

PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF MALE MIGRATION ON THE WOMEN LEFT BEHIND

Abstract

The present research explores the psychological and social consequences of male migration on the plight of women are left behind. A sample consisting of 10 married women from migrant households was selected from the rural and urban areas of four cities in Pakistan, namely Gujarkhan, Chakwal, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol. Thematic analysis of the interview protocols yielded previously unrecorded results for Pakistani women. The findings of the research suggest that the impact of migration on the wives of the migrants is positive as well as negative. In the wake of male migration, these women face the strains in their personal lives, in their relationships with their husbands and in relation to social support. The research found that on a personal level, the women face social issues like gender discrimination and sexual harassment in absence of their men along with experiencing other difficulties like sexual frustration, and lack of social support. In term of relational factors, they felt lonely, anxious, a sense of insecurity and stress owing to the need to manage household affairs, run errands, and added responsibilities of looking after the children and the in-laws singlehandedly. The research also found that despite significant psychological and social problems, male migration also brought a positive transformation in the social roles of these women. These women reported increased their empowerment in terms of self-reliance, self-confidence, independence and decision-making abilities.

Keywords: *Male migration; wives left behind; psychosocial impact of migration.*

INTRODUCTION

This research utilizes qualitative research methods to explore the psychosocial

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implications of male migration for the families left behind; it views the implications of male migration from the lens of wives who are left behind (de Snyder & Diaz-Guerrero 2003; Fuller-Iglesias, 2015). The psychological context of migration has always been an intellectual backwater, therefore the current research is envisaged to be of value not only in understanding migration and its impact on Pakistani women, but also in the contribution it would make a wider debate on the lives of the families left behind. Results discuss the themes that emerged from unstructured interviews with ten wives who were left behind.

Although much work has been conducted on the impact of earning and the return of foreign exchange to the country (Khan, Irfan, & Cohen, 1985), very little research caters to the effects of immigration on the relatives who are left behind. Migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon (Laliotou, 2008) and has been reported to be a bittersweet experience for those experiencing it (Alarcón & Garzón, 2011; de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Yabiku, Agadjanian, & Sevoyan, 2010) whereas economic impacts of migration are as vital as the psychological and social consequences. In this study, the psychosocial impact of migration is defined as the psychological distress and change in social roles of the wives left behind in the aftermath of male migration in the respective families. Male members in patriarchal society are key decision makers in the family; the family unit rotates round their lives. Families, wives, and children of the migrants feel the loss of the person and this result in feelings of loneliness, low moods, lack of or loss of goal directed behavior and dismemberment of the family unit (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010). Socially, the migration of the spouse affects the mobility of the spouse and the family.

The concept of migration has a long history and can either be from one country to another or simply a move from the rural areas of a country to thriving cities and districts (Chen, Liu, Vikram, & Guo, 2015; Mu & van de Walle, 2011); the latest century has seen a significant increase in migration from countries with developing economies to the industrial countries (Arendt, Nielsen, & Jakobsen, 2012; Fuller-Iglesias, 2015; Naveed-i-Rahat, 1990; Sheikh et al., 2012; Yabiku, Agadjanian, & Sevoyan, 2010).

For Pakistan, the concept migration remains to one of male migration (Azhar, 2007). Pakistani men not only migrate as skilled workers, but also as unskilled workers to different parts of the world. In fact most of them belonged to lower income groups prior to immigration, and the majority of the migrants were young and married. Therefore the impact on the wives left behind is greater and significant enough to study. For example about 1.6 million workers migrated from Pakistan to the Middle East during the 1970s (Azhar, 2007). Therefore, equal number of spouses and families must have been affected.

Apart from its contribution in affecting the overall economy (For a detailed discussion see Muhammad, Ahmad, Shah, Alam & Jawad, 2010), international migration had some far reaching repercussions on the society, particularly on families whose members have migrated abroad. According to an estimate, the total number of Pakistanis working abroad have left about 12 million dependents in Pakistan; this indicates that around 12 000 000 people are living in Pakistan have somebody living abroad (Azhar, 2007). This means that about 13% of the population of Pakistan is directly affected by the phenomenon of immigration. Some Societies in Pakistan are now facing issues of planned migration and the phenomenon of international migration that gained special momentum in early 70's when sudden rise in oil prices by OPEC countries gave an unusual boost to Middle Eastern economy, is now a norm for some rural and urban towns in Pakistan (Muhammad et al., 2010).

In this regard, Ganepola (2002) examined the psychosocial well-being of individuals and families of those who have migrated overseas from Sri Lanka due to conflict-related reasons. The findings found that women faced difficulties in adjusting to absence of husbands, but did not feel it appropriate to disclose their emotional turmoil or sadness to those around them. Instead these women developed newer self-identities and tried to lead more meaningful lives for their children. They assumed the role of the head of the household. The financial comforts served to ameliorate the grief caused by the absence of their life partners.

