

Beyond Remittances: Understanding the Social Costs of Male Out-Migration

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Abstract

Male out-migration from hill regions is the most adaptive strategy to overcome socio-economic and environmental challenges and to look for better prospects. While male out migration is accompanied by socio-economic benefits for migrants' families, it affects lives of the left behind family members in many significant ways. Male out migration can lead to better economic conditions and enhanced quality of life of the families. However, the emotional, social and psychological challenges faced by migrants' family members cannot be overlooked. These effects, positive and negative, are experienced not only by wives of the migrants but also by their children and old parents who stay behind. The multifaceted and differential effects of male out migration on family members need adequate scholarly attention. Using secondary data, the study seeks to understand impact of male out migration from hill areas of Uttarakhand on families left behind. Findings of the study reveal that after male migration, the women left behind often face increased workloads. They have to take on additional responsibilities in both domestic and agricultural tasks. Additionally, these women may feel insecure about their husbands' faithfulness and fear extramarital affairs. Elderly people left behind also suffer from feelings of isolation in the absence of their sons. Children are not spared from these challenges either. They often have to help their mothers with work both in the field and at home, which negatively affects their studies. Life certainly becomes more challenging for those who stay behind when men migrate. The Study points out the need for timely intervention to address the issue.

Keywords: Male out-migration, Remittances, Family, Women, Older People, Children.

Introduction:

Migration can be defined as a type of spatial mobility from the place of residence to the place of destination, usually crossing the administrative boundary (Mc Leman, 2017). International Organization for Migration (IOM) defined migrant as "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons". Out-migration is an age-old and inseparable part of human development and Uttarakhand being a Himalayan state is not untouched with the problem of migration. There are various reasons responsible for the migration in Uttarakhand like low agricultural productivity, lack of educational and health facilities, low availability of employment opportunities, frequent natural disasters, loss of employment of artisans and traditional musicians and social and religious evils (Sharma, 2017).

Uttarakhand is a state located in the northern part of India. Known for its diverse natural beauty, it is often referred to as the "Land of the Gods". The state's economy is mainly driven by agriculture, tourism, and hydropower. The service sector related to pilgrimage tourism and eco-tourism is particularly significant. Migration from one area to another in search of improved livelihoods is a key feature of human history. Migration is often the outcome of numerous multi-dimensional factors they might be physical, economic, social, cultural, political factors or blend of one or more. In the present time economic factors are main responsible factors behind the migration in the developing and underdeveloped countries. Migration has a direct impact on the population size of areas of origin and destination. The entire Himalayan region is completely affected by migration, and the state of Uttarakhand is no exception to this, which has shown a constant increasing trend in intra rural urban migration since its formation in 2000 (Jangwan & Upreti, 2019).

Migration is very common phenomena in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. It characterizes rural to urban and urban to urban migrations within and outside the state. Uttarakhand has three types of migration such as seasonal, rural-urban and international (Sati, 2016). In the context of the hill region in Uttarakhand, 'push factors' predominate the decision to migrate. 3.3 lakh people migrated from Uttarakhand from 2018 to 2022 according to the Rural Development and Migration Prevention Commission of Uttarakhand. Historically, out-migration from Uttarakhand's hilly areas has predominantly involved young males seeking employment. Recent studies indicate that approximately 86% of migrants are male, with a substantial portion falling within the 30-49 age group (51.4%) and another significant group in the 15-29 age range 35.5%). So, male out migration is the most often adopted strategy in rural areas. This migration has profound impacts on the families left behind.

The massive flow of internal and international migration of male workers geographically separates millions of women in developing countries from their husbands. Women are more prone to physical, social and verbal abuse in the absence of men (Singh, 2018). Surprisingly little focus, is placed on women who are not migrants themselves but are nonetheless significantly impacted by the migration process: women whose husbands have left them behind to travel in pursuit of employment. Present study attempts to fill this gap in research.

Though it was brought to light far earlier in international contexts, Himalayan literature has only now begun to address the evolving position of the women left behind. Two sorts of effects are documented by a study of the literature on the consequences of male migration on families. The first is on women's autonomy, as their husbands' absence either forces or frees them to take on duties they would not typically perform (Hugo 2000). The other line of research emphasizes financial hardships and increased responsibilities for women. So, male out migration can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on left behind wife. Previous literature has emphasized the economic benefits that outmigration brings to the families in origin communities (Taylor, Rozelle, & De). Male out migration has been seen to influence the participation of women in the directly productive sphere of the economy as workers and decision makers increase the level of their interaction with outside world (Srivastava, 1999). But given the patriarchal setup, women may have to cope with several problems which are exacerbated due to the uncertainty of timing and magnitude of remittances on which the precarious household economy depends. This, in turn, pushes women and children from poor laboring households to participate in the labor market under adverse conditions. Migration has increased their household income, thereby increasing their social status in village. On the other side with women already undertaking a hefty amount of workload in the hills, this recent male out-migration seemed to have had an impact on the same by increased workload of women in household and agriculture. Feminization of agriculture is happening by default with low education levels, limited skills and opportunities. Within the origin site women either by choice or no choice take up their responsibility of agriculture-based task. Despite agriculture being the primary activity that most women engaged in, they recognized themselves as housewives and considered the out-migrated men to still be the breadwinners of the households. Remittances could hardly make any dent on reducing the workload of hill women. All able-bodied women work for average eight to ten hours daily in various productive activities, such as cultivation, fodder collection, fuel collection, animal husbandry apart from cooking of food and care of child and old people in their households (Mamgain and Reddy, 2015).

