

In the Absence of their Fathers: The Impact of Male Migration on Children

Bigi Thomas

ABSTRACT

One of the key issues in any migration study relates to what happens to the family members of migrant after his migration. Invariably most of the migrants are males who move alone without taking with them their wives and children. Several reasons ranging from not having a family visa to education of children prevent the male migrants from taking their family members with them. An attempt has been made to study the positive and negative impacts of male migration on their children., This article examines the different hardships and great changes experienced by children of male migrants with respect to their age and gender. When these children are able to have quality education due to their fathers' migration, findings of this study reveal that the left behind children feel they live in incomplete families and their mothers are overprotective.

Key Words: Migration, Self-Concept, Left-behind, Gender, Age.

INTRODUCTION

Human migration is one of the most challenging issues facing the world today. Indian emigration has been taking place since centuries but never before in history India witnessed such massive movements of people from India to other parts of the world as in the 19th and 20th centuries¹.

The basic motivation for migration is predominantly economic all over the world.. People move from one place to another in search of better opportunities for employment and income and for economic security. In short, migration is undertaken by people with the hope of raising resources necessary for improving the standard of living for themselves and their kinsfolk on a sustainable basis. There exist, of course, several other motivating factors too - climatic conditions, religions considerations, kinship ties,

educational aspirations and so on, In Kerala, these factors appear to be of little relevance².

Kerala migration, to the rest of India and to countries abroad, is almost entirely determined by economic considerations. The basic motivation for migration from Kerala is economic. People move out of the state in search of employment, higher incomes and greater economic security to improve their and their families' immediate and long term standard of living².

Education is a major migration facilitating factor. From areas where the member of young, educated persons is in excess supply, they tend to move to areas where there is demand for their services. Traditionally, out-migration from the state followed this pattern propensity to migrate were higher among educated persons.

However this was not the case with the Gulf region where the greatest demand, until recently, has been for construction workers. Being a highly literate state which has a large, unemployed population is a salivating factor behind Kerala's large scale migration².

Migration has consequences for men, women and children. In the case of men, the consequences come about mostly because of

AuthorAffiliation: *I/C Director, Department of Social Work S. P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat.

Reprint's request: Dr. Mrs. Bigi Thomas, I/C Director, Department of Social Work, S. P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat. Email: bigisuresh12@rediffmail.com.

(Received pon 15.09.2010, accepted on 25.10.2010)

their own migration. In the case of women, however, consequences can come about, not only because of their own migration, but also because of the migration of their husbands. Children can suffer and benefit because of their parents' migration³.

The absence of fathers causes several hardships for children but at the same time it brings several benefits also. Separation leads to several problems especially when separation between father and children is for a long period. Also the benefits and hardships perceived by children can be varied according to their gender and age.

Living in a family with at least one parent away for long periods is part of the normal experience of childhood for many children in the developing world.

The reason for the father's absence alters the effects on the children or the effects change depending on why he is absent is a matter of fact. A central issue which needs more discussion is how father absenteeism relates to cross-sex identity, differences in scholastic aptitude, juvenile or sexual delinquency, and other differences in male and female children⁴.

In modern societies it is becoming more common to see single parent families, most often consisting of children and their mother. Due to such tendencies, concerns are being raised regarding the possible detrimental effects that the absence of a father can have on his children. The father's role in the family is important to the emotional, psychological, and mental development of his children, and is essential in shaping their future behavior and identity⁵.

The fathers influence on the son seems to be an influence that has been more easily understood and appreciated by both laymen and theorists than have other aspects of the father's influence. An important process involved is that of identification or observational learning. Where the father is interested in and involved with the son, both generally accepting him and appropriately monitoring his behaviour and where the father provides a successful model of behaviours for his son, the son generally will acquire many of the characteristics of the father and initially use his father's example as a general

guide to his own career. To become like the father who is reasonably admirable and desirable is regularly associated with appropriate masculinity, popularity and general good adjustment for the boy⁶.

