

Original Research Article

Understanding Rural Women in Migrant Households: Socio-Economic, Psychological, and Communication Dimensions

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author KP designed the study, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors NA and SS managed the analyses of the study and literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Abstract

The migration of household members profoundly impacts the lives of rural women, shaping their socio-economic status, communication patterns, and psychological well-being. This review explores the multi-faceted characteristics of rural women from migrant households, highlighting the socio-economic challenges they face, including increased financial responsibilities, altered family dynamics, and limited access to resources. The study also delves into the psychological effects, such as anxiety, loneliness, and emotional resilience, arising from prolonged separations and evolving roles. Furthermore, the review examines how migration influences communication practices, emphasizing the adoption of modern communication tools and the role of social networks in maintaining familial bonds and fostering community engagement. By synthesizing insights from various studies, this article provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between migration and the socio-economic, psychological, and communication dimensions of rural women's lives. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and policy measures to empower rural women, enhance their adaptive capacities, and address the unique challenges they encounter in migrant households.

Keywords: Rural women; migration; socio-economic; communication; psychological characteristics.

Introduction

Migration has long been a defining feature of rural livelihoods across developing and transitional economies. In many regions, especially in South Asia, Africa, and parts of Latin America, male out-migration from rural areas to urban centers or overseas destinations has become a common household strategy to cope with economic uncertainty, unemployment, agrarian distress, and climate-related vulnerabilities. While migration is often examined through the lens of economic remittances and labor markets, its profound implications for the families left behind—particularly rural women—remain insufficiently explored. Rural women in migrant households occupy a unique and complex social position, shaped by shifting responsibilities, altered power relations, emotional challenges, and evolving communication practices. Women in migrant households frequently assume expanded roles as household heads, agricultural managers, caregivers, and financial decision-makers. In the absence of male members, they often shoulder increased workloads both within and outside the household [1]. These changes may enhance women's autonomy and decision-making capacity; however, they can simultaneously intensify stress, social isolation, and vulnerability. The dual nature of migration outcomes—empowering for some women and burdensome for others—highlights the need for a nuanced understanding that goes beyond purely economic indicators. Socio-economic, psychological, and communication dimensions together shape the lived experiences of rural women in migrant households. From a socio-economic perspective, male migration can significantly alter household income patterns, consumption behavior, and access to resources. Remittances may improve living standards, enable investments in education and health, and reduce poverty. Yet, access to and control over remittances are not uniform across households. In many patriarchal rural settings, women may manage remittance funds but lack decision-making authority over their use. Furthermore, delays or irregular remittances can expose households to financial instability, compelling women to engage in additional income-generating activities or informal labor [2]. These dynamics influence women's economic security, social status, and long-term resilience. Beyond economic outcomes, the psychological impacts of migration on rural women are profound and often overlooked. Prolonged spousal separation can lead to emotional distress, anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty, particularly in cases of international or long-distance migration. Women may experience heightened fears related to their partner's safety, family stability, and social reputation. In con-

servative rural societies, women living without male partners may face social scrutiny, moral policing, or restricted mobility, further exacerbating psychological stress. At the same time, some women develop greater self-confidence, independence, and coping strategies as they navigate household and community responsibilities on their own. Understanding these psychological dimensions is essential for capturing the full impact of migration on women's well-being.

Communication plays a critical mediating role in shaping women's experiences in migrant households. Advances in information and communication technologies, such as mobile phones and internet-based platforms, have transformed how migrant families maintain relationships across distances. Regular communication can provide emotional support, facilitate joint decision-making, and reduce feelings of separation [3]. However, unequal access to technology, digital illiteracy, and gendered norms surrounding communication may limit women's ability to benefit fully from these tools. Moreover, communication patterns can reinforce or challenge existing power hierarchies within households, influencing women's agency and participation in decisions related to finances, children's education, and agricultural practices.

