeed desire, to support their parents, clearly led to the parents' current materially comfortable position. The parents also expressed considerable satisfaction with the social support they received from regular visits and phone calls. This is quite a contrast to the image of deserted rural elderly commonly portrayed in the mass media and implied in some of the advocacy literature cited in the introduction.

In over half of the remaining cases, the parents also seem to have financially benefited from their children's migration, although for some only modestly. In the rest of the cases, parents appear to have neither gained nor suffered economically from the migration of their children. Most of these cases were quite poor, both currently and at the time that the children departed home. None of their migrant children had studied past the primary level. Thus they were not well positioned to get jobs with decent pay in an urban setting and were either laborers or factory workers. Thus it appears that for some poor parents with little land or other assets and no savings, migration of children may not bring tangible benefits but it also is unlikely to detract further from their low level of economic well-being.

That the economic impact on parents could be substantial is reflected in the fact that at least 7 cases reported that migrant children helped pay for a new house for them or for making major additions or improvements to the current house. In two cases, migrant children also bought land for the parents. In addition, as noted above, in numerous cases migrant children bought major appliances or other expensive items for their parents. Several parents had children with government or military jobs and benefited from being covered by the health insurance schemes that went with these jobs.

Besides mentioning direct material aid to themselves, in a few cases parents also mentioned that migrant children were able to support or assist siblings particularly in their education. In at least three cases, migrant children either helped pay for the schooling or provided lodging for a younger sibling going to school in the city.

Some parents pointed out that, in the absence of their children, they themselves were unable to provide the labor needed to cultivate their own land. Thus they needed to either hire laborers or rent out the land to someone else to farm. This resembles the situation of older aged parents in a Taiwanese village studied by Sando (1986). However, in most cases, this did not seem to present a major problem, at least yet. For example, in two cases migrant children provided money to pay for the hired labor. In addition, most parents had limited amounts of land to cultivate. Moreover, the difficulties created were not necessarily attributable to migration since in most of these cases other children remained nearby but did not fill the need themselves. Thus had the children not migrated, the situation may still have been the same.

When we asked the parents we interviewed what were the advantages and disadvantages of having some or all of their children migrate, many directly mentioned that they had benefited from financial support provided from their migrant children. Quite a few also pointed out that one benefit of the migration was the fact that children were able to support themselves thus relieving the parents of the need to support or provide the means for the children to make a living. This is underscored by one father's complaint that a son who had returned from Bangkok was a burden to support and his hope that the child would leave again to find work. This is also quite consistent with frequent comments by parents that there were few opportunities in the home village for the children to make a living, especially if the parents had very limited land and resources.

"I think it's good because he has a stable job. Living here, he had nothing to do, so no money. There, he can earn every day including overtime, altogether it can be as much as 10,000 baht. That's much better... It's good for him and for us, parents, too. Our son has his own money and needn't ask from us." [married father, Central I, 215/98]

I wanted them to go. Since they have to take responsibility for their families. If they lived here, how could we afford it? Only 20 sacks of rice are not enough for them... Living together, it is difficult to get money. We cannot earn enough money to support family members. The wage during cultivation period is only 100 baht per day and no other way to earn money at the end of cultivation period. [married father, Northeast I, 514/118]

Related to this, it is important to note that most parents are concerned about their children's welfare and believe migration to cities provides better opportunities for their children to make a living independent of any benefits the parents may gain. Thus just knowing that their children were able to find work in urban areas provided parents with an important psychological benefit along with any of the ensuing economic ones.

### *Impacts on social well-being*

As noted, indicators of parents' social well-being are less clear-cut and observable than those for material well-being. In this study we focused on maintaining contact and visiting as key aspects that contribute to social support. In a number of interviews, parents indicated they had conflicted feelings about their children living away, namely that they would like to have them nearby for the company they would provide but that they were also happy that their children, by going elsewhere, could make a better living than would be possible in the local village. In assessing the impact of migration on social support of the current generation of older aged parents in Thailand, it is important to keep in mind that most elderly Thais who have migrant children also have at least one child living with them or quite nearby. Only few are without any adult child whom they could see on virtually a daily basis.

