

Male Migration and 'Left-behind' Women: Bane or Boon?

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AKM Ahsan Ullah¹



Abstract

Women have traditionally been at disadvantage in many countries in the world, due partly to the strong patriarchal tradition which often impinges the rights of women. Hence women's empowerment is a major concern in the developing world and is emerging as an important indicator of the development of a society as well as the status of women. This article examines the impact of husbands' migration on the lives of 'left-behind' women. The purpose of this research is to investigate how the 'left-behind' women turned around in the absence of their husbands and eventually how did they end up being empowered financially, socially and politically. This research analyzes left-behind women's empowerment through three broad dimensions: resources, agency and achievements, specifically women's autonomy and control over their lives; financial issues, and women's political and labour force participation. This research selected 53 women from five countries in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) (Yemen = 6; Jordan = 11; Iraq = 7; Morocco = 9; Egypt = 12; Indonesia = 8) (through snow-ball technique) whose husbands left their countries at least 6 years back. This study shows that the impact of male migration on the 'left-behind' women is complex to investigate. Change in gender role has occurred due to men's migration irrespective of countries of origin. Entire responsibility of taking care of the welfare of left-behind siblings and children has been on the shoulders of the wives. This is, however, not to argue that migration of their counterparts rejuvenated their potential. I rather argue that they successfully used their potential to be leaders in absence of their husbands, meaning that they enjoyed the freedom to make decisions, and that freedom has contributed to their being empowered positively. They eventually have experienced change in their freedoms in terms of decision making, mobility and participation in political activities.

男性移民和“留守”妇女：苦难还是恩赐？

在世界许多国家，妇女传统上处于不利地位，部分原因来自于强烈的父权传统往往侵犯妇女的权利。因此，赋予妇女权力是发展中世界的一个主要关注点，并且和妇女地位一起，正在成为社会发展的重要指标。本文考察了丈夫迁移对“留守妇女”生活的影响。这项研究的目的是调查“留守妇女”在配偶缺席情况下的转变，并最终如何在经济、社会和政治上获得权力。这项研究通过三个方面分析了留守妇女赋权：分别是资源、机构和成就，特别是妇女的自主权对自己生活的控制；以及财政问题、妇女政治和劳动力参与。研究通过滚雪球技术选择了来自 MENA（中东和北非）5 个国家的妇女，她们的丈夫均离开所在国家至少 6 年以上。研究表明，男

¹ Associate Professor of Geography, Environment and Development, University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei.

Corresponding author:

AKM Ahsan Ullah, Associate Professor, Geography, Environment and Development, University of Brunei, Darussalam, Jalan Tungku Link, Gadong, Brunei.

E-mail: akmahsanullah@gmail.com

性移民对“留守妇女”的影响是复杂的。由于男性移民造成了性别角色的变化，这个现象不随国家发生变化。照顾留守的兄弟姐妹和儿童的整个责任都落在了妻子的肩膀上。然而，这并不是说，她们配偶的迁移焕发了她们的活力。我更愿意相信她们在配偶缺席的情况下成功地利用自己的潜力成为领导者，这意味着她们享有做出决定的自由，而且这种自由有助于她们获得积极的能量。她们最终在决策、流动性和参与政治活动等方面经历了更趋自由的变化。

Keywords

Migration, left-behind, empowerment, patriarchy, MENA

Introduction: Left-behind Women

... yes, I was scared during the first few weeks of his departure. I didn't have any relative around. My fear was that I would mess up things especially the financial issues and sending my kids to school. As time passed on, I became stronger than before. Of course, I seek advice on issues I think are complex from my husband when we talk ...

One of the respondents from Indonesia, Annisa, 35, a mother of two children narrated her experiences of being alone in absence of her husband for the last 6 years. In the last six years her husband visited her twice for two weeks each time.

Three decades back, international migration was perceived as a male issue. This assumption was particularly prevalent when attention was focused on the economic aspects of migration, because of the fact that women's participation in international labour migration was insignificant (Zlotnik, 2003). A new revelation is that women have accounted for a very high proportion of all migrants for a long time. The share of female migrants among all international migrants has been rising steadily since 1970s, to reach 48 per cent in 1990 and nearly 49 per cent in 2000 (Zlotnik, 2003). Feminization of migration has become a core dimension of the new age of international migration and globalization (Donato & Gabaccia, 2016). The most important rationalizing factor for migration is the betterment of the families. However, the absence of husbands necessarily changes the pattern of everyday life of the wives (Lan, Theodora, Brenda, & Elspeth, 2015). Family structures get changed as responsibilities are reassigned (Gamburd, 2000; Hugo, 2002; Rigg, 2007).

