

Behavioral Outcomes of Children Left Behind due to parental migration in Southern Wollo, Ethiopia: Implications for intervention

Getnet Tesfaw* and Abebaw Minaye**

Abstract

Despite the advantages of remittance from parental migration on poverty reductions, short-term economic growth, and the material well-being of children, a significant part of the story is omitted. This article explored the impact of parental migration as perceived by children left behind in Southern Wollo, Ethiopia, whose either one or both parents migrated abroad. Accordingly, data were qualitatively gathered from 13 children whose parents migrated from two woredas of the zone. The results of the study suggested that despite children's awareness of the reasons for their parents' migration they do not want them to migrate abroad leaving them behind. It was also found that left-behind children experienced isolation, longing, sadness, lack of motivation in schooling as a result of their parents' migration. The study recommends that to address the problem families, governmental and non-governmental organizations that have a stake in children's lives shall play a role.

Keywords: *(left-behind) children, behavioral outcome, migration,*

* Lecturer, Institute of Teachers Education and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Psychology, Wollo University and PhD candidate at School of Psychology, AAU

** Associate Professor, School of Psychology, CEBS, AAU

Introduction

Migration is an increasingly familiar experience in today's societies. Disparities in economic development have resulted in the emergence of uneven and rapid urbanization and industrialization across the world, making migration a diverse and complex phenomenon. (Bariagaber 2014). As a result, a substantial number of workers have opted to move in pursuit of better work opportunities from underdeveloped to developed countries (Cortes, 2008; Yeoh & Lam, 2007). Parents may be compelled to leave their children behind in their home countries as a result of labor migration.

It's commonplace to see that a child's personality development is influenced by his or her parents' presence and parenting style. According to psychological and sociological and family system theory, the importance of parents and family for child development has been frequently explained (Bowlby 1977; Bowen 2004). Since children are not matured enough to bear the effect that separation entails from parents, they can be the most vulnerable that might be psychologically affected as a result of parental migration (Cassidy, 2008; Amato 1991; Howard 2011).

The lack of a well-functioning family structure as a result of different migration has a major effect on the personalities and feelings of children (Ye, 2008). Children may or may not respond positively to their parents' attempts to rebuild and sustain family relationships across borders, and substituting caretakers may strengthen or weaken the parents' work (Save the children Srilanka, 2006; Samarasinghe, 1989; Mazzucato et al., 2014.). Experiencing psychological problems was also reported in researches that attempted to analyze migrant parents' interactions with their children in the house, as well as the links that bind emigrants to societies in the country of origin (Parrenas, 2005; Levitt & Glick, 2004; Yeoh and lam, 2007). Moreover, the kind of relationship which exists between families living afar and families and LBC in the country of origin was studied from trans-nationalist migration perspectives (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). For example, a qualitative study on LBC in the Philippines and Mexico showed that maintaining the interaction of LBC and migrant parents afar became challenging (Parrenas, 2005; Kandel & Massay, 2002). Other 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, these psycho-social costs seemed to burden girls more than boys (Catrinescu et al. 2011, Jaupart, 2018). The research findings on the plight of Ecuador's abandoned children

were similarly contradictory (Rae-Espinoza, 2012). Some youngsters were discovered to develop resilient behaviors to deal with the challenge of parental migration (Antonovsky, 1996).

Moreover, as a result of the migration of parents, it was found that left-behind children faced challenges and developed poor self-confidence, lack healthy interactions with parents and others (Ye & Murray, 2005). Following the migration of parents, children experienced feelings of abandonment (Dreby, 2007; Vanore, Mazzucato & Siegel 2015), and 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 et al., 2010; Kiros and White 2004; Agadjanian and Cau, 2011). Save the Children (2006) conducted research in Sri Lanka using interviews with caregivers also 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 while many of them remained at home (Asis, 2006; 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 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.

Moreover, in Wollo, there are data on labor migrants migrating mainly to the Gulf States (Abebaw, 2013; Getachew, 2016; Dessie Town Labor and Social Affairs Bureau (DTLSAB), 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 lives of the migrant, the left-behind children, and families is not yet fully explored. Although there are researches conducted on left-behind children and families elsewhere (Asis 2006; Bryant 2005; Cappelloni 2011; Buck & Castenda 2011; Cortes 2008; Save

the Children Srilanka 2006), migration researches conducted so far in such issues Ethiopia is lacking.

