



## Socio-Economic Impact of Emigration on the Families Members Left Behind: A Case Study of District Rawalpindi

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### Abstract

*The phenomenon of migration is not new and there are many reasons behind this emigration; achieving higher socio-economic status is one of them. In developing countries like Pakistan, poverty is one of the major root causes of emigration. There are some districts of Punjab from where the masses have the trend to migrate. This study addresses the impacts of international migration on families left behind in Dhamial, District Rawalpindi. In-depth interviews were conducted, however data was quantified around positive and negative socio-economic impacts on families left behind. The evidence showed both positive and negative impacts of international migration. The flow of remittances influences the life of people in positive way and it assisted in improving the socio-economic status of the families. However, there are many other serious problems faced by the families left behind.*

**Key Words:** Family, Migration, Remittances, Socialization, Spouse, Stress, Social Status

### Introduction

With the rise of globalization, the world community has witnessed the huge movement of masses from one to another part of the mother planet. One of major reasons for the phenomenon of migration is considered to be the desire for change in socio-economic status. Pakistan is categorized in those specific countries where the trend of migration is very high. In fact, keeping in view the nature of international migration, there are different types of migration from Pakistan to the outer world: North America, European Union, Persian Gulf, and East Asia. These

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form and nature of trans-border movement varied extensively over time and place of destination depending upon the availability of level and type of opportunities.

Pakistan is grouped in those countries that are highly involved in supplying the workforce to European progression towards industrialization in the era of 1950's. In fact, that initial trend changed in the era of 1970's when geopolitical dynamics changed dramatically and economic configurations resulted in sharp decline in expatriate labor to Europe. In order to explore new regions, the migrants from Pakistan started to migrate to East Asia and more specifically to Persian Gulf States that became of more importance both in terms of numbers and also new patterns of return migration due to short nature of contractual arrangements (Ahmed, 2008).

The phenomenon of migration is relative, moving away from masses individually or collectively from one geographical place to another. In broader terms, there are two types of migration, internal migration, and external migration. The decision-making process to migrate from the native land is highly complex in nature as a mix of socio-cognitive patterns like poverty, domestic strain, limitations, ambitions, inspirations and feelings that are experienced in the main institutional spheres at the origin country, along with the perception of anticipated opportunities to be there in the destiny country planned to be migrated in. As Haq (1974) rightly mentioned in his research work that the phenomenon of decision making to migrate or not is dependent on both aspects of human life, i.e., socio-psychological and psych-sociological in respect of the interaction process (Haq, 1974). It further indicates that the phenomenon of migration in context of decision making process is significantly linked with the factors from agency to structural levels.

As per official statistics, Pakistan is one of the major countries in the developing world which gets a significant amount of revenue due to the phenomenon of migration to the outer world, in shape of remittances received from the people working abroad (Government of Pakistan, 2008). Migration comes with multiple impacts for people as well as countries on either end. It is assumed that the process international migration does play its role to impact the origin country and the moving country in terms of social and economic dimensions, but apart from it the phenomenon of migration also has a profound influence on the status of left-behind members in the family. International migration comes with both positive and negative impacts on the socio-cognitive life of families left behind in the origin country.

In fact, on one hand, the flow of remittances from abroad results in socio-economic welfare of the household left behind. In this regard, a group of scholars emphasized the same point by proposing that general perception among the migrants and their respective families living in Pakistan is that it's the hope of international migration which can raise their standard of living (Sattar, 2009; Sadaf et al. 2010). Hamman (2007) indicated the fact that migrants working abroad send back money in shape of remittances to home country in order to support their left-

behind families (Hamann, 2007). Indeed, these remittances play significant role in meeting the basic needs of life with respect to the left behind family members living in the origin country.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, the absence of youth migrants also has negative impacts on the life of family left behind. One of the significant examples is life of an ailing and aging parent that becomes difficult without the attendant they required for the purpose of regular medical check-ups. The absence of husband results in a miserable and tough life of wives with additional responsibilities impacting her socially as well as psychologically. The wives have to face immense pressure of increased responsibilities as she as a responsible member of the family left behind has to manage numerous additional jobs, which as per prevailing cultural patterns are carried out by male member of the family in patriarchal society like Pakistan (Gulati, 1993; Hugo, 1995; Hadi, 1999). In Pakistan, due to large number of migration, the families left behind face these positive and negative impacts resulting in enormous changes on individual and collective levels.