It remains unknown how many left-behind family members are there, globally. Though there are estimates of total international migrants, however, what is unknown is how many are accompanied by family members and how many are not. The impact of migration on the left-behind family members has long been debated. The impact of absence of husbands on marital life is profound. When husbands cross the border to work, they leave their families behind. Wives and children do not accompany them for varied reasons. The familiar pattern is for the husbands to leave their countries, work overseas for a period of time as long as they can stay and feel is economically feasible and return to their families.

Of the total, low- and semi-skilled ones form the majority of the migrants (IOM, 2016). This implies that either these migrants are not allowed to bring their family with them or they cannot afford. This means, their wives and, of course, along with their children remain behind. In traditional societies, for the wives, this is a fresh experience of living on their own. Some studies bear out that men's migration leads to higher autonomy, independence and decision-making authority of their wives (Yabiku, Agadjanian, & Sevoyan, 2010). As they are remained-behind, they start interacting with so many people, who they never talked and worked with, organizations, schools and banks (Abadan-Unat, 1997). They take responsibilities of agricultural decisions (Boehm, 2008; Gordon, 1981; Hadi, 2001).

Migration is viewed as economically benefiting the family in the home country through financial transfers (Rahman, 2012; Ullah, 2016). Many studies have pointed out the social cost that migration has on families left-behind (Démurger, 2015). International migration, without doubt, may have consequences for both sending countries and receiving countries. While the level of understanding the magnitude of effects is murky, the efforts in investigating myriad of consequences are being intensified (Antman, 2012, 2013; Rahman, 2012; Ullah, 2011).

Motivations for migration are with the primary aim of invigorating economy of their families; however, it always remains an issue that as they leave the country, they leave behind many issues that are to be dealt with by left-behind family members who may be or may not be ready for this. Some tend to say that financial flows help solve all issues they may face in absence of the male counterparts. Financial gains alone do not solve the social problems faced by left-behind ones. When household head leaves, the aftermath situations compel them to take on unfamiliar and new responsibilities. In this new role, how they do behave over time? Does this new role prepare them to become empowered or leaders? Or they become over-burdened that lead them to frustration and fatigued. Historically, in patriarchal societies, women have less personal autonomy (Bloom, Wypij & Das Gupta, 2001), fewer resources at their disposal and limited influence over the decision-making processes than males (Ikuomola, 2015; Osezua, 2013; Schafer, 2000) which means that they are inexperienced and unprepared for taking over new roles. Physical absence of a parent, especially the male parent who has traditionally been holding the household head position and breadwinner in the family, has myriad of consequences on the decision-making processes about the family matters. However, it is important to delve into what happens to women who assume new role and more responsibilities than before as a result of their husbands' truancy.

Both negative and positive impacts of their truancy have been pointed out by many researchers, such as Hondangeu-Sotelo (1992), Ullah (2012) and Hugo (1995). Women's increased autonomy has been the one received most attention by researches followed by the financial hardship and increased responsibilities. This research does not concern about the negative or positive impacts rather this is about the changes in their lives after husbands leave for overseas. Do increased responsibility and autonomy make any difference in the lives of the wives? Some researchers come up with some inferences that men's absence from home and irregular remittances provide conditions for fostering women's autonomy, self-esteem and role expansion (Desai & Banerji, 2008).

Sending a family member to work overseas is often seen by sending family as a bright prospect for their family's economy. IOM (2006) study confirms that male migration contributes to improving the situation of women in part because non-migrating female partners take up new roles and responsibilities that result in increased household power vis-à-vis their husbands. This works as a booster for accepting the absence of the most important member of the family. Gendered analyses of migration prompt to ponder over the impacts left-behind women are going to feel. What hardships are they going to face? Aside from sharing in economic benefits from their partners' migration, might the absence of their husbands result in empowerment and greater independence for them in patriarchal contexts? Hughes (2011) found in his study that roles and responsibilities get intensified once they are left-behind. Manual farm work or managing day-labourers, handling finances and making purchases that usually would fall under men's purview (Hughes, 2011).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to address the impact of migration. Most researches, however, took a side, that is, glorification of migration as if migration can only generate positive outcomes. As a result, the other side of migration has remained unexplored until the last decade. Research on gendering migration has produced innumerable literature. What is prominently missing is that the experience of left-behind female members especially the wives after their husbands leave them with entire responsibility of the family.