Furthermore, 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 through a ‘plastic bag’ that people use for their shopping and associate and label these children as children of the plastic bag’ which affected their psychosocial wellbeing (Getachew, 2016). Personal observations also confirmed that there are many children left behind in South Wollo due to parental migration. 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 no or little research conducted on the behavioral outcomes and experiences of children of migrant parents in such areas. This scenario can thus serve the motivations of researching the social and emotional costs of the migration of parents on left-behind children.

It seems that migration research so far mainly on its impact migrants themselves or on the receiving communities, its contribution to the development, and the social networks associated with it (Abebaw, 2013; Adamnesh, 2006; Getachew, 2016; Fework, 2007; Fernandez, 2010). The positive and negative impacts of migration have been mainly analyzed in terms of migrants and the populations they enter, failing to consider to provide for the gains and losses for left-behind children, the larger family, and the sending group. These may imply the necessity to explore the behavioral outcomes of left-behind children in migration-prone areas. Behavioral outcomes in this study are operationalized and conceptualized as psychosocial problems which include, emotional, social interactions, stress, anger, and related challenges children face as a result of parental migration.

Since children are believed to be a vulnerable social group for different reasons such as migration, they were chosen for this study. Moreover, children, especially those of early ages, are seen as highly susceptible since they have minimal influence and decisions on remittances as far as the migration of parents is concerned. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do the migrations of parents influence the behavioral outcomes of children left behind
- How do left-behind children perceive parental migration?

Research Method

Study Area

South Wollo is one of the ten Zones and a special woreda in the Amhara Regional State in Ethiopia and found 11°8' N 39°38' E. It is bordered in the south by North Shewa and the Oromia zone, on the west by West Gojjam, on the northwest by South Gondar, on the north by North Wollo, and the east by the Afar Region. South Wollo has been heavily cultivated for a long period. Usually, it gets very cold on winter nights.

The study area, Southern Wollo, is generally one of the areas where labor migration to the Gulf States, particularly to Saudi Arabia, is common. This is due to several reasons such as poverty, social networking, and accessibility to illegal routes. According to Dessie Town Labor and Social Affairs Bureau, about 4,183 people migrated to the Middle East from 2010 up to 2014 of these 3,235 migrated to Saudi Arabia and the remaining 948 went to Kuwait (DTLSAB, 2014).

From South *Wollo*, *Tehuledere*, and *Kutaber Woreda* were purposely selected as the study area. According to Ethiopian Population projection values of 2017 at zonal and wereda levels, the total population in Tehuledere was estimated to be 144,860 of which 71,608 were males and 70,730 were females. In Kutaber the number of the total population is 113,132 out of which 55,191 are males and 56,448 are females (Ethiopian CSA projection Database, 2013). *Kutaber werdeda* is 20 km from *Dessie*, and 420 km from Addis Ababa. Moreover, *Tehuledere woreda* is 30 far km from Dessie and 430 km from Addis Ababa. Thus, these two weredas which were assumed to be migration prone were selected as study settings.

Participants

The selections of the participants were guided by the aim of the research and access to informants. Children whose either one or both parents migrated abroad and thus left behind 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 children of which 8 were females and 5 were males took part in the study. The participants were selected in collaboration with teachers who were familiar with the area and knew these children. Thus based on the inclusion criterion indicated above, the children were selected using purposive sampling.

The Left behind children with different characteristics (gender, caregiver types, and parental migration status) were chosen purposely to increase the possibility of disclosing diverse perspectives regarding the research questions. It was assumed that the circumstances surrounding each group of children were highly variable. As far as the migration of parents was concerned, some children might 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 tools were initially developed in English language by the researcher. 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 Amharic language.

Observation checklist: Since the participants of the study were children left behind, the observation was done to see the social interaction of children with their peers and children of intact families. The observation checklist consisted of three items (e.g., “Does the child interact with other children and manifest behavioral problems?”). 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? Initially, the questionnaire was written in English and then translated into Amharic. And it was the Amharic version that was administered finally.

Interview Guide

An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was primarily developed by the researcher and it was then translated into Amharic language with the help of two language experts from Wollo University. This guide was composed of 8 items aimed to elicit the perception and attitude of left-behind children toward 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 emotional and social 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?”) coping mechanisms (e.g., If you are ever unhappy about the fact that your parent is away, what do you do to make things better for yourself).

