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Male Out-Migration and Its Psychological Bearing on Left behind Women: A Case Study of a Poor Farming Community of Bundelkhand Village of UP, India

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ABSTRACT

Out migration from rural areas to developed urban centers as a wage labor is a survival strategy of rural poor for their family and household since older days. However nowadays it's not only a survival strategy but also an opportunity for getting better employment options, higher income, better wages and availing better facilities for the upliftment of their lifestyle. Although our attitude is quite positive towards this migration phenomena but it also has a darker side which badly affects the left behind women's mental state. This paper is a part of a complete in-depth study of 'Male out-migration and its impact on the left behind women in Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh'- which is still going on for assessing the female's condition in different walks of their life, including physical workload and responsibilities, freedom of mobility (women empowerment), patriarchy & changing status of women, decision-making power & empowerment, and various psychological issues. In this paper, I have attempted to understand the male migration and its psychological effects on left behind women (wife of migrant) in a poor farming community village of Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. In the rural Bundelkhand region of UP, living conditions are harsh especially for the poor who depend mainly on agricultural incomes for their livelihood, and are therefore highly vulnerable to drought, failure in cropping systems and loss of employment & incomes. The analysis is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews of affected women who have experienced their husband's migration. Surveyed women are varied in age, education and the duration of their husband's migration. These interviews reveal that mail out-migration had left a very bad effect on the left behind women's mental state aggravating various problems like loneliness, sadness, depression and huge desperation.

KEYWORDS: Rural to Urban Migration, Male only Migration, Condition of Left behind Women.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a form of spatial movement of population from one geographical area to another including temporary or permanent change of residence due to social, cultural, economic and other causes. According to Lee's theory of migration and push/pull model of migration, people are 'pushed' out from their origin places of dissatisfaction (for socio-economic, livelihood or other reasons) and 'pulled' to destination places where they can do 'better' for themselves (Lee, 1966). The

prime motivation factor for such migration is to improve and support the economic well-being of themselves and their household. (Jamie P. Mc Evoy, 2008).

Largely drought, landlessness, unemployment and poverty are the major causes of out-migration in rural areas, which are related with the origin places of the migrants. In developing countries like India, mostly rural to urban migration takes place due to structural changes in rural areas such as polarization of land holding, occurrence of natural calamities (such as drought), degradation of natural resources, landlessness, poor local employment opportunities, low wages, lack of basic amenities, etc. (Saha, Goswami & Paul, 2018). For all these reasons, majority of males from rural area, who are illiterate or semi-literate, unskilled or semi-skilled, marginal cultivators or agricultural laborers, and also young able rural youth suffering from poverty or dissatisfied for their current position, adopted migration as a household livelihood strategy (Roy & Nangia, 2005). They have only one alternative to seek a better living environment outside the village (Jetley, 1987). Therefore, these people prefer to migrate towards urban areas for getting more employment opportunities, better wages, higher income and better facilities etc. (Anju Bala, 2017). In India, migration for wage labor is now established as a firm and substantial strategy for rural poor to survive and for escaping from rural poverty.

Furthermore, different patterns of migration are observed among certain castes, groups, regions, etc. From some regions only males migrate, while from others whole families do so (Jetley, 1987). However, according to India Human Development Survey (2005), it is clear that the behavior of short distance migrants is somehow different from other types of migrants and these migrants often take their families with them while migrating from one place to another. On other hand, in long distance migrations or individuals migrating to another state, they don't prefer to take their families and most often they leave their families behind. One Indian household survey reveals that among ever-married women of age 15-49, about 4.5 percent women of rural areas and about 1.5 percent women of urban areas had husbands living elsewhere. And thus it is quite obvious that a leading form of migration in many developing countries is male only migration, while leaving their families behind at the place of their origin, (Population Report, 1998). The most prominent reason for women not to adopting out-migration is to look after their home, family, children and elderly people. Besides, family's property is also another important area of concern and these left behind women look after the family property in the absence of male members (Kakati, 2014). This form of migration is very prominent in Bundelkhand region but it has left varied implications on left behind wives in different contexts.