Malik, Chaudhry, and Batzen (1995) found out that despite the prosperity enjoyed by the migrant households due to the inflow of remittances, those households realized the heavy price of migration i.e. negligence of children, increased responsibilities, tensions and other emotional difficulties faced by women. It was also found that women suffered so much that they did their best to stop their sons and other male members from the successive generations to migrate for financial reasons.

Previous research has identified intensification in self-reliance and autonomy of women after male migration. In this regard, the case of women of Kerala is comparable to the circumstances in Pakistan. Research theorizes that massive male migration in Kerala has promoted active role of women in the management of family affairs. Gulati (1983) suggests that there is evidence to put forward that women in migrant households face many tensions, pressures, conflicts, and anxieties, which increases day-by-day. Similar findings were reported by research in other patriarchal societies (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Christine & Ragui, 2011). Researcher also has highlighted the need to focus on mental and physical health of the wives left behind (Gulati, 1986; Antman, 2012; Chen, Liu, Vikram, & Guo, 2015). The worst sufferers are the newlywed brides who are married to their husbands during the men's brief vacations from the Middle East. A young wife doesn't only have communication

problems with her new in-laws, but other things add up to make adjustment difficult; for example, conflicts can arise between the wife and the in-laws over sharing the remittances the migrant worker sends back home. This sometimes also restricts the social mobility of the wife left behind (Gulati, 1986).

Similarly, Go and Postrado (1986) observed that more difficulties in adjustment are experienced in households of married contract workers than in households of unmarried contract workers. The migrant's wife, more than anyone else in the household, feels the effect of the temporary separation. She experiences loneliness, worry and the burden of added responsibilities in her husband's absence. She plays multiple roles of a temporary household head, the decision-maker and of a single-parent when the husband is away (Fuller-Iglesias, 2015). These wives may not be happy with these extra responsibilities of taking care of and disciplining the children. The women live a life of dichotomy, where they experience an emancipation from the traditional roles which they would not experience if the husband was back home. Yet they face intense difficulties and social pressures in their husband's absence (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012). However, little research parallels the effects of male migration on the wives left behind in Pakistan.

According to Azhar (2007), the immigration of a male family member calls for a variety of adjustments and the assumption by other household members of additional responsibilities. It also generates a variety of psychological strains that are hardly pliable to measurement. The prolonged absence of a husband creates psychological, emotional and sexual problems for the wife. At times the psychological pressures can contribute to problems of physical and mental health. Due to the societal values, women do not express their distress verbally and keep their worries and anxieties undisclosed. With the passage of time, therefore the psychological conflicts born out of a husband's absence find expression through psychosomatic diseases.

In view of the immense importance of the phenomenon of international migration in affecting the overall society of Pakistan, there is a sufficient amount of literature on the topic. Although a lot of studies have been conducted on different aspects of migration like economic, cultural and sociological consequences of workers' remittances on the society, but there are very few studies which give needed insight on the psychological implications of migration.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present research is qualitative in nature and aims to explore the experiences of wives who are left behind. The research answer calls by previous research to focus only on the personal experiences of wives as opposed to the effects of economic empowerment. It also focuses on the collective family experience as a result of migration. A rigorous reading and coding of the transcripts allows major themes to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes and patterns from these in-depth interviews are analyzed inductively. The emergent themes are illustrated by select narratives. The researchers do not have experience of being left behind and thus selected an outsider's perspective during the development of research and data analysis.

Key Informants

The participants were contacted through a key informant in each locale, who was explained the purpose of research to be conveyed to the sample subjects, ensuring the attainment of informed consent on behalf of the interviewees. In all of the cases the key informants were women who were relatives or acquaintances of the subjects. The key informants identified such household where male migration had taken place. Since these informants were known to the subjects therefore it was easy to gain their consent and cooperation for the in depth interviews. The informants attempted to engage the subjects in pre interview informal discussion and encouraged them to reveal their actual experiences and opinions about the subject under investigation by assuring them about the anonymity and confidentiality related to the interview data.

Rapport Building

The key informants assisted in acquiring the informed consent, briefing about the research topic and establishment of basic level rapport with the subjects. Subsequently the researchers increased their efforts to develop a better rapport by spending extended amount of time with the women of the locales and the subject in particular. Since the interview questions were of private nature therefore, informal group discussions and talks with individual helped in building an environment of trust and sharing, before the actual in depth interviews were conducted.

