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PATERNAL MIGRATION AND CHILD WELLBEING: A HOLISTIC STUDY OF LEFT BEHIND CHILDREN OF SINGLE MOTHER HOUSEHOLD OF QUETTA CITY

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Abstract
Paternal migration significantly restructures family dynamics, leaving mothers to navigate single parent roles while physically separating fathers from their children during critical developmental stages. This study examines the developmental and behavioral impacts of paternal migration on left-behind children within single-mother households in Quetta City. Specifically, it investigates how the loss of direct paternal involvement affects personality formation and social growth, alongside the shifting responsibilities of mothers managing long-term separation. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were gathered from 20 migrant families through semi-structured interviews capturing the triadic perspectives of left-behind children, mothers, and grandparents. The findings indicate that prolonged paternal absence contributes to significant internalizing psychological and behavioral challenges in children, including heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms, altered gender-role identification, social withdrawal, and diminished self-esteem. Concurrently, mothers experience heightened caregiving strain while balancing household authority within broader extended family structures.

INTRODUCTION

Single-parent family structures emerge through various pathways, including parental bereavement, voluntary solo parenting, divorce, legal separation, or labor-induced migration—each transferring the full burden of domestic caregiving onto the remaining spouse (Effectivepaper, 2011). Regardless of the underlying mechanism, paternal absence exerts a profound influence on a child's socio-emotional development (Amato & Booth, 1991). The developmental severity of this separation is largely moderated by child age (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2012); notably, temporary or prolonged separation due to labor migration often carries less permanent trauma than parental death or high-conflict divorce because the loss of paternal co-presence remains fundamentally reversible.

Global assessments further underscore the vulnerability of children experiencing parental absence. A landmark UNICEF (2007) report on child well-being across developed nations highlighted low social and emotional well-being scores among youth in high-income contexts like the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. A critical driver behind these outcomes—and one historically overlooked by social policymakers—is the high prevalence of paternal absence within the home.

When fathers migrate for economic labor, the resulting household reconfiguration produces a complex developmental trade-off. While paternal absence can induce insecurity, loneliness, and emotional distance, it can concurrently foster

resilience, early independence, and adaptive social functioning among left-behind youth (Jokhen, 2017). Financial remittances play a vital role in elevating household food security and living standards; however, economic relief frequently coexists with emotional deprivation and reduced paternal oversight (Jokhen, 2017). Children raised in single-mother households statistically demonstrate lower academic achievement compared to peers in co-resident, dual-parent families (Fomby & Cherlin, 2017). Furthermore, extreme parental disruption and chronic household stress can manifest in severe physiological and psychological strains, including self-neglect and an elevated risk of internalized distress (Lange & Zagorsky, 2001).

2. Significance of the Study

This study examines the lived experiences of left-behind single mothers and their dependent children, investigating how labor-driven paternal migration reshapes child development across social, psychological, and material domains.

When mothers assume both maternal and paternal responsibilities simultaneously, their social identity undergoes a significant transformation. Managing dual roles under social scrutiny often compromises maternal well-being, fostering chronic stress, social isolation, and a lack of institutional validation. By analyzing paternal absence alongside the protective buffer of financial remittances, this study clarifies the structural role of fatherhood in shaping child socialization patterns, educational attainment, health standards, and parent-child relationship dynamics. The findings offer practical and policy-oriented contributions for multiple stakeholders. For caregivers, the insights provide actionable guidance for single mothers to identify caregiving vulnerabilities, balance socialization patterns, and safeguard their children's fundamental developmental rights. For policymakers, the study offers empirical grounding for targeted state interventions, highlighting the urgent need for single-mother social protection policies, community-based mental health initiatives, and local economic empowerment programs.

Review of literature

A father may be absent from the family due to divorce, separation, or work-related migration. The study focuses on the behavioral and social challenges of children whose fathers are absent from the family. Fathers teach their children many things and contribute to the development of their personalities. However, in the absence of a father, children may become more responsible and develop a balanced personality (Helena Whyte, 2010).

