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International Migration of Fathers and the Academic Performance of Left-Behind Children: A Case Study of Dir Lower

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Abstract: International labour migration has become a common livelihood strategy in Pakistan, particularly in regions where many fathers migrate abroad for employment and leave their families behind. The paper has investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding the effects of the migration of fathers to other countries on the academic achievement of the children left behind in Dir Lower. The qualitative research design was used in the study and the data were gathered by conducting semi structured interviews with 15 teachers who were chosen in the government and private middle and high schools. The information was thematically analysed to find the significant patterns that transpired through the narrations of the participants. The results indicate that the migration of fathers is viewed as linked to a number of educational challenges that are interrelated amongst the left behind children. The teachers cited such challenges as poor performance in tests and exams, low classroom participation and engagement, inconsistent completion of homework, inability to focus in the classroom and lack of participation in co-curricular activities. The research paper concludes that financial assistance by migration does not always yield good educational results to the left over children. Rather, the researchers note the significance of parental supervision, emotional stability, and active communication between schools and families in promoting academic development in children.

Keywords: *International migration; fathers' migration; left-behind children; academic performance; qualitative study; Dir Lower*

Introduction

International migration is an international occurrence that takes place within various parts of the world. Individuals migrate because of war, famine, natural calamities and family-related factors, but the most prevalent reason is economic. In the recent decade, there has been a vast rise in the international migration, and labour migration in particular has frequently led to the abandonment of family members, which has led to what is commonly referred to as transnational families (Rozelle & Zhang, 2010).

Migration is usually influenced by lack of opportunities in the home country, family reunification, connection to the host countries and presence of better services and opportunities including health, education, and access to material goods. Meanwhile, the increasing demand of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour and the higher wage rates in the recipient countries are the stimulus to migration (Demilio et al., 2007). Migration offers productive labour to the destination countries and acts as an economic savior to millions of households, in addition to taking the strain off unemployment in countries of origin. Demilio et al., (2007) also suggested that labour migration has positive impacts on the household budgets and forms a significant source of income in the developing nations. Moreover, migration can also help empower the migrant workers in self-esteem and economic autonomy. Migration has been done in most regions of the world due to livelihood and economic factors (Massey et al., 1994). Some of the key drivers of migration include globalization, international division of labour, concentration of jobs and wages in specific areas though the conflict and environmental disparities also play a role in cross border mobility.

Demilio et. al. (2007) posit that international migration has a strong association with household survival strategies in order to satisfy the family members. Migration is different in places and regions but in the Asian countries and especially in Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhaw, migration is mainly men family members who move to the Gulf countries in pursuit of more income opportunities and they often leave their families behind due to economic constraints (Whitehead, 2007). Consequently, the care of the left-behind families and children becomes a burning question, and there is often a plan on how to provide the family life in the absence of the father. In most instances, these duties are left to the blood relatives who offer protection, daily assistance, and care to the remaining children (Durišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Extended family is a usual phenomenon in the Pakhtun culture and society, thus, the grandparents and other close relatives often become caregivers and guardians. Other settings, like Mexican families, also reported similar caregiving arrangements, as they practice them to prevent the risks of undocumented migration and crossing the border (Durišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Despite the fact that international

migration can have both positive and negative impacts, education of the left behind children has been reported to be affected significantly (Ranja, 2007; Farooq, 2009).

Much of the literature on migration has addressed the economic impacts of remittances and their economic advantages, with relatively less emphasis on the non-economic impacts of migration on the children left behind, spouses, and older family members, their psychological, emotional, and health impacts. Migration can have far reaching effects on children and families. In addition to a threat of disrupting the family, migration can also redefine the family relationships in the extended family, where children can start substituting the emotional bond of biological parents by the relatives looking after them. In other instances, children are known to grow so fond of their caregivers, especially the grandparents, to the extent of calling them mother and father (Toth, 2007).

A significant percentage of the labour migrants in Pakistan, and in Pakhtunkhwa in particular, are employed in the Arab and Gulf countries (Farooq, 2009). The Economic Survey of Pakistan (2008) reveals that 45 percent of all Pakistani emigrants are currently working in the Arab and Gulf nations and the rest are working in other developed regions around the globe. In this regard, international migration has helped in enhancing living conditions of households and reduce rural poverty as a result of remittances (Zuhry, 2002). Zuhry (2002) also observed that the remittances of workers exhibited a positive trend with time, reaching a high of 11,569.82 million in April- July 2012-13 against 10,876.99 million in the previous period. Such economic benefits show that migration can improve the quality of life in the family and offer better material conditions to the left-behind families.