Theoretical Issues

Remained-behind family members are those who are directly dependent on the migrants financially and emotionally, and had a subsidiary role in the family. Globally, the low-, semi- and unskilled migrants form the majority of migrants. These migrants with a limited time contract, generally for two or three years (Ullah, 2015). Their migration in most cases is financed by multiple sources: bank loan, loan from traditional money lenders, loan from friends and relatives, mortgaging of assets etc. This implies that recouping the money they spent on financing migration becomes an important issue. Therefore, savings from their disposable income is possible if they migrate unaccompanied. In addition, their salary base and/or conditions of their job contracts in most cases do not support bringing their spouse with them. In case, some of them can afford bringing their family members with them, they at the initial stage do not do primarily because of two reasons: first, they think there should be someone at home back to take care of their properties and assets and, second, bringing family members with them will incur extra cost which means they will not be able to save money.

Some scholars are reluctant to use the term left-behind. The impression is that this has negative connotation, that is, this sounds like they are 'abandoned'. I agree to this as well. Hence I will be using thereafter remained-behind instead of left-behind.

This remains a contentious issue up until today that men's migration has really given full or partial responsibility to the remained-behind women. Some men still make decisions from overseas while some leave on their remained-behind wives. Some women find it an intervention though while some other finds it as necessary to come up with a better decision regarding family issues.

In traditional patriarchic societies, decision-making power rests solely in the hands of the males. Ullah (2011) found that in traditional societies males establish commands even on the income remittances that women make. Some other subsequent studies (Datta & Mishra, 2011) and Dushanbieva (2014) revealed that some wives are still controlled by husbands living overseas. Dushanbieva examined the potential leadership quality of the remained-behind by a number of variables. The following figure is composed of some important variables that enable us to examine whether these women can gain leadership quality in the absence of their husbands as responsibility shift has occurred or not.

The fact is that the remained-behind wives got no other choice than to take over the new responsibilities. Hence, whether intentionally or unintentionally they become used to discharging the responsibility. Some women said it was a primitive idea that women could not manage without the help of their male counterparts. There were fears that the family will collapse if the responsibility is shifted to the shoulders of women. Male migration, however, has given an opportunity to test the capacity of the women.

Childcare responsibility is, traditionally, bestowed to mothers. However, when it comes to major decisions such as marriage, engagement, education, child health, house renovation, buying land etc. they seek advice and suggestions from their husbands overseas. Wives are found to have obtained higher autonomy bringing up their children the way they wanted.

In terms of mobility, some women tend to be mobile, that is, they want freedom of mobility and some are not. Husband's absence forces them to be mobile. When they are together, in case, they needed to buy anything from a distant rural grocery, husbands usually used to go. Now that husbands are not around wives are to go for groceries and shopping, pay for bills, go to the market and deal with public organizations etc. Thus, they enjoy an enhanced freedom of movement.

During the time when husbands were still at home, wives had little-to-no opportunity to handle financial management. The popular notion about women in those societies is that money is something women

cannot manage efficiently. Hence, they were fully dependent on husbands as it comes to make small or large purchase or their private stuff. However, these wives at some point of time deal with investing money and repayment of their loan, buying properties, paying bills etc. The argument is that remained-behind wives in fact turn themselves as a leader in absence of their husbands.

A leader is one who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted and coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives. (Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 7)

Autonomy refers to retaining a sense of self-determination that grows in cooperation with others (Ullah, 2016).

The remained-behind wives are left to handle the remittances husbands send. However, the effect of the handling responsibilities come in varied ways. When there is a consistency in remittances the experiences could be encouraging but when remittance flows inconsistently, wives may be placed in a burdensome condition while Rashid (2013) and Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo. (2006) found that this situation causes women to become economically active and join employment.