With the emergence of high trends of migration, the Government of Pakistan felt a need for recording keeping for a purpose efficient policy and planning. In this background, the Government of Pakistan laid a foundation for Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. The basic mandate of new build institution was to record the phenomenon of international migration specifically with respect to Gulf States. Since the year of 1971, it is observed that approximately 3.6 million working force has migrated to the Gulf States and among those countries; the major receiver of the labor force is the oil-rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (Ministry of Labour Year Book, 2004-05).

With the passage of time, the level of remittances has significantly improved. Government of Pakistan data suggests that the flow of remittances has risen over 22% to record \$806.12 million in September 2009. The migrants working abroad across the world in various sectors of life has remitted a record amount of \$806.12 million in the month of September, 2009 as against the amount of \$660.35 million in the same month recorded in the last fiscal year, i.e., September 2008, indicating a rise of \$145.77 million or 22.07%. As per the Government of Pakistan statistics, this is the third consecutive record amount remitted in a single month during the fiscal year 2009-10 (FY10). The previous highest amount remitted in a single month by Pakistani migrants working in different sectors was recorded in August 2009, when an amount of \$780.53 million was received in the country (State Bank of Pakistan, 2009). Indeed, these patterns of increased levels of remittances indicate the assistance the labor force working abroad provides not only to the families left behind but also their significance in overall economy of the origin country.

The phenomenon of international migration can be observed in the people living across the country. In this regard, the people of Punjab are also found to be

mostly migrating towards the European and Gulf Countries for achieving a better standard of living for themselves and more specifically their left-behind families. It is significant to mention that high rate of international migration is due to numerous socio-economic problems faced by the masses at individual and collective levels. Political instability, lack of institution building, lack of long term socio-economic planning and poor governance have resulted in unemployment and meager business opportunities in Pakistan and in fact has created a chain of international migration to meet the basic necessities of life. In fact, with the phenomenon of international migration, the socio-economic status of the families left behind changes rapidly. In this regard, the remittances are considered to be changing the social patterns and living standards of the families left behind.

A high flow of money brings structural change not only in households but also in society. When an emigrant's family receives remittances from the male migrant working abroad, resultantly their consumption patterns are changed. With positive change in the level of income, they fulfill their basic needs easily and they get in a position to attain the specific luxuries of life which they could not afford in the previous times before the phenomenon of international migration. They built new houses, purchase cars and also hire servants and drivers which bring ease in the lives of families left behind. This ease is all due to the flow of remittances from the emigrants. Moreover, due to this race in material gains, a competition of upward social mobility between members of the society is created and it may come with creation of many problems too. Thus, there is need to assess the socio-economic effects of migration on the families left behind. Keeping in view the aforementioned discussion highlighting the significance of international migration on the socio-economic lives of families left behind, this study was particularly conducted to look into the positive and negative impacts on migrant families.

The main objective of this research study is to underline the relationship between the international migration of the male members of the family and its positive and negative socio-economic impacts on the emigrant's households. How the remittances are impacting the lives of families left behind? How absence of male migrants is impacting the lives of families left behind? As migration has become a very common phenomenon these days, the basic intention was to assess why people are migrating from the origin country, why they are putting their lives in troublesome situations? More importantly, the researcher wants to know the satisfaction level among the emigrant's family, after the emigration, and moreover, to find if they are satisfied with their socio-economic status/ condition.