Although these are some of the positive effects, some studies indicate that the father migration could have negative effects on the children and family life. According to Bakker et al., (2009), father emigration has an adverse impact on the family and children who remain behind. To this extent, the consumption behaviour of families of emigrant workers can also evolve demonstratively due to the migration-related expenditure (Addleton, 1984). Benjamin and Turpin (2008) also noted that the health, socialization and education of children can be impacted adversely. On the same note, Rossi (2006) discovered that the international migration of fathers affects the morality, personality, and behaviour and school performance of children. Moreover, the fatherless situation has been linked to low self-esteem, depression, anger, and abandonment in children (African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Observatory on migration 2012). In the same study, Rossi (2006) also indicated that even though the school enrolment might rise, the dropout rates might go up because of father absence as an emigrant. Similarly, there is a possibility of decreased attendance, level of education, school achievement, and

performance due to father emigration at the middle, secondary, and higher secondary level (McKenzi and Rapoport, 2006).

The literature that has been done on international migration in Pakistan has been more focused on remittances and has not given enough emphasis on the negative impact of migration on the education of the children left behind. Despite the undeniable importance of remittances in terms of its developmental impact, considering the role it plays in national economic development, enhanced living standards of families who have their children left behind and the fact that it has helped them to access a better life, the educational experiences of the left behind children may still be impacted negatively. Their performance at school, the level of education, attending school as well as their involvement in classroom activities can be undermined despite the fact that remittance helps the family to prosper by investing in small businesses, houses and construction works. Contrary to this, children whose fathers are at home are reported to perform better in school, are more active in classes, do more homework, go to school regularly and get better grades in their subjects like English, Mathematics and other science subjects, but the opposite is usually the case with children whose fathers work overseas (Saliva, 2012). On a larger scale, it has been found that parental migration has produced both positive and negative effects to families and children who stay at home (Antamen, 2012). Migration can raise household income and enhance family living conditions and health, on the one hand, or negatively impact the academic performance and school performance of children, their involvement in classroom activities, and can even raise the dropout rates, on the other hand. Children in most instances are out of school to take up responsibilities that fathers have to handle, lose interest in education, see school as a burden or more involved in household chores. Saliva (2012) asserts that international migration has an impact on the behaviour of children, their health, attitudes, and education. Similar results were also reported by Giannelli (2010) who established that parental migration has a negative impact on the school attendance of the left-behind children. Li et al., (2010) also found out that the residential academic, behavioural and emotional issues among children are closely linked to the migration of fathers. It has also been observed by Antamen (2012) that the international migration of fathers can slow down the educational achievement of girls and McKenzie et al., (2011) found that migration of fathers has a strong influence on the education of the children who are left behind. Generally, parental migration seems to enhance household economy, living standards, material comfort, women autonomy, and involvement in household decision making, and at the same time, there are high negative impacts on the education of

children such as poor academic achievement, poor involvement in classes and school activities, poor grades in various subjects, high dropout ratio because of father migration.

In this larger context, the case of Dir Lower is to be mentioned in particular. Absence of fathers in migration-affected communities can change the family care arrangements and decrease the direct parental supervision of the schooling of children. Although the economic value of migration is still significant, the academic experiences of the left-behind children need more analysis. There is need to therefore investigate the impact of international migration of fathers on the academic performance of children left in Dir Lower especially in the eyes of the people who see children in schools on a daily basis.

Statement of the Problem

The migration of labour in the international arena has taken the form of a livelihood strategy in most developing nations including Pakistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and even in Dir Lower, there is a large number of cases when a father goes to the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries in search of a good job and he leaves his family and children by themselves. Though migration can enhance the income of the household in terms of remittance, it can also pose social and education problems to the children who are left behind.

Past literature has indicated that fatherless-ness can influence the academic life of children in a number of aspects such as inability to perform well in the classroom, lack of concentration, low performance in test and examinations, inconsistent submission of homework, and lack of school participation. To a large extent, however, the existing literature in Pakistan has paid an overall attention to the economic gains of migration particularly in terms of remittances and little attention to its educational and social implications on children who are left behind.