One should no doubt appreciate the increasing role of women in decision making and the resultant women empowerment in migrant households but at the same time the mounting demand for such responsibilities and the forced work they have to do in agriculture and elsewhere should not be lost sight of (Agasty & Patra, 2014).

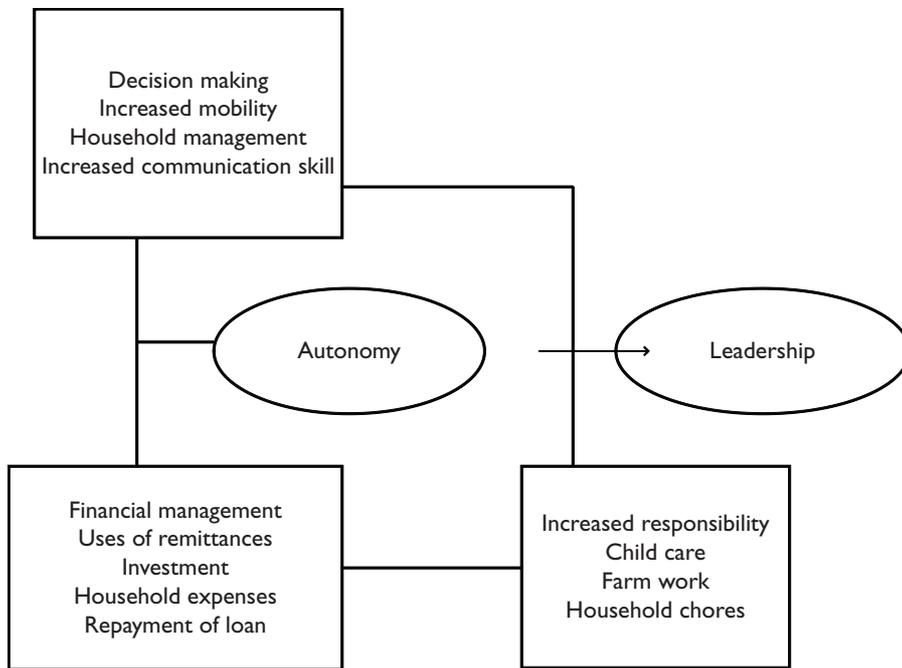


Figure 1. Autonomy and Leadership Dynamics

Objectives and Methodology

As husbands migrate overseas, women shoulder more responsibilities and perform the management of finances and household tasks that were traditionally performed by men. This paper looks into the impact of men's migration on the left-behind women in terms of their autonomy and empowerment. The question this paper asks whether wives of migrants gain autonomy that leads them to be leaders. This is in line with the argument Gulati (1993) made that men's migration lead to women's empowerment, resulting in the break of women's isolation and increasing their mobility in the spheres outside their homes.

This article is based on a research conducted between 2013 and 2015 as a part of a larger project. This research selected 53 women from five countries in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) (Yemen = 6; Jordan = 11; Iraq = 7; Morocco = 9; Egypt = 12; Indonesia = 8) whose husbands left their countries at least 6 years back. The aim of this research has not been to compare the situations of the left-behind wives in different countries between migrating and non-migrating families. The study countries were in fact included due to the fact that these are known to be sending countries and the main project under which this was done covered these countries. Another important justification for including these countries is that these are prominent Muslim countries. With some exceptions, Muslim societies are largely patriarchal. Though the rights of women in Islamic societies have changed throughout history and vary from region to region. In general, women require their husbands' approval to realize many activities and are limited in their access to certain political, educational and economic goods. Therefore, this merits looking into how these remained-behind wives behave in absence of their husbands.

Four trained research assistants collected data by using a checklist. I selected the sample through snow-ball technique due to the fact that there was no sample frame. The researchers had pre-existing acquaintance with some respondents whom we contacted for a recommendation of potential interviewees for this research. In order to obtain a diverse sample of respondents of socioeconomic backgrounds, we interviewed remained-behind wives without predetermining their age and education background (Table 1). However, I excluded those who were exposed to husbands' migration for less than 6 years.

Deliberately urban areas were precluded because it is understandable that gender relation is different from urban and rural areas even in traditional societies. Their professional occupation varies but predominantly the women who were interviewed were housewives. Their responses were recorded and then transcribed with an agreement that their identity will remain confidential.

