

# Gender, vulnerability, & resilience among children 'left behind'

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“Migration is not an experience that belongs solely to those who leave their countries. The protagonists in the migration saga include those who leave, those who stay, and those who come and go for generations to come.”  
Falicov (2000; pp 400)



“The first victims of migration are children. In Eastern Europe half of those who emigrate are women who, in most cases, leave their children at home, entrusting them, at best, to grandparents, or to elderly neighbours, or at worst, and too often, just abandoning them to fend for themselves.” Carmine Flamminio



# Outline

1. Defining the 'left behind'
2. Global evidence
3. Focus on Moldova & Georgia
4. Implications for policy & practise

# Who are the 'left behind'?

- Non-movers connected to migrant households
- Typically confined to immediate dependents of migrants
- For children, usually restricted to those with absent parent(s)

Country	Year	Estimate	Population	Source
Philippines	2001	3-6 million	Age 0-14	Bryant (2005)
Philippines	2000	8 million	Age 0-18	Coronel & Unterreiner (2005)
Indonesia	2002	1 million	Age 0-17	Bryant (2005)
Thailand	2002	500,000		Bryant (2005)
China	2005	14.5-18.5 million	Age 0-18	Liu (2008)
Bangladesh	1996	5514	Age 5-14	Kuhn (2006)
Sri Lanka	2000	1 million	Age 0-18	STC (2006)
Ecuador	2005	218,000	Age 0-18	UNICEF (2008)
Moldova	2006	150-310,000	Age 0-14	Prohnitchi (2008)
Albania	1990-2005	21.7%	Age 0-18	Giannelli & Mangiavacchi (2010)

# Why focus on this specific group?

- Assumptions about inherent vulnerability
- Change in caregiving constellations
- Link between “well-being” and “well becoming”
- “Moral panic” around migration