Children need a balanced life, which is maintained through the involvement of both parents. The researcher believes that mothers are also highly responsible for fulfilling their children's needs, while fathers are considered important in meeting various demands of the family. A home may seem incomplete in the absence of a father, especially from the children's perspective. In such circumstances, children may feel lonely and experience various emotional problems, including low self-esteem (Jeanette Rodgers, 2019).

Father absence may have several pathological effects on children. They face difficulties in developing and maintaining self-esteem, recognizing their feelings, and expressing their emotions to others. The researcher explains that, during the mid-nineteenth century, an increasing number of fathers migrated for various economic reasons, leaving their families behind and spending less time with them. This absence affected children as well as the overall structure of the family (Danis Abalcom, 1998). Nina Chen argues that a father's presence helps children develop high self-esteem and an optimistic approach towards their roles. Children whose fathers are present also tend to have better personal adjustment. However, in the absence of a father, children may lack proper guidance and face difficulties in education and personal adjustment. Father absence affects children both economically and emotionally. It may influence different aspects of their lives, including role modeling, discipline, and economic stability (Bridget Webber, 2010). Families may experience various conflicts and difficulties in the absence of a father. Active paternal involvement contributes to improving children's academic performance and

achievements. A father's presence also plays an important role in developing children's social behavior and intelligence. Paternal attention and support may help children overcome emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety. The researcher further argues that girls may face particular challenges, including emotional difficulties and a lack of moral support (Rick Nauvert, 2011).

A study significantly demonstrates the contribution of a father's presence to children's higher academic achievement (Ermisch & Francesconi, 2001; Corak, 2021). Bridget Webber argues that both parents provide different forms of support to the family and that a single mother may face difficulties in providing all the facilities and resources needed by the family in the absence of the father (Bridget Webber, 2010).

Research findings indicate that father absence has an impact on children's academic performance. The data show a difference of 75% and 32% between the academic achievements of children from intact families and those whose fathers are absent. The research also suggests that female children may be more affected than male children by father absence, while paternal involvement contributes to improved academic achievement (Ahmad, 2014).

Education is also an important determinant of migration. Migration has inevitable effects on family relationships and cohesion. It may have positive effects on specific household expenditures, such as education, healthcare, and housing, as well as on income distribution (Muhammad Salman, Tariq Muhammad Nasir, & Fiaz-ur-Rehman, 2010). Father's migration and the remittances he sends home can influence children's education and schooling, potentially bringing significant improvements to their lives. Household budgets may increase as a result, ultimately improving the family's economic conditions (Gianna Claudia, 2017). Gianna highlights the role of financial resources in improving child welfare and human development. The researcher also discusses the relationship between migration and household income, explaining that remittances are an important economic resource for migrants' families. Although the family's economic conditions may improve, children may suffer physically and psychologically due to their father's absence. Parental absence also brings changes to family patterns and the responsibilities of family members. Children may spend more time outside school and, as a result, may eventually drop out (Gianna, 2011).

Adult children from families with different levels of parental involvement may experience differences in academic competence and expectations regarding gender-related roles. Researchers also explain that the family is the primary source of socialization and has a significant influence on children's learning and performance of social roles. Children learn many activities by imitating and observing their parents. Fathers' involvement in their children's academic development and achievements contributes to their overall growth. Paternal involvement also has a significant influence on children's cognitive development, particularly among male children (William & Norma Rodin, 1999).

Similar gaps have been identified when academic success is measured through grades rather than test scores. Children who live with both biological parents receive the highest grades, whereas children who live with their mothers and an unmarried partner receive the lowest grades (Thompson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994). School-aged children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives are also more likely to achieve better academic results. They are more likely to receive A grades (Nord & West, 2001). They also demonstrate better quantitative and verbal skills, achieve higher grade point averages, obtain better scores on achievement tests, receive superior grades, perform above their expected age level on academic tests, and demonstrate stronger reading skills. Overall, they tend to learn more and perform better in school (Murnane, Maynard, & Ohls, 1981).

