



Out-migration of Husband and Psychological Well-Being: An intra-age-group analysis of Rural Left-behind Wives, India

Sonel Som

Asst. Professor

Cooch Behar College, Cooch Behar

Abstract

The study aims to analyse the effects of husbands' out-migration on psychological well-being of rural adult left-behind wives in the district of Cooch Behar, India. A sample of 400 wives aged between 18 to 60 years has been selected for the purpose of this study through snow ball sampling and subsequently they have been interviewed by a structured schedule. The Psychological Well-Being Index of left-behind wives has been calculated based on the indicators namely, household responsibilities, decision-making, mobility and social relations, life satisfaction and psychological problems. To identify the difference in Psychological Well-being of left behind wives at different age groups, One-Way ANOVA has been carried out. The results shows young left-behind wives are more psychologically well-being than middle aged or older ones.

Keywords: Rural left-behind wives; Out-migration; Psychological Well-being; young left-behind wives; Loneliness.

Received 26 Mar., 2023; Revised 05 Apr., 2023; Accepted 07 Apr., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Rural India is characterised by monsoon dependent agricultural system that causes seasonal unemployment in rural areas, particularly during non-monsoonal months because of dearth of native jobs for the poor agricultural workers. In this situation for managing their family needs they are compelled to migrate away from their native place in any other destination states at south, west or north India to be engaged in secondary economic activities. The most common features of these large-scale male labour out-migration is change in rural social landscape (Rai, 2018) and their left-behind families (Zacharia *et al.*, 2003) specially their wives. Poor rural wives are not only physically but economically and socially also left-behind (Biao, 2007). Though husband's outmigration contributes towards household income through remittances and improve their economic status (Fakir & Abedin, 2021), fulfils their basic needs yet this remittance flow cannot fulfil the voidness of their life. Psychologically they are in a living in a threshold condition where at one side they are enjoying autonomy, and on the opposite side suffering from psychological distress (Mahapatro, 2018). Husband's out-migration offers expansion to primary decision makers in household affairs, makes them authority to carry out family responsibility, social and economic empowerment (Gulati, 1995). They are transformed from humble, fragile caregivers of their families to household managers (Rajan & Zacharaia, 2018). Simultaneously, negative consequences brought by their empowerment could not be ignored. They have to carry out increased burdensome workload, dominance of in-laws, adjustment with family members, restrictions in their social or economic independence etc. those make them vulnerable to anxieties, worries, conflicts, loneliness etc, (Roy, 2011; Haans & Rooij, 2010). Their actual state of psychological well-being are combination of both of positive and negative factors. In Indian context rural social cultural norms and context set a wide array of factors those also controls, contributes and make variations in psychological well-being of these women. This may vary according to age of left-behind wives. Identifying the level of difference at different is always a challenge for social science researchers because of a complex social structure.

II. Methods

Respondents

A group of adult individual rural left-behind wives whose husbands have migrated outside Cooch Behar District in any other states of India and engaged in secondary sector of economic activities have been included in the study. The respondent's age-group was between 18-60 years as they are considered as the adult left-behind wives (Jacka, 2012). Respondents below 18 years have been excluded from the study as they have not reached adulthood. Older left-behind wives of 60 years above are also excluded as they are considered in some study as 'elderly left-behind women' (Luo *et al.*,2020).

Design

Cross-sectional data of 400 (95% Confidence Interval, 4% Margin of error) (Moore and McCabe, 1989) rural adult left-behind wives have been collected and who were selected by snowball sampling technique from 120 villages of the district during field visit 2019-2022, from the cohort of 18-59 age-group and either nuclear or joint family types. The respondents participate spontaneously with their self-consent in the interview procedure.