In support of this study, I conducted a survey of Bijrari village, an economically weaker farming village of Panwadi block of district Mahoba, Uttar Pradesh. This village comes in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. In this survey, I tried to understand the realistic condition of male outmigration of all families, and further tried to observe the psychological effects of such situation on their left-behind wives or women. In Bundelkhand region, majority of population belongs to Other Backward Casts, Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes as 53%, 25% and 1.0% respectively. Remaining population belongs to forward castes, which include Rajputs, Brahmins and Vaishya etc. But on the basis of land records it is clear that majority of agricultural land is owned by forward castes in this region. It is worth mentioning over here that more than 75% of agricultural economy of this region is based on rain-fed farming. According to 2011 Census (Census, 2011), the total population of Bundelkhand region of UP is 96.82 lakh, out of which major part of population lives in rural areas. It further reflects that more than 33% of its household population belongs to Bellow Poverty Line (BPL). A number of severe draughts have ravaged this region for last several years, resultantly it has led to a number of serious disastrous problems including mass migration, starvation deaths, suicides and mortgaging of women (Samra, 2010). Therefore, the entire economy of Bundelkhand region has collapsed due to such prevailing drought conditions and thus massive migration of rural population is reflected in the whole region. As I have already mentioned that the economy of Bundelkhand region is based on agricultural farming, continuous failure of rainfall is the prime reason that the agricultural land of the region can neither provide work for landless labors, nor can it provide food. Hence, dry land farming with low cropping intensity on one side and absence of industrial development on the other side are the two unfavorable situations in Bundelkhand region in which surplus labor force is unable to get employment in the villages of the region (Agarwal and Singh, 2008).

Unsecured livelihoods and non-supportive governance have pushed a large number of agricultural laborers and small or marginal farmers of Bundelkhand region to other regions or states seasonally or permanently. BPL Survey Data of 2002 indicates that 50 percent to total 70 percent of rural households across Bundelkhand districts have at least one member who migrates annually or has migrated permanently. People usually migrate to places like Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat (Human Development Report, Bundelkhand, 2012)

Male out-migration often increases responsibilities on left-behind women, besides the additional responsibility of managing the household matters, the family, children, family's financial issues, a feeling of in security about safety of our stationed husband and the family members including herself, and finally the issues relating to isolation, altogether create a situation of mental stress among left behind wives.

METHODOLOGY AND THE CONTEXT

In this study we have addressed a very prominent research question as- how does a case of male out-migration psychologically affect the left behind women in small farming community villages. For this purpose, I first focused on collecting information for understanding the current mental state of the women; secondly I studied the causes, circumstances and incidences behind various female's mental distresses; and thirdly how such condition affects her physical, mental health and overall life. To answer these research questions, I conducted 15 in depth qualitative interviews of rural women who have experienced their husband's migration. Selected women were varied in age, education and the duration of their husband's migration. This survey was conducted in April 2019in village Bijrari of Mahoba district of UP's Bundelkhand region. In this study, community case study approach is followed, which gives more emphasis on how and why a specific phenomenon occurs within the boundary of a community, and tries to identify various parts of the phenomenon. As this community case study approach allows us to collect rich, in-depth, qualitative data/information on an identified specific phenomenon in a specific setting (Berg 2007), this approach was followed by me in this case study.

Regarding procedural initiation in this research, firstly a complete house listing of this village was done for collecting diversified information on - any migrant in the household, marital status of migrants and family members, size of landholding, and caste characteristics etc. After preparing the complete listing, specific households were identified as married male migrant (whose wives are left behind at home). While preparing the list, I found that there were different patterns of migration including seasonal migration, couple migration and the oldest one male migration. In all these cases, the married male migrants were approx. 16 percent, unmarried male migrants were aprox. 20 percent and male migrants move their family after being out for a long time were approx. 12 percent. It is also observed that out of 40 married migrant households there were only 28 left behind wives who were living with their in-laws, rest 11 left behind wives were sent to their own parents. And thus it is identified that whenever the male migrant was not able to send money to his left behind family on a regular basis, his wife and kids were sent to her own parents. The criteria adopted for participation of left behind wives in the detailed interview in migrant households, was based on-marital status, age of woman (currently married and aged 15-45), educational status at the time of marriage (at least one year), and the duration of their husband's migration (at least one year). During this survey, all women were requested to speak and discuss about the impact of migration over them, how her life is going on? What does she feel? How does she feel by staying away from her husband or is she happy? How is the behavior of everyone in the house towards her? Whether receives a call from her husband or not etc. During the survey it was experienced that these interviews took more time than my previous timeline expectations. As the purpose of this study was to know about the psychological effect of male migration on women and also to identify prime and responsible reasons and circumstances for their distressed mental condition, this excess time was very much justified for ensuring quality results