Children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives are more likely to enjoy school (Scott-Jones, 1984), develop positive attitudes towards education, and participate in extracurricular activities. They are also less likely to experience academic failure. Father absence has been associated with an increased likelihood of antisocial activities among children, particularly

boys (Cavanagh & Huston, 2006). The absence of a father from children's lives may have serious consequences and may increase the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Some widely cited statistics concerning the social consequences of father absence suggest that 90% of homeless and runaway children, 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions, 75% of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers, and 85% of certain groups of young people come from father-absent households. The source also discusses the relationship between father absence, displaced anger, and violent behavior towards women, including sexual violence (Grimm-Wassil, 1994).

There is also a threefold increase in the likelihood that a child will become involved in group activities. Compared with the general population, children from father-absent households may be 200% more likely to require psychological treatment. Furthermore, 85% of children whose fathers are absent reportedly exhibit physical disorders (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2012).

This is an important issue for consideration by attorneys and judges when making decisions that separate children from their fathers. Such separation may contribute to several difficulties. Low self-esteem may develop among both boys and girls. Some statistics suggest a 200% increase in attempted or successful teenage suicide, with 63% of youth suicides occurring among young people from fatherless homes. Girls' observations and perceptions may differ depending on whether they have lost their fathers through divorce or death and the age at which the separation occurred. How and why a father is absent may have an impact on the emotional and material well-being of a child (Grimm-Wassil, 1994).

A strong relationship between fathers and their children helps reduce factors that may contribute to delinquency among young people. Fathers' involvement in their children's lives may reduce the likelihood of problems. According to the researcher, girls are not as significantly affected by father absence as boys. Boys may have a greater tendency to become involved in delinquent activities when their fathers are not present in their lives. A father's presence has favorable and positive effects on the behavior of male children (Deborah A. Cobb-Clark & Erdal Tekin, 2011).

Lee A. Beaty focuses on the sociocultural factors that influence family structure. In his study, *Effects of Parental Absence on Male Adolescents' Peer Relations and Self-Image*, he examines children whose fathers have been absent from the family since their early childhood. These children were approximately five years old when the father's absence began. According to the researcher, boys who experience father absence during childhood may face difficulties in adjusting to their peer groups because they lack a father figure and role model within the home (Lee A. Beaty, 1995).

There are several negative effects of labor migration on the health and well-being of children left behind. These children may have poor health conditions and fewer opportunities to participate in healthy activities. They may begin using substances at an early age, including cigarettes and other drugs. Instead of attending school, some children spend time wandering outside and eventually drop out. They may also receive considerable pocket money through remittances sent by their fathers and spend it lavishly on entertainment, including excessive internet use and alcohol consumption. Father absence may also negatively affect children's overall development. Girls may experience more emotional problems, including disappointment and feelings of insecurity. Changes in family structure due to parental absence bring significant variations in family roles and responsibilities, affecting children's education, lifestyles, and the responsibilities of family members. These changes may create unfavorable conditions for children's psychological and emotional development (Yang Gao-li-p-li, Jean H. Kin, Nathan Congdon, Joseph Law, & Sain Griffiths, 2010).

Jeffery examines the impact of a father's presence on children's behavior. Previous studies also demonstrate the influence of fathers on children's socialization, including their education and social and psychological development. Researchers have concluded that fathers who actively participate in raising their children contribute to healthier social and psychological behavioral outcomes. He further explains that both fathers and mothers play vital roles in children's personality development and in promoting healthy behavioral responses. According to the researcher, children

who have their fathers around them tend to be more confident and may have higher IQ levels. They may also possess better cognitive abilities, which help them perform more effectively in intellectual activities. Overall, a father's presence in the family has a positive influence on children, provides guidance and authority, helps them remain calm, and may reduce feelings of depression and frustration (Jeffery Rosenberg & W. Bradford Wilcox, 2006).

The wives of labor migrants also have to face many problems in the absence of their husbands. According to researchers, they often experience depression and stress because they become solely responsible for managing their own household responsibilities as well as those of their absent husbands. These responsibilities may leave them overburdened. Such circumstances can make women emotionally vulnerable and expose them to various psychological problems. However, these pressures may be reduced when women receive adequate social support from other family members. Many studies demonstrate that modern technology and communication facilities, such as the internet, email, and telephone services, have made communication easier between migrants and their family members (Scott Vabika-Victor, Agadjanian, & Arusyak Sevoyan, 2010).