The interviewer addressed the confidentiality concerns of the interviewees by briefing about the ethical practice of keeping the interview data strictly confidential and ensuring its use for research purpose only (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed by combining previous research on effects of migration on women and the objectives of the current research. It was designed following the method prescribed by Creswell (1998) to facilitate an unstructured interview experience and was informed by the relevant literature around migration and its impact. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed in English, it contained seven questions developed out of previous literature and concentrated on core issues defining the objectives of the current research:

- What are the effects of your husband’s migration on your life (wait for the respondent to answer. If the respondent doesn’t respond adequately, use the following prompts)
 - What are the major problems caused by the migration of your spouse?
 - What kind of additional responsibilities do you have now due to the migration of your spouse (listen to the respondent and guide the discussion towards education of children, care and discipline of children, dealing with in-laws, assets sale and purchase, construction of house)
- What are your major worries in the absence of your husband?
- What kinds of changes have occurred in your household due to the migration of the husband (listen to the respondent and guide the discussion towards decision-making, control, autonomy)
- What kind of effects the migration of spouse has on your personal life (listen to the respondent and guide the discussion towards self-reliance, self-confidence, sense of security, and confidence)
- If given a chance to decide, what would you prefer:
 - i. The presence of spouse with its consequential emotional

Table 1: *Probes associated with the interview questions*

In-depth Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents over a period of 2 weeks. Two interview sessions were conducted with each participant. The interviews were conducted in an informal environment ensuring a genuine and trusting exchange discussion. Due to the good rapport between the interviewers and the subjects, the latter did not feel conscious and were visibly at ease during the interview. The answers were detailed and based on significant personal information. Although the interview protocol was developed in English but it was conducted multi-lingually in Urdu, Punjabi and Pothwari depending on the subject’s preference and for their native language.

Interviews were audio taped with an audio recorder. Each session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. Immediately after each interview, a brief summary was made based on the researcher's impressions of the information acquired through verbal and nonverbal communication of the participants.

Sample

The sample comprised of 10 females whose husbands had migrated to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Gulf at least two years prior were selected through purposive sampling technique. Five of the women were from rural areas of Chakwal and Gujarkhan, whereas the other five were from urban vicinities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The ages ranged from 25 to 55 years. Most of the subjects from rural background were not formally educated, only one of them had passed Matric. The subjects from the urban areas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi were educated. Their level of education ranged from Higher Secondary School Certificate. HSSC (FA) to MPhil. The years of their marriage ranged from 3 to 35 years. All the subjects, except one woman, had children. This particular woman was pregnant at the time of the research. A detail of the demographics are defined below:

Table 1: Demographic Specification of the Sample (N = 10)

Demographic	Categories	Frequency
Age (In Years)	25-35	3
	36-45	3
	46-55	4
Education	Illiterate	4
	Matric	1
	F.A./F.Sc.	1
	B.A./B.Sc.	2
	M.A./M.Sc.	1
Duration of marriage(in years)	M.Phil.	1
	3-5	1
	6-10	2
	11-15	1
	16-20	1
	21-25	1
	26-30	2
Duration of migration(in years)	31-35	2
	3-5	2
	6-10	2
	11-15	2
	16-20	3
	21-25	1
Family type	Nuclear	5
	Joint	5
Husbands' Occupation	Unskilled	4
	Semi-skilled	2
	Skilled	4
	professionals	
Country of migration	Saudi Arabia	5
	Kuwait	2
	U.A.E.	3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing Data

Interviews were transcribed; although the interviews were translated into English yet few of the phrases could not be justified in terms of meaning by the translation so it was decided to use all the verbatim quotes in Urdu as well as in English.

The data was then subjected to thematic analysis. The research questions were employed as the coding frame and the responses of the individuals well as the interaction between the individual of the groups were considered as units of data.

The transcribed data was coded with the help of traditional method of color coding. Following the research questions as guides, the text was searched and coded. Different colors of highlighter pens were used to distinguish each code by a separate color and each code denoted a category. After identification of the main themes, the remaining data was re-coded.

Thematic Analysis

The themes for the current research were data driven; however the label for each theme was chosen to match the themes used by previous researches. The objective behind this was to highlight the universality of the experiences of the participants. Twelve themes were identified by the thematic analysis: loneliness, worry, additional responsibilities, sexual harassment, social stigmas, sexual frustration, emotional insecurity, interdependence and social support, conflict with in-laws, communication issues and social empowerment. Below are the description of each theme and the experience of the participants:

Loneliness

Loneliness is the biggest complaint wives of immigrant husbands had in the course of our research. The dilemma of physical separation and the loneliness of these women were evident in their interviews. Most of these women were deeply distressed about their husbands being away from them. One woman expressed the absence of her husband as ‘the end of her life.’

I feel very lonely because he is not only my husband but also a friend and companion to me.

