

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Influence of Parental Migration on the Psychosocial Development of Children Left Behind in South Wollo Zone

Getnet Tesfaw ^{1*}
Abebaw Minaye (P.hD)²

Abstract

Though the migration of parents contributes to poverty reduction and children's material well-being, the emotional and social turmoil are not yet well investigated. This article explored the influence of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children left behind in Southern Wollo, Ethiopia and whose either one or both of their parents had migrated abroad. Accordingly, data were qualitatively gathered from 13 children whose parents migrated from Southern Wollo, Ethiopia. The data were gathered through interviews and observation checklists. The collected data were analyzed thematically. The results of the study demonstrated that despite children's awareness of the reasons for their parents' migration, children do not want their parents to migrate, leaving them behind. It was also found that left-behind children experienced feelings of rejection, lack of parental love, sadness, despair, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation in schooling following the migration of parent(s). To alleviate the problem of children left behind various forms of support such as from friends, families, and caregivers have to be implemented. Government and non-government organizations have to create conducive environments for the left-behind children so that the children get psychosocial and other services from counselors, psychiatrists, social workers, and mental health professionals.

Keywords: (left-behind) children, psychosocial, parental migration, remittance

Introduction

In today's societies, migration is becoming increasingly common. Due to disparities in economic development, inconsistent and rapid urbanization and industrialization have emerged around the world, making migration a diverse and complicated phenomenon (Bariagaber, 2014). As a result, a substantial number of workers have opted to move in

1 Wollo University, Department of Psychology: email: getnetm.12@gmail.com,
(corresponding author)

2 Associate Professor, School of Psychology, AAU,
email: abebaw.minaye@aau.edu.et



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pursuit of better work opportunities from underdeveloped to developed countries (Cortes, 2008; Yeoh & Lam, 2007).

It's commonplace to claim that a child's personality development is influenced by his or her parents' presence and parenting style. The necessity of parents and family for child development has been frequently explained by psychological, sociological, and family system theories (Wells, 2018; Spyrou, 2019; Miller & Sahni, 2016; Bowen 2004). Since children are not mature enough to bear the effect that separation from parents entails, they can be the most vulnerable and might be psychologically affected as a result of parental migration (Cassidy, 2008; Amato & Cheadle 2005; Howard et al., 2011).

A qualitative study on left-behind children (LBC) in the Philippines and Mexico showed that maintaining the interaction of LBC and migrant parents afar has become challenging (Parrenas, 2005; Kandel & Massay, 2002)). Another research, on the other hand, showed that children who were left behind performed better in terms of education and health than children from non-migrant families (Bryant, 2005). In terms of gender, this psycho-social uncertainty seemed to burden girls more than boys (Catrinescu et al. 2011, Jaupart, 2018). Meanwhile, research results on the social and emotional situations of LBC in Ecuador were mixed (Rae-Espinoza, 2012) by which the migration of parents has both positive and negative effects on the psychosocial development of children left behind.

Moreover, as a result of the migration of parents, it was found that left-behind children faced challenges such as poor self-confidence and lack of healthy interactions with parents and others (Yeoh, & Lam, 2007). Following the migration of parents, children experienced feelings of abandonment (Dreby, 2007; Vanore, Mazzucato & Siegel 2015). They also faced emotional and mental problems when they were obliged to live with other caregivers (Smith et al., 2004). Thus, the migration of parents may have a significant impact on the emotional, socioeconomic, and healthcare situations that the children grow up in (Chae, Hayford, & Agadjanian, 2016; Antai 2010; Kiros and White 2004). Save the Children (2006) conducted research in Sri Lanka using interviews with caregivers and found that, on average, 20% of children of different ages displayed inappropriate behavior following the migration of mothers. Even though the children who were left behind had formed close bonds with their respective guardians, they constantly yearned for their mothers (Save the Children, 2006).

In parental migration due to economic constraints and different barriers such as policy issues, few children may get the chance to move together with their parents while many of them remained at home (Bryant, 2005; Kandel & Kao &, 2001; Yeoh & Lam, 2007). This is why this particular group of children has indeed been named "left-behind children (LBC). Researchers in some countries have been requested to raise their awareness of this particular group of children in order to give a more reliable basis for the study and execution of related policies (Bryant, 2005; Cortes, 2006). In Ethiopia, where parental migration is high, little /no attempts have been made to bring the issue of these groups of children to research.