Sadaf Mahmood (2010) explains that Pakistan is one of the major recipients of remittances worldwide, as these financial transfers serve as an important source of foreign exchange. He further states that approximately ten thousand households depend on remittances for their livelihoods. This money also contributes to future financial security, investment opportunities, and the improvement of household economic conditions. However, in return for these economic benefits, families have to bear the physical absence of one of their members for months or even years. When the absent family member is the father, this separation may adversely affect children's behavior and emotional well-being (Sadaf Mahmood, 2010).

Research Question:

Q: What are the impacts of paternal migration on over all development of their children left behind of single mother household?

objective of the study

To examine the effects of paternal migration on over all development of their children left behind of single mother household.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and procedures:

This qualitative study was conducted under the Qualitative research paradigm, which is intended to gain in-depth information regarding impact of single parent families due to father migration on their children left behind. The sample is comprise of 20 families selected by the help of purposive sampling method. Two FDGs is also conducted, in which 10 persons are participated in each group, who belongs from family of migrant including wife, childern and grandsparents. The study revealed many factors which influence the behaviour of migrant families and overall development of their children and as a result father absence due to migration. The responds were informed about the study and they were requested to cooperate with researcher.

Results

It is not easy for a person to left behind his family and goes abroad for the purpose of earning and securing the future of his children but still people took this step for the sake of their families without considering the problems that their wives and kids can face in the absence of their husband/father due to migration.

Behavioral Issues:

The children whom father is living abroad for years they usually missed their father's love and sometimes the children emotionally engage with their fathers too much and when they are unable to find them around for long months / years they get emotionally disturbed and behaved uncertain. They even have poor relationships with their mothers they also show high levels of emotional distress or strange behavior, they are less cooperative and get lower grades on tests of intelligence such children can also get more love. *In one case researcher found that mother of the children was tried to fulfill all his as well as her husband's responsibilities that made her tried but in spit of all her effort still their kids were not happy and missed their*

father. And always compared her and with their father and this thing depress her a lot.

We have found many cases during our research where at least one children of the family of a migrant is suffering from behavioral issues and their mothers are worried and having difficulty to cope up with such issues. It was also observed by the researchers that in some cases children blame their mother and considered their mother responsible for his father absence. One of our respondent shared, my children some time behave vary strangely and I can't handle the situation. They frequently asked me about my question regarding husband migration, and some time when they more disturb they said you and your demand force him to go.

Other respondent told the researcher, my children always compare our family condition with rest of the families. My children always complain and said why our father not lives with us like other families. And asked me question such as, Is he don't love us? Why he don't come back?.

Mostly male children had more behavioral issues and rather than girl child. It is observed by the researcher during research that girls are become more responsible and boys were becoming more aggressive.

Low Attention in Education:

Wife of a migrant have to play many responsibilities related to their household responsibilities and related to children. But most important task a wife has to play is socialized children in formal and on informal way. Formal way of socialization is base formal schooling. During the research it was found that most of the children that are living with their mothers is the absence of their migrated fathers tends to be less attentive to their studies, they do not take their studies too serious, secure lower marks in their exams and bunk their classes more often comparing to two-parent families.

During researcher also found difference in the attitude of a girl child and a boy. In the companion of her mother by observing their mother struggling for their families and fulfill the needs of the family, girls are become more responsible. They were having sympathy for their mother. Their attitudes and behavior towards their mother was too much supported. As a respondent told her, I have 3 daughters and one son, though my all children are facing problem and missed their father but in spite of all this reaction of many kids are different,. I have to face more problem to handle my son as compare to my daughter.

Though due to the remittances their family receives, these children have got much better educational facilities than others and are enrolled / studding in well renowned schools / Institutes but their interest in studies found very low, while asking the reason of their less attentive behavior towards studies a mother told us that it might be the less parental monitoring of school work, and less overall social supervision that encourages children to take studies as granted.

Involve in Immoral Activities:

The risk of having drugs, to be abused, get mental illness, having poor educational performance and involvement in moral and criminal issues are increased dramatically among the children of male migrants.