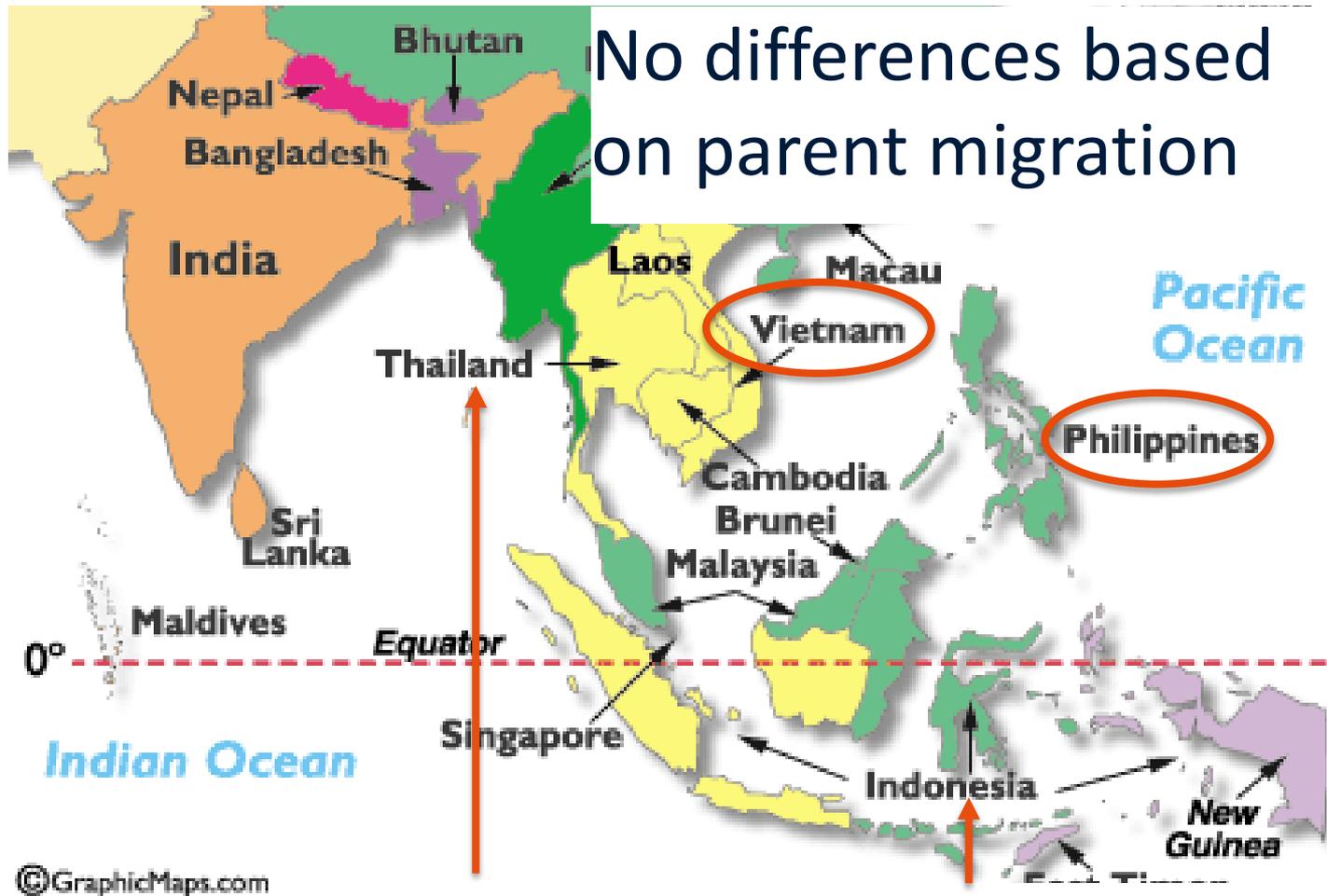


# Global evidence

- Mixed methodological approaches
  - Qualitative: Feelings of isolation, abandonment, & emotional closeness
  - Quantitative: Instruments to detect (clinically-diagnosable) mental health (dis)functioning
- Mixed findings, depending on...
  - Type of migration
  - Caregiving arrangement
  - Demographic characteristics



