



Migration and Its Consequences for Rural Family Structures: A Case Study Approach

Awais Ur Rahman

Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan. Email: sultanawais4344@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the impacts of rural-to-urban migration on family dynamics and social cohesion in rural Pakistan. The research looks into how migratory activities impact various roles in family, marital relationships, child well-being, and community integration. This qualitative case study approach was conducted among 50 participants using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Shifting family responsibilities within the household brought extra roles for women, whereas marital relationships became strained due to separation. Children had emotional challenges, and community cohesion was compromised. Although improvement in financial stability was reported through remittances, dependency manifested itself as well. Thus, this study provided insights into multifaceted effects of migration to rural families and brought out the need for focused support and intervention.

Keywords: Migration, Rural family structure, marital relationships

Introduction

Background of the Study

Migration is considered one of the most important social processes that are found in most countries; an example of this can be cited for Pakistan. It refers to the movement of people from rural areas towards the urban areas for achieving better opportunities (Arif, 2004). Rural-to-urban migration is occurring at a very speedy rate in Pakistan owing to the basic economic pressures, unemployment, and scarce resources available in the rural areas (Chaudhry & Imran, 2013). A huge number of people are leaving their villages for cities in pursuit of finding better opportunities for jobs, education, and healthcare (Siddiqui, 2003). In fact, this process of migration changes the traditional family structures found in rural settings which are generally typified as family bonds and shared responsibilities. The movement of members of a family, especially males, may alter the role, responsibilities and family relationships of the remaining family members. Only those who migrate but also those have to stay behind are affected by the migration process. More difficult is the case of some issues that family members suffer due to being left behind in the rural areas, most of whom are women, children, and the elderly. Some of the women have to be caretakers for other members, children who lost their emotional support from their fathers, and for the elderly, isolation is more likely (Gazdar, 2003). These changes totally destroy the class structure of the rural communities and even make the social cohesion that previously held families together weaken (Khan, 2007). The paper focuses on the social, economic, and emotional impacts of migration on the rural family structures of Pakistan.



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Problem Statement

Traditionally, rural families in Pakistan are quite robust with well-defined roles between men, women, and children (Todaro, 1997). Families stay together or close to one another where the family share the responsibilities like farming for their families, care of elders, or bringing up children. However, this structure is changing as people, especially the youths, are increasingly moving from rural to urban centers. Especially men are moving from villages to cities for work purposes, and they stay away from their families. This eventually changes the roles and responsibilities within the family unit. Women might have to play the role of breadwinners, children might have to grow up without the presence of their fathers, and elderly family members might be deprived of the care and attention they require (Qureshi, 2012). Migration further impacts the social integration of rural communities. In many instances, separation can cause the weakening of previously strong bonds that held them together (de Haan, 1999). The families that would support and depend on each other can end up becoming more isolated and disconnected, thus resulting in a loss of the sense of community that defines rural life (Ullah, 2013). This paper aims at understanding how migration impacts family structures in the rural areas of Pakistan as well as social cohesion.

Research Objectives

- a) To analyze the degree that migration in the rural area impacts family roles and responsibilities.
- b) Understanding the emotional and social impacts left by families, especially on women and elders.
- c) Analyze how migration influences rural families to change new gender roles.
- d) Analyzing the effects of migration on social cohesion within rural communities.

Hypotheses

H1: Rural-to-urban migration undermines traditional family forms and ties in rural Pakistan.

H2: Migration leads to a significant change in the role of gender as female members take up responsibility at the rural homes.

H3. Migration results in increased social and emotional isolation among older relatives.

H4: Migration decreases social bonding and collective assistance in the rural areas.

Literature Review

It has been one of the major concerns of many scholars, especially the social structures and family unit that it affects. In the context of this study, rural-urban migration involves some extreme implications on the individual level as well as the family and community being left behind. This literature review discusses the existing literature on migration and, importantly, the impact of migration on rural family structures, gender roles, and social cohesion. It therefore accounts specifically for the Pakistan experience, a country leading by example in terms of the high number of its migrators from rural to urban bases (Siddiqui, 2003).



Rural-to-Urban Migration

A Global Perspective: Generally, migration has been followed all around the globe, indicated mainly by economic, social, and environmental reasons (Todaro, 1997). In this regard, transferring people from rural agricultural lifestyles to urban industrial employment is often followed by changes in family roles and structures (Van Hear, 1998). In developing countries, usually, the movement takes place in pursuit of better opportunities for employment, education, and health-care facility (Rehman, 2010; Stark, 1991). This impact goes beyond the migrating person because it opens ripples of change in their family and community (Robinson, 2003). Most studies report that, for the people staying back, this process of migration causes them both loss and gain. On one hand, the remittances coming from migrants enhance the economic status of rural families by giving them room for investing in better house, education, and health services (Ullah, 2013). Conversely, the absence of family members, but particularly males, also burdens those remaining, with women often having to take on extra family work (Jamal, 2015; Rehman, 2010).

