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## **The Impact of Rural Migration on Social Structures and Community Life: A Sociological Investigation**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the impacts of rural-to-urban migration on social structures and life at the community level in the rural regions of Pakistan. A quantitative study was undertaken, using a sample from 100 respondents queried using structured questionnaires. It focused on the impact of migration on family structure, socialization levels, and the level of involvement in the society at large. Survey respondents reported significant changes in family roles, particularly with respect to care giving and making key decisions; responsibilities were often assumed by women or elderly family members who stayed in the home country. Furthermore, 65% indicated an erosion of social cohesion in the sense that less community socializing and trust were in place. Respondents stated that community participation declined during the migration process for half of them. Economic contribution 70% of the participants reported an increase in household incomes resulting from remittances that migrants send. However, 20% felt financially unstable due to irregular remittances. This study finds that although remittances contribute to migration's economic benefits to rural families, they also disorganize traditional family arrangements and hamper community relationships. The policy recommendations need to facilitate social and economic restructuring that will strengthen the impact of migration to the rural areas of needs shift.

Keywords: Rural migration, social structures, family dynamics, community participation.

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

The rural-to-urban migration is another issue that affects not just the socio-economic scenario but also social structures and community life in rural areas. This phenomenon, largely driven by economic, educational, and health resources found in urban centers, redistributes the population into significant mutations in both the societies involved (Bilsborrow, 1992). In many developing countries, such as Pakistan, the flow of people from rural to urban areas has gradually increased during recent times with socio-cultural changes that alter traditional family systems and social harmony within a community (Rogaly & Coppard, 2003). Traditionally, in rural areas, people used to live close-knit relations with collective identity and interdependence. But when people, particularly the younger generation, migrate to an urban city, all these attributes have considerably changed over time (Tacoli, 2003). The migration shifts population dynamics in many ways for rural areas. For instance, "migration alters the workforce in agriculture, changes family composition, and modifies governance and participation at the local level" (King, 2012). It also changes the gender roles since women often take up new responsibilities because male members who migrate to urban areas to find employment leave their families behind (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005). These changes may affect the economy as well as social tissues in rural areas, thereby causing distortions in traditional social structures (Lipton, 1980). It affects community life by upsetting social cohesion and local



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participation in communal activities (Ravenstein, 1885). Devaluation of action members in the community, especially those contributing much in social capital, leads to lower community engagement, and this in turn further weakens the structure of society (Coleman, 1990). Social capital refers to networks, trust, and mutual obligations between people needed for the formation of social cohesion in rural communities. Thus, these ties have thus been weakened by the continuous out-migration of people, especially youngsters, and changed the character and culture values of rural societies (Skeldon, 1997).

### **Problem Statement**

Though much is known on the economic impact of rural migrations, the influence on social structures and community life in rural areas is less discussed. As it transforms the nature of rural communities, knowledge on how this influences social cohesion and family structures and participation in community life becomes essential (Hugo, 1996). Specifically, in Pakistan, rurality and out-migration have deep impacts on which alters social and cultural continuity. The study is attempting to explore the dynamics and contribute to the sociological understanding of rural migrations broader impacts.

### **Objectives**

- a) Examine the effects of rural-to-urban migration on family forms in rural areas.
- b) To evaluate the impact of rural migration on social cohesion and community participation.
- c) This study was conducted with the objective of finding out whether out-migration in a rural family affects gender roles.
- d) Analyze the influence of migration on rural area economic and social capital.

### **Hypotheses**

- a) Migration from rural lands is highly likely to modify the family structures considerably, where there would be a revolution on the traditional roles in families.
- b) Rural migration adversely affects the social cohesion that existed in rural regions and reduces participation in rural regions.
- c) In addition, there is a transference of gender roles. Women embrace most of the commanding positions in the household.
- d) The emigration brings a loss in social capital so that trust and networks are weakened in the rural society.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theories of Migration**

Theories of migration have evolved with time, explaining the underlying drivers and the effects of migration. One of the early theories is that of Ravenstein's "Laws of Migration" postulated in 1885, which regarded migration as being caused by push and pull factors, whereby people were pushed from rural areas due to lack of opportunities and pulled toward urban centers by prospecting better living conditions (Ravenstein, 1885). This framework was further developed by Lee (1966) in introducing the intervening obstacles that influence the migration decisions of people.

Another huge theory is the neoclassical economic theory of migration, trying to look at decisions as individualistic for maximizing income and employment opportunities (Todaro, 1976). This theory has been extensively used to provide some legitimacy to the



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major reasons for rural-urban migration in terms of economic factors. However, the new economics of labor migration, as propounded by Stark and Bloom (1985) considers that household and not individual decisions aim at income diversification and more importantly risk minimization.

Social network theory is also important in understanding migration. According to Massey et al. (1993), migrant networks decrease the cost and risk associated with migration through information, financial help, and emotional support. They help maintain the flow of migrants over time and develop social capital for migrants both in origin and destination regions.