Regarding procedures of data collection, the participants were informed about the purposes of the study and thus they participated only after providing informed consent.

In-depth interviews were employed in a place where participants were able to freely discuss the impact of their parents' migration. The interviews were audio recorded by and notes were taken. During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to feel free to talk and express their experiences and perceptions about parental migration without interruption. The in-depth interviews were conducted in Amharic language that is commonly spoken in the study area.

Data Analysis

The data were organized into different themes and analyzed thematically. Using different methods, the informants' responses were highlighted whenever they had relevance to the topic of the study. Codes were created and brought together for categorizing purposes.

Regarding the researcher assigned an identification number to each participant's file for easy identification and to assure the confidentiality of the responses. The researcher used uppercase alphabets. IDLK and IDLT represented interviewed left-behind children in *Kutaber* and *Tehuledre* respectively. The labeled files and codes were given to the participants for easy access to the information provided by each participant during the analysis of the data. Finally, the main themes (based on the category) were identified and the categories were brought together and presented under those themes.

Ethical Considerations

The data collection instruments including the tape recorder were accompanied by an informed consent form and participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary. Consent was also obtained from left-behind children caretakers. Protecting the participants from psychological harm was given due attention. Interview places were arranged for children so that they could comfortably reflect their views.

Findings

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of parental migration as perceived by children left behind. The impact was explored qualitatively. Then Left behind children were asked to reflect on their views about parental migration and the perceived impacts on their behavioral outcome. The behavioral outcome in this study is operationalized as emotional, peer relational, hyperactivity, conduct problems of children left behind due to parental migration.

Regrading demographic data, 13 left-behind children - eight females and five males - took part in the study. Out of the 13 children, four of them were from a family in which both parents were migrant and seven of them were from a family in which only the mother migrated. Moreover, five of the children were cared for by their grandparents and the other four children were cared for by their fathers (with stepmother). Two children were also cared for by relatives. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 17 years. These children were separated from their parents for about two to ten years. By looking at left-behind children's age and years of separation from their parents, it is evident that these children are separated at the stage of development when adequate nurturance is essential for their future. This is also an age when most of the children were not able to comprehend what was happening, and if they did, were probably unable to cope with the event.

Based on the data obtained, the major themes that emerged are presented below.

The migration of parents as perceived by Children

In this study, an attempt was made to explore the perception of left-behind children to ward parental migration. The first question asked the children they viewed their parental migration. The children mentioned that they did not want their parents to migrate leaving them behind. Interview data from the children showed that parental migration was affecting the lives of the children and thus had to be stopped as said by a 14 years old girl living with her grandmother '*parents should not migrate away since children left behind lose a sense of parenthood and the necessary love expected from them - (IDLK)*'.

However, most of the interviewed children positively perceived their parents' migration and even found it necessary giving justifications such as poor financial conditions of the family, lack of resources that do not provide a decent living, and the need to buy a house in town. As a rule, children associate their parent's departure abroad with their objective to provide a good level of welfare: "*to be able to make money to support left-behind families*" (IDLT).

Most of the left-behind children, (seven) indicated that they understood the reasons behind their parents' migration. They said that parents migrated for the sake of their children and left-behind families. A 16 years old boy living with his father and stepmother described parental migration as

I don't agree with the migration of parents leaving their children behind. Even if my mother migrated for the sake of her children and families left behind, I prefer her presence because I want to live with her here. (IDLK).

However, five of the left behind children mentioned that they openly expressed their disagreement with their parents over their decision to migrate away. For instance, a 16 years old girl expressed her reactions to her mother's migration as follows:

I have not agreed with my mother's decision to migrate because the responsibility of caring for my little brothers would be on me. I told my mother to change her mind but she refused to do so. When she was prepared to go, I left the home and stayed elsewhere to express my disagreement. However, she finally went to Saudi, and I returned home and started to do the household chores in her place to fill in the gap created by her absence because I understand the push factors that forced my mother to decide so (IDLT)

Some of the children mentioned that parents were migrating leaving their children behind but they did it to make money and remittances for their children to grow properly having all things fulfilled. A 15 years old girl who was living with her aunt expressed that both of her parents migrated to satisfy the demands of their children as follows:

I feel that it is due to my parents' remittance that I and my elder brother and sister are attending our education. My elder brother is attending his education in private college by receiving remittances from our parents. I and my elder sister are also attending our education through the remittances sent to my aunt. Thus, even if we miss our parents we understand that they are there for the sake of their children (IDLK).