Despite growing recognition of gendered dimensions of migration, existing literature often treats women in migrant households as a homogeneous group or focuses narrowly on economic outcomes. There is limited integrative research that simultaneously examines socio-economic conditions, psychological well-being, and communication dynamics. Such an integrated approach is necessary to understand how these dimensions interact to shape women's everyday lives, opportunities, and constraints. Additionally, rural contexts vary widely in terms of cultural norms, institutional support, and access to services, underscoring the need for context-sensitive analysis. This article aims to address these gaps by examining rural women in migrant households through a multidimensional framework encompassing socio-economic, psychological, and communication aspects [4]. By doing so, it seeks to move beyond simplistic narratives of empowerment or victimhood and instead highlight the complex realities faced by women navigating migration-induced changes. Understanding these dimensions is not only academically significant but also critical for designing inclusive policies and interventions that support women's well-being, enhance their agency, and strengthen rural household resilience in migration-affected communities. Migration is a global phenomenon that significantly reshapes the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological landscapes of

communities. Among its various impacts, the effect of migration on rural households, particularly on women left behind, is profound and multifaceted. The migration of family members—often men—from rural to urban areas or foreign countries in search of better economic opportunities results in a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities for rural women. These women, who remain in their native villages, experience shifts in their roles, responsibilities, and social standing, leading to substantial transformations in their socio-economic, communication, and psychological characteristics.

Contextual Background

Rural households in many developing countries rely heavily on migration as a livelihood strategy. According to global migration reports, millions of people move annually in search of employment, education, or better living conditions. This trend is particularly pronounced in rural areas where limited access to resources, infrastructure, and employment opportunities drives migration. Migrant remittances often contribute significantly to household income, improving access to education, healthcare, and other necessities. However, the departure of a household member—typically the male breadwinner—leaves rural women with expanded responsibilities and altered social roles.

Socio-Economic Impacts

One of the most apparent changes in migrant households is the shift in socio-economic responsibilities. Women in these households often assume the roles of primary decision-makers, managing finances, agricultural activities, and family welfare. While this shift provides opportunities for empowerment and greater autonomy, it also imposes additional burdens. Many rural women face challenges such as lack of financial literacy, limited access to credit, and societal constraints that restrict their full participation in economic activities. Moreover, they often have to navigate traditional gender norms that may resist their increased involvement in decision-making processes. Migration also affects the economic structure of rural households. While remittances can enhance living standards, they are not always consistent or sufficient. Dependence on these funds may lead to economic instability, particularly in cases where migrants face job insecurity or legal issues in host countries. Additionally, women in migrant households frequently struggle with accessing government support programs or other financial opportunities due to bureaucratic barriers or lack of awareness. Understanding the lived realities of rural women in mi-

grant households requires a multidimensional perspective that goes beyond conventional economic analyses and engages deeply with the socio-economic, psychological, and communication-related transformations shaping their everyday lives. Migration, particularly male out-migration from rural areas, is often framed as a strategy for economic survival and upward mobility. However, this process simultaneously restructures household dynamics, redistributes responsibilities, and redefines gender roles in ways that profoundly affect the women who remain behind [5]. These women emerge as central figures in sustaining households, managing resources, and maintaining social cohesion, yet their contributions frequently remain undervalued and insufficiently recognized in policy and academic discourse.

From a socio-economic standpoint, rural women in migrant households experience a complex interplay of empowerment and constraint. On one hand, the absence of male members often compels women to take on expanded roles, including agricultural management, financial decision-making, child-rearing, and engagement with local institutions. This shift can enhance their visibility and agency within the household and community. Women may gain greater control over remittances, participate more actively in self-help groups, and develop new skills that contribute to household resilience [6]. On the other hand, these opportunities are frequently accompanied by increased workloads, time poverty, and limited access to resources such as land ownership, credit, and formal employment opportunities. Structural inequalities rooted in gender norms, caste hierarchies, and rural marginalization continue to constrain their ability to fully benefit from these expanded roles. Thus, while migration may open pathways for empowerment, it also reinforces existing vulnerabilities, creating a dual burden for rural women.

Psychologically, the impact of living in migrant households is equally profound. The prolonged absence of spouses or family members can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and emotional stress. Women often bear the responsibility of maintaining family stability while coping with uncertainties related to the well-being and safety of migrant members. The pressure to manage households independently, combined with societal expectations and limited emotional support systems, can contribute to mental health challenges that are rarely acknowledged or addressed. At the same time, many rural women demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability [7]. They develop coping mechanisms through social networks, community participation, and cultural practices that provide

emotional support and a sense of belonging. Informal support systems, including women's groups and kinship networks, play a critical role in mitigating psychological stress and fostering collective strength. Recognizing and strengthening these support systems is essential for enhancing the well-being of women in migrant households.