میں اپنے آپ کو بہت تنہا محسوس کرتی ہوں کیونکہ میرے خاوند صرف شوہر ہی نہیں بلکہ میرے دوست اور ساتھی بھی ہیں۔

Most wives experienced the absence of their husbands as a form of ‘stress’ and sadness. It was found that some of these women tried to get themselves involved in day-to-day life chores to such an extent that remembrance of their partner became minimal. The researchers felt that the feeling of abandonment was hidden behind the use of word lonely. This finding was in consistency with the past researches (Gulati, 1986; Arnold & Shah, 1986). One of the interviewee related that she had left her husband’s clothes and towel in the same places as he had left them for a year after he had gone away. It was also felt that the degree of expressed loneliness was directly related to the amount of time spent apart. It was reported that one can kill time and spent energies while waiting for better days to come; there are bound to be times

when other members of the family are occupied with their own work or when there is nothing much to do. This is when the loneliness becomes almost unbearable. Physical separation becomes even more pronounced when emotionally the wives feel lonely and need some attention. There were several other ways of mitigating the pain of separation and lessening the feeling of loneliness, such as communication, family and community networks. In situations where there is a lack of such social support, the wives tend to miss the husbands more severely as shared in a by an interviewee below.

Now I feel the absence of my husband more severely as my children have all grown up and are occupied with their own lives. And I also feel lonelier now because my parents are not alive anymore.

مجھے جوانی سے زیادہ بڑھاپے میں اپنے شوہر کی کمی کی شدت سے محسوس ہوتی ہے کیونکہ اب میرے بچے بڑے ہو گئے ہیں اور اپنی زندگیوں میں مصروف ہیں۔ میرے والدین بھی اب حیات نہیں لہذا اب میں زیادہ اکیلا پن محسوس کرتی ہوں۔

Most women reported that they then console themselves by reminding themselves of why their husbands had to immigrate in the first place. As most of them would say:

When a husband has to move away from his wife, the reason for this separation is really crucial.

جب کوئی خاوند اپنی بیوی سے دور ہو جائے تو اس کی ضرورت کوئی بہت بڑی مجبوری ہوتی ہے۔

One woman articulated the absence of her husband as a ‘form of death’. Majority of the wives left behind expressed their feelings of emptiness and uselessness due to the absence of their husbands. They felt that a married woman's life is incomplete and meaningless without her husband. Periodic remittances in the form of gifts (received when acquaintances of husbands visiting on leave) and messages received from husbands also help to lessen the severity of the problem.

The plight of younger women was worse than older women. Therefore their interviews showed greater frequency of feelings related to loneliness. Additionally the feeling of loneliness was also related to the presence or absence of extended family and amount of interaction with local community like neighbors and friends. This was a surprise finding, as earlier it was reported that the young wives were the loneliest. During the current study it was found that the older women were equally keen on living with their husbands because according to them, they had lived their lives without their husbands with the help of their parents and younger children. Now that the parents were no longer there, the children had grown up and were living their

own lives, these women were immensely lonely. Therefore, they think that they need their husbands' company now more than ever.

Worry /apprehensions

These women also claim to worry about the living and working conditions of their husbands in the country of migration. Contract workers face difficulties as working conditions are not always risk free. Therefore, the wives are bound to worry about their husband's life and health being at risk. The majority of the women shared that they spend quite a deal of their time wondering whether their husbands are getting the right food and sleep, and whether their living conditions are satisfactory and favorable or not. Some of the women also admitted to being worried about the uncertainty of their future and the uncertainty of their husband's job.

I get worried for him because I do not know what he eats, how he lives and what kind of living conditions he has to put up with?

میں اُن کے لیے بہت فکر مند ہوتی ہوں۔ پتہ نہیں وہاں وہ کیا کھاتے ہیں، کیسے گزارہ کرتے ہیں اور کس حال میں رہتے ہیں۔

Previous literature calls this a step towards cohesion where all family members tend to see themselves as part of a unit that is making efforts and sacrifices. Communication between couples is said to increase as they tend to take each moment of communications as an opportunity to bond (Fuller-Iglesias, 2015). However, for the present sample it is expressed as eustress. Additionally, there are a variety of anxieties that the wife of a migrant has, and this state of constant anxiety and worry takes a toll on her physical and mental health. Almost all the women interviewed admitted having a mixture of worries about the proper management of their household affairs and children's discipline and education.

I become anxious when I notice that my children are missing their

میں اپنے بچوں کو ابو کے لیے اُداس دیکھ کر بہت پریشان ہوں۔
father.

Majority of these women also confessed to having worried about their children who are living without their fathers. When these children miss their fathers, they become upset and inattentive in school and are distressed on the whole. Therefore, the mothers also get worried on seeing their children being sad.

Additional Responsibilities

In the absence of these male migrants, these women had started taking a more active role in the management of the family affairs, and are becoming less dependent if not all together independent. Women have taken up the responsibilities of their children,

households, management of their finances, and social interaction with the family in the absence of their husbands. But the interviews also revealed that these women were not satisfied and happy with these duties. The majority of the women thought of these duties as an obligatory burden which they had to fulfill while their men were away.