Children left behind developed a negative attitude toward parental migration but at the same time they understood their reasons for their migration this can be seen from the following extract said a 14 years old boy

I don't want parents to migrate elsewhere. I don't want especially mothers to leave their children behind because (ልጆች እንደ እኔ እነዳይሆኑ እና ባዶነት እንዳይሰማቸው) I don't want children just like me to feel a sense of emptiness whenever other children talk about parents (IDLT).

Thus, parents' migration is due to different factors. According to the children's opinion the most important one is a desire to provide for the household families left behind. Nevertheless, the children expressed their disagreement over the migration of parents leaving their children behind.

Consequences of the migration of parents of as perceived by children left behind

In addition to investigating the perception of children left behind toward parental migration, the problems the children faced and the risks they were exposed to were explored in the study. The Left behind children reported that the major challenge they faced was the feeling of loneliness created by the absence of one or both of their parents.

In the synthesized interview data with left-behind children, the most cited consequences of parental migration as perceived by children left behind were longing and sadness, lack of protection and loneliness, and aggressive behavior, less help with education and lack of respect, lack of interest, lack of motivation – all of which are analyzed later in this article.

During observation and interviews with left-behind children, it was found that parental migration was affecting the behavioral outcomes of the children. Despite the positive effects of parental migration, such as the socio-economic benefits of children and families left behind, it was explained by participants that parental migration affected their emotional and psychological aspects. Some of the major problems captured during the analyses of the interview data included feelings of separation, despair, hopelessness, sadness, resentment, loss of confidence, difficulty to concentrate in education, and lack of interest at school.

The interview with the children whose either one or both of their parents migrated revealed their various emotional and social experiences as a result of the departure and extended absence of parents from home. A 16-year-old girl in *Kutaber*, Southern Wollo, who had been separated for 4 years expressed her experiences as follows

I feel that I have got little parental love because I am living separated from my parents from a very young age. In the depths of my heart, I thirst desperately for staying with my parents (IDLK).

Children left behind perceived that they were not properly getting the necessary parental care due to their parent's absence. They said that the emotional and social cost of migration was very high due to the lack of parental care. The Children perceived that they were forced to grow up in single-headed families (if only one parent is migrant), or with grandparents and other relatives (if both of the parents are migrant), filling the vacuum left by migrant parents. When talking about the parents' role in a child's life,

children left behind said that it is “*very much significant to live with parents because living with parents make you feel happy, but when your parents are not at home, there is no one you can talk to and share your feelings*”(IDLK).

The observation and interview data showed that, due to parents’ migration, children left behind behaved differently and were affected emotionally as a girl separated from her mother at an earlier age expressed the situation in the following way:

I feel angry whenever I think of my mother’s absence particularly when I see children with their mother coming to school when the need arises. I am also annoyed easily whenever people talk to me. I am emotionally sensitive (ቡብዙ ነገሮች እበሰጫለሁ ::) due to my mother’s absence (IDLK).

When the participants were asked about their feeling of parental absence, those children whose parents migrated at earlier years of age stated that they didn’t feel anything as they didn’t remember their parents. These children also mentioned that even if they sensed a lack of support when comparing themselves with children living with both parents, they mentioned that they didn’t develop any attachment with their parents as a 15 years old boy expressed the situation in the following way:

After a long period, my mother returned from abroad and stayed here some time and went back again. But I have not experienced a different feeling. I felt (እንደ እነግዳ ነው እምቅመስለኝ ::) like meeting a strange person (whom you do not know very well). Since I do not know her and I did not grow up with her I was not surprised as such (IDLK).

During the interviews, and field observations, it was found that the departure of the mother was more painful than the fathers. The data collected show that children whose mothers were working abroad were more withdrawn and sadder, and found and uncontrollably emotional than children whose fathers were working abroad. This situation was caused by the lack of emotional support within the family as well as by the multitude of tasks falling on children’s shoulders (a situation that is more characteristic for girls) when the mother is absent due to migration. A 16 years old girl mentioned that she is always busy managing household chores while simultaneously attending education as follows:

Since my younger brothers are not expected to cook food and accomplish household chores, it is me who is playing the role of a mother. I lack the

motivation to study hard because I am tired of home tasks. I don't have time to play with my peers. As a first-born child, I am expected to accomplish household activities like caring for my younger brothers and helping my father on the farm. Generally, I am mainly forced to miss classes in taking over the household and assuming caregiving roles as my father needs time for farm activities. (IDLT)

From the above response, it can clearly be understood that parental migration has not only affected the psycho-social well-being of children left behind but it also forced them to assume adult roles at earlier ages, especially girls, that could affect schooling.