This study is conducted only on remained-behind wives. The purpose of this research is to investigate how the 'left-behind' women turned around in the absence of their husbands and eventually how did they

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Countries	<i>f</i>	% (<i>n</i> = 53)	Professional Background
Yemen	6	11.3	5 HW, 1 work in a PC
Jordan	11	20.8	8 HW, 2 run a small business and 1 work for shop
Iraq	7	13.2	5 HW, 2 food supplier to offices
Morocco	9	17	2 HW, 3 run SB, 2 teachers, 2 work for a PC
Egypt	12	22.6	7 HW, 2 run tea stall, 1 runs a tailoring shop and 2 help their relative's business
Indonesia	8	15.1	2 HW, 4 run SB, 2 work for PC
	53	100.00	

Source: Field data 2013–2015.

Note: HW = Housewives; PC = private company; SB = Small business.

end up being empowered financially, socially and politically. To that end, we have taken three broad dimensions of empowerment into consideration: resources, agency and achievements, specifically women's autonomy and control over their lives; financial issues and women's political and labour force participation. Questions in the checklist focused primarily on the issues related to the changes in their overall roles after their husbands left for overseas. The questions asked broadly are: how different is the responsibility in the family now and before their husbands migrated? Do they find it challenging or if so how do they manage? What were the major adjustments in their responsibilities? How did they cope with handling extra work? Do they think that this extra responsibility that they have been discharging is making them stronger? If yes, in what way and if no, why? All these questions were followed by other questions that relate to the three dimensions of women empowerment. This research analyzed challenges women's position in a patriarchal society and helps to understand women's interpretation of their positions and the ways men's migrations affect their lives.

The Traditional Roles

The socialization process which starts at the family level differentiates the girl from the boy child in most countries in Asia and Africa. The family plays crucial roles in creating patriarchal practices by socializing the young to accept socially and sexually differentiated roles (Kambarami, 2006). From the very childhood, males are socialized to view themselves as breadwinners and heads of households whilst females are taught to be obedient and submissive to the family and cultural dictates.

In Muslim societies, historically, women's agency is largely circumscribed. Of course, the complex interplay between religious ideology and practice, political movements and state policies, and the processes of economic and social change have got a lot to do with the lives of women (Baden, 1992). Most powerful, however, is religion for circumscribing the autonomy and freedom of the women. As a result, with some exceptions, in most study countries, women hold low status as compared to other countries in the world. By gender gap index as well they belong to the lowest range. For centuries, patriarchal traditions and religious beliefs have placed women in a low status in both familial and communal matters (Manea, 2010). Though the constitution of Yemen allows equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, religion, race or origin, the socio-political practice has been a discriminative one that privileges white Muslim men above any other group in the society. The last gender equity index reports that Yemen was the worst performer in gender equality (Guilbert, 2014). Indonesia is doing way better in terms of gender equity index than many countries in South and South-east and Middle Eastern counties. It seems that though there are evidences that educational attainment of women in the Middle East has increased dramatically in the past decades (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2003), a proportional increase in the female labour force participation rate is still lacking (World Bank, 2004). In Jordan, in particular, when it comes to the legal provisions with regard to gender, some legal regulations reinforce the notion of women's work as being of secondary character and diminish the incentives for married women to work (OECD, 2012).

Does Male Migration Transform Females?

Irrespective of the countries of origin of the respondents and their professional background, of those who were exposed to absence about 64 per cent enjoyed being remained-behind. As they were asked in what way did they enjoy? They thought this truancy strengthened their relationships between them. They felt

more for their husbands than before. About 35 per cent of the wives believed that this was a testimony of the fact that their husbands trusted in their capacity. Some respondents thought that the absence of their husbands changed their way of life. In what way? One respondent from Egypt said:

‘It has always been hard to earn livelihood in Egypt. We used to work together to bring food on the table for our children. But we had mental peace. I have no time for my children. I am working harder but no mental peace anymore.’

One respondent from Jordan said:

‘It is not new in our society that wives live alone. Many of our relatives’ husbands have been away for long. They have become rich now. But their children were not doing well in schools. For some of the relatives, children dropped out from schools.’