Our research reveals that the most of the children of male migrant families are involved in such immoral activities. They do not obey to their mothers and even sideline them. Some of them have started using drugs as no male member of the family is there to stop them.

Insecurity among Girl Child:

It is obvious when there is an absence of male parent the insecurity among the other family members especially in female increases. In our study where the head of family migrated and left behind his wife and children there the risk of victimized and to be abused cannot be slides down. This is why the girl child feels insecurity more than the boy child.

While asking the question of insecurity some respondents shared that sometimes their daughters complain that people around them at schools / colleges / universities and even on roads stare them and passes some ugly comments as they know that there is no male member of the family is there to give a shut up call to them.

Male Child Miss his Role Model Around:

Every child considered his/her father as a role model and always try to spend and materialized their life according to his / her role model, but once they were not able to find their role model around they feel a big gape among themselves and that gape can never be filled. Our research found that similar incompleteness in some of the children that were missing their fathers (the role models), they were yet confused what they want from their lives and where it is taking them.

Aggression:

When there is behavioral issues, educational deficiency, involvement in immoral activities and insecurity increased in the child of a male migrant the aggression ultimately arrives in once attitude and sometimes this aggression cost the family very badly as the child commits some severe mistakes that leads to crime during their aggression.

One of our respondent shared that after the migration of her husband she found aggression in her elder son, who always ready to fight on petty issues, though she tried a lot to calm his aggression but she couldn't manage as well as her husband can do. One day he was playing cricket with his friends and on a small issue they got indulges in a dispute and on aggression his son severely injured a person from other group with his bat due to that the other party lodged FIR against her son and the police arrested him and now he is on bail and his case is in court.

Conclusion / summary

The most important task and responsibility that made a single mother always tense is socialization of the children especially personality development of male child. Father migration adverse affects the children that are left behind. All the respondents were frequently share their worries and concern about their growing children. They shared With the researcher that it has been always difficult to satisfied the growing needs of their kids begin single mother. Children were missed their father very much at every event. This absence made them emotionally and psychologically weak. As the result Children were facing different behavioral social issues. Same issues are discussing **Gerald C. Ogbuja (2008)** said that "A woman in husband's absence has with a reduction of protection, discourages and disinterested in every phase of achievements. Children with absent fathers manifest in numbers of internalized behavioral problems as sadness and depression, sex role difficulties, social functioning and lower self-esteem."

Researcher had observed different behavioral issues among boys and girl child. Researchers are also of opinion that female children were more in secured in absence of their father then male kids. Boys were more aggressive and hyperactive and mostly were involves in immoral activist. They have less interest in studies. Their results was not good though their families enrolled in vary reputed education institutions and given large fees.

Khan Azhar Ahmed (2007) also observed same results during his research and mentioned that emigration improved the education attainment of the children, housing conditions, income status in the society but having the adverse effects children behavior and control over them. A father's absence can influence a child's mental, physical and emotional health drastically. The male children consequently face many psychological strains. model, discipline. As the result Physical and mental deprivation among the children can easily notice among children of migrants. Male children were engaging bad and immoral activities. After having detail discussion with the respondents and analyzing their conditions researcher come to the conclusion that though the economic condition of the families are no doubt improve but their families were paying huge amount in shape of their social and psychological sufferings due to absence of their male guardian.

Bridget said that both parents bring different supportive outcomes to the family and a single mother male children may not found masculine figure around them. Female children may feel insecure in absence of her father. A mother can't discipline her children and can't safe her children from immoral activities, in this regard father's role is important then mother because only father is one who can save him from engaging him bad and immoral activities. On the other hand children are also suffer from lack of economic resources as they don't get the enough money and also have few

can't able to provide all the facilities to their family in the absence of the father from home. The effect of absence of the father is seen and observed on children. Especially father migration is drastically effects the male children in compare to girl children and these changes can be unfavorable as choices to fulfill their needs especially they don't even get enough food, quality food. These things encourage them to get early employed and try to be economically sufficient. Father's absences have significant effects on the health of children because a single mother is less affective and is not able to handle and provide the proper treatment to the children when they needed. A father's absence also leads towards lack of parental support, poor guidance, care, low economic resources etc.

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