Materials

Instrument that has been used for the survey is a well-structured schedule comprising, 17 items under 5 variables namely, **household responsibilities** (family-size, nos. of dependent , daily workload-**3 items**) ; **decision-making** (decision in child education, decision in household activities, decision in household regular purchase and expenditure -**3 items**); **mobility and social relations** (mobility and contact for health management, participation in social activity, increase in social contact, autonomy in accessing outside world-**4 items**); **life satisfaction** (improvement in lifestyle, increase in savings, engagement in recreational activities-**3 items**) and **psychological problems** (mental stress, depression, isolation, fear of insecurity - **4 items**). All the items are orderly quantified in a five point Likert Scale. 11 items have been measured as (never=1 and always =5) and 6 items have been reversed as (never=5 and always =1), each item scores range between 5-25. The internal consistency of the items has been measured performing reliability test and Cornbach's Alpha value has been found acceptable (0.621) (Taber, 2018). The item scores are transformed to average scores for computing each variables and Psychological Well-being Index (PSWBI) has been developed from the scores of the variables using the following formula

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Psychological Well-Being Index (PSWBI)} &= \frac{1}{5} \sum_{p=1}^5 w_p x_p \\ &= w_1 * x_1 + w_2 * x_2 + w_3 * x_3 + w_4 * x_4 + w_5 * x_5 \end{aligned}$$

Where, w_1, w_2, \dots, w_5 are the weightages of the indicators (equal weightage considered)

and $x_1 = \text{family responsibility}$

$x_2 = \text{decision-making}$

$x_3 = \text{mobility and social relations}$

$x_4 = \text{life satisfaction}$

$x_5 = \text{psychological problems}$

It has been considered PSWBI has positive relation with psychological well-being of the respondents i.e. higher the index value better the level of psychological well-being and vice-versa.

Variable Selection

Selection of socio-demographic variables those influence psychological well-being of left-behind wives is very evident in any empirical research in social science (Gartuala *et al.*, 2012; Hadi, 2001). Adulthood of women is a transitional and interacting phase of human life cycle and in this phase psychological well-being evolves more (De-Juanas *et al.*, 2020). The survey findings reveal that in the study area among the socio-demographic background of adult left behind wives, their age, make a large difference in their psychological well-being (Kousar *et al.*, 2014; Lei & Desai, 2021). The specific objective of the article is to assess the difference in pshychological well-being at different age-groups.

Analytical procedure

For statistical analysis, scores of PSWBI is considered as dependent variable and their age-group has been considered as independent variables. To analyse whether there is significant difference in psychological well-being between age-groups of left-behind women One-Way ANOVA has been performed using SPSS (20.0) version. To measure whether there is any difference in the score of PSWBI within group's pair-wise multiple

comparison test (Bonferroni Post-Hoc test) was also performed (Field, 2013). The assumptions of One-way ANOVA i.e. normality of dependent variable has been assumed (Altman & Bland, 1995), homogeneity of variance among the groups of independents variables has been adequately met (Levene’s Test 0.235, $p > 0.05$). All the tests were two-tailed and probability of $p < 0.05$ has been considered.

III. Results

Background of the left-behind wives

Characteristics of 400 rural left-behind wives (independent variables) has been presented in Table 1, showing their Mean and SD values. The Mean age of these wives is 39 years. The age group of the respondents have been categorised as Young left-behind wives (18-31 years) (22.00%), Middle-aged left-behind wives (32-45 years) (24.25%) and Older left-behind wives (46-59years) (53.75%). Young adult wives (Mean= 2.998, SD= 0.45) and middle-aged adult wives (Mean = 2.997, SD= 0.33) seems to be more psychologically well-being than older adult wives (Mean= 2.669, SD= 0.39). Standard Deviation values are more or less similar so PSWBI within each group is equally spread.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics of independent variables on PSWBI

Independent variables	N	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age-group				
Young adult wives (18-31yrs)	88	22.00	2.998	0.45
Middle-aged adult wives (32-45yrs)	97	24.25	2.997	0.33
Older adult wives (46-59 yrs)	215	53.75	2.669	0.39

Effect of Age group on PSWBI

In regard to left-behind adult women’s psychological well-being a significant main-effect of independent variables have been observed. Age-group makes a significant difference in PSWBI score of left-behind wives with a large effect size (.11) ($F(2, 398) = 25.132, p = 0.000 < 0.001, \eta^2 = .11$) (Saha et al., 2019, Cohen, 1988)

Table 2: Effect of Age-group on Psychological Well-being

Indicator	Sub-indicators	Mean	S.D	Df	F	Sig	Ɔ	Ɔ ²	Effect Size
Age-Group	18-31	2.87	.46	2 (398)	25.132	0.00	.33	.11	Large
	32-45	2.91	.36						
	46-60	2.61	.38						

With-in Group Multiple comparison test

The multiple comparison test (Bonferroni Post-Hoc) has been performed for all the three levels of age-group. The result shows difference in scores of PSWBI within groups of these independent variables. Young and middle aged adults ($p = 0.000 < 0.001$) are significantly higher in PSWBI scores than older adults (Table 3).