What does seem clear regarding social support is that negative impacts of migration have been attenuated by the advent of technological changes in communication and also by improvements in transportation. The spread of telephones and especially the advent of relatively inexpensive mobile phones has made contact between migrant children and their rural parents far easier than was the case just a few years ago. Phone contact is now pervasive. The increased ability of parents and migrant children to contact each other on short notice helps allay concerns of both parties about marshalling each other's help in a time of crisis and particularly in case a parent falls ill. More generally, for a number of the parents we interviewed phone contact provided an important source of emotional support. The importance of this change is nicely summarized by one of the parents whose children had all moved away.

"Although our children are far away from us now, we don't feel such distances thanks for constant connection by telephone. This really makes us feel as though they were near us. Telephone technology nowadays is quite advanced." [married mother, Central I, 263/120]

Thus not only do most older-age rural Thai parents have at least some adult child nearby but those who do not by no means necessarily feel deserted or even far removed, especially now that telephone contact is increasingly a reality for them. Better means of transportation and a constantly improving road system also make it easier for migrant children to visit home and even for parents to visit their children, although this is far less common. Although we do not have systematic evidence that visiting has increased over the 10 years between our studies in our four sites, it seems likely this is the case given how much improvement took place in the roads and long distance bus travel during the intervening period.

### **Conclusions**

Much of the change we are observing in Thailand in terms of the relationships between rural parents and their geographically dispersed adult children is quite consistent with the concept of the 'modified extended family'. This perspective has become common in discussions regarding elderly parents in developed countries but very rarely is applied to the situation of elderly parents in developing country settings. Yet, despite the fact that the

Thai context differs in many respects from that in the US and other industrial and post-industrial societies, there are still many parallels in the forces shaping family life. Our research suggests that there are also intriguing parallels in the ways families adapt to these changes. In particular, extended family ties, and particularly relationships between adult children and their parents, do not simply dissolve because of geographic dispersion. In one of the original articles that develops the 'modified extended family' concept, Litwak (1960) postulates that extended family relations can be maintained over great geographical distances because of modern advances in communication techniques. Hence distance does not prevent financial assistance to members elsewhere and emotional ties and social exchange can be maintained between parents and adult children despite greater spatial separation. In particular, contact and exchanges are facilitated by the telephone and rapid transportation (Smith 1998). This seems to be a fair characterization for the situation of many of the older age parents we interviewed. Recent research on elderly men in Mexico comes to a similar conclusion (De Vos, Solis, and De Oca 2004). While there are certainly cases of deserted elderly parents in rural Thailand who have been 'left behind' by children in the cities, they are quite exceptional. Instead most rural based elderly parents and their migrant children are adapting to the increasing need to live separately in ways that permit maintaining family relationships and in many cases providing each other with support.

An important caveat to this conclusion is to note that in the not very distant future, the rapid transition to low fertility that took place several decades ago will pose new challenges to maintaining a 'modified extended family' for elderly parents and their adult children. As already noted, the current generation of Thai elders are characterized by relatively large numbers of living children. This is a result of past levels of high fertility when they were in their childbearing years and improved mortality ensuring that most of their children survived to adulthood. Thus according to the 2002 Survey of Elderly in Thailand, persons 60 and older average 4.4 living children and only 22 percent have two or fewer children. In contrast, persons aged 50-54 who will be entering the elderly age span in the next decade average only 2.9 living children and 44 percent have only two or fewer children (original tabulations). Moreover, given that fertility in Thailand has been close to below the replacement level since the late 1980s, when younger cohorts reach older ages they will predominantly have only two surviving children (United Nations 2005). Thus the current situation, in which some siblings remain with their rural elderly parents' and others migrate will become increasingly difficult to maintain. This potentially could substantially change the implications of migration for the well being of the parents, especially when illness or frailty sets in and daily personal assistance is needed (Litwak and Kulis 1987). Still it is premature to conclude that the balance between positive and negative effects of migration for rural Thai elders will necessarily become less favorable as a result. Many other changes will accompany the shift in numbers of living children and thus adjustments to resulting modifications in intergenerational family forms will occur in a different social, economic, and technological context than has prevailed during the period of the present research. Continuing to monitor the situation of rural Thai elders in this changing context thus holds considerable potential for contributing to the theoretical and conceptual debates surrounding issues of aging, family and intergenerational relations. It also is crucial for developing and modifying policies and programs that realistically address the needs of the rapidly increasing older population.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the two coauthors of this report, the principal investigators were Jiraporn Kespichayawattana and Suwinee Winwatwanich from the Faculty of Nursing, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