Is it the fault of the wives or husbands? ‘None’, she added. Why? According to the respondents, children generally are more obedient to fathers than mothers. Therefore, husbands’ absence has crucial impact on the lives of the children. One respondent from Morocco said, ‘as husbands are away, children begin to think that nobody is there to discipline them. For remained-behind mothers it is extremely difficult to spend more time for them because the time they have is split into so many errands’. Irrespective of the countries of origins, about 73 per cent of the remained-behind wives said they were waiting for their husbands to join them as soon as possible to hold the steering of the family. A few (about 14 per cent) of them sounded very practical and very resilient. According to them, husbands should stay overseas as long as they can. The longer is the stay the higher is the savings. However, among all the study countries, Jordanians seemed to less resilient. This could be because of the fact that although in Jordan, women’s literacy and their enrolment in all levels of education have improved dramatically, these gains have not led to improvements in economic participation, freedom or agency (World Bank, 2014).

Moroccans and Indonesians were highly resilient. Indonesian women are in general united and take collective action on critical issues affecting them. This may be because they have been exposed to many experiences of surviving natural disaster, disease, food insecurity and poverty (Beard & Cartmill, 2007; IPCC, 2014). Moroccans are more exposed to the world due to its location than its neighbours. Like many other countries, around the world, Morocco removed legal obstacles to women’s participation in economic life (Ash-Shami, 2013). This might have played important role in gaining agency (Kabeer, 2011). Husbands’ absence has become a part of the lives of Iraqi respondents. It was evident from one of the respondent’s (from Iraq) reply to a question ‘what changes you experienced in the absence of your husbands. She said:

None of our relatives’ husbands are alive. They were killed a decade ago in war. I know already how it is like to live and run lives without husbands and guardians. It has become normal to us. We are at least better in the sense that unlike others, we can expect that our husbands would come back. They are alive. For the rest, there is no hope.

Majority respondents from Jordan (59 per cent), Yemen (63 per cent) and Egypt (65 per cent) found to be more dependent on husbands while Indonesians and Moroccans seemed to have been used to the situation. This dependency has implications on their lives as well. Iraqis got a different view because of the fact that many women saw their husbands being killed by bombs. Therefore, absence of husbands to them does not seem to be a big deal.

This research revealed two different living arrangements of the remained-behind which generate two different outcomes. One group live with their in-laws and this arrangements were made before their husbands left for overseas, and another group live on their own. Members in a family system, are held together by degrees of interdependence. The family relationship is high priority in any society because family relationships are fundamentally important to their health and wellbeing (Antonucci, Jackson, & Biggs, 2007). Decisions about living with in-laws or not have roots in the nature of personal relationships, and emotions are an intrinsic part of these relationships (Hobcraft, 2006). These patterns of interdependence define the nature of relationships; thus a change in one family member results in a change in another family member (Chibucos, Leite, & Weis 2005). Wives who live with in-laws go through a different yet complex circumstance. Dual decision-making authorities appear which often lead to a deteriorating of relationship. Disagreements between wives and in-laws on some issues such as enrolling children in particular schools were found common among those living together. Kulczycka (2015) terms this as that they in fact continue to live under patriarchal control though husbands are away. This type of living arrangement may add a new pressure on remained-behind women to obey orders from in-laws. Majority respondents (58 per cent) irrespective of the countries of origin said that their in-laws circumscribed their freedom to mobility and meddled into their personal issues as often they become self-proclaimed guardians. Many of them reported that they defied their restrictions and they thought they could make their own decision. This, however, results in straining relationships. Extended family intrusion in existing housing arrangement was the first among all other challenges. This was informed by the cultural norms that, married women should not stay alone in the absence of their husbands except in circumstances of divorce or death (Ikuomola, 2015). Thus respondents were either living with their in-laws in the same apartment or very close to their husbands' relatives, whom often were assigned to protect, monitor and spy on them. In the case of a married woman these expectations often become problematic in the absence of the husbands (Mondain & Diagne, 2013).

Desai and Banerji (2008) found similar kind of findings as this research that women not residing in extended families are faced with both higher levels of responsibilities and greater autonomy, while women who live in extended households do not experience these demands or benefits. Living in extended family offers the opportunity to share responsibilities but the cost is the potential dominance from others in the family. As people migrate overseas, the members that are most likely to be remained-behind are women, children and the elderly. There are a number of mechanisms associated with migration that can affect those staying behind. The income effect can enable larger investments in education and health care, create new opportunities to invest in businesses, and raise the reservation wage (the lowest wage at which a person is willing to accept a job) of family members who remain behind (Adams, 2011).