In this study, a qualitative method for data collection was used in order to get more detailed and in-depth information regarding the social and economic effects on the emigrant's families. However, the data was further quantified to get better understanding of the phenomenon under study. The research was conducted at *Dhamial* in District Rawalpindi and the targeted population was households whose male members migrated and are used to send money to Pakistan in shape of

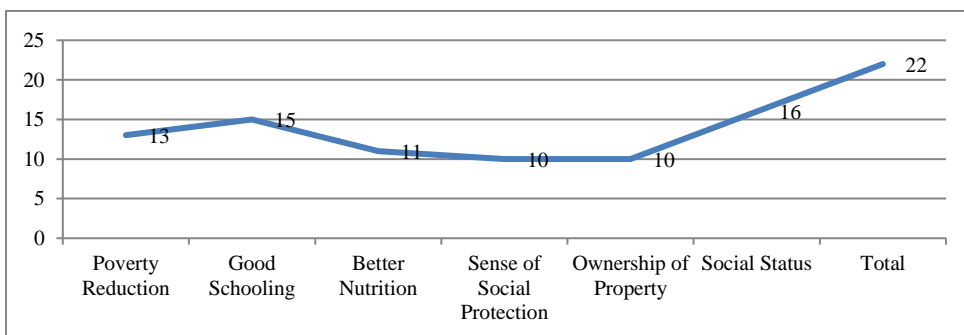
remittances. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to approach the targeted population as it is an efficient way to cover the targeted audiences. A sample of 22 families including married male and female family members were selected to get their respective opinions about the social and economic effects of international migration on their family. The tool of interview guidelines was developed to collect the data from various respondents of the study around the social and economic effects of international migration.

## **Results and Discussions**

This part of the research study is comprised of results and discussion with respect to the positive and negative impacts left behind family members including parents, spouses, and children.

### **Positive Impacts on Parents, Spouse, and Children Left Behind**

The positive impacts of international migration were found the same for all families. The majority of the respondents shared that the flow of remittances made socio-economic life of family left behind better than before. It assisted in enhancing the standard of living of the people back at home. It was also shared that migration resulted in better health facilities since who had migrants, generally had better health facilities than before. The families who had migrants even with low wages were enjoying better health conditions and they were used to visit better private health facilities. The following graph captures overall positive indicators of international migration on the families left behind.



**Figure 1.** Positive Socio-Economic Impacts of Migration

The data revealed that 13 of the respondents out of 22 (59%) were of the view that the impact of international migration has a positive effect on poverty alleviation of the household. The evidence was found that there was reduction in poverty due to the flow of remittances. It was generally agreed that the remittances played a significant role in availing better nutrition. Moreover, due to the phenomenon of

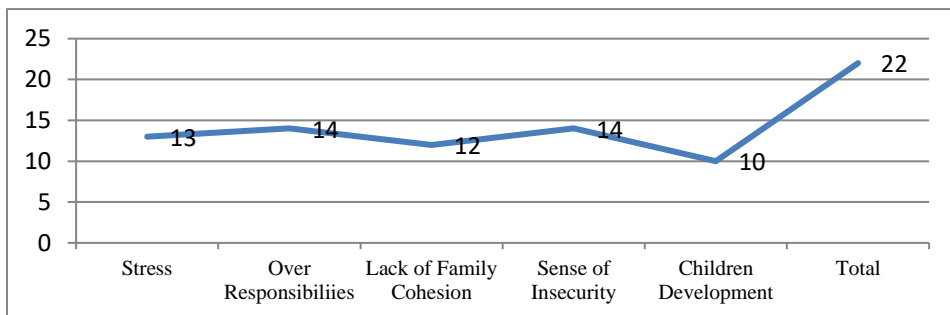
international migration of the migrants, with the rise in living standards, there was an improvement in the social capital of the family left behind. However, 15 of the respondents out of 22 (68%) explicitly stated that remittances received from abroad assisted the households to provide good schooling to the children. Most of the migrants' children left behind families were getting schooling in better educational institutions in comparison to the previous times. It was shared by the respondents that these better educational facilities were not available to children before the phenomenon of international migration. Before migration, the children were used to study in government schools or low-level private schools. While reacting to a question related to the nutrition and diet, 11 out of 22 respondents (50%) believed that access to better food and nutrition is one of the basic priorities of the migrant's households. A considerable amount of remittances are being allocated for food and nutrition.