In Wollo, Ethiopia, there are data on labor migrants migrating mainly to the Gulf States (Abebaw, 2013; Getachew, 2016; Dessie Town Labor and Social Affairs Bureau, 2014). The common response given by migrants is a search for better opportunities for themselves and their families. But to what extent migration changes the lifestyles of the migrant, as well as the left-behind children and families, is not explored. Despite the fact that there have been studies on left-behind children and families elsewhere (Bryant 2005; Cappelloni 2011; Buck & Castenda 2011; Cortes 2008; Save the Children, 2006), there has been

no migration research on children left behind in South Wollo, Ethiopia. In the case of Ethiopia, studies on labor migration are common (Adugna, 2019; Kefale & Mohammed, 2016; Tegegne & Penker, 2016; Dessiye & Emirie, 2018), but studies focusing on its relation with families and left-behind children are scant. In addition to this, migration research so far mainly focused on its impact on migrants themselves or on the receiving communities, its contribution to the development, and the social networks associated with it (Ababaw, 2013; Adammesh, 2006; Getachew, 2016; Frework, 2007; Fernandez, 2010; Adugna., Deshingkar., & Atnafu, 2021; Dessiye & Emirie, 2018). The positive and negative impacts of migration have mainly been analyzed in terms of migrants and the populations they enter, failing to consider providing for the gains and losses of left-behind children, the larger family, and the sending group. These may imply the necessity to explore the psychosocial development and experiences of left-behind children in migration-prone areas. Accordingly, psychosocial development in this study is operationalized and conceptualized as psychosocial problems which include emotional, social interactions, stress, anger, and related challenges children face as a result of parental migration (Goodman, 1977).

In Ethiopia, where migration is becoming a culture, it is common to see children of migrant parents in migration-prone areas. A study in North Wollo also showed situations whereby parents abroad are forced to send back their children to their country through returnees. Since labor migrants living afar are unable to care for their children, they are forced to send children in a 'plastic bag' that people use for shopping. People associate and label these children as children of the 'plastic bag', which affected the children's psychosocial well-being (Getachew, 2016, Adugna., Deshingkar., & Atnafu, 2021). These children are labeled by teachers and community members as truants who are dependent on remittances and do not give attention to schooling. Apart from such labeling, there is little or no research conducted on the psychosocial development and experiences of children of migrant parents in such areas. This scenario can thus serve as the motivation for researching the psychosocial problems of the migration of parents to left-behind children. Children, particularly those in their early years, are considered particularly vulnerable because they have little control and decision-making power over remittances when it comes to their parents' migration. Thus, it is necessary to explore the influence of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children left behind in the migration-affected areas.

Thus, this study aimed to answer the following research question.

- How do the migrations of parents influence the psychosocial development of children left behind?

Review of Literature

The migration of people across borders has been viewed in studies of international labor migration as a family survival mechanism to fulfill the socio-economic conditions of the migrants themselves and left-behind children and families. In this regard, research has been conducted on how migrant parents work and provide money and other materials in the form of remittances to children and left-behind families in the sending areas (Adams & Page, 2005; Levitt, 2001; World Bank, 2010). Research on the influence of the migration of parents demonstrated that parents and children become overwhelmed due to dysfunction of family duties and responsibilities posing a major problem to the familial relationship (Buck & Castaneda, 2011). The impacts could be worse when the migrated families stayed longer, leaving children and other family members behind (Coronel & Unterreiner, 2005). Psychosocial theories and research confirmed that the help of parents is a strong predictor of a child's ability to manage anxiety, stress, and different social and psychological

problems in life. Children can also gain trust and confidence in communities through relationships with parents and emotional interaction with elders (Parrenas, 2005; Ainsworth, 1969; Wells, 2018; Spyrou, 2019; Miller & Sahni, 2016).

Household and family systems change when responsibilities are transferred and rearranged and the current duties of families at home are altered to solve problems that arise as a result of the migration of parent(s) (Hugo, 2002; Parrenas, 2005). As a contribution, sending parents abroad for work might be a valuable source of remittance and may serve as an employment opportunity in migrant-sending communities. It is argued that parents can have job opportunities overseas that would support their children in their schooling and related needs and promote social and educational accomplishment, which may have led to migration. However, the psychosocial well-being of LBC might be threatened if their primary parent is absent (Pottinger, 2005; Pissin, 2013).

Moreover, maintaining emotional relationships between migrant parents and their left-behind children could be a difficult problem in the migration-prone area of Mexico (Kandel & Massey, 2002). The migration of parents has also a long-lasting impact on the well-being of LBC (Artico, 2003; Amato & Cheadle 2005). In addition, research in Mexico also found out that LBC from migrant households experienced poor academic achievements as compared to children living with both parents, and that the males of the migrant parents tend to choose emigration as a career path, whereas the burdens of girls at home increased (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006). Additional complexities were also reported by Mazzucato et al. (2014) while studying the social and emotional well-being of LBC. Mazzucato et al.'s (2014) study, compared children who lived with both parents in the country of residence and children who lived in various types of families abroad and found that the migration of parents was linked to poorer children's health in several circumstances. According to a research conducted in the Caribbean, LBC who did not migrate with their parents were more likely to have feelings of depression, loneliness, and behavior difficulties (Elliot-Hart, Avery, & Rehner, 2006; Jones, Sogren, & Sharpe, 2004; Pottinger, 2005; Tesfaw & Minaye, 2021).