Traditionally, males who are the household heads in the study countries are replaced by their wives as they migrate overseas. This is seen by majority of the wives as an opportunity for them to become strong and a decision maker at the household level. About 24 per cent initially thought husbands migration was a threat to their mental state because this might lead to abandonment. However, as time passed on they began to believe that gender role shift had helped them to be more capable of doing things than before. This was primarily because one of the major changes for gender roles resulted from the shift of the locus of work from the home to somewhere that they did not think of before. This implies that shifting of locations of productive activities from the confines of home to somewhere provided more freedom in their daily lives and less control by family (Iqbal, Idrees, & Mohyuddin, 2014). Woman's autonomy is important in migration context, especially in the feminization of migration. Feminization of migration has become an important concept as it suggests an absolute increase in the proportion of women migrants, when in fact by 1960 women already made up nearly 47 per cent of all international migrants, a percentage

that increased by only two points during the following four decades, to about 49 per cent at present (Willemsen, 2006).

Women have historically been deprived of their due rights due to the fact that male-dominated patriarchy provided them with little space. As a result women have been left out from educational opportunities that led them to miss out from important positions in the professional hierarchies. That they stood up and policy makers are keen to stand by their cause. Results suggest that household structure forms the key mediating factor through which husbands' absence affects women.

For about 32 per cent among all the respondents, husband's absence disrupts personal care for dependent family members, including children and the elderly, and a greater burden of responsibility for work and household chores. Adams (2011) also found similar result in his research that women's new roles create a shift in gender relations, but some women were not comfortable with being landed in new roles. Despite the lack of empowerment, these changes in gender roles and gender relations may influence gender ideologies which are that what women can and should do (Brink, 1991; McEvoy, 2008).

It is clear that male outmigration has brought about a transformation in both social conditions and social attitudes; it has as well added additional tensions to the remained-behind wives. Datta and Mishra (2011) found in their study that for some long stay out of the husbands led to migrants developing extra-marital affairs. In his study, Ullah (2010a) found that the unaccounted migrants tend to engage in a relationship with another unaccompanied female migrants (Ullah, 2013a, 2013b, 2015), which is common in Southeast Asian and MENA countries. There is precedence of such event in the neighbouring areas of the respondents. This, therefore, has been a big reason for their being worried about.

A common fear among remained-behind wives from all the study countries is that they might be deserted, abandoned or divorced at a point of time. The truth of this assumption has been revealed by many researches (Hoodfar, 1996; Ullah, 2010a). This fear has crucial implication on the already overburdened life of the remained-behind. A kind of tension all the time haunts them. Tension grows in the event husbands make call to them after longer intervals than expected. Some remained-behind wives ask their relatives or neighbours living in the same country about their husbands. This situation places them in a complex psychological struggle. Most of the women (who ask about their husbands from neighbours) from all the study countries regret to challenge the fidelity of their husbands. Later, they found it odd and disrespect. A portion of them (about 11 per cent) of course said, 'we believed in our husbands but of course the results were worst'.

Spying on husbands often brings opposite and unanticipated results. As husbands come to know about it, the trust in each other collapsed and as a result this may lead to a range of consequences from separation to divorce. To dealing with these issues is an easy task. About 24 per cent wives said they experienced being threatened of separation or divorce as a result of this complicated living arrangement. Of them, about 54 per cent claimed to have successfully handled those issues. The problem is that they cannot testify the information if this is based on fact or a fabricated one. There are some neighbours who often tend to give information to their wives. They sometime regret the decision to ask information of the husbands. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) revealed in his study that many of the women were opposed to their husbands' migration, primarily because of the fear of being abandoned by them. Many women irrespective of their countries candidly shared their feelings of how it was unfair that extra burdens are imposed upon them in such circumstances. Jetley's (1987) study demonstrated that the insecurities that women faced when they were 'left-behind' by men. Emotional deficiency caused by physical absence could not be compensated by remittances, skyping and phone conversations only. About 45 per cent said this was a kind of irreparable damage to their mental state. This means that their migration may make heavy demand on those women who remained-behind (Agasty & Patra, 2014).