while sparing more time with these women for openly discussing their problems. Apart from this, it was felt during the interview that the women who were living in the joint family were hesitant to say anything in front of their in-laws, so it was necessary to promote them for speaking in a friendly manner and specially when they were alone at home or outside at work.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS FROM FIELD

Male migration and its psychological bearing on left behind women

This section will throw light on the mental state of the left behind women. It has provided an insight on the causes, circumstances and incidences behind the internal psychological condition of left behind. I further express how such condition affects the physical health and life of left behind. The effects of male only migration on left behind women differs from one area to another due to various reasons. A number of scholar have explored various possibilities through their studies, like Khuseynova (2013), Saha, Goswami and S. K. Paul, (2018) identified both positive and negative effects of migration on the whole family. In the form of positive outcomes, where family's income increases with remittances, which finally increases their ability to spend on good health, nutritious food and essential items. And it also increases the purchasing power and consumption patterns. While the negative effects include a very high dependency on remittances sent by male migrant, illness accidents and difficulties of women managing the household tasks with increased workload and responsibilities in the absence of migrant husband. Further they mention that the financial outcomes of migration are mixed, where few women received large amount of regular remittances while the majority of women received minimum irregular remittances. On the other hand, there are psychological effects that are not easily seen but they affect women to a very deep extent which affects their mental state and physical health. Further khuseynova (2013) concludes that some women have had bitter experiences of breaking up and abandoning their marriage and many others feared this incident may not happen to them. In other words, she says that as an outcome of male migration, the women also experienced increased querying of their activities. While male out-migration provides financial support to their left behind families on one hand, on the other hand it increases the burden of family responsibilities of managing their households on left behind wives. All these factors increase their mental stress (Roy& Nangia, 2005).

Mental state of the left-behind women

During the interview of those left behind wives, I not only realized that these women are very sad, upset and stressed but they also admitted themselves that they are not happy due to staying away from their husbands. Women who were aged between 18 and 25 and their husbands migrated soon after marriage or were separated from their husbands by 1 to 5 years, were feeling very lonely and had tears in their eyes while talking. Under no circumstances those women wanted to stay away from their husbands. They wanted their husbands to take them along as some male migrants later took their family with them. One woman even said that "you please help us, talk to my husband that he should come and take us with him."

Those women who were between 30 and 40 years of age and were separated from their migrant husbands by 5 to 10 years, those women, along with grief, loneliness and trouble, also had feelings of anger and frustration. A woman said that her life became worse than hell, now there is nothing in her life apart from adjustments and agreements. She also said that "she is just a lifeless thing that everyone is consuming, and she is now become used to this type of life." A number of incidents and circumstances relating to the repercussions of male migration are primarily responsible for this type of mental condition of women.

Mental stress due to many reasons

Status of Left behind wives in a family:

While observing the repercussions of male migration, it provides economic relief to their families on one hand, left behind wives have to bear the burden of increasing responsibilities of managing their

households and come across social expectations, which leads to greater mental stress on other hand (Roy & Nangia, 2005). Data and Mishra (2011) found in their study that in most of the cases women are not allowed to live alone in the absence of their husband due to varied safety reasons, rather they are only allowed to live with their in-laws or own parents or with their close relatives. All the 15 women, to whom I interviewed in the study area, were living in joint family with their in-laws; these women reported that they were not having a very good family status in the absence of their husbands. They already had a lot of domestic workload but due to absence of their husband, their workload is further increased. The work that husband used to perform earlier, now left behind wife and her children are bound to perform.