In addition, a study by Jia & Tian (2010) on migrant-sending communities of China found that LBC had a higher likelihood of feelings of separation and loneliness compared with other children with non-migrating parents. Children whose parents migrate more often suffer from mental or physical sickness, as confirmed by research evidence (Gianelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010; McKenzie and Rapoport 2011). Moreover, Battistella and Conaco (1998) found that Filipino children with absent mothers showed poorer social adjustment and suffered from impeded social and psychological development.

It was also noted that LBC are at menace for inappropriate action and emotional well-being when they are separated from their parents at an early age and for a prolonged period and when they are cared for by non-relatives with low socioeconomic status and receive little support from their parents (Fan et al. 2009). Regarding the influence of parental migration on the gender of left-behind children, a study report in three countries (Moldova, Ecuador, and Pakistan) also indicated that most girls showed limited engagement in their academics and lacked interest, as well as poor achievement, due to the burden of household chores and responsibilities of providing care for their siblings (De la Garza, 2010). However, findings in China mentioned that due to the migration of parents, boys experienced more problems than girls (Hu et al. 2014).

On the contrary, studies comparing left-behind children and children living with both parents in the Philippines showed that few differences were found between reported anxiety and loneliness symptoms (Battistella and Conaco, 1998). Another study in the Philippines

on LBC at school reported that LBC showed relatively better results on a standard scale that assesses the level of anxiety as compared to children of nonmigrating ones (SMC 2004). The same study indicated LBC and their comparison groups showed slightly the same outcomes on the 'loneliness' scale (SMC, 2004).

Thus, from the above literature, it is possible to infer that the influence of the migration of parents on LBC is mixed depending on the type of care and socializing contexts of children. In the case of Ethiopia, the psychosocial costs are overlooked and emphasis is given to remittances. In the study area, Wollo, it is a common practice by parents that they give their children to grandparents, as well as other extended families for care whenever they decide to migrate.

The migration of parents on the one hand impacted the psychosocial development of children negatively. On the contrary, the migration of parents contributed to LBC that the remittances parents send from afar may be used for education and health. Thus, it is good to explore the perception of children left behind toward the migration of their parents to support appropriate care and support accordingly. The consequences of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children have to be studied in the migration-prone areas to design intervention approaches.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Various child development theories describe various aspects of development. Some are concerned with the internal development of children while others are concerned with external factors relevant to developmental changes. Any of the arguments are based on researchers that tried to test the issue through supervised environments. Generally, these perspectives act as a frame through which investigating children's developmental stages serve as a foundation for research and intervention for their wellbeing. Among the various social and psychological theories of child growth, the following theories are selected and reviewed to serve as a basis for developing conceptual guides for this study.

System Theories: The core tenet of these theories is that growth and development are multifaceted and complex events that may not be investigated by a single definition, such as biology. Human actions, according to system theory, cannot be judged individually but must be perceived in the context of the ecological world in which they exist, and behaviors are heavily affected by cultural practices and families. For Bronfenbrenner (1977), the development of children is influenced by the various processes of the children's world and the interaction between themselves. Changes in either layer of Bronfenbrenner's relationships can contribute to the failure of the whole structure, which means that changes in household composition and dysfunctional interactions with caretakers result in unanticipated effects on LBC's interaction with others.

In general, the system approach implies that children's development must be considered not just from the family and individual perspectives, but also from the viewpoint of society and other social structures. System theory can thus provide not only a thorough understanding of left-behind children and their surrounding social structures but also systemic solutions to left-behind children's problems.

Attachment theories: The creation of long-term, emotional ties among and between children and a particular primary caregiver is referred to as attachment (Bowlby, 1977). To comprehend the dynamic relationship between humans, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth co-developed attachment theory.

From an attachment viewpoint, the family is thought to have a variety of effects on a child's well-being. According to attachment theory, primary caretakers, usually, mothers are the ones that children develop close attachments with, and their constant availability and responsiveness encourage stable child wellbeing and upbringing (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth, 1969). Moreover, it has been stated that there is a need for empirical methods to address diverse cultures in parent-child isolation during mobility since a child in transnational parental migration may respond differently depending on the caregiving situation at home (Bohr & Tse, 2009).

As Bowlby (1977) persuasively said, children with less committed, unresponsive, and indifferent parenting seem to be more prone to grow along a deviant trajectory that may not be compatible with their physical and mental health and leaves them vulnerable to societal changes in a different way. In this regard, as far as some research in such areas elsewhere is reviewed, left-behind children are assumed to fit the case with no/little exceptions. As a result, some of the risky behaviors of LBC, such as criminality, violence, emotional harm, and depression may be linked to a previous unpleasant situation and lengthy isolation from their parents and primary caregiver (Artico, 2003; Bowlby 1977). Based on the above theoretical explanations regarding child development, the conceptual frameworks of this study rest on the above theories with primary emphasis on the family system and concepts of attachment theories. According to attachment theory, a lack of a stable attachment/ relationship between children and their parents at a young age can have detrimental psychological and developmental consequences later in life. Furthermore, family system theory, in particular, is a human behavior theory that considers the family as an emotional entity and involves systems thinking to explain the unit's complex interplay (Bowen 2004). It is in the essence of a family for its members to be emotionally intertwined. Thus, separation can cause difficulties for children because they are without a key to socializing and a caregiver, which can influence their personality growth. The family as a unit appears to have a substantial influence on a child's attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, and the separation has adverse impacts (Bowen 2004).