If the father fails in any of these aspects, the risks of the son's incurring such problems as homosexuality, psychological disorders, or a delinquent pattern are increased although there remain adequate adjustment for the boy can be achieved⁷.

Tess Forrest (1966) suggests that the father's influence on the daughter begins earlier than has been appreciated by other psychoanalytic theorists. She must learn paternal trust during infancy when she learns material trust. Especially from her father does the infant girl need confirmation of her desirability as a female and affirmation of her value as a different and separate person. His gentle tenderness communicates to her his pleasure in her femininity. Father by comparison with mother, has a sharper eye, a firmer grip, a rougher cheek, a deeper voice. He is nonetheless equally tender, loving warm and safe and the infant girl can feel herself lovingly cradled by a man's arms and comforted by a man's voice⁸. She further suggests that the daughter's experiences with the father from early infancy are related to the daughter's later ability to trust other males.

In terms of parents' roles while interacting with the children, the mother is described as expressive with children of either sex, while the father is described as expressive with his daughters and instrumental with his sons. The father is described as more appreciative, less demanding with his daughter and responsive to her attractiveness while with the son he is more demanding and more of a mentor⁵.

Billings and Wiseman (1970) suggest that a healthy father identification for a daughter involves understanding and empathizing with him and accepting some of his values and attitudes rather than wanting masculine like him. They concur with Heilbrun (1965) in noting the evidence that the daughter may gain a wider, more adaptable range of behaviour from identification with a competent masculine father⁹.

A literature survey by Bryant (2005) of the social cost of separation on children left behind

cited various difficulties, including neglect, poor performance in school, delinquency and psychological and relationship problems. Additional problems cited include claims of children being estranged from their parents and seeing them only as sources of gifts and money and children blaming problems of delinquency, drug abuse and premarital sex on their parents absence¹⁰.

Difficulties in education may also arise in children who lack fathers. Popenoe (1996) mentions another major study, known as the National Surveys of Children, which reveals that children from single-parent families, especially boys who live with only their mother, are more likely to display problematic behavior in school (p. 62). Likewise, in her book (1994), McLanahan also reveals that children who live with only one parent are more likely to do worse in school, attend school less, and to concern themselves less with college¹¹.

From the father, the son learns self-control, maturity, and respect for women. When a male child has a father in his life, he learns to view sex as a special and important part of the male-female relationship, in which both partners are equal. As a result, according to Ancona (1998) some males who lack fathers often do not understand and/or care about the importance that love, mutual respect, and equality have in a relationship. They are simply concerned with using women and sexual relationships as a means to achieve pleasure and gain stamina with their peers.

Findings from the 1996's study on grade school children offer a clearer picture of the effects of parental absence on the situation of children. Among others, the study confirmed that the children left behind experience loneliness and abandonment, but at the same time they also understand their parents' departure. The study found that the children of migrant parents lagged behind in school performance compared to children with both parents present. Children left behind also tended to be less socially adjusted than children whose parents were both present. In terms of spiritual and moral formation, the study suggested that the absence of parents did not have a negative impact on the children

left behind, CBCP, Manila 1996¹².

Children grow up lacking a father and the uniqueness of their situations can often result in deviant behaviour or strain within the family unit. (Show and emery 1988) found that an accumulation of stressors predicted higher levels of child behaviour problems.

Research on the impact of the mother or father migration on left-behind children is still in its infancy and there are slightly contradictory findings to date on a number of issues, such as whether children do better or worse in school and whether the impact of a mother absence is worse than the impact of the father absence. In the case of the Philippines, an earlier study (Battistella and Conaco 1998) indicates that children with parents away suffered in their social development and psychological well-being, especially when the mother was abroad. This was not confirmed in quite the same way in a more recent study (SMC 2004) where children of migrating parents were doing better on a number of scores, including their performance at school. This is partly related to the affordability of private education through the remittances, which is of higher quality and children thus do better on the whole.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the demographic characteristics of migrant families.
2. To study the nature of psychological problems faced by children of male migrants.
3. To find out the self-concept of children of male migrants with regard to their gender and age.. 18

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is significant association exists between self -concept of children of male migrants and their gender.
2. There is significant association exists between self -concept of children of male migrants and their age.
3. Lower the feeling of loneliness and insecurity, better the self-concept among children.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the primary data collected in 2004-2005 from nine migration prone taluks, three taluks each from Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts of Kerala state in India for a detailed study of the impact of migration on the families of male migrants. 120 left behind wives of migrants were selected to understand the impact of their husbands' migration on them with the help of quota and purposive sampling.