Table 3: Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test

Age-group	Mean difference	Sig
Older left-behind wives (46-60 yrs)	Young left-behind wives (18-31yrs)	-.2639*
	Middle-aged left-behind wives (32-45yrs)	-.2982*

IV. Discussion

Dealing with psychological issues of left-behind wives is a ubiquitous life –event in all age-groups. Literatures have stated either about their psychological consequences or psychological resilience they enjoy through autonomy, independence and empowerment. An exploration about psychological well-being of this community is very limited. The roles played by difference in age upon their psychological wellbeing is very less known. This study is meant to fulfil that void. Developing and designing Psychological Well-being Index (PSWBI) in a context of backward rural district and comparison of functioning certain demographic variables is the uniqueness of the study.

As expected, age of left-behind wives is a significantly important variable. Age-group of left-behind wives have distinct inverse relationship with their psychological well-being i.e. younger the age of wives higher their psychological wellbeing (Aryal et.al, 2020). Young left-behind’s faces less psychological stress and they enjoys greater autonomy, freedom, economical independence and empowerment compared to middle aged or older left-behind’s (Heller & Kaushik, 2020). As, migration of husbands reconfigure traditional gender roles in a household living arrangements (Hoodfar & Singerman, 1996) left-behind wives’ enjoy having household headship particularly in nuclear families (Arokiaraj et al.,2021) and enjoy psychological well-being too. But young left – behind wives living in a joint family arrangement face the problem of power controlling upon them. This control of the in-laws curtails their emancipation, decision making and managerial ability (Datta & Mishra, 2011). Adult

left-behind wives who are far more likely have the confidence about managing their own lives prefer to make decisions independently (Desai & Banerjee, 2008). They are able to be responsible for their own well-being and comes out from the patriarchal parasol of rural society (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Living in a nuclear family having household headship enhances their controlling power managerial ability (Jetley, 1987) and have greater psychological well-being.

Subsequently, having household headship make young adult wives more likely to be psychologically well-being than others. Young left-behind wives enjoys more independence in mobility, performs fewer responsibilities towards in-laws and greater autonomy by completing chores outside the household (Yabiku *et al.* 2010). Additionally, receiving remittances regularly maintains steady flow of income in the family and exempts them to be engage in further paid jobs (Khan & Valatheeswaran, 2016). Psychological well-being of middle-age or older adult left-behind wives in any kind of household is always lesser as they have to perform greater family responsibilities and deal with all the problems in life course (Thomas & Adhikary, 2012).

V. Conclusion

The study highlights about the psychological well-being of rural left-behind wives belonging to different age categories in certain social circumstances likewise their household arrangement, headship and husband's duration of absence. Young adult left-behind wives are more psychologically well-being than middle aged or older ones. This scenario, easily concludes that age is a factor that controls empowerment, independence, self-reliance. Psychological well-being to left behind wives can give them confidence to cope up with the restrictions, insecurities, hesitations they face in their absence of husbands. As, middle-age or older left-behind wives are more susceptible of being self-dependent in outside household activities they require greater attention and support from society and family to overcome their psychological barriers. Instead of being or feeling marginalised they could be the then part of greater society.