Migration in Pakistan

The country experiencing rapid rural-to-urban movement due to economic distress in rural economies. The large proportion of the population remains agriculture-based and finds the agricultural sector severely afflicted by the lack of water resources, poor infrastructure, and a number of outdated farming methods, thus showing an increased number of families moving from rural backgrounds to urban centers for improving life standards (Arif, 2004). It is said that this migration trend deranges the old and traditional family structure as well as social patterns in the rural areas (Chaudhry & Imran, 2013).

In Pakistan, migration changes the dynamics of families where women fill the positions in houses with men away (Qureshi, 2012). Children and the elderly suffer from psychological trauma due to long-term separation in case of family members (Khan, 2007). The social networking system that brings together families and communities in rural areas collapses (de Haan, 1999). In fact, studies elsewhere in the world have indicated that migration is taking a toll on families and communities; and even here in Pakistan, this does not seem to be an exception (Gazdar, 2003).

Impact of Migration on Family Structures

The usual household types in the rural setting are joint family households, comprising three or more generations of one family dwelling together and taking up collective responsibilities. Traditionally, with time, these family structures become inculcated in cultural and social norms (Malik, 2005). However, migration could disrupt these arrangements because migratory migration often takes place from key members of the family head, especially men who often migrate for greener pastures, mostly in the urban centers (Jamal, 2015). Studies have further pointed out the migration and change in rural family systems (Stark, 1991; Yazdani, 2019). Women take up roles previously being performed by men such as financial management, childcare, and agriculture tasks for themselves (Todaro, 1997). Role conversion in this manner also brings a positive impact on



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women and gives them more authority and ability to take decisions (Gazdar, 2003). It can lead to stress and added workload, especially in societies where women are not considered eligible for such traditional roles (Rehman, 2010). Absence of fathers and husbands can very seriously emotionally and psychologically affect families, especially the children who are threatened with feelings of abandonment, as well as older family members threatened with isolation and lack of care (Robinson, 2003). These changes may weaken the family unit and undermine support systems that are crucial to the functioning of rural households (Ullah, 2013).

Gender Dynamics and Migration

Migration significantly affects the roles of the migrating communities within the gender dynamics in a family at the rural home. Traditionally, men are involved in economic productive activities where they play the central breadwinner role, while women are responsible for carrying out various home activities in the rural areas (Kothari, 2003). In this context, the migration of men to an urban setting calls for the assumption of more responsibilities among women both in the home and the community at large (Khan, 2007). Therefore, this shift in roles will change the gender characteristics because more women are involved in decisions over the family's resources (Yazdani, 2019). Many studies have confirmed that women in rural Pakistan are now gradually assuming roles previously held by men (Qureshi, 2012). These include such roles as managing finances, maintaining livestock, and making decisions on children's education (Chaudhry & Imran, 2013). This shift can make the women more capable and self-sufficient but at the same time, increases the anxiety and burden of work on women (Rehman, 2010). In some contexts, the family or society as a whole may be opposed to women working in non-traditional professions (Malik, 2005). Migration also has implications for gender relations among rural communities. In most cases, many women are left behind in villages and face greater isolation caused by social pressures. Often, they bear the household management single-handedly. Migration has, in some instances, led to social fragmentation and breakdowns of cohesiveness within families and the community at large (Gazdar, 2003).

Social Cohesion and Migration

By cohesion in this context, bonds that bind a community together and enable it to function as such are referred to by Van Hear (1998). These bonds, in the rural context, are mainly bound by family ties, shared responsibilities, and mutual support (Arif, 2004). However, migration weakens these bonds as it takes away key members of the community and shakes the traditional support systems (Stark, 1991). There are several studies suggesting that rural-urban migration has led to a breakdown in social cohesion. Families who were formerly dependent on one another for support and company may become rudely isolated as the family members leave for urban centers (Khan, 2007). Such fragmentation of the family can result in lessened community ties and decreased belonging, which defines rural life (Robinson, 2003).

Studies have revealed that in Pakistan, migration decouples social cohesion in rural areas (Ullah, 2013). As the family becomes increasingly fractured, the social



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contacts that provided support when needed become weakened (Siddiqui, 2003). This inescapably leads to increasing social isolation of especially women and elderly who are the left-behinds when the members migrate (Jamal, 2015).

Research Methodology

In this study, we will use a qualitative case study design to investigate how rural-to-urban migration influences family dynamics and social cohesion in rural Pakistan. We chose the sampling locations as selected rural villages from the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The selected locations have higher rates of out-migration. There were 50 participants involved in the study through purposive and snowball sampling. The data collection method was through in-depth interviews and discussions in focus groups. This availed a comprehensive insight and access to both those who would be the main concerned parties and those around them. Thirty interviews lasted for about 60 to 90 minutes. The report also encompasses three focus group discussions. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was carried out, leading to patterns connecting changes in family roles, communication, and social relationships. The research conducted was within the bounds of ethical compliance and mattered on informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for their cultures. Geographical limitations of the study do not bound its generalisability in the explanations of migration effects on family structures of the rural family settings of Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Participants Demographics

We conducted interviews and focus groups with a total of 50 participants. The demographic details of the participants are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Category	Number of Participants	Percentage
Migrant Family Members	20	40%
Spouses of Migrants	15	30%
Children of Migrants	10	20%
Community Leaders	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Shifts in Family Roles and Responsibilities

Our study reveals a profound shift in roles for families with emigrated males. We found many women assume responsibility for work that, traditionally, men have completed. It's managing money for the household, important decisions, and making sure children are fed and cared for. For instance, one participant described that

"Since my husband left the city to work, everything is up to me. I never used to deal with money, but now I take all the decisions on my family's behalf."