Thus attachment theory and the system theory can serve to investigate, guide, and analyze the data of this study. As a theoretical guide, these theories are assumed to describe and explain the psychosocial development of children in relation to the absence of their parent(s).

Research methods

Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed to explore the influence of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children left behind. The qualitative method focuses on process, qualities, and meaning that cannot be experimentally measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Creswell, 2009). This method helped to investigate the perceptions of children toward the migration of parents. The psychosocial development of children left behind as a result of the migration of parents was also studied through a qualitative design.

Study setting

South Wollo is one of the ten Zones and a special woreda in the Amhara Regional State in Ethiopia and is found 11°8' N 39°38' E. It is bordered in the south by North Shewa and the Oromia zones, on the west by East Gojjam, on the northwest by South Gondar, on the north by North Wollo, and on the east by the Afar Region. South Wollo has been heavily

cultivated for a long period.

Southern Wollo, where the research was conducted, is one of the places where labor migration to the Gulf States is common. The area is expected to have a large number of migrants to the Gulf States, particularly to Saudi Arabia, for a variety of reasons including poverty, social networking, and access to illegal routes. According to the Dessie Town Labor and Social Affairs Bureau (2014), around 4,183 migrants migrated to the Middle East between 2010 and 2014, with 3,235 migrating to Saudi Arabia and 948 migrating to Kuwait.

From South Wollo, Tehuledere, and Kutaber Woredas were purposely selected for the study area. Kutaberwerdeda is 20 km from Dessie and 420 km from Addis Ababa. Moreover, Tehuledereworeda is 30 km from Dessie and 430 km from Addis Ababa. Thus, these two woredas which are assumed to be migration prone were selected as study settings.

Participants

The selections of participants were guided by the aim of the research and access to informants. Children left behind whose either one or both parents migrated abroad were selected as participants of the study. The inclusion criteria used to select left-behind children (LBC) was separation from parents for more than six months during the interview time assuming the onset of emotional and social problems. A total of 13 participants of which 8 were females and 5 were males took part in the study. Participants were selected in collaboration with teachers who are familiar with the area and know these children. Thus, based on the inclusion criterion indicated above, LBCs were selected using purposive sampling. Six children living in kutaber were selected and seven children living in Haik (Tehulederie) were selected. These study areas were selected based on accessibility and the higher number of the migration of people to the Gulf states.

Different features (gender, caregiver type, and parental migration status) of children who have been left behind owing to parental migration have been purposefully chosen to improve the chance of giving alternative perspectives to the study participants. It is supposed that the circumstances surrounding each group of children left behind are highly variable. As far as the migration of parents is concerned, some children may be left behind by their fathers, others by their mothers and some by both parents.

Tools for Data Collection: Interview guides and observation checklists were used to collect data. The items of the tool were initially developed in the English language by the researcher. The interview guides and observation checklists were crafted based on literature (Vonore., Mazzucato & Siegel, 2015; Goodman, 1997) regarding the migration of parents and its impact on children. Back and forth translations into Amharic and English were made by a language expert at Addis Ababa University and by the researcher himself. Data were collected by using the Amharic language.

Observation checklist: Since the participants of the study were children left behind, observation has been done to see the social interaction of children with their peers and children of non-migrating parents. The observation checklist consists of three items (e.g., “Does the child interact with other children and manifest behavioral problems?”). After developing these checklists and identifying left-behind children through the help of the school unit leaders, observation was made accordingly. I went to the primary schools to conduct observation checklists, particularly during children’s break time.

Interview Guide: An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was primarily developed by the researcher based on literature (Vanore., Mazzucato & Siegel, 2015; Goodman, 1997), and it was translated into the Amharic language with the help of two language experts at Wollo University. This guide is composed of 8 items investigating the perception and attitude of left-behind children to ward parental migration (e.g., “What is your attitude toward migration? Anything you want to say about parental migration and its influence”? Feeling of parental migration (e.g., “How did you feel when your parents left? And how do you feel now?”) And psychosocial costs (e.g., “Can you tell me your experience in the last six months? Anything special that stands out in your mind related to your life because of your parent(s) migration.?”). To get demographic data, four items were constructed on gender, age, education, and years of separation from migrant parents (e.g., How long have your parents been away?).

Regarding to procedures of data collection, participants were informed about the purposes of the study and participated only after providing informed consent. In-depth interviews were employed in a place where participants were able to freely discuss the influence and experiences, following the migration of parent(s). The interviews were recorded by audio-tape and notes were taken. During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to talk freely and express their experiences and perceptions about parental migration without interruption.