### **Migration and Family Structures**

Migration critically impacts family structures. The role of different members changes as a result, as generally defined, within households. Deshingkar and Grimm (2005) explain that migration often creates a break-up of the extended family since the younger members migrate to urban areas while their parents and other elderly remain in their hometown. The direction in such migration alters the old pattern of caregiving, which particularly in rural societies shifts more women and older people to engage in typical housekeeping roles. Tacoli (2002) has found that migration will lead to the feminization of rural households. This is because, in the process of deciding and earning, women emerge to become significant shareholders in such households. However, in a patriarchal society where strong elements of gender remain predominant, increased responsibility may also translate to more burdens for women (De Haan, 1999).

### **Social Cohesion and Community Life**

The concern of an impact of migration on social cohesion in rural sociology is significant. Social cohesion involves the bonds that hold together the community, including shared values, trust, and networks of support (Putnam, 2000). When a significant portion of the population migrates, it certainly breaks these ties, with a resultant decline in participative levels within the community and the resultant decline in social capital.

Migration according to Skeldon, (1997) tends to lead to de-ruralization-that devastates the participation of the locals within their community events and governance. Depopulation devotes the social cohesiveness of the rural areas, weakening communal ties due to weak relations between more members of the community, thereby reducing the ability of a community to gather together as one (Coleman, 1990). Out-migration leaves fewer active members in community organizations, thus suffering from a loss of leadership and social cohesion (White, 2009).

However, there are studies that actually point out that migration promotes social cohesion, through the flow of remittances and the creation of migrant networks (Mazzucato, 2009). Thus, these networks are able to sustain relations between the migrants and their home communities with the flow of resources and information flows (Bourdieu, 1986). Overall, the question of whether migration affects social cohesion is still mixed-bag: positive in some cases and negative in others.

### **Economic Impact of Migration on Rural Communities**

There have been massive researches on the economic consequences of migration to rural economies. Remittances play a very significant role in the positive development of the economy of rural areas, as they imply monetary transfers made by the migrants to their



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families back in their home countries (Taylor, 1999). Often, remittances had gone to the improvement of living standards through investments in education, health, and agricultural development for most of the households in the rural areas (Adams & Page, 2005). Labor loss due to migration can also affect the agricultural sector, being a backbone for many rural economies. The drain of the labor force's able-bodied youthful years to another destination could lead to a shortage of labor that tends to deplete agricultural productivity and slow down economic activities in rural areas (King, 2012). In addition, the remittance sharing does not equally distribute the wealth within the rural communities but it tends to heighten the already existing inequalities since the most remittances are received by more wealthy households with better networks of migrants (De Haas, 2010).

### **Gender and Migration**

Gendered dimensions of migration are also relevant. Shifts in gender roles occur across locations, particularly in rural settings, where men move to towns or cities to seek employment, while female members of their household take care of the homes (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Research also indicates that women in migrant families often assume a new set of responsibilities, for example, control over finances, decision-making, and community involvement (Kofman, 2004). However, this impact is compounded for women. Though some women experience enhanced autonomy and power following migration, others experience increased burdens and social exclusion (Chant & Craske, 2003). Urban migrant women also suffer from discrimination and exploitation, particularly within informal labor sectors (Piper, 2005).

2.6 Migration and Social Capital: Social capital defined as the networks, norms, and trust that enable collective action plays a significant role in shaping the outcomes of migration (Bourdieu, 1986). In fact, migrant networks provide valuable resources and support to individuals making the move to urban areas for settlement. They can help one through the process of migration (Massey et al., 1993). These also bring them closer to their countries of origin by keeping alive the social ties between the migrants and their home communities, thereby facilitating the traffic of remittances, information, and social support (Portes, 1998). However, migration does have the effect of dismantling social capital in rural areas. The loss of key members of a community weakens the social network structures and reduces access to local leaders or organizers (Putnam, 2000). Decreasing social capital makes a community lose its resiliency and capability to solve collective problems, like being in poverty and underdeveloped conditions (Woolcock, 1998).

### **Materials and Methods**

This study used a quantitative approach and surveyed 100 participants' perceptions on the effects of rural migration on social structures and community life using a structured questionnaire. These participants were purposively selected from four diverse rural areas of Pakistan where there was an equal distribution of men and women from all directions. This questionnaire, pre-tested for reliability, elicited information on demographics, migration experiences, family dynamics, and social cohesion. Data collection was conducted in person over one month and field researchers administered the questionnaire after briefing the participants on the objectives of the study as well as the ethical considerations relevant to the study. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics in the SPSS software to examine the issues related to migration and



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changes in family roles, community participation, and social cohesion.