References

- [1]. Altman, D. G., & Bland, J. M. (1995). Statistics notes: the normal distribution. *Bmj*, 310(6975), 298.
- [2]. Arokkiaraj, H., Kaushik, A & Rajan, S. I., Effects of International Male Migration on Wives Left Behind in Rural Tamil Nadu. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 28, no. 2 (2021): 228-247. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0971521521997964>
- [3]. Aryal, N., Regmi, P.R., Van Teijlingen, E., Trenoweth, S., Adhikary, P. and Simkhada, P., (2020). The impact of spousal migration on the mental health of nepali women: a cross-sectional study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(4).<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041292>
- [4]. Biao, X. (2007). How far are the left-behind left behind? A preliminary study in rural China. *Population, Space and Place*, 13(3), 179-191.
- [5]. Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203771587>
- [6]. Datta, A., & Mishra, S. K. (2011). Glimpses of women's lives in rural Bihar: Impact of male migration. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 54(3), 457-477.
- [7]. De Haas, H. and Van Rooij, A., 2010. Migration as emancipation? The impact of internal and international migration on the position of women left behind in rural Morocco. *Oxford development studies*, 38(1), pp.43-62.<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810903551603>
- [8]. De-Juanas, Á., Bernal Romero, T., & Goig, R. (2020). The Relationship Between Psychological Well-Being and Autonomy in Young People According to Age. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, pp 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.559976>
- [9]. Desai, S., & Banerji, M. (2008). Negotiated identities: Male migration and left-behind wives in India. *Journal of Population Research*, 25(3), 337-355.
- [10]. Fakir, A., & Abedin, N. (2021). Empowered by absence: does male Out-migration empower female household heads left behind?. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(2), 503-527.
- [11]. Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*. Sage.
- [12]. Gartaula, H.N., Visser, L. & Niehof, A. Socio-Cultural Dispositions and Wellbeing of the Women Left Behind: A Case of Migrant Households in Nepal. *Soc Indic Res* **108**, 401–420 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9883-9>
- [13]. Hadi, A., 2001. International migration and the change of women's position among the left-behind in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 7(1), pp.53-61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijpg.211>
- [14]. Heller, A., & Kaushik, A. (2020). The Consequences of Husband's International Migration on Family Left-Behind in Tamil Nadu, India. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 21(4), 1149-1163.
- [15]. Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1992). Overcoming patriarchal constraints: The reconstruction of gender relations among Mexican immigrant women and men. *Gender & Society*, 6(3), 393-415.
- [16]. Hoodfar, H., & Singerman, D. (1996). *Development, change, and gender in Cairo: a view from the household*. Indiana University Press.
- [17]. Jacka, T. (2012). Migration, house holding and the well-being of left-behind women in rural Ningxia. *The China Journal*, (67), pp. 1-22.
- [18]. Khan, M. I., & Valatheeswaran, C. (2016). International migration, remittances and labour force participation of left-behind family members: A study of Kerala. *Margin: The Journal of Applied Economic Research*, 10(1), 86-118.
- [19]. Kousar, S., Rehman, S., & Rehman, A. (2014). Male migration and problems face by the family left behind: A case study of Thesil Daskar. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 2(7), 20-42.
- [20]. Lei, L. and Desai, S., 2021. Male out-migration and the health of left-behind wives in India: The roles of remittances, household responsibilities, and autonomy. *Social Science & Medicine*, 280, pp 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113982>
- [21]. Luo, R., Zhang, C., & Liu, Y. (2020). Health Risk Assessment Indicators for the Left-Behind Elderly in Rural China: A Delphi Study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(1), 340. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17010340>
- [22]. Mahapatro, S. R. (2018). Impact of Labour Migration on Socioeconomic Position of Left-Behind Women in Bihar. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 61(4), 701-718.

- [23]. Moore, D.S. and McCabe, G.P. (1989). Introduction to the Practice of Statistics. WH Freeman.
- [24]. Rai, P. (2018). The labor of social change: seasonal labor migration and social change in rural western India. *Geoforum*, 92, 171-180.
- [25]. Rajan, S. I., & Zachariah, K. C. (2018). Women left behind: Results from Kerala Migration Surveys. In *Migration, Gender and Care Economy*, pp. 86-102.
- [26]. Roy, A.K., 2011. Distress Migration and 'Left behind' Women. Rawat.
- [27]. Jetley, S. (1987). Impact of Male Migration on Rural Females. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22(44), WS47–WS53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4377662>
- [28]. Taber, K.S. (2018). The use of Cronbach's alpha when developing and reporting research instruments in science education. *Research in science education*, 48(6), pp.1273-1296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-016-9602-2>
- [29]. Thomas, B. and Adhikari, S., 2012. Male migration: Dynamics, issues and difficulties of left-behind families. *Asia Pac J SocSci*, 4, pp.109-30.
- [30]. Yabiku, S.T., Agadjanian, V. and Sevoyan, A., 2010. Husbands' labour migration and wives' autonomy, Mozambique 2000–2006. *Population studies*, 64(3), pp.293-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2010.510200>
- [31]. Zachariah, K.C., Mathew, E.T. and Rajan, S.I., 2003. Dynamics of migration in Kerala: Dimensions, differentials, and consequences. Orient Blackswan