<sup>2</sup> Gross error is the *sum* of older persons who were originally classified as 'yes' to an item but should have been counted as 'no' plus those who were originally classified as 'no' but should have been counted as 'yes'. Net error is the absolute value of the *difference* between older persons who were originally classified as 'yes' to an item but should have been counted as 'no' minus those who were originally classified as 'no' but should have been counted as 'yes'. Both gross and net error are expressed as a percent of all older persons (i.e. both those correctly and incorrectly classified originally). For example, 4 older persons out of 132 were originally classified as being

coresident with a child but in fact were not and 2 older persons were originally classified as not coresident but actually were. Thus the gross error is  $(4+2)/132$  while the net error is only  $(4-2)/132$ , with each being expressed as a percent.

<sup>3</sup> These corrections would not necessarily reduce net error which could even increase as a result depending on their affect on the balance between errors in either direction.

<sup>4</sup> In the course of our interviews we learned that in an additional 6 of the households, a child had at one time lived in the Bangkok area even though there was no child currently living there. Thus of the 27 households that constituted our sample for interviews, only 4 never had a child who migrated to Bangkok or its environs. Moreover, in only one case, had none of the migrant children lived in some reasonably large urbanized area. This particular case was purposively chosen because the person involved was an impoverished widow who live alone with no children in the locality and we were interested in learning how her situation came about.

<sup>5</sup> For example, one of our four study sites is in an area that specializes in raising and training elephants and taking the elephants to various places in Thailand, especially ones with major tourist attractions, to earn money by providing elephant rides or bringing the elephants around for people to see and feed for a fee. This obviously affects the nature of the migration pattern in this community.

<sup>6</sup> In a few of cases of couples, one of the two parents had not yet reached 60 years of age. Thus the 27 cases studies involved 49 parents of whom 44 were age 60 or over.

<sup>7</sup> At the time most of the children of the elderly we interviewed attended school, compulsory education consisted of four to six years of primary schooling (depending on the cohort) which would typically mean finishing school at ages 12 to 15. More recently compulsory education has been extended to 9 years and includes the lower secondary level.

<sup>8</sup> A few instances were mentioned, however, in which parents helped arrange and even finance a subsequent move.

<sup>9</sup> Among the cases we interviewed, there are two in which a the father has either completely lost contact or has rare contact with children from former marriages. In both cases the children stayed with their mother when the marriage ended and thus these instances are not a result of migration of the children. In one case the father has occasional contact by phone but rarely sees the children. In the other the father recently made a surprise visit to one of the two children and now has her phone number although there was very little contact before the visit.

<sup>10</sup> Among the four remaining cases the situation varied. In one, is a son left for Taiwan under mysterious circumstances after borrowing a big sum from the parents for the trip and subsequently has not been heard from. These same parents also do not see a daughter who ran away when young and who visits only every few years but get news of her through her siblings with whom the parents maintain contact. In two other cases, strained relations that appear to be unrelated to migration seem to deter visits. Finally, each of the two remaining cases have a son who doesn't visit or call for reasons that are unclear from the interviews.