Also in the case of Dir Lower where family care has been observed to change towards the mother, grandparent, or extended family member when the father is absent, it is imperative to determine how this absence is perceived to influence the indicator of academic performance in children. Teachers can be able to give valuable insights into this issue since they regularly observe the classroom behaviour, the academic progress made, the participation of students and the school related difficulties they face. Thus, the present research will examine how teachers understand the influence of the fathers who have migrated internationally on the success of left-behind children in Dir Lower. The particular areas covered by the study include the associations of the father absence and academic performance of the students, their classroom involvement, homework performances, and their interest in school activities.

Research Question

How do teachers perceive the impact of fathers' international migration on the academic performance of left-behind children in Dir Lower?

Objective

This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the impact of fathers' international migration on the academic performance of left-behind children in Dir Lower.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study was a qualitative one to have a deep insight into the impact of the international migration of fathers on the academic performance of the left-behind children. The qualitative method was deemed suitable since the research was interested in investigating perceptions, experience and meaning as opposed to quantifying variables. More precisely, the research paper has taken an exploratory qualitative design through interviewing teachers in semi-structured interviews.

Study Area

The research was carried out in the District Dir Lower within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The location of the area was chosen due to the fact that international labour migration, especially to the Gulf and Middle East countries, is widespread in the district, and this aspect is a good location to investigate the educational situation of left-behind children.

Participants and Sampling

The study participants were school teachers in the government and private middle and high schools in Dir Lower that had been selected. The teachers have been selected due to their close interaction with the students and their level of knowledge about the classroom behaviour of students, the school involvement, academic gains, and homework issues.

The participants were selected based on purposive sampling approach, whereby those with sufficient knowledge and experience on students whose fathers were employed in the foreign countries were identified. A total of 15 teachers out of the government and private schools were chosen. The participants were deemed suitable informants since they were placed in the position to monitor the performance and the participation of left-behind children in the school with time.

Data Collection

The instruments used to gather data are semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled the researcher to pose guiding questions in addition to giving participants the liberty to describe their

observations and experiences in further detail. The interviews targeted the views of the teachers about the academic achievement of the children in terms of their classroom involvement, performance in tests and examinations, home work, and their involvement in school and co-curricular activities.

The semi-structured format also facilitated probing questions when there was need to elaborate on the questions. This assisted in coming up with rich and detailed data that was pertinent to the study objectives.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was the way the data were analysed. To start with, the interview responses were read thoroughly on more than one occasion so as to get acquainted with the content. The major notions and common themes then became significant and were coded. This was repeated to simulate similar codes into broad themes that would demonstrate the most significant concerns of the participants.

In this manner, the data were grouped in major themes that concerned the overall performance of left-behind children, which included poor performance in tests, deficient performance in exams, poor classroom performance, and troubles in homework and lack of engagement in school activities. Thematic analysis was appropriate since it allowed the researcher to explain the meanings inherent in the responses of the participants and the forms of presentation of the results in a systematic manner.

Credibility of the Research

In an attempt to make the findings more credible, the selection of the participants was done purposely among teachers with first hand experience with the issue being studied. Besides, the researcher used repetition of reading the data in the interviews and general comparison of the responses to determine the consistent patterns and to eliminate the misinterpretation. The findings section also contained direct quotes of the respondents who were used to substantiate identified themes as well as to make sure that the analysis was based on the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were followed during the research. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and the participants were notified of the purpose of the study prior to the interview. They were also assured that the information they were giving will not be used against their academic purposes. The anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through not revealing the personal identities of the participants when reporting the findings.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research were put across in the form of themes based on the perception of the teachers on the performance of left-behind children whose fathers had emigrated to other countries. Interpretation of the data obtained in the interview indicated that among the participants, the international migration of fathers was viewed as having been linked to a number of interrelated educational challenges. These challenges were manifested through poor performance in tests and examinations, low classroom participation and engagement, poor involvement in co-curricular activities, and incessant homework problems. Teachers also associated these consequences with poor school-family communication and poor supervision of children at home, emotional stress, increasing use of mobile phones and gaming with peers by children.

Theme 1: perceived deterioration in test and examination scores

One thing that came out strongly during the interviews was that the teachers had a general perception that left-behind children performed poorly in tests and exams as compared to children whose fathers still stayed at home. This was of particular concern in the subjects which were demanding like Mathematics, English, Physics, Chemistry and other science subjects. Such children were consistently characterized by their teachers as less attentive to learning, less motivated and as having lower chances of underachievement in written work. Instead of making it a universal condition, the interviews indicate that there is a pattern that is repeated by teachers in various schools.