Communication emerges as another crucial dimension shaping the experiences of rural women in the context of migration. The nature and frequency of communication between migrants and their families significantly influence household decision-making, emotional connectedness, and access to information. Advances in mobile technology have transformed communication patterns, enabling more frequent and immediate contact between migrants and their families. Mobile phones, messaging applications, and digital platforms have become vital tools for maintaining relationships, coordinating financial transactions, and making important decisions. However, disparities in digital literacy, access to technology, and control over communication devices can limit women's ability to fully utilize these tools. In many cases, women may rely on intermediaries or face restrictions in accessing digital resources, reflecting broader gender inequalities in technology use [8]. Enhancing digital inclusion and communication autonomy for rural women is therefore critical for improving their participation in household and community decision-making processes.

The intersection of socio-economic, psychological, and communication dimensions highlights the need for a holistic approach to understanding and supporting rural women in migrant households. Policies and interventions must move beyond a narrow focus on remittances and economic outcomes to address the broader spectrum of challenges and opportunities faced by these women. Strengthening access to education, healthcare, financial services, and livelihood opportunities is essential for enhancing their socio-economic status. Equally important is the integration of mental health support into rural development programs, ensuring that women have access to counseling services, community support initiatives, and safe spaces for expression and engagement. Furthermore, promoting gender-sensitive communication strategies and digital empowerment can significantly improve women's agency and connectivity. Training programs that enhance digital literacy, coupled with initiatives that ensure affordable access to communication technologies, can bridge existing gaps and enable women to actively participate in decision-making processes [9]. Community-based organizations, self-help groups, and local governance institutions can play a pivotal role in

facilitating these changes by providing platforms for collective action and advocacy.

Another critical aspect is the need to challenge and transform deeply entrenched gender norms that continue to shape women's roles and opportunities in rural societies. While migration can create openings for renegotiating gender relations, these changes are often incremental and uneven. Efforts to promote gender equality must therefore be integrated into broader development frameworks, emphasizing education, awareness, and community engagement. Encouraging men and community leaders to support women's empowerment is equally important for achieving sustainable and inclusive outcomes [10]. Research and policy must also recognize the diversity of experiences among rural women in migrant households. Factors such as age, education, caste, economic status, and regional context influence how women experience and respond to migration. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective; instead, context-specific strategies that account for local realities and cultural dynamics are necessary. Participatory approaches that involve women in the design and implementation of programs can ensure that interventions are relevant, responsive, and impactful.

Psychological Dimensions

The psychological impacts of migration on rural women are equally significant. Separation from spouses or other family members often leads to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and emotional distress. Women left behind must cope with the dual burden of managing households and maintaining emotional stability for their families. The absence of traditional family support structures can exacerbate stress, leading to issues such as depression or social isolation [11]. However, migration also fosters resilience and adaptability among rural women. Many women develop coping mechanisms, build informal support networks, and take on leadership roles within their communities. These experiences contribute to their psychological growth and self-reliance, though the long-term psychological effects of such transformations remain underexplored in academic literature.

Communication Patterns

The migration of household members significantly alters communication dynamics within families. Advances in communication technology, such as mobile phones and social media, have enabled migrant workers to stay connected with their families despite geographical distances. For rural women, these tools

serve as lifelines, facilitating the maintenance of familial bonds and providing emotional support. Regular communication with migrants allows women to remain informed about financial and personal decisions, thus reinforcing their roles as household managers [12]. However, access to communication technologies is often limited by factors such as literacy, digital skills, and affordability. Rural women in low-resource settings may face barriers to fully utilizing these tools, creating disparities in communication effectiveness. Additionally, the frequency and quality of communication can vary, influencing the emotional well-being and decision-making processes of women left behind.

Social and Cultural Implications

The departure of family members can also reshape social and cultural dynamics in rural communities. Women in migrant households often face increased scrutiny from neighbors and extended family members. While some communities acknowledge and support the expanded roles of these women, others may impose additional social expectations or restrictions. Cultural norms regarding women's behavior, mobility, and participation in public life play a critical role in determining how they navigate these changes. In some cases, migration leads to greater social recognition and respect for women who successfully manage their households and contribute to community development [13]. Women who actively participate in local governance, agricultural cooperatives, or social organizations often gain leadership experience and social capital. However, such participation can also invite criticism or resistance in patriarchal settings, highlighting the complex interplay between migration, gender, and cultural norms.