Data Analysis

Using qualitative methods of Analysis, each child’s psychosocial experiences were documented, analyzed, and compared to capture the essence (theme) of the problem. First, the data gathered through interviews were transcribed. I read all the data bit by bit continuously until I got the meaning of the collected data. From interview data and observation checklists, themes were developed and explained. The data were organized into different themes and analyzed thematically. Participants’ sayings were highlighted whenever they have relevance to the topic of the study. Codes were created and brought together for categorizing purposes. Decisions on the themes were made based on the relatedness and essence of issues raised and captured in the processes of coding and during synthesis.

Ethical Considerations

Regarding ethical considerations, before collecting the data, the caregivers informed consent was secured. Consent was also obtained from schools. The data collection instruments including the recorder were accompanied by an informed consent form and participants were informed that participation in the research is voluntary. For the sake of confidentiality, writing names on any of the interview guides and observation checklists were not used and requested. Participants were also informed that the data they provide will be used only for this research and will not be disclosed to anyone. With all possible means, protecting the participants from psychological harm was given considerable attention. Classrooms were arranged for interviews so that children can comfortably give their responses.

Findings

The findings of this study focus on the views of children about parental migration and the perceived impacts on their psychosocial development.

Regrading demographic data, 13 were left-behind children, of which eight females and five males took part in the study. Out of 13 children, four of them are from a family in which both parents are migrants and seven of them are from a family in which their mothers migrated. Moreover, five of the children are cared for by grandparents and four children are cared for by fathers (with stepmother). Two children are also cared for by relatives. The age of participants in this study ranged from 13 to 17 years. For two to ten years, these children are away from their parents. Most children at this age would not have been able to recognize what was going on, and if they did, they would have been unable to cope with the situation.

Theme I: Children's perception of the migration of parents

The first theme in this study is how children perceive their parents' migration. The study's first objective was to find out how children who were left behind viewed and understood their parents' migration. The children expressed their dissatisfaction with their parents' decision to migrate and leave them behind. But so, the children interviewed viewed their parents' migration as beneficial and rationalized that their parents' have to go overseas for work by stating factors such as the family's poor financial situation, a lack of resources that do not provide a decent living, and the need to buy a house in town.

Children typically relate their parents' departure abroad with their goal of providing a good standard of living: "to just be able to earn a living to help their children and left-behind family". This reflection also shows that parents' migration actions are motivated by the welfare of their children, which may have a favorable impact on children's psycho-social development. Children who believe their parents' separation is for the best may acquire an attitude that is unrelated to feelings of rejection.

In terms of perceptions toward the issue, the majority of the children who were left behind stated that they understand the reasons behind their parents' move. Children mentioned that parents are migrating just for their children and left-behind families. A 15 years old boy living with his father in Kutaber explained his view of the migration of parents as follows:

I don't agree with the migration of parents. I prefer my mother's presence because I want to live with her here even though she migrated for the sake of her children and families who remained behind.

As can be seen from the above remark, whatever valid reasons are offered, the importance of parents has been overemphasized. Children's coping strategies may be enhanced by this perspective of perceiving parental migration conditions. Children who have a better understanding of the reasons for parental migration are more likely to adjust to their caregivers and form strong relationships with their parents afar.

In a similar vein, some of the children who were left behind reported that their parents migrate while leaving their children behind in order to make money and remittances because they want their children to grow up healthy with all of their needs met. Regarding this, a 15 years old girl who is living with her aunt in Kutaber described that both of her parents migrated for the sake of their children as follows:

I believe that it is due to my parents' remittance that I and my elder brother and sister are attending school. Thus even if we miss our parents we recognize that they are abroad for their children's sake.

Furthermore, some children who were left behind stated that they expressed their dissatisfaction with their parents' migration decision. Regarding this, a 16-year-old girl living in Tehuldrie, Haik, explained her reactions to her mother's migration as follows:

When my mother chose to go to Saudi Arabia, I expressed my dissatisfaction because I would be responsible for my younger brothers. But she eventually moved to Saudi. Because I understand the pressures that forced my mother to make this decision, I began doing home tasks in her absence.

As shown in the preceding quote, children who have been left behind are attempting to influence their parents' migration decisions by recognizing the repercussions. In terms of migration in the area, this reaction appears to be unique. Because of the material in the form of remittances sent from abroad, children are assumed to be happy with the migration of parents and relatives. This response challenges such assumptions and judgments about children who have been left behind.

Another concern of the children left behind is emptiness, which has led to a negative attitude toward parental emigration even though they understand the reasons for migration. An unfavorable attitude toward parental migration was expressed by a 14 years old boy in Tehuldrie, Haik as follows:

Parents should not migrate leaving children behind. I don't want mothers, in particular, to leave their children behind because (ገጽ ስፊት ስህተት ስህተት ስህተት ስህተት) I don't want children like me to feel a sense of emptiness whenever they look at children talking with non-migrating parents.