The subjects did not explain a bad performance simply or directly by the physical absence of the father. They instead outlined a sequence of education disadvantages that arose following the process of migration, such as diminished parental controls, less discipline at home, and less interest in education. Among several that were noticed by one of the teachers, including migrant fathers in children, can have access to school supplies and pocket money, but cannot perform well since there is no proper care provided on the side of the father. Another one wrote that these students seemed to be especially weak in those subjects that demand serious concentration and practice. These reactions suggest that, according to the opinion of teachers, the material deprivation did not correlate with academic underperformance as much as it was correlated with compromised guidance and follow-up of education.

This conclusion is significant in that it makes it difficult to assume that migration directly leads to improved education of children due to remittances. Despite the fact that migration can enhance household income, the current results indicate that teachers tended to view educational assistance,

surveillance and motivation as a stronger determinant of school success than financial resources. In that regard, economic betterment did not always lead to academic betterment of left-behind children.

Theme 2: Low level of classroom and learning problems

The second important theme was the classroom participation and learning ability. Some of the left behind children were explained by teachers to be less active in classroom, less resilient during question-and-answer sessions and more prone to passively staying quiet during classes. Part of the participants also linked this passivity with emotional tension, as some of them had reported that some students had been found distracted, tense, or preoccupied due to their missing their fathers. Such emotional discomfort, as described by the teachers, decreased the concentration and did not allow children to learn the lessons in an effective manner.

The interviews hence imply the fact that academic problems were never restricted to the outcome of formal assessment only. They were also observed in the daily classroom activities which included listening, comprehending explanations, note taking and class activity. Some respondents had a weak association of weak classroom engagement with poor learning, which was in turn associated with poor test and exam scores. This suggests that classroom involvement was a significant mediating variable between father absence and general school problems.

Simultaneously, as well, there is certain nuance to the data. One of the respondents even confessed that they did not know the precise cause of poor learning in children of migrant fathers yet they confirmed that such children usually performed dismally both in class and in the examination. This matters as a methodological aspect, in the sense that it implies that teachers were reporting perceived regularities and not that they were making non-probabilistic assertions. Conversely, the debate must be reserved: the results suggest the perception of teachers regarding the decrease in concentration and learning performance of left-behind children, but not one direct causal process.

Theme 3: Home supervision and problems with homework are weak

The third theme that showed a lot of strength in the interviews was the role of homework and teaching-at-home supervision. In their view, teachers always mentioned homework as a subject where left-behind children generally performed poorly. The participants indicated that children who had their fathers abroad had less probability of attending to homework on a regular basis, less probability of being reminded to study, and more probability of neglecting academic duties in the face of weak household authority. In this regard, the concept of homework was not discussed as a single problem, but it was a symptom of a broader supervision gap in the home environment.

The respondents also linked the issues of homework with other family level factors particularly low literacy levels among the mothers, low awareness of the school requirements and limited capacity to keep track of the academic activities in a regular way. Other teachers also indicated that the children were often busy with household chores or engaged in leisure which minimized on both the amount of time and enthusiasm given to studying. These observations indicate that the educational implications of migration were seen to be determined not only by the presence of father absence in itself, but also by the provision of care and supervision provisions that were left behind following migration.

Much importance is attached to this theme due to the fact that homework is a place of the school and the family. Children might end up slowly lagging behind in grasping lessons, test preparation and study habits when homework is not supervised. The current results hence imply that home supervision may be considered one of the most direct ways by which teachers can view the migration of fathers to influence academic achievements.

Theme 4: low level of co-curricular involvement and disruptive nature of devices and peer pressure

One of the fourth themes was less involvement in school-based and co-curricular activities. Teachers stated that most of the left-behind children were not as active in debate, games, and other activities in school which make them gain confidence, competence, and social development. This decreased involvement, according to participants, was linked to poor school-family contact, minimal encouragement by home, emotional stress and low aspiration. According to them, the decreased involvement in co-curricular activities was not a small problem, but a broader trend of lack of interest in the school life.

In this theme, there were multiple reference to mobile phones, tablets, gaming accessories, peer influence. Teachers proposed that remittances provided access to devices and spending money at times to children, but without the additional supervision that would govern their use. Consequently, a number of children were found to be more engaged in gaming, using of mobile phones or engaging in inappropriate groups and losing interest in school work or vigorous and social constructive engagements. This fact provides a valuable element to the discussion: not all of the migration-related financial resources could be perceived by teachers as equally advantageous, as in certain instances it was thought to exacerbate distraction and undermine educational discipline.