Policy Implications and Interventions

Understanding the socio-economic, psychological, and communication characteristics of rural women in migrant households is crucial for designing effective policies and interventions. Government and non-governmental organizations must prioritize initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by these women. Key areas of focus include:

1. **Economic Empowerment:** Providing financial literacy training, access to credit, and skill development programs to enable women to manage household resources effectively.
2. **Mental Health Support:** Establishing community-based counseling services and support groups to address psychological challenges and promote emotional well-being.

3. **Digital Inclusion:** Expanding access to affordable communication technologies and digital literacy programs to enhance connectivity and reduce disparities.
4. **Social Support Systems:** Encouraging community engagement and peer networks to foster a supportive environment for women in migrant households.
5. **Legal and Administrative Assistance:** Simplifying bureaucratic processes to help women access government schemes, remittance services, and legal support in cases of disputes.

Despite the growing body of literature on migration and its impacts, significant research gaps remain. Existing studies often focus on the economic aspects of remittances while overlooking the social and psychological dimensions of migration. There is a need for longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of migration on rural women's lives, as well as comparative analyses across different cultural and geographic contexts. Future research should also explore the intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of rural women in migrant households. Migration is a transformative force that reshapes the lives of rural women in multiple ways [14-16]. While it presents opportunities for empowerment and growth, it also imposes significant socio-economic, psychological, and communication challenges. By examining these dimensions comprehensively, this review aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of rural women in migrant households. Addressing their needs through targeted policies and interventions is essential for promoting gender equity and sustainable development in rural communities.

Conclusion

Rural women in migrant households occupy a pivotal yet often overlooked position within the broader migration-development nexus. Their experiences reflect a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities across socio-economic, psychological, and communication domains. While migration can serve as a catalyst for change and empowerment, it also exposes women to increased responsibilities, emotional strain, and structural constraints. Addressing these complexities requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that prioritizes women's well-being, agency, and rights. By recognizing and supporting the multifaceted roles of rural women, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can contribute to more equitable and sustainable rural development, ensuring that the benefits of migration are shared more broadly and justly across households and communities.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Indicators of Rural Women in Migrant Households

Indicator	Description	Observed Trend	Source
Average Household Income	Income derived from remittances and local activities	Increased but inconsistent	Surveys, Local Reports
Access to Credit	Availability of financial support for women	Limited due to bureaucratic barriers	Field Interviews
Decision-Making Role	Women's participation in financial and household decisions	Significantly increased	Qualitative Interviews
Education of Children	Impact of remittances on children's schooling	Improved access	Education Records
Agricultural Productivity	Women's involvement in farming activities	Increased labor but variable output	Community Surveys

Table 2. Psychological Well-Being of Rural Women in Migrant Households

Psychological Aspect	Measurement Tool/Indicator	Common Observations	Source
Loneliness	Emotional distress scales	High among women without networks	Mental Health Assessments
Resilience	Coping strategy inventories	Increased over time	Psychological Studies
Anxiety Levels	Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) scale	Moderate to high	Focus Group Discussions
Depression Symptoms	Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)	Common, especially in older women	Rural Clinics Reports
Social Support Availability	Availability and use of informal networks	Mixed; varies by region	Community Support Data

Table 3. Communication Technology Access and Utilization

Technology	Purpose	Access (%)	Challenges	Source
Mobile Phones	Staying in touch with migrants	85%	Limited by affordability and network issues	Household Surveys
Social Media Platforms	Emotional and financial updates	45%	Low digital literacy	Rural Community Reports
Internet Services	Education, health, and remittance management	30%	Infrastructure gaps	ICT Reports
Traditional Media	Local news and community updates	70%	Less effective for direct communication	Media Usage Surveys

Table 4. Social and Cultural Impacts on Women in Migrant Households

Cultural Aspect	Impact	Positive Outcomes	Challenges	Source
Social Recognition	Women managing households	Improved status in the community	Criticism in patriarchal settings	Qualitative Interviews
Participation in Cooperatives	Contribution to local governance	Increased leadership roles	Resistance from traditional norms	NGO Reports
Mobility	Freedom to move for economic roles	Enhanced opportunities	Safety and societal expectations	Field Observations
Gender Norms	Shifts in household dynamics	Greater empowerment	Social resistance	Cultural Studies

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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