# South/South East Asia (1)



Children w/ migrant fathers = Worse conduct & emotional outcomes

# South/South East Asia (2)



Children w/ migrant parents = Better self assessed well-being

# South/South East Asia (3)

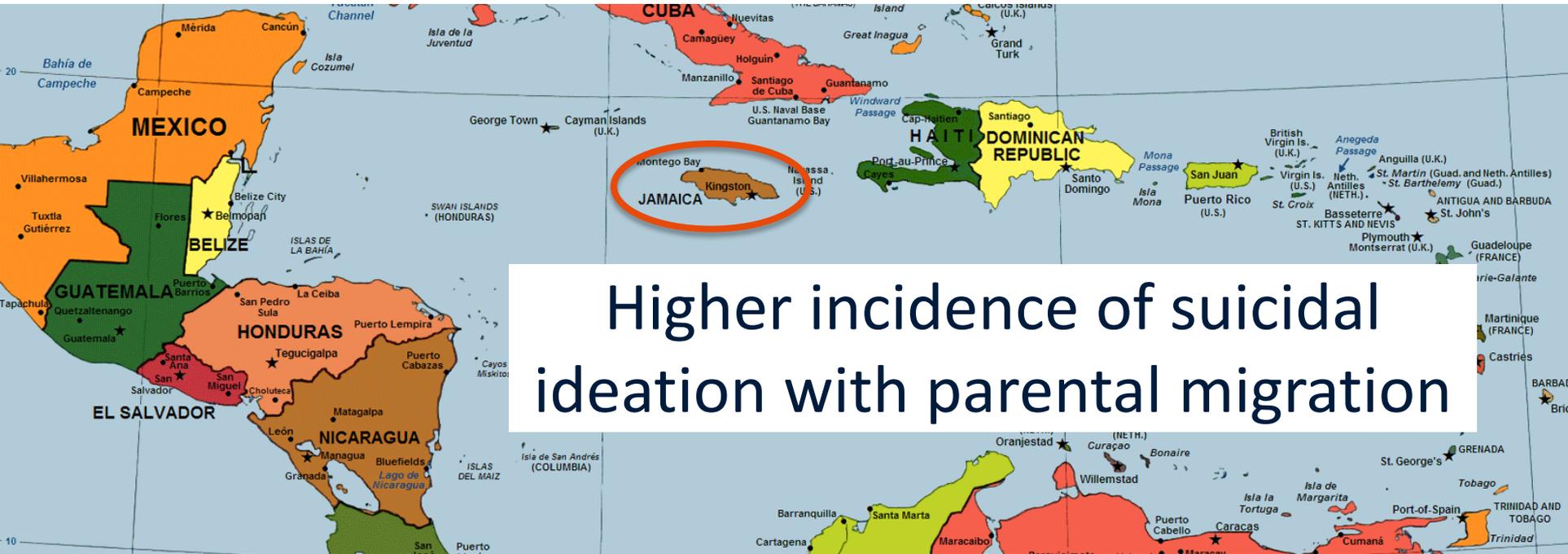


Significantly worse child behaviour outcomes (e.g., conduct disorders)

# Central America (1)



# Central America (2)



Higher incidence of suicidal ideation with parental migration

# Central & Eastern Europe



Higher probability of expressing depressive symptoms



# What is common across these contexts?

- Relatively high rates of recent emigration
- Increasing feminisation of migration
- Concentration of mobility in working-age cohort
- Restrictive (policy) environments disallowing family movement

# In-depth case study: Moldova

- Population = ~4 million
- +/-22% of population abroad
- Half of all new migrants female
- Major destinations: CIS, Italy, Israel
- Remittances accounted for 17% GDP

# Moldova

- Household survey data:
- 12,262 individuals
- 8.2% Adults were migrants
  - 10.8% Men were migrants
  - 5.8% Women were migrants
- 2,658 Children (4-17) → 23.8% had parents abroad

Information collected on: HH roster & living conditions, migration histories of members, caregiving practises, children (education, health, etc.)



# What's the intuition?

- Migration = Inherently gendered phenomenon
  - *Who* should migrate
  - *To where* they should go
  - *What* they should engage in while away
- Norms around social reproduction affect caregiver choices
- ...yet women are migrating more, implying loss of caregivers



# Gendered migration propensities

- Odds of women being current migrants **half** of those of men in Moldova but...
  - ... Women = **+ odds of migrating** to a non-CIS region
- Some factors similar for men & women
  - Poverty = **- migration odds** (greater magnitude for women)
- Some factors differentially shape propensities of men and women
  - Unmarried & divorced women = **+ odds of migrating**
  - Ethnic minority men = **+ odds of migrating**
  - Men with higher education = **- migration odds**

# Measuring psychosocial health

- Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire:
- Informant-rated or self-reported instrument
- 25-question instrument
- 5 subscales
- Higher scores = Movement away from healthy outcomes
- Outcomes can be continuous or categorical

3-category/2-category  
outcome:

\*Normal = 0-3

\*Borderline = 4

\*Abnormal = 5-10

} Normal = 0-4

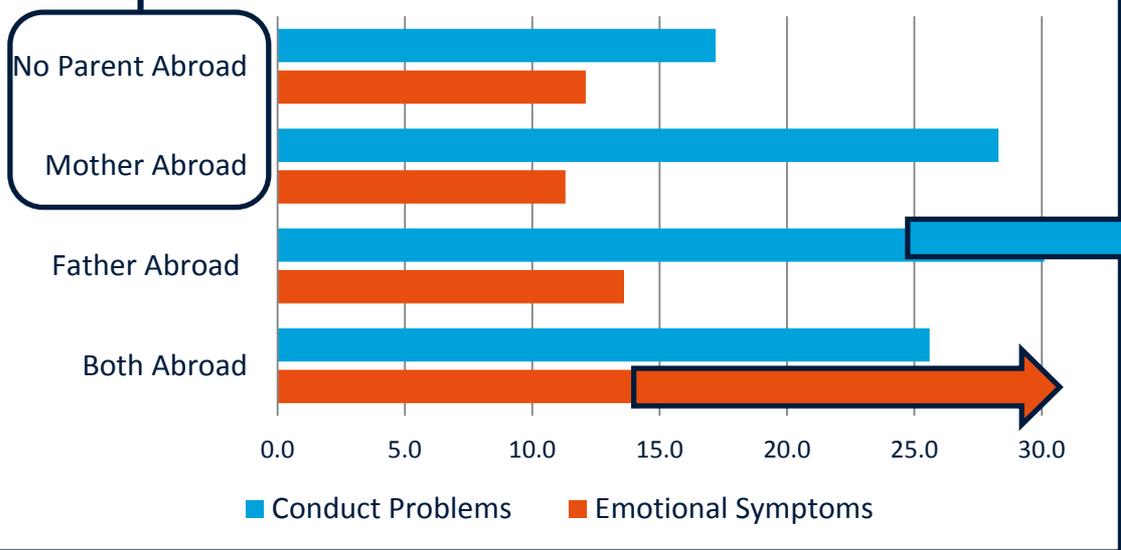
Measure of “externalising”  
problems

Measure of “internalising”  
problems

## Components of the SDQ:

- Total Difficulties
- Conduct Problems
- Emotional Symptoms
- Peer Problems
- Hyperactivity & Inattention
- Prosocial Behaviours