Table 2: Changes in Family Responsibilities

Responsibility	Percentage of Participants Reporting Change
Household Management	70%



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Financial Decisions	65%
Childcare	60%
Community Involvement	40%

Impact on Marital Relationships

As a consequence, physical migration entailed a wide range of painful psychological and social disturbances in marriages. Often, interviewees mentioned the feeling of loneliness, mistrust, and several conflicts that emerged in their relationships after migration. For example:

"We talk on the phone, but that's not the same, sometimes I feel that we are growing away from each other, and it is hard to keep a strong bond with someone."

Our statistics reveal that 55 percent of married participants had strained relationships because of migration, and 45 percent reported that they managed to strengthen the bond between them despite the migration. Summary Table 3 Impact of Migration on Marital Relationships

Table 3: Impact on Marital Relationships

Effect	Percentage of Participants Experiencing Effect
Increased Conflict	55%
Strengthened Bond	45%

Effects on Children and Parenting

Many children left behind by migrating parents present symptoms of emotional collapse. Some of the participants said that their children in places of origin were changing in ways they disapprove. The mother reported:

"My son really misses his father. My son is also very quiet today and hardly talks anymore."

The study also found that while 50% of children changed their behavior, 30% received better performance in academic opportunities with the help of remittances. Table 4 presents effects on children:

Table 4: Effects on Children:

Effect	Percentage of Children Affected
Behavioural Changes	50%
Improved Academic Performance	30%
No Significant Change	20%

Social Cohesion and Community Relations

The social cohesion in the rural communities was affected by migration. We noticed that migrant-member households had low participation rates in community activities. According to a community leader,

"Families who have any member working in the city are more self-centered. They no longer attend community events like they use to."

Table 5: Community Involvement Changes

Change	Percentage of Participants Reporting Change
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Decreased Participant	65%
Increased Financial Contribution	35%

Economic Impact of Remittances

Remittances from migrants contributed significantly to the financial stability of rural families. The interviewed reported spending remittances in order to improve dwelling conditions, education, and health care. However, dependence on remittances created some monetary instability in case of delayed or stopped supply of the funds. Table 6 Consolidation of Economic Impact of Remittances:

Table 6: Economic Impact of Remittances

Use of Remittances	Percentage of Families Utilizing
Home Improvement	45%
Education	35%
Healthcare	20%

Psychological and Emotional Consequences

Migrants themselves as well as their family members suffered with psychological stress while separating. For example, migrants interviewed argued that they were feeling lonely and distanced from their families. The persons in families remained burdened with responsibilities that they were not prepared to accept. "It's not easy staying away from the family for so long. I'd feel a little sorry for the children since they cannot be there with their mom when they are really growing up."

Our data showed that 60% of the migrants and 55% of the members of family were highly emotionally distressed due to the migration process. Table 7 Psychological impact:

Table 7: Psychological Impact

Group	Percentage Experiencing Stress
Migrants	60%
Family Members	55%

Discussion of Findings

Our research proves the impacts of the rural-urban migration on the family structure and social cohesiveness are multi-dimensional. Often, changes in the family role led to increasing women's burden as well as changed family dynamics. Physical and emotional distance caused marital relationships much pressure though not every couple was gravely affected. Children were not exempt from experiencing different emotional responses-for instance, some faced changed behavior in persons, while others received the fruit of more improved educational facilities through remittances. Social cohesiveness in the community was also lowered since many people would contribute little in the communal functions. Economic benefits of remittances were quite substantial but posed a problem of dependency.

It reflects the very intricate interplay between the influence of migration, family roles, and community dynamics. It emphasizes the imperative to offer migrant families support in order to forestall adverse impacts while accentuating the



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positive effects of migration.

Conclusion

This paper examines the influence of rural-to-urban migration on family dynamics and social cohesion in rural Pakistan, unfolding important changes in family role and marital relationships, community relations, and other types of social interaction. We have found that responsibilities change with the nature of responsibilities women take while men migrate; marriages are often strained due to physical and mental distance. Children of migrants had emotional problems and, with their reduced engagement with local affairs, had adverse consequences on the strength of community cohesion. Remittances were significant sources of economic support for the families of migrants but brought about dependency as well. Thus, these results highlight the need to particularly focus on interventions that can help mitigate the economic as well as the emotional implications of migration and underline the importance of developing policies as well as community programs to maintain migrant families and social relationships.

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