<sup>11</sup> Original tabulations from the Survey of Welfare of the Elderly in Thailand. Presumably, for some of these parents, the 'migrant' children themselves were in rural areas. Thus, if the tabulation could be limited to only rural parents with children in urban areas, the percentages could be even be higher. Unfortunately sufficiently precise information on the location of the children is not available in the survey to permit such a tabulation.

<sup>12</sup> The one case for which we do not feel we can make a reasonable assessment involves an impoverished 78 year old widow living alone whom, as noted above, had two children both of whom had left home but not to urban areas. She was not articulate in the interview thus making it difficult to discern how her present situation arose.

She had two children from different fathers. She described her 55 year old daughter, with whom she had lost contact, as epileptic, mentally disturbed and an alcoholic. Her son, at the request of a monk, went to stay in a temple at age 15 to continue his education never to return. The son provides a modest monthly remittance to his mother. The son also recently invited her to live with him but after two months the mother returned to live alone as she had conflicts with the daughter-in-law. Although the mother is clearly impoverished, it is difficult to discern the extent to which migration is responsible given the unusual circumstances mentioned.

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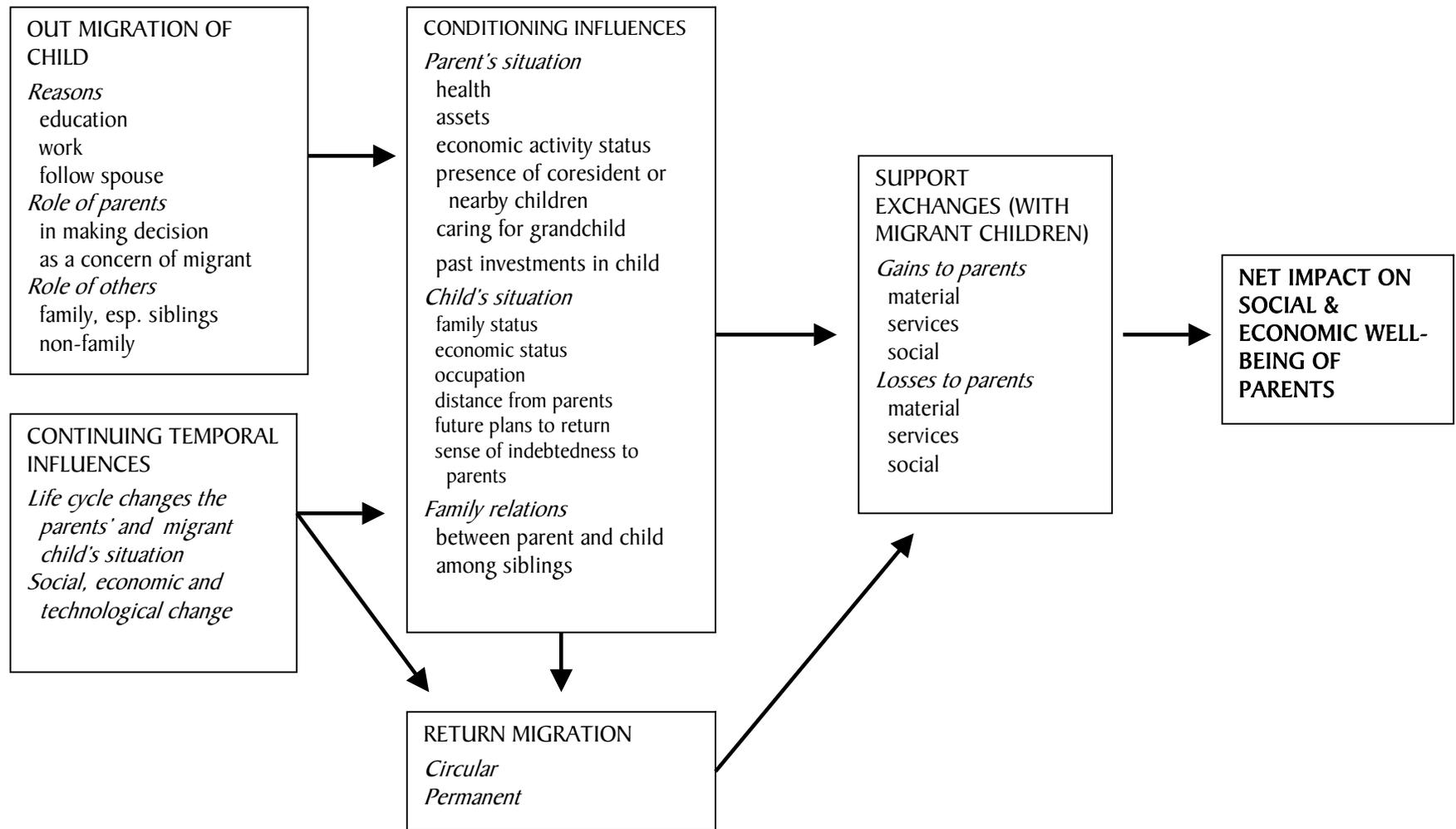
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Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Exploring the Impact of Migrant Children on the Social and Economic Well-being of 'Left Behind' Parents in Rural Areas