Majority of these left behind wives are highly abused in their families (in the absence of their husbands), they are treated like strangers. In one specific case, a woman said that she was taunted at home and was discriminated from other family members. Besides, it is also identified that in some of the cases male members of the family used to see them with lust, and thus they exploit them physically and sexually. While such type of misbehavior, all the elderly members remained silent even after observing all such unacceptable things; finally all these suffixes make the woman even more stressed.

As mentioned by a left behind woman in another case, other women in the family whose husbands are living together in the house also use to treat her poorly. According to Karolina Kulczycka (2015), due to the husband's absence the workload of left behind wives increases, these left behind women bear all the necessary responsibilities of the household in the absence of their husbands. But even after bearing all such additional responsibilities, they also have to go through unexpected mental stress and are normally treated badly, so that these wives remain much stressed in the absence of their husbands.

Verbal or Physical Abuse in their own family:

Ruchi Singh (2018) has expressed the view in her study that left behind wives often face verbal or physical abuse in their own family as well as in the society, as the other family or society members think that they have been left by their husbands. And thus these women are perceived as permanent left wives by their husbands.

During an exclusive discussion with a women in the identified Bundelkhand village, she expressed that "my husband usually visit home after a long interval and does not send money regularly. Due to which all the members of household taunt me a lot. Often they addressed me with abusive language. Sometimes they say that your husband has left you and now he will not come. These family members also comment that your husband has left his responsibility on us and we cannot further bear your expenses, so leave this place and go to your parent's house". She further added that "On such incidences, if I respond them or retort it somewhere, they abuse me and beat me severely". These entire incidences make the woman even more stressed.

Sexual Harassment by close relatives or family members:

In majority of cases, the wife is left with her in-laws or own parents or other close relatives mainly for security reasons. In such situation, however, cases of sexual harassment come to the force. The discussion revealed that mostly the close relatives including father-in-law and brother-in laws etc. are responsible for such acts (Kakti, 2014).

However, after interviewing all the selected left behind women of Bijrari village, I found that some women, between the ages of 30 and 40, admitted that they had been (were) sexually assaulted several times by elder male members of their own families/households. Initially, they opposed it a lot and complained to other female members of the family, but in response of the complaint they (female members) assaulted them and alleged characterless. So later on, these women did not complain/tell such incidences to others. And also not told their husbands for avoiding any sort of misunderstanding with them. Due to such silence on their misconduct, it becomes a type of regular punishment and such incidents were repeated again and again. Most of the times, in the form of

consequences these ladies got pregnant, and then they were bound to consume contraceptive medicine at home for unsafe abortion. During all such development all the elderly members remain silent and they do not oppose at all. All these incidences make the life of left behind wives hell. Roy (2011) found in her study that two kinds of impacts were reported during the discussion- one is when the women tried to resist the abuse then they are beaten up, and two is to hide the trauma in the name of family prestige. For all these reasons, these women are deeply traumatized and go into deep mental depression in such conditions.

Feeling of Loneliness and Emotional stress:

Male out-migration has a very bad effect on the psychosocial wellbeing of women left behind. Saxena (1977) conducted a study on Bihar migrant families of pre-industrial period. In this study he has identified the reflection of the feelings of left behinds in the folk songs called Bidesia and Birha, which refer to the beloved living in a faraway countries or places and reflect upon the unhappy and lonely existence of left behind wives (Saxena, 1977& Roy, 2005). In an another study of left behind women of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Ruchi Singh (2018) also concluded that most of the women reported her that they suffered from the constant feeling of loneliness due to absence of their husband.

During the discussion with left behind women, of Bundelkhand village- Bijrari, majority of women mentioned that, when their family members misbehaved with them, at that point of time they felt very sad and missed their husband very much. Besides, they mentioned that after completion of all the household tasks, if they expect or ask for fulfilling their small needs, they face negligence of family members and then they miss their husband very much. One another woman mentioned that "whenever she saw another woman happy with her husband, she missed her husband very much". Finally, I observed that in the absence of a husband, the wife use to feel very unhappy and lonely, these wives are often worried about their husband and use to think several things like whether their husband has eaten properly or not? and so on. They are usually worried whether their husbands have got stuck in bad habit of consuming alcohol due to the feel of loneliness. All such thoughts make the wife worried and upset.