Since my husband left I had to take all the responsibilities regarding our household, our children, my parents-in-law, the extended family and other external matters. I am hard pressed with the burden of these responsibilities.

مجھ پر اُن کے جانے کے بعد گھر، باہر، بچوں، خاندان اور ساس سسر کی تمام ذمہ داری آن پڑی ہے اور میں اس ذمہ داری کے بوجھ تلے دب گئی ہوں۔

One of the major additional responsibilities of Gulf wives that resulted from their husbands' immigration was the management of their children's education. Taking care of children's education is not the only added responsibility they have taken upon themselves. Managing family finances and remittances received from husbands, keeping contacts with husbands abroad and taking care of the health of the members of the family are a few of the other added responsibilities. These findings are consistent with previous study findings (Go & Postrado, 1986; Gualti, 1993; Zachariah & Rajan, 2001). In households where no close male relatives were present, these women even took over the responsibilities of sale and purchase of property, assets and construction of their houses. These women also shared that they had to compensate for their husband's absence in family events like weddings and funerals. Some of these women who were living in joint families were also taking care of their old and unwell in-laws, which increased the burden of their daily household routine.

Care and Disciplining of Children

The upbringing of their children is also an important part of these women's responsibilities. One woman articulated the absence of her husband as a 'form of death'. Where there were young children to bring up, the spouse left behind had difficulty coping emotionally with the absence of the partner.

My biggest problem is bringing up my children single handedly in the absence of my husband.

میرا سب سے بڑا مسئلہ شوہر کی غیر موجودگی میں بچوں کی تربیت اور پرورش اکیلے کرنا ہے۔

Almost all the interviewees admitted to having problems in child-raising and disciplining. These women shared that the disciplining of their children single-handedly was a big problem for them because the children look up to their fathers as being the authority figure in the household and only submit to their mother's control to a certain extent, especially adolescents who are extremely difficult to manage. Excess of money and lack of paternal guidance in their education led these children to severe social and behavioral problems.

Social and Psychological Empowerment

The husband's absence, increased economic resources at the disposal of these wives and the ability to communicate with him whenever needed have all become instrumental in transforming a shy, dependent woman into a self-confident autonomous manager with a status equal to that of any man in the society. Majority of the women admitted that the absence of their husbands has also brought forth a very positive change in them. They have become more independent and self-reliant in managing their households, making the decisions about the children's education and marriage. They have gained confidence for venturing out into the financial setup of society and dealing with bank and in property transactions. Even the illiterate women have become more self-aware and independent. They have learnt to manage their remittances and finances single-handedly with the advice of their male relatives. When these women effectively perform duties that were earlier carried out by their husbands, they feel a great sense of pride and achievement which gives a boost to their self-esteem. The women who manage their personal, family and financial lives successfully alone are greatly valued by their husbands (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010).

1. I have changed pretty much since my husband has left. Now I make all the decisions regarding my children, the household and other matters outside the home and I do not rely on any one for anything.

1. Due to the absence of my husband I make all the decisions independently and now I am quite self-confident.

(1) اُن کے جانے کے بعد مجھ میں بہت تبدیلی آئی ہے۔ اب میں اپنے گھر کے باہر کے، بچوں کے تمام فیصلے خود کرتی ہوں اور کسی پر انحصار نہیں کرتی۔

(2) خاوند غیر موجودگی کی وجہ سے میں تمام فیصلے خود مختاری سے کرتی ہوں اور اب مجھ میں کافی حد تک خود اعتمادی آ گئی ہے

Some of the women who stated that they were less independent felt it was due to the fact that they were living in joint family systems which gave them a very minimal margin of performing these duties on their own due to the presence of other male

relatives who would do these chores on their behalf. The women living in joint family systems are more protected and taken care of than the women living independently. These independent women exercise a great amount of control and autonomy in their households. Their problem-solving and decision-making abilities develop and are enhanced to quite a great degree due to their frequent interactions with society. These women start participating in public life as well as in private life. This finding is different from latest research conducted in patriarchal societies like Turkey, Egypt, Morocco etc., where research has found that gender roles have not been reversed or affected by society level migration. In this effect previous research has not that gender roles tend to become more stereotypical and more binding for women who are left behind then when their husbands were at home (for a detailed discussion on the issue see for example Day & Icduygu, 1997, King et al., 2006, and Hampshire, 2006).

Sexual Harassment

Another issue of significance revealed in the interviews of these women was their experiences of sexual harassment in the absence of their husbands. In a patriarchal society like ours, women without their men are exposed to a variety of problems, and sexual harassment is one of them. Women in rural areas have to face more cultural and traditional constraints and are expected to stay at home for the care of family. Venturing outside their private domain in to the male dominated society renders them “vulnerable to different types of violence against them” (Khan, 2006). Few of the women openly admitted that they had faced harassment while their husbands were away.