Therefore, the attitude of children who were left behind toward their parents' migration suggested that children value parental presence over remittances, which can be considered unique. Left behind children's attitudes toward migration may help children cope with the psychosocial issues that arise as a result of their parents' migration.

Theme II: Psychosocial influence of the migration of parents as perceived by children left behind

This study looked into the extent to which children perceive the challenges and risks concerning the psychosocial development they have been exposed to as a result of their parents' migration. Children who have been left behind are aware of their circumstances, stating that the main problem they encounter is loneliness and other psychosocial issues brought as a result of parental migration.

It was found through observation and interviews with left-behind children that parental migration has an impact on their psychosocial development. The major psychosocial repercussions of the migration of parents captured during the analyses and syntheses of data collected from children left behind were that the children experienced feelings of rejection, feelings of lack of parental love, sadness, despair, and unhappiness, feelings of lack of confidence, lack of motivation in schooling, lack of confidence, and difficulty in concentrating.

Following the migration of parents, children mentioned various psychosocial problems they become exposed to. Regarding this, a 16 years old girl who lived with her relative / aunt in Kutaber due to the migration of both her parents expressed her situation as follows:

I missed my parents greatly. It appears that everything I experience, especially when other children are with their parents, reminds me of my memories with my parents. As a result of my loneliness, I cried sometimes.

The preceding quote explicates a child's obvious emotional connection to a migrant parent, as well as the powerful emotions and hardships that accompany separation. When these children observe other children living and being cared for by their parents, it appears that the children who are left behind feel lonely.

The psychosocial problem of children left behind was also reflected by the following quotes of a 17 years old child who lived with relatives in Tehuldrie, Haik. *'I generally play alone or keep to myself. I have many fears and I am easily scared following the migration of both of my parents.'*

Moreover, left-behind children, whose either one or both of their parents migrated elicited emotional and social experiences as mentioned by a 16-year-old girl in Kutaber: *'I feel that I have got little parental love because I am living separated from my parents from a very young age.* Thus, due to the parent's absence, the children left behind believe they are not receiving the necessary parental care.

The qualitative interview with children also explained the impacts of the migration of parents in different ways. For example, a 14 years old girl living in Kutaber with her grandparents described the situation as follows.

Mothers should not leave their children. Children are suffering greatly following the absence of parents. Following my mother's migration, who was a teacher, I no longer have the motivation to attend my education as I did before. My mother was the one who encouraged me to study hard and become a clever student.

The above quote implies that children become exposed to difficulties that affect their motivations toward education. Due to their parent's absence, the children left behind believe they are not receiving the essential parental care. Because of the loss of parental care, they claim that the emotional and social costs of relocation are quite significant. Children who remained behind felt compelled to grow up in single-parent families (if only one parent is migratory) or with grandparents and other relatives (if both parents are migrating), filling the gap left by migrated parents. When asked about the importance of parents in a child's life, children who were left behind stated that "living with parents makes you feel joyful," but that "when your parents are not at home, there is no one you can talk to and share your feelings". This implies that parental presence at home plays a substantial role in the children's happiness which consequently contribute to the development of a healthy personality.

An emblematic citation from a 17 years old girl from Kutaber and who separated from her mother also summarizes the psychosocial impact of mother migration as follows:

My mother was everything to me...I felt satisfied whenever I see her at home. She understands my feelings, and preferences, and always lets her children feel secure. But following her absence, I felt sad.

The psychosocial impact of the migration of mothers was also described by a 14 years old boy who lived in kutaber with his father as follows:

I want my mother with me. I recall a time when someone offended me and no one intervened on my behalf. It's really difficult without my mother. I live with my father and stepmother, so I don't feel so alone, but I still have bad days because no one can replace my mother.

The child's reflection above can be understood to suggest that the father alone cannot provide what a child requires to feel confident enough in everything. The absence of parents, particularly a mother, influences the psychosocial development of children who are left behind.

During the interviews and observations, it was found that the departure of the mother is more painfully felt by children than that of the father. When the mother is away due to migration, this condition is characterized by a loss of emotional support within the family as well as a variety of responsibilities falling on the shoulders of the children (a circumstance that is more common for girls). In response to this, a 16-year-old girl from Tehuldrie, Haik, stated that she is always busy handling domestic tasks while also attending school, as follows:

Because my younger brothers are just not supposed to prepare or do chores, it is up to me to take on the role of my mother. I don't have the urge to study hard since I'm exhausted from doing household chores. I'm too busy to play with my friends. In general, I am obliged to stay home from school to take over the household chores and caregiver responsibilities because my father requires time to work on the farm.

It is clear from the above response that parental migration has had an impact on the psychosocial well-being of children left behind, as well as forcing them to assume adult duties at an earlier age, especially for girls, which may have an impact on education. The researcher found left-behind girls with their four-year-old brothers during the interviews, whose mothers had gone abroad. As a result of parental migration, girls are obliged to shoulder additional responsibilities, which has an impact on their psychosocial development as well as their educational achievement.