During the interviews, the researcher also observed two of their little brothers. They were left behind who were at the age of four. These children mentioned that they were living with their father but they were caring for their little brother and managing household activities such as cooking while attending schooling. Thus, it is due to parental migration that these girls were forced to take roles of such burden that affects their psycho-social development in earlier years.

The observation checklist and field note also demonstrated that children left behind face difficulties in interacting with their peers and other children and they frequently prefer to withdraw from the play. During the observation it was noted that children left behind did not even want to disclose any information about their parents' migration. They were reluctant to share any information about the migration of their parents perhaps they were afraid of classmates. The qualitative data revealed that beyond material well-being, parental migration was affecting the social and emotional development of left-behind children. This situation is described by a 15 years old girl who separated from her parents for 4 years as;

I feel angry ... I sometimes insulted others even if they don't make mistakes. I hate others around me. I lack the motivation to accomplish school-related activities following my mom's (who was a teacher) migration to Saudi. I don't feel like I have my mom beside me. I am so scared when I look at children with their parents every day enjoying weekends and holidays (IDLT).

An emblematic citation from a 14 years old boy who separated from his mother for 6 years also summarizes the overall psychological effect of mother migration as follows

... father is at work so it is the stepmother who stays at home. I don't feel comfortable when I go home since my mother is not at home (. I am not confident

enough to play with other children who are living with intact families too. I feel frustrated. I remember a time when I cried a lot when a mother nags me in favor of supporting her child. I don't feel happy whenever I think of my mother's absence. And I don't want any parent who has a child to migrate abroad (IDLK).

The above response of a child whose mother migrated seems to mean that the father alone cannot fulfill what a child needs to feel confident enough to interact with peers. However, if a father is present, the child has his mother to have a healthy psycho-social development.

The study findings indicated that the love, attention, and proximity of the mother were not replaced by even the best caregivers by the standards of the children. The majority (7) of the children stated that they felt lonely due to the absence of the parents. Particularly, children whose both parents migrated indicated that they felt lonely or sad despite the fact that they are left with a caregiver.

Relationship with their peers is also a problem that left-behind children, particularly girls, have been experiencing. In this study, it was observed that some children showed -lack of interest in friendships as they prefer a lonely and quiet life due to parental migration which constitutes a social psychological problem. A 16 years old girl said that

I don't have friends. I do not have time to play either. I quickly rush into the home and engage in household chores (IDLK).

The problems of playing with others were also noted during observation.

Finally, left-behind children were also asked to respond to the question 'If you are ever unhappy about the fact that your parent is away, what you do to make things better for yourself?' Some (6) children left behind responded by saying that they write diaries, pray, and communicate frequently with the migrant parents afar via telephone. Regarding coping mechanisms, a 16 years old girl who is living with her aunts described her experiences as follows:

Whenever I feel a sense of lack of parental care due to my parent's migration, I write in my diary what comes to my mind. I usually write stories about the happiest things I enjoyed while my mother was here and what I aspire in the future. I also try to participate in school extra-curricular activities as a coping mechanism (IDLK).

Apart from the above coping mechanisms, the rest of the children who participated in this study did not say anything about the coping mechanisms they are using rather than just wishing their parents to return

Discussion

The perceived impact of parental migration on the behavioral outcomes of children left behind was studied in one of the migration-prone areas of Southern *Wollo*. The findings showed that even if children who were left behind understand the main reason for their parents' they are opposed to parental migration. Children left behind clearly said that their parents' migration was affecting their emotional and psychosocial development. Consistent with this finding, Save the Children Sirilanka (2006) reported that children were found to be exposed to psychological and emotional problems and were prone to feelings of rejection, and resentment at being left behind due to parental migration. The same source also reported that even though children left behind might develop ties with their caregivers, they still missed their mother. Another study in the Philippines using a qualitative method with children left behind also showed found social and psychological problems among children left behind (Parrenas 2005; Bryant 2005). Thus care should be taken to the social and psychological well-being of children during the migration of parents.