In my husband’s absence some of his friends and male relatives make obscured sexual suggestions.

میرے شوہر کی غیر موجودگی میں کبھی کبھی اُن کے رشتے دار مرد اور دوست معنی خیز قسم کی باتیں اور اشارے کرتے ہیں۔

The harassers were usually neighbors, friends, colleagues and male relatives of the husband. These men assumed that these lonely women might be desperate and would not desire in male companionship and would not turn their offer down. Since these men perceive these lonely women as weak, vulnerable and easily approachable, they do not lose any time in pouncing on them. Women in Pakistan are not very independent. They are usually protected by their men. Therefore, the women who are alone are more exposed to these men outside their homes who might take advantage of their vulnerability.

Discrimination

In a patriarchal society like Pakistan, the male as the main link in networks of kinship, as argued by Khan (2006) that despite cultural ethnic and linguistic diversity, Pakistani women have to face strikingly similar patterns of agriculture-based tribal, feudal, clan system and kinship network. Men want their women to be dependent on them; women living alone are looked down upon and are condemned for their independence and self-reliance because independent women are considered uninhibited or rebellious. It is a major social disadvantage to be perceived as rebellious in a society where “the women’s lives are guaranteed in exchange for obedience to traditions and social norms” (Khan, 2006, p. 74). Some women, during the interviews, revealed that sometimes they are criticized for living their lives alone, yet so independently.

1. **I am always fearful that I might be defamed for living alone.**
2. **Before I leave home unaccompanied to run my errands I pray to god to protect my honor because I fear somebody can have corrupt thoughts by finding me outside the home all by myself .**

(1) ہر وقت یہی خدشہ رہتا ہے کہ کوئی مجھے یوں اکیلے زندگی گزارنے دیکھ کر کوئی الزام نہ لگا دے۔

(2) میں گھر سے نکلنے سے پہلے دعا کرتی ہوں کہ مجھے یوں اکیلا کام کرتے دیکھ کر کوئی غلط بات نہ سوچے اور خُدا میری عزت کو محفوظ رکھے۔

One of the interviewees confessed that she gained the reputation of having a doubtful character in the neighborhood just because she was taking her sick son to the hospital daily without any male escort. Other women also related such incidents where, while performing their household duties like paying their bills and shopping for groceries, they were thought to be having fun behind their husbands’ backs. Even other women looked down at women’s whose husbands were away. Another woman also related an incident when she was out to shop for groceries and was seen by her brother-in-law. When she returned home, she found him furious. On inquiring, she came to know that he was mad because he had seen her shopping alone in the market surrounded by so many strange men. The majority of these women had the fear of being labeled as a woman of bad character just because she is living on her own and doing her own duties without anybody’s help, especially a man’s help. Generally, Pakistani women are often not socially and culturally empowered to function without the protection and support of a male partner.

Emotional Insecurity

The women, who live with their husbands not around, face a lot of fears and insecurities. These women endure emotional insecurities because they become emotionally dependent on their spouses, so that when the husbands are away these women feel unsure of themselves. An interviewee related that she felt very insecure without her husband, alone in the house. She checks all doors and windows repeatedly and is very sensitive to any strange sound or people around the house.

I feel as if I live in a house that only has walls and there is no roof over me.

مجھے یوں محسوس ہوتا ہے جیسے میں صرف دیواروں میں رہتی ہوں اور میرے سر پر کوئی چھت، کوئی ساجبان نہیں۔

These insecurities are not just inner feelings but they are sometimes reinforced by their external environments. These women feel insecure because they look up to their husbands for providing security and safety to the house and the family. Therefore, when he is not around, they feel shaky and are unable to trust anyone. They develop feelings of social insecurity because of the people around them, who give them strange doubting looks and wonder what these women are really up to in the absence of their husbands.

I feel very insecure because of my husband not being around and I do not trust anyone easily.

میرے شوہر کے نہ ہونے کی وجہ سے میں بہت اپنے آپ کو بہت غیر محفوظ محسوس کرتی ہوں اور کسی پر آسانی سے اعتبار نہیں کرتی۔

Sexual Frustration

Although sexual deprivation is a very significant issue in the lives of migrants and their wives, still it is not given due attention. Pakistani cultural norms forbid the people, especially women, to talk about their sexual needs and wants. Sexual relations between a husband and wife are of great significance in their marital life, without which it becomes quite difficult for either partner. During the interviews, only one out of ten women openly admitted to being sexually deprived.

I miss physical intimacy with my husband severely because other than being a mother and a wife, I am a woman too.

میں ایک بیوی اور ماں ہونے کے ساتھ ساتھ ایک عورت بھی ہوں اور میں اپنے خاوند کی جسمانی دوری کو بہت شدت سے محسوس کرتی ہوں۔

This finding was also supported by previous study (Arnold & Shah, 1986). While the rest of the women avoided giving any details about their sexual frustrations and only shared that no doubt they that do feel bad about the physical separation, but they just accept it because it has to be endured. Some of them, especially older ladies also mentioned that they did not miss their husbands physically, or in other words, sexually. But the way they state it represents a whole element of loneliness and the amount of patience and they had to exercise.