Being burdened with household chores among girls left behind has impacted their social relationships with their peers. To this end, the result found that some children showed a lack of interest in social relations as they prefer a lonely and quiet life which constitutes social and psychological problems as explained by a 16 years old girl who said, 'I don't have friends. I do not have time to play either. I quickly rush into the home and engage in household chores'.

The observation checklist and field note also revealed that children who are left behind face difficulties to interact with their classmates, and they frequently opt to withdraw from the play. During the observation, it was also identified that the children who remained behind became reluctant to reveal any information regarding their parents' migration. They are reluctant to share anything about the migration of their parents, perceiving that their classmates, as well as others, may label them differently.

In the study areas, it was observed that children left behind are assumed and labeled as children of migrant parents and children, who merely receive remittances from parents

and failed to show socially desirable behavior. This labeling can also affect the psychosocial development of children left behind negatively. Thus, intervention mechanisms have to be developed to include people in the sending communities to create awareness about the psychosocial consequences of the migration of parents.

On the other hand, there are children who better understand the migration of parents and try to please their parents by studying their education properly. Regarding this, a father migrant child who lives with his mother in Tehuldrie, Haik expressed his experience as follows:

My father went to Saudi to support the families. He always sends me materials and advises me to study hard. I know that my parents expected a lot from me. I think it's challenging for my father to work there... I am attending my education and I want to make my family.

In conclusion, the study findings showed that the mother's affection, care, and intimacy were not substituted by even the greatest caretakers by the children's standards, with most of the children indicating that they felt vulnerable because their parents were not around. Although they are left with a caregiver, children whose both parents migrated expressed feelings of isolation and other psychosocial problems. Even though some of the children who are cared for by grandparents appear to be better off than those who are cared for by other caregivers, children unexpectedly blamed their troubles on the presence of grandparents. Children who were left behind believed that it was because of their grandparents' presence that their parents are readily migrating.

Discussion

In this study, the influence of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children left behind was studied in one of the migration-prone areas of Southern Wollo, Ethiopia. Even though children who were left behind understood the major reason for their parents' departure, the findings revealed that they indicated their disagreement with parental migration. Children left behind clearly said that their parents' migration is affecting their emotional and psycho-social development. Consistent with these findings, prior research on children left behind also reported social-psychological problems such as loneliness, stress, and intense fear as compared to their peers with non-migrating parents (Reyes, 2007; Battistella&Conaco 1996; Save the children 2006; Pissin, 2013). Moreover, researchers in Moldova identified the psychological problems of children whose parents migrated (Vanore, Mazzucato, & Siegel, 2014; Bryant, 2005). Previous reports also mentioned that LBCs were found to be more exposed to psychological problems and violent attitudes compared to other children (Pissin, 2013; Fan et al, 2009, Tesfaw& Minaye,2021). The theoretical approaches of attachment (Bowlby 1977) and system (Bown 2004) that are used to develop the conceptual framework of this study also emphasized the role of parents in their children's psychosocial development. Thus, care should be taken to the social and psychological well-being of children during the migration of parents. Parents and caretakers have to be aware of the emotional, and social consequences of the migration of parents. Proper care for the children left behind has to be given to mitigate the problems children are exposed to following the parental absence.

The observation checklist of this study showed that left-behind children faced behavioral problems of interacting with others and easily withdrawing themselves from play. Children expressed that they feel angry, and lack the confidence to play with their peers following their parents' migration. Consistent with these findings, previous research re-

ported that left-behind children showed low self-confidence, a looser relationship with parents, being silent, or being less communicative to neighbors (Ye & Murray, 2005). In this regard, though parental migration benefits families to enhance per capita spending, it does not benefit children's health or cognitive ability, according to comparison research from four countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam (Nguyen 2016). Other studies also confirmed that children feel abandoned following the migration of parents (Dreby, 2007), and are psychologically affected since they are obliged to adjust to other caretakers (Smith et al., 2004).

The qualitative interviews of this study revealed that children left behind miss their parents, feel a sense of loneliness, lack of parental care, and related social and psychological problems following parental absence due to migration. Similar findings regarding the consequences of parental migration demonstrated that children felt a sense of separation and experienced emotional and psychological problems (Smith et al, 2004; Dreby, 2007, Parrenas, 2005, Tsehay, 2016). Children in this study reported that nothing compares to the love of a parent, particularly a mother, and they argued that parents should not move elsewhere separated from their children. A similar finding was also reported in the Philippines with children of migrant parents that showed a prevalence of social and psychological problems among LBC (Parrenas 2005; Bryant 2005). It was also argued that children could develop positive relationships with extended families (Save the children Siri Lanka 2006) but it is difficult to replace the love and affection provided by the mother (Jampaklay 2006).