In addition to the increased responsibilities, the concern of migrant husband's safety increases left behind wives mental stress. Women are always worried about how their migrant husbands will be living in the city, whether they got food on time or they may not have fallen into any wrong company (Gulati, 1993).

Old fears and Insecurities:

Many researchers have observed the internal fear of left behind women's indifferently. Jetley's (1987) study throws light on various types of insecurities of the women which they use to face, while being left behind by their husband. Jetley finds out that out of all left behind women interviewed, only one-third were positively unhappy about their husband's migration, while half of them regretted the long absence of their male members from the family.

Similarly Menon, (1995) observed that male migration is not an easychange; he concluded migration as a period of hardship. Most often, women's anxieties about the male migration are closely related with the fear of divorce and desertion. As some women experienced marital separation or abandonment, and many others feared this could happen to them also (McEvoy, 2008). In majority of cases, women opposed their husbands at the time of taking decision for their migration, due to the fear of being abandoned by them (Datta & Mishra, 2011).

In a study of left behind women of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Ruchi Singh (2018) concluded that more than 50% of women also mentioned that they were suffering from a feeling of insecurity and constant fear. Although in less count but few women expressed that they were suffering from constant fear of being left by their husbands or that their husband may create another family at their work place.

Like various other researchers, I found almost the same results, during the interview of left behind wives at Brijari village. It is identified that due to prolonged absence of their husbands, they have a fear or insecurity about the husband regarding his physical relationship with another woman in the

city of workplace. They are always afraid of their permanent separation with their husband in the form of divorce and worried about the husband may marry another woman in the city. Women whose husbands migrated soon after their marriage and their marriage was only 1 or 2 years old, feared more as their husbands might forget them or establish a relationship with another woman in the city and marry her. These women were most afraid of breaking up their marriage. These types of unwarranted thoughts always scare such women and become the reasons for the stressful situation of the left behind women.

Physical health of a left behind women

One thing that came up during the interview of left behind women was their physical health condition. It is observed that after the male migration, the left behind woman suffers from a variety of mental problems due to domestic circumstances and prolong separation with their migrant husbands, which negatively affects their psychological and physical health conditions. During this survey, most of the women complained of headache and also said that they do not sleep well at night. Most of the left behind women told that they often feel headache and state of vomiting and thus feel nervous and have a desire to cry. Women who were in the age group of 30 to 40 said that they get angry over small things, have very irritating behavior and thus observe wrinkles on their faces with a sign of fatigue in this young age. Some women also reported that their menstruation is not regular and they also have a lot of pain during that time.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study and the review of available literature on the psychological effects of male out migration on women left behind, I can say that, the findings from the study is similar to findings from the literature. It is revealed that loneliness in women is a dominating factor, developed due to prolonged separation with their migrant husbands. This finally brings sadness and feelings of anxiety, which is collectively reflects the pain of virha. During this prolonged separation, she also fears about facing consequences in the form of break up with her husband, and all these things put her under deep mental stress. On the other hand, the burden of increased physical work load, responsibilities of the household family, and harsh behavior of family members make her life even more pathetic and stressful. In majority of times, she is also sexually abused or assaulted by her family members or close relatives and beaten up for any further protest in the name of family prestige, and thus she use to face a situation of deep shock. Therefore, we can say that male migration has both positive and negative consequences. It depends on the societal tradition and the level of awareness of human rights and values as well, where positive effects make women empowered and independent at one place, while the left behind women is in distress conditions at another place.

At this juncture, it is essential to draw the special attention of Indian policy makers and community leaders for taking some effective steps for supporting left behind women at community level through some effective initiatives of local government. In this context, we should identify some places where huge male out migration use to take place. In such places, initiatives must be taken for engaging people, specially left behinds, in small scale or house hold industries. These women, through local support, should try to raise their educational level for better future prospects. Besides, local government should also provide them different types of training i.e. weaving, stitching, embroidery etc. for making these left behind women self-reliant, so that they can become more financially strong for upbringing their children, and thus no female has to spread her hands in front of any other male member of the family or society in any case, due to which they are often victimized of physical or sexual exploitation. By such initiatives, we will be able to create the village environment safer than earlier for all women including left behinds. With these positive efforts such women will become more independent and thus a strong and healthy society can be built at local level.

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