All the children interviewed to study about the impact of absence of their fathers at home, were the children of selected wives, who are in the age group of 7-18 years and as only 60 children were available who fitted with the selection criteria in the households under study, the number of respondents is fixed as 60. If there were more than one child in the house hold who fitted the selection criteria, only one was selected for the study.

TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

1. A detailed interview schedule is used to collect data regarding the general back ground information and the feelings and attitudes of children towards their fathers' migration.

2. An 80 item Children's Self-Concept Scale developed by Piers-Harris (1969) to find out the level of self-concept of children

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Most of the respondents are boys belong to Christian religion from nuclear families between 10 -12 age group. It is evident from this study that economic remittances from their working abroad fathers are enabling the children to have better education as majority of them are studying in English medium and private schools. This supports the findings of some earlier studies that almost all migrant families have built good houses or renewed and extended old ones, bought properties and gold,

given good education for their children and have modern life facilities (Reeba, 2004) and majority of the women were very keen to ensure that the children were admitted in good schools, preferably convent schools or other English medium institutions (Sekhar, 1996).

Due to the absence of their fathers at home children reported that they have become self-reliant, independent and courageous, a factor which was also recognized by Reeba (2004). At the same time children do feel less confident, insecure, lonely and over-protected in the same condition.

All the children are staying at home and majority of them are average in their academic performances. In their mothers opinion most of them are obedient and do not want to join their fathers in near future mainly because of their studies. Many children reported that they help their mothers in house hold activities.

While 30 percent each want to become doctors and engineers, a whopping 20 percent want to become nurses. It is evident that increasing demand and scope of this profession must have influenced the career decisions of these children too.

Even though many children reported that they are attached to both the parents, 54 percent of them can share everything with their mothers only. Finding of this study makes it clear that helping these children in studies is mainly the responsibility of mothers.

While chi-square tests results reveal that there is significant association between age of the children and their feeling of loneliness, feeling of being insecure and feeling of mother over-protective, no significant association is seen between their age and feeling of enjoying more freedom and feeling of incomplete family.

This study further reveals that there is significant association between the gender of the children and their feeling of mother being over-protective. But no significant association is seen among the children between their gender and their feeling of enjoying more freedom, feeling of loneliness, feeling of incomplete family and feeling of insecurity.

Chi-square tests show significant

associations between age of the children and different sub variables of their self - concept like behaviour, intellectual school status, physical appearance and attribute, popularity, happiness & satisfaction. It further states that there is significant association between the age and self - concept of the children.

Again this study reveals significant associations between gender of the children and their anxiety, happiness & satisfaction while no significant associations are seen

between gender and their behaviour, intellectual school status, popularity and physical appearance and attribute. So there is no significant association between gender and Self-concept of the children. It is very clear from this study that there are significant associations between self concept of the children and their religion, educational level and type of school when no significant association is seen between the self - concept of the children and their medium of learning and type of family.

Table 1: Table showing correlations between dependant variables like loneliness, feeling insecure, feeling of incomplete family and feeling of mother over-protective with the age and gender of the respondents

	loneliness	Feeling insecure	Feeling of incomplete family	Feeling of mother over-protective
Age	-0.116	0.060	0.253	-0.265
sig	0.207	0.547	0.117	0.006
Gender	0.015	0.182	0.039	0.403
sig	0.874	0.067	0.679	0.000

Spearman’s Rank Correlation reveals negative correlation between feeling of mother over-protective and the age of the children as these variables are negatively correlated, (r =

0.265, significant at 0.00 level) where as it is clear that feeling of mother being over-protective is more among boys than girls i.e. (r = 0.403, significant at 0.00 level).