The results here do not imply that there are no children of a migrant father who become indifferent or distracted. Instead, they suggest that educators consistently identified a risk pattern in the cases where

material comfort did not correspond to parental supervision, and thus they showed decreased participation in both academic and co-curricular elements of schooling. This explains why, some of the participants associated weaker academic performance with not being active in school activities.

Overall discussion

When combined, the results indicate that the teachers also thought that the international migration of fathers was linked to a larger tendency of educational vulnerability amongst the kids left behind. This weakness was not a one-dimensional issue like poor grades. Rather, it was manifested in a number of related domains of school life, which include; academic achievement, low classroom participation and engagement, homework completion, co-curricular involvement and emotional willingness to learn. The interviews thus indicate a multi-layered conceptualization of academic performance where the school success relies not only on the financial help, but also on the day to day supervision, motivation, emotional balance, and maintained communication between the school and the home.

One of the contributions made by the study is that it shows the variation in economic provision and educational presence. Migration can help to increase family income, but the teachers in this study held the general view that the lack of the father decreased direct help of the father on the study, discipline and school following up. The results thus substantiate the claim that the academic success of left-behind children is to be viewed in the higher context of the social care provisions, domestic surveillance, and school-family contacts. In this regard, migration is not just a labour strategy, but also a reorganization process of the family that has implications on the educational lives of children.

Lastly, the findings imply that there should be educational reactions beyond identifying poor performance when it happens. The schools might have to have a better communication with the mothers and caregivers, offer closer academic follow-up of the left-behind children, and establish some supportive opportunities of participation both in and out of the classroom. The responses are particularly critical in areas such as Dir Lower where fathers here tend to migrate out of labour, and where the educational requirements of the children abandoned might otherwise be unmet adequately.

Conclusion

The paper has investigated perceptions held by teachers regarding the effects of international migration of fathers on the academic achievement of left behind children in Dir Lower. The results indicate that, teachers view the migration of fathers as having to be linked with a series of interrelated educational challenges and not just one singular academic issue. These problems as pointed out by the participants were manifested by poor performance in tests and exams, low classroom participation and engagement,

infrequent completion of homework, less involvement in co-curricular activities, poor in classroom concentration.

The research also suggests that the educational problems of left-behind children cannot be interpreted solely through the concept of the physical absence of fathers. These teachers attributed these issues to a larger group of family and school-related factors that included poor supervision at home, inadequate educational support by caregivers, poor communication between school and home, emotional stress, the increased use of mobile phones, gaming and peer groups among children. In this regard, the results indicate that the migration can increase the household income, but the financial aid does not always lead to the positive results of the children that are left at home.

Altogether, the paper demonstrates that the academic performance of left-behind children is a multidimensional issue is a complex multi-dimensional problem that is formed by family care-based arrangements, emotional status, educational oversight, and educational contacts. According to the testimonies of the teachers, the international migration of the fathers seems to introduce the gap in the everyday monitoring and encouragement of children, which can adversely impact their educational achievement. The research thus reveals the significance of school and family interventions to left-behind children in communities that have been migrated to like Dir Lower.

Recommendations

In accordance with the results of the research, it is proposed to recommend the following recommendations:

The Dir Lower schools need to spot left-behind children early on and put them under more intensive academic follow-up, particularly in terms of homework, test preparation, and classroom activity.

Better communication between schools and the caregiver should be strengthened especially the mother and other family members taking care of children when the father is not at home in order to enhance academic monitoring at home.

Special consideration should be paid to the emotional and behavioural needs of left-behind children by teachers and school administrators because stress and distraction were seen to influence learning and concentration.

The schools are supposed to motivate left-behind children to engage more in co-curricular and school-based activities to build their confidence, social adaptation and attachment to school life.

The parents in the host country are advised to have frequent educational interaction with their children and schools instead of being involved in the provision of only financial assistance. This

could assist in mitigating supervision loopholes and enhance the feeling of responsibility of children to study

The views of children, mothers, and caregivers in addition to teachers should be incorporated in future studies to gain a better understanding of the educational implications of fathers migration. It is critical particularly since the current research is grounded on the perceptions of teachers.

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