**I have sacrificed my youth living the prime period of life
without my man only for my children and their future.**

میں نے اپنی جوانی اور زندگی اپنے گھر اور بچوں کی خاطر قربان کر دی ہے۔

These women explained that their sacrifice started the day their husbands decided to leave for work abroad. They sacrificed their emotional and physical companionship for the betterment of their children and the family. These women endured the agony of separation from their spouses so that the financial conditions of their families could be improved, thus leading to an overall improvement in their living conditions. Thus their rights as women were sacrificed, as their roles as a wife and a mother. Previous literature seems to indicate that separation from husbands can result in a strain on marriages and some marriages may even break in face of such separations. In the case of the present research participant, it was felt that none of the participant felt that they had any choice in the matter. This may also be linked to lack of concern for the sexual needs of women in patriarchal societies (Tarar, & Pulla, 2014; for a detailed discussion on infidelity among migrant husbands can be read in Boehm 2011; Frank & Wildsmith 2005).

Hesitation in Disclosure of Emotions

Spouses left behind did not generally discuss their emotions and feelings that absence generates, either with family or friends. The attitude that most displayed was 'just-get-on-with-it'.

I don't really miss my husband a great deal

مجھے اپنے شوہر کی کمی کچھ خاص محسوس نہیں ہوتی۔

Although families had extended kin support, where emotional endurance is concerned, relatives were little equipped to handle grief and the sense of loss. Almost all the women from rural backgrounds were hesitant in sharing their feelings about this issue. At first, they avoided giving any details about their personal lives and they dealt with the questions in a very casual manner by saying that we do not feel our

husbands' absence as being too much of a problem. But later, on further probing and rapport building, they started disclosing their feelings and problems regarding their husbands' migration. Though some of the interviewees from the urban background were quite open and frankly related their problems and their feelings about the issue, which was very helpful during the study.

Social Support in Joint and Nuclear Families

Absence was strongly felt in nuclear households due to the lack of social support, which is provided in a joint family system. Women living in nuclear families showed more tendencies of anxiety and depression than the women living in joint family systems, because the women living in extended family systems were able to share their problems and to counter their solitude with their family's support around them. These women also felt more burdened by the additional responsibilities they had to perform while their husbands were away without the help of any family members or relatives. These women were independent but did not have interdependence with the family.

My parents and siblings live in another city and I don't have any in-laws too therefore I have to deal with all the problems solely in my husband's absence.

میرے والدین اور بھائی بہن دوسرے شہر میں رہتے ہیں اور میرے سرال بھی نہیں ہیں جس کی وجہ سے خاوند کی غیر موجودگی میں مجھے ہر قسم کی مصیبت خود چھیلنی پڑتی ہے۔

The interviews showed that the women who were living cordially in joint family systems were supported by their families considerably. Majority of the women explained that these joint living arrangements were made when their husbands left home for work abroad. These arrangements were made to make sure that these women and their children were well taken care of in the absence of their male household head. The women who lived in the joint family system revealed that the everyday responsibilities of household and children were shared by other family members too. It was also found out that some of these women of migrant households are also depended for emotional support on women relatives or neighbors whose husbands had also migrated because they could understand each other's circumstances very well. These joint living arrangements were either with the husband's family or with the wife's family. The decision of living with either family was up to the woman and her husband.

Since I live with my in-laws, I do not have any particular responsibilities outside the home. My husband's brothers and relatives are very helpful toward me.

سرال میں رہنے کی وجہ سے مجھ پر کوئی خاص ذمہ داری نہیں ہے۔ میرے خاوند کی غیر موجودگی میں ان کے بھائی اور باقی رشتہ دار میرے بہت کام آتے ہیں۔

Conflict with In-laws

Women living with their in-laws after marriage have to face confronting them alone, once their husbands are away. They cannot count on any emotional or moral support from their husbands in any matters of family dispute and have to deal with everything on their own. There is also no support network in the in-laws because of which these women cannot share their personal feelings.

It's really hard to live with one's in laws when the husband is away. I have to bear everything alone and I can't speak my heart out to anyone.

سرال میں خاوند کے بغیر رہنا بہت کٹھن ہے۔ مجھے سب کچھ اکیلے سہنا پڑتا ہے اور اپنے دل کی بات بھی کسی سے نہیں کہہ سکتی۔

This suppression of feelings leads to severe depression in many women. Comparatively, women living with their own parents after their husbands migrate are less likely to be despondent concerning family matters. During the interviews, most of women admitted to having severe conflicts with their in-laws. One woman articulated that she severely misses her husband during family disputes as she had to face them all on her own. The finding is consistent with the previous study (Gualti, 1983). Interestingly this has also been reported in international literature also. For example for a nation like Mexico, where multiple generations may exist in the same family unit, the wives of the migrant are criticized along similar lines (Fuller-Iglesias, 2015).