It is evident that change in gender role may have occurred though partially, however, in most cases power shift has not occurred as much. As discussed above that many of them made an arrangement to live combined with their in-laws. They thought it was sort of putting them in an increased 'policing' situation. Therefore, their role changed in the family and those who lived independently, however, constant advice, orders and instructions came from abroad. Irrespective of all the countries, 32 per cent thought about it positively because this ensured the accountability of their work. This means when their husbands return they would not have to face difficult questions about all those decisions made in their absences. About 39 per cent complained that their husbands asked their relatives to keep an eye on the remained-behind wives. All of them thought that curtailed their freedom. They are looked at suspiciously whatever they do and wherever they go.

A few respondents (12 per cent) from Jordan, Yemen, Morocco and Indonesia mentioned that, in addition to other tensions, they are concern about potential of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STD) (Ullah, 2010b; Ullah & Huque, 2014). Their concern is endorsed by study conducted by Kulczycka (2015) that revealed that the majority of remained-behind wives in his research worry about their marriage and relationship with the husband. They can infect their wives with diseases such as HIV or STD (Kulczycka, 2015). Many studies of course suggest that there is a correlation between migration and increased spread of HIV/AIDS in the countries of origin and wives being the primary victims (Corno & Walque, 2012). Wein and Kashuba (2012) confirm that HIV risk is associated with prolonged and/or frequent stay of husbands overseas, financial status and difficult working and housing conditions. Hence, in many countries, governments are concerned that incoming migrants might bring HIV with them and they may spread the infection upon return to their respective homes (UNAIDS & IOM, 1998). The study shows that the absence of husbands enabled them to change themselves. As reallocation of family roles and redistribution of responsibility takes place, they turned independent temporarily, become exposed to short time opportunities and become family decision makers.

Conclusions

This article focuses on lives of remained-behind wives in absence of their husbands. Traditionally, these wives are under control or dominance of their husbands in terms of family decision making. This asks a few questions to answer: does this absence provide them with autonomy? Does this autonomy helps them to gain leadership quality? The answer is complex. There is no absolute 'yes' or 'no' answer. Irrespective of the countries of origin, majority enjoyed a certain level of autonomy.

In fact, even husbands were out of the country, we realized from our interviews that they had a distant command on their wives. This is true for all the study countries. There is a difference in being controlled between those living in in-laws families and those living on their own. Disagreements and arguments on different issues that wives living with in-laws had to deal with. Those who lived on their own said that they would feel more secured if they were to live with in-laws.

In most societies, male migration is seen as an outcome of gender discrimination, as male preference for migration is gendered, that is, females are 'left' to take over household chores. Female as independent migrant therefore is a new phenomenon. The theory of feminization of migration came to the fore only when some sending countries in South and Southeast Asia began to send more female migrants than males.

This paper explored an area not previously the subject of empirical research: the lives of the wives remained behind. A specific concern was the identification of those wives experiencing the greatest degree of difficulty in their husbands' absence. The paper focused on a delineation of the wives'

situation; their attitudes towards being remained behind. This study revealed that the wives gain decision-making power in their husbands' absence. Now the question is whether husbands when they return home approve the decision made by wives in their absence. This study demonstrates that change in gender role has occurred due to men's migration irrespective of countries of origin. Entire responsibility of taking care of the remained-behind siblings, elderlies and children has been on the shoulders of the wives. This is, however, not to argue that migration of their counterparts rejuvenated their potential. I rather argue that many of the remained-behind wives successfully used their potential and reinvented them in the absence of their husbands meaning that they enjoyed the freedom to make decisions, and that freedom has contributed to their being empowered.

The impact of migration of the husbands on family members who stay back home is difficult to investigate in one single research effort. The notoriously varied dimensions of impact remained-behind wives are exposed to, should be investigated from socio-economic, demographic, political, health and sociological perspectives. Economic freedom and participation of women are very broad concept. The fact is that the role in decision making in traditional societies is changing, albeit slow (Adepoju, 1997, 2004; Desai & Banerji, 2008).

The long truancy of husbands, remained-behind wives become used to handling chores independently. It was resonated from our interviews from the wives that as husbands return finally to home country after many years of overseas stay, a kind of personality conflict begins because husbands reject to share responsibilities or are not willing to let their wives do as they before. This is because, to husbands, wives took over the responsibility only on their behalf in their absences. It was not given to them forever. This implies that mind set of the husbands has not necessarily changed.

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