### Results and Discussion

#### Demographic Profile of Participants

The demographic profile of the respondents included age, gender, education level, and occupation. From Table 1 below, the respondent distributed averagely by gender whereby it was 50 males to 50 females. Most of the respondents 60% were aged between 30-45 years of age while 30% were aged between 18-29 years of age. The remaining was 10% above 45 years of age. Concerning education, 45% of the respondents had secondary education, whereas 35% had a Master's degree and 20% never attained any form of education. Concerning the nature of work, 40% were engaged in agricultural activities, 30% in urban jobs when undertaking migration, and 30% were housewives or inactive.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage (%)	Number of Participants
Gender	Male	50	50
	Female	50	50
Age Group	18-29	30	30
	30-45	60	60
	Above 45	10	10
Education Level	No Formal Education	20	20
	Secondary Education	45	45
	Masters Degree	35	35
Occupation	Agriculture	40	40
	Urban Jobs	30	30
	Homemakers/Unemployed	30	30

4.2 Impact of Migration on Family Dynamics: Being a related objective of the study, the researcher cared for the way family dynamics were affected by such migration from rural to urban areas. Table 2 summarises the responses of respondents on queries regarding changes in roles in the family, in decision-making, and in responsibilities towards home-caregiving. Results here are reflected to show that 70 percent of respondents responded to the question that family roles have really changed with this new migration. In most regions, it was the older relatives or the women who were often left behind in rural areas who took on the responsibilities of looking after the children. Another change experienced by 55 percent of the respondents was the centralized decision-making power within the household because the male migrants assumed leadership even though they were away from home. Only 25 percent replied that nothing of major importance changed in family roles, while the rest provide clear evidence that migration had significantly changed the structure and the very function of families in the countryside.

Table 2: Impact of Migration on Family Dynamics

Aspect of Family Dynamics	Percentage of Participants Reporting Change (0%)
Significant Shifts in Family Roles	70
Caregiving Burden Shifted	70



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Centralized Decision-making	55
No Major Changes in Family Roles	25

Data from this study reveal that the process of rural migration alters the normative family dynamics along with the caregiving and decision-making, which are created and assumed to be given responsibilities. In most of these instances, the remaining population, especially the female part, faces greater stress in assuming domestic duties and the roles presumed for a typical migrant.

**4.3 Social Cohesion and Community Participation:** The research also focused on the influence of the movement on social cohesion and community participation in the region. As observed from Table 3, 65% of the respondents indicated that migration had negatively impacted their belongingness to the community. Most of the migrants reported that they cut off ties with their place of origin rural communities once they relocated to urban centers, while the migrants who remained in the region reported a reduction in trust and cooperation among the neighbors. In addition, 50% of the people felt that migration led to a decline in community participation, where individuals reduce their participation in local activities or communal undertakings like farming or community projects. However, 20% of the people expressed the view that migration had boosted social cohesion through the different remittances that the migrants used to improve communal resources.

Table 3: Impact of Migration on Social Cohesion and Community Participation

Aspect of Social Cohesion/Participation	Percentage of Participants (%)
Negative Impact on Sense of Community	65
Reduction in Community Participation	50
Strengthened Social Cohesion through Remittances	20

These results indicate how migration may erode the social capital in rural communities, especially regarding trust and bonding. However, at other times, the remittances that migrants send back may actually sustain or enhance the community assets and, therefore, strengthen ties.

**4.4 Economic Impact of Migration:** The study also covered economic impacts on the migration process, which focused on discussing how remittances affected the rural families' living standards. Table 4 indicates 70% increase in household income due to the remittances that the migrant family members sent back home. Increased income helped finance improved housing, education, and health for its members. Some 20% of the participants stated that remittances are irregular or even uncollected, hence leading to instability in finances. 10% had no experience with any economic impact.

Table 4: Economic Impact of Migration

Economic Impact	Percentage of Participants (%)
Improved Household Income Due to Remittances	70
Irregular/ Insufficient Remittances	20
No Economic Impact	10

The findings highlight the dual role of migration as both an opportunity for economic advancement and a potential source of financial vulnerability, particularly when



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remittances are unstable.

### Discussion

The results of this research show how difficult and complicated migration from the countryside has been for the social and community structure. Altogether family dynamics concerning care of the family and decision-making are changed; people staying behind take on new roles and positions. Trust and participation in the community somehow weaken because of it, as participants reported that there had been a decrease in such factors. While remittances can raise household income and even community resources, they also represent a source of unpredictable financial support for families that receive irregular infusions from migrants. Deep social and economic impacts result from rural migration, permeating the very core of a family to extrapolate into the community as a whole. These results shed light into the many challenges that rural families and communities face in efforts to adjust to the impact of migration and to the significant dimensions that policies and programs about migrants have left and should continue to support for the families who remain.

### Conclusion

This study has shown how rural-to-urban migration heavily influences the social setup of structures and community life in Pakistan. The data from 100 respondents showed that such migration alters family scenarios since much of the caregiver and decision-making responsibilities devolve on women and older members who stay back. Rural community social cohesion is adversely affected because many of these migrants and their families feel estranged from their communities, thus contributing to less trust and less participation by the group. For many, remittances add wealth to households, while creating instability in family budgets, since these remittances rely on fitful support. The current piece of research identifies the ambivalence of migration and how this labor produces benefits while, at the same time, unsettling the traditional roles within families and communities in order to present an argument for policies that would aid rural families in transforming to change.

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