**Appendix A. CENSUS FORM OF OLDER PERSONS** (for each person or couple aged 60 or older)

Tambol 1 xxx 2 xxx 3 xxx 4 xxx

Village number \_\_\_\_\_ House number \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of older person/couple \_\_\_\_\_

Birth date/age of man (husband) \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date/age of woman (wife) \_\_\_\_\_

**Marital Status: 1 married live together 2 married live apart 3 widowed 4 separated/divorced 5 single**

Sex of older person if not married and living together: 1 male 2 female

Living arrangements: Ask who lives in the household with the older person(s) and check all that apply below.  
(Note: sons and daughters include all own, adopted and step children)

___ single son	___ single daughter
___ currently married son	___ currently married daughter
___ separated, divorced or widowed son	___ separated, divorced or widowed daughter
___ son-in-law	___ daughter-in-law
___ grandchildren under age 18	___ other adults (specify: _____)

Total number of persons in household including older persons \_\_\_\_\_

Ask about adult children not living in household (check all that apply; note sex and number if known)

___ next door	___ in urban area other than Bangkok
___ not next door but very near by	___ elsewhere
___ not nearby but in same tambol	___ away but does not know where
___ in Bangkok or surrounding area	

Any adult child now living in village but who use to live elsewhere and returned?

1 yes 2 no 3 yes but only as soldier 4 yes but only for studying 5 comes and goes 9 unsure

1st informant: 1 SA staff 2 ASM 3 headman 4 assistant headman 5 older person self

6 other household member 7 neighbor 8 other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Does the 1st informant seem confident about the information provided? 1 yes 2 somewhat 3 no

2nd informant: 1 SA staff 2 ASM 3 headman 4 assistant headman 5 older person self

6 other household member 7 neighbor 8 other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Does the 2nd informant seem confident about the information provided? 1 yes 2 somewhat 3 no

Comments:

**Appendix B. INTERVIEW GUIDELINES** (for older person in rural area)  
Migration Impact Study

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

- 1) The interview should be carried out in conversational style at a leisurely pace. Do not fill out the form during time of interview but be sure sufficient information is provided so that the form can be filled out later. Only record notes on matters that can facilitate the interview such as listing children's names and whereabouts.
- 2) Be conscious of possible interview fatigue. If appropriate make more than one visit to complete the interview.
- 3) Explain fully the purpose of our study. Give the respondent a chance to ask questions about it. Ask permission to tape record the interview and explain why we are doing so. Explain that only the study team will have access to the tapes.
- 4) In cases of a married couple try to interview together. Note when interview is with couple, try to get both to participate in the conversation. Also in such cases R refers to both husband and wife.
- 5) If others are present use your judgment as to whether they can help by participating in the conversation. However questions marked with \*\* are probably best asked when others are not listening so if others are present postpone asking these questions until they can be asked privately.
- 6) Bring information from census form to confirm and note all discrepancies.
- 7) Soon after each interview, listen to the tape and record appropriate information in a systematic way on forms we will develop for the purpose. Also make notes about anything of interest for our study and about sections that need to be transcribed or written up in detail.