### Male: % of Abnormal Scores by Type of Parental Migration

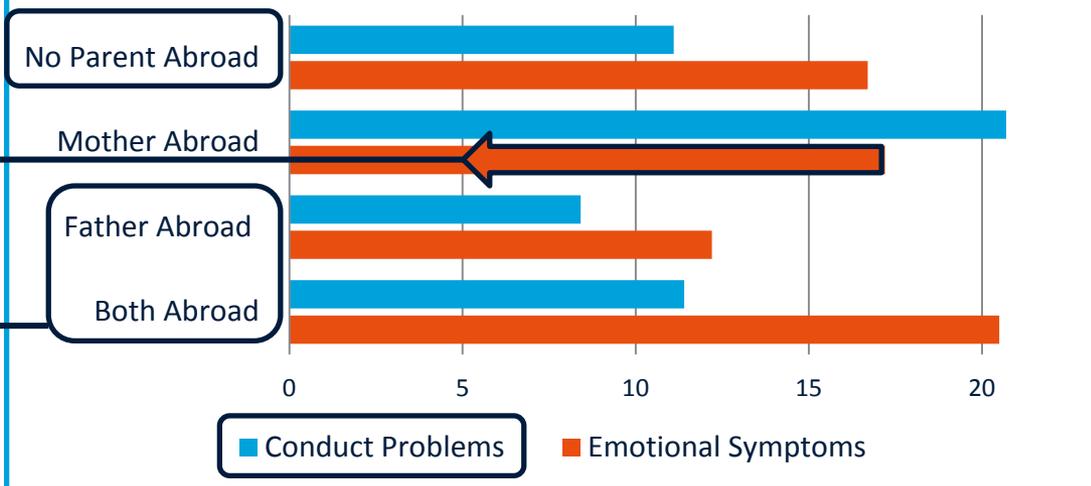


No significant differences

+12% Chance of Abnormal Score

+17% Chance of Abnormal Score

### Female: % of Abnormal Scores by Type of Parental Migration

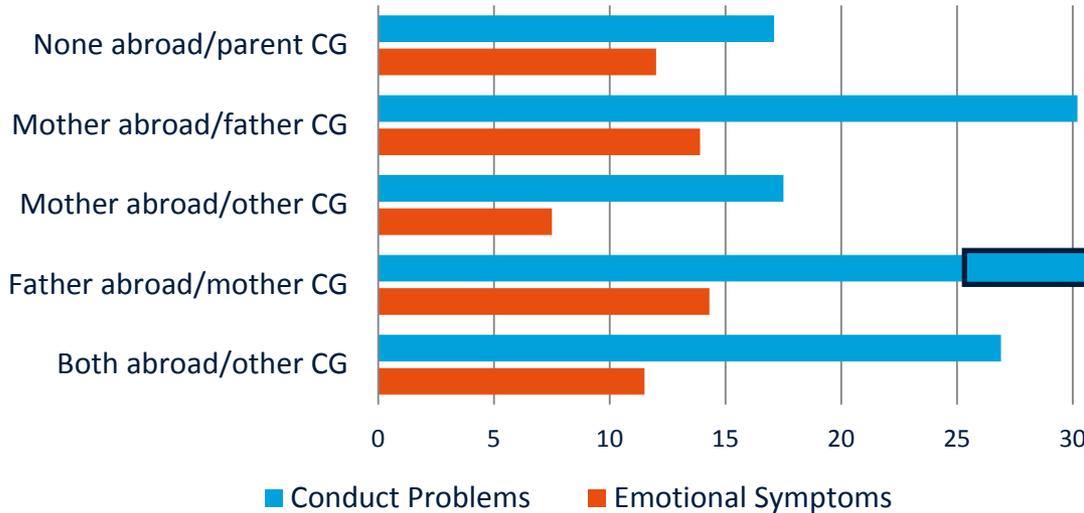


-10% Chance of Abnormal Score

No significant differences

## Results: Moldova parent abroad/ Caregiver type

### Male: % of Abnormal Scores by Migrant/Caregiver Type

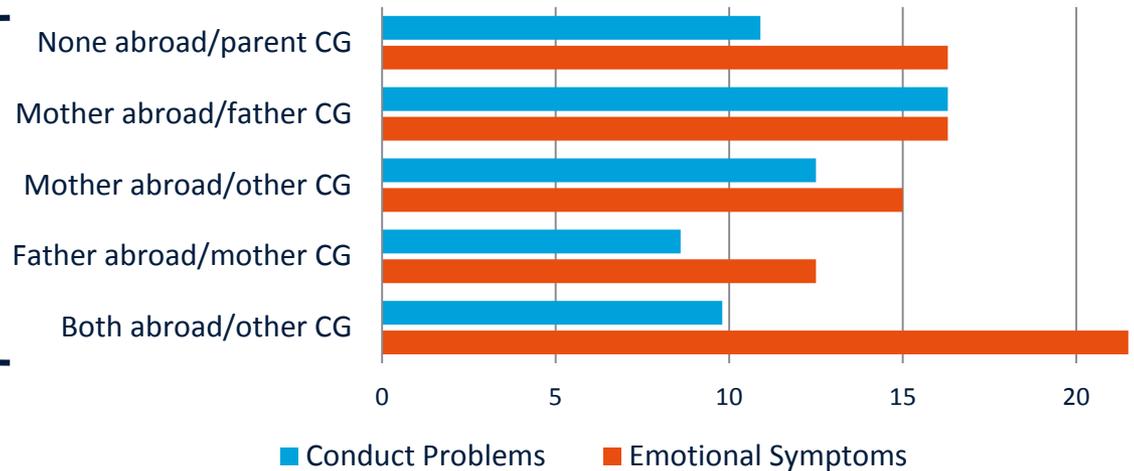


+12% Chance of  
Abnormal Score

... Otherwise no significant  
differences!

No significant differences  
by migration/caregiver  
arrangement!

### Female: % of Abnormal Scores by Migrant/Caregiver Type



**So what does this say about resilience?**

“It is increasingly recognised that resilient youth are **active participants** in creating their own environment (Scarr & McCarty, 1983)—a reasonably radical concept that transcends stimulus-response behaviourism and smacks of **human agency** (Bandura, 1989).”  
(Kumpfer, 1999; pg 181)

# Some factors promote resilience...

- Continuity of care + predictability of family networks
- Co-decision making & sense of co-responsibility
- Ability to plan & to take autonomous decisions for the future

## ....and some erode resilience

- Framing of migration as vulnerability
- Stigma around parental migration
- “Othering” & distancing from migrant identity

# What does this mean for policy?

- Policy systems create corrosive circumstances:
  - Ensuring parent-child separation
  - Encouraging ad-hoc decision making
  - Limiting opportunities for circularity
- ... Which would be largely avoided by creating legitimate labour migration channels