Communication

There is little that the husband or the wife can do, under current conditions, to avoid physical separation. However, there are several ways of justifying the pain of separation and lessening the feeling of loneliness, such as communication and family and community networks. Periodic remittances, gifts and messages received from husbands through visits from friends returning on leave also help to lessen the severity of the problem. One way to amend a woman's problem of loneliness, mental strain and misunderstanding is to have constant contact with her husband through letters, telephone calls, email and the Internet chat. All the subjects in the interview

used all available means of communication, the most common being letters and telephone calls.

Therefore, it was discovered that frequent communication links between husband and wife plays a major role in easing the severity of loneliness and avoiding its extreme consequences. The interviewees revealed that these means of communication were also employed while making important decisions regarding the house, the children and other important family matters.

1. **I am constantly in touch with my husband through letters and telephone.**
2. **The internet and email has lessened the distances between us to a great extent.**

(1) میرا اپنے خاوند سے فون اور خط کے ذریعے مسلسل رابطہ رہتا ہے۔
 (2) انٹرنیٹ اور ای میل نے ہمارے درمیان کے فاصلے کافی کم کر دیے ہیں۔

This relationship between the wives and husbands is of prime value for the relationship. Without adequate communication, fragmentation of the marriage occurs that may cause the relationship to diminish over time. This communication acts as emotional bondage between the spouses who live apart for long periods of time, and a break-up in this communication may result in irreparable strain on the marriage even after the migrant husband returns (Fuller-Iglesias, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This current study investigated the psychosocial impact of male migration on the wives left behind and its finding suggests that the impact of migration on women can be positive, negative or both, depending on the ability and background, as well as the family environment in which the women are placed. A starting point for examining the impact is provided by the in-depth interview responses given by Gulf wives to the question about the problems they have faced and the benefits they have received from the migration of their husbands. Favorable outcomes of migration like rising incomes and living standards outweighs the disadvantageous ones like agonizing loneliness of divided families, the stress of expected roles and responsibilities entails lingering psychological problems and social challenges for the women in the wake of migration.

Women and men perform their traditional roles in a society where both the partners perform their duties and fulfill their obligations in separate spheres of life on reciprocal basis. Thus, women and men keep a fine balance by complimenting each other's role and create a complementary society. Due to the male migration the balance between these complementary roles is invariably strained and as a consequence the women in migrant households were obligated to take a new role which eventually led them to the change in their self-concept and self-identity.

This transformation in their traditional roles has both favorable and adverse effects on their lives. The positive changes are namely that of empowerment, self-reliance, independence, confidence and increased self-esteem. And the negative effects are regularly the forced change in their traditional roles due to the additional responsibility that are undertaken by them in the absence of their husband. This change in women role is sometimes incomplete, the women are compelled to change in the wake of the migration but the change is unwelcome since there is a discrepancy between her expected and personally desired role. Some time when the women are changed, the environment around her is not conducive therefore it does not accept her new role which also results in an incomplete change. The burden of responsibilities that is thrust upon her while the husband is away creates an immense strain and stress in the women which is further intensified by the agony of loneliness and distress. Therefore, the findings revealed by this study are of immense value in understanding the psycho-social impact of migration on the women left behind and could serve as a research base for any upcoming, conclusive or quantitative researches about this subject.

LIMITATIONS

This study has been successful in exploring the voice of the wives who are left behind when their spouses migrate to other countries. There are certain limitations in the research design which can help future research build-upon the findings of the current research. The current research employs a small sample. Though small samples are recommended when the researchers wish to study a phenomena in depth; however, this poses a threat to the external generalizability of the research. Future research may employ larger sample to explore the phenomena further and maybe use a more representative sample from a cross-section of the population. Also, future research can expand the understanding about the psycho-social issues by controlling the demographic and psychographic characteristic of the sample. The researchers felt that socio-economic status, location of residence, relationships between spouses, duration of marriage etc. were important predictors for specific psycho-social problems experienced by the wives.

Also future research may benefit from mixing other methods to gain a wholesome view of the experiences of these wives. Even though the interviews spanned over a two-week period for each respondent, the interview method was able to generate only a snapshot view of the experiences. Due to the sensitive and personal nature of the topic under study, the researcher could not question the participant after a certain point. Therefore probing was highly context dependent; secondly, rapport development and maintenance was also very precarious and had to be negotiated very carefully with each interview and each respondent. Use of multiple methods may help future research tackle this limitation; this may also help in probing the experiences in more subtle ways than the one allowed by the structured interview.

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