**IDENTIFICATION**

Case ID from Census of Older persons: \_\_\_\_\_

Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Amphoe: \_\_\_\_\_

Tambol: \_\_\_\_\_ Village number: \_\_\_\_\_

House number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of respondent(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Marital status:

Married living with spouse

Married living separately from spouse

(Where does spouse live: \_\_\_\_\_;

Why live separately: \_\_\_\_\_)

Widowed

(How long: \_\_\_\_\_)

Divorced or separated

(How long: \_\_\_\_\_)

Year/month of birth of man (husband): \_\_\_\_\_ Stated Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year/month of birth of woman (wife): \_\_\_\_\_ Stated Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of times married

man (husband): \_\_\_\_\_

woman (wife): \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of current (or most recent) marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

If married before, duration of previous marriages

man (husband): 1st \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_\_\_

woman (wife): 1st \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_\_\_

Number of own children from current/most recent marriage

Number of living sons: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of living daughters: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children from man's (husband's) previous marriage(s)

Number of living sons: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of living daughters: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children from woman's (wife's) previous marriage(s)

Number of living sons: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of living daughters: \_\_\_\_\_

Any adopted children?

Number of adopted sons: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of adopted daughters: \_\_\_\_\_

Educational attainment of man: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading ability of man:

Educational attainment of woman: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading ability of woman:

## HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AND THEIR ROLES IN HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT AND FUNCTIONING

Fill out separate household member listing form

Describe any thing unusual about the living arrangement of persons listed as usual household members, such as only present sometimes.

Describe the role of each member in providing support for the household.

What other services do members do that help maintain the household such as cooking, cleaning, repairing, minding children.

Is there anyone in the household who R considers to be primary care-giver?

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Yes (Who: \_\_\_\_\_)

## ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Is R currently economically active?

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Yes (Describe type of activity and frequency of work)

If R has stopped working or is no longer fully economically active, describe

- 1) previous economic activity
- 2) why and when the transition to reduced activity or inactivity occurred.

## HEALTH

How does R or couple judge their health? (Ask about both husband and wife)

Man (husband) 1 very good 2 good 3 fair 4 not so good 5 poor

Woman (wife) 1 very good 2 good 3 fair 4 not so good 5 poor

Does R or couple have problems with the following

Man (husband)

Woman (wife)

Seeing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes    Seeing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

Hearing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes    Hearing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

Walking: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes    Walking: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

Chewing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes    Chewing: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

Memory: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes    Memory: \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

Who usually takes care of R or couple when ill?

Has R or couple been for any medical treatment in last year?

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Yes (Describe details including for what, place of treatment, for how long, cost, who paid)

## ECONOMIC SUPPORT, ASSETS, AND FINANCIAL SITUATION - OVERVIEW

Current sources of support (Note relative importance of each including R's own economic activity).

How does R judge the sufficiency of current level of support?

Has R had financial problems in last year?

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Yes (Describe frequency and severity)

Who owns the house?

Does R Own any land? If so describe? Also ask if any land has been transferred to children.

## LISTING OF CHILDREN

Review with R the total number of living children (including own, step and adopted children. Fill out separate listing of children form.

Before continuing, categorize the children into:

- 1) those living next door or very nearby
- 2) those living in same village or tambol but not very nearby
- 3) those living elsewhere

Use the list to help guide the following questions about each.

## CHILDREN WHO LIVE NEXT DOOR OR VERY NEARBY

Ask about each child living next door or very nearby:

How often do you see (name)?

During the last year did you receive any of the following from (name):

money -- how much and how often  
 food -- how much and how often  
 help in doing things – what and how often

During the last year did you give any of the following from (name):

money -- how much and how often  
 food -- how much and how often  
 help in doing things – what and how often

### **CHILDREN WHO LIVE LIVING IN SAME VILLAGE OR TAMBOL BUT NOT VERY NEARBY**

How often do you see (name)?