The respondents, 10 of the respondents out of 22 (45%) shared that the families left behind felt more socially protected due to the improvement in the social capital and an increase in the social capital is observed to be in direct relation with the international migration of migrants. It was also shared by 10 of the respondents out of 22 (45%) that the flow of remittances from abroad resulted in the ownership of houses and property. The families, who were living on rent, either got ownership of houses or shifted to better housing facilities.

The majority of respondents like 16 out of 22 (72%) were satisfied with the socio-economic status after the migration of migrants. The flow of remittances directly increased the social prestige in social life. The respondents told that they paid back the loan, which the families borrowed for fulfillment of the financial needs in the past life and also paid back the cost of migration procedure requirements

### Negative Impacts on Parents, Spouse, and Children Left Behind

Along with the positive outcomes of the migration, respondents also identified negative impacts of the migration facing by the families left behind. The following graph depicts the negative socio-economic outcomes of the migration.



**Figure 2.** Negative Socio-Economic Impacts of Migration

Due to flow of remittances, the families left behind avail better health facilities, however, it was also revealed by the 13 out of 22 (59%) respondents that some health issues existed in the families particularly the parents suffered from the stress and depression in the absence of their elder children. One of the parents, whose all-male children were migrated abroad found it very difficult to avail the better health facilities, as the female children were found to face problems assisting parents in transporting them to hospital and back, taking appointments from doctors, etc like jobs. They further stated that they face emotional and psychological strain issues in the absence of their child. The long gaps of separation have serious impacts on the parent's social-psychological life. Spouses also suffer from such psychological problems such as loneliness, insecurity, alienation in the family, lack of confidence, feeling dependent on social life and most severe loss of family life in the absence of their husbands at home.

In addition, 14 out of 22 (63%) respondents shared that the spouse came under the extra burden of responsibilities after migration of husbands. Different social issues emerged in the absence of the migrating fathers from houses. Women had to interact with relatives and other people to play their role as head of family. Similarly, 12 out of 22 (54%) respondents shared that the international migration of married migrant has negative impacts on family cohesion. In instances, when the separations between the couples are for longer periods, this creates troublesome relationship between the couple. In the absence of husband, woman becomes the head and in most cases actively plays her role by fulfilling the responsibilities but when it comes to major decisions, such as children's education, marriage, and city for residence, other family people also want to play their role. Strain in relation to the family members was observed in decision-making practices and empowerment on part of spouse.

### **Insecurity in the Absence of Husband**

The data revealed that 14 out of 22 (64%) respondents expressed that in the majority of cases, the spouse found herself insecure in the absence of his male partner as a migrant. The families shared the facts, which can have serious implications on her and her family's social life. It was found that the male/female individuals were trying to get control of their social life by influencing in one way or another. This specific situation was creating a sense of insecurity in absence of husband. The spouse left behind was facing the sexual abuse attempts not only from the individuals out of family but also the same attempts were made by the relatives. The spouse was found to face stress in this regard as she was unable to communicate the sexual exploitation attempts to anyone in the family.