Table 97: Table showing correlations between Self-concept and different independent variables related to children.

	Loneliness		Feeling Insecure		Feeling of Incomplete Family		Feeling of mother Over-protective.	
Self-Concept	value	0.515	value	0.329	value	0.209	value	-0.092
	Sig	0.000	Sig	0.001	Sig	0.026	Sig	0.343

The above table shows the correlations between self-concept and different independent variables like loneliness, feeling insecure, feeling of incomplete family, feeling

of mother over-protective etc among children. This study attempts to examine the correlations between the self-concept of the children left out by their migrant fathers in

terms of loneliness, feeling insecure, feeling of incomplete family and feeling of mother over-protective.

Feeling of loneliness and self-concept of the children are positively correlated i.e. ($r=0.515$, significant at 0.00 level) which means higher the feeling of loneliness due to the absence of father at home, better the self-concept.

There is positive correlation between feeling of insecurity and self concept of the children i.e. ($r=0.329$, significant at 0.00 level) that means higher the feeling of insecurity, better the self-concept.

Further it can be seen that there is positive correlation between the self-concept of the children and their feeling of incomplete family i.e. ($r=0.209$, significant at 0.02 level), which makes it clear that if higher the feeling of incomplete family among children, better the self-concept among children. It can be inferred from the findings that the independent variables namely loneliness, feeling of insecurity and feeling of incomplete family are positively correlated with their self-concept.

So it can be concluded that higher the feeling of loneliness, insecurity and incomplete family, better the self-concept the left out children of male migrants have. This means the more they feel the absence of fathers, better the self-concept they have. Putting efforts by themselves to make up the absence of their fathers at home due to their migration is undoubtedly helping these children to have a better self-concept which includes behaviour, intellectual school status, physical appearance and attribute, anxiety, popularity, and happiness & satisfaction as variables.

Letters are the still widely used method of communication between the fathers and children. As every letter takes at least a week to reach to the addressee, communication between them cannot be considered as fast. Training the children to have chat on internet with their dear ones and to send emails can be a solution to take the communication more effectively, so that many problems like loneliness, misunderstanding, and inability to make joint decisions etc can be addressed.

REFERENCES

1. Irudaya Rajan. Dynamics of International migration from India: Its economic and social implications. Paper presented in the Adhoc Expert Group meeting on Migration and Development of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific in Bangkok, August 27-28, 2003.
2. Zachariah, K.C., E.T. Mathew, S. Irudaya Rajan. Dynamics of Migration in Kerala. Dimensions, Determinants and Consequences. Hyderabad; Orient Longman Pvt Limited, 2003.
3. Zachariah, K.C., B.A. Prakash, S. Irudaya Rajan. Kerala Emigrants in the United Arab Emirates: Issues, Problems and Prospects, prepared for the Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001.
4. Baruch, G. K., Barnett, R. C. Fathers' participation in the care of their preschool children. *Sex Roles*, 1981; 7(10): 1043-1055.
5. Badaines, J., Identification, imitation, and sex-role preference in father-present and father-absent Black and Chicano boys. *Journal of Psychology*, 1976; 92: 15-24.
6. Harris, K. M., Morgan, S. P. Fathers, sons, and daughters: Differential paternal involvement in parenting. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1991; 53: 531-544.
7. Brook, J. S., Whiteman, M., Brook, D. W., & Gordon, S. Depressive mood in female college students: Father-daughter interactional patterns. *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 1983; 149: 485-504.
8. Belsky, J. The determinants of parenting :A process model. *Child Development*, 1984; 55: 83-96.
9. Biller, H. B., Weiss, S. D. The father-daughter relationship and the personality development of the female. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 1970; 116: 79-93.
10. Byrant. International Migration in the Escape Region: Key Policy Implications, 2005.
11. McLanahan, Sara, Gary Sandefur. Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
12. Cruz Victoria Paz, Seasonal orphans and solo parents the impact of overseas migration, Scalabrini Migration Center, CBCP Commission on Migration and Tourism, Manila, 1987.