Pandey (2019) identify that when adult man works away from home resulted changes in the households' labor-configurations and division of labor and ultimately increased burden of work to the women further reduces women's participation in education, degrades their health, and negatively affects their reproductive process and fertility rate. Lei and Desai (2021) work on the male out-migration and the health of left- behind wives in India, concluded that the negative health implications of husbands' out-migration were partly driven by low remittances sent by the migrants, which could cause economic hardships for women left behind and lead to negative health consequences. Due to outmigration of the male members of the households the wives and mothers left behind are facing acute workload of household chores fieldwork livestock ranging, taking care of aged parents and managing all social obligations on their own some of the households present a different approach as their standard of living has raised drastically and have had positive impacts of male out migration (Hasiya & et al, 2023). The impact of male migration can be especially adverse for girls, who often have to wear additional domestic responsibilities and take care of younger siblings. The absence of male supervision further reduces their chances of acquiring education (Srivastava, 2001). A study by Menon (1995) show that women oppose male migration in apprehension and fear of being left by their husband. Left behind wives are in the constant fear of their partners infidelity, fear divorce, experienced divorced while their partners are away and express anger toward their partners having family left behind. Male out migration from Uttarakhand led to two acute problems: Overburdened women and low output from the cropped land which ultimately leads to food scarcity and poverty among the households who live in the rural areas and fully dependent on agriculture (Sati, 2016). With out-migration of male members and women's hectic schedule, their attendance in Gram Sabha meeting have gone down and the information received is limited (Sharma, 2021). Thus, women's contribution is very critical in supporting household well-being, more so in-migrant households in hill districts of Uttarakhand.

Women may adapt well, learn from new experiences, and even become more self-assured in certain circumstances where they have to live alone without their partner. For instance, women in migrant homes have a broader perspective on financial matters as a result of their exposure to banks (Gulati, 1993).

In the Indian context, also in many Asian countries, family is the main source of support for older adults. In India patrilocal residence and Often co-residence with multiple generations is generally the norms for sons. The striking element with regards to the impact of migration is the emotional cost suffered by those left behind a burden which is being eclipsed by their desire to consider the happiness of the migrated children. Thailand knodel et al. (2010) comment that in the long run the out migration of younger family members will have detrimental effect on older adults who are chronically ill and need long term care. However, the effect of migration on elderly people is always not negative they also receive income and care from other family members in the family. Remittances play a huge role in supporting families with education, healthcare and housing. Travel of family members, sending of gifts and paying for care are also mechanisms that are used by transnational families to compensate for the absence.

Communication Technologies also act as way to reduce the distance between family members mobile phones oblique smartphones have revolutionized the way family members can maintain a sense of co presence in each other lives. The out migration of the male members of the family affects the women left behind in different ways. Some of the women in the study area, whose sons have out-migrated with their families long back, have become the victim of social isolation. An old woman responded when she was asked about the number of members in the family.

The separation caused by migration can lead to emotional distress and social challenges for families. Children may be particularly affected, facing disruptions in their education and emotional support systems due to the absence of one or both parents (Rural Development and Migration Commission Report, 2019). Parents migration may lead to a redistribution of decision making and responsibilities within the household which can affect child schooling either because the new decision maker for example the other parent or an older child care more or less about investment in education than the migrating parent or because the redistribution of roles puts more pressure on children to help in the household. Other studies that have assessed the negative consequences of parental absence have found that parental migration increase the probability of a child's dropping out of school and of delayed school progression and has a negative impact on children's school performance. The gender differences in workload are so sharp that even school going girl child has to share tasks related to farm, animal husbandry, fuel and fodder collection with her mother more frequently than her brother. Girl children hardly find any time to devote time for their studies at home. Many of them 5 This emerged prominently during our discussions with villagers of Ujedi, Lwalli, Kanda, Malli and Bagwari 15 would like to pursue higher studies. But their parents are unlikely to support them partly due to weak financial position of households and partly due to passiveness towards girls' education (Mamgain and Reddy).

Conclusion:

Male migration is conventionally viewed as economically benefiting the family left behind. Remittance transfer can ease budget constraints and thereby increase spending on health care and education, improving households long term welfare in the source country however the migrant's absence might also have negative consequences for non-migrants be the children the elderly or spouse. The out-migration of males from the hilly areas of Uttarakhand is a complex issue rooted in economic necessity and social dynamics. While it provides opportunities for individual migrants, it also poses significant challenges for families left behind, highlighting the need for targeted policies to improve local employment opportunities and support rural development.

Suggestions:

Support systems for these families may need to be bolstered to help them cope with any detrimental impacts of migration. Future research may focus on how both migrants and left behind family members interact and help each other to reduce the adverse effect of migration on the family. The participation of left behind children, wives and elderly people in the study will help to understand and explore more of their own protection right and seek ways to reduce the difficulties faced by left behind families of the migrants in the future. Field studies should concentrate on providing women's empowerment program to learn new skills techniques and technologies to increase productivity and generate more income and diversify livelihoods.

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