Respondents were quite concerned about the socialization and development of their children. The respondents, 10 out of 22 (45%) stated that in the absence of the husband, mothers had to play the role of policeman by keeping a close check

on children is quite challenging. Mothers were found worried to keep eye on all social-psychological aspects of the children. Education activities and good health conditions of children, with the eye on peer groups of children for any negative activities, which play important role in socialization process become the responsibilities of mothers in absence of migrant parents. Absence of father makes the child vulnerable to delinquent behavioral patterns. For efficient functioning of households in respect of socialization and child development process, the presence of father is of much significance. Children due to the fact of migrant fathers were facing many problems in this regard. The remittances from abroad were found very helpful for the better living conditions of socio-economic life. Along with this fact, some consequences of these remittances are also there, children are becoming dependent. They are less inclined towards their responsibilities to work. The flow of remittances helps the household to provide the children with opportunities for better education facilities for good bright future prospects. But there is also the other side of picture, which describes that in the absence of father, resulted in the lack of concentration and involvement in studies. The outcomes of children were not of satisfactory level despite the fact of huge remittances investment.

Another serious implication was the issue of father substitution. In the absence of a father at home, the children get attached to the other male in the family setup. It disturbs the children psychologically and their process of socialization also influences negatively.

Due to the absence of one of the parents, the children can't coup up to the situation and find it difficult to understand the complexity of the situation. The researcher found that the absence situation of the father becomes the foundation for the children to indulge in the activities of delinquent behavior. The children of migrant fathers are at risk of many social-psychological problems. The left-behind children do not have the opportunity to feel the warmth and care of the father. It was observed by researcher, this situation created a lack of confidence phenomena in the social life of children. This lack of confidence trait can be observed in every day social life. This situation becomes more complex for female children.

The role of the father is very important in the social-psychological life of children. The migration of father has very severe and evident effect on children. The data collected revealed that children's social-psychological life becomes vulnerable to greater threats. The following are the observed negative impacts on the part of children in the absence of migrant fathers.

### **Observational Analysis**

It was observed during the course of study that;

- Houses of people were well maintained and beautiful
- There were vehicles available in their houses
- Well dressed people



People were satisfied with their economic, social as well as with their present household condition that all is going well after the emigration. Some of them said they want their husbands to come back and start a business in Pakistan because they are the need for family. It was observed that international migration of migrants resulted in the internal migration of the families left behind. The respondent revealed that internal migration was done for the sake of better socio-economic facilities, e.g., health, education, social protection, and better sanitation, etc. The researcher observed the signs of cultural change in the life of families left behind. One of the significant impacts observed in the life of families left behind was the adoption of modern lifestyle. The migrant families were found to adapt the modern values of world in most cases. One of the interesting positive outcomes was the coming of new ideas and attitudes along with migrants from the outside world. The exchange of information and ideas by migrants brings the family left behind with these new ideas and attitudes from destined country.

## **Conclusion**

The emigration has a positive or high impact on the household economy. The survival of people became easy and further left behind families of emigrants are found to be enjoying the luxuries of life after emigration. Due to the phenomenon of emigration, social status of the families significantly changed. People who had lower social status before the phenomenon of emigration, now they shifted to upper social status and enjoying easy life with respect to access to basic needs. They are availing all the facilities which they have not before the international migration of the male migrant.

People, who had no facilities like, water dispenser, heating unit, and telephone line before emigration, were found to be availing all these facilities after the emigration of male migrants. Moreover, they availed luxurious household accessories like refrigerator, air-condition, computers, expensive mobile phones, TV, cars, and motorcycles. More significantly, the household who already had these daily life accessories went for increase in quality as well as quantity. The emigrant's families were spending more on education than the previous period before international migration, and their children were found to be getting higher education. The emigrant families also very careful about health care of the family members and they were spending more on health care than the previous times. Mostly household heads are satisfied with their social status, economic status, and present household condition after the emigration. The respondents strongly agree that emigration can help to alleviate poverty. Some respondents want to send other members of the family too as an emigrant. Apart from the positive impacts, international migration also has negative impact on the members of the family left behind. Among negative impacts, non-availability of attendants during the phases of hospitalization or any other painful activity was of serious concern in the

respondents of the study. In addition, serious socio-psychological strain was observed specifically in the wives of the emigrants due to the absence of male migrants. The wives of the male migrants had to bear additional responsibilities of running the house affairs together with the socialization of children.

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