In the study, children left behind frequently raised the social-psychological problems they faced due to the migration of mothers. Left behind children with both mother and father migrated also mentioned that they experienced social and psychological problems by saying that they missed their mothers because they attached everything with them. Concerning this, it was argued that even if both mothers and fathers send gifts and money and maintain communication, especially mothers are expected to continue providing emotional care to their children (Parrenas, 2005).

In this study, both girls and boys whose parents migrated mentioned that they have been experiencing psycho-social problems. Supporting this finding, research in the Philippines by Parrenas (2005) using interviews with children in migrant households reported psycho-social problems. In addition, cross-sectional analysis of children left behind by migrant parents in the rural areas of China, Jia, and Tian (2010) found that children of migrant parents had shown loneliness than did children living with both parents. Unlike the findings of this study, research results concerning the social conditions of the children left behind in Ecuador were mixed (Rae-Espinoza, 2012).

Regarding the influence of parental migration on gender, girls in this study expressed a negative attitude towards parental migration due to the excessive burden of household activities they were expected to undertake. Girls felt that they are responsible for managing the home, doing household chores, and caring for their little brothers while they are simultaneously attending schooling. Supporting this view, Parrenas (2005) explained that migrant mothers put much more responsibility on their female children than on their boys, in terms of managing household chores. Girls are more likely than boys to be held responsible for younger ones at home after their mothers leave (Parrenas 2001, 2005). Moreover, due to the burden of domestic tasks and duties of caring for their siblings, most females demonstrated poorer school engagement and interest, as well as achievement, according to a study report from Ecuador, Moldova, and Pakistan (De la Garza, 2010). However, research in China found that due to parental migration, boys had more difficulties than girls (Hu et al. 2014). Contrary to the findings of this study, Battistela and Conaco

(1998) revealed little or no evidence to attest those children of migrants had greater psychological problems compared to children living with both parents.

Other studies also showed that children's education and health showed better indications in left-behind ones than those of children in non-migrant households (Bryant, 2005). Thus, such factors as the quality of care from caregivers, the resilience and personality of children, and the age and gender of children need a further investigation that could mitigate the effect of parental migration.

It was observed that, in the sending areas, girls are not only expected to accomplish the household chores in the absence of their mothers but also quit their education and migrate to support their families. Therefore, educational support for the LBC shall focus on identifying potentially affected groups as a result of the migration of parents.

In general, left-behind children's perceptions and experiences regarding the impact of parental migration on their psychosocial development, as represented by conceptual guides helped explain the situations. As indicated in the major themes, apart from the good aspects of the migration of parents, the social and emotional repercussions on children were explored. As a result, the findings may serve to aware those who categorize and label these children differently.

In our context, Ethiopia, this study is unique in terms of exploring the views of children left behind and the influence of parental migration on them from the perspectives of children themselves. Putting more emphasis on the remittance's aspects may oversimplify the impacts of the migration of parents or underestimate the psychosocial costs that parental absence could influence the development of children.

To this end, while children left behind may benefit from their parents' migration, they may also suffer numerous difficulties as a result of their absence, including emotional distance from migrant parents, a loss of supervision and care, and greater household obligations at their earlier ages.

Conclusion and Implications

The impact of parental migration on children left behind was explored using a qualitative study design. Due to parental migration, left-behind children experienced feelings of longing, a sense of isolation, unhappiness, emotional deprivation, and related social and psychosocial problems. Due to parental migration, some children lack the motivation in attending their schooling and are exposed to the burdens of doing household chores.

Thus, to mitigate such problems, prevention and intervention strategies can be provided. Prevention strategies have to be designed in the form of training to the sending community, the potentially migrant parents, and the caregivers about the consequences of parental absence in the psychosocial development of children left behind.

This study has also implications for intervention mechanisms. Left behind children who faced psychosocial problems have to be supported by counselors, psychiatrists, and mental health professionals. Psychotherapy and counseling services can help the LBC to develop and build their low confidence. Besides, various forms of support from friends, left behind family, caregivers, and teachers have to be given to children left behind due to parental migration. Thus, counselors, social workers, and teachers have to be involved in

creating conducive environments for the LBC to receive social support. This study implied that some left-behind children who faced a lack of motivation for education have to get the necessary advice and support from teachers and school counselors.

Moreover, as a research implication, future studies may focus on identifying the specific coping mechanisms these children are using whenever they faced problems following the migration of their parents. The identification of coping mechanisms will help to prepare intervention strategies. Since there is a dearth of information and research outcomes on the impact of parental migration on left-behind children and families in Ethiopia, where migration is becoming a culture than the exception, more research has to be conducted so as to bring the issue of children to migration research and develop a more comprehensive intervention approach.

Limitations

As a qualitative study, this research is not without limitations. This study was conducted on the influence of the migration of parents on the psychosocial development of children left behind using qualitative approaches. Since qualitative researches are unique, it is difficult to replicate its results, in a larger population. The psychosocial problems identified in left-behind children in this study cannot be generalized to other groups of children. Since data collection is made through an interview and observation checklist, it is also difficult to verify the results of this study objectively against the situations explained by participants.

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