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, lack confidence to play with their peers following their parents' migration. Consistent with these findings, previous research reported that left-behind children showed low self-confidence, a looser relationship with parents, being silent, or less communicative to neighbors (Ye & Murray, 2005). In this regard, though parental migration benefits families enhance per capita spending, it does not benefit children's health or cognitive ability, according to comparison research from four countries, including Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam (Nguyen 2016). In India and Vietnam, but not in Ethiopia, parent migration lowers children's health outcomes and decreases cognitive skills test scores (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). Moreover, depth interviews with children in migrant households in the Philippines and Mexico found problems of maintaining appropriate

social relationships among children left behind (Parrenas, 2005; Kandel & Massay, 2002). Moreover as was intensely stated by Bowlby (1988), children who have less engaged, unresponsive, insensitive parents due to various reasons are more likely to develop social and psychological problems

The qualitative interviews of this study revealed that children left behind missed their parents and feel a sense of loneliness, frustration, and lack of motivation in schooling. Similar researches on the impact of parental migration also reported that left-behind children feel abandoned, and suffer emotionally, and psychologically (Smith et al, 2004; Dreby, 2007, Parrenas, 2005, Tsehay, 2016). Research results from Mexico also pointed out that children from migrant families have shown lower educational achievement than other children, and the boys of migrant parents intended to migrate themselves while daughters' burden in household chores increased (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006). Other studies also revealed that 80 percent of children who broke laws in Jamaica had their migrant mothers, while this was the case for only 30 percent of other children with intact families (D'Emilio et al. 2007). 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 a sense of loneliness, longing, and sadness. Children left behind responded 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). Thus, it appears that moms' attachment and link endures beyond the borders of the home and does not quickly fade away when they emigrate abroad.

In this study, both girls and boys whose either one or both parents migrated mentioned that they had 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. Children whose parents have migrated faced problems interacting with peers, which consequently affected their well-being (UNICEF, 2008). Unlike the findings of this study, research results concerning the social conditions of the children left behind in Ecuador were mixed (Rae-Espinoza, 2012) by which parental migration affected positively and negatively.

Regarding the effect of parental migration on gender, interviewed 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 were responsible to manage the home, doing household chores, and caring for their little siblings while they were simultaneously attending schooling. Supporting this view, previous researches on the impact of parental migration on gender reported that girls appeared to be the most affected by these psychosocial costs than boys (Catrinescu et al. 2011, Jaupart, 2018). Parrenas (2005) also 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 that 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, the age and gender of children need a further investigation that could mitigate the effect of parental migration.

Regarding coping mechanisms of children left behind some of the children stated that they would write diaries, pray, and participate in extra-curricular activities to manage the psycho-social impacts of parental migration they are facing. Previous researches on coping mechanism explained that migration of one or both parents forced children to “taking an active role and reacts to cope up with the migration of parents” (Asis, 2006:47) and they are expected to try to depend on their individual skills to adjust (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Boyden and Mann, 2005). However, some of the participants of this study didn't mention specific strategies that they are using to cope with parental migration rather than simply expecting their parental to return. Even if children left behind didn't mention specific strategies of coping mechanisms, their understandings of parental migration can help them to confront the challenges.

Antonovsky's (1996) concept of 'sense of coherence' and 'comprehensibility in this regard explained that children's 'meaningfulness', in which their 'understanding' of the situation invested them with 'coping strategies. When left behind children accept the circumstances by placing the focus on themselves, stating that their parents left to provide a better life and opportunities for them, they tend to develop resilient behavior accordingly (Antonovsky, 1996).

Conclusion and Implications

The impact of parental migration on children left behind was explored using a qualitative study. Due to parental migration, left-behind children experienced feelings of longing, a sense of isolation, unhappiness, emotional deprivation, and related social psychosocial problems. Due to parental migration, some children seemed to lack motivation to attend their schooling and were also exposed to household chores.

Thus, the implications of this study are beyond material well-being, parents need to understand the hidden emotional and social costs of parental migration. Families and sending communities, private and government organizations have to acknowledge the problems associated with children left behind and develop intervention programs that mitigate the issues. Migration policies shall first also ensure the best interest of the child from the migration choices of their parent(s).

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