Who visits whom?

During the last year did you receive any of the following from (name):

money -- how much and how often  
 food -- how much and how often  
 help in doing things – what and how often

During the last year did you give any of the following from (name):

money -- how much and how often  
 food -- how much and how often  
 help in doing things – what and how often

### **RETURN MIGRANT CHILDREN**

Have any of the children who live with you, next door, nearby or in the same village or Tambol ever lived away from here for a year or more?

If R says any child goes back and forth, indicate the nickname of each child and ask for the last two times away:

- 1) when, where and for how long did (name) go?
- 2) the reasons for (name) going back and forth.
- 3) whether any visiting occurred during the period away.
- 4) if during the absence or at the time of return (name) provides parent(s) with money or other material support.

If any children currently living with or nearby R had ever lived elsewhere for a year or more continuously, list the nickname and when and where each had lived.

Then ask for each:

Why did (name) go, why did (name) return? Probe.

During the time (name) was away, did (name) help support you or your household?

Did (name) leave grand children with you when (name) was away?

How did R feel about (name) moving back to the local area?

Where there any benefits for R about (name) having lived elsewhere?

Where there any negative effects for R about (name) having lived elsewhere?

Where there any benefits for R about (name) returning?

Where there any negative effects for R about (name) returning?

### **CHILDREN LIVING ELSEWHERE**

Ask the following questions about each child who lives outside the parents local area (tambol):

*Situation when leaving home*

How old (name) was when they first left home?

Did you expect (name) to leave?

Why did (name) leave home?

Who suggested the idea of their migrating?  
 Did (name) consult with you about their decision to leave?  
 What did (name) say about his/her plans when (name) left?  
 Was there any discussion of what (name's) departure meant for your (the parents') welfare?  
 Did (name) express concern about you when (name) left?  
   If yes, what was the nature of the discussion?  
   If no, did you think about this at all?  
 Was the decision to leave related to the plans or circumstances of the brothers and sisters.  
 Before (name) left was (name) contributing to the support of the household?  
   If yes, did (name's) departure create any financial difficulties for you?

#### *Migration history*

Since leaving the first time, has (name) lived anywhere else besides where (name) now lives? If yes, where and for how long?  
 Has (name) ever come back to stay for a long time?  
   If yes, why?  
   For how long?.

#### *Contact patterns*

How often do you have contact with (name)?  
 What is the most common way to have contact with (name).  
 If there is contact by telephone ask:  
   Who calls whom?  
   How often?  
   What is main purpose of the calls?  
 Have you ever visited (name) after (name) left?  
 How frequently? For what purposes?  
 Tell us about your last visit.  
   When was it?  
   For how long?  
   Why did you visit (name)?  
   Did (name) give you any money or material gifts during the visit?  
   Did you give (name) any money or material gifts during the visit?  
   What do you do on the visits?  
 How often and for what reasons does (name) visit you here?  
 Can you tell us about the last visit?  
   When was it?  
   For how long?  
   Why did (name) make the visit?  
   Did (name) give you any money or material gifts during the visit?  
   Did you give (name) any money or material gifts during the visit?

#### *Support exchanges during period of absence*

What support did you give to (name) during time (name) has lived away, now and in the past?  
 What support was received from (name) during time (name) lived away, now and in the past?

#### *Perceived consequences*

How do you feel about (name) living elsewhere?  
 In what ways do you feel you benefit from (name) living elsewhere?  
 In what ways do you feel that you are disadvantaged by the fact (name) lives elsewhere?  
 How does (name) feel about living away from you?  
 In what ways do you feel (name) benefits from living elsewhere?

It what ways do you feel that (name) disadvantaged by the fact (name) lives elsewhere?

### **FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**

Do you think any of your children who moved out will eventually come back to live here?

Why or why not?

If yes, what would they do for a living if they moved back?

Do you think other children will move out in the future?

Why or why not?

