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The Impact of International Migration on the Health of People who Stayed Behind in the Republic of Moldova - A Literature Review

Abstract

Nearly one fifth of the people who permanently live in Moldova had at least one household member who went abroad for working in 2010 (Ganta 2012). Therefore, people of all age groups are affected by migration - mainly children, spouses and parents of migrants. This literature review examined the impact of migration on the health of people left behind, including physical and mental health as well as certain social aspects of health. HIV and human trafficking were dealt with separately. Furthermore, the impact of migration and brain drain on the Moldovan health system was analyzed.

The research for this literature review was performed primarily through on-line resources and database searches as well as printed sources. Qualitative and quantitative studies were evaluated by their strengths and weaknesses. National statistical data as well as public media completed the work.

In the last decade many, primarily highly selective qualitative studies were conducted dealing with the impact of migration on the health of people left behind, mainly with negative consequences (Gavriliuc et al. 2006, Vladicescu et al. 2008). But more recent, in particular large-scale, representative quantitative studies initiated a growing controversy as mainly neutral and positive effects of migration on the people affected by family member migration were observed (Gassmann et al. 2013, Lücke and Stöhr 2012).

Key findings of this review include a positive association between parental migration and a reduced prevalence of physical diseases and a higher accessibility, quality and diversity of food related to children left behind. Parental migration had negative impacts on the mental well-being and psycho-emotional development of affected children, it led to a higher risk of child institutionalization and a lack of guardianship for affected children. Physical health of children appeared to be unaffected by parental migration. However an increased vulnerability of adolescents related to HIV/AIDS was observed. Adult child migration led to an increased food variety of elder people left behind. Physical and mental diseases were not associated with adult child migration. A strong protective factor related to the emotional well-being and support of elder people appeared to be the presence of an adult person in the same household. In particular single parents and children both affected by spouse or parental

migration, respectively, were at a higher risk of human trafficking. Migration appeared to be strongly linked to brain drain and severe shortages of health professionals within the Moldovan health system. The health insurance system and the social security system face future difficulties due to emigration such as an increasing demographic pressure and an aging population.

Intensified quantitative research is required to further assess and reduce the vulnerability of the population affected by family member migration. Corresponding research results might function as a basis for future policy and public health interventions.