Would it be (Is it) a problem for you to live here without any children nearby?

If all your children move out, would you want to go live with one of them?

Why or why not?

If so which one and why?

If you start having serious health problems who will care for you ? Probe if any migrant children would come back, if R would go join a child elsewhere, or if will some other arrangement be made?

### **\*\* INHERTIANCE PLANS**

If R owns the house and/or land, what plans if any does R have for the transfer or bequeathing of land and house in future?

Have you ever discussed with your children about who will inherit your property?

Are you plans for bequeathing your house and property related to who has remained at the village and who moved out?

## Appendix C. INTERVIEW GUIDELINES (for Migrant Child who returned to live with or nearby parents)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Note: These guidelines assume that the parent has already been interviewed and thus that information about the returned child's siblings has already been provided by the parent.

Bring information from listings of parent's household and parent's children to confirm and note all discrepancies.

### IDENTIFICATION

Case ID of parent(s) from Census of Older persons: \_\_\_\_\_

Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Amphoe: \_\_\_\_\_

Tambol: \_\_\_\_\_ Village number: \_\_\_\_\_

House number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

### DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sex of R \_\_\_\_\_

Age of R \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status of R \_\_\_\_\_

(If married) How many children does R have?

How old and what sex is each?

Educational attainment of R: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation of R: \_\_\_\_\_

Where does R live in relation to parents:

\_\_\_\_\_ same HH \_\_\_\_\_ next door \_\_\_\_\_ nearby

### PARENTAL HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AND SIBLINGS

If parent was interviewed, confirm that the HH Member form from that interview is correct. Describe any thing unusual about the living arrangement of persons listed as usual household members, such as only present sometimes.

Ask about the role of each household member in providing support for the parent's household.

Is there anyone in the household who is a primary care-giver to the parents?

If yes, who is it?

Review with R the listing of the children of the parent (these are the siblings of the respondent) and confirm the information is correct.

### MIGRATION AWAY FROM HOME

When did you first move away from your parents?

How old were you?

Where did you go?

How long did you stay?

Why did you go?

Did you consult with your parents about leaving?

What did your parent(s) think about your leaving?  
 How did you feel about leaving?  
 How did your parent(s) feel about your leaving?  
 Did you parent(s) help you financially or in any other way to facilitate your leaving?  
 After you left your parent(s), did you move to other places before returning back here? Probe where, when, for how long and why.  
 During the time you were away, did you help support your parents?  
 If so, probe for details.  
 During the time you were away, did your parents help support you?  
 If so, probe for details.  
 (If R had children) Did your parent(s) ever take care of your children when you were away?  
 Do you think there were advantages for you that you lived elsewhere for some time?  
 How about disadvantages for you?  
 Do you think there were advantages for your parent(s) that you lived elsewhere for some time?  
 Were there any disadvantages for your parent(s)?  
 How did you keep in contact with your parent(s) when you were away?  
 Probe re visits, letters and phone calls.

### **RETURN MIGRATION AFTER LEAVING HOME**

When did you move back here (where your parents are living)?  
 Why did you move back to where your parents are living?  
 How did you feel about moving back at the time you decided to return?  
 Were there any benefits for you in returning?  
 Were there any disadvantages for you in returning?  
 How do you feel now about having moved back?  
 Were there any benefits for your parent(s) in your returning?  
 Were there any disadvantages for your parent(s) in your returning?  
 How do your parent(s) feel now about your having moved back?

### **FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**

Do you think you will move away again?  
 Why or why not?  
 (If has siblings away) Do you think any of your siblings will move back in the future? Why or why not?  
 (If has siblings living in Tambol) Do you think any of your siblings will move away in the future? Why or why not?  
 Would it be problem for your parent(s) to live here without any children nearby?

### **INHERTIANCE PLANS**

Do you expect to receive any property or the your parent's house in future?  
 Have your parent(s) ever discussed with you children about who will inherit their property?  
 Are you parent's plans for bequeathing the house and property related to who has remained at the village and who moved out?



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